**Hide and Seek**

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**Hide and Seek**

by *tvsn*

**Summary**

Mary Woodhull and John Graves Simcoe attempt to hide the body of a man they believe themselves to have killed in an act of manslaughter. Hours later, they return to the scene of the crime in order to dispose of the corpse only to discover that it has gone missing. It quickly becomes clear that they are not the only people with a vested interest in finding it.

When their victim later shows up at an engagement party neither is particularly keen on attending, it seems everyone has something to lose.

**Notes**
Ultimately this is the story of the weird friendships one tends to develop with people in a local pub. That said, the first chapter is extremely dark, which, if I know myself at all, will probably be a recurring theme throughout the work. Don’t worry, nothing is as bad as it initially seems, but if you are the type of person who shies away from trigger warnings, it might be best to sit this one out.

Okay, still with me? Enjoy!
The Alibi

The last time Mary Woodhull had been in the old, filthy, 4-door sedan, it had belonged to her best friend. Technically, it hadn’t changed possession in the six years since, but rather, everything else had. The last time she had seen Anna Smith they had been roommates. She found herself considering the bitter irony of that fact as she searched the glove compartment for the pack of cigarettes she remembered Anna used to store there, becoming ever more frustrated that she could not find what she was looking for. She considered that Anna had quit - giving her apparent circumstances - but the choking odor inside the auto suggested otherwise. Furthermore, Mary noted, the excess of empty coffee-cups, water bottles, candy wrappers, papers, clothes, magazines and books indicated that even if she had in fact stopped smoking, it was unlikely that she would so much as think to remove the small box of vice from her glovebox.

Mary herself hadn’t smoked in years.

She found a lighter laying among the various papers Anna had deemed important enough to neatly stack, but nothing to burn.

She wondered if she should go inside and buy a pack - see what was taking her unlikely accomplice so long - but ultimately decided against it. She didn’t want any more record of the night’s adventure than she had agreed to.

Still, she would have absolutely killed for a fag. Mary hated herself for the urge. She blamed the scent lingering in the upholstery that had likely brought it on. She figured that deserved, nay, needed the nicotine fix for which she was figuratively ready to slay, as she had literally murdered a man for less not an hour before.

The last time Mary had smoked, she had been a rising sophomore in college. A pregnancy test sat on the kitchen table as Mary paced the length of the small adjoining room, breaking her own rule against cigarettes indoors. The timer she had set sounded. Mary inhaled once more before reading the result. Two lines. She walked over to the sink, turned on the faucet, and held the smoldering stub underneath water which ran like her tears. She didn’t say anything when Anna came home later that evening from her shift at the bar with a big smile of her face. A smile which Mary remembered returning. Anna had unexpectedly run into and “reconnected” with her high-school sweetheart. Mary, in desperate need of a distraction, had asked her for details. In short time she came to find that Anna’s ex and the man whose seed she carried were one and the same.

Mary moved out two weeks later without giving her then-friend a clear reason as to why.

Throughout the course of her marriage, she had never once brought the matter to her husband’s attention.

She wondered periodically if she would have kept the baby, gotten married to a man with whom she had very little in common and moved out of the city had she never found out that this same man had once belonged to the woman whom she had admired and envied since freshmen orientation.

She wondered what had happened over the course of Anna’s life since her departure from their shared flat that it now seemed to be following a similar trajectory.

Perhaps Simcoe would know, he had mentioned the name of the woman whose car Mary had borrowed on the drive down. However, it seemed to Mary that the less she spoke with the man
who was keeping her waiting in a dimly lit parking lot on the other side of the sound in the sound, the better. Fifteen minutes for half a tank of gas, a box of condoms, and a ticket for the carwash. He was taking too long. She was starting to worry.

She was beginning to question if the situation could have been improved had she taken a second Xanax earlier that evening. She felt the effects of the first wearing off as she redirected her search from Anna’s glove compartment to under the driver’s seat.

Nothing.

Perhaps Anna had done the responsible thing after all. Or maybe Edmund had.

*Edmund and Anna.* Two names she still could not believe were collected in the same thought. Had it not been for them, she might not be here at all. She would not have had access to his medicine cabinet, she would not have had reason to take anti-depressants, she wouldn’t have driven to the pub to pick her husband up – she wouldn’t have had a car to drive.

She inhaled deeply, hoping enough second hand smoke still lingered in the Escort to take the edge off her nerves.

There wasn’t. Like everything abandoned in the sedan, the scent was just pollution.

Mary wondered if Anna’s *messy chic* was going to be a point of contention with her now sharing Edmund’s immaculate above-garage loft. She wondered if there was a section about general tidiness in Cosmo’s *100 Questions You Should Ask Before You Tie the Knot*.

She had overhead part of the magazine-generated conversation from earlier.

“*Do you believe in Karma?*” Anna read aloud.

“I believe time on earth is linear, and the attempt to assign meaning to the patterns we discover is part of the human condition.”

Mary hadn’t understood the astronomer’s answer. She took one the two pills in her hand and swallowed it dry.

“And as for you, my dear?”

Mary looked at the second small, white capsule she hoped would help her sleep, considering that dear Anna may need it more. She took her time answering the question. In the end it turned out that Anna didn’t know if she held any beliefs on that matter whatsoever. As she was listening though the adjourning bathroom door, returning the drug to an otherwise neglected bottle, Mary hadn’t known herself if she had any views on karma.

But what a difference a few hours could make.

Mary heard a knock on the passenger window. She removed her hand from underneath the seat. As she pulled the lever to open the passenger-side door, a soft, high voice asked her what she was looking for.

“Do you know if Anna still smokes?”

The ginger giant produced a cigarette from his dark green jacket and handed it to her. He crouched his shoulders slightly forward as he sat, straining his neck in an attempt to avoid the ceiling.
“Still?” he asked, “I wasn’t aware that the two of you were acquainted prior to this afternoon.”

“We used to be.” Mary replied flatly.

He did not inquire further.

They sat in silence for a few minutes with the windows rolled down a quarter of the way, smoking Simcoe’s Gauloises.

“I opted for the wax.” he commented as he threw his butt out.

Mary didn’t care so long as the front bumper was clean.

“Do you think we should risk leaving DNA evidence behind?”

“I think the plan will work at least well enough that we needn’t worry about the authorities finding a single stub among thousands across state lines.” Simcoe seemed distant, aloof. She had heard his name before in conversations she had not taken part in, but the man sitting beside her seemed nothing of the brute of which her husband and her father-in-law’s other tenant had spoken.

Nothing? Mary corrected herself. An hour prior, Simcoe had come close to beating a drunkard to his death. She watched him as he picked up random objects within Anna’s Escort, examining them with feigned interest for a moment before setting them back down. Was he nervous or was he as oddly calm as she was?

She knew that he and Hewlett visited the same psychiatrist. Perhaps they were on the same prescription as well. Hewlett neither took his medicine nor seemed to realize when a pill or two went missing. Simcoe may well have been more responsible in that regard, though given the night’s events in their entirety it was impossible to say.

Mary looked at her cigarette, feeling a bit of disgust in herself as she threw the rest of it - still burning- from the window of the parked car.

“I don’t really smoke.” she clarified, unprompted. Simcoe curled his lips in response.

The car was lifted onto the automated platform of the $26 full-service carwash in the near-empty Connecticut rest stop her passenger had suggested. It felt wonderful to surrender control. Mary knew she shouldn’t have been driving before ever stepping into the borrowed automobile. After putting her son Thomas to bed early, she had taken a prescription drug which wasn’t hers, poured herself half a glass of Riesling, curled up with a Jane Austin novel she had read a hundred times before and attempted not to speculate about what may have been happening down the hall. She had been living in her father-in-law’s mansion for the past year or so; her own house – which she had purchased during the bubble, still unfit to pass inspection. Edmund Hewlett had been renting one of the many rooms when unforeseen repair costs had forced Mary, her husband Abe, their son and their au pair under Richard Woodhull’s roof. Mary had always loved the house, but she hated calling it home. Her husband now elected to hang out in the city most nights in an attempt to avoid seeing his father. He slept most days. Mary sometimes wished she had that option as the judge could be a most unpleasant man. The elder Mr. Woodhull’s tenant was polite enough, though never really present when he sat with the family at mealtime. She knew from small talk that he was working on his Ph.D. in astrophysics, that he had a job lined up with the ESA, and that he was leaving at the end of the spring semester. Mary hadn’t grown particularly attached. A month ago,
however, he casually mentioned that he had met someone and was considering staying stateside after all. Could he renew his lease? Would it be possible for her to move in? Mary had been pleasantly surprised by this unexpected turn of events, Richard seemed somehow relieved. They ought both to have asked more questions.

When Mary had come home from work that afternoon, eager to meet the woman she hoped would grant her a bit of reprieve from the tedium of living in a house full of men consumed by their own interests, she was appalled to see a slightly older version of the girl she had once planned to drive cross country with. A girl whom she had since blocked on all social media platforms. Mary had found herself unable to so much as formulate a greeting.

Edmund Hewlett’s someone was apparently the recently divorced Anna Strong, nee Smith. Abe’s ex. Abe’s gorgeous, brave, spontaneous, fun-loving first love, whose name he still occasionally moaned in his sleep.

Mary had watched as Anna’s confusion slowly transformed into understanding. She realized that she had never given her former friend an explanation for her sudden departure from her life. Now it seemed she needn’t. Anna’s eyes were on Thomas as Edmund happily introduced the two women to one another. They had in turn responded with “Nice to meet you.” and “It is a pleasure.”

Anna’s tone had been apologetic, Mary’s livid. Edmund seemed none the wiser.

Mary watched the two them unpack, high-fiving - rather than embracing - when they were through. Her first thought was that he was afraid of injuring the baby - which Mary assumed based on her own experiences must exist - but Edmund seemed slightly uncomfortable with even that small level of physical contact. If Anna noticed she gave no indication, but to Mary it was clear. Anna would most certainly be alone in her affections. Edmund may well lust after her for a time, he may well have honorable intentions keeping him in America, but he would come to resent her. One day he would look at her and see all that he had given up. Anna would come to despise him for his cold stares. If the couple stayed in Setauket, she would inevitably “reconnect” with Abe.

Edmund and Anna seemed to be laughing in his room. In their room.

Mary was glad the door had been closed.

She couldn’t bear to look at either of them.

Mary glanced down at her own lap and then at Simcoe’s. She could see through the thin plastic bag that he had purchased Magnums.

“We have to make it look believable.” He answered her thought without inflection.

She was beginning to second thoughts about their hastily agreed to alibi. What if the police found the body? What if their investigation lead them to the Connecticut gas station, to the seedy motel with good security cameras? What if Abe believed, as the world was intended to - should it come to that- that Mary had actually spent the night in the arms of another?

Would that become the grounds for his own affair?

“Not having second thoughts are we?”
“I’m married.”

“I respect that. My dear Mrs. Woodhull, I am a warrior yes but not a monster. I would never presume to suggest that we give this story an added layer of credibility. Here.” He handed the bag to her. “I have no intention of doing anything in the hotel beyond checking the foreign markets.”

“I thought you said they had HBO.”

“Indeed.”

They were silent again as they listened to the water and wax as it sprayed over the car, erasing any evidence of manslaughter which they hadn’t been able to wipe away with towels from the bar.

“Did you use a credit card?” Mary asked.

“For the condoms and the gas. And yes, before you ask, I put only enough in to replace what was consumed in the drive.”

“What about the Odometer?”

“It failed to turn after reaching 100,000.” Simcoe pointed with his finer. He was right. Mary really couldn’t have asked for a better get away wagon.

“And the wax?”

“After I paid, I pretended to see the advertisement for the first time, asked a few questions, and paid in cash.”

“No I mean, what if Anna notices that her car is suddenly shinny and clean from the outside?”

“Tell her it rained overnight.”

“Her boyfriend -”

“Is a glorified star gazer and a shite one at that. Not a meteorologist. Besides, he is out of work at the moment.”

“He is?”

Simcoe stared at her for a moment without expression. “I take it they haven’t asked you to sign an affidavit then?”

Mary blinked, still unable to grasp the idea that her father-in-law, a man who had practiced law for over 30 years before his judicial appointment, had let someone sign a binding lease without checking references. Had that been the reason behind Hewlett’s sudden interest in the fairer sex? Over the course of the afternoon Mary had learned that Anna was some sort of manager. Was she planning on supporting them both while she was expecting? Her heart suddenly bleed for the other woman. Their situations were more of parallel than Mary had realized.

“Christ.” Simcoe sighed. Taking his phone out of his pocket, he began to type.

“Who are you texting?”

“Hewlett. Telling him he needs to familiarize himself with more Yankees and fast if he ever want to pull off this little scheme of his. Not for his sake, but rather for that of our mutual friend.” His fingers danced across the illuminated screen as he spoke.
The car wash ended. The vehicle rolled forward off of the platform, but Mary failed to start the ignition.

“You can’t text anyone right now.” she warned.

“Drive over there. We need to get out and make sure that all traces of your direct involvement have been eradicated.”

Outside Mary felt the cool breeze cover her as she bent down, using the light from her smart phone to search for specks of the blood that the bumper had been drenched with. Simcoe was doing the same. Mary wondered if the man had been dead before she hit him. She wondered what Simcoe would have done if she had been completely sober at the time of the accident. If the man had a wife and children who were wondering where he was. If he would be missed.

Simcoe’s phone buzzed. He seemed annoyed as he read.

“You didn’t send the text, did you?”

“Over WhatsApp. It is encrypted.” He handed the phone to Mary.

Oyster

Online

block away.

11:26

On the left.

11:27

I see it. Thx m8.

11:30

√√

-Today-

If you can find an American to vouch to the authenticity of your relationship it will carry more weight w/INS.

2:58

√√

I appreciate the concern. Be assured that it is wholly unwarranted. The matter has
already been addressed.

3:05

“Wholly. Double L.” He said in disgust as he took the phone back.

“Thanks mate.” Mary countered, unsure of why she was defending her house-mate’s 3 AM typo to a man who might have killed her had he not needed her to collaborate an alibi. “Didn’t realized the two of you were friends.”

“Were not.” Simcoe scuffed, “And here is why, my relaxation of proper English was both intentional and acceptable. Hewlett’s was most certainly neither.”

“It is three in the morning.” She yawned, handing the phone back.

“Well that is the point, isn’t it? This little shite routinely gets away with acting like he is the only one to have passed his A-Levels, displays baseless vanity in every interaction, and yet somehow convinces people to take pity on him. Its bullocks.” he spat.

He continued finding fault with Edmund, but Mary stopped listening when the monologue veered away from Simcoe’s resentment of the other man’s relationship with Anna, which she shared, into sport affiliations. She was more concerned with the fact that Hewlett was in fact awake at this hour and could vouch for the clear sky. But then maybe Anna wouldn’t ask about her car. Maybe Mary could define the wax job as a housewarming gift.

She stared at the bumper. Something about it seemed strange, but she could not put her finger on it.

“Mrs. Woodhull -”

“Mary,” she corrected. “If we are to pull this off, you should call me by my first name.”

“John.” he replied, reaching out a hand she was hesitant to take. She felt a bit sick as she shook it, remembering how earlier it had been covered in the same blood they had just finished ridding the car of.

“It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.” She responded, turning to look for dents in the bumper. She didn’t see any to her great surprise. Anna’s car was an American model, the plastic, she realized, ought to have shattered upon impact. Had the man been dead before she hit him? Mary again questioned if her decision not to call the police had been made in haste. Certainly, the family she had married into had enough connects to have gotten her off with a reduced sentence for driving under the influence, but it was too late now to even consider retreat.

John seemed to read her mind.

“We best get a move on it then.”
the radio on, but it somehow seemed inappropriate. Instead, she opted to break the silence with the question she had been asking herself since Simcoe had first slouched into the passenger seat back in Setauket.

“Why we’re fighting, anyway?”

“The usual.”

“Are you willing to expand?”

“Politics, mostly. Bigoted and racist remarks. After around two hours of listening to this YouTube comment section of a man vent his various frustrations over the sounds of your husband’s atrocious music, I invited him to step out into the parking lot with me. Worry not, love, he won’t be missed.”

“Never would have taken you to be socially conscious.”

“We all have our flaws.”

Sugarhouse Motel was as disreputable as Mary had been promised. She didn’t know why it surprised her that the man working reception seemed to know Simcoe by name. He put $30 on his Black American Express and led Mary to a room she wished he hadn’t referred to as his “usual suite”.

“Do you frequent these quarters often?”

“I do what my employer requires of me.”

Mary wonder for a moment what kind of criminal she was dealing with before he informed her, “I’m a stock broker. Yourself?”

“Public relations for a global NGO.”

“Hm.” Simcoe smiled again. “That certainly explains quite a bit.”

“Agreed.”

He opened the door. The room was clean, though it looked as if it had last been furnished in the late 70’s. Even the television had a back to it. Simcoe took the remote from the nightstand, turned on the old set, and input a number in the low 900s. Mary sat on the edge of the bed. It was lumpy, uncomfortable, but this was probably for the better. She would sit for an hour, watch a bit of television, return home before anyone woke up, and resume her daily life as if nothing had happened. If questions were ever raised, her alibi was solid, secure – if not embarrassing.

She exhaled. She was good at this kind of thing. The man they had killed would not be missed. Everything was going to be fine.

“I don’t want you repeating a word of our conversation.”

Mary responded with a look of skepticism. She had no intention whatsoever of mentioning any part of this nightmare to anyone for as long as her life should last. Did Simcoe? She was about to use
her mom-voice on him when he clarified, “About Hewlett.”

“It isn’t in my interest to spread rumors.” Mary said, feeling that response felt more diplomatic than I was barely listening anyway. She was grateful that owing either to the drugs, the alcohol, the adrenaline, the stress, or a mixture of all of these factors, both she and her accomplice were able to divorce their thoughts from the crime. She wondered when the gravity of guilt would hit her.

For the moment though, her main focus was elsewhere - specifically, the German news program Simcoe had switched to.

“I thought you said they had HBO.” Mary grumbled.

“Allow me to check the DAX.” His nonchalant tone contradicted his death grip on the remote. With his other hand, Simcoe produced his phone from his jacket. Tapping the screen lightly, he continued, “If you have any interest in purchasing VW stock I might suggest you do so now.”

“It is three-thirty in the morning.”

“Making it after nine in Frankfurt.”

He went on to briefly explain something pertaining to global markets, but Mary was no longer able to listen.

She found herself gripped by the pictures displayed on the screen.

“Simcoe.”

He didn’t respond.

“Turn on CNN.”

He didn’t move.


“John!” she yelled in the same tone she used when addressing interns at work.

“Is that? It can’t be.” His fingers began tapping against the back of the controller as they had against the window in the car.

The image of the smiling man with a strong jaw faded from the TV screen. A reporter stood against a backdrop of the New York skyline.

“Bis jetzt wissen wir nichts-”

“CNN!” Mary demanded.

A woman’s artificially deep voice narrated the scene of an emptying political rally on the American network.

“- Senator Arnold was, of course, scheduled to speak at the fundraiser earlier this evening. His absence is of particular concern in the wake of threats made against him, following his recent filibuster-“

Mary watched the small figures in suits as they seemed to shuffle through an empty conference
hall. She recognized the room from an event her employer had thrown the previous year. CNN was able to get in touch with the Senator’s chief of staff, who made assurances to the public that all measures were being taken to locate the elected official. Mary didn’t care about all that. She was waiting for something specific.

CNN broadcasted an official photograph again.

Simcoe sat on the edge of the bed.

“That is him. That is the man we killed.” Mary stated without glancing over at him. “We killed a US Senator the parking lot of a dive bar.”

“So it seems.”

“Simcoe, do you believe in Karma?”
“How do you want your eggs?” Edmund Hewlett asked as he cracked two into a pan which was already crowded with bacon, blood pudding and sliced tomatoes. He had no intention of eating even half of the food he had simmering in its own fat, but he was resolved to keep busy for as long as his guest continued to Skype with his mother at the kitchen table.

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“Same,” the guest replied without looking up from the screen. “No, no – I was speaking to your son, he says hello.”

Hewlett had said no such thing. In fact, he had said very little since his guest had arrived, a full five hours before he had been expected.

>> Did you forget about the derby? <<

He had, but he didn’t find this fact alone to be particularly surprising. Manchester had never held any great interest for him, football or otherwise. To be honest, Hewlett wouldn’t have known it was Sunday at all had he not received a most unwelcome series of texts regarding his own club’s lackluster performance the day before. He wouldn’t have otherwise realized then that there had even been a match. This was probably for the best. Part of him wanted to forget Great Britain in its entirety. He wanted to forget the flight he hadn’t taken, the exam he hadn’t passed and the faces of all of the people he had yet to explain his current predicament to. This included his family, his friends back home, and the few non-academic contacts he had made in the three years he’d spent in the colonies.

To that end, he wanted to remain locked away in his room as he had been for much of the past two weeks – spending his days in a state that fell somewhere between sleeping and controlling his urge to simply scream into his pillow; his nights gazing through his telescope in the hopes that the stars would speak to him as they once had.

Unfortunately for him it seemed, John Andre would having none of it.

Before he had lost his insurance, Andre had been his doctor. Now, he insisted, he was there as a friend. This was a lie. Andre was there, primarily, Hewlett reasoned, to make sure that he showed up to play in an association match that afternoon. The former doctoral candidate might well have refused him this request had he not felt partially responsible for the fact that they might find themselves with an actual opponent for the first time in several weeks.
Then again, had he known that Andre planned on playing life-coach in the intermedium, he might well have reconsidered inviting him in for breakfast. He most certainly would not have lent him his laptop, or have consented to a trip down to the local tavern.

“Hm? I don’t think so, there is a woman, you see. - Oh he didn’t? Hold on.”

Hewlett only heard half of the conversation over the sound of the range vent, but he didn’t need any more context. He was meant to be back in Edinburg, having lunch with his parents, celebrating his scholarly achievements, repacking his suitcases for the move down south.

Instead he was making breakfast for his former psychiatrist and mentally preparing himself for the hideous task of drinking to his recent failures with a collection of people whom he knew only by name at 10 AM on a Sunday. His bag was only packed for the football match which he had no real desire towards playing.

Hewlett wasn’t going home.

This reality alone was difficult enough for him to grapple with – without the reminder that he couldn’t legally stay in order to complete his post-graduate degree next semester.

Which is where the woman came in.

The woman existed only within the good doctor’s mind and only as a means to an end.

Andre himself had such a woman, Hewlett had been shocked to learn. Upon reflection however, he wonder why he had allowed that fact to surprise him. The doctor was Hewlett’s antithesis – effortlessly charming, confident, conventionally attractive, and charismatic enough to not only get a beautiful young actress to play a role in his Green Card scheme but to have together given consecutive convincing performances before audiences of immigration officers as well as New York’s elite.

When Andre had first brought the matter up shortly after his arrival, Hewlett had reminded him in no uncertain terms that he hadn’t been able to answer a few basic questions about a paper he himself had written without choking and tripping over his tongue. Even if he didn’t find the very idea of desecrating of a holy sacrament morally abhorrent, Hewlett lacked every personal characteristic that had allowed Andre to get away with that fraud.

When he had quite patiently explain as much, Hewlett felt he had been ignored.

Now he was absolutely certain of it.

While it was one thing for his countryman to suggest that he ought to deceive the US Government and at least one of its tax paying citizens to his own ends, it was another entirely for him to get his mother’s hopes up. Hewlett had just turned thirty-five. According to his estimates, his mother had been begging him to settle down for at least the past decade. Andre knew this from the hours Hewlett had spent on his office couch. He considered the possibility that he had been ignored then as well.

“I wish you wouldn’t lie to my parents,” he said curtly.

“Is that an exclusive privilege?” Andre asked after turning off the microphone.

“I’ve not lied to them, I’ve simply not been forthcoming with the truth surrounding my mishap.”

“Mishap?”
The doctor had a real talent for being able to look interested, concerned and contemplative. He raised his eyebrows slightly, bent his head to the side and pressed his lips in a way that suggested they were about to open to ask and how does that make you feel?

Hewlett did his level best not to simply glare back. When he felt that his face seemed incapable of obeying the orders of his mind, he turned away. He pulled two plates from the cupboard after a moment’s search, divided the contents of the crackling pan, plus a can of lukewarm backed beans and a few slices of toast among them. He took out his phone to reply to the picture he had been sent earlier from another teammate with one of his own when he realized with dismay that he had forgotten to make tea.

“Coffee alright?” he asked, noting the half pot that his house-mate Mary must have left for him.

Andre gave a single nod without averting his eyes from the screen.

“Sorry, he is busy at the moment. Says he will ring you in the evening. - No, our evening. - I will pass that along. Thank you again for the lovely care package. - Yes, were about to eat it now. I think Eddy is posting pictures of his culinary masterpiece as we speak. - Hold on. Eddy -”

Hewlett had been named for his father as his father had been named for his. He wondered if he would ever outgrow the short-form which he so hated, especially when it was not being spoken in his mother’s voice.

“Please refrain from-”

“Your mum wants you to post the pictures on Facebook.”

“I’m never on Facebook.” Hewlett responded, possibly loud enough for his mother to hear.

“I’ll send them too you Mrs. Hewlett. - Of course. - Good day to you as well. -Thank you. - No, I really must be going. - Okay, love you too. Bye.”

Hewlett felt a twinge of envy shoot through him. The last time his mother had told him she loved him was at Christmas. Had that been the last time they had spoken? He had not called her before his attempt at defending his dissertation, and he most certainly had not called her afterwards. When her care package had arrived like clockwork, he sent an email thanking her, but had received no response.

Or perhaps he had simply forgotten to look.

“Why must you do this?” he asked, half-knowing the response.

Andre closed the notebook with a hint of drama. Pushing it to the side as Hewlett set a plate down before him, he answered, “You won’t and your parents are growing concerned. We are all growing concerned. When is the last time you even left the house?”

It was a legitimate argument. He had only shaved a slovenly beard after Andre’s arrival. Looking in the mirror at the dark rings under his eyes, made darker still by the contrast of his pale skin, Hewlett was not sure what the stress of failure had turned him into. He cursed his few friends from the team for not calling him out on it when last they had met.

“Wednesday” Hewlett sighed, “for training."

For the first time in the course of their relationship, professional or otherwise, Andre looked genuinely perplexed. “We’ve training?”
“In the loosest sense of the word.”

“Since when?” he almost gaped.

“Since Akinbode happened to mention to one of his clients that he ‘played’ for a team called Bye Week. Did you … did you not receive the message in the group-chat?”

“I’ve it blocked. I had no idea you’d returned to using it for its intended purpose.”

“Here.” Hewlett handed his phone over after opening the series of messages that explained the why and how. “You have to scroll up a bit but I believe you will find that-

“This is still just you and Simcoe hurling uninspired insults at each other,” Andre’s tone was no longer courteous or curious, though his expression remained. “I see enough of that on Twitter. No, this reaffirms my decision to -” he paused in unconcealed disgust, “honestly man, where do the two of you even find half of these pictures? Who has time for this?”

For his part, Hewlett had all the time in the world. He had no excuse for Simcoe, but then he never really did.

“Literally everyone else on the team,” he replied, suddenly ashamed at the suggestion that he was stooping.

“Was it productive then – the training?”

“Five people showed up.”

“So when you say everyone else…” Andre challenged.

“With respect, that is more than we have on any given Sunday.” Hewlett rebutted.

“Quite,” he conceited before inquiring further with a hand gesture.

“We passed the ball in a circle for all of 10 minutes feeling quite content with our level of commitment, when Akinbode started up about how he got into it with a few lads he happens to be defending on assault charges who mentioned they play for Urfa SK. Captain” he stressed, leaving little doubt as to who he considered to be responsible, “suggested we pay them a visit. Akinbode knew where they had parked their food-truck and in end effect we all went for a kabab, went back to the dark lair of my nemesis and played FIFA 15 for two hours before calling it a night.”

“Did you get in a fight?” Andre gave his interested look full intensity again. As always, Hewlett couldn’t tell if it was genuine or not.

“With our esteemed captain?”

“With the guys from Urfa SK who seem set on calling us out on the pitch this afternoon,” he said flatly, evidently having gathered enough evidence from Hewlett’s mobile to support a working hypothesis with respect to his teammate’s regard for one another.

“At the Kabab place? No, it was just banter. We got –“

Hewlett’s phone buzzed. Andre blinked. “Honestly how do you have good reception out here?”

“What does it say?”

“It is in another chat.”
“With whom?”

“Demon?”

“Go on then.” Hewlett smiled.

“Actually, bring us some,” Andre read aloud.

“Ask him if he is using the royal we or if he means for me to bring breakfast for the whole pub.”

“Who am I talking to?”

“Who do you think?”

Andre handed the phone back. “Clean up your own mess.” He pulled out his own device and waved it around. “Nothing,” he complained, not for the first time that morning.

“Did you try turning it off and turning it back on again?”

“It is 2016.”

“Sometimes it helps.”

“I have been meaning to ask you how you managed to muck up your dissertation but now it seems fairly-”

“Don’t,” Hewlett warned.

He heard the sound of Andre’s phone shutting down. They ate for a few minutes in silence before Andre asked if and how much of the food he ought to spare for the others.

“None. I asked Simcoe who was pouring, he send me back a series of emoji leading me to conclude that it is not one of the bartenders who turns a blind eye to outside food and beverage … which I suppose explains why he was fool enough to order a meal there in the first place.”

“I don’t follow.”

“Do you remember last year when he wrote a bunch of Game of Thrones spoilers in the gent’s and everyone assumed that I’d done it and I was banned from entry for a few weeks?”

“I remember that it took the staff roughly 3 weeks to even see the vandalism.”

“Exactly. That anyone would eat somewhere where hygiene is of such little importance that the restrooms are not cleaned daily-”

“Do you not eat street-meat on Wednesday?”

“That is not the point.”

“Hm. Quite right. Clean but costly WCs, the one thing I truly miss about the motherland.”

Andre’s sarcasm went unnoted.

“Ah, yes I … concur completely.” Hewlett had never really thought about it before, but he was willing to add the absence of self-cleaning, pay-to-piss toilets to his running tally of things he couldn’t stand about the United States.
“You’ll miss it here too, you know,” Andre said after a moment of contemplation. “Someday, a bit later than you anticipated, sure, but someday, you’ll be sitting in a lab late at night, wishing you were back state-side, eating a proper breakfast before going to a dirty dive bar with cheap beer and a sports package, taking offence when the locals correct your pronunciation of ‘soccer’ -”

“I sincerely doubt it.”

“Wait for it. Call me then to tell me I was right,” Andre said, turning his phone back on.

“I mean about working in my field. At all.” It was the first time he had said it allowed. The words seemed to linger in the air even after he was asked: “How bad was it?”

“Columbia is generously allowing me to resubmit next year, provided that I retake two courses and complete some additional specified course work … but I’ve been made redundant in my role as teaching fellow and no longer possess the credentials for either a work or student visa. On Friday I received a call from Paris informing me that with respect to my failure to defend my dissertation the ESA has decided to suspend their offer of employment. My optimism has turned to cynicism, it shames me to say, and the only thing getting me out of bed are the messages I receive from the only person whom it seems I am not paying to be in my life – who, perhaps consequently, happens to loath me.”

Andre lowered his fork and sat back. “You may find it difficult to believe right now, but I am extremely proud of you. I was … growing concerned that you were still in denial over the matter.”

“For the record, Andre, I am not paying you right now for your professional advice.”

“Nor am I giving it. But you will pay me before the morning is over, that much I can guarantee you.”

He glanced again at his phone, his slight grin vanishing. Hewlett saw an opportunity to pivot the conversation away from himself.

“Do you need to use mine?” he asked.

“No, I am waiting on something.”

“Business? Isn’t Dr. Clinton on call at the weekend?”

“He is, but this is for pleasure.”

“A girl?”

“A guy,” Andre smiled again. Hewlett would save his moral judgement for after he was done basking in his small victory. “This might take your mind off things. Do you know who Benedict Arnold is?”

“I’ve heard the name but can’t place it.”

“The senator who gave that speech a few weeks back about using drones to spy and perhaps open fire on suspected terrorist within the continental US?”

It was not what Hewlett had expected.

“Is he a patient?”

“More of a research subject. One I am desperately waiting to hear back from. You might appreciate
Andre showed Hewlett a series of saved texts and photos which caused him to blush. “I … is that?” He knew exactly what he was looking at, it was the rather the question of why this information was being shared which he found perplexing. “I don’t know what you imagine about me, but I most certainly do not-”

“Want to see a dick’s dick pics?” Andre laughed, “Do you get enough from our mutual friend?”

He did, in fact, once receive such a text from a drunken teammate who swore it was meant for someone else. Once was more than enough. “I am appalled, sir,” Hewlett said without averting his eyes as Andre kept scrolling.

“You are a prude, Hewlett. Let me explain how that could work in your favor, now that I’ve your attention.”

“Don’t bother. I am significantly less interested than I was an hour ago … which is to say, not at all,” he cleared his throat. Using same tone he had lectured in for the past eight semesters, he continued, “I was not, and am not, interested in projecting my problems on to some innocent woman. I know I messed up with my final exam, I know I should have renewed my visa as a precaution back in November, but these are my problems, no one else’s. I am not about to trick someone into committing themselves to me based on my failings.”

“I never said you should,” Andre paused. “You know, two years ago you would have let your experiences embitter you. You would have looked for an easy out and you would not have cared quite so much about -”

“I do not believe myself to have been as callous as you evidently do, but go ahead, give yourself a pat on the back if you feel you must.”

“This has nothing to do with ego, Hewlett. Will you do me the simple courtesy of allowing me to explain?”

Hewlett nodded.

“My wife is cheating on me, if you can call it that. She had been for a rather long time with a man I find impossible to stomach.”

“Senator Arnold you mean?”

“No, no. He is a hobby of mine. Philomena knows, of course. We talk about getting divorced at times, as our three years have long since passed but somehow we never get around to it. It is an arrangement, nothing more. When I met Philomena she was crippled by student debt and I had just finished my residency. I wasn’t making nearly enough money at the time to buy my way into permanent residence, but I had enough for a flat, and enough to help her with a few of her bills.”

“You never loved each other at all?”

“Perhaps not in the way you would define it, but I do love her, and I have loved her, if you take my meaning. Our union is, however, strictly for business purposes. We both understand that. We always have. I am telling you this because such partnerships are not uncommon, especially not in New York, and I think this might be your best shot.” Hewlett opened his wide mouth to protest. Andre held up a finger in warning. “Stop. Hear me out. You would need to fly home to apply for visa renewal and after a three month wait - if what you are telling me is true with regards to your loss of standing -there is no guarantee that your application will even be accepted. Even if it is you
will have wasted the summer when you could have otherwise been completing your coursework.”

“I know.” Hewlett sighed.

“Unless you still have the equivalent of $60,000 in your trust fund -”

“I put my car up for sale ten days ago but thus far there has been no serious interest.”

“Not many people can drive a manual over here.”

“So I’ve found.”

“If you are unable to sell in a reasonable time frame, how much do you have to invest in Plan B?”

Hewlett wanted to simply reply with ‘none’, but Andre had obviously thought this through well enough that he felt obliged to be a gentleman and answer him in the numeric terms he requested. “How much can I afford to pay a woman to pretend to be the love of my life?” he clarified before doing some mental math. “Optimistically, no more than $10,000. How much did you pay Philomena?”

“Thirty. Plus the shared flat.”

“Good, alright. Glad we had this little chat.”

“Don’t be so quick to surrender.”

“I am not surrendering, I was never fighting in the first place.”

“That may be your problem.”

“I do not understand how you find it at all difficult to comprehend. I don’t want a fake wife who sleeps around with people I hate. I don’t want to pay for another fucking relationship. I am friends with you because I had insurance that covered it, my landlord and I get on chiefly due to the fact that I pay for my room and by contrast his wayward son does not. I don’t have anyone else. I don’t even know any women. Do you imagine that I am not lonely? That your solution to me temporary problem would not just make my enduring ones worse?”

Andre exhaled audibly. “You have a lot of friends, Hewlett. What I said earlier, about you paying for my presence, was only in reference to the entrance fee they charge they now at the pub, due, one would imagine, to the loss of property in the many physical altercations have broken out there, some of which I believe you are partially responsible for.”

“In my defense-”

“You needed provide one. I know perhaps better than anyone how Simcoe … gets.”

This was a lie. Andre could not possibly have acquired tenth of Hewlett’s expertise on the subject. He thought about the last time they had physically come to blows more than a year prior. “The fact that he to dare insinuate anything with regards to LFC when QPR was-”

“We are not trying to rehash, I am simply stating that I am looking to you to pay the $20 fee as I spent most of my cash on the taxi out. But come, let’s finish, I want to get there a bit early to get a seat at the bar.”

“The bar? I thought you were set on watching the Manchester Derby.”
“Oh I am, I am. We’re sitting at the bar for your benefit.”

“I don’t need a drink quite as badly as you may imagine. Though, I’ll admit, I need one considerably more than I did before seeing so much of the Senator on your phone.”

“Embarrassing as it is entertaining, isn’t it? When my work has been done, you’ll understand. And speaking of the work I do on my weekends off … when over the course of our conversation did I so much mention alcohol? That is not why we are sitting at the bar.”

“Ah -” Hewlett tried to object.

“I might remind you that we are only poor within our own circles.”

“How long must this continue?”

“Until I’ve made my point.”

“Until you’ve made your point or until I’ve agreed to your scheme?”

“Both.”

“Andre, I don’t have $30,000. I don’t have a flat in Manhattan. I am not poor in my circles, I am destitute. While there may well be thousands of students within New York, $10,000 would do little towards debt relief. I can attest to this from personal experience. Even if I had your funds and the lack of moral conviction that would allow me -”

“You want to stay.” Andre said almost forcefully as he rose from the kitchen chair. “You want to finish what you have stated, enough so that you are willing to part with one of your prized possessions. Think of it this way, stranger things have been done in the pursuit science.”

“I do not argue that.”

“But?”

“What are the chances that I could find someone who would be willing to -”

“Very, very high. Do you know my receptionist?” he asked, flashing a charming smile once more.

“Abigail? Who is all but engaged?”

“She has a friend who is going through a divorce. Currently sleeping on her couch. It is an arrangement that can’t last much longer and I believe I could make an introduction that could lead to your mutual benefit.”

Hewlett shook his head, muttering under his breath “You have to be kidding me.”

“Wait. You need to let me finish.”

“If you mean Anna Strong, I think you already have.”
…like you have never been involved in an immigration conflict. Don’t look at me like that.

I owe a huge shout out to all of the lovely people on tumblr who were willing to answer my questions about life in the United States. I still can’t get over the fact that toilets are free, highways go through towns and cities (and not around them as the Autobahn does) and that Bill Nye was a real thing in the 90s. Thanks also to the people who advised me to break this chapter up – I hated the idea at first but now I am of the mind that it may actually be beneficial to the narrative as a whole (and not just to my update schedule.) Since this is a shout out and not a call out, I am not going to embarrass any of you by name here, but suffice it to say that if any of this refers to you, I am in your debt.

Now, a few notes -
The Full English: The title of this chapter refers to the breakfast hangover cure. It consists of blood pudding (sausage), bacon, eggs, beans, tomato, and toast.

Soccer / Football: "The ball is round and the game lasts for 90 minutes" - Sepp

Green Card: The United States Permanent Resident Card (Form I-551)

Bye Week: The American term for when there is no scheduled match.

ESA: The European Space Agency, which is headquartered in Paris.

“Not many people can drive a manual over here”: Fun fact! Not many people can drive an automatic in Europe.

LFC / QPR: Two English clubs. Queens Park Rangers was an obvious choice, Liverpool’s chant goes ‘Come on you Reds!” which also seemed appropriate. The Manchester Derby is between City and United. As someone with taste I hate doing this to poor John Andre, but take a guess as to who he’s supporting in this match-up. (And if you were wondering, no, I am not myself especially keen on any English club in particular. I was born and raised Fenerbahce Istanbul, but my heart now belongs to FC Bayern – and that is how integration works. Now you know. ;)

Next week we will visit the bar before the murder, you’ll get to meet Anna, Abigail, Akinbode, Cicero, Rogers, a few of the various “redcoats” whose names I won’t trouble you with now, and Simcoe will be back. (Yay!) That should take us up to the day of the crime, and by the time Mary runs over Senator Arnold (I am hoping!) that the entirety of the interpersonal dynamics I’ve introduced will make perfect sense. I will likely break for a week to revisit Medusa at some point in the near-ish future, but not next week. No, brush up on your soccer terms, kids –

Up Next: Redcoats with Red Cards

(If you want you can leave comments/kudos. Always nice, but never necessary. My only goal in posting my writing is to provide you with a few minutes of entertainment. Hope you enjoyed.)
The Full English (Pt. 2)

Chapter Summary

Simcoe argues with Hewlett over the nature of statistics as if his life depends on it (and it just might.)

Chapter Notes

This chapter deals in part with an accidental overdose and its immediate psychological aftermath. Recurring themes include burn out, immigration fraud, association football, gambling debt, and self-medication (albeit only with beer in this round.) So … consider this your warning label.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Is that British slang?” Jordan Akinbode asked the after hearing his best-friend-by-default refer to someone as an oyster for the third time that morning.

“Not … quite in this context.” Simcoe said, adding that there was a story behind the sobriquet without elaborating on in. Akinbode didn’t pursue the matter further, though he made a note to consult a dictionary with reference to the word’s colloquial meaning, if, in fact, there was one. It would do him little good to simply ask. Simcoe may have been his closest confidant, but their relationship was rather disproportional by nature. He needed Simcoe’s friendship far more than Simcoe needed his, and, for the moment, Simcoe seemed to need the friendship of the man whom on the receiving end of the series of text messages the ginger was shooting off like bullets.

“Hewlett won’t call Wankfield. Says that it’d be less of an embarrassment to lose with eight than to lose with nine.”

By Wankfeild, the captain meant their teammate Wakefield, or, as an American in the same situation might put it, Wakefuck. This time Akinbode didn’t need to ask for a translation. “Should I have a go at it then?” he asked. Simcoe glanced to the side but gave no verbal response. Akinbode decided on an alternate course of action.

He took the two empty beer bottles sitting before them back to one of his former classmates to exchange for new ones. Anna Strong had been in his undergraduate program at NYU, had, like him, graduated summa cum laude and had, like him, immediately thereafter pursued a law degree at Columbia. They had both graduated with like honors. Afterwards their paths differed. Akinbode had passed the bar on his first attempt. Anna was still working behind one. It had been two years. He had made junior partner at a prestigious firm. She had made cocktails. And none of it made sense.

A few months prior Anna had asked him to represent her in her divorce case. It wasn’t his branch but he agreed out of a possibly misplaced sense of guilt and gratitude. She e-mailed the required
paperwork, flawlessly filled out, which he only needed to sign as a formality and print on his firm’s stationery to ensure that the proceedings would be swiftly addressed. He was appear in court on the coming Tuesday. The divorce was non-contested. In total, it would take 20 minutes of his time. 20 minutes he had come to resent her for. Anna knew everything there was to know about New York State Law. She was smarter and more capable than most of the partners at his firm. The bar wasn’t a problem in itself, but rather an excuse that had transformed into one, and not just for the soon-to-be-ex-Mrs. Strong. College debt had killed her credit. Unable to get an apartment on her own and unwilling to move in with either of her parents, she had landed on his long-term girlfriend’s couch and seemed unmotivated to rise from these depths. And Abigail? She seemed to welcome the reason Jordan’s 10-year-plan had hit a set-back. By his calculations, or rather, expectations, Abigail would have been living with him in his brownstone by now and wearing a giant diamond at that, were it not for the charity she was doing the woman who had just handed him two bottles of Bud Light.

In short, Anna owed him. Much more than another round on the house.

“Can you take the afternoon off?” he asked.

“You know I am working a double.”

He did, for she had done so every Sunday that memory allowed for. He used this fact to further his next argument. “You need a break, and I need someone who can play left wing.”

“I haven’t played soccer in years.”

She hadn’t done much else either, Akinbode reasoned, but he didn’t bring this up. He didn’t need to.

“But you coach,” said Cicero, the son of the other bartender on duty. “You have your cleats in the car.”

Simcoe had recruited the help of the boy Akinbode hoped would one day be his step-son earlier that morning to their shared cause. He was surprisingly good with kids. Akinbode was good with mothers, this mother in particular, and had reassured her when she began to raise her concerns in the form of don’t you think you ought to have checked with me first?

“You about to ask your mom to cover for me then?” Anna asked. Cicero’s shoulder’s fell as he shot Jordan a look that said I tried.

“Close the bar for a few hours. It is not like you get a lot of afternoon traffic anyway, and the DeJong’s are still in Florida.”

Anna, ever the rebel, seemed to consider his preposition. “Isn’t that Andre’s position though? Or is he sick too?”

“Andre inn’t playin’,” a gruff voice from down the bar informed her. “Least not if your lot expects me to.”

“What we expect, Mr. Rogers, is that you honor your commitment to this club without regard to you dispute with one of its other members.” Simcoe said calmly as he appeared next to Akinbode, who had not heard him approach, taking one of the beers from his hand. Averting his attention, Simcoe asked “Am I to understand that you will be joining us, Mrs. Strong?”

Anna didn’t answer, but handed Simcoe a pen when he asked for one. He started marking up a coaster with assorted letters as he though aloud. “We’ll play Cicero up front with Jordan and move
Andre to midfield with me. Anna – are you left or right footed?”

“Left.” Akinbode and Anna answered at once, with Akinbode adding that Anna had played left back in several international U20 matches as an undergrad.

Simcoe blinked in surprise and smiled at her in a way she didn’t respond warmly to. “I never knew that,” he said.

“It was a long time ago,” she replied, brushing off any sense of optimism Akinbode had hoped to inspire with her tone.

“Unfortunately Oyster is useless save as a defender so I’ll need to play you on the outside.” Akinbode smiled the captain’s strategy seemed to concur with his own.

“Eastin and Joyce can switch if needed.”

“Yer going to need yerself a new keeper -” Rogers tried to interject.

“And what may I ask would make you say that?” Simcoe’s voice grew higher. If this wasn’t already a threat, Akinbode reasoned, it was about to become one.

At that very moment the bell attached to the door rang to signal its opening.

“It is because he is under the impression that I owe him money.” Andre informed the room. “I don’t.” he added flatly as he threw a half-empty bottle of lukewarm Irn Bru he had confiscated from Hewlett’s car. Rogers examined the contents of the bottle against Anna’s protests of no outside food or beverage. He assured her the soft drink could qualify as neither, said something to Hewlett in Gaelic and received a response in kind, lifted his head fully for the first time since he had arrived at opening and said “I’ll come to yer game, John.”

Akinbode didn’t know to which John Robert Rogers was referring (the one who had taken a seat next to him or the one who had resumed one of his numerous ongoing debates with the unfortunate foreign grad student who had just arrived) but the matter of starting without a full team seemed to be as settled as it was ever going to be. He thanked Anna, more from hoping to set a good example for Cicero than any sense of obligation. She owed him, after all.

Akinbode had no way of know this at the time, but later that afternoon, driving back to work after a defeat on the field, Anna would agree to paying a price far higher than one he personally would have set. It would result in several attempts at murder, a marriage, a divorce and a child born of sin and christened in his name.

It would make his legal career. And incidentally ruin hers before it had been given a fair start. But Anna wouldn’t be sleeping on Abigail’s couch for much longer.

They had been arguing since exchanging greetings. Since they had both woken up, if one were to take into account texting and social media into account.

Everyone thought he was being an asshole. He probably was, but not without good reason.
He had to keep this going.

But talking about maths after five beers was taxing, regardless of how committed one was to their cause.

It helped, of course, that on the topic of statistics, John Graves Simcoe really did fundamentally disagree with Edmund Hewlett. Hewlett was of the mind that statistics should not be considered mathematics at all, but rather as an attempt to numerically explain uncertainty. Simcoe acknowledged that the theorems used in his branch were of little interest to pure mathematicians, but refused to consent that it was pretentious to refer to a subject that made so much use of calculation as anything other than epistemology. Especially to someone whose work was purely theoretical in itself. More especially when said individual seemed to have a primitive need to always get the last word, no matter what the debate was about. Most especially when, eighteen days prior, said individual had made an attempt on his own life.

As far as he could tell, Simcoe was the only one who knew. Not that they had ever really talked about it. Not that there was all that much to say.

It had started as a joke the summer before. They had been at a restaurant in the city. A seafood restaurant. Simcoe had wanted to order oysters, Hewlett advised him in his approximation of a mother-knows-best tone that one ought not to eat raw shellfish in months containing the letter ‘u’ on the grounds of heath. Simcoe insisted that they wouldn’t be on the menu were that the case.

He ended up in hospital with severe food poisoning early the next morning.

Point for Hewlett.

Slightly embittered by the experience, he made sure that he listed Hewlett as his emergency contact. Hewlett received a call at 6 AM after a night of drinking.

Point for Simcoe.

When her arrived at hospital, after giving yet another lecture about how irresponsible Simcoe had been in his choice of appetizer (and receiving a nickname as a result) Hewlett had changed his emergency contact to Simcoe (it had been someone named Mary before – an ex? A classmate? A distant relative? Aside from Anna and Abigail at the bar neither of them really knew any women. Simcoe, for his part, didn’t have anyone listed prior to having the idea of inconveniencing his sometimes-friend.) Hewlett had said that he had made the change so that if he was ever to be murdered the policed would know who to investigate. Simcoe replied (without yet having any way to verify his words) that were he to ever kill someone, the police would never recover the body.

He smiled. Then Hewlett. It was uncommitted. But, Simcoe asked himself, aside from this Mary whose very existence he had reason to question, who other than himself would Hewlett call in a calamity?

He wouldn’t admit it, but there wasn’t anyone Simcoe trusted more to show up in a crisis. In some rare occasions, Hewlett’s predictability could be considered reliability, and Simcoe was grateful for it. Which is why when he was called by the hospital two weeks ago, he left in the middle of a lunch meeting, knowing full well that the decision to do so would cost him somewhere in the low millions in stock options – so that he could be there when Hewlett woke up after having his stomach pumped. He found out from doctors that Hewlett had taken triple the recommended dose of a common benzodiazepine before attempting to defend his doctoral thesis. Failing to do so after making himself quite literally incapable of the task, he crushed a few more to ‘treat’ the panic attack he felt coming on. And then he had the sense to ring an ambulance before passing out in a
public restroom.

As much as Simcoe had wanted to tell him what a fool he was, he knew it wouldn’t help the situation. So instead, after hours of waiting and investing all of his spare change in a machine that made the worst cup of tea he had ever had (he drank eight in total during his wait) Simcoe was there to argue about probability distribution when Hewlett woke up, confused, wondering where he was and why, in the name of all things holy, was the captain of his association football team there to make things worse.

Simcoe’s working theory (and it had worked thus far) was that as long as Hewlett was forced into the role of an intellectual autocrat, which he was, by nature, oh-so-comfortable playing, it would be less tempting for him to try and finish what he claimed before God and Simcoe and the unfortunate nurse who had been left with his discharge not to have intentionally started. He had, after all, been the one to phone the ambulance.

In short, it matter very little to Simcoe when he was told to leave “poor Edmund” alone. He ignored them when they asked (as Abigail had the last time it was his turn to fetch a round from the bar) “What has he ever done to you?”

In part because the only answer that was his alone to give was “He told me not to eat oysters in the summer and was right about it, and I resent him as a result.”

The two had other intellectual differences Simcoe was keen to exploit as they presented themselves. Which they seemed to with relative and increasing frequency. Which he could express mathematically were he to implement probability theory. An event $E$ can happen in $r$ ways out of a total of $n$ possible equally likely ways, let $E$ represent the probability of landing on a topic that will sufficiently aggravate Oyster, he thought. He had to keep this going. He realized his fingers were tapping. Filling the silence. The match was shite and he had let the conversation lapse.

He had to keep this going.

He took the pen he used to sketch the game plan and wrote $P(E)= r/n$ on the opposite side of the same coaster. Hewlett saw it and shook his head. Simcoe gave him a wicked grin.

He had to keep this going. It had yet to occur to him that it was as much for his own sake as it was for Hewlett’s. It wouldn’t occur to him at all, in fact. He would be informed as much the following Thursday by Dr. Andre, and he would have to pay $250 to learn that he was lashing out as a means of coping with abnormal stress. Which was, of course, absolute rubbish.

Before the start of the second half he had mentioned that Anna Strong had been recruited to join their ranks. She had been semi-professional in her youth, and depending on how today's game went, Hewlett may have to surrender his preferred position to her. After all, Simcoe stated, he couldn’t give preferential treatment to defeatist.

“Anna Strong is playing?” Hewlett asked twice for clarification. “With us?”

He excused himself after twice receiving a slow nod of affirmation.

Simcoe waited a few minutes. Finding that it was increasingly impossible for him to keep his temper under control in a room full of Americans cheering for Man U under the pretense that the model H&M used in their underwear ads was still playing, and one fellow Brit who (although he likely knew the current roster) was making an embarrassment of the nation by carrying on in the same overblown fashion, he went to find the only person he knew on this (lesser) side of the pond who harbored a hatred of the Red Devils that rivaled his own.
Hewlett was in the bathroom. Hiding in the same stall that Simcoe had previously defaced in his name.

“You know they don’t even feature in the TV series. The Greyjoys.” Hewlett lamented.

Simcoe had no idea what he was talking about. Or if that had anything to do with Anna. Rather than confess to his ignorance, he changed the subject.

“Still nil-nil.”

“Ah.” Hewlett replied without interest.

He didn’t want to ask.

He didn’t want to know.

He really didn’t want to have a heart to heart with a man he pretended for everyone’s benefit to loath beyond all measure in the gents at a dive bar. But against his better reason he asked “Alright then?” as casually as he could, half terrified that Hewlett had just crushed and swallowed some thirty odd pills.

“Can you keep a secret?”

Simcoe shrugged but closed the door behind him, keeping his hand on it lest he be forced to run back upstairs to fetch (and perhaps then kill) the good doctor. It was enough of an invitation for Hewlett to continue, and so, he did.

“Anna … ah, Mrs. Strong. It is just -”

Simcoe closed his eyes, waiting for the worse. The worst then being: given her predisposition towards short, skinny losers, made a pass at me, which cause me panic, short, skinny loser that I am.

Not, as Hewlett actually said: Andre suggested that I marry her for a Green Card. We had a bit of a row over it. I don’t want to bring her into a situation which I wish I wasn’t in myself.

“Then don’t,” Simcoe said simply before Hewlett could insert a conjunction.

Not that that stopped him.

Not that Simcoe had expected it to.

“I am tempted. To ask at the very least. I know her living situation isn’t ideal and I could offer an alternative. Plus some degree of financial incentive.’”

“Do you hear yourself when you speak?” Simcoe asked in raised tones. Hewlett told him about his dissertation (the part between the two attempts at overdose which he continued to maintain were unintentional); about the timeline he was given for a second chance and the reaction of the ESA –

“And you think –given your circumstances- that you have something to offer someone else?”

“Platonically speaking.”

Hewlett went on to tell Simcoe -after swearing him to secrecy once more- that Andre had done the same thing years before. Simcoe wasn’t sure why this fact in itself surprised him. He had always suspected that man of questionable dealings (though to be fair, he suspected most people of the ills
he failed to recognize as his own.) And his opinion had already been reduced due to the events of eighteen days ago – Hewlett was a fool, if Simcoe, a layman, could see that much, Dr. Andre, a trained professional - who incidentally Simcoe’s HR department insisted he entrust his own mental health to- ought to have seen that as well.

And yet he was, evidently suggesting a legally binding union between a woman whom Simcoe thought might just be the love of his life and a man who most certainly did not deserve the simple pleasure of her company.

He thought of a more delicate way to put it.

“Why don’t you just go home? Apply for a student visa and accept that you may have to wait until the following semester. It is not like the stars are going anywhere.”

“That is not … well, entirely accurate. The universe is constantly expanding.”

Simcoe took a long but shallow breath through clenched teeth, staring at Hewlett without blinking until the other man’s discomfort showed itself in his wide features.

“That is your logic?”

“It is a fact?” Hewlett seemed genuinely confused. Simcoe had had about all he could take.

Leaving Hewlett where he sat, Simcoe went upstairs, pulled Andre from his barstool and dragged him outside. He overheard Anna state that this was why the bar had a strict policy on insurance fees it demanded.

“Nothing is broken.” Abigail confirmed, examining the fallen barstool.

“We will say there is and spilt the profits?” Anna suggested with a smiled. Abigail responded with a fist bump before reaching for Andre’s abandoned phone. A few of the pub’s patrons gathered at the window to watch the action outside.

“I am so sick of this shit,” Anna said. She counted. Fifteen. Plus two in the parking lot. She looked at the TV. 60:38. 60:39. “Has anyone seen Hewlett in the past half or so?” she asked to no response.

Abigail was enthralled with the same app that had been keeping Andre busy since he entered the bar, praising the signal he suddenly found himself back in range of. “Abby?”

Her eyes went wide. “Oh my God Annie, you need to read this!”

“Have you seen Hewlett?”

“Not since he came in, why?”

“Look, I’ll rock/paper/scissors you for who has to go down to the toilets to check if anything has been broken.”
“Anything or anyone?”

Anna rolled her eyes. “I hate match day,” she said as she placed her left fist into her right palm and pounded it three times. Abigail mirrored the motion, unclenching her fist in the end whilst Anna’s stayed shut. She reached back for the phone. Anna turned around with a sigh.

“Hey. Hi!” she said to the man who had just finished walking up from the basement.

“Hello.” Hewlett responded cautiously.

“Is anything broken? Besides the sink. We know about the sink.”

Hewlett blinked, still unsure what was happening. “The American higher education system in its entirety?” he ventured.

Anna thought about it for a moment. “Yeah. That’s fair. Beer?”

She brought him a cider instead when he asked for one.

“So I hear you will be joining us this afternoon.”

“Um.” Anna wasn’t sure how to respond. She wanted to play with people her own age, certainly, but hadn’t actually agreed to do so before the captain put her name on the roster. Part of her had been afraid to object.

“I’ve been meaning to talk to you about that,” Abigail interjected. “I’ll make you a deal. Go, keep an eye out for my boy. I’ll cover for you here. Tonight if you could just – I know you were planning on studying but- could you also maybe keep an eye out for Cicero? Jordan wants to take me out.”

Anna smiled and agreed, stating that anything she could do to repay Abigail’s kindness was -. But Abigail cut her off. “No. Just this.”

Anna turned around to Hewlett again – who introduced himself as Edmund. And smiled at her for the first time.

Outside Simcoe shoved Andre. They argued. In hushed tones. Knowing they had attracted an audience. Andre defended his proposal the same way he had to Hewlett when he had gotten self-righteous about his position. Simcoe dealt deeper blows. Said that he had never considered Andre particular capable (who forms a football team primarily out of people under ongoing anger management therapy?) But he really needed to leave Hewlett out of whatever scheme he was working on. Andre said he was trying to help out a few of his friends. And then Simcoe said it. Aloud. For the first time. To anyone. “Hewlett tried to kill himself. He tried bloody well take his own life with a weapon you prescribed. You enabled him.” Andre replied that Simcoe only had a pale grasp on the situation. He, on the other hand, was very much aware what was going on with each and every one of his patients.

Simcoe had his doubts. But thought it was best not to act on them further. They were already down
two players. And he had to wear the band of captaincy in less than 40 minutes.

They lost 3-2 and only because Anna was every bit as brilliant on the pitch as Akinbode had built her up to be.

After the match Simcoe drove back to the bar with Akinbode, Cicero and Joyce. Rogers had dipped out before they had gone back to the locker room to change, dodging a tab he had left open. Andre and Eastin carpooled back to the city after they had taken quick showers. Anna had been given her own changing room. Simcoe had tried to look for Hewlett after borrowing antifungal cream from a player on the other team for him. (Hewlett had the worst case of athlete’s foot any of their number had ever seen – which somehow he managed to blame on Simcoe on the grounds that he had gotten it when they were going to the gym together in the mornings. This had given Simcoe pause for that had started around New Year and ended shortly thereafter. How long had he had it? Didn’t it itch? Why hadn’t he purchased a remedy? Was he planning to cut his toes off? And how was Simcoe responsible for the fact that he had forgotten flip-flops for the locker room? Some people.)

When he couldn’t find him, he saw that Anna’s car was missing and new without searching further that Hewlett was with her. Nothing seemed out of sorts when he met them back at the pub. Until he asked Anna to become a permanent member of the team. She consented. There was a toast. Anna and Hewlett said “to us” as everyone else had, but this was different. They were looking each other in the eyes. They were smiling.

Simcoe felt sick.

Chapter End Notes

I hope and pray that no one young and impressionable is reading this fic. Contradicting that last statement, here is a ton of notes, many of which deal with some pretty dark themes you’ve just encountered:

-“Is that British slang?” / “Not … quite in this context.”: The third definition of “oyster” is “a closemouthed or uncommunicative person, especially one who keeps secrets well.” Does it fit Hewlett? I can’t quite decide, and you?

- Wankfeild / Wakefuck: Oh how I love a good name based pun. So here is one that didn’t make it into the final cut … he has the Wakeflu. :)

- summa cum laude: With the highest honors

- international U20 matches: All the players are under 20 years old.

- “Unfortunately Oyster is useless save as a defender so I’ll need to play you on the outside.”: defenders are so under appreciated. Please go out and hug your back line.

- Irn Bru: a Scottish soft drink. It tastes like cotton candy and it is awesome. Chase
with vodka, because that mess is sweet as ----

- Is statistics truly a branch of mathematics or would it be better classified as a science?: We could talk about this all day. I cut a lot out but if you have an opinion or want more of an explanation of either or both sides of the argument hit me up on Tumblr or in the comments.

- one ought not to eat raw shellfish in months containing the letter ‘u’: Fact. Just don’t.

- benzodiazepines: Minor tranquilizers that act against anxiety. Sedative. Highly addictive and commonly misused.

- P(E)= r/n: Definition of Probability

- Americans cheering for Man U under the pretense that the model H&M used in their underwear ads was still playing: David Beckham retired in 2013. He last played for Man U in 2003. This might well be insulting so some of you, but the last time I was in the s-tates (for all of four days) I met a lot of people who didn’t know this. (But by that token ask me or any other average European to name one single American Football (the egg-shaped one) player. Nope. Drawing a blank.)

- “You know they don’t even feature in the TV series. The Greyjoys.”: I mean I don’t know. They might now. I stopped watching when the show over took the books. Optimist that I am and all. But this was a cheap reference to a previous chapter.

- crushed pills: can be absorbed quicker. Alcohol also has this effect. So please, please, please if you dear reader are on any kind of medication whatsoever take as instructed.

Did I forget anything? Do be so kind as to let me know. Comments and kudos are always cool to get, but sometimes as hassle to give, and if you are just not in the mood trust me when I say we have all been there. I’m just happy that you took the time to read this mess. Thanks, as always! Hope to see your lovely faces again soon! Till then, XOXO.

Up Next: Everybody Talks
The Courtship

Chapter Summary

The former poster child of the Pro-Life Movement considers the ethics of spying on a functional alcoholic and his dysfunctional friends whilst her roommate falls in love with one of them.

Chapter Notes

Teen pregnancy, state politics, childhood trauma, and vaguely written female masturbation. Enjoy!

Abigail had been homeless for 10 days before she finally got an appointment at the free clinic. Her mother had kicked her out when she found out she was pregnant. She was fifteen.

Before finding herself with a rucksack full of clothes and nowhere to turn, she had made up her mind to have an abortion. Loneliness changed it. She found herself in a staring contest with the volunteer OB-GYN when she spoke the words that would permanently alter the course of her life.

“If it weren’t for your husband’s legislation, I would have been able to purchase contraceptives. Now this baby is my only family. Of course I am not seeking an abortion out of state.”

She had the incredible luck that Dr. Margret Shippen’s youngest daughter had overheard her outburst. Of course, what Peggy heard was not the cutting criticism that Abigail had intended, but rather part of a commercial that would soon be run state-wide. Her father was up for reelection, after all. He seemed to have been in a constant campaigning cycle since her birth. Her mother’s very presence at the free clinic was due entirely to the recommendations of one of her father’s advisors. Peggy was there with the camera crew. It was what she knew.

Abigail had smiled for the camera as she gleefully said “If it weren’t for Governor Shippen’s legislation, contraception would have killed my family.” She smiled at various speaking events, including the time she was interviewed by the local Fox-affiliate. She had no reason not to. The Shippen’s were paying all of her medical expenses. She was living in their home.

Later, she would discover that the other people who had been in that particular series of ads had been paid far more by a special-interest group than all of the care that Abigail received was worth, if one were to put a dollar value on it. By that point in her life, it made no difference to Abigail whatsoever. The friendships she had forged with the Shippen sisters while living with them were worth more to her than any amount of cash.

She really had incredible luck.
She would have lived with the family until she finished high school, had she, in fact, finished high school. After she had given birth a month early, possibly to coincide with a rally being held in the governor’s honor, she had decided to leave that world behind as soon as opportunity would allow. The baby had been taken from her before she had had a chance told hold him. She couldn’t be certain from her hospital bed, but she had a sinking suspicion that there was already a reporter taking pictures of the child in his incubator. The next morning her fears would play out on local news. By then she would already have a plan of escape.

She had seen the commercials for online universities before, but never paid them much mind. The first three times the ad telling her and whomever else happened to be watching History of Rome at 2 AM on a channel that would later keep the same name but would only air documentaries about blue-collar workers in Alaska, she ignored them. The fourth time she decided that becoming a medical billing specialist might not be such a bad idea after all.

She wrote down the number, and closed her eyes. When she woke up the next morning to a room full of excited Shippens and their yes-men, she had made her decision. And decided on a name for her baby; Cicero.

The course took nine months to complete. After Cicero’s first birthday, Abigail moved her small family - impossible save for the ban on contraceptives that had since been overturned - to New York City where she had found a full time job. She was seventeen. In the years to come she would advance to the position Administrative Head. If her life had gone according to its original plan, she would have graduated from high school in a month after originally taking the position. She considered sometimes her life wouldn’t have gone much beyond that. She certainly wouldn’t have as much reason to fight for a better future. Eventually, she imagined, she would have ended up like her mother, under educated, under employed, and unwilling to do anything about it.

Abigail lived in the city for two years before moving to Long Island when Cicero started preschool. It was there that she met several pre-law students, including the one who worked at the only bar in the small town of Setauket, who would in short time become one of her best friends, and the handsome man she was arguing with about a national minimum wage, who would later become her significant other.

She was Anna’s maid-of-honor. She was also the first person Anna called when her husband was arrested for a minor possession change, when he elected to serve in the US Navy for two years instead of going to prison for three; the first person she called when Selah had decided to enlist after his conscription had ended; the first person she called when he came back from Iraq with a girl named Najma (who, as it would turn out, had been born and raised in Trenton and was serving as his CO); and ultimately the first person she called when it was clear that they would be unable to reconcile their differences and spilt.

Abigail offered her home to Anna as she herself had been offered a home when she needed one. She liked having her around. She was the only person who Abigail had ever truly trusted with her son.

That is, of course, until the day Anna Strong excitedly told her the latest mistake in a series that Abigail was stating to believe were by-design. Two days prior to her divorce being finalized, Anna had agreed to marry a man whom Abigail knew from the waiting room of her employers’.
She worked at a psychiatric clinic.

Their first date started out disastrously. After Anna’s inaugural training with her new soccer team (another decision she was beginning to regret), the pair had gone to a Barnes and Nobel nearby at her suggestion. She had wanted to grab coffee, he had alternate plans. For a while the walked through the rows of bookshelves in silence, occasionally picking up works with interesting covers, making private judgements at each other’s taste. Anna decided after fifteen minutes that Edmund probably though himself smarter than her and was probably correct in his assessment. She had never heard of half of the things that seemed to warrant his interest. When she would pick up a book for herself, her selection would be met with an “Ah.” or “Hm.” as if her preference for popular literature told him everything he needed to know about her. As if he somehow disapproved. Without knowing why, Anna saw this as a challenge. Without knowing why, she hoped to show off. She walked over to the classics and chose the most impressive looking book she saw, flipping through it as if she understood the Latin text. “Meus ventus!” he smiled. “Salve,” she replied with the single word she recalled from high school. Hewlett looked skeptical, than pleased, then curious. “You … understand Latin then?” he asked. Without waiting for her to reply he told her he thought that was brilliant. Anna smiled uncomfortably as he purchased the book for her.

Afterwards, when they were having coffee and a light but overpriced dinner in the book store’s café, Anna flipped through the pages trying desperately to remember more of something she hadn’t used in twelve years. Edmund, meanwhile, spoke about his love of Ovid, his favorite passages, what certain verses meant to him and framed his understanding of the thematic tension between art and nature. Anna hadn’t gotten anywhere close to being able to read ancient texts in school. She had barely mastered the verb congregations, and the vocabulary was lost on her. She was keen to listen however. She had never met someone who spoke the way he did. She mentioned this when he asked for her opinion, using the words odd, first and date casually in her response.

“Date?” Hewlett replied, slightly flustered. “Ah … Anna it has always been my intention to keep matters between us, well … platonic, as it were.”

“Platonic,” Anna repeated slowly. If she was wondering if he truly thought her a fool, she was about to have her question answered.

“Platonic, er, yes. Deriving its name from Plato -” He stopped short as he noticed her glare. “Ah, Mrs., rather, Miss Strong now I suppose, I apologize if-”

“Platonic?” she repeated for a second time. “You honestly think that I don’t know the root or the definition of platonic?”

“I … no, no. I merely hoped to indulge my interest in philosophy. I … rather hoped you might share it. If I insulted you in any way, I ask humbly for your pardon.”

Anna looked down at the book with the words she couldn’t understand and back up at the man who seemed set on patronizing her. She wanted to leave. She confessed that she had taken two years of Latin in high school because she thought it would be easier to meet her graduation requirement with a dead language than a living one. To this Hewlett smiled. He had also originally chosen Latin to avoid ever having to speak it. And then Anna smiled. He bought them both another round of coffee and a round after that. They stayed until closing. By the time the teenage barista who had steamed milk for them all night ever so politely told the pair that it was time to go, Anna
no longer wanted to.

“Platonic?” Abigail repeated after Anna told her the story two weeks later. Hearing the word in her best friend’s mouth didn’t make it sound any better. “Jesus.” She shook her head before stretching it as far back as she could. “I can’t work with this.”

Anna had asked Abigail to write her an affidavit stating that she and Edmond had been in a long-term relationship prior to his impromptu proposal. What Abigail evidently heard was *I give you permission to use my relationship to further your armature artistic endeavors.*

Abigail thought that the marriage plot was the most intriguing story line she would ever play any kind of role in and felt compelled to write a fictional account of it for her blog. Anna thought that Abigail had stories of her own worth telling. She had been saying as much since the first time the two of them had gotten properly wasted together and Abigail had told her the epic tale of how she used her teenage pregnancy to influence the outcome of a gubernatorial election. Abigail had shrugged then, as she did now. “Things are just less interesting when they are happening to you.”

Anna had to agree. Still, she initially took issue with the idea of Abigail writing a story about her – dare she say *love life*? – knowing that as with all of Abigail’s stories, it was bound to be published online sooner or later. Fearing that someone at the US Immigration and Naturalization Services would one day find it and connect the dots back to Edmund and herself, she had asked that the setting might be changed accordingly. Abigail had agreed immediately. Anna was a mess. She was the inspiration for much of her best friend’s fiction. There was no reason why her “epic romance” would cease to be epic if the particulars were changed.

“An arranged marriage,” Abigail tapped her pen on the kitchen table. “A young divorcee and a brilliant scientist. Maybe you’re spies. And it is set during the Revolutionary War or something. And you are on opposite sides but fall in love anyway.”

“One, you really, really need to take the Hamilton CD out of your car. It has been months. Two, if Edmund and I go to immigration with a story like that they are going to say the same thing.”

“About Hamilton?”

Anna hoped to get the conversation back on track. Abigail was meant to be penning Anna’s affidavit, not her next novel. As much as Anna wanted this part of her life to remain secret, as much as she was loath to talk about her odd courtship, she needed Abigail to be crafting the story she asked her to write for the benefit of the court; the story that she would soon be telling the court when they set a date.

“Or maybe you are a rebel spy and he is a British officer.”

“Can’t see it.”

“And why is that?”

“For one he is Scottish, not English.”

“Untied since 1707. Just saying.”
Anna found herself wondering what Abigail did all day at her nine-to-five. Her own job paid little but demanded a great deal of her mental energy. Abigail, on the other hand, had a well-paying job that seemed to leave her with plenty of time to Google random facts. That, or she simply had a mind for them. “Oh my God, we would rock pub trivia if we were allowed to play.”

“There are other bars you know.”

Anna jumped into her usual excuses about how she couldn’t take time off right now, suspecting that Abigail could see through her lies without ever acknowledging their existence.

She gave Anna a skeptical look.

“Go on about Edmund. Sorry.”

Anna feared that she would go on for days if given the chance.

“He is …” she stopped, blushing. “Okay, don’t judge me on this alright? He is like a gentleman from a Regency-Era novel. The kind of guy you actually want to spend more time with. Not because he is fun, or even all that handsome from most angles - and God there are too many in his face alone- but because he is interesting. And interested. In literally everything but me.”

“Sounds like he’s gotten some dating advice from Andre.” Abigail responded in referenced to her boss whose game strategy they had both seen many fall victim to before.

“Could be.” Anna allowed herself a moment to hope this were the case. She knew they ran in the same circles, but there was something different. Edmund was too honest. “Or not. He seems so genuine. You should see the way his face lights up when he talks about the things he loves. He has read everything and can hold his own in a discussion or debate once it gets going. But he seems all at once … I am not sure. Reserved. But not in a cold way. Not at all. I wish … that we had met under different circumstances. That he saw me as more than a means to an end. I mean, there is some comfort in the certainty of it. But I wish it was with someone else.”

“Who?”

“No one in particular. With Edmund it just seems like there could be more there.”

“What exactly makes you think he is not interested?”

She was glad for the panel of glass separating her from the patients. It was for her own safety, mostly to serve as protection from the mother of troubled teens who suddenly found themselves equally troubled when Abigail was forced to explain that their insurance was refusing to cover the cost of more than six visits. But she could deal with screaming customers. After all, she moonlighted at a sports bar at the weekend in order to help pay her son’s private school tuition. Hysteria was easy. Hard, in contrast was calm. And John Graves Simcoe was far too calm for her liking.

He looked at her, unblinking, as she examined the monthly appointment schedule.

“Dr. Howe is not currently accepting new patients,” she advised, hoping he wouldn’t note the slight crack in her voice, “and Dr. Clinton doesn’t have an opening prior to March 6th.”
“Then I should rather like to take it.”

“It is at 10 AM,” she said, hoping to dissuade him from his decision.

“No matter.” Simcoe replied, his blank face making a momentary shift into a slight smile.

“Do you want to keep your appointments with Dr. Andre until then?”

Simcoe shook his head. “I fear that attempting to obtain medical care from someone whom I see socially serves neither of our interests.”

Abigail nodded as she wrote the date of the appointment on a business card. This was the second time she had heard as much in the past two weeks, and she knew that this wouldn’t be the last of it. After office hours, or perhaps before, Dr. Clinton would certainly have something to say about the matter as he had on previous occasions.

Simcoe thanked her and wished her a pleasant remainder of her afternoon.

When his back was turned, Abigail nodded at one of her subordinates and walked into the breakroom to make a telephone call.

“Can you pick up Cicero after school?”

“Andre off the wagon again?”

Abigail wished that her boyfriend held her favorite boss in higher esteem.

“Can you?”

“Wait.”

She heard Jordan put her palm over the receiver, muffling the sound of him talking to whomever was in his office, likely an underpaid paralegal being given an impossible assignment. She felt herself hoping it was Falkoff, noting the hypocrisy in the fact that she had strong, possibly unwarranted opinions of a few his co-workers as well.

“It won’t be a problem,” he paused, “do you want me to … do anything with him afterwards?”

Abigail could hear the awkwardness in his voice as he asked and knew it to be of her making. She had been on a few dates with Jordan before mentioning that she had a son, surprised that the then college-student’s interest in her hadn’t abruptly ended as experience had told her it would. They went on a few more dates before she let him meet her boy. As Cicero grew from toddler to preteen Jordan was the only father figure he had known. But he wasn’t Cicero’s father, as Abigail reminded her boyfriend each time her felt comfortable enough to offer his opinion on anything pertaining to Cicero’s upbringing. She knowingly pushed him away time and time again. It wasn’t that she considered him a bad influence, or entertained any kind of fantasy that he didn’t have her boy’s best interest at heart. The fact remained, however, that Cicero had already been abandoned by one father prior to his birth. Though Jordan Akinbode had proven time and time again that he bore no resemblance to the confused Philadelphia teenager who had lost her number after giving her a child, the tension remained.
“Just make sure he does his homework. He may need help with math or science.”

“Should I … wait?”

“No. I am not sure when I will get home. If you don’t mind -”

“I don’t. Not at all.”

When the conversation was finished, Abigail was intensely proud of herself for allowing the man whom she planned to spend the rest of her life with to share in her life. It was a small step, but a step nonetheless.

It wasn’t just that Edmund had said platonic, it was that he’d meant it. Maybe it was that Anna was used to having drinks bought for her, maybe it was because she hadn’t really been seeing anyone in so long that she had forgotten the taste of rejection, but it left her feeling broken and bitter every time he left without the slightest nod towards intimacy.

She thought about him when she touched herself. Her fingers were as timid as he seemed to be. She hadn’t showered. She never did when she got home shortly before sun rise. Exhausted, she unfolded her blanket and laid on Abigail’s couch, imagining the man who had walked her home, carrying the flowers and chocolate and other tokens he had purchased for the sake of appearances.

She liked him.

She like the fantasy of the packaged romance. The roses and truffles and cards that he signed with only his initials. She liked playing along. She wondered how much of it would have been a game to her were it not for the things he seemed to do with increasing abundance and without forethought. Things that were more him than his three-year-plan. Anna only had one night off each week, Tuesdays, half of which she spent coaching Cicero, half of which she was now obligated to spend with her new team. She wanted to get to know him, but couldn’t take two nights off. Not now. Edmund, thankfully, never asked why. He never said you work at a bar as if this were an insult or something that she ought to be ashamed of. Instead, he made an effort to see her. He started coming to the tavern during the week, he would have a beer and then he would start working. He said he had to keep himself busy. She looked at his soft hands and wondered how they capable of performing the kinds of manual tasks he had given to himself. He fixed the bathroom sink, repaired a hole in the wall, and fixed one of the lights.

He said that engineering majors always get on physics majors for their lack of practical knowledge. But that is simply not the case as he was more than keen to demonstrate. He talked about school a lot. He had been living alone in one sort of dormitory or another for more than twenty years. Anna, in contrast, had never lived by herself. She was raised in a two-parent home, then, when they spilt before her senior year in order that their daughter qualify for more federal financial aid, she went to live with her father. As a freshmen she had shared a dorm room with a girl named Mary, with whom she had also rented a small apartment sophomore year before Mary disappeared as a result of (Anna assumed) having found God or something equally as embarrassing. She moved in briefly with another friend named Caleb before wedding Selah. After they split she lived with her mother for a few weeks and was quickly reminded of why she had chosen to live with her dad after her parent’s fake divorce, which had turned into a real divorce sometime along the way. She had since been living with Abigail for a little over a year. And soon she would be living with Edmund. Who
seemed to want her around but never seemed to want to be in the same room.

Her friends sometimes asked if she felt smothered, having him at the bar at least three nights a week and at least once at the weekend. No, she’d answer honestly. For the most part he seemed lost in his own devices. They would exchange pleasantries and the occasional gift. Once she had kissed him on the cheek when his timing had saved her from a conversation with Simcoe she didn’t really have time for when she would otherwise have been taking inventory. Hewlett had taken a step back, mumbled something, and then chatted with their mutual acquaintance about the sorts of things that Anna guessed were only interesting to emigrants with trust funds back home.

She though a lot afterwards about his reaction.

Until something small changed between them.

After he finished making repairs he’d deemed necessary in the tavern’s kitchen, he started cooking in it. They would eat after her shift ended. He was embarrassed when she would complement him. Once the night was warm and clear, he made a picnic on the rooftop and moved it down to the unlit back parking lot when she froze on the fire escape, confessing to him that she was afraid of heights. He smiled and said he was afraid of everything, she had no reason to be ashamed. Not in his presence.

Edmund pointed out all of the stars in the sky as the munched on the contents of a care package she imagined he had artfully arranged before she forced him to change his plans. Anna couldn’t visualize the constellations, but she could now make connections to a few of the myths she read in *Metamorphoses*, with the assistance, of course, of an online translator. He was impressed. She thought he would kiss her. She thought that she wanted him to.

Alas. Edmund Hewlett maintained that he wanted to keep things platonic. He was good at acting, the whole town seemed to thing he had feelings for her. Anna wondered why she allowed herself to believe in his lies as well, knowing them for what they were. She felt as comforted by the lies he told for his own benefit as she felt comforted by her own. If they were in love, then what she was doing was not so horrible. At least, that is what she told herself.

Her fingers were suddenly sticky and wet as she thought about him. She moaned his name softly. What if someone came downstairs? Was she acting now for someone's benefit?

They talked about everything and nothing. She found out that he had been sent to boarding school when his parents were having problems, had done his A-levels early and immediately thereafter enrolled in St. Andrews. She asked if he was a genius. “All genius is gone by the third year, I am afraid,” he smiled. Sadly. He had been a student all his life and now he wasn’t. Anna wondered if he would have felt equally as lost and confused had he obtained his post-doctorate. She felt like she would be nothing without the bar she had been working in since she was twenty-one and managing since she was twenty-three; the same way everyone seemed to feel that she was nothing standing behind it. Edmund not. He said he liked it there. Friendly patrons, cheap imports, hot staff. Anna blushed. “Oh, no, I meant Caleb” he said dryly. She smiled. After that she spent a lot more time looking in the mirror, wondering if she had gained too much weight after giving up smoking. Wondering if he preferred blonds, or perhaps boys, or if it was only books that really intrigued him.
“You need to tell him” Abigail said one Sunday morning.

“What?”

“You are so full of shit, Anna.”

John Andre was past the point of hiding that he was using clear liquor to clear his mind. Abigail wondered how many shots he had had in the past hour, but if she had to judge by his gait she would estimate that the number was around five. Clinton, she noted thankfully, was not looking at him, but rather at Simcoe’s charts and medical history. Abigail wished she wasn’t in the room.

“I simply misjudged the situation.”

“It is not a simple matter when a patient nearly died.”

Andre closed his eyes. Abigail was happy when Dr. Clinton asked her to get another file from the cabinet.

It took her a moment to find the one he had requested, forgetting that the patient in question had been moved from “current” to “former.” Easy mistake. She saw enough of him these days.

It wasn’t her business. She knew it was an infringement on physician-patient privilege, but she also knew, surrounded by lawyers in her private life, that no charges could be brought against her in the state of New York. As she walked back to the conference room, she read the last three pages of notes in Hewlett’s file. She had been working at the firm for nearly ten years. From what she understood of mental health care, which, she reckoned, was quite a lot, Andre had not, as he claimed, misjudged the situation at all. What she found surprising was that he seemed to have done nothing about it before letting it get out of hand. She removed a page from the file, folded it, and placed it into her back pocket before re-entering the meeting and giving the rest of the file to the man who had requested it.

By that time Dr. Howe had joined the discussion.

“Do you think it wise to socialize with your patients?”

“You fail to understand how that class behaves. Trust isn’t earned, it is financed.”

“This is the Upper East Side, Andre. Everyone here has means and name recognition.”

“Yes, but they are American.” Andre said, stressing the last word.

“That is rather ironic,” Clinton muttered without looking up from the charts he was comparing.

“Do you suppose that patient Simcoe understands the extent to which patient Hewlett’s condition parallels that of his mother’s death?”

“I have reason to doubt it. Simcoe confessed to me previously that he never read the full damage report on Pakistan. As you’ll note if you look back to my notes from July 2013, it seems rather unlikely that he knew the extent of his mother’s condition either, and I should think it very unlikely that he sought out any answers at a later date.”

Clinton flipped through to the corresponding page and followed along.
“Have you in any way encourage him to do so?” Howe asked.

“I have not. I am of the mind that little good can come from it.”

“And yet Simcoe seems to have made a connection between the prescriptions his mother was taking and those you prescribed to Hewlett.” Clinton interjected.

“As you may also note, sir,” Andre’s voice grew hard, “I did not write the original prescription, and if you will refer to the charts I have been steadily reducing the dosage since accepting him under my care.”

Clinton nodded. Abigail noted that he hadn’t looked up from the files throughout the entire course of the meeting.

“I wish you would have come to me with this sooner.”

“I wish you would check your email. I requested your advice on the matter back in December.”

“Do not attempt to put this on me, John.”

Andre was silent for the rest of the meeting. Clinton grew increasingly annoyed that the research Andre had been doing for the past three years was amounting to what he called very little. Howe was concerned that Andre’s behavior was reflecting negatively on the practice. Abigail was relieved when they asked her to make a pot of coffee.

It would make it easier to get Andre into her car.

“Cultural relativity, love,” he said.

“Be that as it may I am not letting you walk to the nearest bar.”

“I’m lucky to have you, you know.”

“I do.”

After putting him in the passenger’s seat Abigail got into her own vehicle but didn’t start the ignition. They sat in silence in the now-empty parking garage until Andre finally asked if she intended to bring him home or not.

“We need to talk,” she replied.

Andre nodded. “Of course I am not alright.”

“Not about you.”

“Oh?”

Abigail took a deep breath and handed him the paper she had been sitting on. Andre blinked. “You can read this?”

“I will remind you that I have been working for the practice since before you obtained your
American accreditation,” she paused. When Andre was not forthcoming with a counter she continued, reminding herself with each word that she was speaking to one of her bosses and not to her son, “I want to know why you are pushing this relationship between Anna and Edmund. I want to know if he is a threat to her.”

“No you don’t. That isn’t what worries you,” Andre replied with an air of perfected nonchalance.

“I’ll admit that part of my concern stems from that fact that Anna is a large enough part of Cicero’s life that he calls her his aunt as he does with the Shippen sisters. As he calls you his uncle.”

“No, you are not worried about that either. Hewlett is and has never been a threat to anyone but himself. Through I suppose your extensive knowledge of human psychology would tell you as much.”

Abigail blinked. Andre continued, “What you are worried about is your relationship with Anna falling apart after you move to Brooklyn next month. It won’t. Neither of you would ever allow that to happen. Hewlett isn’t replacing you, Abby. His relationship with Anna is, how to put this -”

“Illegal. She has asked me to write and affidavit and a plausible backstory. I know.”

“Artificial, would be the term I would use.”

“That is the thing though, I have a feeling that it isn’t for her.”

“I’ve never spoken to Miss Strong in any kind of professional capacity so my evaluation may -”

“John,” Abigail swallowed, “I think there is something that you need to know about Anna Strong.”

Abigail pulled Anna into the back office and told her what she had overheard at work. At her real job. Implying that Anna’s job wasn’t real. Hewlett suffered from anxiety and depression. Did she know that? She did. Did she know that he had tried to kill himself only weeks before? She did not.

“Do you think you can fix him?” Abigail asked.

“He isn’t broken.”

And then she knew what Abigail had known for weeks. She was in love with him. She went into the bathroom and cried. She was overwhelmed.

Because he loved her too.

Platonically, of course.
I wrote a lot more that I wanted to include this week, but I figured it would be more fun to leave you guys wondering what exactly Anna is hiding. No spoilers or anything but you won’t find out next week in what will essentially amount to an incredibly wordy Sim-chapter, catching us back up with the events that played out in the very beginning (or so I hope!)

Since most of the cultural references I made this week were American, for the first time since putting pen to paper I don’t have that many notes for you. (But if you have notes for my Euro-ass please, please, please don’t hesitate to comment. I am sure my understanding isn’t perfect.)

Anyway, translations:
... when he [Selah] came back from Iraq with a girl named Najma…
- Najma means “Stars” in Arabic simply because I love poetic irony. Selah falls in love with Stars and later Anna falls in love with someone who is also in love with stars and that is just beautiful.

“Meus ventus!” he smiled. “Salve,” she replied with the single word she recalled from high school.
- “My favorite” and “Hello”, respectively.

As always thanks for reading and I hope you enjoyed!

Up Next: Robert Townsend drops a mix tape (and a bomb)
The Slow Procession

Chapter Summary

Anna moves in with Hewlett, Simcoe can’t find parking, Andre stands up his date, Mary drives into a public figure.

(... and Peggy!)

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Short, slightly misogynistic discussion of masturbation preferences and sexual tendencies, severe childhood trauma with psychological and physiological aftermath, heartbreak, rejection, day drinking, various scattered references to modern politics and policy (as well as allusions to events that played out on the international stage in the late 90s), marital problems, auto accidents, bar fights over really explosive topics.

(This is a long update!)

And I’m not going to lie, I happen to think it is a pretty sad one, but probably (hopefully!) not for the same reasons you might. Not to get too personal, but I know what it is to lose one’s parents at a young age and the far-reaching effects something like that can have on an individual. Obviously this is way more dramatic, but writing it I kind of felt surprised that some of these implied thoughts came so easily to the forefront of my mind. So … general trigger warning for adults who were once orphans, I guess?

Anyway, hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Happy We’re-Not-Acknowledging-What-Day-It-Is,” Hewlett had said as he handed over a CD which had been given to him moments before. He had given him a card earlier. Simcoe had fiddled with the envelope, tapping it against the table until the corners were blunted. He hadn’t opened it.

“No. I’ve heard most of the tracks already and have little interest in the rest of the album. It might be something for you though.”
Andre raised his eyebrows, “I wasn’t aware that you had any familiarity with the genre. Do you have a secret nightlife we know nothing about?”

“Ah … no, no. My nights are as dull as you imagine them to be. The band, one of my housemates is in it. They practice directly under my flat sometimes. Less often of late. I never say anything about the noise because I am all but nocturnal as it is, thusly young people seem to find me cool.”

“No one thinks of you as cool. Don’t flatter yourself.” Simcoe’s eyes glazed the back of the album cover falling flat on the series of words that might prove fatal to the course of action he had been attempting to dissuade Hewlett from taking since the very instant he’d first approached the topic. “Culper Ring. The street you live on. That is the band’s name.”

“Yes?”

Simcoe read the names on the back cover several times over.

“Woodhull. You live with Abe Woodhull who lives at home, meaning that you rent from Richard Woodhull.”

“Sorry, were you taking this somewhere?”

“You can’t move Anna in to that place.”

Hewlett looked confused.

“Have you never read the William Smith article about Judge Woodhull that came out during his Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, basically eliminating his chance of appointment?” he asked condescendingly. He hadn’t heard of the piece himself before Anna had mentioned several years back that her father had won a Pulitzer. After Abe had said something which had acquainted his face with Simcoe’s right fist for the first time. He recreated the scene for his two dining companions with a cold poetic flourish, not ignoring the fact that Abe and Anna had once been a couple, and had split over the publication of an article that was still read widely enough that it was the third result when one googled the Woodhull name; something which he was glad demonstrated. Hewlett was horrified, Andre intrigued. The former excused himself from the table to phone his fiancé. A few minutes later he returned for his jacket, promising to settle his share of the cheque when next they met.

For a few hours after the conversation had taken place, Simcoe had allowed himself to hope that the ridiculous Green Card scam had fallen through after all.

Then he received a text stating that the move was still on. That Hewlett would tell him about what had happened in the morning. Simcoe sincerely hoped he wouldn’t.

The music was every bit as awful as he had anticipated it would be. The first time it was an amusing hate-listen. The second time the album played in full on the stereo of his Land Rover, he had taken some enjoyment from the fact that the mixture of post-punk guitar riffs blaring at 110 decibels and the copious amount of alcohol which Andre had consumed the night prior seemed to be causing him physical anguish. By its third rotation, Simcoe was starting to consider that Culper Ring’s existence might have been a contributing factor to Hewlett’s decision to make an attempt on his life exactly two months prior. He ejected the disk and turned the radio to a low hum. Andre
asked if they could stop for coffee so long as they were going to keep driving around. Simcoe ignored him as his hunt continued.

After a little more than two hours of searching for street parking, their first chance escaped them. He felt himself bringing to sympathise with Second Amendment enthusiasts as a four-door sedan robbed him of what he recognised was his last shot of saving Anna Strong from ruining the next three years of her life.

“This is clearly why the city issued a gun ban.”

John Andre groaned in response. “Should we just forget it then?”

“No,” Simcoe answered slowly, “Though I do have half a mind to tell you where I’ve a bottle of Jäger stashed so that we might create a literal Jägerbomb and thusly available daytime parking.”

“You know that I am legally obligated to report such statements to the authorities if I am given any reason to doubt that your words aren’t purely hyperbolic.”

“No risk at all, Doctor, as I am quite certain that you would simply finish the flask before it would be on any use.”

“Why are you driving around with an open bottle?”

“Isn’t that a question for the philosophers?” Simcoe asked as he pulled into a petrol station, surprised at how much gas had been used on the same eight blocks. When he went in to pay he bought Andre a coffee as he had requested as well as a small tea for himself, pocketing a few packets of cream and sugar to bring back to the man who had elected to wait in the car.

“You?” Andre asked as he emptied a second package of cream into his coffee.

Simcoe shook his head.

The last time he had white tea was shortly after his tenth birthday.

Sometimes he could still taste it when he was under stress. As he was now as the search entered its third hour. In general, driving made him nervous. Driving slowly made him especially nervous.

Sometimes, under stress, he could taste white tea.

Sometimes he could smell burning oil.

Sometimes the sounds from the streets morphed into screams.

He wondered if he had actually head them prior to the roadside bombing, or if his memory had been influenced by depictions in film and television. His fingers tapped against the wheel. It was curious, the things one remembers and the things one does not. He had forgotten the sound of his father’s voice, for example. But he knew enough to recognize that it couldn’t have sounded much like his own. After the explosion, he couldn’t hear for months. He didn’t speak for many more.

And when he finally did, his voice came only as a high squeak and did not alter half as much during puberty as the rest of him did. He wondered if other people still heard him the same way he heard himself. It had once been embarrassing. Until it wasn’t. Until the comments stopped shortly
after he discovered that he could use violence to express what he struggled to vocalize.

In the wake of the attack had brought him from Islamabad to Chelsea, Simcoe spent the majority of his time staring off into space. Trying not to think about anything, or trying to think of anything else. Until he had forgotten. Everything except the minor details.

He still preferred texting to talking. He was glad the rest of society had finally come around to this inclination.

“Glove box.” Simcoe said as he watched Andre tapping nervously at his phone.

“Forgive me,” his passenger said as he reached for the bottle, “I find myself in the difficult situation of breaking things off with someone who doesn’t quite realize that we have been dating.”

“If you don’t mind my input that hardly seems onerous.”

“One would think.” Andre sighed. “Truth be told I was rather starting to enjoy the flirtation, but external factors have rendered continuation an impossibility.”

“My condolences.” Simcoe hoped he wouldn’t continue. He had enough of Andre’s creative interpretations of what constituted as a relationship over the past six weeks.

“He, the man in question, and she, the girl I have been perpetrating myself as for the past few months are attending the same event tonight.”

“Perpetrating … over the internet?”

“Hm.”

“Isn’t one of the licencing requirements for practicing phycology in the State of New York to be of good moral character?”

“If you knew who I’ve been catfishing you would recognize that I was doing the Lord’s work.”

“Care to elaborate?”

“It depends.” Andre paused, “How closely do you follow US Politics?”

“I am aware that they are having an election. And then some months later there is going to be another one. And that they are treating it as if it were the end to democracy.”

“The name Benedict Arnold means nothing to you then?”

“Never heard of him.”

“Then it will probably be as much of a waste of my energies attempting to explain this to you as it was to Hewlett.”

“That is vaguely offensive.”

“A senator. One of the instigators in the attempted government shutdown last fall. I’ve been
writing to him as Peggy Shippen and,” he smiled, “oh the things I have gotten him to send.”

Simcoe thought about the gorgeous blonde in question, her features transforming into Andre’s in his mind.

“To Peggy Shippen?”

“You know her?”

“I am more than familiar with her Instagram account. In lieu of what you’ve just disclosed it pains me to say I find myself forced to remove her from the spank bank.”

“Curious.”

“What is?”

“That you share my taste to some extent.”

“I think that your tastes are so extensive it would be far more curious if there wasn’t some overlap.”

“Hewlett had no idea who she was.”

“The teenage version of your wife? No, of course not, but then he would have no need of a proper wank,” Simcoe paused in thought. “What do suppose it is like to have gone through life without ever having had an erection?”

“I imagine it is something of a super-power. One that would have saved me from many of an embarrassing situation.”

“As angry as I am with him I can’t help but pity his situation. Though he will probably find some parallel in mythology that suits him and become in short course aggravatingly self-righteous about it.”

“We all have our coping mechanisms.”

He didn’t remember the explosion. He remembered the hospital afterward. He remembered staring at the people who were trying to talk to him. Afraid to blink. He remembered later being told to look at a certain point of the wall. A point that didn’t exist as anything in particular except that it was where someone’s finger had just been. Something to gaze at as his eyes and ears were being examined. Then the doctors would then smile at him. And he would stare at them until they left or indicated that he should look in another direction.

He didn’t remember the flight from Chaklala to Heathrow. He didn’t remember his estranged mother picking him up at the gate, he didn’t remember the roughly three weeks he had spent in her flat. He remembered finding her laying on her stomach in the foyer one evening and turning her over to see the white foam that had formed in her mouth. It reminded him of steamed milk.

It didn’t remember if he cried or not. He didn’t remember how long he sat there with her body, waiting for her to smile or move or tell him to look somewhere else. He did, however, remember that by the time he returned to his tea it had grown as cold as she had. And it looked like the stuff
that she seemed to have been throwing up. He poured it down the sink. From that point on he had taken his tea black.

He drank quite a lot of black tea before leaning to enjoy it.

Sometimes he wasn’t certain he did.

He drank cup after cup from a hospital vending machine when he’d learned that in a sick twist of fate someone he had then considered a friend had failed where his mother had succeeded. He’d drunken a great deal of black tea since. It kept him up at night until he became aware of the change to his consumption, but this realization did nothing to abate his thirst. More, it just severed to increase the number of personal text messages he sent and received. Before he averaged in the low 300s. Now he was up to the mid-800s. He didn’t ask if he was being annoying. He knew he was. But Hewlett was himself annoying. And whatever Simcoe could think to say seemed to annoy him enough for him to stay around, if only to get the final word in.

Subconsciously Simcoe wondered if his mum had tried to call for help, if it had been an accident or a mistake or if things would have been different if he had been able speak to or hear her. Or had it always been in his nature to do everything within his grasp to push others away; and what then? And so what?

After his mother died of her own hand, Simcoe lived with his godfather for four months before his hearing returned. It would be another two before he began to speak and a year before he started to recognize that there was something wrong with his voice. It was around that time that he would be sent to boarding school, and it would be another two years or so before he realized that staring at people, sometimes past people, tended to make them uncomfortable. But what was he meant to do? He still had trouble sleeping most nights and likely would for the rest of his life. He was afraid to close his eyes. Afraid that he might miss something.

He didn’t feel it consciously most of them time. Sometimes he did. Sometimes it was all he was conscious of. Especially when he was in a slow moving vehicle.

Simcoe was silent for a moment.

“She deserves better, you know. She deserves more than he could ever hope to provide her.”

“I would remind you that it isn’t a real relationship by any stretch but I hardly think we are discussing Miss Strong anymore. You see this as another betrayal in a series the likely goes back to the day you and Hewlett met. I’ve noticed lately that there seems to be a pattern of transference.”

Fearing that this would transform into a conversation about his parents that he had been successfully dodging for 18 years, Simcoe emotionlessly replied, “Transference? No, we were at school together. This goes back longer than you assume.”

“I thought you said there was no overlap.”

He had lived with his godfather for a little under two years before being shipped off to a boarding school 40 km away, never to return. It was his first time being educated outside of home, and for that matter, being around other children. Fortunately for his sake, and perhaps by the same token unfortunately for others, he was competitive by nature. In short order he found that he was in the
perfect environment to foster that aspect of his character.

Upon his arrival he’d found something to aspire to in the form of a sneering, sardonic sixth-former who hadn’t bothered to learn the names of anyone who couldn’t aid in his personal advancement.

“What I admired the most about him was that he was, in truth, a terrible leader,” Simcoe scoffed, “but he had such an air of authority about him that no one ever questioned or challenged his being in charge. If you asked him a question he would respond with impatience or indifference and even the teachers and faculty seemed a little intimidated by him. I spent the next six years trying to emulate that same kind of fear-based rule with limited success. You can imagine my disappointment when I met him as an adult and he turned out to be just as sad and submissive as everyone else whose spark has been extinguished by the light pollution of the big city.”

He thankfully had never experienced this sensation for himself. Simcoe rose to meet every challenge that faced him with a sarcastic smirk. Despite having been held back two years when he first entered the British school system he graduated near the top of his class and went on to read econ at Cambridge. He made his first million before graduating. After five months of working at the LSE he’d requested a transfer which his employer had been more than happy to grant him. Simcoe needed a challenge. He needed Wall Street.

The other streets of New York, however, he could have done without.

“So by your understanding, your behaviour towards Edmund stems from a desire to bring back the side of him you knew from a distance?”

It took him a moment to reply to this unwanted intrusion, looking for a diplomatic means to end the conversation without answering the question. He had no idea what Andre was getting at, and no intention of asking.

“They say never meet your idols.”

“My assessment still stands. You feel betrayed that rather than being the person you thought he was he turned out to be exactly the person you need him to be.”

“Right. Because everyone needs a prissy nerd to come out of the night and steal the love of his life because he can’t get his own shit together.”

Andre took a sip of lukewarm Jägermeister from the bottle, chasing it with the last of his petrol-station café au lait.

“You’re jealous.”

“I’m not.”

“The evidence you yourself have presented would suggest-”

“Do you hear yourself? This is why you have no friends outside of the team. And no support within it. You can’t seem to let it go that I’ve chosen to take my business elsewhere, that you have one less project to study the effects of life’s variables on.”

“I’ve cut my losses. Therapy only works if you are willing to let it.”

“I don’t need therapy. For that matter neither does Hewlett and probably more than half of your other patients. Your job is simply to tell people they have problems until they believe you. As for me? I believe in myself.”
“Then why did you seek out my services?”

“Court Order. And God help me, if you even start to ask -how does that make you feel? - I will Princess Di you into the nearest guard rail.”

The previous night had marked the first time he had been out on his birthday since turning the day he turned ten. Since the cars slowed down and then stopped moving. He never read the fully report. He didn’t know which side of what war had killed his father and the rest of the convoy. He hadn’t known if he had been the target or if he was merely collateral damage. It didn’t matter. It never had. What was done was done. It didn’t really matter by whom or on what grounds. A year later the Pakistani government would test its nuclear capabilities and Simcoe would decide for himself that his father’s very presence in the region had been for nought. No one could really be said to have been at fault. It had been a matter of international politics and power plays that had taken its share of victims. That’s it. It was different matter with his mum. He felt he knew who was ultimately responsible for her death and hated him at least as much as everyone else seemed to.

He didn’t like talking about these things, which is why doctors throughout the years suggested that he ought to. The conversation never went anywhere though. It was just a line cost for the insurance provider. Sometimes he sat staring at the phycologists, thinking if they were real doctors they would tell him where to put his eyes. Andre would sometimes simply meet them, sit 45 minutes in a cold quiet, and charge his health care for this visit. Sometimes Andre would say things such as “put that down”, “don’t touch that”, and phrases of the like. Sometimes he had ideas like making everyone in his Anger Management group do sport together. Which was how Simcoe met nearly all of the friends he had state-side. Because his employer said that he had to go and talk about things he could barely recall but were evidently affecting his ability to talk to clients. Because he was afraid to speak and often found himself saying cruel things to take the focus away from the voice he said them in.

It never got easier. But it was difficult for different reasons. Before when someone eventually found out he was an orphan they said “I’m sorry,” and he said “me too.” And he meant it. And then they treat him differently, as if he wasn’t different enough. As if he didn’t feel different enough. As an adult (for is anyone truly an orphan after 18?) they would say “I’m sorry.” and he would respond “It was a long time ago.” And he would mean it. And he would sound heartless. And maybe he was. Maybe he was just angry at nothing in particular and occasionally his unacknowledged rage found an outlet.

Like in the fact that he couldn’t find a parking place. Or in the fact that the girl he had been enamoured with for years had decided that she was in love with someone she simply found convenient. Or in the fact that he was helping them move in together. Or in the fact that he would have moved heaven and Earth to spend a moment in her eyes and warm himself in their fire.

She hardly looked at him if she could otherwise help it.

Too small for his Land Rover. In front of a fire hydrant. Too far from the building. The few
options were all fatally flawed.

“I’ll call back, see if anyone can ask a neighbour to move or something.”

“Don’t.”

“Hm?”

Simcoe had thought about it after hearing the way Andre spoke to his wife over the telephone earlier. He had, of course, only heard one side of the conversation, but he couldn’t imagine that Philomena had done anything to deserve the resentment Andre bore her. On the few occasions they had met, Simcoe had come to the conclusion that her stage-name suited her; Cheer.

“I’ll do it. I don’t want to risk any kind of social contagion. If Hewlett ever speaks to, or even about Anna the way you speak to your wife -”

“You have no right to speak about my marriage.”

“You have no right to call it a marriage. I could report you all to the authorities you know.”

“You won’t though, will you? You would never do anything to hurt Anna, Philomena has done nothing to warrant your wrath and the idea of losing the two people who aren’t absolutely terrified of you and chose to be in your life anyway keeps you up at night,” Andre bit back.

Simcoe hit the brakes, “Get out of the car, John.”

He did as instructed, taking a gift card from his wallet and laying it on top of the card Hewlett had given him last night – still unopened – on the dashboard. “Happy Birthday, Asshole.”

As fate would have it, Jordan was part of a legal team involved in a class action suit against the city filed by food truck entrepreneurs. He was constantly working on it, even when he was he obligated to be elsewhere. After his latest Blue-Tooth conference call he texted the captain of his soccer team with the location of a nearby industrial car park one of the plaintiffs in the case had recommended. He needed someone to instil order. This was taking far too much of his otherwise costly time.

When Simcoe arrived after a five minute walk he saw half of the people he knew and some he didn’t taking a break on the stoop outside.

“It has been more divvying up than actual moving.” Akinbode informed him. He wasn’t smoking, everyone else was. “So you know, you are all obligated to help me and Abby next month,” he informed the group for what Simcoe would learn was the eleventh time before going back inside to make a work-related call. Simcoe pulled out a cigarette, feeling that he’d earned it after the exceeding long drive that had taken him nowhere. He enjoyed watching Hewlett squirm as people who defined themselves as social smokers tended to, knowing that he could expect no further charity. Simcoe blew a ring in his face.

As he wasn’t on speaking terms with anyone holding a UK Passport, he turned to the man on his left – a man who it turned out was Anna’s ex – and made small talk about the merits of Virginia. Selah had been stationed in Norfolk and his new fiancé had taken a job at Blackwater. They were moving on Friday. Selah was relieved that Anna had been willing to sell him the furniture she had
brought into their marriage as she was unable to fit most it in her new flat. There were some
bookcases she refused to part with, but that could be sorted in a single trip to IKEA and would not
require, as Najma may have gleefully anticipated, several weekends spent in that place he called
hell.

Simcoe had stopped listening after “Anna sold most of her furniture.”

He felt an unexpected urge to speak with Hewlett once more after all. “At any point did you think it
apt to mention that you don’t have any furniture of your own either?”

He hadn’t. But he would find a way to cover the costs of whatever they made need. He was
making too much of an effort to sound sincere for Simcoe’s liking and so his words were met with
bitter scepticism. Hewlett said that he accepted the low paying job at the planetarium for which he
was over qualified.

“Oh, are you now? Qualified, that is.”

Andre tried to interject.

“No, no. I want to hear how Oyster would attempt to defend his accusation, as he’s, oh yes, failed
so miserably in that respect before if memory serves.”

Hewlett gave him a look that he may have intended to seem frightening, but as it was as
superfluous at the rest of his ridiculous facial reactions Simcoe couldn’t hide a half-smile which he
knew to be terrifying. Hewlett took a step back as he spoke, but whatever his response was it was
muffled by the sound of the mail carrier that had just pulled up in front of the building.

“’Bout to drive out to Setauket. You guys want to throw anything in the truck?”

“Sexy!” Peggy Shippen said as she modelled a little black dress in front of a full length mirror.

The ladies had been trying on the items of Anna’s clothing she hadn’t packed prior to leaving the
apartment a year before, evaluating as a group what was worth keeping and what ought to be given
to Goodwill.

“Sure,” Anna cringed, “but that is a slip, not a cocktail.”

“Still,” Peggy protested, “You could rock it with a mini jacket and hit the club.”

“I am afraid those days are long behind me. If you want it, it is yours.”

Peggy winked at her. She never had the opportunity to pick out items for her own wardrobe. She
knew a dress had been sent over to the hotel from Bloomingdale’s, a dress she hadn’t seen but was
sure she would hate as she was meant to wear it to the GOP fundraiser she had promised her
father’s aid she would attend that evening. She was tempted to show up in Anna’s hand-me-down
instead. She was even more tempted to skip the event altogether and take the petticoat on the
adventure it deserved.

“What about this? I love this!” Philomena exclaimed as she pulled another garment from the box
Selah Strong had unceremoniously thrown it into, dragging out the word love for several syllables.
“I haven’t seen that in years.” Abigail’s eyes grew wide. “I’m sorry, Mena - Annie! You have to keep that.”

“I really don’t think it will fit me anymore.”

“Try it on!” Peggy urged to the group’s general consent. Anna rolled her eyes but agreed to indulge them, provided someone help her with the zipper.

She examined herself in the mirror. The last time she had worn the dress in question she had run into Abe Woodhull and they had enjoyed one another’s bodies for all of three minutes in the alley behind her bar before he vanished from her life once more without much of a trace. When he had remerged years later she found out he had gotten married and had purchased a house in the area. Or his wife had. At any rate he was married, she was married, and a barrier existed between them that a light blue A-line couldn’t break. Even if, as Abigail claimed, it looked better on her now than it had in her early twenties. She sighed.

“You have to keep it,” said Philomena in a tone that gave no room for debate.

“Annie, you could wear that dress to the Court House.”

“For my wedding?”

She wondered what Edmund would say if he saw her in it. She wondered if he ever truly saw her at all.

He did. He had caught a glimpse of her reflection in the mirror from behind the door and felt himself paralysed by it. She was stunning. Exquisite. Far too much so to be hung up on him. He wondered if he heard sadness in her voice as she offered amendments to the story Abigail had written and was now preforming about their supposed first date.

“He erected his huge, magnificent telescope behind the tavern as he prepared to show her all of the wonders of the night.”

“Is that a euphemism?” Philomena laughed.

“No. It is quite literal.” Anna said.

Edmund died a little as he listened.

“I think it is romantic that he brought his world to you.”

“So do I,” she seemed to choke before excusing herself to an adjacent chamber to get another box.

“What?” Peggy asked as Abby and Mena exchanged a look.

Hewlett hoped that however close Abigail was the Shippen sisters that she had enough sense not to tell the daughter of a party elite that her other best friend was prepared to wed on erroneous grounds.

“She is getting cold feet,” Abigail stated.
“She shouldn’t. You should have seen him last night!”

“And you should have let them to their own business.”

Anna hadn’t answered her phone the night before because Peggy had taken the Acela to New York City a night early. If she was being otherwise forced to spend a few days in this, what she deemed, lesser city, she was going to get a girl’s night out of it. But Hewlett had been given information that couldn’t wait till morning. He was happy to find the girl’s at Abigail’s townhouse with Chinese take-out and a bottle of bubbly. He was surprised to see that Peggy was so willing to help in the move the next day, but then a lot of things about her surprised him. In addition to being unbelievably kind, she was every bit as beautiful as she looked on social media and twice as brilliant as half of his professors at Cambridge had been; which said a lot to the credit of someone who otherwise said things like “Hashtag, no filter!” during normal discourse. She reminded him a bit of the person Andre had been before, well, before he started pretending to be Peggy Shippen. Part of him thought to warn the only person he seemed to be on speaking terms with as to her presence in the flat. The other part of him was still frozen in the spot where Anna’s reflection had left him, eager to hear how the incomparable Miss Shippen interpreted the events she saw from behind closed glass.

“You should have seen his face when he hugged you. It was as if all of his worries had vanished, it was as if he had reached heaven’s gates and a choir of angels were singing your name. I mean, don’t take this the wrong way, but normally he is a bit …”

“Peculiar looking. It is alright, you can say it. We all do.”

“When he smiles the world makes sense doesn’t it?” Anna objected.

“It does. And you are his world. Don’t let this chance of happiness escape you.”

Hewlett would later learn after she had been arrested that Peggy had surprisingly little romantic experience of her own to use as a basis of reasoning. For the moment however, her arguments made sense to him, to Anna, and to the man he hadn’t realized had snuck up beside him.

“You have to tell her. The longer you wait the worse things are going to turn out.” His words, for once, didn’t feel cruel or reprimanding but simply concerned, for Anna’s behalf no doubt. It made the all the worse.

“I know,” Hewlett admitted, averting his eyes to the floor.

Simcoe was bitter that his glory had been stolen by one Caleb Brewster, who, on account of driving government property, didn’t have to worry about where he parked it. He wondered if the postal worker cum world’s worst drummer was breaking federal law by allowing the remainder of boxes and bookshelves to be loaded in his mail truck but Brewster didn’t seem too concerned. Unlawfulness seemed to be the theme of the day, after all.

“Can you help me with this?” Hewlett asked.

“Akinbode.” Simcoe called out to the man who promptly pushed his adversary aside.

“Wouldn’t want you to break a nail, Oyster.” He said, lifting the last of the three still-assembled
“Let it go,” Andre advised Hewlett, “he is in a mood.”

After fighting with his otherwise lovely wife, who had shown up during her lunch hour with catering from her set, Andre had taken to giving orders about how things should be packed and where. Simcoe’s Land Rover didn’t make his list. He wondered if this was out of spite or owed itself more to the fact that the vehicle was currently four blocks away and there was a half empty USPS vessel double-parked before the building’s door. If it weren’t for his weekly drives out to Setauket, Simcoe swore that he would sell the thing. Andre seemed to do fine without a car after having his licence suspended and Hewlett had mentioned on the previous evening that he meant to downsize. What was the point of having a Defender 110 if it he couldn’t use it to help his friends? What was the point of anything if the word friends itself could only ever be used in its weakest form?

He wondered if there had ever been a time where his presence didn’t send shivers down Anna’s spine, as it so clearly did as he tried to offer his assistance with a particularly heavy box. He could hear her pulse from the ten centimetre distance between then. Not from physical exertion (she lifted heavier cases of beer at the bar all the time and had the arms to prove it), or from forbidden lust and anticipation as he had long believed to be the case. He wondered if things would have been different had he taken advantage of her when she had once offered herself in a vulnerable state and hated himself a bit more for the thought. He took the box against her protests and turned away, abandoning his ambitions of spiriting her back to his penthouse on the Upper East Side while making all the promises of protection that Hewlett had no doubt offered. Promises that he knew himself to be capable of delivering on. Promises he took very seriously but kept silent, knowing that if he were to speak them they would fall on deaf ears.

Philomena left after lunch with a few old garments and a Latin-English dictionary Anna still had form high school but said she no longer needed. Edmund had three and she was doing fine with Google. She hugged them both and wished them the best of luck, hoping that their marriage would be happier than hers. She wondered if it wasn’t worth it to get in touch with a solicitor after all. She wondered if she would ever be as happy with Charles Lee as she had once been with John Andre were she to leave him.

Abigail left shortly thereafter to pick Cicero up from school. She told Anna she would swing by Whitehall later to help her unpack and asked if she should pick up some food on the way. Pizza and beer was an excellent choice.

Akinbode had excused himself as soon as the last box had been loaded for transport, stating that he needed to get back to his office. Simcoe said he would have given anything to steal him for the legal team of his employer, and Akinbode said he would think about it if he was still alive after this case. He kissed his girlfriend on the cheek to the oohs and awes of her oldest friend.

Anna and Selah embraced as they parted ways for the final time. She asked he needed any help on Friday, to which he responded that the military was paying for it. She was happy that he had found a job the enjoyed, he was happy that she was still happy at the bar where they had met. They compared notes on each other’s new partners (encouraging, with a hint of joking disapproval.)

Hewlett left with Caleb in the mail truck, Anna’s car now packed to the brim with not only its usual
debris but a few odd boxes. He needed to be the first one to arrive at the home he and Anna were about to share, and he had multiple reasons for it.

Anna followed them in her Escort, after a final round of goodbyes.

Simcoe considered following the party back to the house. He was headed to Setauket anyway. Andre had mentioned something about important business at DeJong’s that very night. After a few minutes of searching for his teammate and former doctor he abandoned his quest. There was no Champion’s League on this given Tuesday and what other business could have required Andre to be at a dive bar on Long Island? He said goodbye to Anna’s ex and his current. When the later responded in Urdu he resolved to go to DeJong’s himself. He left without saying as much, feeling he owed no one an explanation.

Things would have been different for all parties had Simcoe put a little more effort into his search. He would have seen Andre on the corner with a girl wearing a black slip-dress far too early in the day for such attire. He would have overheard her ask him to show her the city. He would have seen the Andre’s face soften as his other plans were forgotten.

He wouldn’t have ended up on his date.

Seven hours later, Simcoe found himself sitting next to a man he didn’t realize was the face behind the dick-pic Andre had shown him while they had been looking for parking. The man had been talking at length about the problem with women. At first Simcoe had been keen to listen, not wanting to otherwise associate with the on-duty bartender, the maître d’ from the night before, or the third member of their band, who walked in around nine, completely unaware that he now had an angle living with him under his father’s roof.

When the conversation turned from heartbreak to misogyny Simcoe had already heard his fair share, but, as it would happen (and as it often does), the man beside him also had quite a lot to say about ethnic and religious minorities, the LGBT community, English as the national language, and a host of other topics which Simcoe would have been better able to write off on a normal day as drunken nonsense rather than dangerous rhetoric. But it wasn’t a normal day. It was the accumulation of the reminders the past two months had given him about all of the various reasons that Anna Strong would never become Anna Simcoe. He had thought he’d had enough beer to tune out the bigot beside him, the three idiots whose impromptu live performance was every bit as bad as their studio album, as well as the rest of the patrons. And then the one-sided conversation turned to what a shame it was that Europe’s refugees weren’t being kept in concentration camps. Surely they still had them in Germany at least? They still had Volkswagen. Simcoe turned, blinked, and asked the hateful man if he was serious. When he answered affirmatively Simcoe invited him to step out into the parking lot.

The instant the door was closed behind him, Simcoe had the man of the ground. With a bloody fist he dragged him back up to his feet so that he might knock him down once more. After the first few swings it wasn’t about the man or the extremities to which he took his right to free speech. It wasn’t about Anna, or Hewlett, or Andre, or the various traumas of his youth which might have been used in a last ditch effort to excuse his behavior at sentencing. It was just a blur.

Until he saw the light.
Or, more appropriately, two lights; two headlights of a dirty four-door sedan he knew all too well. The vehicle screeched to a halt a moment too late. There was a thud as the car and corpse collided, and then a gasp, as the driver stepped out.

He had never seen the petite redhead before.

Wordlessly, she kneeled down and checked for a pulse, looked at him, at the body at her car and back up at him again. And then she said something that would rewrite the town’s history. Something that he would never forget. He would joke later that she should have included it in her wedding vows.

After the statute of limitation had passed, it would be the way he began telling the epic that was about to unfold to his daughters; the very first words their mother had ever spoken to him were, “I have a key to the basement. If you help me carry the body, we can hide it there until everyone has gone.”

Chapter End Notes

No, you read that correctly, ‘Mary and Simcoe Hide a Body’ will turn into ‘Mary and Simcoe Have a Baby’ before this tale is done - come on, who among you isn’t shipping them after 3.7? - 
+ Akinbode will win big in court, Peggy will be arrested, and both Anna and Hewlett are hiding something potentially problematic from one another (if you were keeping tabs on the foreshadowing.)

As most of this makes reference to news items that are purely American, I’m asking you guys for notes this week in case I got anything wrong. (And if you have any questions by all means feel free to ask!)

The Simcoe lived in Pakistan thing was spun off a deleted scene from season one (where he lived in India until he was 10 when his father was killed. I’m not sure which region so I just picked the one where something was happening that fit in with the Modern AU timeline.)

Thanks as always for reading. I don’t normally ask for comments / kudos (although they are always fun to get, I won’t hide my vanity …)

BUT

Half-jokingly, someone warned me while I was writing this that I, as a Muslim, should be hesitant to write fanfic that included certain “buzzwords” that other people wouldn’t have to think twice about. So I really thought long and hard about it and decided that it is, I think, very stupid to worry about such matters, and that if some poor individual –who I recognize is protecting me as well as my neighbours! - was forced to read this in full because it contained a certain word or phrase, I am so sorry for wasting your time and consequently taxpayer money. Send me a list, I’ll avoid them in the future. That said - I would absolutely LOVE to get some c/k love from you, if you, in fact, exist the form I was told to feel paranoid about.
Actually, to that end … don’t you think it is about time we met Ben in this thing?

XOXO - till next time.

Up Next: Peggy takes Anna's old slip out of the ride of its life.
The Crime Scene

Chapter Summary

Mary and Simcoe return to the scene of the crime to find it empty. They come up with a plan B and grow a little bit closer throughout the course of setting it into action.

Chapter Notes

Slight language warning for this chapter, but no dark subject matter appears that hasn’t been addressed previously. This update specifically has to do with rejection, jealousy, misconceptions of character and intent, cosmetics, bad coffee, book clubs and unrequited affection.

You know, like fluff, only with Mary, Simcoe and a missing corpse. Shall we then?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They spent an hour watching the news unfold in Simcoe’s shady motel of choice. Mary questioned every decision that had led her to this point; stealing a single pill to calm her nerves, returning the second that would have knocked her out; letting her husband use their only car knowing full well that he meant to drive it to the bar, agreeing to pick him up when she knew she shouldn’t have gotten behind the wheel.

Had she been in full possession of her mental facilities, she would have phoned the police and told them there had been an accident, as opposed to forming an allegiance with a man who might well have been the devil made flesh.

She glanced over at him, lounging comfortably in an arm chair beside the window, presumably still making trades on his mobile device in the Asian and European markets. He said he didn’t sleep much, something partially owing itself to medication, partially to the condition it pretended to fix. He declined to offer more detail. Mary assumed he’d meant cocaine.

When he noticed her eyes on him he attempted to offer her reassurance, something which, to his credit, he’d been doing since their arrival.

She flipped through the hundreds of news channels available on the old TV though what turned out to be an even older satellite dish. Fox was claiming terrorist involvement. The BBC was drawing parallels between the senator and an MP who had recently received threats from a politically explosive student union. The German NTV had since returned to screening a documentary on the history of submarines from what little Mary could tell and Simcoe could translate. Russia’s RT seemed to be doing there level best to cover the story while implying that western media had hindered the investigation, and CNN seemed set on proving Moscow right. The correspondent whom Mary had spent the majority of her wait time watching had gotten ahold of the inspector who had been named to head the investigation. He looked bewildered but determined and seemed to say all of the right things. Promising to keep the press and the public informed when more details became available, he wanted to refrain from speculation at this stage of the investigation.
He seemed young for an inspector, confident without being cocky. Mary wondered why she took an instant disliking to him, until she saw his name.

She looked at Simcoe once more, glad to have left the cops out of it. She wasn’t certain if she trusted him, but she knew he was better than the alternative the NYPD was offering. She set a reminder in her calendar app to record Nancy Grace tomorrow and she what she had to say on Benjamin Tallmadge’s return to policing. A lot of pundits would offer a range of the same opinion on the inspector and on the now four year old case his name evoked in the days to come. The police force ought to have expected as much; it was, after all, an election year and tensions were accordingly high.

“Shall we?” Simcoe asked as the quiet buzz of the alarm he’d set sounded.

Mary nodded, switching off the TV and saying goodbye to the lumpy but surprisingly comfortable hotel bed.

She let him place his arm around her shoulders as they walked back to the car, partially for the sake of appearances, partially because the memory of what had happened to Sarah Livingston while she was in police custody in 2012 still sent shivers down her spine. Simcoe asked her if she was alright and then answered his own question with the same reassurances he had been providing all night.

After depositing the room keys in a fishbowl at the reception desk with the others that had served their night’s function, the pair hurried to Anna’s Escort and rode in silence back to Setauket.

Simcoe instructed Mary to turn off her headlights when they reached the edge of the town, drive two blocks or so and park on the side of the unlit back road. DeJong Tavern was less than a five minute walk away, he claimed. After they had seen to their business, he would give her a ride back to Anna’s car and follow her in his so as to make sure she got home safely. There was something simultaneously venomous and nonchalant in his too-high voice.

“Have you done this before?” she inquired.

She could feel him looking at her.

Mary wasn’t certain that she wanted a man who was able to calmly discuss the disposal of a corpse to know where she lived. On the other hand, she realized, she wasn’t certain when the last time anyone at all had concerned themselves with her personal safety had been. Both of these realities stung.

“Thank you,” she swallowed.

“No need,” he smiled, tapping his fingers haphazardly against the window.

Mary pulled the vehicle to a full stop when Simcoe indicated for her to do so. She had barely been driving it since turning off the lights, afraid of having another accident.

They walked for the five minutes Simcoe had sworn to before Mary could tell that they were nowhere close to their target. The night was different in early spring. In the summer the woods would buzz with the humming of insects and the crackling of a campfire’s last embers. In the winter she would have heard the crunch of fresh snow beneath her feet, in the fall the sounds of
leaves and laughter. Spring was cold and damp and deadly silent. The chill that seeped into her bones, however, had very little to do with the early morning fog which embraced her town.

“Are you cold Mrs. Woodhull?” Simcoe asked, already removing his jacket.

“Tired,” she replied as he moved closer. Mary took the jacket when it was handed to her but didn’t put it on. She noted how soft the leather was as she felt around in the pockets for the French cigarettes she had been given earlier.

“May I?” she asked as she found the box.

Simcoe took a lighter from his jeans and lit hers before lighting one for himself.

“Thank you. I’ll pay you back. What do these things cost these days anyway?”

“Twelve, fifteen dollars I believe? But you needn’t think on it.”

Mary coughed after a long inhale, “I don’t usually -”

“I know.”

It was the third time she had mentioned it. Beyond her name and occupation, the fact that she didn’t normally need a nicotine fix was probably the only thing he knew about her.

It was better that way.

She tried to hand the jacket back.

“Are you certain that you are warm enough?” He looked concerned, at least in lighting consisting of stars and stubs.

“I’m fine,” Mary assured him. “I just wish we had stopped for coffee.”

“I’ll make you some when we get back to DeJong’s. It is shite, mind, but you wouldn’t find better quality at a 7-11 or at a petrol station at this hour.”

“You won’t,” Mary replied. Realizing instantly that it sounded like she was concurring with his assessment of late night coffee options, she added, “make coffee when we arrive, I mean.”

“Why not?”

“Go upstairs and put the lights on? Simcoe -”

“John,” he reminded her, urging her once again to call him by his given name. “Mary, no light escapes those shutters and even if it did, there is nothing here and no one to notice.”

He was right. There wasn’t. Mary wondered when she had even seen the last sign or lamp post. The realization made her feel colder, still, she refused to wear John’s garment.

“I thought you said it was a five minute walk.”

“I…I thought it would be faster by foot. Perhaps not. Forgive me, I’d simply prefer to walk,” he replied. There was an audible shift in his voice. Her statement seemed to have thrown him off, exposed something. He was nervous. Mary asked herself why and answered with the fear that had been suppressed, but was now aggravated by adrenaline, alcohol and anti-depressants.
She stopped.
She knew.

Inside, she panicked.

Perhaps it was due to the memories of the Sarah Livingston media frenzy, perhaps it was instead the fact that Detective Tallmadge had been promoted to Inspector and had been assigned to the Arnold case. Perhaps it the reality that she’d recently become a murderer was finally hitting her; that she was walking with a not entirely welcome accomplice, that she had been walking for longer than five minutes or that she didn’t really know the area as well as she should. Mary really couldn’t say. Two things were however clear to her; her husband hadn’t called since she hadn’t shown up to retrieve him from the pub. He wasn’t angry, he just didn’t care. If she were to disappear, she wouldn’t be missed or immediately sought.

And Simcoe likely realized this as well.

Mary felt her heart stop. She found herself with the horrifying sudden certainty of what would very soon befall her. She opened her purse and dug around inside, wondering what would prove the most effective weapon; the keys, which Simcoe would need to get into the basement, her mobile, or her mace. She would have ran if she wasn’t sure that he could catch her, if she knew where she was or where she should go. The police were no longer a viable line of defense.

“So,” Mary inquired, “how are you planning to dispose of my corpse?”

Simcoe didn’t notice the possessive pronoun. “The plan hasn’t changed, you and I shall carry the body in the tarp back up the flight of stairs, place it into my SUV, bring it to the sound and -” he stopped, realizing that she had, “Mrs. Woodhull?”

“Mr. Simcoe,” she said, armed with her phone in one hand and a bottle of pepper-spray in the other, hidden behind her where he could not see it. Mary approached slowly. When she was near enough to him that he could view the picture on her phone’s display, she continued, “This is my son, Thomas. He is in kindergarten.”

“He’s precious.” Simcoe blinked, attempting to follow.

Mary took a deep breath. “I’m all he has. Please. My husband is never willingly around, my parents have barely spoken to me since Thomas’s birth-”

“And you think me a monster,” he finished, seemingly taken aback, hurt. “Mrs. Woodhull, what I am planning is to help you dispose of a dead senator, drive you back to your car and make certain that you arrive home safely. I don’t understand what part of that I failed to make clear.” After a long pause he added without looking at her, “My mother died when I was a child. I have no intention of forcing the same loss upon your son. Now, shall we?” He motioned for them to continue. Mary took the first step.

“I … apologize,” she half stammered.

He snatched his jacket back from where Mary had hung it over the crease in her arm, exposing the mace. Shaking his head, he pushed past her.

“For which part?” Simcoe asked, unable to disguise his agitation.

Mary wasn’t sure, and so she didn’t answer.
She wondered if she was being ridiculous or just stupid. If Simcoe were a demon with designs on her life, she wouldn’t have dared hope to appeal to his humanity. Now she had hurt him, and perhaps her own cause by proxy. Still, she kept her distance. He occasionally looked back to make sure she was still following him, but refrained from speaking.

It was better that way.

They walked in silence for the remained of their journey. It took them twenty-three minutes.

When they arrived at the tavern - as psychologically unnerving when empty as the woods at been-Simcoe went to the front parking lot to procure the hearse and Mary went around the back to unlock the door. She stopped when she noticed it was already cracked open, moving back and forth slightly in the light breeze. She didn’t dare approach alone.

In the fifteen seconds that followed, Mary ran as fast as she could until reaching the moving Range Rover. Indicating for the driver to stop the vehicle with her left arm outstretched and her right index finger over her mouth to caution silence, she approached. Simcoe recognized and complied with her gestures, turning off the engine and exiting as quickly and quietly as he could manage.

“What’s wrong?” he whispered. Mary could feel the warmth of his breath on her forehead.

“The door. It’s been opened.”

“Are you certain you locked it?”

Mary wasn’t sure, and so she didn’t answer. He nodded. She wasn’t sure if this was meant to reassure her.

Simcoe positioned her behind him as he approached, stopping short when the gravel of the unpaved rear parking lot turned to dirt.

“Do you see that?” he asked, pointing to the soil.

“What?”

“Exactly. No footprints, not ours from earlier, not any from whomever was here in our absence.”

Mary looked at him, unsure of what to make of it.

“Go wait in the car. I don’t want to leave you alone out here.”

Mary didn’t want to be alone at all. “Then take me with you,” she insisted.

Simcoe thought about it for a moment before giving his consent, “So be it. Stay close behind.”

“Do you want my mace?” Mary offered. She didn’t know what to expect in the bar’s basement. If her accomplice was planning to lead a charge into the unknown, it might be prudent to arm him with the one item in her personal arsenal which might prove useful.

“I’m all the protection we need,” he answered curtly.
She had witness the end of a fight earlier and gathered that he was probably right.

There was no light at the top of the indoor stairwell leading to DeJong’s basement storage area. Mary took the unspoken offer of Simcoe’s hand and followed him blind, save for the light from her home screen.

“I don’t believe anyone is down here,” Simcoe said quietly.

When they reached the light switch where the stairs ended his suspicions were confirmed. No one else was in the basement. Alive or dead.

The senator’s trap was in the corner where they had left it. No one was inside. There was more blood on it than Mary remembered, but less than enough for her to go on.

Simcoe crouched down to examine it.

“He can’t have gotten far.”

“What do you mean?”

“With the amount of blood loss, injury sustained … not to mention the lack of footprints before the door … He is still here. Somewhere.”

“We should call the cops,” Mary offered. If Simcoe could protect her from a ghost, he stood a shot against making sure she wouldn’t share the same unenviable fate that had befallen Sarah Livingston.

“And say what exactly?”

“That we were coming back from Connecticut, I had the keys to my friend’s pub and we decided to stop for a nightcap. We found the bar like this. Thinking something was amiss we thought to ring the authorities to let them sort this out. Do you have Anna’s number? I’ll ring her first to let her know there was a break in.”

“There is no need to involve Mrs. Strong in this.” It sounded like a warning.

“Right. Okay. The most we will get booked with is trespassing,” Mary explained. “My father-in-law is the chief justice in the NYSC, he has connections. He can get the charges dropped.”

“For a cheating daughter in-law?”

“Scandal terrifies him. At any rate, I shouldn’t be telling you this, but he keeps certain off-book accounting records in a safe in his home office, and I’ve at least one press connection which I would be more than willing to exploit to ensure our safety.”

“I’ve told you, there is no need to involve Mrs. Strong in any of this.”

“I wouldn’t be. The threat alone would be enough to control Judge Woodhull.”

Simcoe considered it before countering, “You are forgetting, I spent half the night drinking next to the senator. He will recognize me.”

“He might recognize you,” Mary corrected, empathizing the modal. “Come here.”

“What?”
“Come,” Mary beckoned for him to bend down. She freed his hair from the tie that bound it and ran her fingers through it until it was straight. Until she was satisfied. “Your hair is so soft!” she whispered, delighted in the surprise. “What kind of shampoo do you use?”

“Uh,” Simcoe replied, stupefied.

Mary retracted her hand from his mane. “Sorry. There. You look like a ginger Jesus. He is drunk, likely has a concussion, and will be none the wiser. Do you have a change of clothes in your car?”

“I have my sport bag.”

“Go change your shirt at least,” Mary instructed, noting for the first time the blood on his cuff.

“What about you?”

“Arnold never saw me.”

“You have a point.”

Mary nodded, pleased with her own quick thinking. “With the car having been washed, the receipt for the condoms, our cameo on the hotel’s security system, our story should check out. Go change, I’ll find the senator, and then we will ring the police. Who knows, we may even become heroes in the next news cycle for finding him in time to save his life.”

“We’ll both be banned from the pub though,” Simcoe said. For the first time Mary detected a hint of remorse.

“Be thankful that that is your only concern. And not necessarily. Anna and I used to be friends. You say that you are decidedly not friends with Edmund but you seem close enough to have at least some dirt on him.”

“Dirt? Filth.”

“See? Setauket is a small town. Anna is not going to want to lose any customers and if she is willing to let you go, putting pressure on her boyfriend might entice her to let you stay in the interest and peace and quiet. Now go change.”

“I don’t want to leave you down here alone.”

“I have my pepper-spray.”

He smiled at her for the first time since she’d incited their small spat. “I find myself wishing we had met under better circumstances, Mrs. Woodhull,” he whispered.

“I wish I’d never made your acquaintance at all,” she winked.

Mary went upstairs when she was unable to find any signs of life in the basement beyond what looked like rat droppings. The bar was no more promising. There were a few emptied bottles littering a few of the tables, but in a manner which suggested that whomever had closed had left the clean-up for the next shift, rather than Benedict Arnold had woken up and continued his binge. Mary made a mental note to casually give Anna tips on how to discipline her employees when next
they spoke. She proceeded to check the kitchen and finally the bathrooms for signs of the senator. Nothing.

There was no blood, nothing whatsoever to suggest that an injured man had entered the main building. Mary took a long look at herself in the ladies’ room mirror. Tired eyes. Pale pink skin bleached out by the fluorescent lights. At least her $35 lipstick held up to its marketed promise of lasting 24 hours. Considering that she’d ate, drank and smoked since applying it, she was impressed. She fashioned her long red-gold hair into a loose bun, making a kissy face at herself as she did and a note to purchase a few additional shades plus whatever luxury hair-care products Simcoe used on her next pay day.

Provided that she was still a free woman.

The door opened, startling her.

For a moment she let herself hope it was the senator; that she wasn’t so hard, so shallow that she was honestly thinking about the MAC Counter when a corpse she had intended to hide was evading her. She could no longer blame the combination of Edmund’s Xanax and Richard’s Riesling for her delayed reaction time and emotional disconnect. This was her. She was horrid.

Simcoe, wearing a sweatshirt and soccer tricot for a team whose sponsor she didn’t recognize, breathed a sigh of relief. He spent a moment staring at her before electing to speak.

“Mary, your plan won’t work.”

“I couldn’t find a single trace of him anywhere.” She bit her bottom lip in frustration. A quick glance back to the mirror told her that it had no effect on her lipstick’s staying power. She didn’t know what she was thinking, but she knew it was wrong to have such thoughts. She started crying in spite of herself.

Simcoe wrapped her in his arms. Whatever he said was muted by her tears. It took only a moment for her to gather herself and come to her better senses, but what had remained of her morning mascara was now in a nasty black stain on Simcoe’s shirt. She’d have to buy him a new one. And switch brands with regard to her eye make-up. New soccer jersey. New mascara. New shampoo and conditioner. Same lipstick, new shade. She made a list in her head.

“What team is that? I’ll get you a new one.”

Simcoe glanced down.

“It will be alright, Mrs. Woodhull. He can’t have gotten far. I’ll bring you home and continue my search. I’m sure I can find him by morning.”

“I should help.”

“It is best that you stay out of it,” he said. Another warning.

“What are you planning, John?”

“I think you are right, he will either recognize me or he won’t. Either way I’ll sort it. The less I say to you the less trouble you will find yourself in.”

“He doesn’t need to die. Listen to me. We still have a chance here. We will clean up the basement. Anna has industrial supplies, I’ve seen where they are kept. We will make it look like whatever happened didn’t happen here. You have an alibi that I will vouch for.”
“Why are you doing this for me?” he asked, again taken aback.

“You helped me move and hide a body before anyone noticed that there even was one. You’ve been … present, throughout all of this whereas I’ve been,” she shook her head, not sure why she was confessing to her seemingly base nature, “I’ve just been thinking about additions I want to make to my fucking cosmetic case. Of all things. I accuse you of being a monster. I killed a man. Or thought I did. And I can’t even seem to connect to that. I’m sorry I … I’m rambling.”

“It’s fine. You know what I’ve been think about?”

“What?”

“How English betting houses set their odds. The entire night. I’m trying to formulate an argument in defense of statistics and find myself at a loss. It is something of a kindness, really. A defense mechanism. You are a decent person in an unfortunate situation, Mary, and for that matter, so am I,” he looked down, realized he was still cradling her, and slowly but decidedly loosened his grip. He didn’t take a step back. Mary wondered - not for the first time - if he had some sort of social deficit. She wondered if it was contagious. She resented him for letting her go as much as it disturbed her that he was standing so close. Then again, it was a small bathroom. She reached behind him to the door handle.

He followed her back into the basement.

“Okay, listen to me, take the tarp, load it back into your car, and drive it down to the sound. If they find it in the river the police will focus their search in that area, provided that Senator Arnold isn’t already enjoying the comfort of a hospital stay.”

“Do you do this for a living?” he smiled.

“In a way I suppose, I work for a charitable organization as I believe I mentioned. You’d be horrified if you knew the sorts of things I’m charged with keeping from the media.”

“I wish we had people like you on Wall Street.”

“I think Wall Street is beyond the level help I’m able to provide,” she smiled back. “It’s mostly dried,” she said feeling the thin waste-wool. “You might get a few drops on your upholstery but nothing you won’t be able to remove with a basic stain remover. I will mop the floor, the whole floor, so that nothing looks conspicuous, and by the time I’ve finished you ought to be done disposing of the tarp. You can give me a ride back to the Escort and we can go on our merry ways.”

“It won’t work,” Simcoe said after taking a moment to think about it.

“Why not? Often it is the simple solution which proves the best.”

“Have you ever been to DeJong’s before tonight, Mrs. Woodhull?”

“I can’t say that I have.”

“It is something of a wonder that they manage to pass the heath inspection. A clean basement would be a red flag.”

“The state of the house is nothing unusual then?”

“Not at all.”
“Then we clean the whole bar.”

“I don’t think you understand what it is you are signing up for.”

Simcoe took his time throwing the tarp into the sound. By the time he had return Mary had scrubbed the floors in the basement, bathrooms, and kitchen free of blood, piss, oil and animal droppings. Wearing think gloves, she’d dusted, cleaned the toilets and refilled the paper hand towels and soap. There was less to do in the kitchen. Mary wonder if this was because it was upstairs, if it was overused, or if it was never used. Simcoe returned with the insight that Hewlett had recently repaired the hood vent and some of the lighting. He’d probably cleaned and cooked a few meals in there as well. It wasn’t unusual for the regulars to step in and help Anna out. She now had to manage with a considerably reduced staff. The bar’s owner wasn’t planning on returning from his winter lodgings in Florida. From what he’d heard, Martin DeJong meant to sell. The slow market recovery was the only factor hindering the process. At any rate, he was no longer willing to reinvest any of the profits into upkeep. Anna and her two part time employees were doing their best, but their best only went so far.

“It gets to me that this is the second time in the past eighteen hours that Caleb Brewster will get the glory for my hard work,” Simcoe said as he wiped down a table.

“My hard work,” Mary corrected. “What in heavens name took you so long?”

“I was … seeing if I couldn’t hunt down Senator Arnold.”

“I wish you’d remembered to hunt down some coffee,” Mary yawned. The area behind the bar was spotless. The bar itself was not. She resumed her work on a particular stain before being told that it had been there so long it was now part of the fixture.

“We should steal something,” Mary offered when they were all but finished.

“Pardon?”

“We will take some beer, whatever they have in the back office, make it look like a robbery.”

She was tired of cleaning and tired in general. It was close to daybreak.

“There is nothing worth taking as you can well see.”

“Beer? The register? A safe?”

Simcoe went behind the bar and started making the coffee he had promised on the drive up from Connecticut but had yet to deliver upon.

“I hope you don’t need milk in it,” he commented after finding a jug of 2% in the mini-fridge behind the bar, showing her the week old expiration date.
“I do,” Mary lamented.

“I can put whipped cream on it.”

“Works too. But then no sugar.”

Simcoe nodded, gathering assorted supplies that had, or rather should have, absolutely nothing to do with a cup of coffee.

“How do you take yours then?” she asked skeptically, pointing to a few of the various bottles Simcoe had stacked on the counter between himself and the stool Mary was sitting on.

“A robbery, I’ll admit, would grant us another level of cover, but I am hesitant to take something that might cut into Anna’s bottom line.”

Mary wondered how close the two of them were. Over the course of the night Mary had learned in no particular order that John Graves Simcoe was an orphan, that he had done well for himself in banking, that he spent his spare time watching sports or engaging in them, that he had no sense whatsoever of personal space, a pronounced nervous tick, limited self-restraint, and a borderline obsession with the local beer wrench. She wondered if that meant that she would have to see him again now that Anna was effectively living with her, and alternately, if she had found yet another erroneous ground on which to envy her college roommate.

“The cider may well be arsenic and ought to be disposed of in the interest public health,” Simcoe continued, “Wine, pfft! Here, take these and share them with the women in your book club.”

Mary had no interest in serving cheap wine to her friends. She did however, question when exactly she had brought them up.

“How did you know I was in a book club?”

“I didn’t. I assumed based on numerous factors that you spend you free time in the company of women who are using The Alchemist as an excuse to judge each other on whose toddler will get into the best private prep-school, whose husband got the highest bonus -”

Mary smiled. Was she that transparent?

“Dangerously close, Mr. Simcoe. We’re on Eleven Minutes, Au-pairs, and we judge women we don’t know rather than those we do, primarily on the basis of fashion. Which leads me to mention, I can’t possibly serve them this,” she said, pointing to the three bottles he had set in front of her.

“It can’t possibly be allowed to remain. I only know of one individual who orders wine in a damned pub. Act against nature that it is.”

“I didn’t say I wouldn’t take them, just that I wouldn’t serve them to anyone,” she winked.

“Pity. I hate to think of you drinking alone.”

“Maybe you can invite me to your book club then.”

“I’m not in a book club. I have, however, read Coelho.”

“To impress a girl?” By girl she meant Anna. He seemed aware.

“Is it that obvious?”
“How did that work out for you?”

“How did that work out for you?”

“After a few awkward dates she told me she just wasn’t ready to see anyone at the moment.”

“You should have tried Austin.”

“You should have tried Austin.”

“Too late now. After we ended something she’d never let begin she decided she was ready to commit to one of my best friends, ex-friends. Truth be told I’ve always hated the man.”

“Oh. Ouch,” she said with as much empathy as she could force.

Simcoe smiled as he poured her a coffee.

“Is that how you met your husband?”

“Is that how you met your husband?”

“Through Jane Austin novels?” Mary shook her head, laughing at the thought of Abe feigning culture. “No, ours is a good old fashioned story of meeting at a frat party and being young, drunk and impressionable enough to have unprotected sex.”

Simcoe seemed caught off guard.

“That’s rather unfortunate. I apologize, I didn’t intend-”

“No, no, I didn’t mean it like that. I am happy with the way things turned out. Mostly. I love my son, he’s my reason for everything. I love my husband too, for what it’s worth. What about you? Any children?”

“No yet.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll find a storybook romance with a happy ending someday, I’m sure.” It was a white lie. There were no Mr. Darcys or Miss Bennets in the real world. Mary knew that better than most people.

“Are you, or is that just something Americans say to make themselves feel better?” he challenged with a hint of sass.

“Does anyone really feel better thinking about an ideal world?” she asked with genuine curiosity.

“It brings me some comfort.”

“And what do your dreams look like?”

“The woman I love realizes that she is making a huge mistake in agreeing to marry a man she barely knows - hopefully without her ever having to suffer him at his worst. Things then return to the way they were except … when I find an opportunity to tell her how I feel she will be more open to the idea of us.”

Mary took a long, slow sip of coffee that had lived up to its guarantee of being ‘shite’, then took Simcoe by the hand the way she would a girlfriend whom she was emotionally preparing for a chilling truth. “Okay, I think you need to let that one go.”

“What do you mean?”

“Speaking from personal experience? Anna might be pregnant. It happened to me. A lot of insurance plans don’t cover contraceptives. A lot of women think -”
Simcoe stated to laugh, “Anna Strong? You’re not serious are you? Who told you that lie?”

“It is obvious isn’t it? Listen John, I didn’t mean-”

“Well that is bound to fall apart,“ he poured more coffee into both of their mugs, “cheers.” After a sip, another chuckle and a pause, he continued, “I wish I could tell Oyster about this. Or anyone in our circle, really. Pregnant. That’s rich.”

“How else would you then explain -”

“A woman who didn’t know the man’s Christian name six weeks ago suddenly becoming the Grand Dragon of the Hew-Klux-Klan? I have my theories.”

She raised her mug to the pun. He didn’t return the gesture.

“Well?” Mary asked, suppressing a laugh.

Simcoe remained silent, picking out a few half empty bottles to steal in an effort to confuse the police and adding them to the contents of the *Lost and Found* box.

“He’s gay and needed someone to marry as a condition of his trust fund,” she offered after much contemplation and the remainder of a cup of coffee she won’t have been able to drink were she not in desperate need of one.

“Excuse me?”

“Hewlett and Anna.”

“Oh. OH! No, but keep trying,” he encouraged, “these just keep getting better.”

“Tell me,” Mary quietly demanded.

“What concern is it of yours?”

“I’d like to know who I am living with.”

“Mrs. Woodhull, if you please. Think about the nights events and rephrase your argument. I’ve known you for all of six hours and can already recognize that you are one of the most capable, self-reliant people this world has ever produced. Nothing your pathetic tenant or his amazing bride-to-be could do could in any way threaten or harm you.”

“So they are getting married?”

“I’d prefer not to speak on it.”

Mary was not willing to take no for an answer.

“I’ll tell you why I want to know. Abe, my husband, and Anna, who is now living in our house, dated in high-school. I don’t know that he ever really got over her. We were room-mates freshmen and part of sophomore year, Anna and I, when we were at NYU together. When Abe and I first started dating the two of them  *reconnected*, as she put it. Anna told me all about it the day I realized I was pregnant and that was the last I ever saw of her until she evidently became a HewKIP voter under circumstances which seem mysterious. I love my husband, Mr. Simcoe,” she swallowed, “but I don’t know for certain that he loves me. I never have. So tell me, please, whatever it is that you think you know, what I may need to prepare myself for.”
Simcoe was silent for a few minutes. Why wouldn’t he be? Mary asked herself. She had put him in the awkward position of having to defend the relationship of two people he wanted to see together even less than she wanted to have them in her home.

“Listen, as I’ve said before, this remains strictly between us. Hewlett failed to defend his dissertation. He can have another crack at it next semester, but he missed his opportunity to apply for a renewal to his student visa and having blown through his trust fund, he doesn’t currently possess the economic means to qualify for another option. There is, however, an exception in the form of a marriage visa. Thanks to the specific advice of another friend of ours, one John Andre, better known to you as the ass who orders wine you wouldn’t serve to you book-club friends in a place like this, Hewlett asked for Anna’s hand. I’m not certain why she agreed initially; I imagine it has something to do with something in, or rather absent from, her divorce settlement. She didn’t trust herself to ask for anything. Akinbode, who represented her in court - incidentally yet another friend currently on my shit-list - didn’t advise her otherwise. I think she needed fast cash and a place to stay. I wish she had spoken to me. Or I to her. But it is of no matter,” he clenched up. “She’s in love with him, she even told me as much. I believe her. You can see it in the way she looks at him, in the way she indulges his eccentricities. She isn’t a treat to your marriage, Mary. But, to that note, you shouldn’t settle.”

It clearly pained him to talk about it, she had no reason to press the matter beyond her own blatant curiosity, but Mary swallowed and asked, “Do you think Hewlett loves her?”

“I don’t think he loves anyone but himself,” Simcoe rolled his eyes. They landed on Mary’s hand, still atop his. She didn’t remove it. It somehow didn’t feel appropriate that she should. “However,” Simcoe continued, still looking at her hand as she started to rub her fingers softly against the back of his, “I don’t think him uninterested. He has -how should I phrase this - personal hurdles he has surmised as unsurmountable for reasons of convenience. Perhaps dear Anna will give him reason to ‘get the fuck over himself’, as you colonists say.” He tried to smile.

Mary felt awful.

“John, thank you. And it isn’t really my business, but you shouldn’t settle either.”

Lighting a cigarette he said, “No one wants me, Mary. Even my closest friends hate me more than half the time.”

Taking yet another from his dwindling pack, she offered his a small but honest consolation. “To be fair, you hate them too.” Simcoe nodded in agreeance. “If I’d met you under different circumstances,” Mary continued, “I’d think you were a nice guy.”

“And now?” he asked as he lit her fag.

“I’d still call you if I ever wanted to pretend to have an affair again.”

“Maybe that’s what I am doing wrong. Maybe I need to focus more of my energy on getting into physical altercations with pseudo-fascists in front of working moms who can’t find the breaks in borrowed cars.”

“Maybe.”

They did a final check upstairs to see if any evidence of Benedict Arnold’s undead presence had been unveiled during the cleaning. Finding nothing, Simcoe carried their take from behind the bar –as well as a carton of boiled eggs from the kitchen he didn’t want to see turned into salad- and carried them in the Lost and Found box to the basement below.
“Oh no.” Mary said, noticing a bloody handprint that likely belonged to her on the wall by the light switch next to the stairwell. Simcoe handed her the box before punching out the drywall, unintentionally killing the lights in the process.

It was still dark outside to Mary’s surprise. She felt like the night had lasted more than two centuries, it didn’t seem like time should still be on her side.

“Is that my husband’s album?” she asked once inside Simcoe’s green Range Rover.

“Right, yeah. Sort of a last minute joke birthday present from your tenant.”

“Edmund? You guys really do hate each other, don’t you?” she teased.

“Not a fan either, then?”

“I support Abraham. I don’t have to like what he does.”

Simcoe followed her home after driving her back to Anna’s car, exactly as he’d promised. He said that he would drive around for an hour or so before going back to the city. Mary asked once more what he planned on doing if he found Arnold and once more Simcoe declined to answer. He told her he would go home to shower and change, go to the office a little early, yell at however many people he needed to frighten until the entire office decided it was best to leave him alone and then try to get an hour or two of sleep at his desk. He’d perfected the technique. Mary’s plan of action was to dictate half of her to-do list to her interns. Sometime in the late morning or early afternoon, she would pretend to receive a call saying that Thomas had a fever and she needed to pick him up from school or day care. It wasn’t perfect, but she had pulled it off previously.

They wished each other well and said good night.

Mary realized after they parted ways at the edge of her driveway that they had forgotten to exchange numbers. She realized by the time she made it to the house that she wouldn’t mind seeing him again, though what good could possibly come from it?

The motion sensor lighting didn’t go off when she used the garage entrance. She remembered Hewlett disabling it a few months ago, after he had been given permission, of course. He’d said something about light pollution. Mary had jokingly asked him if he meant to hide a body. He had responded by talking at length about his interest in telescopes. Mary, half ironically, looked around for shallow graves where Benedict Arnold might be hiding or might have been hidden. It was then that it dawned on her – there had been no footprints at the bar, neither from her, nor Simcoe, nor Arnold, nor anyone else who would or could have used the rear entrance.

Someone had defiantly been there in their absence.

Someone who might be able to provide witness against them.

Arnold couldn’t have escaped on his own.

Mary didn’t want to see Simcoe again. She needed to. And in the morning she would need to have an awkward conversation with one of the immigration swindlers about how to get in touch.
Chapter End Notes

I promised you guys an Andre chapter last week, didn’t I? Good news is it has been written, bad news is I can’t quite decide if I want to juxtapose it with the Hewlett and Simcoe bits happening at around the same time in the narrative. Either way, you’ll get it soon, I promised. (And if you’ve a preference or opinion I’d love to hear it.)

I have a few notes this go around, not too many, as always I learned a lot about America and the English language in writing this and set most of my cultural references in the New World (If I got anything wrong, please be so kind as to tell me in the comments!)

Fox is a privately owned American right wing news agency. When footage from their station makes its way onto European stations we mostly take it as satire. It may well be the exception rather than the rule that they shout terrorism at everything. Meanwhile, the foreign news stations (BBC, NTV, RT, CNN) all have their own quirks. Germany doesn’t have an international English language 24 hour news network, partially because we are so bad at news in general. I pick on NTV a lot in this fic, but all of our networks do the thing where they give 15 minutes of coverage an hour and then run old documentaries with a news and stock ticker at the bottom. Regardless of what is going on.

HewKIP is a play on the British political party UKIP. Not sure how or if the Brexit is being covered in the US, but in Europe UKIP voters are being absolutely slain in the press right now (for 15 minutes at the top of each hour, followed by the history of the Hansa). Good on Mary for using an English reference, or? She was a loyalist in the show, so I can’t imagine her not having some interest in the UK in an AU. But then maybe she was just trying to impress Simcoe. Time will tell, won’t it?

Paulo Coelho is a Brazilian writer, Jane Austin was an English novelist. I’d honestly be surprised if you’ve never read (or been made to read) their collective bodies of work.

I think that is it, but if I missed something or you have a question you know the drill.

Anyway, hope you enjoyed. Thanks, as always, for reading! Comments and Kudos are always super fun to get, but its weekend ... it summer ... and you already made my day. Now, go out and enjoy yours!

XOXO – bis nächste mal!

Up Next: (finally!) John Andre gets fired from his own research project, Martha Dandridge-Custis gets a call from the Pentagon. (possibly! Anna and Edmund vs. Mary and John in who can more convincingly fake a relationship with the cops keeping score. – you guys want to read 7K or 9K words?)
The Fear

Chapter Summary

An architect of his own destruction, John Andre seeks to absolve himself of sin by obtaining and dispensing a controlled substance he lacks the qualifications to prescribe. His deceit is discovered and he is promptly dismissed on the night that a prominent politician disappears.

Chapter Notes

Warnings: Alcoholism, medical malpractice, blatant manipulation, broken relationships, implied sexual deviance, prescription drug abuse, catfishing, research grants, pharmaceutical corporations, minor references to modern politics, “Schwizerdütsch”

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The cab fare from the restaurant, to the hotel, to Long Island and back home cost had him a total of $275. He gave the driver -who had humored him by switching the radio at his request from Top 40 to NPR after a short breaking news report had interrupted his date’s favorite song- $50 extra for his troubles. The doorman greeted him and he responded in kind but didn’t approach; preferring to stare at his building’s beautiful façade than enter his broken home. At four o’clock in the morning the early spring air was cold and moist. Fog and smog obstructed the city’s neon and florescent lights, creating a soft ambiance that seemed out of sync with the song New York usually sung him. This was a lullaby. This was a dirge. He took a deep breath, hoping that the soloist upstairs would sing the verse he’d just written without forcing her familiar chorus on his unwilling ears.

“Is this sexual? I’m not in the mood, John,” Philomena Andre sighed, closing her eyes, no doubt wishing she had gone to bed when she had gotten home a few hours prior instead of reading reviews of the night’s performance and Skyping with her sister in Tel Aviv. The sister had greeted him when she saw him through her monitor. His wife had not. He probably should brought her flowers with his odd request, but the pair had long since stopped playing the roles they once had for each other. He wasn’t her husband in anything but name; a name he paradoxically refused to affix to the divorce paperwork that had been awaiting it for the past four years. He should have brought her flowers.

“Mena, please -”

“It is not really worth my time. You’re drunk. Assuming you can even get hard enough to make it at all worth my while, you’ll finish before I’m even wet. I’m not faking another orgasm for you tonight, and I’m sure as hell not doing it while pretending to be some teenager who had enough self-respect not to spread her legs for you.”

In nearly any other situation, he could have offered her a half-hearted apology or an empty excuse
in lieu of an explanation, but he was in desperate need of her particular talents. He knew it was a long shot; that even if he could get her to agree to read from his script, there might not have an audience for her performance. He looked down at his phone again. The senator had yet to respond to any of the text he’d sent since he had heard the news. “Benedict Arnold is missing,” he informed her, “this has nothing to do with Peggy.”

“That guy who was meant to speak at the Trump Rally tonight? Solange and I were just talking about that,” she paused, and in a pitch that promised revenge at no one in particular added, “Did you hear that the NYPD has Ben Tallmadge leading the investigation?” He hadn’t. Even if it were true, which he found unlikely - having lived in New York during the Sarah Livingston scandal- it mattered very little to him now. John took his wife’s hand in his and swallowed, preparing to confess to yet another life altering error in judgement.

“I think he may be dead. I think I may be responsible. He is the man I opened a chain of correspondence with, pretending, as it were, to be Miss Shippen. I took things too far, and upon seeing that I had lost control of the situation I had endeavored to create, I …” he had forgotten the instant he saw the woman he had been presenting himself as online. He was a victim of his id’s unchecked impulses. Of Peggy’s incomparable eyes. He continued slowly in a soft but deliberate tone he normally only used on his patients and partners, “I accepted his request for a face to face meeting. I was unexpectedly held up, and by the time I arrived the location we had set he was gone, having left a series of texts and voicemail which force me to consider the possibility, that he, that I … I can’t reach him. His staff and the police can’t seem to find him. Assuming he is alive but at risk my voice and confession will do nothing to alleviate his feelings of betrayal. I can’t go through this. Not again. Please.”

Philomena nodded, biting her lower lip. When she at long last spoke, she asked in a voice that was not her own, “Like this? Would you say? I only met her briefly and I half suspect that you spent most of the night showing her… the city.”

“A little higher, melodic, but with an understated force,” Andre instructed. Philomena’s true talent as an actress was her ability to take direction and deliver. He worked with her until he could see Peggy when he closed his eyes. “John, if I do this, there is something that you have to do for me.”

There it was. The chorus. John sighed.

“Mena, don’t ask this of me. Not for him, and for the love of Christ not today. In addition to this mess with Arnold, I was fired from writing my own research paper and threatend with a malpractice suit I will most assuredly lose if I can’t convince Martha not to bring it. I’ve lost what few friends I have, and found a love I can’t embrace. Please. Not today.”

“No,” she agreed, “Not today. When I leave you, John, I want you to be fully aware of what you’ve lost.” With that she walked away, returning a few minutes later with her giant purse. Philomena reached into her bag and handed him an envelope she had filled with brochures. “This is what I’m asking in exchange,” she explained, “Do we have a deal?”

There was something mundane about dating. Andre had once thought flirtation an art, but lately he had come to realize that it was more of a mechanical system. He wasn’t painting the predictable desires of the men and women he was entertaining in the colours of his carefully chosen words, but rather observing these lusts as they travelled through an assembly line. For a brief period he had
considered himself its engineer, but after countless rounds of entice, ignore, and embrace he found that he was merely its controller. And he had lost control.

He didn’t attempt to justify to himself why he first started to play with them emotions of people he had never met, and likely would never meet. Perhaps he saw thin lines forming in the corners of his mouth and eyes and questioned if he could still prove interesting when his beauty was lost to time. Perhaps his motivation to manipulate was born from burn-out, having lost either the desire or the ability— or a combination of both— to influence his patients in a meaningful way. Perhaps it was the fact that he had no friends stateside outside of the people he was obligated to impress; or that lately he had failed everyone so devastatingly that his only other refuge would be to lose himself entirely to drink. Perhaps it was the fact that he had been functioning under the influence of alcohol for the better part of his adult life.

Andre had allowed his fun to continue for as long as it had because it was the only bad decision he had made in the past few years that he could reasonably live with. He talked to Arnold about what he would fictively do to him the moment he had him alone in large part because he couldn’t talk to anyone else about anything. He watched the clandestine crush escalate as his own world collapsed; using a fake relationship with a total stranger to escape the relationships from which he felt himself estranged.

He couldn’t stand to look at Hewlett since it happened. Simcoe seemed to want to talk to him in a professional capacity for the first time since he had accepted him as a patient, and for the first time Andre found himself occupationally inclined to discourage discussion. He lost them both as clients, others followed suit. He had absolutely nothing to say for himself. Which was perhaps why he let so many of his phone calls go to voice mail.

He felt his phone buzzing in his back pocket. The girl he was dining with twisted and twirled a strand of her long blonde hair between her middle and index fingers as she agreed that most relationships had a certain level of artificiality to them. She had asked him to show her the city after they had done a quick but familiar dance upon meeting— entice, ignore, embrace. He knew her previously only through pictures, both as one of his administrative assistant’s adoptive sisters and as the girl he allowed Benedict Arnold to imagine himself speaking to.

“It is easier, of course, to deceive when one’s conversation partner is drunk,” she’d responded after he had first tried to compliment her on her ethereal beauty. “But no,” she continued, “I never use filters. Just the right combination of drug store cosmetics and a basic skin care regimen.”

Her offhand comment about his surprisingly visible alcohol problem had cut him like a knife, as, he realized, he had likely injured her by commenting on her looks when she had clearly been attempting to capture his mind by displaying the prowess of her own. Andre had apologised, Peggy had shrugged it off by continuing to address his faults. Her father was in politics, most of the people she was forced to engage with were abusing one kind of substance or another. She doubted that anyone else was aware. He doubted anyone paid him much mind these days, and wanted to tell her as much for reasons he couldn’t justify; but years of brief illicit connections had forced his tongue into reciting another line from his all too familiar script. This one worked. She had asked him to show her around town. He found himself terrifically happy to comply with her request.

Andre took her to some of the least notable places he could think of, partially because he wanted to make a show of the fact that he wasn’t trying to impress her, partially because it was his wife’s name— rather than his own— which carried in it the power to open the city’s doors. He wasn’t sure if Peggy knew any of this and he was hesitant to ask. She seemed to be having her fun with him.
“Do you need to get that?” she asked when his phone buzzed again, “I know from Abby that your work is important.”

“Nothing matters more to me at this moment than you,” he answered in all sincerity. “What I ought to do is turn the thing off.” When he pulled his phone out of his back pocket to do just that however, the name of the display unnerved him. He swallowed as he watched the light on the screen fade as voice mail took over. He had nineteen missed calls. Three of which were from his research partner. John Andre hadn’t spoken to the woman who had lent her prestige to his upcoming paper in months. He knew that he had missed a deadline, but he would have been surprised if it had registered with her. No, he knew what the call was about. He glanced at Peggy apologetically before looking at the names in his back log to confirm his assumptions. Two unanswered calls from Pfizer. He looked at the times and realized that he had been driving in circles with Simcoe and talking in circles with Peggy when he ought to have answered the ringing battle cries. He had been waiting for the call, after all.

He looked back up to the woman he would have gladly forgotten everything else for in that moment; she said she understood without waiting for him to offer an explanation. Andre excused himself from the table and stepped outside.

Dr Martha Dandridge was a tenured professor of phycology at Columbia who taught a handful of graduate classes each semester in between organizing and conducting research and contracting herself with various three letter agencies. She had first made Andre’s acquaintance after reading a dissent he had written while at university on her work with regards to military interrogation techniques. He had been as surprised to receive a reply from her as she had been to have her work thrown into question by an English undergrad. They had developed an instant rapport -as both were naturally inclined to do- as well as a deep mutual respect for one another which had lasted for over fifteen years.

Although their professional admiration had proven it could withstand all measures of time and distance; the differences in their individual approaches to conducting a long-term controlled study effectively ended their working relationship the instant she had agreed to co-author a paper on the societal effects of fear. In the year since Dandridge had accused him of becoming too personally involved in the outcomes of the study and asserting her concerns that the data was being thusly corrupted the two had barely exchanged greetings. The past few months had proven to Andre that his partner had been correct in her criticisms. They hadn’t spoken since.

He dialled his answering service, preparing himself for the conversation he had been avoiding having with anyone to unfold in the worst possible - and simultaneously most logical - manner. He braced himself for Martha’s diplomatic and almost maternal tone, which he knew from the declassified records of notorious detention facilities had previously undermined criminals far more dangerous than himself.

“I just got a call from my favourite Pfizer rep.” Andre deleted the voice mail without listening to it in full, knowing that his colleague was bound hyperbolise whatever brief conversation she was force to endure on his behalf as the most painful occurrence of her week. He rechecked his own call log to confirm. Yes, the call had come directly from the man he had illicit dealings with, a man he knew she despised. The second message was directly in reference to the medication Andre had gotten from the drug company that wasn’t classified for psychiatric use. The third kindly suggested that he ring his solicitor.
He took a deep breath and turned around to face the hole-in-the-wall Ukrainian restaurant where Peggy Shippen was waiting on him to return. Their initial encounter a few hours prior had marked the first occasion since nearly killing one of his patients with some intent that he wished he wasn’t completely wasted. He knew that if he went back inside now he would drink the entire bottle of wine the waiter had brought, which thus far he had rejected in favour of water. He had known her for half a day and recognized she deserved to know a better side of him. Everyone did. Something in Peggy convinced him that that man still existed.

He closed his eyes and pressed the green icon next to his partner’s name. After a brief exchange of greetings and letting him know in no uncertain terms that this call was long overdue, Dr Dandridge started in where her first voice message had been deleted.

“I received an invoice from Pfizer which we really ought to discuss.”

“I’ll reach out. I am sure there has been an error,” he replied calmly, hoping to cover his transgressions rather than defend them.

“I don’t think you would be avoiding the university were that the case,” she paused. Andre could hear her lighting a fag in her office. “I spent half of my evening discussing your arrangement with Mr. Jefferson. With respect to our past partnership I am going to give you the benefit of a meeting tomorrow morning during office hours in which I’ll allow you to make your case for why I shouldn’t report you to the American Medical Association.”

“Past partnership?” Andre clarified.

“You are not licensed to practice internal medicine, John. Can you imagine the lawsuit? I’m sorry. You have left me with little choice. This data – you Oxbridge / Ivy subjects in their entirety must be eliminated from consideration.”

The air outside felt colder. Andre had written the original proposal, most of the research was born from his efforts. The study would make his name when the results were published; and while he agreed that some of his actions had been unethical, amoral, and illegal, he could not simply allow his contributions to be passed over for the sake of the university’s convince.

“That is not how science works,” he challenged, “You know that.”

“I agree that the evidence you’ve presented is compelling, but if it bears any basis in truth similar results will be found elsewhere,” Dandridge’s tone was level and soft, but it did nothing to mask the sternness of her message.

“With regard the original proposal-”

“It is not your study anymore,” she interrupted. “Let it go. The only thing you ought to be concerning yourself with is how to convince me personally not to report you for the actions you seem to have convinced yourself that you took to further the study’s academic objectives. This has all gone a little too far, Dr. Andre. You know, or at least you should, that there is a line that shouldn’t be crossed between patient and physician. They aren’t your friends. You’re not theirs, and you are most certainly not a cardiologist.”

“I know,” he consented, “I know.”

“If this ever sees the light of day-”

“It won’t,” his voice hardened as he began to pace. “Even if the subject somehow discovered the role I played in saving his life, which I find highly unlikely-”
“How? How versed are you in the particular ailment you’ve sought to treat?”

He wasn’t. At all. Andre’s father had been a chemist and he was better acquainted at an early age with prescription drugs than he knew most other doctors in any branch to be after years in practice, but this fact didn’t qualify him to dispense heart medication any more than the guilt that filled his own did. He tried another route, knowing it wouldn’t lead him far. “I know him. He’d agree with my actions. He always does.”

“Well, it is me you need to convince.” With that she hung up. Andre had never heard her angry before, he wondered how nothing changed in her sweet voice. He imagined that part of her was relishing the opportunity to dispose of the pharmaceutical representative in question. But he could be convincing, he reassured himself. He swore as he approached the bar to order and drink a quick shot of vodka before returning to his lovely date that in the morning he would get his name back on the study which was essentially his and his alone. He would prove to his partner and to the university and to whomever else came to challenge him that he had acted in the interest of caregiving and that he should be applauded for doing so.

By the time he would make it to Dr. Dandridge’s office the next morning however, she would be on the phone with the director of a far more threatening three letter organization than the AMA. The series of events that had transpired in lieu date he had forgotten he had in Setauket would have by that point effectively forced an end to the project as a whole. In the next two hours he would begin to see Benedict Arnold as a real person as opposed to a passing fancy, he would be forced to deal with the mistakes he had made and their personal and professional implications, and perhaps most dangerously at all, he would fall in love.

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Peggy hung up her phone quickly when she saw him approaching.

“I apologize for my absence. There is an issue at the university I’ve to sort in the morning.”

“I am more than capable of finding my own amusements, Dr. Andre,” she said giving him a small coquettish laugh. “What University? I assumed you were strictly private-practice.”

“I am the co-author of an ongoing research study, my colleague is a tenured professor at Columbia,” he said taking his seat at the table once more.

“Am I to take from your tone that you don’t get on?”

“It is research. It isn’t a question of it I much care for her or not. The problem I have is that it has primarily been my work, and the closer we are to publication the more Dr. Dandridge seeks to, how should I put this? Undermine my contributions. I am unfortunately willing to let her. I need her name recognition to secure the grant.”

“Couldn’t help but to drop it, could we?”

“I suppose it is a force of habit. Academia isn’t much interested in the contributions of an immigrant with a redbrick educational background, but if Martha Dandridge adds her star to the proposal funding and interest are all but guaranteed.”

“What is your research about?”
“The Importance of Fear in a Post-Modern Closed Gesellschaft”

“What does it mean though?” she asked.

“I’m hardly fluent, my parents are originally from Switzerland,” he began to translate.

“Das habe ich alles verstanden. Ich meinte,”

He was impressed, especially given that the bankers from Frankfurt he sometimes saw at DeJong’s had trouble with the light dialect he had inherited. “Oh, the paper itself? It examines the effects fear has on closed societies.”

“Is that something you can quantify? Fear?”

“It is the only emotion which is also an instinct - something that has been tragically overlooked in past research.”

“Is it interesting?”

“It is proving more problematic than anything else. We are looking at an assortment of groups. Martha is of the opinion that I’ve embedded myself into one sample in particular to the extent that there are ethics questions surrounding that gathered data. Though I can see the matter from her perspective I don’t share in her opinion that the data in question ought to be neglected. We’ve been going back and forth over this what she deems an issue for quite some time. This is just the latest round.”

Peggy’s phone buzzed while they were waiting on desert, “Sorry,” she excused herself as she checked it.

“Don’t be, I did the same to you,” Andre smiled absentmindedly. In spite of all of the day’s stress, he had forgotten that the world existed beyond the table where they sat, discussing whatever topic came to mind. Peggy shared his appreciation -if not his tastes- for art, music and literature. She was politically astute, worldly and well-informed; nothing of the shallow fool he followed on social media, the girl he perpetrated himself to be in moments of want and apathy.

“No, you didn’t. I know your work is important whereas this is … I’m,” she looked distressed, “Okay. Moment of honesty. I’m supposed to be interrogating you right now.”

“Interrogating? Me?”
“You set up one of your friends with one of mine, things are moving pretty quickly between them, and yet another mutual friend of ours suggested - based on your browser history - that I might be able to get more answers from you than she was able to.”

“My browser history?” Andre realized and instantly regretted having Abigail coordinate the administration of the office’s computer system. What else – and how much – did she know? He made a mental note to settle the matter by talking to his partners about giving her another raise. Howe would be an easy sell, Clinton would object for the sake of argument. He would bring it up on Friday afternoon when everyone was eager to escape to the Hamptons for the weekend. Problem sorted.

“On the internet,” Peggy clarified. Andre worried that he had said something which drew her attention to their age difference. “Here. You’ve been following me on Twitter and Instagram and Facebook and Tumblr for months – by the way, I don’t run or even have access to any of these accounts, my father’s aids do,” she sighed, “I just have to show up where I am told and look conventionally pretty,” he detected a hint of resentment which he found oddly intriguing. “I don’t know,” she continued, “for whatever reason I guess Abby thought you had a thing for me.”

He couldn’t tell if she was flirting or apologizing.

“Hm.”

“And I’m supposed to be using that to get you confess your motives as it were.”

“My motives,” he repeated, disappointed that the only thing that had enticed Peggy to have dinner with him was the fact that Abigail noticed that he’d looked at a few photos that had been published of the youngest Miss Shippen over his office’s server. “For following you? Abigail brought you up once or twice. I generally add the friends of friends on social media. It is called networking.”

Peggy handed him her phone. A WhatsApp message simply read >>And?<< to which she had responded >>I’m having the time of my life!<< Andre smiled at her, “Really now?”

“Don’t let it get to your pretty little head,” she teased.

It had.

“Should I sort this?”

“What do you mean?”

“How about – John says that he didn’t pressure Eddy to court Anna per se, but he is happy to see a romance blossoming between the two of them. Will that settle the matter?”

He hoped it would, at least for Peggy. He personally didn’t wish to spend the evening talking about Edmund Hewlett any more than he wanted to spend the next morning doing so.

“I should doubt it. Anna is … how should I put this? She’s ordinarily open, friendly, but emotionally closed off either by choice or character. I can relate, though I can’t understand why anyone would elect to govern their heart in that fashion if they weren’t otherwise under pressure to do so. It is rather curious though - now that she doesn’t seem to have put up her usual defenses we are all a tad concerned for her.”

“Do you care to elaborate? How do you govern your heart, Miss Shippen?”

“I have very little say in who I socialize with, where I go or how I dress. I am afraid that I will fall
in love someday with someone really worthwhile who doesn’t meet my family’s standards or who
doesn’t fall in line with the party’s objectives. Or I will be tied to someone I’ve never met and very
likely couldn’t stand if I did because some old man running my Twitter account thinks it a
politically savvy move. Do you understand? I am due to give a speech on Friday about defending
the rights the constitution grants us without being able to relate to what it means to be free. Look,”
she took her phone back and opened another chat, “One of my sorority sisters sent me this.” It was
a screen shot of Benedict Arnold, or someone who had access to his account, asking Peggy where
she was, saying that he would wait for her all night, as he had been waiting his whole life for a girl
like her to come along. He’d tweeted at her 17 times. “I met him once when I was all of…
fourteen? Fifteen? I mean, it is probably not even him and he is probably as humiliated by the
whole thing as I am.”

Andre was speechless. He remembered once more where he was meant to be and who he was
meant to be having this very conversation with. He suddenly wished for the topic to revert back to
the intelligence work she was meant to be engaging in.

Peggy took a deep breath, rolled her shoulders back and adjusted her posture. Collected, she
continued, “Forgive me, John. I am certain you have to deal with these kinds of rich-kid problems
in your 9 to 5 and his all seems tiresome and ridiculous. I know how comparatively fortunate I am
and I don’t claim not to be appreciative, I just, what I meant to say in all of this, getting back to
Anna, is that if I were in her shoes, I would be keen to pursue love and romance. I think that is
exactly what she is doing with Edmund and I really don’t comprehend why Abby has come to a
completely alternate understanding of their relationship. But then she is far closer to Anna than I
am. I was just meant to get your honest take.”

In honesty Hewlett had needed a Green Card and Anna provided a simple solution to a complicated
bureaucratic problem. That much Abigail had already discovered or had been told. What she likely
didn’t know was that Andre had made the particular match because he hoped that in doing so he
would restore the balance of power that had been lost when Simcoe started blaming him directly –
and correctly- for the specifics of Hewlett’s incident. He figured Miss Strong would be enough to
bring their rivalry back up to standard, at least to the point of where their hostilities towards one
another would be open enough for them to ignore how much they individually resented him. In
theory, he should have had his authority back. Hewlett would be afraid of Simcoe and would look
to him once more to keep their captain in line. Reality had backfired. The two now talked amongst
themselves in numbers and figures Andre was beginning to think was code. As much as Simcoe
resented Hewlett’s new relationship, he seemed to genuinely want Anna to be happy. Andre
worried about how and where Simcoe’s building volatility would escape him, if not in its usual
curse.

Abigail didn’t need to know this, above all else because she already couldn’t stand her boyfriend’s
teammates. Andre had heard Jordan mention that she didn’t like him hanging out with the lads
from the association team, and if he was forced to quit, well, they would be hard pressed to find a
striker who could replace him. No, Abigail didn’t need to know his true intent. And neither did
Peggy. He looked for an exit.

“My honest take is that you are nothing like the patients I see nor like anyone else I have ever met,
Peggy. I’m sorry that you are forced to suffer the backlash of what is written about you or in your
name,” he replied, unwilling to admit that he had dealt her the hardest blow. “Abigail’s problem is
with my role in Anna and Edmund’s relationship, rather than with either party. Hewlett is part of a
circle which Abigail has deemed a possible negative influence on her son because she is frightened
by a few of its other members. I’ll speak with her in the morning. I’d ask that you pardon her for
requesting your involvement, though I’ll admit I am grateful for the pleasure that has been your
company.” With that he rose, taking a card out of his wallet with which to pay the bill.
“If you didn’t intrigue me, John, I would have broached the topic earlier. I would have forgotten it completely had I not received this reminder.” For a moment she looked vulnerable until he asked if he could see her again. She told him she would check to see what her calendar would permit.

Between dessert and the yellow taxi which Peggy insisted on finding since she was, after all, on holiday in New York City, they kissed. Peggy said she might be able to find some time for him in her schedule after all.

Fate had other plans.

During their midnight ride back to her hotel the radio station interrupted its regular broadcast to inform its listeners that Senator Benedict Arnold was reported missing by his own staff after failing to show up for several meetings and the rally he was scheduled to attend.

“I was supposed to be there,” Peggy stated in shock.

As was I, Andre thought, albeit of the dive bar with a sports package in Setauket where he had arranged to meet his would-be-ex-online lover. To Peggy, he said, “Explain that you were exhausted from the train and from helping Anna to move some furniture out of her old flat. You took a nap and slept through the rally.”

“I’m concerned because of that stuff Lydia sent, what if – my God I am sure it is already making its initial rounds of over-analysis on Reddit. Daddy is going to be so angry.”

She was likely correct in her assessment. John Andre would have loved to have been able to calm her fears by offering to vouch for her whereabouts, but he recognized without much consideration that were he to do so her problems would only escalate.

“I’ll call Abigail. If anyone asks she will say that I spent the night with her,” Peggy though aloud.

“I could -” Andre stared.

“No, it is … you don’t know my father. He can be so stubborn when it comes to whose company I keep. If it comes out -”

“I understand,” Andre said, hoping that he sounded more empathetic than relieved, “Can I call you?”

“I hope you will.”

Philomena tried to reach Senator Arnold three times before she and John decided it to give up. There was something different about him, something that a dalliance with debutant and an emotional affair with a missing senator didn’t explain. He seemed elated by the payment she’d demanded for her performance. He seemed his old self, the connection between them had briefly reemerged, which made what she was gathering the strength to confess all the more difficult.

“I’ve been saving this,” he said, producing a bottle of port from the open kitchen, “Looks like this will be my last chance. A final drink?” Without waiting for her to answer, he took two glasses from the cupboard. He came to sit by her on the floor behind the sofa, pouring the glasses half full and leaving the flash open on the bare wood floor.
Philomena grew quiet. She swirled the red liquid around without taking a sip. “When you come back from rehab, you should know that I won’t be here.”

“I do,” he nodded. He wouldn’t meet her eyes.

“I won’t ask you to sign until you’re ready, but I can’t do this anymore.”

“Do you truly love Charles?” Andre asked, putting his arm around her shoulders.

“No,” she answered honestly, snuggling up to him. “But he makes me happy. After you, happy is enough.”

“Things weren’t always this bad between us, were they?”

“They were. I was never your muse, John, but you’ve always been, and will likely always be mine. I don’t regret ‘us’.”

“Nor do I. Mena, for what little its worth, I’ve always loved you in my own fashion.”

“It is worth nothing, but it is nice to here.”

“I’m sorry,” he said with all sincerity.

“So am I.”

“I think I should go and talk to the police,” he said after finishing his second of three glasses.

“I don’t. You made a mistake, as people sometimes do. Assuming that Benedict Arnold was as fascinated with you are you are with yourself - which is a stretch I might add – if he took the rejection to the absolute extreme you’re imagining, it isn’t your fault. At an-”

“One of my patients recently tried to take his own life. I did nothing to stop it. I can’t avoid drawing parallels.”

Philomena didn’t know how to respond, so she simply fed him a line that was meant to sound encouraging, “I’m sure that’s not true.”

“It is. In a rather roundabout way it is the reason I was fired by Columbia. I saw all of the signs and rather than uphold my oath to do no harm I watched him spiral and recorded the effects on those closest to him as part of my research. A couple of weeks ago another patient called me on it in a social setting. He can’t possibly know just how correct he was in his assessment. Unless … no. Patient A, we’ll call him, is in complete denial, and even if he weren’t I find it extremely unlikely that he would confide in Patient B about such matters. I find it equally doubtful that B would feel comfortable starting or even taking part in a conversation about the event, set back as he seems to be from it.”

“Why not just call the Hewlett and Simcoe? Your friends aren’t that difficult to sort.”

“Why not?” he agreed, pouring himself another port, “I’ve broken every other rule, regulation and law governing the practice of medicine,” he said bitterly. John was quiet for serval minutes before calmly continuing on a separate though, “If Professor Dandridge decides to report me to the AMA
I’m not going to fight it. I fully expect to lose my license over this, well, over the part where I overplayed my hand in an attempt to right my wrong.”

“I’m not clear on what you mean,” she said. *It is clear you need to talk about it*, she meant. She rubbed the back of his neck as he spoke, wondering if the decision to grow his hair out had been entirely conscious.

“A few months ago I explained to one of the subjects of the research I’ve been carrying out in the University’s name, Patient A as it were, that I wanted to attempt to steadily reduce his dependency on a certain pharmaceutical substance I don’t believe ought to have been prescribed to him in the first place - given the way it has been known to react in clinical studies with other drugs he is taking for the treatment of a genetic circulatory condition. A is, shall we say, fellow man of science and it was as such that I addressed him in explaining the potential risks and side effects he may well have been unknowingly exposed to. Because there is a certain level of chemical dependency inherent in the drug the patient was prescribed by the NHS in the nineties when they were dosing it out to everyone, I thought it too much of a risk to simply cut him off or to make a switch to a generic alternative. I don’t believe he was as forthcoming in therapy at that time as I had come to anticipate. Had I known last fall how difficult he was finding it to cope with the heightened academic stress, I would never have … At any rate, I have reason to believe that he stopped taking the anti-anxiety drug altogether after that conversation. At least two prescriptions went unfilled.”

Philomena wondered if he was rehearsing for his meeting with Dr. Dandridge. “I don’t understand how you reckon that you ought to hold yourself responsible.”

“Rather than discussing it I let him continue. I watched him fall. When he asked me how much he would need to consume to end his miserable existence I answered him simply. A week later he tested my hypothesis to the milligram.”

Evidently a dress-rehearsal it was not, unless he truly intended to atone through punishment.

“Maybe it was an accident,” she offered.

“No one takes 14 pills on accident. Normally it should only have taken 12, as opposed to the 30 he would have needed without the blood thinners, but being as he took them over the course of 2 hours he even calculated for gradual diminish. I’m impressed by how much effort he put into saying sod off.”

“But you were wrong.”

“He rung an ambulance before passing out and he happened to be on campus, blocks away from one of the city’s top medical facilities. Admittedly, my failure to treat A as a patient, friend, or anything beyond an academic interest in the months leading up to his attempt is enough to call my right to practice phycology into question; what I did next in an attempt to compensate for my mistakes answers it. For reasons I don’t pretend to fully understand, Patient B is listed as A’s emergency medical contact. He, B that is, found out from the insurance agent on the receiving end of what I can reasonably assume to have been a verbal assault that A would lose his coverage in a few days’ time –no longer being a student. B asked me to help get A released from before he would accrue a list of charges for a hospital stay he could never hope to pay out of pocket. I complied.”

“You did the right thing.”

“I tried to. In the end I truly did. Do you recall that conversation we had a while back where you asked me if the man you assume to be A had any theater experience?”
“Because of the blocking he constantly seems to be engaging in? I am not sure how it is relevant unless you mean to say something about the suicide attempt had been staged somehow?”

“Were that the case. No. He, that is to say A, had a fairly severe stroke when he was 20 before the condition I have been reminded that am in no way licensed or qualified to treat was diagnosed, and a series of minor ones since. Despite years of physical therapy he is convinced left side of his face doesn’t move quite as fast as the right and it is less apparent if you observe him from that side. Mind, it’s not apparent at all until he’s mentioned it. But that’s why he won’t look directly at you, why he stands at off angles and had a car shipped over from Great Britain though it would have been less expensive to purchase the same model here.”

“That’s horrible.”

“I know. No one should ever be that self-conscious. We’ve had talks about it, off the couch as it were. He oughtn’t to be ashamed, but he needs to do better to keep his condition in check. He won’t live to see retirement as it is, with the way he chooses to live in terms of diet I should doubt that he will make it to 50. Completely untreated though? I hazard to think. Now, I am acquainted with a number of pharmaceutical reps as you well know. I used these connections to refill his medicine cabinet off the record. Of course, they wanted something in exchange. I didn’t hear my phone today when one of their number called to collect, and so he reached out to Martha with an invoice of my sins,” Andre’s voice switched from accepting to angry when he mentioned the involvement of his phone in the avoidable drama.

Philomena finished the remainder of her port in a single sip and asked, “Is that why you’ve been drunk for two months?”

“No. Nothing so poetic. I’m simply an alcoholic. You knew that when we married.”

Philomena thought about it for a moment.

“That’s what you need to tell her … Dr. Dandridge, I mean. Admit that you have a problem, that you are voluntarily checking yourself into a rehabilitation facility, essentially that you accept the consequences of your actions. She seems the sort of woman who would put some stock into that.”

“And you?” Andre smiled half-heartedly, having consumed enough wine that he was beginning to feel its effects through his built up resistance.

“Me? We’ve been married for seven years. I believe that you make promises in earnest and uphold them so long as it suits you.” She tussled his hair as he laid his head on her shoulder, finding a lock of hers still braided into it. He leaned up and their lips met. For the first time his kisses truly felt cold. It didn’t stop her from returning his embrace, nor did his confession about Peggy or the girls that had come before her, nor his text-based affair with a missing public official, nor his being fired or the events surrounding his termination; the same way her extended and almost public affair with one of her co-stars hadn’t caused him to put an end to nights like this; nights which sometimes turned to weeks or months. Not this time, Philomena swore to herself. In the morning she would take the first step to walking away from the disaster that was her marriage, but before the sun rose she wanted to be wanted.

“I love you,” he said, “Likewise,” she replied, neither of them wanting to acknowledge that they were trading in lies.
I spent too long with Andre in what was meant to be an opening to include half of the scenes I intended to in this chapter. Which works I suppose because Andre seems to have a lot of people confused, and also doesn’t because I had to omit most of the other personal narratives, each of which would have made this chapter hilarious (as opposed to almost sad, as I fear this update was.)

They say comedy is tragedy plus time, so you’ll see what I mean next week. Hope you’ll stick around!

So … notes:

Pfizer: An international drug company headquartered in New York, NY

Oxbridge / Ivy: terms referring to elite, private universities

redbrick educational background: schools which receive state funding, compare with above

bankers from Frankfurt: the ECB is headquartered in Frankfurt, Germany. I just like that there are Hessians in the show. What would a historical drama be without a German villain? (I also love that the most threatening thing they did was offer Abe Sauerkraut. The taste grows on you, I promise!)

Striker: (soccer) a forward that is his team’s primary scoring threat

NHS: Great Britain’s socialized healthcare system

-and a quick translation that wasn’t covered or otherwise clear from context- “Die, was ich beherrschen kann, ist doch keinen Hochdeutsch. Apropos, wir können uns ja duzen, oder?” “What I can speak isn’t standard German. By the way, we can refer to each other in familiar terms, don’t you agree?” (We have two forms of the second person pronoun – I incorporated it into their English conversation by having Peggy switch from calling her date from his last name to his first. So it was kind of there if you knew what to look for. Speakers of different dialects have can have some trouble understanding one another. I personally like Swiss German, but sometimes when I am bored at work I’ll watch “Schwiizerdütsch Wetter” on YouTube for a laugh and highly recommend you do as well.)

Did I forget anything? Let me know. Visit me on tumblr or something. Comments and Kudos are fun and appreciated, but so are a lot of other things, which reminds me - Happy (belated) Independence Day to everyone in the United States! Hope you all had a great holiday weekend, and if your summer holidays are stating that you’ll be doing something you have been looking forward to!

Thanks for the (unexpected) 400 hits! You guys rock. XOXO – Tav

Up Next: Versus
The Bar

Chapter Summary

Anna and Hewlett have a long overdue conversation about intentions, romantic and otherwise. Simcoe plays phone tag.

Chapter Notes

Few warnings, nothing really too dramatic this go around when compared with the rest of the work. Sex, religiosity, money, business, falling short of expectations, suicide, illness, mental health, there is a racial slur, a few curse words, and masturbation while stuck in morning traffic.

As always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Edmund Hewlett awoke to the sound of cannon-fire at seven o’clock on a crisp Wednesday morning. More than he was surprised at his fiancé’s wake-up call of choice, he was startled to discover that such a time existed outside of the realm of theory. Furthermore, he wondered how anyone could possibly force themselves into consciousness at that hour.

“Sorry,” Anna excused herself, “I really out to change my alarm.”

“To eight, nine perhaps?” Hewlett yawned.

Anna rolled over and kissed his cheek. “To something less startling.”

“That’s quite alright, love. I boarded at Duke of York’s, archaic battle soundtrack dose little to unnerve me. It is just … rather early for such a ruckus, would you not agree?”

“Military discipline didn’t stick with you then?” Anna stretched, awarding his complaint with a mocking smile.

“Name one offensive that required man to rise before the sun.”

“Remember the Alamo?” she teased before yawning herself.

“Refresh me,” he laughed, sitting up to kiss her cheek.

The pair had gone to bed less than five hours before after a spontaneous game had generated a long discussion, a discussion they had both put off for far too long. He never expected to wake up beside her. He had planned to sleep on the small sofa by the window -as he had most nights for the past two years- giving her the elegant bed wanting of comfort. It was she who had asked him to stay. He had barely been able to sleep with her arms draped around him, her purrs of affection giving way to light snores. Despite her reassurances he still didn’t feel that he had the capacity to
provide her with all that she asked of him. Despite his doubt, he desperately wanted to love her in
the same way she seemed to love him. Despite advice, forewarning and his own better judgement,
he was worried that he already did.

“Did you sleep well?” he asked.

Anna’s smile filled the room with warmth. “Never better.”

“Ah, well, that is, I am happy to hear it.”

“I don’t normally have to get up this early, but Caleb rarely cleans when he takes the Tuesday night
shift and I need to get the tavern ready for my day drinkers before they arrive at ten. Tomorrow,”
she smiled, “we can sleep until half past eight.”

“Don’t you get home at a little after two?”

“Umm hmm.”

“Anna, darling, you’re simply not getting enough rest.”

“If it was within the budget to hire more people—” she began. Hewlett took this as his cue to step
up.

“I’ll do everything in my power to make that a reality for you. After I finish at the court house and
visit my embassy I’ll make an appointment at Barclay’s.”

“Is Simcoe your banker?” she asked, “That might prove useful.”

“No, no. I simply have an account there so it seems as decent place as any to start,” he thought for
a moment on how to best caution her hopes. “Anna … I don’t want to mislead you with respect to
my means,” he stressed, as he had repeatedly the night before. “I’ve never been able to afford
John’s services and it is not as if he has ever been forthcoming in offering pro bono financial
advice. Furthermore, he turned me down for a private personal loan not a month ago. Given my
residency status, I question that his colleagues will be apt to accept the proposal despite what you
may think based on your breach of….” not wanting to start another argument, he finished simply, “I
will try my best.”

“You went to him for a loan?” Anna asked, her eyes widening slightly.

“Something small. Forty-thousand that I might avoid…” he looked at his sovereign ring handing
on a leather cord between her large breasts which he had given to her in proposal, “At any rate, he
said he wouldn’t invest without the guarantee of a return.” What Simcoe had actually said was that
he it was in his personal interest to see him return to the UK in disgrace, but Hewlett hardly thought
that relevant.

Anna followed his eyes to her latest accessory. She closed her eyes as she grasped it tightly in the
hand that was too small to wear the ring as it was meant to be worn. “It’s not immigration fraud,
Edmund. I do wish to marry you.”

Hewlett had reservations about every aspect of her claim but he forced himself to smile through
them. With a little effort, he echoed her sentiment, “Your happiness is my priority, Anna.” His
wide lips were forced shut when the woman he had known for little over a month, who, in turn,
would soon be his wife, pressed her own against them. He leaned back when he felt her tongue’s
initial attempts to pry them open, “Ah, Anna … dearest Anna. Not now”
“We are going to need to work on that.”

Their relationship had to look real for the sake of all parties involved, but must he truly be forced to work to that end at this hour? Hewlett knew from his very limited experience that Americans could be more forward in their affections than Brits, but this cusped on the ridiculous. Anna responded to his face’s twist of disgust by giving him a look that made him question his objections in their entirety.

“Um, yes, I suppose I’m rather out of practice.”

“You are a great kisser, you proved that much last night. You need to stop being so tense.” He felt her hands slip themselves under the back of his t-shirt as she pulled him closer. How could they be so very different and yet so very likeminded? They had both entered into this still awkward arrangement with the intent of improving their station. Hewlett had had the curtesy to be forthcoming with his intentions from the onset. Anna had seemingly fallen in love despite his objections –or she hadn’t and pretended to herself that the lies she told the world had some basis in truth to absolve herself of her own wrongdoings. Edmund wondered if it mattered. He liked her enough, and it would only be a year.

For the moment, however, a year seemed an eternity on so little sleep.

“It is seven in the morning and I’ve yet to brush my teeth,” he protested, gripping her gently by the shoulders and pushing her far enough away that she not fall victim to his morning breath.

“Oh. Oh! God, you must think I’m gross,” she correctly assumed, backing up another inch or so. “Sorry, let me ... God, I really need to shower.”

Hewlett instantly felt guilty for forcing his self-consciousness on his future wife. “Forgive me,” he said. “I never meant to imply … I, fear I may be ‘gross’ too, as you so put it.” She gave him an unconvincing smile. It had been too long since he had been someone’s significant other. Once more he struggled for what to say. “Ah - I’m simply tired. Can I make you a tea, breakfast?”

“Coffee, black, and no need, we still have some of the pizza from last night in your mini-fridge. I’ll just eat that before I head out.”

“Ought I to go downstairs and microwave it for you?” he offered.

“What are you talking about? Cold pizza is the best! If you nuke it, the crust will get soggy and the toppings will dry out.”

Edmund was recovering from the idea that anyone would consider yesterday’s take-away a proper breakfast. Eating it cold as a matter of preference was incomprehensible. He couldn’t tell if she was being serious or not.

“As you wish.”

“And Edmund? I don’t want you eating anything too high in cholesterol. Please. For me.”

So it was to be a real marriage in every sense weather he wanted it to be or not. He sighed, then nodded, then returned the quick kiss on the cheek she gave him before she rose from their shared bed.

After Anna left to take a shower, disregarding the clothes she had slept in on the floor, Hewlett laid back down and closed his eyes, blissfully forgetting the black coffee and cold pizza. He was on the verge of sleep when Anna’s phone again alerted him to its existence. There was no gunfire this
time. By the fourth ring he realized that the shrill sound was coming from his own device. He answered with his family name without reading the number.

“Good morning, Edmund,” a high, chipper voice replied.

“Mum? It’s really, really early here. Can I ring you back in an hour or so?”

“I’m afraid this can’t wait. And … mum? Really?”

John Graves Simcoe had phoned him all of six times during the entire course of their relationship. He had referred to Hewlett by his given name twice, once shortly after they had first met and once when he had recently been in hospital.

“Edmund, really?”

“Would you prefer I called you Oyster?” Simcoe bit back in mock-concern. Hewlett rubbed his eyes.

“I would prefer that you didn’t call me at all before … nine o’clock, shall we say.”

“Some of us have careers to concern ourselves with.”

Ah, there was the devil that he knew.

“What do you want, John?”

“I need to get in touch with Mary Woodhull, would you be ever so kind as to provide me with her number?” Something was clearly wrong when Simcoe was being this courteous. Hewlett check the number, questioning if the call was coming from a hospital room or a jail cell. Seeing instead a saved contact on his screen, he thought for a moment about what had just been asked of him.

“Mary Woodhull?” Hewlett clarified, half certain he had misunderstood.

“Your housemate,” Simcoe affirmed.

“I can check to see if she is around.” Hewlett replied, stretching as he stood up. “Wait … I’ve to put some clothes on first.”

“Ugh. Mate … no.”

“You know it’s not like that,” he said, slipping off his pyjama bottoms and into yesterday’s jeans which were neatly folded and set upon his dresser. Thinking back to Anna’s confessed imaginings of how she assumed him to behave in bed, he assured his rival, “As luck would have it, I don’t think Miss Strong finds me particularly attractive in any sort of sexual sense you may be imagining.”

“I find it something of a stretch to believe that you yourself ever thought she would, or that you believe I’ve any interest in discussing the matter further. Now, if you please, just give me the number.”

Hewlett laid the phone on the dresser as he pulled a black cashmere sweater over his head. He looked at himself in the mirror, tousling his now messy dark hair as Anna had the night before, commenting that he looked better that way. He wasn’t convinced.

“I did take your advice, by the way,” he said, returning his mobile to his ear.
“My advice?”
“Talked to Anna.”
“And, how’d she take it?”
“Better than expected.”
“Hm.”

The line was silent for a minute.

“Listen, entertaining as this little heart to heart has been, I really must make contact with Mrs. Woodhull. Time is of the essence.” Hewlett heard Simcoe’s fingers tapping, or perhaps typing, rather nervously. He wondered if the other man was already at the office and glanced at his Rolex - 7:34. Simcoe really had a talent for silently making him aware of his shortcomings.

“What business could you possibly have with my house mate that would require you to talk to her before she’s likely finished breakfast? What business could you possibly have with her at all for that matter?”

“Not that it is any of your concern whatsoever,” he paused, perhaps in dramatic flair, for a rather long while, “but she and I met recently to discuss her stock portfolio,” Simcoe stated finally, so calmly that it forced Hewlett to question the very authenticity of his claim.

“So you are in personal finance now?”

“I do favours sometimes.”

“In that case-”

“Not for you.”

Hewlett hadn’t been serious, but if there was any chance that his beloved enemy was attempting to assist a woman whom he must have just recently made to acquaintance of, than surely he would also be willing to help rescue the one who deepened the division between the two them, the one they both professed to being in love with.

“It not for me,” he spat, hating himself for suddenly hoping that Simcoe continued to be enamoured with the soon-to-be Mrs. Hewlett, “Come, we both know that. I’m just,” he sighed, knowing exactly what he could anticipate “I’m trying to get a half million together for Anna.” He heard Simcoe choke on a laugh, as he’d well expected for him to do. “Can we perhaps lunch sometime this week?” he continued, “I don’t need your money per se, but I would be willing to hear your advice.”

“I’m a bit busy at the moment … it is difficult to say when my schedule will clear up, but if you want a base opinion – whatever happened last night, negotiating you up from ten to five hundred thousand dollars is not –as you claim- your little talk having gone better than expected. Don’t marry her.”

“Ah, Simcoe … it is not what you think. I don’t wish to speak of this matter over the phone with Anna in the next room. Please. I wouldn’t ask if it weren’t urgent.”

“I feel for you, truly Edmund, I do, but you’ve heard my advice a hundred times and chosen to ignore it. You blatantly disregard all of the evidence that doesn’t support your hypothesis of, I
suppose, John Andre is always right,” the sarcasm was almost palatable. Hewlett rolled his eyes. “That is just bad science, Doctor H – oh, wait. Who am I to tell you anything about bad science? I’d almost forgotten that was your specialty.”

Hewlett took a deep breath. It was way too early for this.

“Yes well … love defies logic as they say.”

“We took the same route on the Tube, glancing at each other for months before either of us gathered the courage to speak; she bumped into me on accident and I commented on the impracticality of her heels, she made a remark about my blazer and the next thing I knew I was stripping out of it, frantically kissing the nape of her neck as I pulled down her nickers,” he explained, trying to sound confident enough in his rendition of the story he had skimmed to pass it off as his first time.

“Let me guess,” Anna challenged, clearly unamused, “she left the shoes on while you fucked her blind before her stop.”

Hewlett hoped she was simply jealous of the woman he’d forgotten to name. “Well, ah …” he stammered for a moment before being taken out of his misery.

“You know, I did read this magazine before suggesting we take the quiz.”

The pair had made a game from an article in a women’s glossy entitled 100 Questions You Should Ask Before You Tie the Knot. Rather than go in order, Edmund suggested that they roll dice. The initial role would provide the base value, after which a twenty-sider -which she’d mocked him for having–would determine the next question. The player’s opponent, as it were, would then roll a six-sider to indicate if one should add – for even number values, or subtract – for odd. They would then both answer the question, switch dice, and keep playing. If they happened to arrive on a question they had already answered or otherwise thought they knew the answer to, they could try to attempt to win a point by answering it as their partner would. In Hewlett’s mind, it was good practice for the interviews they would be given by the immigration police. Anna, whose sprit of competition he had vastly underestimated, had been thus far destroying him, even prior to arriving on one of the questions he was rather hoping to avoid and sequently trying to sell a story from the same issue of Cosmopolitan as his own.

“Edmund,” she continued, “I can deal with the near constant avoidance, I can live with vagueness, but this is clearly a lie. No one’s first time involves bringing a fashion executive to multiple orgasms while riding the damn subway. I know I make you uncomfortable somehow and I respect if you want to skip this altogether, but honestly? We’re living together in a crowded space, I am going to be your wife in a few weeks and you still can’t even look directly at me. I know you want to keep things platonic but you know that we have to make this look genuine and that may prove difficult if you persist in dodging anything and everything remotely intimate. You can talk for hours about the external forces that stimulate you so, but sharing a memory that relies on more than just a list of facts – why do you of all people find this task so difficult?”

He apologized when he found himself without a more suited response.

“I’ll tell you about your first time and you’ll tell me if I’m right.” Hewlett sighed. Anna went on,
"You went on a date or two with a girl who had you doing her homework. In a moment of guilt or gratitude she took you in her dorm. There were no candles, no rose petals, just light flowing in through venetian blinds exposing the wear on her furniture. It was nothing like you had hoped or imagined. She moved a pile of clothes off the bed and it all happened so fast that all you distinctly remember is how you cried afterwards in the shower you immediately took to wash yourself of sin."

He was appalled and offended, though in truth Anna’s fantasy was far preferable to the reality he knew. “That is what you suppose I’m like in bed?” he gaped, “Anna I’m a lot of things, but heavens! I’m not Catholic.”

“No? I assumed after hearing you recite the Pater Noster in Latin,” she shrugged, “And, for the record Mister, I didn’t cry in the shower after Abe Woodhull took me on a bed very much like the one right over there, just down the hall,” she pointed. “I was sixteen. It was horrible, as everyone’s first time is. We were both nervous and just sort of mimicked things we’d seen in porn or been told by our friends. But, I thought it was heaven, having no point of comparison.”

“‘You’ve an ear for language,’” Hewlett tried to compliment her, wishing to end the subject and to forget every word she had just spoken about young Abraham.

“I’ve an ear for everything, I have a legal background.”

“And … ah … a Catholic one?” he couldn’t help but ask.

“Is that a deal breaker?”

It might have been if she were anyone else. Unwilling to admit this, he stammered, “No, no, I’m, um, just trying to skip ahead it seems.”

“I’m from Long Island. I’m largely agnostic and attend mass at Christmas ever year or two if my little brother is spending the holiday with our mother and she feels like putting on airs. You?”

“Eaglais na h-Alba, or simply, the Kirk, which you might know as the Church of Scotland - Protestant, Calvinist leaning. I suppose I’d call myself devout if it were not for the Premiership’s insistence on scheduling all of the good fixtures on Sunday morning.”

“So when it otherwise suits you, much like myself.”

“Sure.”

Anna went on to ask how good his Gaelic was after repeating the few words he had spoken. His mother had originally come from the Western Islands, he’d answered, before moving to the mainland to attend university. She had grown up in a bilingual household, he – unfortunately- had not, due largely to his own lack of interest in the subject. Still, Mrs. Hewlett had yelled at her children often enough in the language of their forefathers that he had very little difficulty understanding Robert Rogers when he was piss drunk either on ale or on one of his long-standing resentments.

“Your mother sounds fascinating.”

“I think you’ll get on. She is compassionate and strong, not unlike yourself.”

“Will I meet her?”

“If it pleases you, I suppose.”
“Have you told her about us?”

“I’ve told her about you.”

“Nothing good I hope.”

He stared at her warmly. In spite of all of their differences, what else would he possibly have to say?

Hewlett pulled up the email he had sent his mother on his phone in praise of Anna’s beauty, strength and virtue for her to read and judge herself. He’d called her by far the most interesting, intelligent and captivating person he had ever met and claimed that he was honoured that she’d accepted his invitation to explore their special friendship to see if it could blossom into something more. He’d mentioned that she had gone to law school at the same university that was keeping him in America, though, truth be told, after getting to know her he was in less of a rush to return to Scottish shores. She managed a bar in the town where he was living, a place that felt central to the community in a manner that was surprisingly rare on this side of the Atlantic. He hoped one day to bring her back with him to Edinburgh. In his sign off, he’d said that he was certain the she and father would fall every bit as in love with her as he had.

He watched her carefully as she read, trying to guess the passages where her eyes would stop, pool with tears, and read again before moving on.

“Do you mean this?”

Every word, he longed to say. “The part about bringing you back with me to Scotland? Anna, Setauket is your home. I know I can’t simply take you from this place. Truth be told, you are the only person I’ve ever met who holds any great love for their home town,” he replied instead.

“And the rest of it?” she inquired, sounding more sad than curious.

“Ah, I … it – our relationship that is - it has to look real.”

“Sure,” Anna said as she rolled the dice again. Thirteen.

“Are we counting from religious denomination or first time?” Edmund asked, rolling a four.

“First time. I guess,” she replied, taking the magazine in her hands and flipping to the next page.

“Do you believe in Karma?”

After a few more rolls, questions answered and points attempted, Anna posed a question of her own.

“Don’t you think it cruel to tell your mother you’ve fallen in love with a girl she’d love when you plan to divorce me as soon as you get your PhD?”

“No, she knows from experience to temper her expectations.” he rubbed his temples. Simcoe was right. He had to have this conversation with her eventually, and preferably before her crush turned into something less perishable, “Have you told your parents about me?”

“Yes. Well, my dad. My mother hardly let me get a sentence out before telling me that I needed to
spend less time worrying about boys and more time worry about passing the bar.”

“Oh.”

“My father wanted to know if you make me happy and if it was possible that Abigail was writing erotic fiction about our romance.”

Hewlett blinked. “Can you repeat that?”

“I told him yes to the first and no to the second - a lie but I don’t want to put my dad in therapy, you know?”

“You mean to tell me that um, your father is reading erotic fiction? About you and me, written by your best friend? That make things slightly awkward I’ll admit.” Hewlett decided he would prefer to never dive down to DC to introduce himself Anna’s father, and to the same end he needed to return to therapy himself -preferably at a different practice as to avoid the woman who seemed set on sending him into prolonged treatment. He wondered what he had ever done to make her hate him so.

Anna laughed, reading this from his expression.

“You didn’t know about Abigail? I mean, it is not directly about us, it is about a beer wrench during the American Revolution who works as a spy for the Continental Army and falls in love with the Major occupying her town. A lot of it is about doing laundry, actually.”

Hewlett considered what he had just been told for several minutes in complete silence.

“Say something,” Anna urged.

“This Major wouldn’t have been occupying the town being that it belonged to the crown. I assume the poor fool was rather trying to reinstate law, order, and authority to a people for whom these ideals had been lost. I truly hope that your friend didn’t use a noun like ‘occupier’ in her characterization of the figure I assume to be based on me, if only because it rings of historical inaccuracy.”

“I’m not going to lie, much of it does. I can send you the link if you want though.”

“Please,” Hewlett requested. He would come to regret it.

“I love your indignation,” Anna laughed later on after the game had been retired for the evening with her leading by 5 points. Hewlett skimmed the spy periodical. His bride contented herself by flipping through his various sketch books trying to guess which anime or manga the girl he kept drawing was from. They are all you, he wanted to say. Instead he just nodded in affirmation to a few of her suggestions as he continued reading. The story’s primary antagonist reminded him in most ways of a red-clad Simcoe brandishing a bayonet at anyone who crossed him; something which would have been hilarious in and of itself, had it not been terrifying in that Hewlett could see himself meeting a very similar end at the hands of the character’s obvious inspiration if he didn’t find a way back to the conversation he had become so skilled at dodging that he now did so unconsciously. Anna was sitting next to him on the small pull out sofa meant for one that he could feel the warmth of her skin against his chill. He closed his laptop and took a deep breath.
“I promised Simcoe - well, no, I shouldn’t drag anyone else into this. Ultimately it falls only on me.” Anna looked up from the various poorly drawn Anna-me figures, giving him her full attention. Hewlett swallowed. “I have a problem that I doubt I’ll be able to hide indefinitely and I ought to have addressed it with you sooner.”

“I know,” she said solemnly.

“You do?”

“About the suicide attempt. If that is what you are talking about.” It wasn’t. She reached for his hand. He pulled it away.

“Ah, I’m not sure where you could have possibly gotten that information, but I can but guarantee that you’ve been ill informed.”

“From a reliable source.”

This was curious as he had never actually spoken about the ordeal. He couldn’t imagine even his other housemates knowing about his self-obstructed endeavor to exit on his own terms.

“Who then?” he asked. “Unless doctor/patient confidentiality counts for nothing in this land and you are familiar with someone who happened to be working in the ER, I can only think of two people who even know about the incident to which I assume you are referring.” He tried to temper his tone. “I’m not upset, not with you, never with you; it is only that of the people who know, Andre has recently made it all too clear he couldn’t give a damn about me. Simcoe, in contrast, has been arguing with me over SMS for the past two months about number theory because he can’t bear to ask >>How could you<<, and I in turn can’t force myself to say >>I’m sorry<< because, in truth, I’m not. And so,” he took his phone off of the charger and handed her his phone, inviting her to scroll through two months’ worth of messages if she so chose. Anna kept her enormous eyes fixed on him. “I find it highly unlikely that he would mention that episode to someone else, especially someone he wants to appear strong in front of.”

“Abigail told me. Please don’t say-”

“I won’t,” he reached for her hand this time, trying to reassure her of that fact, “It is not as if I have anyone to talk to about it anyway.”

“You have me,” Anna whispered to herself. Raising her volume slightly, she turned back to him and continued, “When you say that you are not sorry about-”

Hewlett laughed. “I’m not in crisis as they say, dearest. I never was. You needn’t worry.”

Anna didn’t return his smile, forcing it into a retreat.

“How close did I come to never being given the opportunity to know you?” she asked, her voice quivering slightly.

“One faculty vote?” he suggested, trying to lighten her mood.

“What?”

“My dissertation.”

“And that’s why you…?”
“No, no.” It was now or never. On one hand, Hewlett didn’t think himself capable of actually lowering her opinion of him, on the other, he didn’t want to force Anna to admit to herself that her crush was an embarrassment – evidence that she had fallen perhaps even further than he himself had.

She looked at him with a pity he could have done without.

“I have a rare abnormality in my genetic code, the CECR1 gene if we are being specific. It was originally misdiagnosed when I was a teenager, and as a result I suffered a stroke at twenty. It had nothing to do with diet or lifestyle, ischemic strokes are just the most dangerous symptom of Sneddon Syndrome, among, admittedly, a host of other inconvenient ailments I’m forced to manage. Since then I’ve only really suffered small transient ischemic attacks, and the last I had of those was six years ago. It is more something to worry one's self about in youth, although I am sure I will be on medication for the rest of my life. With regards to whatever story you might have heard; the truth is that I shouldn’t have tried to defend my thesis this past semester. I knew I wasn’t ready before going into the oral exam, though, comically, it has taken me a very long time to admit it,” he tried to force his lips into a reassuring smile. Whatever form they took instead seemed to have the opposite effect.

“I took a few too many anti-anxiety pills before going in. Ah – I wanted to calm down, not, as, you may have heard to die in that moment, at least. I needed to calm down. If I’m being honest what I truly needed was more revision and more time and to have filled out my visa application back in November … but that is hardly relevant I suppose. At any rate, forgetting in a moment of panic that my blood thinners can enhance the drug’s potency, I may have taken too many. I was dizzy, confused, and numb within a half an hour. Then it ended. I thought I was having another stoke and seeking a less painful obliteration I swallowed the rest of the bottle. In a moment of clarity I rung an ambulance. Turns out, I was just having a good old fashioned panic attack. No paralysis or resulting extensive physical therapy, no lasting neurological deficits. I’m fine. I want to live just … not in the state which I feared may have been the only one open to me. I’m fine, love.”

Anna wasn’t. “How dare you, sir? Seriously, how the fuck-” she hissed. Of the range of emotions in which she could have reacted, anger was the last that he had awaited.

“Darling, I -”

“No. No. You listen to me. How…”

He wanted to obey her demand but she seemed unable to continue.

“Anna, it doesn’t affect me. In most ways I can and do still lead a normal life. I work, I’m working –still- on my bloody post-graduate degree, I do sport, I get into to all sorts of trouble with the lads. In my day to day there are only very small manifestations of my ailment. I, for example … find it difficult to look at people directly, something I know you’ve noticed.” Anna shook her head in disapproval. “Everyone I know, who knows, assures me it is not noticeable but I fear that, well, if someone were to look at me for too long they would see-”

“Did no one ever tell you that you are beautiful?” she interjected. He hadn’t expected her to comment so favorably on his looks either.

“Um.”

“Because you are. You are handsome, Edmund. There is absolutely nothing wrong with your face. I love your face,” she claimed, reaching up to stroke it. Hewlett was paralyzed. Anna continued, “You are handsome and brilliant and kind and decent and yet … conceded, condescending,
paranoid, patronizing and completely full of shit,” she patted him on the cheek, a little too hard, “Grow the fuck up.”

He opened his mouth to speak but Anna’s words filled the room before his could form.

“I too note the hypocrisy in me of all people telling you to act like an adult, but knowing what you know about whatever genetic predisposition you have and smoking? Eating the kinds of food you do? Do you have no idea how much people love you?”

If nothing else, Hewlett thought to himself, his parents would -as he had claimed- absolutely adore her. He felt like a child. She was scolding him as if he were. Perhaps he deserved it.

“I … it is only social-”

“Well it is going to stop. If you think for a moment that I am going to allow-”

It was more than he could bear.

“It is a paper marriage, Anna. You need to let go of this concern for me. I need to quit you as well, I fear. Not … not that if things were even slightly different I wouldn’t … I do, very much in fact …”

“What are you saying?”

“I doubt that I will ever be enough for you. Romantically … Physically, above all else. I don’t wish to see you hurt or disappointed. You are giving up a year for me. You needn’t give me your heart as well.”

“Don’t you think that I ought to be allowed to be the judge of that?”

“Alright, counsel Strong. Earlier, when I was telling you about my first time, I lied. In truth I - I’m a virgin and I am ashamed of that fact. Around you, mostly.”

“I assumed as much.”

“Ah … really?”

“Initially I confess I thought it a religious thing.”

“Ah, well, yes I suppose Kirk doctrine would dictate such. Although that is hardly my principle concern, Anna we’re, you and I, we can’t… I can’t rather. Because of the medication I take I can’t-”

Anna raised her hand to her mouth, covering a small giggle. Hewlett turned away from her, burring his head in his hands, his elbows resting on his knees. He felt her fingers dance up his back until they reached his neck. “Be honest with me.”

“With the sole exception of the article I orally plagiarized I’ve been nothing but. Do you imagine, Miss Strong, that this isn’t difficult for me? To trust you with my closest held secrets only to have them be met with laughter? Did you truly me celibate by choice?”

She ran her fingers through his hair, “Be honest with me, is that why you’ve shot down my every attempt to flirt with you? Sex? Edmund, I’m no medical expert, but I am pretty sure they make a pill for that too.”

Hewlett straightened his posture and looked at her directly when he finished laughing at her little
tease. She laughed when their eyes met, which forced him into an involuntary echo. For a moment he couldn’t remember what it was about her – what about being open with her – had caused him such dread.

“You know I’m falling love you, despite all of the reasons you use in an attempt to dissuade me. Correct me if I’m wrong, Edmund, but I think you feel the same.”

She wasn’t mistaken, not entirely.

“In a year I’ll be gone, you’ll be here. There are so many factors that hold me back, Anna, but I notice you. I hear what you say and I am honored by and appreciative of all of it. I don’t know that I am there yet - emotionally, where you claim to be. Maybe your right, maybe everyone is for that matter, that this is psychological on some level and I need to ‘get over myself’. I like you. I want to love you and I want to quit you at all the same time. I haven’t been in anything that could constitute as a relationship in over ten years, I’m not entirely sure what I am doing and I never meant, and never want, to lead you on. I like you though, and I want to make your happiness my priority.”

He leaned in to kiss her, unaware that he would shortly regret the last words he spoke.

An hour later they were laying in Anna’s new bed in each other’s arms when Hewlett’s phone buzzed.

“What is it?” she asked drearily.

“Simcoe.”

“At this hour?”

“It isn’t atypical of him.”

“More math? He really does care about you, you know, in his own way.”

At some point, Hewlett reasoned, he would need to explain how rivalries functioned.

“No … now he is giving me advice about the INS. Curious, I assumed he would be so pissed over the move that he would decline to speak to me for the rest of the week. But then maybe I read too much into Abigail’s historical drama.”

“Me too. I think you guys have suppressed feelings for one another. The Oyster Major and the Mad Dog Captain, a love that dare not speak its name.”

“How? … What can I do to convince you that that is not remotely the case?” his face twisted in disgust.

“Kidding!”

“Apropos, Abby called me Oyster?” He wondered how many people Simcoe now had using that epithet.

The phone light up again with another WhatsApp message. “You got the affidavits from Caleb and
“Abigail, right?”

“Yes.”

“Wonderful.” He set the phone back down after turning off the notifications.

“Do you know what I am most afraid of?” Anna asked when he turned back to her.

“Heights?” he ventured.

“Happiness. I think I am afraid, or was afraid for a very long time, to simply be happy, with you, with my job, with my dreams or with myself. Knowing you has changed that somehow, and yet … when this started out, I was using you. I don’t want to be, but I still am. And that scares me too.”

“I know,” he smiled. “Come now love, our first conversation began with me asking you to marry me for a sum of $10,000. That doesn’t … make me want to be with you any less.”

“I don’t want your money. I wish I could do this for you without asking anything in exchange but … do remember when we said that we would starting looking for a new place at the end of the month? I actually already know of the perfect location.”

“Well, that’s glorious. Tell me about it. Do you think it will still be on the market when I can afford another move?”

“We could live there rent free but, oh God. Do you remember how I was almost brought to tears by the letter you’d written to your mother? You know what part really got to me? When you talked about the tavern. I passed the bar two years ago on my first attempt. I am licensed to practice law in the states of New York and Connecticut. I don’t because I really, really love the job I have now. I know I is stupid but-”

“How can I help?”

“Really, just like that?”

“I think you would make an excellent barrister, Anna. I’ve always believed that. But I know for a fact that you are among the best bartenders I’ve ever been served by and if that is what you would rather be doing, there is no need for further litigation. You can keep your job. We can move closer to the tavern.”

“I want to buy it,” she corrected as she embraced him. “I want to own the business and the building where it is housed. We could turn the empty upstairs offices into an apartment and live there. It is out in the middle of nowhere so you could mount your telescope and look at the night sky while I work. Mr. DeJong has been trying to sell for an age. I know he would sell to me if I could get the capital together. That is where you come in.”

“How … how much exactly?”

“Half a million.”

He wondered if she had been lying in all of the things she’d meant to be indicative of her growing love. He questioned if he had any right to resent her for it.

“Anna, I have about $40,000 in liquid assets at the moment. Even if I sold my car, my stocks and my horses back in Scotland I still wouldn’t break $200,000. And I’ve still to pay rent and utilities. And my tuition next semester. And I’ve to make certain I’ve enough to cover the costs of health
care. My means are humbler than you may have been lead to believe, and for that I am truly sorry.”

“I’m not asking for your money. I am asking for your signature. I am $35,000 in student debt and it isn’t like I can ask my parents for a loan. My brother is still in school. And beyond that, I mean, my folks literally divorced so that I could study law and then to turn to them and say I want to run a dive bar instead? I can’t. Not yet. But I’ve made a business plan - in three years I’ll will have paid off all of my debt and I will own the business outright. You’ve seen how I run the place. If I had the liberty to make a few changes I could double our profits.”

“I … I don’t doubt it. I am still confused about what exactly you are asking of me though.”

“You are the only person who has ever believed in my dreams. The only person who has ever treated my choice of employment with any level of respect. My friends all make fun of me for pouring so much time into that place. But … I can’t give it up. If you’re willing,” she said hopefully, “we will apply for a small business loan together and when we divorce - if there is any outstanding debt- I will assume it.”

Hewlett thought of all the reasons he should say no.

“Given my current residency status-”

“You have a valid New York address and I ran a credit check. You’d get approval.”

“You ran a credit check?” he gaped.

“Edmund, I would marry you regardless -”

“You ran a credit check?” he clarified again, “Without my signature? Tell me, how fictive is Abigail’s periodical? Is everyone in this town in truth a forger or a spy?”

“Oyster … are you even paying attention?”

He wasn’t. The sound of running water had stopped. White steam escaped into the room as the bathroom door opened.

“Hey,” Anna’s rich voice called out to him, “Can you do me a favor and run out to my car? I think I may have left my hair dryer in the back seat.”

“I’m going to have to call you back. My fiancé asks so much of me.” Fiancé, the word filled him with resentment, but felt wonderful to say.

“Who is she?” Anna asked playfully pointing to the phone pressed against Hewlett’s ear, as she approached wearing nothing but a towel and his ring.

“Simcoe. He just sounds like a bird over mobile. Normally he sticks to texting.”

“Hi John,” she said loud enough for Simcoe to hear and respond to her greeting. “Edmund, where is my promised coffee?”

“Um.”
“Say goodbye to your side-hoe and join me for breakfast?”

“Side-hoe?”

“You know … like, someone you’re seeing outside of your established relationship. It was a joke. Another bad one I’m afraid.”

“Side-hoe,” Hewlett repeated, “Side-hoe … Simhoe,” he said into the receiver, “This actually isn’t the first time she’s brought this up, if you can believe it.” He heard Simcoe choke. “Changing your contact name, mate.”

“Not bad, not bad. Preferable to Paki at any rate.”

“Corrected that not two minutes after you strangled me for it.”

“Right … good times, and right well deserved you shite. What did you have me down as then?”

“Demon, you know, my go to.”

“I had you down as Oyster for an age.”

“Why is it so hard for boys to grow up?” Anna asked. Whether she meant it rhetorically or not, Hewlett didn’t answer. He was enjoying the conversation that echoed of better days too much.

“What is it now?” he asked.

“Mesut Hewzil.”

“Right then?”

“Off Arsenal’s Özil. Only other man I can think of with such oddly amphibious features.”

“No I get it.”

“Not my best work. I’m changing you to Hewlot, off harlot. Hm. Worked better in my head. I concede this round, forgive me I’m undone by exhaustion. Now, before you run off to pour dear Anna the bubbly your pretending is champagne to drink with the German caviar your pretending is Russian, do us a favour and kindly text me the number to Mrs. Woodhull.”

He still failed to understand what Simcoe could possibly want with Mary, despite his claims of helping her with her personal finances. He didn’t imagine that his favourite Woodhull would be all too happy to receive a call from the demon who plagued him, but looking at Anna, he felt that he would sell his very soul for her. Mary Woodhull’s comfort and convince fell off his list of priorities.

“Give me an appointment and the number is yours.”

“You are going to loath whatever I have to say,” Simcoe assured him.

“That is nearly always the case but it is hardly the question – have we a deal or not?”

“I’ll pencil you in when I get to the office.”

“When you … Where are you now?”

“Why … just outside Setauket,” he replied happily. “I finally understand the complaints of your lot
-traffic is really awful trying to get back to the city this time of day.”

“Did you spend the night out here or something?”

“With the most amazing woman I’ve ever encountered.”

“With … Mary Woodhull?”

“Unlike yourself Oyster, I’ve the class not to kiss and tell.”

Mary Woodhull sat in morning traffic, her son Thomas asleep in the child’s car seat in the back. She was gazing at him through her rear-view mirror, envying his slumber, when her stereo told her she had an incoming call from an unlisted number. She accepted, half hoping that Abe was calling to beg her forgiveness, half dreading the sound of her husband’s voice. Be that as it may, there was nothing on the radio but news and speculation surrounding Senator Arnold’s disappearance, and the only CD she had in her car was the soundtrack to Frozen, which was proving every bit as annoying as it had been when she’d bought for Thomas as a toddler. Outside, sitting cars honked at other sitting cars as if sound could somehow quicken the pace of time. Any conversation whatsoever would provide her with the distraction she was longing for. When a woman addressed her she allowed herself to hope that it was someone from her son’s school calling to inform her that class had been cancelled, giving her an excuse to call her boss with an excuse, turn the car around and sleep until noon.

“Mrs. Woodhull?” the high voice asked, “I apologize for ringing you at this hour. I obtained your number from Hewlett, I hope you don’t mind. It is rather an emergency.”

“John?” she asked. It wasn’t one of the assistant principals of Thomas’s school as she’d hoped, but she was elated all the same. She had wanted to get Simcoe’s number from her housemate’s herself, but coming home to an empty bed, she had taken a long bath and left the instant Abe came home from who knows where in the early morning with her car, their only car, clearly under the influence. She had grabbed her son and fled before saying something she might later regret. As a result she had an hour to kill and nothing to occupy her but the questions of where Senator Arnold had gone off too, and if she hadn’t played a role in killing him, if she would have had the courage to fill up the gas tank and chase the sun across the country. Alas, leaving now would look suspicious. At least she had a friend.

“Mary, I fear our business may not be concluded after all. I spent the wee hours of the morning with an Officer Bradford, convincing him of the alibi we’d agreed upon. I suspect that you’ll be asked to collaborate.”

Alibi? Forget friend, Simcoe was clearly and idiot. He’d gotten himself arrested in connection to a high profile missing person’s case and was throwing around vocabulary that did little to make him look less suspect. What if his line was bugged? She could turn this around.

Mary blinked, “Alibi? Oh John, I don’t know how long I can play these games. It is you I want, you I want to be with. Who cares what people will think?”

“Excuse me?” he paused, “Oh. OH. That’s brilliant, I … quite desire you as well.”

“Where are you now?” she asked dramatically.
“I’m just driving back into the city,” he answered bluntly.

Okay, they could play this differently.

“Me too. Where are you?”

“Still on 495.”

“Have you passed the Jericho exit yet?”

“No, I’m coming up on it.”

“Take it, we can meet up and resume things where we left them. As it works out, I was rather hoping you’d call.”

Simcoe was speechless.

“I’m not trying to sound presumptuous, but can I buy you a real cup of coffee?” She wasn’t sure if she was actually flirting or not. It had to look genuine. Given Abe’s recent behaviour it shouldn’t be too difficult to convince anyone that she would stray, after all, she had spent the majority of their marriage convincing herself to remain.

“I’d … rather like that.”

“Are you familiar with the area?”

“Enough.”

“Meet me at Starbucks?”

“Sure.”

Mary looked back to make sure Thomas was still asleep. She pulled out the dildo she had stowed in her glove compartment for such an occasion as murdering a man with an attractive stranger or Weezy dropping a new single. She twisted to unzip her pencil skirt until she could open her legs wide enough to make the call worth her time.

“And John? Until I get there, can you do me a favour and remind me of exactly what you did to me last night? This morning has been awful for me as well, let me relive last night’s clandestine passion.”

Chapter End Notes

I owe you guys some notes for this long, dialog heavy chapter, but in the theme of honesty, I am just way too tired. In general though, don’t judge people based on religious denomination or anything else for that matter, take your drugs as prescribed, don’t call anyone before nine in the morning, avoid racial slurs, take appropriate measures towards your own health and wellbeing, recognize your limitations, keep a dildo in your glove box if you have a long commute, and leave comments and kudos if you are thus inclined.

Thanks for reading, I love you guys! XOXO – Tav
Up next: Ben gets a search warrant, Mary and Simcoe get coffee, Anna gets some devastating news
The Francophones

Chapter Summary

Simcoe finds himself between a rock and a hard place, or, more directly put, between the rather unfortunately named Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI’s Manhattan field office and the woman with whom he may or may not have murdered a US Senator hours before.
Meanwhile, Hewlett finds himself faced with a judge ready to bring charges of immigration fraud against him and three international secret service agents at his door.

Chapter Notes

I only have a short update for you this week, lovely faces, and thusly a correspondingly short list of warnings: Starbucks, musical theater references, phone sex, fake filtration, true live, real crime.

Nothing too severe. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

John Graves Simcoe was beginning to reconsider his stance on telephone conversation when he noticed the two Frenchmen smile and wink at him, causing his face to flush and his stomach to turn. He had been standing on line at a Long Island Starbucks for the past twenty minutes waiting for his accomplice to show up. >>What do you want?<< he had whispered moments before, having already attracted the unwanted attention of all the good people of the world happy and willing to trade their liquid funds for lacto-based liquid fuel as he tried to figure out the rules to a game he had never played before. It took him about five minutes to understand that she was asking him to describe sexual acts to her, another ten to before he was beginning to think she was actually aroused. When he arrived at the chain coffee shop, he became uncomfortably aware that his own trousers were growing tight. With the engine off he could hear an electrical disturbance between her moans. His -albeit incorrect- assumption that the noise he didn’t recognize was the police tapping his line, as Mrs. Woodhull indicated they might, both calmed him down and forced him to keep going, reminding him of what was at stake. Once inside however, he became conscious of the fact that he needed to lower his voice. Fortunately for the ruse, the woman on the other end seemed to like his whispers of affection enough. >> I want to inside of me! << Mary Woodhull cried loudly enough for the wide-eyed tourists in front of him to take pause.

“I - I meant at Starbucks, Soy latté? Cappuccino?” Simcoe swallowed as the smaller of the two men made an obscene gesture with his tongue.

“Thomas just woke up. I’ll see you in a few,” Mary replied.

“Thomas is with you?” Simcoe gaped, remembering the smiling blonde haired boy whose photograph Mary had shown him when she’d convinced herself that her life was under threat. He wondered in horror, shame, and disgust how much the formerly sleeping child had heard of their
impromptu audio drama. Mary was no longer available to answer any of his pressing questions, having hung up as soon as she took notice of the boy in the backseat.

The platinum blonde in front of him, whom Simcoe guessed owed his hair to a bottle of bleach, said something else in French which everyone within earshot understood without translation while the cheeky redhead beside him laughed. Simcoe wondered if they were tourists or businessmen. From the cut and fabric of the tailored suits they were wearing he leaned towards the latter. His fellow ginger surprised him by ordering coffee and breakfast in perfect, unaccented English. It crossed Simcoe’s mind briefly that he had seen him somewhere before.

“Hamilton,” the man replied when asked to give his name. “Alexander Hamilton.”

The barista rolled her eyes as she sloppily wrote something on a paper cup. “Just you wait,” she replied pointing to the end of the bar where another young woman was fidgeting with a milk-steamer. She then turned to Simcoe who was pretending to study the menu as he tried to place the man. He asked if they had tea. After rattling off a list so long that by its end Simcoe was both certain that he hated this place every bit as the girl behind the counter seemed to and that such had likely been her intent, he asked again if she could make him a black tea. No milk. No sugar.

“Oh, English Breakfast or Earl Grey?” she asked, adding that milk and sugar were at the end of the counter. He ordered a skinny soy vanilla latte and a skim-milk cappuccino for Mary – not knowing which mom-sounding drink she might have a preference for, bought the least disgusting looking vegan fair-trade holier-than-thou juice box for her son and ordered breakfast sandwiches for the three of them. Once he had his order, he walked over to a group of teenagers sitting on what looked to be the most comfortable chairs which the café had to offer. They moved quickly when he politely asked them to, something that would have come as a surprise had he not seen his own reflection in the glass and known himself to look like a man who may or may not have murdered someone hours earlier. He rung his secretary to tell him to have a fresh suit ready for him back at the office along with a toothbrush, mouthwash and a disposable razor.

He had tied his hair back, watching his tea as it steeped. After a few minutes had passed he played with the bag until the label broke off, robbing him of his short-lived entertainment. The Francophones had gone outside where the one who had not identified himself as the title figure from the musical which Simcoe’s former friend Andre thought bound to sweep the 2016 Tony Awards lit a cigarette. Simcoe wondered if he offered one of his fags to angry young woman behind the counter if she would let him smoke inside. He guessed that she would but before he was able to test this hypothesis, Mary Woodhull had shown up, clearly flustered. A number of patrons who must have overheard his end of their conversation were giving her strange looks, to which Simcoe responded with a glare of his own.

After they had exchanged an awkward greeting which Simcoe found sounded forced on Mary’s end, she thanked him warmly for the meal, for thinking of Thomas and for imagining that she was the kind of woman who could suffer through soy or skim milk. He apologized for being presumptuous, but she didn’t appear to have heard him, her eyes fixed instead on the two men who had just walked back inside.

“Do you know who that is?” she asked in a whisper, leaning in as she cut Thomas’s egg white spinach omelet on ciabatta for him.

“A Alexander Hamilton?” Simcoe replied unimpressed.

Mary nodded, paused, and then shook her head. “That name really means nothing to you?”

“What? Is he actually in the cast?”
“John … he is the Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI’s Manhattan field office and,” her whisper turned into a hiss, “he keeps looking at us. What the hell did you do?”

Simcoe blinked, looked over at the man with the most unfortunate name in New York City and back to Mary.

“He was standing in front of me while I was waiting in line, talking you though um … I have reason to believe the plan is working,” he whispered back, expecting his words to console Mary as she so required. He saw Thomas smiling at him and he smiled back. Mary opened an educational app on her smartphone and handed it to her son to play with.

“Why couldn’t you have just gone home?” she asked turning her attention back to Simcoe, upset enough to raise his concern. Sometime between Mary’s confessing that Abe had gone off to Oyster Bay the night before without so much as word and her repetitive insistence that she loved her husband whilst she curled up on the couch beside him for the sake of appearance, the FBI field office director and his foreign college had lost interest in them and gone back to discussing business – this time, thankfully, in English. From what Simcoe thought he understood, the NYPD had appointed someone to the case at federal recommendation whose name attracted enough media attention that the facts investigation itself would fail to excite the public on the same level.

“What happened last night?” Mary cooed in his ear.

Simcoe flinched when he felt her fingers drag themselves across his shoulder. “Here?” he clarified, wondering is all American women were insane on some level.

“With the police,” Mary replied in disgust that was easily head through her faux seductive tone.

“I was looking for something I had hastily discarded when a patrol officer named Bradford saw me by the side of the road parked with my headlights on. He asked me what I was doing, I told him taking a piss and he proceeded to ask me a few questions with regard my whereabouts and asked if I had witnessed anything suspicious. I confessed I was with my lover and no questions were raised about the nature of our liaison. I provided your name largely because Woodhull carries a great deal of weight in the area and he immediately dropped the inquiry, which was rather fortunate as I couldn’t have him searching my car,” he purred back.

“What were you looking for exactly?” she teased, tapping her finger playfully on the end of his nose.

“A mobile that we took along with lost and found box we packed the goods we meant to steal into. After I dropped you off it wouldn’t stop ringing. I threw it out of the window in aggravation and drove another 50 meters or so before thinking that said phone may have belonged to the friend we briefly met last night. I turned round to search for it, least the police find the device with my fingerprints on it when I was forced to call off my search.”

“And did you by chance resume it?” Mary smiled.

“To no avail,” Simcoe smiled back.

Mary inhaled slowly and deeply, giving him a look he couldn’t entirely read. Behind him he could hear the two intelligence officers rise suddenly, causing him to briefly concern himself with the possibility that their conversation hadn’t been carried out as quietly and deceptively as they had both seeming allowed themselves to imagine. He felt he lips press against his own as he watched the Assistant Director in Charge and his foreign associate walk past them at a hurried pace.
“It has to look real,” Mary said breathlessly, smiling at her small act of duplicity as she turned around to make sure that the cops were in fact leaving. When she looked back at him she was practically beaming.

Simcoe stared at her, unblinking, unsure of how else to respond.

Hewlett brushed his teeth with the bathroom door open, watching his beautiful finance dress out of the corner of his eye. She clothed herself in such a deliberately slow manner that Hewlett wondered if she meant it as punishment for looking. He half waited for her to vanish back into the hell he thought himself to be in, much in the same manner that the mythological Eurydice did when Orpheus had turned to behold her. Anna smiled when she noticed that she had caught his eye. He returned the gesture on instinct before turning back to view himself once in the mirror, his hair still intentionally untied the way Anna had indicated she preferred. It seemed to him all at once that everything was Anna, and Anna was everything. God, Hewlett decided, certainly had quite a sense of humor.

After walking out to her car to find her hair dryer—wondering why she had elected to park so far from the house—Hewlett went to see if there was any coffee left over. If the argument between father and son which he could hear from the foyer lead him to believe that he would be able to obtain his beloved’s breakfast beverage of choice without confrontation, he was about to be disappointed.

Richard Woodhull ceased the verbal crucifixion of his only living child upon seeing his tenant, but refrained from addressing Hewlett until he had finished pouring a cup of coffee while attempting to be polite to both Woodhulls present; his >>Pleasant morning to you both!<< going unanswered. He was halfway out the door when the judge gruffly informed him that neither the coffee, nor the mug were his to take.

“My apologies, Richard. I never knew you to take issue with my occasional enjoyment of your coffee before.”

“I hadn’t prior reason to find your thievery particularly offensive.”

“My thievery, sir?” Hewlett rubbed his brow, wondering if this was an opportune moment to mention the drugs he’d noticed periodically went missing from his medicine cabinet.

“Edmund,” the judge cleared his throat, “Court resumes next week. When I return from Albany, I fully expect you to have that woman out of my house.”

“You made no protest when I added her name to the lease,” Hewlett replied patiently.

“I was not aware at the time that Anna Strong and Anna Smith were one in the same person.”

“Anna is here?” Abe asked, adding after taking a gulp of coffee, “With you?”

“As it so happens,” Hewlett grinned at him. Turning his attention back to Richard, he said, “By the time you return from Albany, Anna Strong nee Smith may well be Anna Hewlett, should a rose in fact smell sweeter by another name. She is to be my wife.”

He could feel Abe seething next to him, seeing his periphery that the eternal teenager beside him
was no longer casually leaning against the counter top. He kept his eyes fixed on the judge who seemed keen to persevere in his hatred of the award winning journalist who ruined his reputation by proxy.

“I’m a United States Federal Judge, Mr. Hewlett. Do you honestly think me incapable of seeing through your fraud?”

Hewlett felt his heart pounding, he felt short of breath, he felt like he ought to speak but his tongue froze on the words they longed to say to someone else. Outside he heard sirens. “I’m in love with her,” he choked after they stopped. Both Woodhulls glared at him as he took a seat vis-à-vis from Richard, trying to regulate his breathing without much success. “I’m in love with her,” he repeated more forcefully. The doorbell rang. Richard looked at Hewlett in the same manner he looked at his own wayward son when he saw his influence waning, grunting in disgust as he rose.

Aberdeen rushed into the kitchen with wide eyes, “Sir, it is the police, sir.”

This caused Richard to smile menacingly. Both Abe and Hewlett followed him to the door to meet the three men waiting on the front porch.

“I apologize for disturbing you at this hour Justice Woodhull, my name is Benjamin Tallmadge,” said the man holding up his badge for the judge’s inspection, a conventionally attractive uniformed blonde. “I am an Inspector with the NYPD. This is ADIC Alexander Hamilton of the FBI and Agent Lafayette of France’s DGSE. We have a few questions for one of your tenants.”

Hewlett felt his heart pounding, he felt short of breath. “I’m in love with her,” he told the international secret service agents, all of whom he was immediately certain had designs on his arrest and deportation.

Time would prove him right in all counts.

Chapter End Notes

All I had in me this week given the terrible political situation I spent the better part of the weekend watching unfold, but I hope it is better than nothing with all the bad romance I threw at you. Comments and kudos are always appreciated, never necessary. Do me a favor though and give someone who needs it a smile or a hug or a kind word this week. As for me, you know I love you. Hopefully I will have more mental energy next week to spend on the special task force, the man who thinks he’s evaded them, the man who just may have succeeded to that end, and the one who, well … you’ll just have to wait and see.

XOXO –Tav

Up Next: Watching the Detectives
The Conspiracy

Chapter Summary

Anna faces an informal interrogation, Aberdeen helps Hewlett spy on a Frenchman

Chapter Notes

Big warning this go around, lovely faces:
Once again, I broke the Cardinal Rule of the TURN fandom. Namely, I chose to portray Edmund Hewlett in the context of his interpersonal dealings as possessing some truly negative attributes. I wish I could point the more militant among you to a certain section you could skip altogether, but there are a few recurring themes and the point of view that paints him in the lowest light happens to also be the most important to this chapter (and thus to the overall progression of the story.)
Don’t worry though! Opinions change, people grow, and the far off ending of “Hide and Seek” will ultimately be a happy one, but if you feel possessed to leave me hate here or on Tumblr, please be sure to include language like “u are a disgusting human being”, “how dare you do that to my bb???” and any kind of statement attacking an aspect of my person that plays no role whatsoever in my writing. It is always amusing. I urge you to be creative, and have fun. :)

That said, this chapter as a whole is pretty heavy. Additional warnings include but are not limited to: institutionalized racism, natural disaster, kleptomania, corporate buyouts, body image, self-scrutiny, petty jealousies, wealth inequality, ill-attuned parenting, hentai, harsh language, unrequited affection, global espionage and an openly confessed love.

As always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Martin DeJong awoke early at his Florida residence for a morning tee off at the country club of which he hoped to soon become a member. He had recently sold his home in Setauket and upon receiving an offer on Monday for the property which housed his remaining holding, he was satisfied with the prospects retired life could offer. He finally had time to work on his swing, watch daytime reruns of sitcoms from his youth, and otherwise do the sorts of things he had always imagined doing with his wife. Before playing golf with the men he hoped to impress with his latest (and last) business dealing, he planned to read the newspaper while his missus did the crossword, discussing interesting things between bits of dry toast such as which of their old friends had recently been diagnosed with cancer, how long someone else had been widowed, and whose grandchildren they were most certainly glad were not their own.

After taking a quick shower –for he had yet to see a Naples water bill- Martin strode into the kitchen with a smile wearing the shirt his wife had purchased for him at a yard sale the weekend prior, only to be met with a look of grief. Phone in hand, she nodded as the person on the other end
of the line spoke, seeming to have forgotten that whomever she was conversing with had no way of discerning her non-verbal. His first thought was that something had happened to one of his children; the reality was far graver.

“It is Applebee’s,” his missus informed him, handing over the handset, “they want to renegotiate.”

Martin quickly grabbed phone from his wife and listened to the man with whom he had had very pleasant and productive dealings not two days prior tell him that the parent company was now only willing to pay a third of his reduced asking price. He told the man he was being ridiculous and hung up the phone, expecting that he, or someone he worked for, would ring back in a few minutes with a more realistic offer.

The call would never come.

Mr. DeJong was not yet aware of this when he sat down with a smug grin, reassuring his wife that this was all part of the sale process. He opened the newspaper to find that Senator Arnold, a politician he rather enjoyed watching when he appeared on Meet the Press because he spoke loudly enough that both he and his wife could understand him without having to turn up the volume on their television to the point where the neighbors started banging on the walls- causing his wife to worry about her shelves and the little glass figurines she had displayed- had gone missing. Unfortunate. He flipped to the sports section to see what was happening in the more accessible world of basketball.

Before he had finished breakfast the phone rang as he had expected it to.

It wasn’t Applebee’s.

It never would be.

A man named Alexander Hamilton informed him as to why.

It wasn’t that the humidity in the room, nor were her thighs still damp from the shower; Anna Strong’s skinny jeans were simply keen to remind her on this of all mornings that she had long since forgotten about general upkeep of her figure. She pulled them on slowly, painstakingly, her idea of her own worth diminishing in the process. It wouldn’t have been hard for her to come to terms with the fact that she wasn’t simply bloated as she had long excused herself as being were it not for the various sets of eyes that had been fixating on her since her arrival. No, the working class life she led by choice had forged a figure that was now hers to bear. She had been able to accept and otherwise ignore the weight she had steadily been gaining since law school had ended around the same time as her first marriage. The breasts and the butt had increased her tips and the muscle she packed on from the physical nature of her profession made the labor easier as time went on. She liked her body, or had, that is, until she noticed the way that Mary Grant, now Mary Woodhull stared at her in the hallway the day before.

Anna looked down at the small mound at her midsection that was causing her such dissatisfaction. Mary Grant, now Mary Woodhull, a girl she hadn’t seen since she had worn a size two, had seen her small belly and assumed she was pregnant. Mary Grant, now Mary Woodhull, had herself actually gone through a pregnancy, born a child, and was still a double zero. As humiliating as the brief interaction had been, Anna would have been able to keep it from her mind, despite the
nagging of the stretch fabric, if Edmund wasn’t watching her in her moment of struggle.

She smiled at him. He smiled back, awkwardly, as if it surprised him that the eyes he had failed to avert had been noticed. Anna held her breath and with it the bump disappeared back inside of her. She was suddenly aware that she had been holding her breath since the first time he had spoken to her, literally, figuratively. He spent a moment gazing dreamily at his own beautiful face in the mirror after he finished brushing his teeth. Anna wondered what exactly she was waiting for as she picked out a clean shirt; fitted, as they all were, further accentuating her double D’s. She pulled it over her head and frowned. Edmund claimed he wasn’t fit for intercourse due to some of the drugs he was on and had very little sex drive due to others. >>Thankfully! << he had had the nerve to say. She wasn’t attractive to him, she realized, and never truly would be. His light-hearted exclamation had stung as much as Mary’s presumptive look, as much as Edmund’s own consistently judgmental one; which was to say, about half as much as his words had the night before.

“I think I am getting fat,” Anna addressed him as he approached her with a wide grin, pushing her stomach out to its limits.

“I think you have a vivid imagination and an impressive lung capacity,” he replied, almost laughing, as he leaned in for a kiss.

She pulled back.

“Ah, alright, you were being serious,” he thought aloud. Clearing his throat she continued, “Anna, I find you gorgeous, I don’t understand where this is coming from.”

“Mary thinks I am pregnant.”

“Mary Woodhull?” he clarified, his face twisting in confusion.

Anna lifted her chin slightly in affirmation.

“I am sure that is not true, and if it is it has nothing to do with you, ah, physically, but rather with the swift nature of our courtship.”

She glanced at her reflection again in the full length mirror. It had been her first time seeing herself in one since she moved out for her mother’s spare bedroom, scarcely a month after moving in. She remembered the caution her mother had given her when she had first mentioned Edmund’s presence in her life. >>Focus on yourself for once << she practically spat, not leaving room for further discussion. Anna rolled the large eyes she had inherited from the woman who to her mind was an embodiment of the very advice she offered.

In the end Anna had taken it. She ran a credit check on Edmund after speaking with Mr. DeJong about the purchase she had long been hoping to make.

Getting to know Edmund had been the next step. True to form, Anna tripped and fell.

She saw him beside her in the mirror, gazing at her cautiously as he took short, nervous breaths, unsure of how to proceed. Anna wondered if she had ruined everything by asking him to help her apply for a line of credit, or by telling him that she loved him – a sentiment he seemed to want to return but didn’t, and perhaps never would. She closed her eyes, imagining his arms around her out of desire rather than a misdirected sense of obligation. She opened them when he spoke.

“I ought to … um, begin my search for your hair dryer and coffee then.”

“Do you think you’ll ever want kids?” she responded.
"I- well, that is, like quite a lot of things in life, I fear I have never given that question much consideration, as the answer lies only in the theoretical. I’m not certain where this conversation is going, darling, but I fear much of last night make have been an error on both of our parts."

Anna smiled weakly and nodded, “Coffee, yeah. Coffee is good.”

Edmund turned to leave, took a step and backtracked. “Hey,” he said softly, “I only meant … what I meant to say that is - I wish I could divorce my feelings for you from our business arrangement. I believe in your dreams and believe that I will do everything within my power to make them obtainable, as you are well doing for me, but given the nature of our joint predicament … Tell me, do you think we would ever have come together without necessity acting as a catalyst?”

Anna tried to respond but choked on the words that wouldn’t form.

“I don’t know either,” he offered, “but having had the pleasure of getting to know you, I would rather like to imagine that we somehow would have.”

She looked around the room after he had gone at all of his fine possessions. Edmund’s half of the closet contained nothing but labels, whereas the majority of Anna’s own clothing had been bought on sale at department stores and chain boutiques with a slightly younger target cliental. She found a sweatshirt from Columbia, a commemorative T-shirt from a SUPA funded workshop with a few signatures on it (which she supposed he never wore) and an assortment soccer jerseys from an English team she would never be able to force herself into supporting. Everything else Edmund owned stank of the riches he claimed not to have. Anna didn’t believe him for an instant. Her bridegroom was either entirely insensitive when it came to wealth or he had no idea about how to discuss the topic. She thought about his off-the-cuff remark about having asked Simcoe for a small loan of $40,000, a small loan that would have settled the student debt that Anna would be working off until shortly before retirement. She wasn’t asking too much, she concluded, as she looked at framed photos on his desk of his artificially beautiful sisters – both of whom had clearly had work done – posing in polo gear with the horses Edmund had bought himself for his thirtieth. She had ridden in his imported Jaguar, gazed through several of the high-end telescopes she was afraid to touch and wore a gold ring of his she was convinced could be pawned to cover two months’ rent.

This was the man who claimed to believe in her dreams, so long, Anna figured, if he wasn’t being asked to pay for them. He was kind but not generous, afraid or simply unwilling- to give her more than a portion of his genetically damaged heart. The room seemed smaller without his presence. Anna was beginning to wonder what was taking him so long, imagining Edmund stuck in a conversation with Richard Woodhull about the harm limitation principle and her father’s repeated failures to respect the ethics code. She wondered what their connection was, why Edmund, who could clearly afford to be living among his high-society friends on the Upper East Side chose to live in a crappy one bedroom apartment in a house on the edge of nowhere. Maybe he was being honest about his means, maybe there was something else he was hiding.

She looked through his bookshelf, through his medicine cabinet, both packed full of words she didn’t trust herself to pronounce. Why me? Anna asked herself. And why, for the love of God, why you? She felt the weight of the ring around her neck and the weight of the world on her shoulders as she remembered the soft, wet kisses he had covered her in the night before as they compared with the hesitance and mild disgust she had been met with the morning after. Focus on yourself.
She was probably correct, Anna thought, trying to imagine that the woman who had always put career before family loved her in her own way - the way she was also forced to with her friends, former lovers, regular customers, and now, with Edmund.

Edmund who said he didn’t want to hurt her and meant he didn’t want to meet her half way.

Anna ran her fingers through her long, dark and no longer damp hair; feeling them snag on the frizzy curls a good blow out would have eliminated. She closed the medicine cabinet to look at herself in the small mirror and pouted once more. Deciding that her husband-to-be had lost interest in performing the simple act of retrieval she’d asked of him, she slipped a hair tie from her wrist and knotted it behind her ears. She went back into the bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed as she put on her trainers to walk down to the car herself when her phone rang.

It was Mr. DeJong.

Anna verified the time on her watch before answering. No, she wasn’t late, a day drunk hadn’t called the number posted on the door to complain that he didn’t already have a beer in hand the way they tended to when one of her employees was a minute or two late in unlocking the door.

“Hello?” she said, having to repeat herself over the odd sound of sirens ringing through Setauket.

By the time Edmund came back upstairs, awkwardly clutching her hair dryer and a mug of lukewarm black coffee, flanked by Richard, Abe, Cicero’s French tutor (whose presence baffled and name escaped her), two men she didn’t recognize and one she most certainly did, Anna was in tears. She met Edmund’s wide eyes as she shook her head.

“I have to go,” she told her now former boss over the bad connection, “they are hear. Yeah, yeah, I’ll pass that along.”

Edmund whispered her name as he went to embrace her, holding her tightly as she sobbed into his soft cashmere. “Darling, what’s happened?”

Instead of answering him she pulled away. She gave the young inspector a cold look and asked, “How dare you barge in like this?” Lowering her voice to a hiss, she added, “I can have the DA on the phone in seconds.”

The redhead standing directly beside him whispered something in his ear. Tallmadge nodded.

“Miss Strong, my name is Benjamin Tallmadge,” he responded politely, showing his badge, “my associates and I have a few questions we’d like to ask you with regards to one of the customers you may have served last night.” Addressing the others he asked, “May we have the room?”

“No,” Anna answered. “Inspector, I am happy to do my civic duty and comply with your inquiry, but I insist upon my right to legal presence.” She met the judge’s cold eyes and pleaded with them not to leave her alone with a man whose name carried the stain of the woman who had been raped and murdered while in his custody.

“Dad -” Abe started.

Richard Woodhull exhaled slowly, “If it is all the same to you Inspector, the last thing I need this morning is to incur the wrath of my old friend Nancy Smith.”

Tallmadge nodded.
“Thank you,” Anna said under her breath.

“Mademoiselle, Messieurs?” one of the other officers addressed the remaining parties. The girl who Abigail paid $10 to help her son conjugate irregular verbs each week left with a shrug, Abe slipped away after echoing Anna’s thanks to his father. Edmund stood before her, confused and hurt as he had been when he entered the room. “Darling, what is the meaning of this?”

Anna shook her head, fighting back tears. She stoked his cheeks, noting for the first time their slight asymmetry as she pulled him in for a parting kiss. Edmund’s pulse quickened when their lips met, more still when their landlord cleared his throat in warning. “Forgive me,” she pleaded. Her finance blinked.

“You have no idea what you’ve gotten yourself into with that one, do you?” Richard asked as he ushered Edmund out. Turning back to Anna and the task force, he grunted. “Let’s make this quick, I have a case to review and an opinion to finish writing.”

“You’re really a Lord?” Abe asked Hewlett in the hallway, harking back to the short series of questions the ADIC had asked him upon his arrival. He seemed to have been waiting for him, casually leaning against the green papered walls with a cynical expression. He wore the same shirt advertising a band Hewlett had never heard of that he had been in since Monday, which now stank of the night before. Abe’s hair was covered by an old grey beanie he removed only on occasion, which had long lead Hewlett to assume that the younger man was experiencing early balding. Attitude aside, it was sometimes impossible to recognize that the derelict before him was in fact the son of a chief justice.

“My father’s brother is a hereditary peer. Prior to the birth of the little prince I was second in line to inherit the title that allows him that position, but due to recent reforms – why are you asking me this?”

“Is that why you came here, to America I mean? To write your PhD?” Abe seemed to mock. Hewlett rubbed his temples. His landlord’s son wasn’t entirely correct in his assumption, but he was close enough to touch a nerve.

“Certainly perceptive, though I would argue at the moment your talents might be put to better use,” he whispered in reply, pointing at the door that lead to his bathroom. He had to know what was going on. All evidence seemed to indicate Anna, frustrated by one or many of dissatisfying aspects of the life he offered, had acted rung the authorities on him. His own fear had passed and his primary concern was that she would stick to her convictions and come up with a way of condemning him without damning herself in the process – paint herself as a victim, say she had somehow been forced into playing his bride. He had to get into the bathroom to ease drop. Smiling, the younger Mr. Woodhull adjusted his position as to block the door. Hewlett considered that Abe was in on whatever Anna was planning. The memory of his beloved’s description of her lost virginity returned with a sting of betrayal.

“If you’re telling me to shut up,” Abe said, “you won’t hear much from up here. Follow me.”

The college drop-out led Hewlett to the dark basement below his own flat and pointed to an open pipe in a back corner, “If you stand close enough to it you can hear everything that goes on up there.”
“E-everything? Ah, Abraham, I have to ask-”

“About the hentai? We are all – collectively- aware. Why do you think Culper Ring stated practicing in Rob’s dad’s house?”

If lives weren’t otherwise at stake the insinuation would have filled him with embarrassment as opposed to simply giving him pause.

“Ah, I meant, about last night?”

“I wasn’t here last night. You didn’t hear Mary this morning? Shit, I thought she’d woken the whole town proper,” he sighed. “I’ll probably have to give a statement too, I think I saw him there with your mate. Didn’t say anything though.”

“Who?” Hewlett inquired.

“What do you mean who?”

“Must you always be so cryptic?”

“Are you really that daft?” Abe shook his head in disgust, “Benedict Arnold?” Seeing no signs of recognition, Abe took the Lord’s name in vain and asked a series of vaguely insulting rhetorical questions before Hewlett signaled for his silence.

Through the old pipe the pair could hear the Judge explaining to Anna that his presence was merely for procedure; even if he wished to do so he would be unable to provide her with legal representation given his office.

Hewlett looked at Abe in confusion. Pre-Law had been one of the Abe’s constantly altering majors before he’d dropped out, had it not?

“She knows all of this, her mom and my dad used to work together before the bot got their current appointments. That’s what fucked us both up so hard.”

“How dare you speak of Anna in such language,” Hewlett replied, taken aback, “She is one of the most capable, intelligent women I have ever met and is most certainly not -as you suggest -*fucked up*.”

“Yeah, I guess you would see it that way, but then, you don’t really get out much do you? Afraid to mix with the proletariat? That’s why you picked Anna for your little Green Card Scheme, fallen princess that she plays at?”

“Are you that jealous?”

“Me? No. You are *not* going to marry her, mark my words there.”

“I’m in love with her,” he stated plainly for the first time, his initial panic having passed.

“Then I’d say you’re even more of a fool than I thought, if I believed you. Knock it off with this honor shit. It is clear to everyone that you’re only interested in my ex because you’ve failed at everything else you’ve ever attempted, and she is only interested in you because –like my father- she sees the clothes you wear as an indication that you have money rather than that you blew your inheritance on luxuries, hoping to disguise the fact that you are an absolute buffoon who struggles to participate in the most basic of conversations. How long do you honestly think it will last?”
It was a rich criticism given its source, but Abe once again had proven himself surprisingly perceptive. The only part of his critique which Hewlett could rightfully take umbrage at was the not entirely incorrect assessment that Anna was after the very assets he’d squandered - if only for the fact that he believed her enough when she told him she was falling in love with him.

“You’ve gone too far,” he hissed back, “Truth be told, Abraham, I’ve never much cared for you either. You are free to carry whatever opinion of me you wish but if you continue to insinuate that dear Anna shares your weak character or base nature-”

“You’ll what exactly?” Abe scoffed.

“Don’t try me,” Hewlett cautioned, placing his index finger over his lips before using it to point back to the pipe.

“My boss, Martin DeJong, called me to inform me about the search warrant a few minutes before you arrived,” Anna clarified for the three men sitting before her.

“The conversation I am more curious about, Ms. Strong, is the one you had with, your fiancé I believe shortly before he left the room – what did you mean by ‘forgive me’?”

Anna looked at Richard who did nothing more than return her stare. “Last night Edmund and I were in an argument.”

“Can you elaborate?”

“How is this relevant?” Woodhull asked. “I can personally vouch to the fact that the couple spent the duration of the night here at Whitehall. Explain to me, Inspector, what pertinence their private domestic life has to your investigation?”

Tallmadge chose to drop the line of questioning. “Who was working last night?” he continued.

“Caleb Brewster.”

“Would you be able to put us in touch with him?”

“Absolutely, I have his number stored in my phone if you’ll let me get it for you.”

“Please.”

Anna pulled up the contact and handed her phone to the man whose trousers appeared to be at least as tight as hers felt. His expression of gratitude was muted by a question from the FBI representative – someone whose title seemed far too esteemed for him to be sitting on the small couch of her rented room. Until this point, the Assistant Director in Charge had been reviewing something on his tablet in silence.

“Ms. Strong, a few months ago you tweeted the following to the Pennsylvania Senator: *Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety. #domesticdrones #wtf*”

“It is a quote from Benjamin Franklin, and a lot of people were using that hashtag after the filibuster,” Anna replied.
“You used the original version at that,” Hamilton remarked, slightly impressed.

“Fit into 140 characters.”

“Do you follow politics closely, Ms. Strong?” Hamilton continued.

“Enough.”

“And yet you claim that you first heard of the senator’s disappearance this morning, moments before my esteemed colleagues and I arrived.”

“I didn’t watch the news last night,” she answered honestly.

Monsieur Lafayette’s device buzzed. It was larger, plainer than most phones, something that recalled the early days of mobile technology. It was more likely more powerful than her husband’s computer and nearly impossible to hack. She had seen one like it before when a friend of her parent’s had been doing some contractual work for the FBI. The DGSE operative excused himself from the informal inquiry.

“Monsieur Cohen!” he addressed the Director of the Mossad as he stepped out into the hallway, thanking him for his quick response and apologizing for the hour several times before realizing that the building he was in was suffered from poor reception.

In the basement Hewlett turned to Abe and told him to continue to monitor the interview whilst he left to uncover what had taken the foreign agent’s interest away from the manager of bar where Senator Arnold was last heard from.

Aberdeen had first met Mary Woodhull in the summer of 2010 after an earthquake had destroyed her city the pervious January. Mary had been a college student volunteering in Port-au-Prince for the relief organization which now employed her. She’d captivated the then teenage girl who had recently lost her home with stories about her seemingly glamorous life in New York City in the broken French she’d learned in high-school. Aberdeen fell deeply, dangerously in love with the opulent locations omnipresent in Mary’s tales about her crazy roommate, the girls on her cheer squad, the boys she’d fancied and the university she attended. Against a backdrop of devastation, the dream of New York seemed the only reality. When Mary and the other children of privilege who had paid to spend their summer holidays building schools and handing out water bottles returned to the United States feeling quite good about themselves - as Aberdeen later realized white people were want to do – she left without an assortment of women’s glossies and an old English – French Langenscheidt. Aberdeen would never know if Mary discovered they were missing from her luggage, or if she knew who was to blame.

After finishing secondary school –ironically, thanks to the aid the island received after the disaster – Aberdeen applied to a for-profit New York based Au Pair agency, hoping to find work placement in Manhattan, assured by a recruiter that the city was filled with young, working parents hoping to raise their children in a bilingual environment. Two weeks later she found herself standing wide-eyed in line to be frisked by a TSA agent at JFK, a family called Woodhull awaiting her at the other side of the terminal.

She was surprised and delighted to meet Mary again, discovering upon arrival just how small a city of eight million people could truly seem. Mary’s crazy roommate had been replaced by a lazy
husband, the cheer squad by a book club, the boys with a baby and the university with a high earning job, but the still-young woman remained unchanged and the city itself was everything she had unintentionally advertised it to be. Aberdeen earned enough through the organization and the money the Woodhulls paid her on the side to go out once a week, but Mary’s husband had cute friends who often stopped by. As so, more often than not, she elected to stay in on her nights off. By the time the family moved out of Queens Aberdeen had enough saved up from all of the evenings productively spent watching Robert Townsend play video games with her boss that she could enroll part time in community college. Furthering her education hadn’t been part of her original plan, but she needed an excuse to go back into the city after falling real-estate prices had forced her exodus. Abe had persuaded Mary to buy a house in his hometown - a few miles and an eternity away. When it turned out the house could not be lived in, the family had been forced to move in with his father.

It happened that Aberdeen was one of young Thomas’s favorite people, and thus she quickly became one of the only two individuals the right honorable Judge Richard Woodhull could tolerate. The other, unfortunately, was a tenant of his whom Aberdeen strongly suspected of racism and imperialist sentiment. He would order her around as if he was paying for her services, as if her job description included half of the ridiculous requests he had. Once he made the mistake of asking her to get a pair of gloves from his room, becoming aggravated when she said that she didn’t know where he kept them. After he’d made a small quip at her expense, she went to look for them, not because she wanted to gift the grad student with any sense of satisfaction, but because she was new in Setauket and could think of nothing better to do. She found what he was asking for, among a scattering of other items that filled her with fancy. Aberdeen pocketed a piece of jewelry and pawned it the first chance she had. From that day forward she was keen to make tea or run errands or do laundry for l’homme-grenouille as she’d dubbed him. He had become a paying customer, after all.

When Aberdeen turned twenty-one she took herself to the only bar in Setauket and was surprised to see that the bartender was a fellow woman of color, rare in the otherwise white-washed town. It happened that on the night in question the bartender –who it turned out had a nine-to-five in a more glamorous location- was hot over a fight she had had been in about a casually racist Tweet a white girl she said was her sister had posted for her roughly two million followers. The two traded stories about social injustice and formed a fast friendship based on their shared indigence. Aberdeen could finally complain about the man who kept trying to correct her pronunciation of his name while constantly and consistently remarking on hers. (Why, she asked aloud, as she screamed internally each and every time, did the city she shared a name with have to be in Scotland?) Two cocktails later, Abigail hated Hewlett every bit as much as Aberdeen did, and Aberdeen hated the friends of someone named Jordan every bit as much as Abigail did.

From that night forward, when she had off and Abigail was working, she would go into gossip. Over time their bond expanded beyond the endless bullshit of institutionalized prejudice to beauty, family, entertainment and academics. Abigail had wanted to be a writer before she was forced by circumstance to become otherwise successful. As such retained an extensive knowledge of English grammar. Now, once a week, Aberdeen would go over to her town house in the evening and tutor her son Cicero in French. Abigail would in turn review her homework assignments, editing and explaining any errors she found. Afterwards they would eat dinner and talk about the sorts of things they had no other audience for. Empathy was overrated. Abigail hated to say it, but when she complained to her white friends about the concerns she had for her son’s safety in a society beset by police brutality, they seemed to say ‘but I’m not like that’ rather than ‘we need to put pressure on our policy makers to make appropriate changes which over time could put an end the systemic problems from which these conflicts arise.’

Aberdeen herself was still in culture shock about how contradictorily different groups of people
were treated in a nation that advertised itself as believing that all men were created equal. Her white people, which was to say, the ones she lived with and their equally well-to-do friends, seemed incapable of seeing the discrepancy at all. A few weeks prior Aberdeen asked herself if she was beginning to blindly accept this particular kind of ignorance when Abby asked her if she had any new stories about her English imperialist. >> No, << she was forced to admit after a moment’s thought >> I think he might actually be mellowing out. Maybe he is seeing someone. <<

She shrugged.

To this Abigail had replied >> Oh my God, that reminds me, have I told you about Annie yet? <<

On the cool but sunny Wednesday morning in March when she opened the door for three members of an international task force, Aberdeen learned that as small as New York City seemed, the social scale of Setauket was downright miniscule. L’homme-grenouille was dating Anna Strong, which didn’t in itself excuse him from being a colonialist, or for freaking out when he found her in Richard’s study, reading the magazine she had taken from his room out of habit. He had most certainly not mellowed out.

But he said please for the first time, which was a start.

“Aberdeen, please,” he said after calming down over the issue of Cosmo he had correctly deduced had been swiped from his chamber, “if I may trouble you for your assistance.”

“What you need?” she asked without moving to close the erotic short story about the fashion executive fucking a complete stranger in the privy of a train. Hewlett placed a long finger over his lips and beckoned for her to follow him in silence. Aberdeen guessed he wasn’t asking for a cuppa.

She was led into the sitting room adjacent to the foyer where a man was pacing, speaking hurried French. Aberdeen guessed it was the doe-eyed bleach-blonde she had seen earlier, noting the differences in the Parisian and the Caribbean dialects.

“What is he saying?” Hewlett whispered.

Aberdeen listened for a moment, becoming convinced that the conversation was of no business of the man who’d inquired. She gave Hewlett a hard look which rather unexpectedly forced him to mind his manners once more. “Please,” he begged.

“I have school on Friday,” Aberdeen said, for once able to enjoy the upper hand in negotiation. “I want to drive your car.”

“Ah … fine, yes. I believe that is in order,” he conceded, however annoyed.

“Get me a pen.”

Hewlett found one on the table beside an incomplete crossword form the Sunday Times and quietly spirited it over to her. Aberdeen began scribbling on the magazine in shorthand everything she overheard. When the call ended, which according to the clock lasted eighteen minutes but spanned over fifty-six pages, the man whose name—or perhaps codename given the context of the conversation—he had learned to be Lafayette, marched back upstairs into the hallway which connected Hewlett’s apartment with the rest of the house.
Followed by the man who may have unknowingly made her a co-conspirator, Aberdeen tiptoed back to the study and took a legal pad from Richard’s desk on which to translate and transcribe her notes.

“Time may be of the essence,” Hewlett warned. She wondered what he imagined was going on, as nothing that was said had anything to do with him whatsoever. Aberdeen grew aggravated.

“See? Do you see?” she said pointing to marks that would have been illegible to another native francophone, “’Ee spoke to ‘is boss in Paris. I think, maybe, it was a conference call. Mossad – that is Tel Aviv,” she looked at him for confirmation. Hewlett nodded. “A Director Cohen said that they had no relevant evidence of radical elements – I think ‘ee meant terrorism- to report and then this was agreed upon by the … BND and,” she squinted, struggling with her own handwriting, “also SIS … I think I wrote,”

“Ah, yes that sounds correct,” Hewlett rubbed his temples.

Aberdeen skipped a few pages until she found the beginning of the topic which had caused the poor foreign agent the most distress.

“The dollar is falling due to the missing senator and ‘ee –Lafayette - is to mislead the FBI for as long as possible about French interest, they want to strengthen their hand in an upcoming trade deal, and so long as there is an … appearance of instability on the world stage, it is better for the French worker … whole Europe.” Hewlett looked at her with gaped-mouth confusion and asked her –again in polite language typically reserved for only Mary and Richard – to please continue. Aberdeen flipped through the next few pages of notes. “This is just a list of businesses that would stand to profit by a huge margin if the media behaves irrationally for the next twelve weeks … apparently they together employ 38% of the population. I … I am not certain if it was exclusive to France or if the whole EU was meant.”

“A list? You wrote them all down?”

“You asked me too,” she shrugged.

“Could I trouble you to, um, make at least that bit legible?” he pointed at the scribbles. Aberdeen nodded, imagining herself driving to Robert Townsend’s new restaurant after class on Friday as she wrote. The valet would park the Jaguar XJR and she would drink coffee with him at the bar. When his shift ended she would offer to dive him home and he would be impressed by the fact the she had gotten Hewlett to lend out his luxury ride. Then she would suggest that they went somewhere else instead and he would agree that her idea was a good one. By Friday she would have an idea, of that she was certain.

When she was finished she looked back up at Hewlett who had been standing over her, sweating. She smiled. He returned it. It was disconcerting.

“Thank you, thank you, my dear. I’m truly in your debt.”

“Eulett?”

“Hewlett,” he corrected for a countless time, and then, “Ah, Edmund is fine really if you would prefer.”

Aberdeen had mentioned once in complete frustration something awful Hewlett had said to Abigail’s boyfriend Jordan who responded that the Scotsman wasn’t mean per se, he had just grown up in a bubble.
Maybe Anna had popped it.

“Edmund … what are you going to do with that list?”

“Show it to someone who will know what to make of it.”

She decided that she didn’t want to inquire further. Aberdeen hadn’t grown up in a bubble and as such knew it was in her better interest to not mess with multiple secret service organizations. Anyway, she had to google places that might be fun to drive to in a sports car that cost more than she would likely earn before turning thirty— even with the items she occasionally pocketed and pawned supplementing her income.

Anna ran to find Edmund as soon as the short interview had concluded. Inspector Tallmadge, who had invited her to call him Ben, had proven himself far more of a gentleman than the media had portrayed him to be in the wake of the Sarah Livingston investigation. It had done little to calm her nerves.

Nothing about the conversation she had with the Inspector or his federal and— albeit briefly— international colleagues made any sense. From what she understood, Senator Benedict Arnold, a Republican who had made a name for himself as an honest politician (having been elected by a population who wanted to see the legislative branch of government shut down and then doing his level best to do just that on Capitol Hill) had failed to show up at a scheduled event. He, or someone who had access to his Twitter account, had made multiple public declarations of love to her friend Peggy, who had also failed to show up at the same fundraiser, from an unregistered mobile device whose last use had been triangulated to DeJong Tavern. Monsieur Lafayette indicated that he had reason to believe Arnold’s disappearance was connected to the rise of radical Islam. Even if she took the smartphone as evidence, Anna failed to understand how there could possibly be a connection between a senator who seemed as set on undermining the United States Government as its overseas enemies, Peggy Shippen, and a dive bar in a small town so far removed from the complicated world of politics.

Ben assured her that she was not considered a suspect, apologizing that the bar itself would need to remain closed until further notice to allow CSI to sweep it for evidence. Assistant Director Hamilton had shown her the search warrant and asked her if she was willing to accompany them to the property, they had a few additional questions that would be better asked on site.

Anna complied. Despite the reservations she had developed in recent years towards the police and her hesitation around the man accused and acquitted of one of the most grotesque examples of abuse of position, she was happy to perform her civic duty and assist the investigation however she could. Patriotic duty aside, she had to visit the tavern. She had to say goodbye to the place and to her dream of one day owning it.

Tears pooled in her eyes as she considered what Mr. DeJong had told her over the phone. DeJong Tavern was to be the next location of America’s Neighborhood Bar and Grill. The sale of the property was all but finalized. There was no need to reopen after the police had finished. She had been made redundant. Her letter of reference would depend on how quiet she could keep the police.

The news would have been devastating under any circumstance. All Anna could think about
however was her confession to Edmund that she had gone behind his back to make sure he had the required credit rating to be approved for a half million dollar loan to secure the rights to a business that had quite likely already lost its future by that point. Now she was unemployed and he was clearly hurt into thinking that the affection she had shown him was as counterfeit as the signature she had forged.

By the time she found Edmund reading a handwritten letter in the study she was crying. He rose instantly to embrace her. Holding her tightly as she once again wept into his sweater, he asked what happened, curing himself for not rejoining Abe in the basement and promising her protection from harm in whatever form it chose.

Anna explained through sobs that her tears had nothing to do with the missing person or the individuals charged with carrying out the related investigation - who had all been surprisingly cordial to her, as had Judge Woodhull in their presence. After telling him about the corporate takeover, Anna tried to admit that Edmund had been correct in his earlier assertion.

“You were right, I should have never tried to marry my material wants to my romantic inclinations. I should have never forged you name or ask a favor or fallen in love or tried to force you to go along with any of it-”

Her apology was interrupted by an open mouth kiss. It was short lived, as Anna was too stunned to return it.

“When I spoke earlier,” Hewlett state plainly after taking a deep breath, “I made the mistake of assuming that I was the same man I knew myself to be prior to meeting you. It was wrong, and perhaps hypocritical of me to imply that your occupational goals delegitimized the feelings you claim to have … for, for me. Me, of all the more worthy men who would seek your hand. It defies all logic, and yet, I find myself in love with you too, Anna Strong.”

Anna’s heart raced as her breathing became erratic. When she was at last able to catch it, she spoke, too surprised to truly be delighted. “Forgive me I … I never … Edmund you needn’t say those things only because I wish to hear them.”

“I’m not. That much I can promise you. I love you, Anna. We will find a way to make this work, all of it. Immigration, your pub, my degree, our romance. Ah … as it so happens, I may already have something of a plan worked out.” Anna looked up at him, smiling as he continued. “Um, at any rate, I likely ought not to bring this up, but we have to move again as soon as possible. I don’t believe I can trust any of our house mates.”

Anna nodded slowly, “What exactly do you have in mind?”

Chapter End Notes

So I have a ton of notes for you this week, many of which are abbreviations you have seen in weeks prior which I have failed to define. Let’s get to it, shall we?

SUPA - a pooling of physics research and post-graduate education in eight Scottish universities (including St. Andrews where I mentioned Edmund having attended in Ch. 2)
DGSE – Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure, the French external intelligence agency
ADIC – Assistant Director in Charge, the individual charged with overseeing a large scale FBI field office
FBI – the American Federal Bureau of Investigation
Mossad; Yossi Cohen – The Israeli Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations; Yossi Cohen, who speaks fluent French, has been its director since 2013
TSA - the Transportation Security Administration, an agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (and to my mind the most secretive of the American three letter agencies, do you have any idea how much research went in to finding out what this department was called?)
JFK – an airport in New York
BND – the Bundesnachrichtendienst, a German intelligence agency
SIS - the Secret Intelligence Service, a UK intelligence agency, also known as MI6

Did I miss any? Do be so kind as to let me know.

Translations and other notes:
l’homme-grenouille – the frog man
harm limitation principle – in the ethics and standards of journalism, harm limitation deals with the question of if everything learned ought to be reported. You’ll find out more about Anna’s father in a few weeks (and mummy dearest tentatively has a bit role in the next chapter!)
hereditary peer – part of a really complex legal system historically comprising of hereditary titles, not super relevant for this story, but don’t worry, you’ll find out more about Hewlett’s background too.
the issue of Cosmo – it has appeared a few times, hasn’t it? In case you were wondering, no, this isn’t based on a single issue (and certainly not the 3.2016 US Edition. The porn comes from a UK issue, the quiz appeared in the German version. Both articles are accessible online.)

Oh! That was rather long, wasn’t it? I hope I cleared up any discrepancies or confusion. Thanks as always for reading! Comments and kudos are always appreciated, never necessary (but hey, if you hated the chapter I already got you started there at the top … it wasn’t that harsh though, now was it?) Anyway, in lieu of what happened in my country of Friday, I am glad I had this story to distract me from panic – really you guys, thanks so much for the hit count on this, knowing that I have people reading something I am putting out is sometimes just the most settling thing, I am not sure how to explain it. You guys rock, I hope you have a beautiful week, and when we next meet we will find out what is going on with John Andre.

XOXO - Tav

Up Next: Committed
The Gamble

Chapter Summary

Tallmadge makes an arrest, Hewlett convinces Simcoe to help him hold the world’s markets hostage, Simcoe struggles with his feelings for Mary, Andre goes to rehab, and Akinbode examines his life only to find that he really detests the sofa in his office.

Chapter Notes

The biggest warning for this chapter is the word count, essentially I’ve given you guys a two week long chapter three weeks late. Before we begin though I want to give a shout out and thanks to Tumblr and AO3 user rapid-apathy for surprising me with this gorgeous moonboard aesthetic.

Alright, let’s do the thing: sexual deviance, light self-harm, harsh language, sport references, street meat, fair trade coffee, OC cameos, bar fights, knife fights, violent kisses, toxic friendships.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At three in the morning, Jordan Akinbode was beginning to regret his decision to sleep on the sofa in his office. The imported leather was soft, but the piece itself was seldom used and the padding was as hard and uncomfortable as the day it had been shipped from the manufacturer. He had been tossing and turning for an hour or so, wondering if avvocati faced similar challenges in finding comfort, or if the lovers of Italian lawyers were more adamant that their partners came home at night. Most nights, Akinbode found himself at his desk long after housekeeping had left and the lights in the hallways had all been shut off. Would things be different when Abigail moved in next month? Expectations aside, he couldn’t imagine how they could be.

His job was stressful but predictable. Nothing of the danger and glamour of the television shows he’d never had the time to watch. He rarely found himself in court, and on the odd occasion that he stood between twelve jurors, his client, a lengthy sentence or a heavy fine, time seemed to warp with his adrenaline. The room blurred as his heart raced, coming into focus only long enough for him to pull a punch. A quick knockout. A moment of public glory which could never be fully enjoyed. He preferred to settle outside of the courtroom, or rather, his firm did, and he was content to comply. Akinbode simply enjoyed battle, the weapons and terrain were of little consequence. Half of corporate law was research and, as such, most of his time was spent reading. The real fight was with his eyes, in keeping them open long past the point of exhaustion, in shutting them when he recognized that he could no longer make sense of the words before him.

He wondered periodically throughout the night when awoken by a jolt of pain from lying on the makeshift bed to which his tall frame was ill-fit if he should get back to work; if he should fire his useless paralegals; if he should craft a letter of complaint to the couch’s designer; if he should just sleep on the floor. He shifted under the weight of the wool coat he was using as blanket, hearing
Akinbode tossed for the next six hours, dozing when he could find a comfortable position, long- 
ning for the couch that had once graced his office before it had been renovated when he could not 
force his eyes to shut. He shifted all night between wanting to get up and make coffee and wanting to go 
home. Work places tended to have that effect on people, he found. When his phone rang ten 
minutes before the alarm was set to go off, he was grateful for the interruption form his thoughts 
and from the lack thereof.

It was going to be a long day. They all were.

“Hey,” he answered. No number appeared on the caller ID, but he figured that anyone ringing him 
on his cell this early in the morning was doing so in error or for personal reasons. A recording 
informed him that he was receiving a call from the NYPD. Akinbode closed his eyes after pressing 
one to accept, waiting for either Simcoe or Rogers to explain how being stopped for a minor traffic 
violation had turned confrontational enough to warrant detention. The line was silent for ten 
seconds before Akinbode offered a more professional greeting.

“Ahm, Akinbode?” said an Englishman, in exact accordance with his expectations.

“Speaking.”

Hewlett spent the next 45 seconds introducing himself. Akinbode knew this because he always 
looked at his watch when the Brit who seemed least at ease with the Queen’s English began to 
stutter over something that should have been simple to articulate.

“What’s good fam?” he responded, smiling. Hewlett hated, or at least seemed thrown off by 
colloquialisms, no matter how dated. He imagined the left defender from his Sunday league squad 
twisting his caricature of a face into an expression of absolute confusion. If Hewlett actually 
harbored any of the prejudices of which he was so often accused, he had never made the mistake of 
voicing these in Akinbode’s presence. Still, he sometimes found it mildly amusing to use slang his 
would-be step son had picked up in prep school - of all places - on someone who was perhaps 
simply afraid to call him on having personally grown up behind a white-picket-fence; an only child 
of doting parents in an upper-middle class suburb.

“Ah, yes well, nothing, nothing is good, you see. I’ve rather found myself in something of a 
predicament.”

Akinbode rose, thanking his bones and muscles with a long stretch for their patience with him the 
night before.

“Sure,” he replied as he walked to his desk waiting for Hewlett to elaborate. He took the 
toothbrush, paste, floss, and mouthwash he kept in a Ziploc from his pen drawer, almost on 
instinct. His parents were both dentists. Tooth had either been his first word or it was a very well-
constructed lie. At any rate, dental hygiene had always been rather high on his list of priorities. 
When he was fourteen he’d had his first and last cavity, having been denied anything but the most 
basic local anesthetic when his father gave him a filling, a trauma he hoped to never relive. Seeing 
the otherwise warm and friendly man from the chair, drill in hand, had altered his perception as 
well as his life goals. For all his flaws, Akinbode never wanted it said that he took pleasure or 
made profit through prolonged torture.

And so, as an adult, he practiced corporate law, insuring that his clients never had to face the pain
of consequence.

He walked to the bathroom to freshen up, wondering if he had deodorant in his gym bag and if he had by some stroke of luck forgotten to take it out of his car, whilst Hewlett sputtered through an apology about the hour of the call.

“I was about to get up anyway. What do you need?”

“I’m, you see, I am being detained. I know it isn’t your specialty but I am in a situation where it would be beneficial to have a solicitor present for questioning and I know you’ve acted-” he mumbled on. Unless he had assaulted and officer, it was unlikely that the police would waste their resources on an interview. He barely knew Hewlett outside of sport, but he couldn’t fathom that Mr. Fair-Play would, under any circumstance, debase himself in the same manner which their other teammates were want to. This likely had to do with immigration. He glanced at his watch, noting that it was not atypical for the INS to make their arrests before sunrise, wondering how long Hewlett had been waiting at the station.

“Questioning? Shit,” he snorted. Hewlett’s visa was still valid for two months or so if he remembered correctly. He could personally get any charges dropped on that fact alone. Still, there was probably a good story in this, and half the soccer team liked him less than usual as of late. Akinbode would waive his fee if his teammate would waive his right to attorney-client privilege. The locker room needed a laugh. “Hewlett, it has been a day. Not even! I know folks who’ve been living in our great nation illegally for thirty damn years without once attracting the attention of the authorities, so tell me, how’d you manage?”

“My,” he responded after a long pause.

“What?”

“My great nation, you said ours and I’m not, strictly speaking, even supposed to be here right now.”

Akinbode rolled his eyes, wondering if it was worth it to explain the ideals on which the city upon a hill was founded and how and why the plural possessive, rather than the singular would always be proper in a statement of patriotic sentiment. Then again, he had yet to open his first can of generic energy drink and Hewlett likely hadn’t taken tea or whatever substance it was the helped him out of bed. It wasn’t worth it.

“Look, we can debate the use of a possessive pronoun in a common expression or you can tell me where you’re at and what you did to land there and I will be down when I can. I wouldn’t worry too much. Assuming the worst, the deportation process can take years and you’ll probably have finished your degree before they even give you a deadline for the paperwork you’ll be given sufficient time to submit. Just stick by whatever story you and Anna agreed to -”

“I, I think there has been a misunderstanding. You see I’ve, ah,” Akinbode looked at his watch again, wondering how long the torcher would last this time. Hewlett, meanwhile, had lowered his voice to a whisper.

“I’ve been arrested for murder. In a rather high profile case it would seem.”

It was going to be a long day.
Akinbode paced the length of the six-stall gent’s for the eight minutes it took him to brush and floss his teeth to meet his approximation of what nine out of ten dentists might be said to recommend. He was in the process of splashing cold water and hand soap on his face when one of the senior partners walked in, greeting him as he unzipped his fly at the urinal.

“Long night?”

Akinbode was never sure how to respond; an honest assessment of the workload would sound like a complaint, playing down his toils served only to insult his own sense of integrity. He elected instead to give his boss an accurate account of what he was able to accomplish in the fourteen hours he had spent at his desk before calling it a night.

“Impressive,” the aging attorney replied as he moved to wash his hands in the sink next to him. “Care to join me in my office for coffee, you look as if you could use it.”

It wasn’t just an offer or an assessment, it was the invitation Akinbode had been positioning himself since his last promotion.

“Another time?” he suggested, “I’ve to visit 1PP for a deposition.”

“Not one of your little friends, I hope. You seem to be out of the office quite a lot recently on their behalf. Perhaps, Jordan, you might do better to reevaluate your priorities … and your peers.”

“A friend? Not entirely,” Akinbode answered, grateful that his deep voice rarely betrayed the emotion behind his words, “I’m acquainted with someone who is being detained in connection with the Arnold Investigation.”

“The Arnold Investigation?” his boss clarified, the fine lines that cut across his forehead transforming into deep creases as his eyebrows raised in astonishment.

Akinbode had glanced at his news ticker as soon as he had gotten off the phone. He was as lost as the rest of America as to what might have happened to the Pennsylvania senator, but he was in possession of enough of details to defend the wanting of his presence at a deposition.

Benedict Arnold was scheduled to speak at a huge rally being held for his part’s presumptive nominee the night prior. Authorities had reason to believe that foul play was involved and were quick to respond accordingly. The case had been assigned to an overzealous inspector with whom Akinbode was well acquainted. Benjamin Tallmadge, who prior to having his name scandalized had grown up down the street from him, was proving himself a more interesting talking point for pundits and morning media personalities than the acts of the investigation that had thus far been made public.

“I know the arresting officer,” he shrugged, “the suspect is a legal alien with a big mouth and a weaker command of the English language than his nationality might otherwise suggest. I’m all but certain that I can have this sorted and dismissed in no time.”

“No, white guy, lose connections to aristocracy back in Europe,” he replied sharper than intended.

His boss took no notice. He advise him to bill for his time to Wachtell Lipton and to stop by for coffee the following morning. He seemed impressed that Akinbode knew how to exploit his
connections. Akinbode wondered if that were so or if he was, as he rather imagined, simply being strangled by the interpersonal ties that too often seemed to tighten like a noose.

He found his sport bag in his trunk where he’d hoped it would be. As he shifted around the dirty kit and still damp towel from Sunday in search of the toiletries he knew must be in there somewhere, his phone rang again. This time a woman was sobbing on the line in broken English. Her accent was amplified by her tears to the point that Akinbode found himself struggling to understand a single word.

“Aberdeen? Baby girl, you alright?”

“Monsieur ‘Ewlett was arrested. Anna Strong just called to ask me to get ze car of him.”

“I know, I’m on my way down to police headquarters now?” his voice raised as if he had just asked a question. It was a strange morning indeed. Akinbode wondered if he had, in fact, actually managed to fall asleep on the small sofa his firm had had imported from Milan. If that was why his shoulders still hurt, if that was why it was taking him so long to find the bar of deodorant and the bottle of Jean Paul Gaultier he knew he kept – in the side pocket. Well. That was sorted at least, he though as he sprayed himself with something that had been a gift from one of the interchangeable Shippen girls on their last family visit to New York.

Still, it didn’t explain his shoulders, Hewlett’s arrest, or Aberdeen - who’d maintained that she absolutely ‘ated ‘im since the day he’d made her acquaintance, and likely before that as well - was so torn up over it. He had never been much of a fan of Dr. John Andre, but if he awoke with the dream intact he would have to write it down and ask him about its possible interpretations.

“Sorry, ze signal is shit in Setauket.”

“I know, I know. What’s up though?”

Aberdeen explained that she may be in trouble. Hewlett asked her to translate a telephone conversation they had overheard a French secret service agent having with a few high profile players (though lizard people was the term she’d used.) She had transcribed what she had heard and given Hewlett the names of traded entities which stood to profit the most from the fall of the US Dollar and the subsequent rise of the Euro, Shekel, Lira and Pound over the coming months. She wondered if that was illegal. Akinbode wondered if he could have been given a better weapon. After thanking her for the information, assuring her that she wouldn’t get in trouble (but not to mention it to anyone else until he’d had time to review the charges being brought against his client) he had his dream turn back into a nightmare when she mentioned that she was in the car with her boss, Mr. Woodhull. Someone had to drive her to the car with the stick shift she and few others knew how to operate, or? Sure, Akinbode agreed reluctantly, kicking his back tire both in frustration and in hope that the shot of pain would wake him if a better reality did exist outside the confines of his evidently strange subconscious. No such luck.

“Can you hand the phone over?” he asked cautiously.

Two minutes on the phone with Abe Woodhull told him the following – the man had no business being behind the wheel, he likely hadn’t been listening to his Au Pair’s conversation, and that even if he had by chance overheard the conversation it its entirety, he seemed to be either too inebriated
or too want of intellect to use the information in any purposeful way. Akinbode advised him to let Aberdeen drive him home, they could pick up the other vehicle later on. He spoke to his girlfriend’s friend once more, assuring her that he had this all under control. When he hung up he said a short prayer for her safety before driving to face the son of the man who had taught it to him.

The interrogation room where Hewlett waited in handcuffs was small and ill-lit.

“So I talked to Aberdeen on my way over,” Akinbode said in lieu of a greeting.

“Great, then you’re already up to speed,” Hewlett said as he tried to reach into his coat pocket. “I need you to give this to Simcoe.”

“Man, I don’t want to go near your blood money. Keep that shit to yourself. You’re going home today, that much I can assure you. Give it Simcoe yourself if you are that set on dragging everyone you know down with you,” he snapped. He could see he’d have his work cut out proving the client’s innocence if the man was set on furthering his criminal activity within the enemy camp. Hewlett looked uncharacteristically disheveled. His eyes were bloodshot and his hair was a mess. He’d seen him in this state before after what Abigail insisted had been a suicide attempt, an idea he gave little merit. Akinbode prided himself on being able to scope out weakness. Edmund Hewlett was cold and self-centric, but he wasn’t by any means suicidal; he loved himself too much to play such games.

“I’m not quite sure that is an option. Ah, going home, I mean.”

“You didn’t say anything did you?” Akinbode asked, his heart falling.

“No, I … no, of course not,” he asserted, adding under his breath, “I was certainly told quite a bit.”

“Forgive me were you … roughed up? You look a little-”

“I cut myself shaving and Anna maintains that she likes my hair better this way.”

Akinbode shook his head as he spit into the palm of his hand, using the moisture to rework his client’s dark brown hair back into its usual order against Hewlett’s crises of disgust and protest.

“Listen to me, finance or not, if the NYPD decides to film this interview it could be used by the prosecution at trial. I want you to sit up straight, I can’t have you looking depressed or deranged. No matter what you actually say, should this go to court, jurors’ gut reaction is driven by the visual.” He pinched and patted the cheek that he wasn’t certain if the Scotsman had full feeling in or not. “Now, tell me, what do these bastards possibly have on you of all people?”

Seeing that he had a series of unheard and unread messages, Hewlett stayed inside the car when he and Anna arrived at the former DeJong Tavern, in spite of his finance’s gentle pleas. The carpark was flooded with men in blue paper jumpsuits carrying metal cases full of equipment, no doubt to prod their way around her establishment, looking for evidence he doubted they would find. Fights
didn’t break out when Caleb was pouring. The mood was always jovial, and the bearded part-time bar tender was more than happy to throw out anyone threatening the festivities—literally, if need be. He, and everyone else he knew—save for perhaps Wakefield, who he couldn’t imagine quarreling with anyone, and Andre, who kept his drunken pity parties at home and work where they belonged—had found himself out on their ass once or twice. The same had probably happened to the senator, if in fact, he had been there at all.

Occasionally, Hewlett reasoned, Abe Woodhull—who claimed to have seen Arnold last night—fancied himself politically minded. When the mood struck him, he spent half the day on the couch arguing openly with the characters on C-SPAN who never seemed to take his suggestions to heart. Had Benedict Arnold truly been among the tavern’s patrons, would Abe somehow not have recognized a prominent politician sitting down the bar from him and being a prominent politician and taken the opportunity to offer his opinions where they could be heard? Hewlett considered for a moment that Abe’s real passion was screaming at the TV midday, and that, quite possibly, if his father had been watching another station the night before, young Abraham would have spent his afternoons yelling at court shows or soap operas instead.

Anna winced as Inspector Tallmadge joined her at the door as if she expected to find a corpse inside. Hewlett snapped a photo when her back was turned, making sure to get as many uniformed officers as he had the possibility to. He had something of a plan. Now to find out who he needed to bribe or beg to actualize it.

The night before, somewhere between Anna’s confession that she had forged his signature to run a credit check and his discovery that her snores, while at first endearing, were rather difficult to sleep through, Hewlett had applied for a number of quick loans online, only to discover that without a full-time job and a sufficient percentage of the desired sum in liquid assets, every last one of his applications had been declined. Traditional banks, which typically had stricter lending policies were likely to echo their answer. He’d been unable to sell his car in the nearly three months it had been on the market, and, in the middle of the night, not knowing where else to turn, he’d done what he was almost famous for and implored his mother for financial assistance, offering his horses as collateral.

She had yet to respond.

Luckily, he had a rather large family. Hewlett took a deep breath, wishing that he hadn’t promised Anna that he would quit smoking altogether as he prepared himself for the onslaught.

“What the actual fuck you think mum’s going to do with a team a’ bloody polo horses? I’ll settle with you though, six thousand for the whole lot. But, with you still paying the stable fees, or does mum pay those too? Anyway, Paris is beautiful this time of year and no, neither Fabienne nor I were injured in the recent attacks. Thanks for not asking. Ever notice how you only bother ringing when you want money? Something to mull over at that pub you’ll never own I guess. Cheers!” His little brother had a point, several really, none of them immediately helpful. He’d rung back a few minutes later to ask if Edmund was really getting married, said he wasn’t really angry about the horse thing, although he was fairly sure their parents and sisters were, and that he really should make more of an effort to keep in touch. “I guess you work for NASA now so well done there.” Eugene added before hanging up a second time. Edmund realized he still had yet to tell his family that he had failed to graduate and that his employment options were slim at best.
Someone from HR at the planetarium called, both reminding him of how far he was from where he’d ever expected to be at this stage in his life, and that she needed to see a valid copy of his work visa.

Hewlett sighed once more. Not having received any hate mail from Eleonore, he decided to go ahead with his plan. He sent his younger sister the picture he had taken and dialed her number.

“Edmund!” a familiar voice rang out in surprise. “Why, it has been ages! How long have you been in the colonies now? Two years? Three? I thought you were coming home.”

“Ah, yes, I … good afternoon, Effie. Is my sister around? I rather need to speak with her. I truly wish this wasn’t the aspect of my personality presenting itself as dominant these days, but there is something which … or wait,” he said, remembering that his favourite sister’s best friend and flat mate also had a press card and might know where to start with his request, “Maybe you can help instead?”

“Aw! Ellie’s not even gotten round to proposing and I am already being treated like a member of House Hewlett,” she laughed. “But, seriously, what do you need?”

He explained, as he had briefly to his mum in an email, that his finance managed a bar and wished to purchase the business from the owner who was selling it to finance his retirement. Evidently, he had made a deal with Applebee’s—an American chain restaurant – but there was reason to believe that the deal had fallen through, or might before it is finalized. A US Senator was murdered on the property last night. Could she perhaps find out if whoever made acquisitions at Applebee’s knew this and were they planning to pull their offer? Could she perhaps leak the photo he’d taken to a news agency or two if not?

“Wait, Benedict Arnold?” She repeated the name several times in varying pitches before adding that his name was all over the news in Great Britain, but the media were treating the story as something of a terror attack, saying that the threat came from ISIS, and at this time no one knew if the senator was alive. And you are saying he was murdered in a dive bar? Edmund tried to backtrack, explaining in the vaguest way possible that Britain’s standing in global finance and within the EU if he had understood correctly was partially contingent on the verifiable parts of the story not getting out. Not yet.

“Okay. Okay, I’ll see what I can find out. Stay on the line though, don’t think you’re getting out of talking to your sister. Everyone is furious at you, you know?”

“Everyone? Well then, it would seem, my dear, that things are exactly where we left them.”

Hewlett would never speak to his sister, or find out if Applebee’s had had second thoughts about purchasing the property. Uniform was knocking on his car window, inquiring why he was telling a foreign news agency that Senator Arnold had been murdered in a dive bar before being ordered to step out of the vehicle.

Hewlett was cuffed and brought to headquarters, where after giving his fingerprints, passport and every other form of identification he had at his immediate disposal, he was thrown into a little room and told to wait. When an inspector had come in to ask him a few question, he’d demanded the presence of a solicitor.
“So let me get this straight,” Akinbode said, “in the past few hours you find out about an acquisition, use the disappearance of a public official to try and halt the purchase, obtain what is essentially insider trading information from the Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure, which, based on your give this not-at-all-suspicious-envelope to Simcoe, I assume you are planning to try and exploit? You use terminology at a crime scene that you didn’t actually enter explicitly referencing murder – Fuck, Hew, what if they had just found a dead body inside?”

“I wasn’t thinking … on that; the scenario in its entirety seems very unlikely if I am being honest.”

“But you didn’t say anything to the police directly?”

“Beyond I’m afraid there has been a misunderstanding and I demand to speak with my solicitor? No. Not a word.”

“Good man.”

Hewlett asked if Akinbode thought he could build a defense to which he nodded, admitting it wouldn’t be easy. He told him that Tallmadge was - contrary to the media’s portrayal- one of the most upstanding officers he would ever encounter, but not to let that blind him. Ben Tallmadge was, at least in this instance which had Hewlett handcuffed to a chair, the enemy, no matter how decent, generous, or friendly he otherwise seemed.

Hewlett asked a series of questions which lead Akinbode to the realization that he hadn’t been stateside during the Sarah Livingston hearing. He offered the Brit a short version of the tale he rather wished had been forgotten. Sarah Livingston, a young nurse, was being robbed and rang the police. When they showed up thirty minutes later she had killed three men in self-defense with a hand gun that was legally purchased by and registered to her. Sarah was arrested, detained, and found dead in her holding cell a few days later. Tallmadge, who’s DNA had been found on and in her, was eventually acquitted of any wrong doing, but his name carried a stigma. Crime went up after the acquittal because women were afraid to call on the police’s help.

“And I left Anna with him?” Hewlett winced as understanding swept over him, “That was the look she was giving me, that’s why she wanted Richard to stay during her interview. I left her with him.”

“Did you not here me? Ben is innocent. Always has been, nothing you can do against spin. Boy is the son of a preacher. Your girl is safe. Anyway, she can’t be that scared. I’m sure she and her mom had multiple conversations about him. Nancy basically owes him her current post after all.”

Hewlett looked slightly more perplexed than usual.

“Jesus Christ have Mercy, I know your relationship is fake but have you never discussed anything real? Or are you truly that daft? Anna’s mother has been the District Attorney since you arrived in this beautiful country of ours. After Tallmadge was acquitted her predecessor resigned, and Nancy Smith, who as a state prosecutor gained a reputation for being tough on crime after breaking a Bratva boss on the stand in the late nineties, won the election in a landslide. One of her first acts was promoting Tallmadge to the rank of Inspector, perhaps in thanks. To my mind, it may play into why he was assigned to the Arnold Investigation, but then I’m sure he would have otherwise earned everything on his own merits. Went to Yale, you know.”

“Anna only mentioned that her mum wanted nothing to do with me. And that the two of them don’t exactly see eye to eye,” he paused, changing course. “So John Andre, in all of his brilliance, thought it wise to suggest that I marry the daughter of the DA for a fucking Green Card, while living under the same roof as the state’s Chief Justice, with a family who hates me, who Anna also
has a sorted personal history with. It is like I was set up for failure,” he mused quietly.

“Well the good news is you fell so in love with her that you broke your impossible moral code, killed a senator, spied on a French spy, then -high on your victory- tried to commit an act of corporate espionage in earshot of the police? Was the plan all along? Kill someone so prominent that it would scare off the competition, drive down the price, and buy the bar with funds you mean to obtain from insider trading? Doubt Simcoe will go for it, mind.”

“Is that honestly what you think? I literally found out about Anna’s intention to buy DeJong Tavern last night. Everything that happened since was happenstance.”

“It doesn’t matter what I think happened. That is the general idea Tallmadge is going to throw at you, so come,” Akinbode looked at his watch, “I can’t imagine we will have more than a quarter hour, let’s rehearse what you’re going to answer and what you are absolutely not to say.”

They rehearsed.

And rehearsed.

And rehearsed.

Two hours passed without a single interruption form New York’s finest. Akinbode was growing impatient, Hewlett agitated.

“What?”

“Money coins. I’ll go get us some of the worse coffee you’ve ever suffered. Milk? Sugar?”

Hewlett stood up and instructed his lawyer to reach into his back pocket. “White tea, no sugar, but not if they only have powdered milk. Then black with lemon.”

“Beggars can’t be choosers. I’ll try to find out from the floor what is taking so long.”

One Police Plaza was buzzing. From the vending machines Akinbode could hear the Nancy Smith screaming at someone in her deep, throaty voice, someone whom he hoped wasn’t Ben but feared might be. That wasn’t good. Ben tended to be more aggressive when he found himself under stress – something he knew both as a defender and as someone who’d played a number of the same sports back in high school. It was useful, having someone on your squad who was always good for a late goal, but facing someone who approached the world with that level or intensity in a professional setting intimidated even him. Akinbode bought Hewlett a cup of tea he hoped met his specifications. He prayed that the stuttering, sniveling Brit could hold it together during the interrogation. Rodgers would have been comparatively easy to get off; hell, he would rather have been tasked with establishing reasonable doubt for Simcoe -whose guilt he would have no question over had the ginger been arrested instead. He kicked the vending machine, causing the steaming hot liquid dripping from the faucet to spray on his leg. He wasn’t dreaming and it was high time that he abandoned that hope. He’d barely slept, his shoulders ached, and this was going to be a long day.
They all were.

Especially when they involved teammates, current and former alike.

“Tallboy!” he cried out when he saw Ben standing over someone’s desk on the way back, clutching a number of thick files he assumed had nothing to do with this client.

“Air Jordan!” Ben greeted him in return. They tried to shake hands but finding it impossible, settled on rubbing elbows awkwardly.

“How is thirty treating you?” Akinbode asked. He had to turn down Tallmadge’s invitation on Monday, having previously made plans with Simcoe, whose birthday fell on the same day. Plans, he thought bitterly, that work had made him cancel like everything else that might have proven remotely pleasant. By his hasty calculations he spent more time hanging out with his chosen peers in police stations than in pubs. Ben’s expression told him he wasn’t alone.

“How do you think?”

“Not well from the looks of it. Coffee or tea?” he offered, holding the cups out. Hewlett would forgive him.

“Which one is coffee?” Ben asked, looking at the two identical beverages. Jordan handed him the one he’d let spill slightly in an effort to snap himself into another level of consciousness.

“I don’t think it matters, that machine makes the weakest beverage I’ve ever had.”

“Ironically the decaf tastes alright, but what is the point?”

“Exactly. I don’t think my client is missing much. Say how much of a wait-”

“Hard to say. The DA is in the process of recusing herself from the case so the whole process is on standby while I wait on an ADA to be appointed and to issue a proper search warrant, which of course no one is outright willing to do given that the suspect rents a room from Richard Woodhull. It is a mess. And the feds are involved, which is always an exercise for the temperament.”

Akinbode studied Tallmadge as he blew on his tea and took a long, slow sip. His pretty, soft features had likely been tied in knots all morning, his slightly too long hair fell in his face without him noticing. Akinbode wondered if this was a Pisces trait, and had half a mind to ask Hewlett when he got back if only to piss the astrophysicist off. He smiled. Tallmadge was done. They had this.

“Why are you pursuing this?”

“We have to take every lead seriously at this point. Furthermore, don’t you find it a little suspicious that your boy moved to this country two years ago, barely has any social contacts, and the one’s that he does have all seem to immune him from the rule of law?”

“That sounds circumstantial at best.”

“If there is a connection between Hewlett and Arnold I mean to find it. Thanks for the coffee, or tea, I better get back. I’ll do my best to have you out of here before lunch.”

“Thanks, this doesn’t count as me taking you out for drinks by the way. How was your party?”

“There was none,” Ben paused to lament.
“Ah, dude.”

“No it’s, it was probably for the better. The calm before the storm, you know? I ended up just having a few beers with my dad. We’ll get some after this is all behind us.”

“Tonight then?”

“Confident, are we? I have enough to hold him,” he warned.

“We’ll see.”

“And Jordan, for the record, you look like shit too.”

“Burning the midnight oil. As always.”

“I thought things had settled down for you.”

“Domestically, perhaps. Abby is moving in next month. The job is still shit.”

“I’d imagine,” Ben shook his head, “How did a kid I went to Sunday school with end up selling his soul to corporate law?”

“I don’t have enough of your pops in my life anymore I guess. Evidently neither do you. You know your side is as corrupt and backward as mine, right?” he joked.

“It would seem so. Say where have you been on Sundays? Wachtell Lipton doesn’t have you working then too, do they?”

“Rarely. No it uh … do you remember Robert Rogers?”

“To clarify, the Scotsman who used to buy us beer at 7-11 in our more rebellious youth?”

“One and the same. I play football, well, soccer, on a team with him now. Matches are usually on Sundays, only time I get a chance to socialize. You should come round sometime.”

“You should wash your mouth out with soap for calling ‘soccer’ football. In the name of all that is holy,” Ben shook his head.

“Drinks tonight then?”

“Tomorrow. I’ve been up since around two.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

Ben came in forty-five minutes later with a canister of coffee, an ash tray and a file larger than Akinbode would have imagined.

“You smoke?” he asked Hewlett after uncuffing him, producing an etui Akinbode had seen before.

“I’m trying to quit.”

Ben held the gold plated case up to Jordan.
“I pretend to be an athlete on Sundays, so no.”

“Same way you pretend soccer is a sport?”

“Touché.”

Hewlett looked confused.

“Soccer is what we call football,” Akinbode offered, “and Inspector Tallmadge is doing exactly what I warned you he might. Charm you into thinking he harbors you no ill will in hopes that you’ll give him something he can use in return. What is in the folder, Ben? You said you’d have me out of here by lunch.”

Tallmadge went over Hewlett’s criminal record, a series of misdemeanors and one arrest for aggravated assault.

“Charges were never filed,” Hewlett clarified.

“Relevance?” Akinbode interjected.

Tallmadge held up a finger as he read the report to himself. Leaning across the table, he asked in a low, level tone, “If you were to kill somebody, Mr. Hewlett, would you do so in your girlfriend’s bar with a steak knife?”

Akinbode wondered what exactly the police had uncovered at DeJong’s. He wondered what he was doing there, and why he had spent the better half of the past four hours discussing strategy with Hewlett when his client answered with calculated nonchalance, “Probably not given that I lack the upper body strength to break more than the first four layers of skin as your report may also indicate.”

“Hewlett,” Akinbode said, intending for him to stop. No such luck. Rogers, even Simcoe, would have proven easier to defend.

“Lads fight sometimes. It came to nothing,” he almost smiled.

“Am I to take that to mean that this is normal behavior for you? You were found afterwards by a patrol car wandering naked through the woods.”

“Not my proudest moment I’ll admit.”

Akinbode wondered if Ben could tell that he was lying. Hewlett probably had wet-dreams about the time he stabbed Simcoe and lived to tell the tale.

“It was in self-defense. Check my phone which you confiscated, we’re still mates,” he lied twice more.

“Be that as it may, let the record show that the suspect has a history of violence, a familiarity with Setauket’s terrain as well as with DeJong Tavern.”

“May I inquire into what exactly was found in the bar?”

“Nothing,” the inspector answered.

“Nothing? Inspector -”

“Absolutely nothing. Not so much as a single finger print. Whoever was there last night certainly
took measures to cover their tracks, though there appears to have been a struggle in the basement storage area. Ms. Strong informed us that some of the inventory couldn’t be accounted for. Tell me, Mr. Hewlett, do you favor Strongbow or Magner’s?”

“Don’t answer that.”

“Moving on then, with regard to the bar manager, your finance, no?” Hewlett nodded. Tallmadge continued, “Anna Strong nee Smith, very recently divorced, put in paperwork this morning for a marriage license. How long have the two of you been together?”

“On and off for two years.”

“She said the same. Reading through her social media updates suggests otherwise.”

“Do you put everything online, Inspector?”

“Not everything. That said, if I was in a relationship I certainly wouldn’t complain about the lack of sex in such a way: February 23rd, 2016, 15:36: How long has this dry spell been? How long must it last? at - Rainbow Station with - Caleb Brewster, Sally To, and 2 others” he paused, “317 ‘likes’. December 16th, 2015-”

“I’m a virgin,” Hewlett interrupted. Akinbode brought a palm to his face.

“Need I remind you that you are under oath?” Tallmadge asked.

“Ask my cardiologist or better yet, my multiple therapists. For the past nearly two decades I’ve been on drugs that have hampered with my ability to achieve and maintain an erection. Anna and I have never, and likely will never have sex,” he laughed. Akinbode wondered if he was being ironic. He might have done better to warn him that that sort of humor was largely wasted on Americans. “It’s not surprising that she would complain from time to time,” Hewlett continued, “but I should think there is more to a relationship than simply a physical element.”

Akinbode wondered if Hewlett had ever tried dating before deciding to marry. He wondered if Anna, who had proven time and again that she wasn’t smart enough to pass the bar (and must have given up on pretending to try) was also so dumb as to tell her parents that she was planning on marrying a foreigner she barely knew. She was certainly dumb enough to file for a marriage license whilst Hewlett was in custody.

He wondered if she had had Aberdeen drive her into the city, and what Aberdeen might decide to take in return - hoping it would be one of Anna’s many books with which to better herself. They were certainly doing Anna no good boxed up as they were. It occurred to him that perhaps the multiple trips he made from Selah Strong’s apartment to his car with Anna’s heavy crates were the reason for the pain in his shoulders and neck, and that he had been too hard on the imported Italian sofa he’d accused of being hard on him.

“I imagine, in what might prove the best case scenario for you, Mr. Hewlett, such a relationship might also involve quite a bit of paperwork, am I right?” Tallmadge asked, clearly unamused.

“Rendition,” Akinbode protested, “Hewlett, you don’t have to answer.”

“But you should. Let me outline what I think happened – Anna Strong, a girl with all the degrees and connections one could ever hope for, hides her bar results after her now ex-husband is sent off to Iraq as sentencing for a drug offence, serving three years under then General Arnold. At the same, Anna befriends Peggy Shippen and uses this connection to charm Arnold into coming into
her bar on a night she isn’t working. Using you as her alibi—

“Enough,” Hewlett spat, more forcefully than Akinbode thought him capable of.

“Mr. Hewlett, Miss Shippen has already admitted to the connection. She came in this morning to clear her name of any suspicion and has a solid alibi for last night.”

“As do I, as does Anna,” Hewlett shot back, reaching for a cigarette, “may I?”

The Inspector nodded. Akinbode fumed under the realization that Anna had passed the bar and had been standing behind one by choice. What had been the point of all the late night study sessions she’d organized? The flash cards she made, the books she read; how long had it all been for show? He looked at his client, who appeared nervous but not in the least bit surprised at his future wife’s unwillingness to enjoy the benefits that her education should have brought her. That she had so hotly pursued. Akinbode felt let down. He reached for the gold plated etui himself, coughing as inhaled.

“Did it never strike you as off that Ms. Strong chose to work in the Tavern when she could clearly have been doing something more worthwhile with her life?”

“Relevance?” Akinbode questioned, though he was keen to hear Hewlett’s response as well. “I’m sorry, Inspector, who exactly is under suspicion?”

“Did you kill Senator Arnold to impress your finance?”

“Of course not! I could never do such a thing and Anna would never ask. She is interested in American politics, certainly, but like myself, and yourself I should rather imagine, she would never break the law.”

“You right. Anna Strong has never broken the law. But you have. You attacked an unarmed man in the very bar where Arnold was last heard from with a knife, according to witness statements. Tell me, which of your contacts helped you get off that time?”

Akinbode spoke before Hewlett could. “No charges were brought. John Graves Simcoe, the victim in question, denied ever having been injured by my client. If that is all you have, Inspector, than I think we are done here.”

“We’ll be talking to him, rest assured.”

“Fine,” Hewlett muttered.

Akinbode hadn’t been there that night, but he had a rough idea as to what happened from witness accounts. The pub had hosted a beer pong tournament, and John and Edmund both suffered from the sort of hubris that made them think they could beat a bar full of Americans at their own sport, on their own turf. Each round had cost them something like $20 to participate in, and by the time they reached the semifinals, they had run out of cash. Simcoe bet Hewlett’s expensive, and by that point beer-covered clothing in lieu of paying the fee, and when they lost, Hewlett was forced into a fleece blanket which he wore as a toga for the remainder of the evening. At some point, after warm beer had given way to hard liquor, Simcoe made reference to one of the multiple times he’d fucked his pong partner’s ‘fit’ sister (whatever that meant) back in York and found himself with a scratch on his chest. Hewlett was thrown out for the evening, and Easton, who’d called the cops—which wasn’t done—was given a lifetime ban. Abby had been pouring that night. The way she - and half the team - recalled the event, Hewlett hardly came off as a hardened criminal. Why was he doing his level best to play it that way now?
“Mr. Hewlett, immigration questions aside, I’m going to ask that you not leave the area.”

“On what grounds?” Akinbode challenged. “Your theory is circumstantial and speculative. With regard to the only item you were able to find after hours of searching through my client’s file, the single relevant fact lies in that no charges were sought. If you intend to use this as evidence of malicious character or intent, it won’t stand up in court. We both know that, Inspector. Are you done wasting my client’s time?”

Ben looked at the file again. “Your right, Counsel.” And with that the horror was over. Tallmadge thanked them for their time, solidified his plans with Akinbode and bid them both farewell, politely, despite his exhaustion and clear frustration. Hewlett, who seemed to be surprised at being allowed to walk, became cordial once more.

“I’m willing to cooperate in any way I can to put this silly mess behind us, Inspector. I misspoke this morning based on an assumption and nothing more.”

The inspector nodded, “We’ll see.”

“New York’s finest my ass!” Akinbode exclaimed when they were back on the street. He check the time. “Would you look at that? We got out in time for lunch after all, no thanks to you. What the hell was that in there? Acting tough when everyone know knows you know you spend most Saturday nights in your room sipping on canned shellfish, reading dictionaries for fun and shit.” He didn’t know if that was how Hewlett spent his time, or if anyone shared his assumptions. Hewlett didn’t deny them, and so they would be forever solidified in Akinbode’s imagination.

“Ah, well, the Inspector, Tallmadge was it? He seemed rather set on throwing suspicion on dearest Anna, and I simply couldn’t allow that to happen.”

“Listen to me, if you are ever in a situation like that again, think only of yourself. Anna Strong can call on her own senior defense team, she doesn’t need your help.”

“Yes I -well, that sounds accurate. What do you want for lunch? Extra compensation for your added troubles.”


“Want to go to The Newsroom? The have open for lunch on Wednesdays and I know the … um, well, maybe that won’t work out.”

“The Maître d’? What did you stab him too?”

“Nothing so vile, he simply knows about something I should really delete from my laptop, something that I rather wish he didn’t.”

“Alight, Newsroom it is. Come on,” he said, locating and unlocking his car remotely with a beep.

“We can walk. I’d wanted to stop by Barclay’s on the way.”

“This is America, son. The Newsroom is some thirteen blocks from here. That’s more than a mile, no one walks that far.”
“Exactly, this is America, where the hell do you want to park?”

“Point,” Akinbode agreed. He locked his car with the press of another button and followed Hewlett in the opposite direction.

Seven blocks later, after Hewlett had given a far too thorough explanation of what hentai was and Akinbode regretted ever asking, they saw a familiar face waiting in line at a street vendor.

“What the hell is he wearing?” Hewlett muttered.

“Let’s find out, Akinbode said before shouting, “Captain!”

If John Graves Simcoe could divorce effect from cause, he was having a rather pleasant day. He had been passionately kissed by a beautiful woman, unexpectedly made a few trades just before news broke which destabilized the world’s markets – benefiting Barclay’s -and his career- immoderately. His secretary had misunderstood part of his request and rather than make sure that a clean suit was waiting for him at the office, and had taken his spare to be laundered. Simcoe -who had arrived at the office too late to go home and change into something more appropriate of a workplace setting- was left with nothing but a denim shirt to throw on in place of his now ruined Rangers jersey. It had its benefits; the garment was far more comfortable to nap in, he could eat a hot dog from a street vendor without worrying about mustard staining something of value, and it seemed to be driving his closest friend mad.

Oh, and to that note, Edmund Hewlett had evidently spent the morning in an interrogation room.

John Grave Simcoe was having a rather pleasant day indeed.

“Do you realize the power you’ve given me?” he inquired with a smile, “I could go down to the police station right now and file back charges against you for the near mortal blow you dealt, and yet … you seem to think the best way of getting me to vouch for your … upstanding nature is to insult my outfit?” Simcoe placed his left hand - the hand which wasn’t preoccupied with street meat – on his chest in dramatic faux indignation.

Hewlett returned his mocking tone with a hard one, sneering as he asked “Alright, Simcoe, would you like to join us for lunch? I’d wanted to sit down with you to discuss something anyway.”

“Oh, now that can’t be good. Alas, I’ve already my lunch sorted,” he waved his hot dog in front of the shorter man’s face. Hewlett produced a sealed letter from his Burberry Mac and mirrored the gesture. Simcoe broke first and reached for it, handing Hewlett the hot dog which he saw in his periphery was instantly thrown into a street rubbish bin.

Simcoe swallowed. His hands unconsciously fiddled with the edges of the paper as he read. He hadn’t been handed a letter at all.

“Where on Earth did you get this?” he whispered, leaning in.

“Through the combined intelligence of several international secret service agencies. Are you in?”

“Have you lost your damn mind?” Simcoe hissed, noting, as Hewlett perhaps had yet to, that they were discussing insider trading openly –albeit in hushed tones- on a crowded street of the finance
Simcoe glanced at the paper again. He wasn’t selfish. He didn’t enjoy money for the sake of wealth, but he enjoyed the challenge of beating the market. In the four years he had spent in America he felt that he had outgrown his current position at the corporation. Age kept him from promotion, but what he lacked in experience he more than made up for in instinct. Not three hours before he had received a call from Tristram Roberts inviting him back to London to discuss advancing his prospects. It wasn’t common to receive a call directly from the head of Human Resources, but then it wasn’t common to accidentally profit from the free fall ignited by the disappearance of a man one had accidently murdered. Simcoe wondered if he was already guilty on some level of market manipulation. He wondered what shade of morally grey it was to take further advantage of something which he had already benefited from so immensely.

Hewlett, for his part, was making it sound like a great service to the United Kingdom, as he, of course, would. At the end of his short speech – which suffered multiple interruptions between Hewlett’s nervous stutter and Akinbode’s interjections of “Are you kidding me, man?” “I just got you out of detention.” and “I’m done with your ass.”- Hewlett said, as a means of punctuating his greater points, something that would ensure Simcoe’s cooperation; “Inspector Tallmadge is convinced of my involvement. As long as I can keep myself suspect I’ll be able to spy, or, as I did in this case, recruit others to spy for me. We can keep an eye on the hands that control the system, do you see? Europe and her partners are going to profit anyway, why shouldn’t we?”

“You’ve been reading Abby’s novel?” Akinbode asked, “I don’t know how far you are into it but that shit doesn’t end well.”

“Ah, yes, well.”

“Oyster,” Simcoe spoke at last, “You had me at I haven’t done the maths yet.”

“What?”

“You admit it, statistical analysis is a branch of mathematics and not, as you’ve so suggested, a mere science. Submission suits you,” he smiled. “Right lads, where’s lunch?”

As he led the way, Akinbode asked, “You’re actually in on this?”

“Mmm,” squeaked Simcoe in response, hoping the sound didn’t betray his doubt.

“As your lawyer, I’m forced to advise both of you against it, but,” he speech slowed, “as your friend, I want in.”

“I’ll plug the numbers in when I get back to the office, if things pan out as Hewlett suggests they will and I have reason to suspect they might, I’ll start the paperwork and we can have a meeting to discuss investment options tonight. No. Tonight is bad for me. Can you lads meet me at mine tomorrow morning, early? We’ll say, around four?”

Neither offered a word of protest.
Those came first when Simcoe and Hewlett found themselves outside of The Newsroom for the second time that week,

“Honestly, you people act as if there is no other restaurant in the city.”

“Define you people,” Akinbode warned. Simcoe looked at Hewlett, trying to gauge if he had made a similarly insensitive statement earlier. Hewlett shrugged, nonplussed.

“Children of privilege, but take it how you will. We not going in here.”

“I concur. It is a, a rather nice establishment, we’re not all in exactly proper attire, now are we?”

“C’mon, you promised Newsroom, now deliver.”

“I will, only …” Hewlett trailed off as he looked disparagingly at Simcoe. “Seriously mate, denim on denim?”

“I’ve changed my mind,” Simcoe chirped as he strolled towards the entrance, “Let’s do this.”

“At least un-pop your collar,” Hewlett said as he reached up, “I’m not sure what sort of fashion statement you are trying to make but-” he stopped abruptly, seeing what Simcoe was trying to conceal.

“Honestly, that is why half the team thinks y’all two are gay.”

“Is that something people have a problem with? Do we need to have a little team meeting about tolerance and respect?” Simcoe replied as he fought to free himself of Hewlett’s caress.

“What the actual fuck, man?” Akinbode all but exclaimed as his eyes met Simcoe’s bruises. “Is that …?”

“You know right well what it is,” Simcoe affirmed, turning to Hewlett he added, “do you want to tell him, darling, or should I?”

“Are … are you alright?” Hewlett stammered, still lost for words.

“Little rumpy-pumpy ‘innit? Christ mate, how much of life is lost on you?”

“You had … sex then?” Hewlett gaped. Simcoe nodded. Akinbode high-fived him. Hewlett continued to look as if he would prefer to choke on his own vomit that open his wide mouth once more to inquire further. He waited until they were inside, until after Robert Townsend had greeted them and shown them to the table (which another party had been waiting more than an hour for), until after drinks and appetizers had been ordered and Akinbode was in the middle of the harrowing epic of how he’d saved him from being charged outright to finally finish his inquiry;

“You had sex … with Mary Woodhull?”

“That is a rather judgmental tone coming from someone who was just arrested for … murder,” Simcoe smiled mockingly as he readjusted his collar once more. It wouldn’t help. His friends would be staring at his neck for the better part of the afternoon, veiled or not. He wondered if Mary’s light pink lipstick still left a stain, if the contusions had darkened. He could still feel her soft lips turn to stone as they began to pull at his skin.

Five hours later, they still hurt like hell.
He pictured her sitting before him, her cherry blonde hair, slightly undone, flaming in the light of morning sun behind her against the dark interior of the café. There had been something wicked in her smile, something he ought to have taken warning of. Instead, he had returned it. And she moved in for a second kiss. His face flushed as he pulled away, his eyes darting to down Thomas who seemed not to have registered his mother’s aggressions.

“They’re gone, love,” he whispered, as if the Assistant Director with the Unfortunate Name and his companion were still seated meters from them.

“They’re gone,” she echoed excitedly. “It worked.”

Simcoe wanted to ask what exactly her hand was still doing on his chest as it slowly made its way down past the mascara stained Air Asia logo on his jersey. The otherwise breathable fabric was suffocating him as her fingers danced against it. He felt his jeans tighten as Mary slipped her still perfectly manicured nails into his front pocket, rattling with contents that pushed up against the base of his cock.

He wondered if she was aware of what she was doing to him; her eyes hadn’t left his, her gleeful expression hadn’t altered.

“There,” she said as she fished the now half empty pack of Gauloises out of his pocket, placing one between her lips with a flick of her hair and a little wink. “Care to join me?”

“I … can’t,” Simcoe stammered, half hoping that openly acknowledging his erection would, in fact, direct some of his raging blood flow back to his cheeks where it most certainly belonged.

“You can. Follow me closely.”

Mary turned to Thomas, ruffled his long blonde curls and told him to finish his breakfast, she would be right outside where she could see him.

Simcoe meanwhile adjusted his legs, remembering the last time he had had an odd public boner, when he was in the sixth form and Ellie Hewlett and Effie Gwillim came in late in their skin tight riding breeches to a morning maths lecture when he had been at the blackboard. The sound of the giggles that followed might have caused him resurgent embarrassment if he did not also have vivid, and frankly fond, memories of having fucked them both in the stables after class.

Mary reached for his hand and pulled him against her backside. He felt how tight her ass was as he struggled to conceal himself against it.

“I’m so sorry, this,” he started, stopping when he realized that he didn’t fully have a defense that didn’t involve an awkward recollection of a previous escapade.

“Don’t be. It has to look real, remember?” Mary teased as she pulled him outside.

“For who?” Simcoe asked. Mary’s answer came in the form of a kiss.

“You’re married,” he repeated her refrain from hours before remembering all at once the missing corpse of Benedict Arnold, the rodent-like features of her sniveling husband and the pepper spray that was likely still in her purse.

“In name.”
It was her tone more than anything else that killed his erection. Mary seemed simultaneously sad, self-conscious, angry and guilt ridden.

Anger was the emotion she latched onto as she told him to bend down. Against half-hearted protests she kissed, bit and sucked at his neck and earlobe, piercing him so hard as he turned away that he feared he might lose it.

“Mary,” he tried to scold, his voice betraying him with a moan.

“Got a light?”

“I have a job,” he replied as squinted to see his reflection in the glass panels, seeing only Thomas playing with the remains of his egg white omelet and the angry barista, taking enough of a break from listing the ways steamed milk could be mixed with fair trade espresso to give him a disgusted look. “Jealous?” he mouthed, before returning his gaze to Mary.

“You said you would be sleeping in your office for most of the morning. Anyway, your hair is long enough—”

“I can’t wear it down at the office and I should doubt that I’ll be able to avoid everyone I work with while I wait for these bruises to fade.”

“Isn’t that what Wall Street is? Hard drugs and loose women?”

“You’re not. Fuck … Mary, don’t sell yourself short, just because your husband might.”

She bit her lip and averted her gaze. It was the wrong thing to do, he knew, but he couldn’t stop himself. Simcoe took her face in his hands and gave her a long, tender kiss, lifting her slightly as they embraced. Mary Woodhull kissed with a ferocity he had never known, that consumed him and confused him and left him gasping for breath and grasping for reason. Before he placed the petit woman down, he gave her ear a small nip.

“Now were even.”

“Not so fast. Meet me back here at around seven?” she seemed to be thinking aloud. “We have to find that phone before the feds do. I think my prints are on it as well.”

“Do you have a criminal record?” Simcoe asked, wondering why Mary would be concerned.

“One I would rather like to keep a certain politician as far away from as possible.”

Simcoe agreed, lit her stolen cigarette as requested and watched her pace as she smoked it, thinking that the two of them were either the best actors in the world, or the absolute worst.

It had to look real. Did it have to feel so well?

“Mary Woodhull? Remind me who that is again.”

“Hewlett and Anna’s housemate. Abe Woodhull’s wife, cute, reddish hair, works for Unicef.” He wanted to tell them more, he wanted to tell them everything, but he had fought too hard to keep the secret he and Mary shared. The bruises on his next stung as his heart raced at the mere thought of
“Damn,” both of his companions said in unison with completely different inflections.

When the oysters came only Akinbode showed any real interest in eating them. Simcoe played by dipping his index finger into water and rubbing it along the rim of his glass to make it sing. Hewlett advised him on the matter.

“You have to drink some. The glass is too heavy and therefore vibrations are slower. Here,” he demonstrated, taking a sip and making a piercing ring. Simcoe fought back a smile. He hadn’t been aware of what his hands were doing. He never really was. It occurred to him that either very few people knew that or everyone did. When he looked at his hands he could still see Arnold’s blood.

“Have a cigarette with me?”

“Ah, sure. Alright.”

When they stepped outside Hewlett refused however, saying that he promised Anna to be more mindful of his health. Simcoe nodded, both disappointed that Hewlett was growing even more impossibly boring and pleased that he wasn’t shouldering the burden that was his friendship alone anymore.

“I should quit too. I know, I just, I get nervous and I fiddle with things. These make sense.”

“Your nervous?” Hewlett asked as if he had never considered the concept. “If this is about … we really need to think of a code name. Listen, if I’m asking too much—”

“It’s not and you not, but I have to know; why? If this ends badly- even if they end well, if your sins are uncovered, be it twelve weeks or two decades from now, well that’s it, ‘innit? Are you certain?”

Hewlett didn’t answer; instead after a moment of silence in which Simcoe had let half of his fag burn without touching his lips, he switched the topic back to Mary, “I’m not judging you, you know. I’m, it is just, I’m not quite as articulate as I’d rather fancy and I’ve … that is I’ve simply no idea what to say.”

“I actually wish you would in this case. Go on then, give me one of your infamous impositions of what you’d define as moral and righteous. Throw in a few obscure verses from the Good Book, make references to Greek poets and Roman orators no one understands, cite the Bard as if you are the only man alive who was made to suffer iambic pentameter in year eight, just tell me I’m wrong. I’m too tired right now to fight it.”

“Crist, am I that bad?”

“Worse. I can’t fathom how you possibly blind yourself to just how much people loath you.”

“You love me. Apparently. According to a half of the team that doesn’t include us anyway. And no lectures. Not today. Fuck it,” he reached for a cigarette while Simcoe lit himself a new one. “I’m in no place to judge; to save myself from eminent deportation I agreed to Andre’s ridiculous Green Card scheme, fell in love with the girl I’ve implicated, found out she’s using me for money I don’t have and thusly resorted to trying to use information I accidently learned through various acts of espionage to help her out of her self-imposed situation. I got myself arrested and acted like an absolute sociopath in front of a man who wants to charge me with murder. All so … if and more probably, when I go down, no one else has to suffer the consequence of my decisions. I don’t … I don’t even know if she loves me as she claims or if I’m just playing myself. But there it is. Do
what you will, I’m unfit to lead.”

“You’ve picked a hell of a day to try to turn over a new leaf, you know that?”

“And you’re not the only one who’s had an absolute shite past twenty four, or, no. Sex. I forgot. Must be wonderful.”

“Mary and I aren’t having an affair, not really, I, she is having problems in her marriage and, I suppose she thinks it expedient to -”

“How long has this been going on?”

“Is it relevant?”

“No. I suppose it isn’t. You’ve just been, I’m … concerned.”

“Can we not do this? Ever?”

“Fine. But for what little its worth, I think she likes you too.”

“Bugger off, yea?” Simcoe snapped back as Hewlett poked at his bloodied ear.

“Does it hurt?”

“Immensely,” he smiled, thinking of something he could add to torment Hewlett. “Maybe you’ll understand someday.”

When they returned Akinbode had finished the oysters. He was laughing to the maître d’ about something on his phone.

“There you are, I’ll get your entrees then,” Townsend said as his own phone buzzed in his back pocket.

“Maybe you’ve got one too,” Akinbode offered.

“Doubtful. I tweeted something from the band account earlier that when viral and we keep getting more followers. It has been doing that all morning. Whether that translates to more bodies at shows remains to be seen, though I find it doubtful.”

“Let’s see then,” Simcoe said reaching for his device, “Oh, oh wait now, fuck, this is gold. Yes, bring the food and a bottle or port, news like this deserves a proper toast.”

“And here I thought my stocks would plummet after the loss of my best customer,” Townsend remarked dryly.

“Bring a forth glass, have a drink with us,” Hewlett implored.

“I’ll stick to my coffee, thanks.”

“That’s not very … punk rock of you, now is it?” Simcoe peeped.

“Very good, sir,” Townsend said as he left.
John Graves Simcoe was having a rather pleasant day, despite the murder, the insider trading and Akinbode’s insistence that Andre checking himself into rehab was a quadrennial event, or, as he chose to simplify it for his audience “about as regular as a World Cup or a Diana inquiry.”

Hewlett maintained that he was proud of Andre for seeking the help he needed. Akinbode confessed that he saw the same elephant in the room everyone else was trying to ignore; Abigail was clearly smitten. Simcoe was just glad to have him far away from the people he seemed set on hurting, especially now that he knew exactly how close he himself was to the line that should never be crossed.

By the time their main course arrived with the bottle they had ordered, Simcoe and Hewlett had taken to reading texts from the group chat aloud, which Akinbode explaining the finer points of the dialogue they only half understood.

“No, that is a reference to Arijan Ademi, the Dinamo player holding Roger’s gambling wins in dispute”

“You’re kidding. A UEFA decision? That is what their feud is about?”

It was by now common knowledge that Rogers thought Andre owed him money, as was often the case. The current argument, like the countless that had preceded it, would likely never be resolved. It was unsurprising that it was over something petty, impersonal and uninteresting. It always was.

Hewlett read on in his early canny Rogers impersonation. Simcoe responded to the continued, increasingly incoherent, demands that he not leave without first paying a sum of $200 as Andre himself did, by ignoring them completely and waxing poetic. At some point it had ceased to be funny. Among John Andre’s many talents was the ability to play a martyr while confessing to his faults. He sent various well-thought-out apologies and well-wishes to most of the members of the team individually, though he might have done better to have simply written “Love and pity me, as I do you when it otherwise suits my interests” fifteen times. Akinbode got something in Italian, which he said was congratulatory and superfluous – he wrote back bluntly, “hai detto che mi avrebbe aiutato a spostare casa.”

Simcoe’s missive was itself restricted to sport, with compliments to his management of the team as its captain, which must have been rather difficult for John Andre to write. It resonated very little with someone who was so glad to see him go. Even Rogers received a fond farewell after Andre wrote in all caps that he would never, under any circumstances, be paid the $200 he most certainly was not owed.

Hewlett received nothing. He would find out weeks later that Andre had been cautioned not to speak to him directly while charges of medical malpractice - which he had been unable to persuade his former research collaborator not to report - were being investigated. For the moment, with no further insight as to why he had been singularly ignored, Hewlett let the slight embitter him.

Akinbode was annoyed by the whole of it, if he should have to suffer through a text in his second language, why not everyone else? Technically, Simcoe informed him, though it be his primary, English was his second language if they were assigning languages a lineal numbering system. “Maybe Andre isn’t done showing off and is trying to write you something in Latin?” he suggested. It annoyed him that Hewlett had been left out of the fun – he seemed hurt. Simcoe wondered if he
would have an opinion on this at all if Hewlett had not unknowingly offered himself as a decoy.

“Alright lads. Let’s take a selfie and send the good doctor off with a parting toast.”

Chapter End Notes

I don’t have too many terms that weren’t immediately defined in the text this time, but before I shower you all in my affections:

**Wachtell Lipton** - one of New York’s more prestigious corporate law firms

**Strongbow / Magners** - brands of hard apple cider; I personally prefer Magners (which is sold as Bulmers in its native Ireland)

**Rainbow Station** - an erotic shop in NYC

**Arijan Ademi** – a Macedonian midfielder who tested positive for doping in a Champion’s League Qualifier in which his club, Dinamo Zargreb beat Arsenal 2 -1. The result was allowed, the player was suspended for four years.

“*Hai detto che mi avrebbe aiutato a spostare casa.*” - Italian, “You said you’d help me move house.” (And I am so, so, sorry if I wrote this wrong. I get a chance to use Italian one every two years or so and as much as I wish it weren’t the case, I am pretty lapse about reviewing my grammar in the interim.)

Thank you guys so much for reading, as always! I know I’m awful, giving you guys such a long update after such a long wait, but I was pretty busy before going on holiday and not sure where to break this up I left it in its 25 page glory. Comments and Kudos are always appreciated, never necessary. I hope that you are enjoying the last days of summer.

XOXO – tav

Up Next: keep your friends close and your enemies ... busy
The Front Line

Chapter Summary

Watching the detectives.

Chapter Notes

It occurs to me that I have reached a part in this narrative when I can no longer produce weekly updates. Given the nature of the plot, my recent chapters are weighing in at around 15K words. This takes a little longer to produce than I have come to expect and may have established a pattern for posting. Hate to say it, but *Hide and Seek* is going bi-weekly (at best). Thanks for your patience with these extended pauses, and as always, for your continued readership. I really appreciate it!

*This* chapter however I decided to break up. We have seen so little of the cops so far and so much goes down in this chapter’s second act that I did not want their narratives to get lost or forgotten. (*…like Senator Arnold?*)

Anyway, you’ll get your romance and rejection by the weekend if everything goes according to plan.

As I’ve no trigger warnings this go around, shall we proceed? Fabulous!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Of all of the glamorous locations to which Aberdeen imagined driving the Jaguar in the ninety-five minutes that elapsed between spying for Mr. Hewlett and his arrest, One Police Plaza was not among them. Nor was One-Forty-One Worth Street – but she assured herself, she was still in Manhattan, as was *The Newsroom*. She distracted herself from the tedium of sitting still with dreams of her boss’s best friend, the absurdly handsome maître d’ with a sharp tongue and a slow temper. Soon, she thought. She looked around wondering when soon would come. Abe Woodhull sat beside her, cradling his head in his hands. Anna Strong had given up on sitting altogether and was staring out of an office window to the parking lot below.

When Miss Strong noticed Aberdeen’s glance she pressed her full lips into a forced smile as was characteristic of her ‘class’ and ‘breeding’, the au pair thought mockingly, attributing Hewlett’s faults to his would-have-been missus. The woman who had been there before -the one they were all waiting on to return- most certainly did not smile when she made eye contact, which Aberdeen appreciated. Her hard stare felt more appropriate; it was refreshing, for those in clear positions of power were so rarely honest in their demeanour. She was shorter than Anna, stern and stout, though she wore her excess with a befitting elegance. She did not address Aberdeen in the entire half hour she spent scolding her daughter. Mr. Woodhull warranted only a slight eye roll as she greeted him by stating both of his names. He was likely as grateful as she herself was that the District Attorney showed so little interest in his presence, albeit for different reasons. Whereas Aberdeen had something to hide, Abe was simply too hungover to carry on a conversation.

From the time he had come home at a time that was morning (if one were to judge by a clock) and was night (if one were to judge by the absence of sunlight), Mr. Woodhull had had very little to
He yelled at his wife, spoke to Jordan over the phone briefly at the request of the latter, and then complained and stubbornly insisted on accompanying Miss Strong to the City Clerk’s Office. After telling her insistently and emphatically that she was not going to marry Edmund Hewlett, he remained silent until a bureaucrat’s refusal to grant an application without both parties being present allowed him to say, “I told you so.”

All of his sentences were brief, all of them begrudged.

He had barely spoken at all since entering the police station.

Aberdeen would have had quite a lot to say were a question posed to her. Jordan had warned her not to speak and yet she found herself in the office of the city’s most powerful prosecutor anyway. No one noticed her panic until it passed.

“It shouldn’t be too much longer,” Anna tried to reassure her.

They had been waiting for the better part of an hour for Anna’s mother to re-join them. From what Aberdeen understood of the situation on the floor, a pharmaceutical sales representative who the NYPD had been after for months had been captured by the force of coincidence. He had a meeting with some mob boss to discuss getting his company’s product back on the street in the same hotel where Senator Arnold would have slept had Mr. Hewlett not killed him. The District Attorney called this a ‘consolation’ and seemed happy enough with her prize. Anna likely hoped to use her mother’s unexpected shift in fortune to her benefit. Thus far Nancy Smith had disclosed nothing about the case involving Edmund other than occasionally throwing in ‘he is a dangerous criminal’ with her ‘you really know how to pick them’s and ‘are you doing this to punish me’s.”

Abe Woodhull nodded while she spoke. Aberdeen copied his gestures in hopes of contending with the banality in which she felt herself entrenched.

She looked at the clock on the wall. The Newsroom was open for lunch on Wednesdays and Sundays from eleven to three. The holdup was probably to her benefit. By the time DA Smith was finished yelling at the cartel, Robert Townsend would be getting off. Maybe he would step outside while she drove by slowly; smiling and asking him if he had anywhere he needed to be. Abe was too hungover to ruin it, and there would be room in the car. From what the District Attorney had indicated, Hewlett was not going to be released and she would personally ensure that a man called Cooke would not set bail. Aberdeen might have panicked if she did not believe that Jordan would not let him give her up in his presence and Hewlett would not speak on record without a barrister. It will be fine, my plan, she told herself. She then remembered Anna mirroring her mother’s wagging finger. Aberdeen wondered if she could simply leave her there at the station to morn her lost lover, or if that would be rude and would get her scolded. Anna might kill the mood she hoped to set with Robert.

“I’m in no great hurry, ma’am.”

“Aberdeen, were friends, no need for formalities. It’s Anna, just Anna, okay?” the woman whom Aberdeen had known through their mutual acquaintances for a little over a year said. Just Anna seemed to have convinced herself of this, but Aberdeen was almost certain that she had not known her name until Abe introduced her as his au pair that same morning.

“Right, Anna.”

Like her betrothed, Ann-ah, not Ah-na corrected Aberdeen’s pronunciation, pressed her lips together in way meant to mimic a smile and offered an alternative. “Or Annie, if you want.”
There were quite a lot of things Aberdeen wanted to call the Hewletts that had nothing to do with Christian names or diminutives, but she kept those to herself and smiled at them as she nodded.

A phone buzzed with the promise of temporary release from the bright room that was bringing to feel like a prison. Both women searched through their handbags. Anna’s face fell when she saw that hers was not ringing, as did Aberdeen’s when she saw the name of her real boss on the display.

“Good afternoon, Mary,” she answered in forced cheer.

“Aberdeen, listen. I know this is inconvenient but is there any way you could pick up Thomas from day-care? Now or as soon as possible? You can take the train out to the city and drive back in my car, or borrow Father’s if he is around. Or Miss Strong’s if she is willing. No,” she paused, “not Anna’s. You might both get sick from the stench.” She rarely heard Mary this flustered. Aberdeen rose immediately, assuming something had happened to the boy.

“I ‘ave ‘Ewlett’s car now, but I am at the police station. I can maybe leave. Is Thomas okay? Is ‘ee sick?”

“Thomas is fine; he bit a classmate and has been suspended for the rest of the week.”

“Thomas bit someone?” Aberdeen repeated, adding, “that is very unlike ‘im.”

“I know, I know. It is probably my fault. I bit Sssah—ah- you know what,” she said, regaining her poise, “I’ll explain later.” Both were aware that Mary, for all of her pride and dignity, most certainly would not be forthcoming with further details. Aberdeen, for her part, did not much care for things that did not concern her immediate interest and forgot the words as soon as they were spoken. After a short pause, Mary changed the topic. “Did you say that you are at a police station with Hewlett’s car? Did you … God, I’m sorry to have to make these kind of assumptions, but is it hot?”

Aberdeen wondered if Mary had ever heard a certain proverb about people living in houses made of glass. She took a deep breath before answering.

“No, ‘ee was arrested at the tavern and Mr. Woodhull and I went to pick Miss Strong up at there. Miss Strong’s – um Ann-ah’s- car is too full with things she worried might get stolen in the downtown. She wanted to go to the City Clerk and because I am the only person who can drive a stick shift, I am acting as a chauffeur. Mr. Woodhull came along to tell her that she was not going to marry Mr. ‘Ewlett, and he was right because the City Clerk or some lady who works for ‘im won’t allow it. Also … Mr. ‘Ewlett is never getting out of jail because ‘ee killed a senator late last night. But it is okay because ‘ee said this morning that I could borrow ‘is car if I put the petrol back in it,” she half-lied in her care not to say anything about her involvement in the crime she had originally assumed he had been arrested for. “We’re friends now,” she added, seeing Anna’s indignation at her otherwise factually accurate summary of events.

“Jesus,” Mary said, echoing Aberdeen’s annoyance.

“Do you want to talk to Mr. Woodhull? ‘Ee is sitting next to me. ‘Ee asks about Thomas,” she fibbed as she nudged him. “We’re waiting on Ms. District Attorney to finish yelling at Mr. Drug Cartel, and when she comes back we ‘ave to drink a coffee with ‘er and then we can leave. I can go now and come back.” She glanced at Abe for his approval. He shrugged.

“I don’t want Thomas at a police station and I don’t want my husband alone in a room with that, that – No, it is fine Aberdeen. I needed an excuse to take the afternoon off anyway. Stay with my husband. Text me if anything develops with regards to … Mr. Hewlett’s impending imprisonment? 
Odd.”

Aberdeen agreed to do these things as she questioned why Mary chose to empathize the words *my husband* each time she spoke them.

“Travel safe,” her boss said before hanging up. It was an unusual turn of phrase; one that Aberdeen had marked hearing on a previous occasion, though not through Mary’s lips.

“Travel safe,” she repeated to a dead line.

He had seen the world, or parts of it. Enough, at any rate, for him to recognize that no one was bound to lie more during an investigation than the detectives. Investigation, he thought scornfully. This was a hostage situation, and international bureaucracy was its host.

It was ironic, he considered, that the disappearance of Senator Arnold had tipped off this chain reaction. If half the players could be trusted to cooperate, the man would receive from his absence everything his caucus had been filibustering Congress for since the session began. Whether he lived to see it was any man’s guess. Benedict Arnold was irrelevant. There were now treaties and trade deals at stake.

Lafayette had asked if he believed the whole thing had been orchestrated when they first heard the news. Hamilton had his own scepticisms, but no was his answer. He would have liked to think at least that his superiors would have given him advanced knowledge, but even if this was a pipe dream, all the evidence spoke against conspiracy. It was now his job to help create one, after all. The FBI’s official involvement with the Arnold Investigation was a proxy. Alexander Hamilton had seen his job reduced to secretary, coordinating the calendars of men of action. Arnold himself was on no one’s present agenda.

This left the investigation itself in the hands of the NYPD, or, more specifically, a man named Tallmadge whose name had scarred the profession of policing. Hamilton had liked him from the instant they met that morning outside Whitehall, the country estate of the chief justice of the state’s highest court. As of the night before, Tallmadge reported, the bar manager from the tavern where the senator had last been heard from was leasing a room. And who was she exactly? The daughter of the man who’s pen had nearly brought Woodhull to ruin. Alexander himself had read it countless times and written several reactions to the piece, published anonymously for reasons apparent. He was suddenly interested. More so when the door opened to an Englishman who claimed to love her. Edmund Hewlett, he discovered over the initial course of questioning, was from a minor house of landed nobility to which he owed his name. His mother, a commoner with loose clan ties, had been arrested and jailed for eco-terrorism in the mid-seventies. Curious pair, he thought. More curious still was the story of how Edmund had come to live at Whitehall, how he had moved Anna—newly divorced from a man who had served three tours under Arnold in the War on Terror—into what was essentially enemy territory. Hewlett was overheard speaking of murder as he stood before an unswept crime screen. ‘Insidious’ Tallmadge had said of the entire situation.

Hamilton agreed. It was all too conspicuous to be purely coincidental.

He relayed this much to the DNI on their last conference call.

An hour later Martha Dandridge arrived at Federal Plaza after receiving a call from the same man.
Hamilton had worked with her before, though not recently, and knew her to be swift and efficient. She was meant to establish a criminal profile, one, perhaps that fit the model that was already being sold to the public, or would have been, had the damned press core not been so focused on an internal investigation from four years prior. She was no use to him at the main office. Not when Tallmadge already had a real suspect in custody. Washington or the man who shared the capitol’s name could yell at him later. He was sure that he would, just as he was sure that he would be able to argue by the time he received the call that their European allies were dragging their feet.

He knew the world, or enough of it, to know that no one lied during an inquiry more than a detective.

Except perhaps Tallmadge who was far too green to be handling a hostage situation.

After spending fifteen minutes in his office with the individual who had identified himself as a character witness, Inspector Benjamin Tallmadge was beginning to empathise with his primary suspect. Nothing of what the man with a bruised neck and a bleeding ear chose to relay gave any credibility to the idea of Edmund Hewlett’s innocence, but his explanations left Ben with a clear notion of why one would be driven to attack John Graves Simcoe. For a moment, he found himself wishing that Hewlett had better aim as he listened to Simcoe prattle on in a high pitch puberty ought to have phased out.

“Et tu, Brute? I asked. It was a great joke … did not land though, which I suppose you could take one of two ways; either Hewlett is not anywhere near as literary as he claims to be, or he was plastered enough to both try to take me in a fight and to miss a Shakespeare reference. I offer my assurance that nothing came of it, Inspector… Tallmadge was it?” The man sounded like a toy Ben wished he had not purchased for his dog. Simcoe continued to click the retractable pen he had been given to write a sworn statement. There was no rhythm to it, but Ben subconsciously sought one, a fruitless exercise that threatened to drive him to madness. He had reached the point of exhaustion where nothing quite felt real.

Nothing?

Ben reconsidered, allowing for the exception of the blood and bruising that distracted from Simcoe’s claims and perhaps devalued them entirely.

“You say you came here to provide this account at Hewlett’s request?”

“Indeed,” Simcoe grinned. There was something disquieting in his smile. It was not forced, but it was clearly fake. The Inspector felt as if he were being openly mocked; Simcoe closed his lips, tilting his head slightly as if indicating that this was his intent.

“Were you in any way pressured?” Ben rubbed at his earlobe, gazing uncomfortably at Simcoe’s.

“No, this is from my illicit lover,” he answered, pulling down his collar to reveal the remainder of the string of contusions and small cuts, dark against his alabaster skin.

Ben winced.

“You might want to have that looked at. The human bite can be highly infectious,” he thought for a moment before reaching into his desk drawer and pulling out a first aid kit, “I think I have
Neosporin in there, feel free to take a bandage too.” Simcoe looked at the contents of the box hesitantly.

“You don’t often seek medical attention, do you?”

“With respect, sir,” Simcoe taunted, “it was a kiss.”

“A kiss in the way your having been stabbed by Mr. Hewlett was, to quote,” he looked again at the statement and jabbed in a mock-English accent, “just a row, yea?”

Simcoe seemed to take the suggestion seriously. He suddenly seemed very far away. His face lost every hint of expression and though his eyes did not deviate from their position, Ben could tell he was no longer looking at him.

“Why … yes, Inspector,” Simcoe concurred after returning from wherever his mind went to reflect. “I believe you may be on to something.”

Ben could not tell for sure if he was employing sarcasm or not. Simcoe gave him a chilling half smile and a slight shrug. It was all a game to him. Ben felt as though Simcoe had him at a loss.

The witness rose with a stretch, “If that is all, Inspector, I fear I am needed back at the office.”

“It is not, Mr. Simcoe. Please sit down. I have a few more questions and” he sighed, “for reasons of the press, I cannot possibly allow you to walk out of police headquarters like that.”

Ben knew scandal too well already. Four years prior, a woman died in a holding cell. She had been the victim of an aggravated break-in. When police were slow to respond she had enacted her constitutional right to firearms and protected herself where the NYPD had failed. She should never have been arrested, and Ben should have never been involved.

In truth, he had not been. He first learned of Sarah Livingston’s unlawful incarceration with the rest of America after her tragic death. An autopsy later revealed that he had lain with her three nights prior to her death. The press ran a leak and the narrative was distorted. Mistrust grew between the police and the public for reasons far removed from all of the areas where reform was so clearly, so crucially needed. His crime was consensual sex; his punishment was the ruin of his name.

Ben had not slept with anyone since. He kept a low profile, rarely going out, rarely divorcing himself from his desk. The friends he had not lost to scandal he had lost to the inevitable passage of time. Jordan Akinbode, the last holdout, mentioned that he was moving in with his long-term girlfriend. A ring would likely follow. After the wedding, Ben doubted they would see each other much at all. Maybe at Christmas, and when, then only at church.

In the meantime, he had a case that was attracting a lot of media attention and a name the press had not forgotten.

Which was not even to mention the man at his desk who looked as though he may have been strangled. No, the self-declared character witness could not leave the room this way, illicit lover or not.

Ben was in the middle of cleaning the slight injury as Simcoe grimaced from the sting of
disinfectant when the door swung open after a curtesy knock.

“Tallmadge! Why aren’t you in interrogation?” Nancy Smith never questioned, she only critiqued. Answers and explanations were largely irrelevant to her. “If you’ll allow for an interruption,” she continued in her deep smoker’s voice, “I would like to introduce Dr Dandridge. She is working with the FBI to establish a profile – Jesus fucking Christ, what have you done?” She did not allow Ben to respond. Dropping her bag and all interest in the contracted phycologist, she rushed to where her eyes fell.

“Mr. Hewlett, Nancy Smith, New York District Attorney,” she said reaching out her hand. Simcoe, astonished, took it without offering a correction. He was not afforded the chance. “Truth be told, I never wished to meet you,” she spat, “though least of all under these circumstances. Please accept my sincerest apologies on behalf of the entire force for the treatment you’ve endured. Brutal examination tactics are not condoned by the NYPD and - following an investigation- appropriate punishment will be sought on your behalf.” With that, she dropped Simcoe’s hand and shifted her attention her attention back to Ben. Before his boss could continue on one of her infamous tirades of chastisement, Ben spoke.

“Ma’am. This is John Graves Simcoe; he came in voluntarily to provide a character witness. And he arrived in this state.”

Nancy’s black eyes hardened. He had some degree of sympathy with her unspoken anger. The most high-profile investigation of her tenure had been taken from her long before she was forced by principle to recuse herself from it. Though the FBI claimed that they had the intent of working in cooperation with local police, it was clear from the onset they had very little interest in collaboration. Her anger was understandable; Ben shared it.

Then again, knowing the DA as well as he had come to, it was easy for him to imagine her being disappointed that the alleged killer set on corrupting her daughter had not, in fact, been beaten up by one of her boys in blue. Fighting a smile at the thought he suspected they shared, Ben shifted his attention.

He glanced at the small, demure woman with a kind but weary expression he assumed to be Dr Dandridge.

“It is a pleasure to meet you,” he said extending his hand.

“All mine, I’m sure.”

“I am afraid there has been a mix up somewhere. Edmund Hewlett is no longer in police custody. There simply was not enough evidence to hold him.”

Smith threw up her hands in blatant frustration. Dandridge said something reassuring; Ben was not certain if it was meant for him or for his boss.

“We know each other, don’t we?” the DA turned back to Simcoe, lifting her chin ever so slightly.

“We do in fact; I’m a friend of your daughter, dear Anna,” Simcoe explained. He reached for his phone. “If I may, I believe this is the man you are looking for,” he said as he displayed a picture showing him, Akinbode and Hewlett holding up a half empty bottle of Velha Colheita. Nancy looked at Ben sceptically as he identified the other two men in the photograph – clearly taken that afternoon.

“I didn’t have enough to hold him, ma’am,” he repeated.
Nancy scrutinized the picture she had not asked to see in silence, becoming visibly confused, “Is that really him?”

Simcoe answered quickly, “Believe it or not, we were at school together, Hewlett and I. It is the drugs, I fear … reeks absolute havoc on the skin. He is only thirty-five if you can believe it.”

There was something different in his tone. This was not chitchat; this was combat. Simcoe curled his lip.

“Drugs?” Smith pressed.

“Forgive me, ma’am. I know so little about that aspect of his life - having absolutely no association with it - that I fear it isn’t mine to comment. We’re friends but we live such different lives,” Simcoe shook his head in disapproval. “He is currently unemployed, you see. At least prior to meeting your lovely daughter, I know he was up all night at underground progressive post-punk venues – not quite to my taste I confess.” It sounded like a misrepresentation; just as everything else Simcoe said did.

DA Smith seemed to believe him. Ben realized that he knew very little about her daughter Anna. The girl he met that morning was deceive, practical, smart and wilful, rather like a reserved version of her mother. Ben had his suspicions as to what extent Anna had really fallen for Hewlett’s charms, whatever they may be.

He glanced back to the witness. Simcoe’s expression said ‘I don’t understand it either.’ Ben realized that Simcoe had not come to vouch for Hewlett at all; he had come because he thought doing so would please the fiancé of the man he called his friend.

There had to be a connection.

“They let you into The Newsroom like that?” the DA asked, as she returned Simcoe’s phone.

“Pains me though it does to say it, I know the Maître d’, and if this is about the shirt, in my defence I’d planned on having a hot dog from a street vendor.”

“It is about your ear, Mr. Simcoe. Tallmadge, finish up and meet me outside. Martha,” she said, returning her attention back to the woman whom she had come to introduce, “forgive the miscommunication. I am sorry that your time was wasted.”

“Actually, I would like to speak to the witness if I may,” she smiled, raising her perfectly painted eyebrows slightly.

“I’ll get uniform in for you.”

“Ma’am, I could-” Ben started, embarrassed at being kicked out of his own office only moments after identifying a possible pressure point.

“Outside, Benjamin,” the DA gave no room for argument.

He sighed, but followed.

Before leaving the room, Ben whispered Anna Strong’s name to the profiler. “Give me ten minutes,” she winked.

Chapter End Notes
I only have two notes for you, and one is more of a correction:

*Chief Justice* - technically the incorrect nomenclature. The highest court in NY (The Court of Appeals, not, as in most states The - - Supreme Court) appoints judges, not justices, for 14 year terms. Now this can annoy you when you’re listening to *The Gabfest* or wherever you go to get your court updates.

*DNI* - Director of National Intelligence, the big boss who oversees the seventeen U.S. secret service agencies. Seventeen! (For comparison, we’ve seven in Germany.) What I love the most about American history after watching *Turn* is how it had spies before it had international recognition. Brilliant.

As stated previously, I will get the rest of what I’ve written since last we spoke up and posted soon. Till then, I love your comments and kudos, and all of you naturally. Thanks for reading as always! If your school or uni term is about to begin, best of luck! (If not … want to trade?)

XOXO – Tav

Up next: Mary feels betrayed by her own heart (and a few choice individuals). Simcoe examines his relationships and how best to exploit them; he then comes to a horrifying conclusion while talking with a profiler. Mama Smith gets a consolation prize in the form of Big Pharma after recusing herself from the Arnold case. Hewlett is ghosted on social media, confronts a thief and makes another unlikely ally. Aberdeen schemes to make Robert notice her. Ben tries to make sense of it all.

(Aren’t you a little glad I didn’t make you take the whole thing in one shot? You’ll have around 25 pages more soon, I promise.)
The Swedish Capitol

Chapter Summary

Jealous gingers, estranged (and strange) friendships, one-sided affairs.

Chapter Notes

As far as warnings go, I have a twofold one regarding language (length and vulgarity, respectively). Other than that, romance and rejection are thrown into the usual mix of manipulation, extortion, blackmail, fraud, larceny and self-deprecation. Specifics include (but are not restricted to) an animal killed in cold blood, consensual (but underage) sex discussed candidly, empty intercourse and foreplay (parts of which are not heteronormative), E.coli and vehicular impact.

There is also a risk that a third of the way through this monstrosity (if not sooner) you may want to punch the deuteragonist.

Still with me? Great! As always, I hope you enjoy.

“T’m speechless, Tallmadge! Speechless!” The District Attorney asserted emphatically after hailing down a constable and showing her into Ben’s office. She followed with an equally forceful contradiction to her claim of having nothing to say. “How could you let the suspect go? If nothing else you could have sought to hold him on charges of immigration fraud.”

“I tried that route,” Ben defended, “Ma’am; I have to ask, is this personal?” It was not a question as much as it was a reminder. This was not her case. Thanks to federal involvement, it was barely his. He was hesitant to discuss it in a crowded hall. Ben could feel the stares of more senior officers, jealous of a predicament enviable from their outside position. Everyone saw the assignment as having the potential to be career making, yet he felt his contributions were irrelevant and redundant. ADIC Hamilton had sent a mere civilian in to interrogate a suspect he had released; and the woman to whom the entire force bowed would not cease reminding him of this failing. Still, Ben could not help but pity Nancy Smith. Her office was decorated with photographs of her children. It was his understanding that she never otherwise saw her beautiful, smiling daughter outside of those picture frames. Anna, she once told him, would have frowned if she had known that the image she was to be in was fated for her mother’s desk. Spiteful, she claimed. The morning seemed to corroborate the accusation.

He had heard whispers from those she worked with directly, when Anna failed to show up at a promotion or an office party in celebration of her mother’s achievements, that Nancy had never missed a single of her daughter’s soccer matches, even after she’d divorced the girl’s father and been told that her presence was no longer wanted. That it never had been. Ben had no way of verifying if any of the rumours he heard about the senior prosecutor’s home life were true. Whenever the job called him into DA Smith’s shrine to her estranged offspring however, he found
himself calling his own mother afterward to check in. Yes, he would be at church on Sunday. Yes, he would stay for dinner if he could.

The DA bit her upper lip. Throwing her hands into little fists and placing them on her wide hips to make herself seem more imposing, she leaned in and asked, “Do you think Hewlett is guilty? In relation to Arnold, I mean.”

“I think he is involved,” Ben answered. If forced to choose between virtues, he would rather be honest than kind.

“Then it’s personal. Do you have children, Tallmadge?”

“I do not.”

“As a mother,” she started, her eyes shifting uncomfortably to the heavens. Whatever thought then entered her mind in the second she paused to stare at the florescent lights seemed to change it.

“Please keep me informed,” she continued, shifting her tone from concerned parent to competent public official. “I’ll make sure you don’t get derailed by the likes Jordan Akinbode again. Although maybe not. It would be … convenient if Di Martello doesn’t have to face him in full focus when they meet in Albany next week. The city really can’t afford to lose the food truck revenue. - Anyway,” she sighed again, “I wanted to let you know, Cooke is in the process of signing your warrant. It’s been a nightmare. Not one of my assistants was exactly forthcoming in authorizing a search on Whitehall lest it effect a ruling. Everyone seems to have to argue before Judge Woodhull’s bench this session. Cowards, the lot! And the fucking feds won’t move, of course. Get used to that. If I -”

“I’m sorry,” he interrupted.

Nancy threw up her hands, motioning for his silence.

“It is not you who let me down. It is our system. It is a lack of faith in our public officials, Judge Woodhull included. It’s that damn senator who had to go missing in New York City as if there weren’t plenty of other stops on his speaking tour. It is not you. Not at all.”

No, Ben thought. It is Anna. He gave his boss a soft smile, knowing she was thinking it too. Unexpectedly, she returned it.

“I better get back then; you’ll never believe what I got as a consolation prize. Say goodbye to Martha for me when she’s finished.”

“What then?”

“Oh, you’ll love this. It is your case, Tallmadge. Big Pharma. Jefferson is in holding,” she laughed. “Found him in Arnold’s hotel not an hour ago with a suitcase of Oxy set for the street.”

Ben’s heart stopped. Smith went on to explain that Baker, one of the offer’s he had sent to sweep the hotel had stumbled in on a conversation happening in the room next door.

“And I am in here talking about beer pong and bar fights,” he scuffed.

“Keep up the fine work and who knows; maybe Hamilton will throw you off the investigation,” she jabbed, adding with a hint of regret, “Then I can have the commissioner send you back to where you’d be more useful.”
It was not a taunt, but it struck a nerve.

“Ma’am I, I think that Simcoe may be in love with your daughter.”

Nancy swallowed a laugh, “That’s all you got out of him?”

“No I-

“Of course he is in love with my daughter; everyone is in love with my daughter. Hell kid, you would be too after ten minutes with her,” she teased, boxing at his crossed arms.

“I find that very unlikely for a variety of reasons,” Ben replied, trying not to smile.

“Everyone, Tallmadge, apples and trees, after all,” she winked. “Now, want to come with me down to interrogation and watch as I rip this bastard’s balls off?”

He very much did.

America’s founding myth was a lie, Simcoe thought. He had not learned much about the Revolution at school but this was clearly not a formerly Anglican people. America could not possibly have been a colony of the British Empire for her citizens had absolutely no understanding of cricket - the defining characteristic of former English oppression.

He had tried to explain the sport once to Akinbode when he had had a few of the lads over to watch The Ashes only to be met with boredom and confusion. Simcoe could empathize with the glazed over look in his friend’s eyes, which alternated for a short while between him and the screen. Eventually, Akinbode said he was going to get a beer from the kitchen, asking if anyone else wanted anything. Simcoe had said the same thing to Andre when he had brought him -along with two nameless strumpets- to Yankee Stadium a year prior. His hopes of escape had been dashed when one of the young woman on Andre’s arm informed him that –as with hot dogs and popcorn- beer had feet and a booming voice at American sporting events. Simcoe had been kind by comparison. He let his friend go and did not explain the game further when he returned.

There were some finer points of sophistication the yanks would never truly understand. Simcoe felt confident that he could now add lad culture to a list that included real sport and proper spelling. He was growing weary of defending - first to Inspector Leggings, now to Dr Eyebrows- that drunken brawls occasionally broke out without cause or consequence. There were only so many ways of explaining this simple fact to people with no basis of comprehension. Americans tried to force meaning into everything. He had had enough. It was really too bad DeJong’s would be closed for the foreseeable future. He wondered who was playing at the weekend and if a row would ensue that might give credence to his claim. Americans, rather than Brits, ought to make more of an effort to integrate themselves within public houses. Especially if they wanted to go on pretending they had been a colony at one point in their short history.

He made a final effort to clarify these points to the doctor with a name he had heard somewhere before but could not place. Dandridge suggested traumatic bonding not at all subtly in response.

“Stockholm Syndrome, you mean? That’s … new.”

He would have to tell Andre about this episode later. The shite would probably be jealous that he
did not come on it himself, much as he loved telling him to avoid Hewlett off the pitch. Simcoe was aware that he was smiling awkwardly as he envisioned Andre’s light, casual grin warping with envy as he tried to stay calm. It was truly the stuff of tragedy that he had chosen this day -of all days- to check himself into rehab. Simcoe hoped Andre would not learn any breathing exercises or twelve-step barmy involving a higher power whilst there, for what little remained of their friendship would surely disintegrate. Andre was at his best when his façade was broken, when a slight gesture or a small quip visibly unnerved him and revealed him for the imposter he was. Akinbode was of the opinion that he would simply become slightly better at hiding the bottle for a short while until everyone was on the verge of giving up on him again. Not even therapists believed in therapy it seemed. Simcoe snorted back a bitter chuckle.

“Is that amusing to you, Mr. Simcoe?”

“Most people who know us two consider me the abuser.”

“You clearly don’t.” When he did not respond, she continued, “Did you ever consider it could be the other way around?”

With Andre, this conversation could have been amusing, even fun. Dandridge unnerved him. She listened before she spoke, a talent scarce in individuals, singular among those who had chosen to study social sciences. She followed his eyes as they moved about the room. She was fake-attentive, Simcoe concluded. She was fake-attentive the same way Andre was fake-sophisticated and Hewlett was fake-nice. After all, if she were paying attention, she would have come away from their little chat about a night he hardly remembered with the understanding that the brawl was empty as most were. If she were a real doctor, she would tell him where to look, when to stop staring, and compliment him on now being very good at both of these tasks.

“Mr. Simcoe?”

“Hewlett’s weak,” he replied, hoping to end it there.

“And yet you bow to him.”

“I don’t.”

“Really? Yet here you sit.” An eyebrow raised, “You say you were at school together? Tell me about that.”

“I see no point in discussing it.”

Dandridge looked down at the yellow legal pad she had yet to write on. Simcoe waited for her to press, if only to demonstrate his resistance. He had nothing to say.

Evidently, neither did she.

“Cello? Guitar? Violin perhaps?” she asked after allowing a few minutes to pass in uncomfortable silence.

“Pardon?”

“My grandson,” she clarified, “fifth grade. He is taking strings as an elective.”

“I don’t play an instrument.”

“My tip? Next time someone asks, pretend you do. He is always doing that with his fingers, tip-tap,
“I don’t,” Simcoe placed his hands on his knees where they would be less distracting. He glanced at Constable Sanchez who had yet to speak as though she might be able to collaborate his assertion. Sanchez raised her shoulders slightly and released them. Simcoe shut his eyes. He had nothing to say. He spoke.

“My father was killed in a roadside bombing when I was ten. The day I turned ten, actually. It might have been after that, after waking up in hospital. My mum killed herself a few months later. Maybe then. So around eighteen years either way. Maybe. I never notice it until everyone else has. So maybe it started before. Or later.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, about your parents,” Sanchez said as per the societal script Simcoe had had no hand in writing.

“It was a long time ago,” he replied.

“Eighteen years,” Dandridge concurred. No ‘but still’ followed.

Suddenly, subconsciously, Simcoe rather liked her. Throughout the course on her inquiry, her tone had not changed. Cordial, relaxed. Detached yet attentive. She had no understanding of sport or pubs and the fights that break out in them but he could not well fault her for her nation’s defects. Not when she was capable of acknowledge the passage of time without adding an unnecessary value statement.

“With regard to Hewlett and I being at school together,” he offered in return for the advice she had given, “it was only a year, he was leaving as I was coming in. I know his younger siblings better. Well, knew. I suppose I know Edmund better now. I meant only to say that we were in the same year, the twins and I. Edmund didn’t take much notice of me when he still had everything. It’s funny, when we first met I was the one who could barely speak and now he is the one with a stutter. Or maybe he always tripped over his words. I don’t know. Like I said, he never really spoke to me.”

“Define still had everything.”

“I can’t,” he was not lying. He did not know why he had phrased it that way. Hewlett had everything Simcoe himself had ever hoped for and refused to see it. He felt himself seething. It was not that Hewlett had taken the woman Simcoe had long envisioned spending his life with so backhandedly, nor was it that he had been so callous and cavalier in doing so. Simcoe could live with this, if he could imagine Anna being happy as Hewlett’s bride. In time, he might have otherwise convinced himself that he was happy for them both, but this was not to pass. Hewlett did not love Anna - not as she deserved- and the little bastard had had the nerve to admit as much before moving her into his humble quarters.

Hewlett had everything, but nothing had meaning for him. Not even the woman whose fire and passion had no contender. He strung her along in a naked display of arrogance. His vanity was perverse. He was cruel. Simcoe had long known this to be true. When it came to Anna, Hewlett’s behaviour abhorred him, yet he could not deny his general admiration for the audacity of it all. It would be over soon enough.

“What do you mean, Mr. Simcoe?” Dandridge pried.

Simcoe would not have Anna’s name brought into this. He could save her from her suffering
without inviting Dandridge to begin another discussion about toxic bonding or whatever bollocks term she felt might threaten his sense of security.

“I can’t. Because its tosh ‘innit?’ he answered. “But it is how Oyster sees it and how were all meant to. He had a massive stroke when he was twenty, which is sad, I will give him that, but he’s set on making it tragic - and he can’t, can he? He went through all kinds of physical therapy to reanimate himself and to my mind, he is better off for it. Do you have any idea how rare it is to find a two – footed player?”

The constable nodded. The profiler invited him to continue.

“Enlighten me.”

“Right, so, as with your hands, one side is usually prominent. Most people are right handed, some left, and a select few are ambidextrous. It works the same way with feet. What I am saying is, his only tragedy is that he hasn’t any ball intelligence. That is more of a metaphor. Its fucked up, all,” he said, adding less dismissively in a slightly elevated pitch, “He’s only himself to blame.”

“So you play soccer together then?” For the first time Martha Dandridge seemed nonplussed. Americans, Simcoe thought. Americans understood nothing of sport and you could not explain it to them.

“In the same club. I hold the captancy,” he doubted this would mean anything to her, but he could not resist the opportunity to boast. “Third in the league table; we were first, mind, until Akinbode made the mistake of verifying our existence, but it is no matter. There is still three months left in the season and we’ve a new left-wing who is absolutely phenomenal.”

“You have a soccer team … yet you never play?”

“It is difficult to gather the entire squad together. Sunday league, of course. Most of the players – sorry, why are you writing this down?”

“I’ve a friend with a keen interest in soccer; it would be nice to have a few talking points. Please, continue.”

“I don’t know that this would be on any particular interest to anyone, but to carry on, most of the players have high stress jobs and can’t always make it out to the field. Rogers, our keeper,” he paused, “the chap who stands in between the goal posts -” Dandridge nodded. “Rogers came up with a rather clever joke-name to trick our opponents into thinking no match had been scheduled.”

“By-Week?”

“Oh! Quite perceptive,” he commended.

“The players on this team, are you all English?”

“No, though many of us are so lucky. Akinbode is American though, and Robeson, Strong too. Rogers and Hewlett are both Haggistani.”

“What?”

“Scotsmen.”

“Is the team part of a cultural society?” her pen sild back and forth across the paper as hurried as her questions. It was odd. Beyond Akinbode, no one seemed interested in the dynamics of the
squad. He had half a mind to ask her if she had an opinion on who could replace Andre in midfield, as he would be out for the rest on the season.

“What, like the Italians have out in Belmont? No. Well, it is funny that you mention it -”

“I’m going to take a shot in the dark and say that you are all graduates of elite universities.”

“Are we famous?”

“In some circles.”

Simcoe wondered why this sounded like a threat.

“I’ve always assumed the guy who founded the club wanted to be its star player. We’re not generally known for athletic prowess as compared with state schools. But – Sorry. How did you know?”

“I didn’t. You told me,” her pace slowed and she dropped her pen. “Mr. Simcoe, what happened at school?”

“I read econ at Cambridge. Hated every moment of it so I doubled down and finished early.”

“I should have clarified. Boarding school.”

“Nothing significant.”

“In seven years?”

“Nine. I was held back twice. Linguistics and -” he stopped.

“Let me rephrase. What happened between you and Mr. Hewlett when you were at school?” she tapped her gel-filled nails against the desk laud enough for him to take note. A challenge, or reminder, or both.

“Can we suffice it to say that he made less of an effort to conceal his character?”

“If you wish,” she paused, “Mr. Simcoe, do you care to tell me what your motivations are for being here?”

“I have repeatedly.”

“Do you want to try being honest?”

“It won’t alter my response.”

“I’ll tell you what I think, Mr. Simcoe. I think you’re trying to rationalize the actions of a man you have every reason to hate based on an off-putting idea of, forgive me, would you call it nationalism? From where I sit, the suspect has a history of violence – specifically of engaging in banal bar fights, even more specifically, in the very same bar where the alleged victim was last seen. Why are you defending this? Ought I to have a look at your own record?”

Simcoe realized he had made an error in judgement. He sought to lead the conversation astray, in hopes she would get lost and be unable to find her way back to the talking points she pressed in vain.

“Have you ever lived abroad, Ma’am?”
“I’ve had contracts in Kabul, Baghdad and Gitmo.”

“Sahir.”

“Jiddan,” she replied, not looking surprised.

“I can’t see what is not to understand then. When you are living far from home, even when you speak the local language, you don’t understand anything. Not at first.”

“That’s not been my experience.”

He elaborated his. “Everything you say, everything you do is completely misinterpreted. It is draining, isolating, you begin to see yourself through the eyes of the people who have taken pains to tell you that you don’t belong. So you seek out the familiar. I find it highly unlikely that I’d be friends with Hewlett -or half the others for that matter - if we were all back in the United Kingdom, but were here; we can laugh about the same things.”

“Such as aggravated assault?” she challenged.

“Not only. I won’t deny it, sometimes I ask myself why friends with these people. But then something stupid happens, and I’m at a police station having to explain that lads fight sometimes - as if that were some sort of novel concept- while two locals stare me down as if I were trying to pull the wool over them. I’m not. No one is. You’re just asking too much from your imports. I could call any of my British friends and have a proper laugh over it. An American, by contrast, asks in horror how I could stick up for a man who quote stabbed me, and to them I say: do you honestly think that anyone who knows how to wrap a toga in this day and age could inflict physical harm?”

Sanchez held back a laugh. Dandridge waited until she was certain he had finished and offered an understanding smile although it was clear to Simcoe that she understood nothing at all.

“You want him to see you the way you see him. You respect him because he refuses to. That is why you came. Think on it.”

“Maybe. I’m disappointed with him more than anything else,” he confessed. “If he had stabbed me as the report claims I could be dead and I would have been spared from this rather frivolous interview.”

“You’re free to go,” she replied flippantly. “You just don’t want to until you’ve had the opportunity to lie about your ear.”

“You’re not going to ask me?”

“No. Why should I? I can’t expect you to be honest with me when you refuse to be honest with yourself.”

“I’ve spoken honestly about everything.”

“Tell me about school.”

He had nothing to say. He spoke.

“Do you want to know what sort of man Hewlett is? I’ll tell you this; when I was sixteen I went into the commons during the winter holidays and saw his younger sister there. I asked her if she wasn’t going skiing in Switzerland or whatever it was that children with parents they rarely see did
over Christmas. No, she said. Said they were staying at the estate that year and that she wasn’t
going home because it made her upset. Said she didn’t want to talk about it but went on to tell me
that her older brother was living there again, that he was nocturnal and half dead and it depressed
her too much. Said she didn’t want to sit at the dinner table and watch everyone else pretend that
Edmund didn’t go into the stables one morning and shoot his favourite horse clear through its
head. I don’t remember why Ellie told me. I think she wanted me to buy her beer. That is the way
they all are, family Hewlett, ones I’ve met anyway. Open if it serves a means to an end. You learn
to deal with it if your options are limited. I fucked her, by the way. Ellie. That Christmas. Or she
fucked me, I don’t know anymore. That is what the fight was about. The one where I was stabbed.
Told him – Edmund – that I gave her riding lessons after he went and killed some dumb animal. He
didn’t defend or deny it. Just set him off – do you want to see?”

Simcoe unbuttoned his shirt midway to reveal a small scar between his un-waxed pecs. Sanchez
made a cheeky remark on his hair colour. He nodded slightly, embarrassed by her eyes.

“That is at least a little worse than you made it out to be,” Dandridge commented on the scar.

“It’s not serious. He was lain up for a few days afterward with hypothermia. Half of Setauket saw
him bare. We’re even,” Simcoe asserted.

“Do you think it deserved?”

“Friends fight. Some more famously than others.”

“My friends and I only stab each other in a figurative sense.”

“We do that too. Stab is excessive though -at least- physically speaking.”

“Let’s talk about it figuratively then. Tell me about Anna Strong.”

He would tell the world how he thought of her one day. Anna Strong was exceptional. She was at
once both fire and ice, charming him with her smile whilst she avoided his advances. She was, and
would ever remain, un tarnished; regardless of the suffering she seemed keen to beset herself with.

When his absent mind was allowed to wander, it always ran back to her. He catalogued each
interaction, every glimpse he caught from afar. With the sound of her name he could feel her
fingertips brushing against him, knowing that they we playing a game. Simcoe would never win.
He was satisfied with surrender. Anna was all-conquering, he was hers from the moment her first
stepped into the tavern.

He questioned when he had last allowed himself to have sex with his eyes open. Flesh ceased to
have the same allure. For a time he sought to find amusement in women who shared her physical
traits but he found there was ultimately no resemblance. Anna was everything, but nothing was
Anna. Not his hand, not some toy, and not some fair skinned brunette he had found at another bar.
John Graves Simcoe hardly slept and never blinked, but when he kissed his eyes hid; partially to
aid his fanaticises, partially to shield him from shame. He was not betraying her, she was never his,
but he was hers, even when he whispered poems he had penned for her in the ears of another.

A number of things had occurred since the turn of the year that made him wish the knife he took in
the fall had found his heart. Anna had come to his flat after clubbing with her girlfriends in the city,
drunken, desperate, and barefoot on a winter’s night carrying six-inch heels. She offered herself when he offered her socks, an aspirin and his bed to sleep in. It did nothing to sully his opinion of her - for nothing could - but the sun had not shone as brightly since. The world was darker with the knowledge that lesser men had given her the impression that she was worth so little. It was darker still when he recognized that had she been a lesser woman he might have taken what she presented without further thought.

They dated for a few weeks. Dated, only in the sense that she invited him around more often. She allowed him to kiss her, but met his lips with a hesitance he did not expect. When he tried to tell her how he felt she replied that she was not ready for a relationship.

A month later she was divorced. Give it a few weeks, he told himself when Akinbode mentioned off hand that she had been given a court date. He remembered her smiling and laughing after her first match with the team. He remembered her warm and willing embrace after he scored on her assist. Give it a few weeks, he told himself, she loves you, she will soon realize it.

Soon came and went without Anna noticing. When he arrived back at the tavern for a toast she was effectively engaged to one of his closest friends. Once more, the world was darker with the knowledge that lesser men had given her the impression that she was worth so little. For all of his manners and niceties, Edmund Hewlett was as much of a bastard as John Graves Simcoe had ever imagined him being.

*Forgive me*, Hewlett would later ask. Simcoe simply could not. By the time Hewlett had gotten around to offering apologetic sentiment without actually apologising or admitting to any foul play, Anna had told him that she was in love. With Hewlett. The figurative knife twisted.

In spite of all the scars the stargazer was set on inflicting with wonton disregard, Simcoe liked to think that he was capable of accepting his beloved’s wishes. He swore that her happiness was paramount, and for a time it seemed that Hewlett was offering an olive branch by way of echoing this sentiment.

Simcoe was satisfied within reason, until an offhand comment was made while they were settling the check that afternoon.

“Why sign it over?” Akinbode asked after Hewlett finished explaining his plan to purchase *DeJong Tavern*. “If you own a legitimate business with people in your employ you can legally reside in the United States. Many of my clients do this. Set up a repayment plan with Anna and when her debts are settled you can put it into her name. That way you won’t have to marry.”

“Oh thank God!” Hewlett exclaimed at this revelation.

Simcoe remained silent; hoping that the deity Hewlett sought to praise would strike him down for his insolence.

“And here even I was starting to believe in the myth of Anna and Edmund,” Akinbode shook his head. “Look we have more than our share of problems but Anna and I’ve been friends for over ten years, can you maybe -”

“No, no, ah – I believe there has been a misunderstanding -” Hewlett started. Simcoe noticed Akinbode idiosyncratically looking at his watch. It would have amused him if he thought the speech impediment to be symptomatic of anything other than a bold-faced lie. In the next two-minutes, thirty-six seconds, Hewlett checked out that he really was in love with Anna Strong; at least he thought he was. On these shifting grounds, he did not wish to marry. Not, at any rate, under his current circumstances. There was an admitted logic to it. He loved her and thus did not want to
force her to take his hand for any reason other than mutual sentiment. No, Simcoe thought, you love only yourself.

When they were walking back to the police station that Simcoe might give his statement and Akinbode might pick up his car, Simcoe broke up a conversation about Anna having hidden her bar results to offer Hewlett a proposition.

“Do you want to make this interesting?”

His plan was such. He would move some assets around and purchase DeJong Tavern. If Hewlett were as confident as he claimed in his insider information, at the end of a twelve-week period the business and the remaining funds would be his, on the condition that he did not marry Anna Strong. If his trades failed to raise half a million, Simcoe would sign the business over to Anna anyway on the condition that Hewlett never mention his involvement.

Hewlett’s lips twisted into a wide and wicked grin. Simcoe hated him more than ever.

Ironically, it was this very characteristic that made Simcoe covet Hewlett’s friendship to begin with. He was not unhappy to see it resurface. In addition to providing much wanted vindication, it served to send Anna into his arms where she was truly wanted. Everything would be right, or, everything would better resemble his own idolized world. He and Hewlett were better off when their standing rivalry turned bitter. “Toxic” Andre called it, “real recognizing real” Akinbode said, “gay as fuck,” the somewhat self-loathing Joyce had remarked. Joyce was not entirely wrong in this assessment, but as with every shot Simcoe had ever watched him take in their association matches, he was not exactly on target either.

Simcoe had always presumed Hewlett was slightly bent; a suspicion that his apparent lack of real interest in the fiery, passionate Anna did nothing to quell. They had kissed once before, or maybe it was several times within the same evening, Simcoe could not recall and it was not significant. The emptiness it left in him was easily filled with alcohol and argument as manifestations of loneliness often were. He did not remember the kiss itself, beyond the fact that it was he who had initiated it after The Three Lions had beaten Les Blues 2-0 back in November. He was afterwards satisfied that he knew enough about his own sexuality in that he remembered the result of a friendly more than the small act of deviance it had inspired. Nonetheless, he found himself thinking about it more and more since that snake had slithered into his garden.

If all of his dreams of Anna should fall apart, Simcoe reasoned, he would probably end up settling down with a woman not unlike Hewlett in character; fickle, cold, someone who used sex like a weapon and feigned a headache or whatever strange ailment Oyster claimed to suffer when one tried to otherwise initiate it. She would likely clothe herself in luxuries bought from money she’d not herself earned, talk far too much or not at all, and never quite make sense regardless of what was uttered. She would probably be borderline; and, with any luck, she would show signs of it before things got so far with them that he would inevitably blame himself for a condition over which neither had any control. Everyone at his firm seemed to have such a wife waiting in faraway homes they rarely frequented.

He wondered if Mary Woodhull was such a woman. He wondered why he was thinking about Mary Woodhull as a romantic possibility given what she had done to his ear and neck, given that Anna was as good as his. He wondered if his mother had also been such a woman, and, more light heartedly, when John Andre would check himself out of rehab so he could pose this very question to him. It would be more fun, of course, if Andre were to be drinking and having a gay of himself time prior to Simcoe’s intrusion. That would serve to sober him. Regardless, it was something else to look forward to.
Then again, Anna would surely be his by the next time he met his former shrink, and Simcoe would surely have ceased speaking of anything besides the virtues of true love. Doubt be damned.

“About Anna? Nothing to tell” the nature of the moment forced him to reply. “We went on a few dates, a couple of months back. Never slept together. I suppose you are going to suggest that I am in love with Hewlett as well?”

“No. You are obsessed. I think it not hard to imagine this occasionally manifesting itself affectionately, though most of your interactions are marked by disdain. It is not love. I imagine it is the same way with Miss Strong.”

Simcoe opened his mouth to reply.

“No, now. Before you protest. You want to beat him. Am I wrong? Not only that, you want him to look you in the eye and tell you that you’ve won. That he had suffered a crushing defeat at your hands. I’m going to give you some advice, and I don’t mean this to be cruel, but you need to let go. For your own sake. Mr. Hewlett is never going to submit, not to you. Even if he were to, would the victory have any real value? No. He has already lost. You know that. You torture yourself with the knowledge that the only person to ever defeat Edmund Hewlett was Edmund Hewlett himself. Once by his own body rebelling against him and once by his own hand as you were forced to sit on the side-lines and watch. It must have been hell. From what you’ve explained, he’s a narcissist, Mr. Simcoe, and so too are you.” Her suddenly hard tone offered little room for contradiction. Simcoe was forced into defence.

“I didn’t say anything -”

“I’ve been in this profession a long time. Do you think yourselves unique? A colleague of mine, former colleague rather, has this burnt out rivalry he can’t release. Maybe it is born of expat solidarity as you suggest, more likely because it has proven a constant and they are both individually terrified of losing that aspect of their self-understanding. Take heed; do not look to others and hope to find yourself in them, Mr. Simcoe. You’ll be universally disappointed.”

“How did you -”

“I have tenure at Columbia. I know who Edmund Hewlett is and what he attempted. I know John Andre, Robert Rogers, Jordan Akinbode and yes, Anna Strong as well. Her mother and I do yoga together,” she chimed. “Small world, isn’t it?”

Simcoe felt like he was choking.

“So, Mr. Simcoe, let’s talk about what happened to your ear.”

“Are we done then?”

“We will see one another soon I’m sure,” she stated calmly as she motioned towards the door.
Hewlett could stay in America without marrying Anna Strong. Every way he read the projections, they indicated such. It was better this way. Simcoe could not sleep at night and Hewlett did not. A five-hour time difference would unbalance their routine. He want Hewlett to leave defeated without actually leaving, because your rivalry has proven a constant and you are both individually terrified of losing that aspect of your self-understanding he heard himself thinking in the slight southern drawl of Dr Dandridge. Bollocks! Even Andre would agree it was a poor assessment, but then of course he would, he had formed a toxic bond himself somewhere along the way, had he not?

Simcoe hated that he remembered the term she had used. He hated the he identified with what she had said and he hated that he had gone to give a statement at all. He ought to have let Oyster clean up his own mess. Except that the mess was not Hewlett’s. It was his own mess. His and Mary Woodhull’s. And mess was her word for it.

Simcoe played with the gauze on his left ear until he aggravated it gagging how wealthy he could reasonably expect to make his rival and a choice few other accounts under his management if everything else should go wrong in the world. The higher the digits grew, the worse he felt. He had beaten a man, possibly to death, and the worst people he had ever met or read about would profit from it. He included himself in that sentiment. Pulling up Anna’s Facebook page and clicking through a slide show of old albums, yet another word the profiler used re-entered and repeated in his mind. Obsession. No, the thought. She was wrong. This was love. He gazed at the Anna on his screen. This, he said to himself of her smile, was exactly the way she would look at him when she owned the bar she was standing behind in a solid half of the thousands of selfies she had posted.

Obsession.

The word hit him again when he noticed that two figures were staple in Anna’s backgrounds. He glanced at his phone to see if the argument he had felt comfortable laughing about earlier had ceased. It had not. Simcoe did what seemed logical, without considering that in doing so he was proving the very point that gave him umbrage.

Hewlett answered on the first ring.

Before he could offer a greeting, Simcoe spoke, “What the fuck have you done, bring money into this? Are you mad or just stupid?”

“Fuck Simcoe, what did you say?”

It occurred to him that given the questionable legality of their business dealings, he had perhaps misspoke. He smiled to himself for a minute as he listened to what sounded like Hewlett hyperventilating in a very public place. Realizing this may not play out well for him personally, Simcoe offered a correction, “Nothing, nothing to that extent anyway. I was with a criminal profiler for the FBI.”

“Again, that begs the question-”

“I realized something dreadful. You’re my best friend.”

“Much appreciated,” Simcoe responded with matched acid. “I always thought though, I might settle for someone like you someday, just not like this. No matter.”

“Like what exactly?”

Simcoe clicked through a few more old photographs. As delicately as he found possible, he asked,
“Do you think it possible that we’re slowly turning into a modern version of Andre and Rogers?”

“I hope they didn’t make you take a piss test,” Hewlett scoffed. Simcoe ignored him.

“What if were still carrying on like this ten years from now, except all of the girls and goddesses we’ve known have left us, our professional and academic interests have been exhausted and all we’ve been left with is football rivalries and unpaid debts and bar tabs?”

It was an honest question. Hewlett seemed to take some time in considering his answer. As was his custom, the answer he started with too many pauses and modifiers for Simcoe’s preference.

“Oh … that, that will never happen for a variety of reasons, you see, not the least of which is the fact that QPR has a long-”

“No, no. You’ve already made money an element of our understanding this and I’d appreciate if you would leave my Rangers out. For now anyway. Let’s strive to keep it interesting.”

“Are you having second thoughts?”

Not when it came to Anna. Never with her. He had already made a few calls about the property. Simcoe was keen to make her dreams come true, but he was also keen to profit at Hewlett’s expense. He would take the half million as his fee and purchase the place for a fifth of what was being asked. It would not matter. Not to Hewlett. So long as he was on top, Hewlett did not care about anything or anyone else, not even the woman whom they both claimed to love. The woman he put a price on as though she were a simple accessory to a life her felt himself entitled to. Simcoe questioned if Hewlett was aware of his moral and civil deficits or if he was as fooled by his delicate mannerisms as those whose favour he courted.

Why did he so seldom find himself on the receiving end of Hewlett’s good graces? He did more for that man than anyone else would even conceive of doing. Even his quest to win Anna was a kindness. Hewlett craved misery to the point that he would create it if need be. His suicide, his frivolous spending that brought him close to the poverty line – to Simcoe’s mind, these did not even have the decency to be cries for attention. Hewlett was simply born wistful and ached for that which might excuse him.

“Of course not. Not about that. I’m loath to admit it but I’ve been looking at projections and you really are a genius. I plan on riding these gains back to London.”

“London?” he asked, suddenly tense.

“I’ve a meeting with the director of HR next month to discuss a promotion.”

“Well done, I’d offer to join you for a celebratory drink but that sounds rather like it feeds into this self-fulfilling prophecy of yours. How did you come on it?”

Simcoe looked at yet another old picture of the gorgeous girl who had come between them. Yet again, it was sullied by the figures fighting in the corner. Philomena was with them this time. It must have been taken before she was famous, when she could still go out to any old place and have a drink or two. She seemed happier as a plebeian than she ever had as a thespian. Simcoe wondered when the picture had been taken. Philomena Cheer had been a trending topic on Twitter and Tumblr since his second stint in Chelsea. Two-thousand-ten he read in the notes. He clicked through a few more pictures of collegiate Anna until he landed on one of her in front of a pile of boxes with her arms around Mary Woodhull, huge smiles on both of their faces.

Simcoe remember the story Mary told him about how their friendship ended. Abraham had slept
with them both within a few weeks of each other. Hate though he did to give the weasel the benefit of doubt, it did not sound malicious. It sounded like what lads did in their early twenties. He wondered if Abe knew that Mary and Anna were even acquainted. He wondered, using their history as a model, if his fake affair with the former would ruin his final chance with the later; and if Mary wanted it to.

“Pains me as it does to say it, I could really stand to be drunk at three in the afternoon these days,” he responded, half in reference to what Delphi portended.

“Agreed.”

“Did you meet Martha Dandridge – the FBI profiler?”

“Ah – no. I simply sat in interrogation for hours waiting for … Tallies, I believe - it is possible I am mistaken, I am simply dreadful with names.”

“Tallmadge,” Simcoe corrected. “You are a narcissist, by the way.”

“What are you on about?” Hewlett protested, growing annoyed. “Did you explain that it was just a row or not?”

“I tried to. They trick you. You wanted to remain a suspect, did you not?”

“I suppose.”

“Well!”

“You never can keep the beast in chains, can you?”

“Heavy accusations coming from someone who allegedly killed a man.”

“What killed a man? Moi? You can’t honestly believe that about me. Why, only a demon would be capable of such an act against man and God. To that end for all I know you’re involved.”

Simcoe went silent. His eyes focused on the redhead on his screen. He felt the steal in her soft lips. He felt guilty. Mary Woodhull was smart, quick and decisive. She deserved more than to be stuck in a loveless marriage with a musician waiting for his big break. He deserved more than to play an instrumental role in their break-up, if that was Mary’s design as he strongly suspected it might be. He deserved the chance to make Anna as happy as she had been before circumstance had placed them all in their current predicaments.

Circumstance, which included having murdered a man with Mary. He questioned if Hewlett would be so cold as to joke in such fashion if he truly suspected Simcoe. Or rather, would the same inkling lead him to take the fall as he had volunteered to do? If it could be viewed as an act of love on Hewlett’s side, it spoke only of suffering and self.

“Simcoe?”

He wondered how long he had left the line.

“You’re delusional.”

“I confess - you almost had me for a moment.”

“It was good wasn’t it?”
“Ah, yes, quite,” he sounded relieved.

“Do you think I could kill?” Simcoe inquired with hesitance.

“Christ.”

“Do you?”

“I won’t lie and say I haven’t considered it, but no. Certainly not a public figure. Maybe it is an expression of my arrogance, but I’d like to think if you were going to up and off someone, it would be me.”

“It would, without question,” he smiled.

“Well, that’s always lovely to hear. Heaven knows I needed that kind of reassurance.”

“Glad to be of service.”

“If that was all, I ought to return to making an absolute ass of myself elsewhere -”

Something was wrong. Simcoe was loath to ask.

“Wait. Amused as I am at what has befallen you, I wish you didn’t let yourself suffer.”

“Oh, let’s not do this. I need to get used to not smoking first.”

“Your right, quite insensitive.”

“Right caged animal you are.”

“Is that truly your assessment of me? Oyster, tell me, are we friends simply on the basis that we’re both English?”

“Because were English? You’re a damn Paki and we’re barley friends at all. Simcoe … get some rest.”

“Mujhae akela chore do, Oyster,” he spat back in Urdu.

"Ah - Ceart gu leòr," Hewlett replied mockingly in Scots Gaelic. Maybe that was it. Maybe he had let it creep into his understanding as well.

“Why did I even mention my fears knowing as I do your inability to let things go?”

“You want some kind of assurance that a woman you spoke to once made a false diagnosis – alright. You and I, were not base. We do not discuss money outside of a business setting or get drunk in public during daylight hours. We’ve ancestry. America won’t extinguish that in the short time that we have remaining.”

“My, my. Such snobbery! Such blatant classism! Did anyone ever tell you that you’d be among the first they would drag off to the guillotine if this were the French Revolution?”

“Yes, as that is such a clear point of reference. Apropos – are you at your computer?”

“I am.”

“I have to send you something that may cheer you up. Hold on.”
"What is it?"

"Before waking up this morning I thought it was going to be the worst thing I’d encounter all week."

"That sounds promising"

"It is historical fiction about the American Revolution, written by our own Abigail."

Simcoe chuckled.

"Don’t laugh quite yet; you are a character in it too."

"Too?"

"Why yes, I’m the incompetent Major; you’re my insane Captain."

This was growing vaguely offensive.

"In what world would you outrank me?"

"In a colonial melodrama, evidently."

"Did I ever tell you my theory about how America was never in her history a British colony?"

"Go on then."

"Its cricket-"

"Cricket? Honestly Simcoe, did you ring just to make a nuisance of yourself?"

"Could well be, though I hoped for your honest take on what seems is an increasingly bitter rivalry."

"I believe the fact you called to ask provides your answer. You’ve never given a damn about mine."

"You see? We’d ought to make some life changes, methinks."

"Like what, drinking less?" Hewlett laughed.

"Blood hell! I talk of improving my life not effectively ending it."

"Want to go for a beer now, then? I’m still in the city, will be for a while. Some block offed himself at Huntington. Again."

"Where is your car?"

"Back at the tavern I assume. They wouldn’t let me drive it to police headquarters somehow."

"Fancy that," he piped, mirroring the sarcasm.

"Beer?"

Simcoe clicked through a few more photographs of long forgotten better days before closing the tab and facing his spreadsheets once more. He could work from anywhere but needed to put some face time in at the office. He needed to give the firm a physical embodiment of his dedication,
especially went promotion was being whispered.

“Love to, but I’ve to crack this before going hiking tonight.”

“Ah, that’s why you’re dressed like that and have been so off-tempered all day.”

“What do you mean?”

“The denim.”

“About my temperament?”

“Hiking, mate. The woods unravel you. I assume I’m Rogers in your dystopian future and only half because you whore around with married women.”

Ah! Simcoe thought mockingly. There was the judgement he had been awaiting. He wondered if Hewlett would have been so candid about the price he put on Anna if he had not seen him marked from the advances of another woman. Perhaps the artificial affair played into his pocket after all.

“You can sod off, you know that? It is not as if you are a frontiersman.”

“Yes, yes, but be that as it may, you are comically useless outdoors. Do you remember when we had practice and you kicked the ball into the shrubs and it took you an entire two hours to find it – eventually gave up and tried to run to Dick’s to buy a replacement?”

“I did no such -”

“Just take a GPS. Is it a work thing? One of those damned cooperate bonding -”

“It a date I am now sorry to admit.”

“Well that makes one of us.”

“Trouble in paradise?” he squeaked with tempered joy.

“I keep trying to reach her-”

“Don’t think too much on it. That is how women are. Phone in their hand all day and when you text you get no reply – and then later, oh, sorry love, it was in my purse on vibrate. Act like you believe them, in the end it is all trivial. As for Anna – if she doesn’t want to talk, she won’t. Learn to live with it or kindly step aside.”

“I do not think you entirely appreciate my predicament. I have not been able to contact her since I left the station. She has me blocked on every social media platform and her phone rings twice and then the line cuts out.”

“Blocked? I have to commend her dedication.”

“Every platform. I might make like the chap before me and leap off this one when the trains start running again.”

“I’ll try to get in touch,” Simcoe said, pulling up Anna’s Facebook page again.

“Thanks.”

“If that be all, I better get back to it. Travel safe -”
“Wait.”

“What?”

“About earlier. I want you to know that I didn’t mean—what I said, how I said it or the way you took it. I want Anna to be happy. That is all I want. Wait no that is also inaccurate, ah, I ought to start over, you see, I would hate. No, I, I just would hate to think of you, and consequently Mary Woodhull—of all people—being hurt in the process. Loath though I am to admit it, I fear you may be my best friend too.”

“That is all rather traumatic. Forgive me for starting out with such lofty overtones.”

“So, are we good?”

“Never,” Simcoe asserted. “We are just better than everyone else as per your own world view.”

Mary Woodhull did not feel the tears that were streaming down her porcelain face until they overcame her. She sat sobbing in the shower, drowning in the thoughts of what she had done and what she was resolved to do as a result while thin streams of hot water beat against her back before pooling by the drain.

Abraham was sleeping in their bedroom. He was there; passed out, face down on the bed, still wearing his trainers, when she arrived home from picking their son up from kindergarten. Mary found it to be rather insensitive; for all the days he spent lounging on his father’s couch or distracting their contractor Rogers from finishing the repairs necessary for inspection at the house she had purchased at his urging, that he chose this day to sleep in their bed. Their martial bed. The one that she had in theory and act unmade.

She could still taste John on her lips, smell his sweat and feel the silk of his hair. Even wet, hers felt like straw by comparison. In her mind she heard the soft hum of his high voice, frantic whispers of perverse acts born of fantasy. She wondered what it was about him made her feel so dangerous, deviant; if it was their short shared history, the awkward phallus she felt pressed up against the thin fabric of her skirt, or the simple fact that his heart belonged to the woman whom she imagined still danced through her husband’s dreams.

John had not wanted to kiss her. He had not so much as wanted to look at her as she left him with little reminders of the night they shared. It angered her to the point that she had drawn blood and it angered her more that she felt incapable of admonishing herself for it. She did not love him, though, she reasoned, she deserved a love like his. A love that only the Anna Smiths of the world seemed to inspire.

When the water or the air around her began to chill, Mary rose and washed herself quickly. As soon as she turned the faucet off she could hear Abe’s heavy snores. She hated the sound; she envied it more. Mary did not want to risk waking her husband. She did not want to explain what she was doing at home in the middle of the workday. Abe would have offered no explanation, and Mary did not know whether the truth or the lie she had established to cover it would damn her marriage more. She did not know if the conflicting narratives of her affair with a lonesome and loathsome Englishman and the man they had murdered existed separately or as one. John was too present in her thoughts. She wondered if she even existed for him.
Wrapped only in a bathrobe, Mary tiptoed across the hall. She pressed her ear against Hewlett’s locked door. Hearing nothing, she opened the door to the hall bathroom, which he rather stupidly never thought to secure. She saw her reflection in the mirrored medicine cabinet; Mary did not just feel like a monster, she was beginning to resemble one as well. Her eyes were still bloodshot; her skin was dry and chalky. Of all of Edmund Hewlett’s effeminate tendencies, face cream was unfortunately not one. Still, she knew he wore contact lenses, and likely had eye drops hidden among his numerous prescriptions. Mary pressed against the left edge of the cabinet to open it. She found what she was really looking for instantly, forgetting her dry eyes and skin at the sight of the bottle of Benzodiazepine.

The déjà vu was not lost on her as she shook two pills into her hand. Had she taken enough to pass out the night before as she had intended, she would have never read Abe’s text, she would have never stolen the keys to Anna’s car and thus have never used it to drive into the senator. She wondered how many she would have to take to forget about last night’s events altogether. She questioned if she wanted to. From the time she had extinguished her last cigarette under the flow of the kitchen sink in her college flat after discovering that she was pregnant, Mary had not felt secure. Five years later, Simcoe offered her one of his smokes, and somehow she felt safe. Protected. Was that feeling worth trying to hold onto? If she reached for it, she knew she risked letting go over everything else she had convinced herself was dear.

Dear, like the Xanax she periodically stole to help her disconnect from it all.

Mary turned on the faucet and cupped her hand beneath it, collecting enough water to swallow two pills and her absence of faith. As she brought her hand to her mouth, the door connecting the guest bathroom to Hewlett’s chamber creaked open. Mary jumped.

“I can explain!” she said in a single breath. Seeing Aberdeen she asked, relieved, “can you?”

“I was just returning Mr. ‘Ewlett’s keys.”

“Oh.”

“And you?”

Mary held out her right hand, exposing her bad habit. “Want one?”

“What is it?”

“A short acting anxiolytic,” Mary said, handing her the bottle for further clarification. “I need to take a long nap.”

“Nah, I am done getting mixed up in these ‘igh-profile shit. No offence but I saw Mr. Pfizer down at the police station and your lot can keep ’im. I’m out.”

Mary had no idea what Aberdeen was talking about and declined to ask.

“‘Ow is Thomas?” For all of her faults the charming Haitian au pair truly did love Mary’s little boy. She looked as if she had been running around the house since returning looking for the little angle who gave them both so much light.

“With his grandfather. I told Richard that school has been cancelled for the rest of the week due to an E. coli outbreak in the cafeteria and now they are at the movies.”

“E. coli. Such culture! Gosh I miss the city,” Aberdeen exclaimed without a hint of irony.
“I know,” Mary sympathised, “me too.”

She looked back down at the pills in her hand. “Aberdeen, at the risk of seeming uncouth, may I sleep in your bed for a few hours? Abe is sleeping in ours and I don’t want to disturb him.”

“You can but uh, I’ve a paper to finish as long as I am off, so I’ll be typing the whole time. Why don’t you just sleep in there?” she offered, pointing to Hewlett’s room behind her.

Mary noted that Aberdeen did not inquire further about her reasons for not wanting to sleep beside her husband. The poor man who deserved nothing from her, especially not this. She swallowed both pills dry.

“Mr. ‘Ewlett was released from police custody about two hours before we met with Ms. District Attorney. I don’t remember what she is really called except that it is not Strong.”

“Smith. Her name is Smith.”

“Oh. Ms. Smith was quite angry at Miss Strong when Mr. ‘Ewlett was arrested but she was just as angry at his release. Miss Strong was angry too, so angry that we ‘ad to drop her off at some gentrified ‘ouse in Brooklyn and I don’t think she is coming back.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“She was quite worried about ‘im, you see. After the police we went to The Newsroom as it was closing and Rob said that Mr. ‘Ewlett had been in for lunch with Jordan and, and … their other friend. The ginger.”

“Simcoe?” Mary’s heart raced. She could feel her face flushing, either from the sound of his name on the lips of someone familiar or Aberdeen’s odd expression as she repeated it slowly. “Anyway, ‘Ewlett was there having a rather gay time, drinking port and eating oysters with ‘is mates while Anna, who ‘ad been so concerned for his welfare that she went to slay ‘er dragon of a mother for ‘im,” Aberdeen was becoming emotional. Her accent grew stronger as her volume raised. Mary knew the feeling. She placed a hand of support on the younger woman’s shoulder. How many times had her own presence been over looked in response to the drama that followed Anna’s name? Poor girl. When this was all over, she would invite Robert Townsend back to Whitehall on Aberdeen’s behalf.

“Ee didn’t even ‘ave the curtesy to call and say ‘ee ‘ad been released and she needn’t worry. And ‘ee was on the phone the whole time. They all were. Just not with ‘er. So I don’t think she will come back to Whitehall.”

It was the sort of thing that Abe was constantly doing with Robert Townsend and Caleb Brewster, Mary thought as she found herself cheering for her rival. “Good girl, Anna. Get out while you still can.”

“And as for Mr. ‘Ewlett I don’t think ‘ee is coming back soon either. It was in the news radio that someone jumped the rail so there will be delays.”

“God, I miss the city.”

“I know; me too.”
Before she fell asleep, Mary confessed to Aberdeen that she was meeting someone that evening and asked her to wake her at six. She borrowed a pair of Anna’s jeans she found on the floor and a loose, warm, old sweater in which to wander the woods. Tired from the medicine, she stared into Hewlett’s cheval glass, wondering if she looked as pretty in casual chic as Anna seemed to without effort. She braided her long hair. Anna had everything, Mary though, rolling up the bottom of the borrowed skinny jeans. She was tall and fit; a soft face with strong, dark features. Mary felt so pale in her shadow. She always had, even back when they had been friends.

She remembered going out with Anna, flirting with countless handsome men at bars they snuck into with fake IDs bearing the names of fictional characters. Mary spent hours getting ready; Anna, in contrast simply brushed her hair and teeth, throwing on whatever was on the top of the hamper. Yet Anna was always the one who stole the room. Mary was simply the gatekeeper, and like a fool, she had been happy to play that part.

The sweatshirt read >>Columbia<<. Mary wondered if having a child had not forced her to abandon her dreams of law school if she could have ever played Anna’s part.

No, she decided laying down on Hewlett’s hard mattress. Stars were born, not forged. She had married into a world she was not part of. She had married where Anna had fled. Once again, Mary saw herself losing a war Anna likely did not know them to be fighting.

She counted the glowing stickers in the cosmos Hewlett had stuck to his bed’s canopy. She did not reach twenty before falling asleep.

Hewlett was solemn and silent when he nudged her back to consciousness.

“ Aberdeen, what time is it?” she asked before opening her eyes.

“Oh, Oh. Edmund! Forgive me I-”

Hewlett held up his hand. “It is I that may owe you and apology, Mrs. Woodhull,” he spoke softly.

“Mary.”

“Ah, yes. Mary. Of course.”

“What time is it?” she inquired, still groggy from the stolen pills.

“Ah … quarter past. Five. Five fifteen.”

He started pacing. “Which mean it has been eight hours since my arrest, four since my release, and she still won’t take my calls,” he sighed heavily. “She has be blocked on every social media outlet. Why would I imagine she be in my bed … wearing my sweater at that.”

“This is yours? I thought-”

“We have the same one, but, ah, may I?” Mary leaned forward. “No, -M- it is mine. It is yours now if you want it. What does it matter? I tried to be the man she assumed I was, who whom she implied that she wanted me to be and I ruined everything - Or maybe everything between us was
already ruined and it took me getting arrested to see it - Or maybe it was always a one sided affair. I’m a fool. I always have been. Everyone can see it, hell, even I can see it.”

He looked at Mary as though he expected a protest. When she was not forthcoming, he continued.

“I didn’t know anything of your shared history until yesterday. She isn’t coming back. That horror for you is over; and I would ask your pardon for it,” his pace was slow, his voice deep. As always, he was dreadfully boring. She hoped, as she often did, that she would not nod off in the middle of his soliloquy. She figured she would need at least twenty minutes to make her escape, and thirty more to apply the cosmetics she did not want Simcoe to see her without. She fought against her eyelids. Maybe if she closed them he would just disappear. It was a tempting thought.

“Mary, I’ve - I’ve been alone all my life. At times I thought myself happy, because I had no idea what happiness was, and at times I thought myself miserable for all the same reason. Now I doubt that I shall ever smile again.”

Mary had no compassion for Hewlett’s loss. He was a man like any other, arrogant when he felt he could afford to be and atrabilious otherwise. Anna had been wise to abandon the idea of him, regardless of what her reasons were. She fought back the grin she felt creeping onto her face at the realisation that if fortune continued to favour her, she need only hear one side of this break up.

“So, why were you arrested?” she asked, remembering what Aberdeen had said.

“I misspoke in front of a crime scene.”

“What crime scene?” It was the first time she had heard those words.

“Senator Benedict Arnold, a Republican from Pennsylvania, was apparently last seen at DeJong Tavern. I’m surprised you’ve not heard about it. Are you feeling quite well?”

“The police are at the tavern where Anna works?” she asked, trying to seem surprised.

“Worked,” Hewlett corrected, stating that everything had gone to hell.

“Oh.”

She saw tears forming in the corners of his eyes. Remembering the way John’s lit up at the very mention of Anna’s name, Mary saw a means of avenging herself against the woman whom the rest of the world assumed had hung the moon. Anna had longer legs, a brighter smile, a far more enticing figure, better breeding and an Ivy League law degree. She made a mockery of Mary, her marriage, and countless other women who swallowed the pill of societal expectations by standing close enough to them that comparison was inevitably drawn. Anna won every conceivable contest with laughing indifference. Edmund Hewlett, weak, weeping Edmund Hewlett was a fitting punishment for the injustice born of her presence.

He sat down beside her. She reached for the hand he was not currently folding his crying eyes into.

“I know that she went to visit her mother to beg for your release. It has been a long time since I’ve known Anna or called her a friend, and I’m not from the world the cast you both out. Still, if you’ll accept some insight, you and Anna, you are idealists. She spent her entire adolescence pretending that money was irrelevant as you spent yours pretending that everything had a price. She’s grown up enough that she sees she needs it, but that it isn’t enough. Not alone. Find her. Fall at her feet before someone else -someone better- beats you to her alter, or to the alter, if you find my meaning.”
“You don’t much like me, Mary, do you?” he correctly surmised.

“Not much. Not right now anyway,” she answered honestly.

“I shouldn’t know this, and forgive me if I am speaking out of turn, but whatever is going on between you and … and Simcoe-” he spoke the surname of her spurious lover as if it were a curse.

“Nothing is going on,” Mary informed him as she released his hand. Who was he to pass judgement?

“He’s smitten. Hurt and well ah, injured, but somehow smitten all the same.”

“He is just a stand in. I have the feeling he always is. I have the feeling I always will be.”

“I can’t believe I’m defending this, but John, he – he doesn’t accept substitutions. For all of his faults he is honest about his emotions and intentions.”

Mary knew all too well. She wondered if Hewlett was trying to punish her for being in his room the same way she was trying to punish Anna for the excitement surrounding her existence. The unspoken solidarity pained her. Neither was willing to admit it aloud, but they had both become far too invested in the promises of artificial affection. If Anna -dear Anna- were otherwise occupied with another, John would respect her pursuit of happiness. Of this, she was certain. “You’re married,” his voice echoed in her memory. He deserved so much more than an empty dream.

“What are you doing in my bed?” Hewlett asked before Mary could consider her feelings for her partner-in-crime further.

“Abe snores.”

“If it makes you feel any better, Anna does as well. I understand your torment.”

It did. They shared a smile. It didn’t last. Mary looked down at his watch and saw that it was nearly six. She was due to meet Simcoe in an hour, she needed to put her face on first, and rather than talk simple strategy, she would be forced to break the news of police presence in DeJong Tavern; likely searching for the phone he had so thoughtlessly tossed into the woods. Unless Hewlett had already. He was his own favourite topic of discussion, to be sure.

While she considered how to make her exit, Hewlett’s eyes fixed on the open bathroom door.

“Ah, stay as long as you want Mary, I should really be going though.”

“Me too,” she said as she slid off the bed.

Hewlett walked to the bathroom and opened his medicine cabinet. “Making myself a little cocktail,” he called out bitterly. “You want anything while I am in here?”

Mary’s heart stopped.

“Not unless you have percolators,” she said, knowing he did not and hoping he would drop his accusations before he voiced them.

“It is strange. I thought I would be out of my heart medication by now, but the bottles seemed to have refilled themselves. Curious.”

Mary did not know if he was talking to her or to himself.
“My Xanax, however,” he sighed. “Do me a favour and simply ask. You understand that this is a controlled substance for a reason, don’t you?”

He was calmer than she would have expected. Almost concerned. Mary felt like a child, which, she supposed, was intended.

“I’m sorry I, I just needed-”

“And don’t tell Simcoe. Truly, he mustn’t know. Ah - wait, if you will.” After taking a handful of top shelf, Hewlett re-entered the room, retrieved a Styrofoam box from underneath his bed and handed her a bottle she did not recognize. “It is Scottish soda. Enough sugar to reanimate the dead. You should feel better after drinking it.”

“How long have you known?”

“About you and Simcoe? Since lunch. About your answer to sleep deprivation? I’ve had my suspicions. Saw you in my bed with the bathroom door open. You ought to be more careful.”

“You too.”

“Ah, yes well, I suppose there is something to that.”

“Buy her flowers,” Mary instructed after a long pause. “Nancy I mean, she can be a nightmare. Aberdeen knows the address, I’m sure she would be happy to drive you there.”

They smiled again at one another. It was not friendly, but it was not tense. It was as if Setauket itself was a joke and they were the only two who had heard the punchline.

Mary arrived at Starbucks a half an hour ahead of schedule. She saw Simcoe through the shop window; sitting in the same spot she had inspired a public erection that morning. He sipped at his tea, his unblinking eyes, bluer than any she had ever seen, drifted back and forth across a tablet.

Devotion. That was what she loved in him.

She saw it now. She felt it harder. John Graves Simcoe was devoted to his work, to his friends, to his teammates, to his idea of tortured romance, to whatever task may be at hand. Right now that included her protection. Mary took a deep breath and stepped inside.

“You’re early!” he said, rising with a smile. It was then she noticed that his ear was wrapped in bloodied gauze.

Her own eyes grew wide at the sight of him. She meant to offer an apology. She wanted all at once to beg for his forgiveness and to beg him to run away with her, far away from the world of the misery she had fought too hard and for too long to hold on to in fear that it was all the world would ever have to offer. Away from snoring husbands and weeping housemates. From book club meetings with women she was not entirely sure even read. Away from the charity. Away from self-doubt.

She wanted to embrace him and make hundreds of dangerous and empty promises she was not sure her heart would be able to keep. She wanted to be cool, casual, sexy, mysterious. She wanted him
to see her as he did the woman whose jeans she was wearing. She wanted to be objectified, or adored, it did not matter which.

She wanted him to look at her as if she were a doll if only because she had become so accustom to men doing so. She wanted silent lips made of stained bone china, if only to prevent her from saying what she did in greeting.

“What are you wearing?” she asked as her gaze fell on his denim shirt.

“Aren’t you going to ask me if I’m alright?” he sneered back.

Chapter End Notes

…Lovely faces, I am screaming too (and not just about some of the sport terms I am now tasked with defining.) Let’s just get right to it, shall we?

**Cricket** – a bat and ball sport

**The Ashes** – a Test cricket series between England and Australia

**Attempt / Shot On Target** - any shot attempt that would or does enter the goal if left unblocked

**Three Lions / Les Blues** – the national teams of England and France, respectively

**Friendly** – a test match, the result has no bearing on standing, these usually still trigger an emotional response

This chapter left me a slightly unsatisfied. Perhaps it was the tone; the emptiness and tragedy of Simcoe’s quest to win the heart of a woman who makes him feel whole. Perhaps it has more to do with the theme of seeking one’s self in others. Then again, I might just be exhausted after writing a character I’ve been fairly generous to from a far less favorable view. Try not to worry your pretty heads too much for Hewlett, though. You don’t imagine I’ve left him without a plan, do you?

To that end, I have my concerns that the telephone scene ought to have included a second “POV”, but this was an Anncoe chapter, pure and simple. If the conversation came across as haphazard and gratuitous, just wait. Much of what was discussed will be paramount in the next update … which tentatively won’t include any of these characters at all. No deus ex machina just yet, but my favourite barely functioning alcoholic will be back and at it. Oh John Andre, how I’ve missed you.

It will be a few weeks dear reader before we meet again. Term starts tomorrow and I’m only a year away from my own dissertation-based breakdown. Oh so much to look forward to. It has been a great summer with you guys though. I will try to get updates out bi-weekly, but “Andre” chapters tend to take me longer.

I hope till then life treats you well. Good luck in whatever adventures you have planned. Drop me a comment or hit the kudos button if you are thus inclined.
As always, thank you guys so much for reading!
XOXO – Tav

Up Next: OG
The Victim

Chapter Summary

Robert Rogers relives his darkest hour, attempts to repair his truck’s engine, vows to extort a gambling debt and is half-willingly conscripted in the fight against the forces that would threaten freedom.

Meanwhile, Andre experiences infatuation, though he had another word for it at the time.

A decade worth of backstories, beer and ill-conceived bets.

Chapter Notes

Hello again, lovely faces! It has been a while, and I am sorry about that. Ready to do the thing?

Warnings: outsider art, heartbreak, substance abuse, sports references, bad intelligence, right wing and realpolitik rants, conversation involving race relations, religion and murder. *Minor character death.*

We good? Awesome … because *guess who is back this go around?* As always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The boy should have been back by now.

Rogers wondered exactly how long he had been underway. He had sent him to the junkyard in the morning after ringing the mechanic and been given a seven-hundred dollar quote for work he was certain he could undertake himself without the assistance of a computer to tell him what he already knew he would have to replace. He still maintained that the man could shove the price up his arse, but after five hours of pulling apart the vehicle’s engine, the amount he was quoted for labour no longer seemed unreasonable. It would be dark soon. He had been able to repair the dents in the bonnet and front bumper but unless the boy returned shortly, he would miss another day at the construction site. Seven-hundred dollars, he thought slowly as he looked at the engine parts laying on a sheet on his lawn. Seven-hundred.

He would lose the equivalent with each day his work-truck remained out of commission, but it was principle that stopped him from paying and, as he tried to instil in his workers, a man must have a principle. The mechanic would surely go under for charging prices like his in Setauket, he thought. Even if they were fair. Then again, perhaps not. Rogers doubted that half of the city commuters could change their own oil, much less rebuild half an engine with used parts. Used parts that ought to have arrived hours before.

He wondered if it had been a mistake to entrust Welsh with the money, if Newt was not of the
mind to negotiate on price, or if the website had not been updated and the depot did not have any rod bearings he could use as replacement. It was every bit as likely that Welsh had gone to the train station and used the cash on hard drugs, or that he had otherwise not known what he was looking for and had subsequently been too ignorant to ask. Rogers wondered what he had been before circumstance found him at the halfway house. The boys were all rough sorts now, but it was possible that Welsh had been a paper pusher in a previous life.

Useless, Rogers thought, like the rest of that lot.

He did not trust him at the work-site yet. By the same logic, he now admittedly should not have trusted him with the money. If temptation proved too great and the boy relapsed, his caseworker would show up on his doorstep and would surely want to have herself a little looksee. Rogers could not explain everything under his roof. Not today.

His phone buzzed. Knowing it not to be relevant to his task he ignored it, electing instead to stare at the pile of metal rubbish that had served his transportation needs the night before. It had been ten years since he had been in a major accident. Sobriety, he concluded, was an utter waste. In neither incident had he been over the legal limit. In neither incident had he ample time to break. He had a few minor cuts and bruises from the wreck, nothing out of the ordinary for him. Nothing visible. Nothing that would draw attention or cause concern. His pick-up was another matter entirely.

The boy should have returned by now. He had to get this metal mess out of sight. There was something rotten in Setauket. Eyes were always open; mouths were never shut.

The phone buzzed. Again.

Again. Twice more in rapid succession.

The device itself was called an upgrade, at least according to the teenager at the mall kiosk who had renewed his contract. It had not cost him anything but valuable time he could have otherwise dedicated to thinking about work he never seemed to have the supplies to complete. Back when he had a flip phone he could reasonably assume that clients were calling with demands or that employees were calling back to explain why these very demands were not being met. This still happened on occasion. This still happened at the exact same rate and frequency to which he had long been accustom, though now it was harder to recognize. Most of the mobile’s activity was in text form, most of the messages sent by the boys that he played football with at the weekend. John’s team, dandies who assumed that asserting their intellect made up for the excessive back passing Rogers saw on the pitch. Even Jordan engaged in it. He read, or rather saw, something written in Italian, meant for the man who was ignoring his debt but sent to everyone. Rogers put the phone down and replaced it in his hand with a bottle of rum chilled by the early spring air.

The boy should have been back by now.

He should probably look for him.


He grunted, deciding that the best course of action was to repack his tool kit and place the salvageable parts of his engine in the garage. He needed to visit the junkyard himself, look for a junkie and explain to the Woodhulls that he would not have the drywall up before Friday. Instead, he looked at the group chat. A toast to your success, Simcoe had written above a photograph Rogers did not bother to click on, expecting that, like Simcoe himself, the insult lacked fineness.
The captain’s words were followed by a series of hieroglyphs depicting laughing faces and alcoholic beverages. Rogers wondered how his teammates made the little pictures appear in their texts. He himself could barely master typing with his thumb. He wondered if there was a hieroglyph of $200 that might serve to strengthen his own message. He sent it again. Words only. The only words he had for John Andre.

You are not going anywhere until you pay your debt to me.

The doctor claimed that he was voluntarily checking himself into rehabilitation or some such shite. Rogers knew better. He knew Andre. He knew he would never honour his word on his own initiative. He must have some secret; some great undoing that could be exploited. Something, or someone, was clearly forcing Andre’s hand, and Rogers meant to discover what or whom. Effects, as he had once warned, had a funny way of becoming causes themselves if left to fester, and for Robert Rogers, the wound was open. He had hit a financial set back in the form of a tree. Two-hundred of the doctor’s dollars would go a long way. Two-hundred dollars he swore to himself he would acquire one way or another before Andre left the city in search of the serenity he promised but could not seem to sell out of his own psychiatric practice. “A man must have a principle,” he muttered, “as a cause demands an effect.”

Rogers took another gulp of rum before carrying the remaining tools to the garage, cursing the drink, the doctor, the tree that had refused to make leave and the boy who should really have returned by this point.

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His wife left with their nearly adult children and his sense of propriety. She had her reasons; he had known them once. None of this had been a lie, though none of it had been relevant. He had first taken to drink after he had found another to fill a physical void, and several to succeed her when she left as well. There were no women in his house on the outskirts of Setauket anymore. No children, just an empty room, a few empty bottles and the secret he occasionally hoped to drown in them.

He was not an alcoholic, but he was properly buzzed when he first met John Andre a decade prior. It seemed appropriate. Business was hurting. His alimony payments did not alter with the economy. The construction market dried up after the housing bubble burst. He had been forced to choose between declaring bankruptcy and make redundancies.

That is how the whole business started with the State Penal System.

After being let go and not having a transferable skill set, one of his former workers - a man at least five years his senior whom Rogers referred to only as boy - spent a year in prison after trying to trade steaks purchased with food stamps for meth from a dealer who turned out to be an undercover cop. When he was released he gave Rogers’s address - the only one he knew offhand - as the place he was staying, claiming it to be a halfway house. His former boss did not refuse him. He came with a rent check from the state government. More followed. In the eight months after the boy’s arrival, Rogers had been sent six more addicts to rehabilitate. He put them to work on one of his sites paying only minimum wage and they were grateful. They loved him for it, and he loved them.

Though they remained in his employ, two of his boys had recently moved out. Only one of the vacant rooms had been filled. Six weeks passed. Rogers called local prisons, rehab clinics, and a few personal injury lawyers whose numbers he knew from TV jingles trying to fill it, but nothing
came of his promotional efforts. A room he could be getting paid to let remained vacant, and Rogers thought an AA meeting might prove the perfect venue for meeting the sort of client he sought.

For the first time in his adult life, he found himself in a church.

A little soothmoother with some air of authority who initially seemed his best bet for taking up residence under his roof would have nothing of it. Rather than allow Rogers to go around giving his pitch, he made him stand up in front of the group and explain a problem that largely only manifested itself during the Old Firm derby.

“Hi,” he started awkwardly in the given structure. “My name’s Robert. Ahm an alcoholic. S’been bout three-fourths an hour since m’last, and amur another moment ah walk out.”

“Hi Robert,” the room echoed. It was a familiar chorus for them. He wondered if they had understood or even listened to the rest of what he had said. The Englishman who had started the meeting by handing out a few tokens and telling some rubbish about surrendering his licence invited him to continue. Rogers spoke about divorce which seemed to appeal to the crowd’s sympathies more than his honest decelerating about later getting himself properly trashed had. He left immediately after he finished, without finding that sobriety was indeed preferable, and, thanks to the smug, pretty-boy Brit, without finding a new tenant. He walked to the nearest pub, as promised.

A few days later, the same Englishmen who had lead the AA meeting joined him.

“John Andre,” he introduced himself again with a smile that failed to effect Rogers’s disposition towards him.

“Hi John,” he echoed, rolling his eyes. He moved his ale in an attempt to indicate to John Andre that he was not indeed welcome on the stool beside him, but the signal was misunderstood.

“Relax. I’m not here solely to watch this week’s match either,” he smiled lifting the glass of wine the bartender had since handed to him. “Cheers.”

In the same fashion that Andre claimed to be in recovery whilst hiding out in drinking holes, Rogers reasoned, he also lied about being a fan -or even a follower- of the beautiful game. They were in the middle of an international break. Scotland had just lost to Switzerland in a friendly, which, if anything else the young man claimed about his history was true, he really ought to have known.

The match on the pub’s small, flickering rear-projection television was two weeks old. Rogers had seen it once before, ESPN2 had aired it twice since. City won in the end, a reality of which the man wearing a United jersey seemed unaware. Rogers took it upon himself to inform him. Andre had ten dollars that said he was wrong. He never paid his debt in cash, but he bought Rogers enough drink during the game that the Scotsman forgot to call him on it.

“Are you a City supporter then?” Andre asked after the match ended exactly as Rogers said it would.

“Rangers.”

“Queens Park?”

“Glasgow,” he spat.
After the short exchange, they opted to drink in silence. Rogers had disliked him instantly and immensely.

The sentiment never softened in the years since, but Andre did not judge him when he occasionally needed a beer to get through the day, and in that manner, an artificial familiarity developed. Secrets slipped through pints and at some point Rogers had told him about Samuel Tallmadge. Andre had offered nothing memorable in response. This might have gone some ways to solidifying a friendship, but by that point Andre had not only prevented Rogers from shopping for tenants at Alcoholics Anonymous, he had taken to stealing them from under his roof.

He had seen her naked twice before first making love to her. The first time was at a gallery opening he had been given tickets to. She was three metres tall and her face was a mystery. Originally, Andre had assumed that the flowing blonde hair that fell just above the figure’s shoulders belonged to the artist herself, but he was delighted to be corrected. They exchanged pleasantries when he introduced himself. “Artist or model?” she had asked in reply. “I dabble in both I fear,” he replied. “Me too,” she said coyly. He was infatuated. She had not offered her name.

He took a live drawing class a few weeks later when he encountered her again. There was a difference between looking at a model for perspective and gazing at one with desire. His sketch suffered for it.

It was hardly his first time observing the exposed flesh of a young woman but even decades later he would remember it as being a singular instance. Although the room around her disappeared and her figure was all he saw, it seemed he did not see her at all. He dreamt her. Her body remained perfectly still for one hundred twenty minutes. Slightly leaned back on a stool draped in dark fabric that made her pale skin seem to glow, one impossibly long leg bent, arms crossed behind her head. If her muscles cramped against the sting of sustained sedentariness she gave no indication. Her visage remained serene. She was so natural that she hardly seemed exposed. Andre instead felt himself bare. Conscious. Alive. Occasionally, the model’s eyes seemed to glaze. Occasionally, they seemed to dance. When they fell on him, they seemed to read right into the intent he wished he could reign in. He crossed his legs as best he could. She successfully fought back a mocking smile.

He first learned her name, or rather one that she used, after the class had ended and his piece was less than half-complete. He would never finish it, though he would sketch her countless times in a feeble attempt to recapture the attraction he felt when he knew nothing of her beyond the curve of her neck which a professional had so masterfully depicted.

“Ladies and gentlemen, give it up for Philomena Cheer!” Patience Lovell said jovially as she handed the model a silken robe and a cup of coffee. Philomena smiled and curtsied and walked around for a long while as she stretched. Andre hurried to finish some shading while the instructor gave him a few tips he wished he could remember. At the time, Patience Lovell was already gaining recognition in New York for her talents in painting and sculpture. A few months later one of her pieces would sell for millions at Sotheby’s and she would no longer offer classes in his price range. Though he would continue to see the artist on occasion, cocktail parties and art galas were hardly the venue to ask for tips on how to complete a picture he doubted she remembered her influence had brought into existence. Its incompleteness never seemed to bother the woman who would become his wife.
“You dabble?” Philomena said as she first examined the work with delight. *You remember me then?* Andre wanted to reply. Instead, he asked her if she wanted to get another coffee. Instead, he took her home.

Andre dwelled in an open flat in the UES that his esteemed colleague had long since lost interest in and was otherwise trying to sell. “If you like the apartment so much, it is yours,” he told him with a laugh. Pricing was never discussed. Andre lived there rent-free for a year before her was able to make an offer, an offer which was promptly rejected. Two years into their marriage, Philomena would purchase the apartment for the asking price of around two million when market recovery threatened to throw them out.

He always wondered if it was she initially fell in love with him or the flat. Her first time inside she mentioned she was living in a crowded halfway house on Long Island.

“Robert Rogers?” Andre inquired, taken slightly aback.

“How did you know?”

“It is ironic; I first met him at an AA meeting.”

“That is ironic given that he isn’t an addict and you are clearly not in recovery.”

“Clearly,” he repeated, pouring them both another glass of port.

“I am not,” she started after a few seconds of silence robbed her of her comfort. “I’m not a criminal or on drugs or whatever you might be thinking. I’m just an actress, or,” she paused, “at least I am trying to be.”

“I’ve always known it to be a scam, darling. I am thinking only of how lovely you are.”

He leaned in to kiss her. The quest was successful, if not short lived. Philomena pulled away, preferring to admire and comment on the architecture. She had learned a few terms in her time under Robert’s roof. Andre felt invisible and opportunistic. *Infatuated*, as he would later describe it. At the time if felt like something deeper, at the time perhaps it was.

Philomena explained that she had been priced out of her apartment when a real estate developer and purchased the property and the court upheld that a two hundred percent increase in rent was legal. It would take months to get on the wait list for normal housing assistance. In addition to the occasional modelling gig, Philomena, like much of the rest of the class Julliard had recently graduated, was trying to pay off her crippling student debt by serving food and pouring drink. Her tips went but so far. Unable to find a room on such short notice, she had been living at a shady motel on the Connecticut border. One morning she had been late for work and explained why to a group of day drinkers in an effort to stop them from calling her boss to complain. Word of her plight travelled quickly through the backwater. Rogers visited on her next night shift to offer an alternative.

The plan was simple. The plan had worked. Philomena used her stage make up skills to create meth scars for her meeting with a number of bureaucrats. She copied the mannerisms of many of her new neighbours from The Sugarhouse Inn, explained that she was in recovery but was homeless and was given a $400 check to help her become a more productive member of society. She remarked with bitter laughter that it was the only steady acting job she had been able to obtain.

Andre offered her another part. He put the entirety of his savings into negotiation.

“Thirty-thousand?” she laughed. “What exactly are you asking of me, Mr. Andre?”
“Doctor,” he corrected, “I’m asking for your hand in marriage, Miss Cheer.”

“Cheer is just my stage name. A … translation. I am thinking of changing my given one, though I’m not sure I like Andre very much.”

“Appreciate my predicament. I am trying to recruit a young, beautiful, talented actress for a simple but rather specific role. Pretend to love me for three years. Love me as we both love New York City. I can make it worth your while.”

To his delight, she consented herself to the proposal. She fell into her roll; she fell into his bed. At the time it felt like love, at the time perhaps it was.

There were times when he forgot that they were merely married on paper. They went out on her night off, filling the evenings with culture and concupiscent conversation. Then almost suddenly, the success that Andre had long believed the city promised finally introduced itself, only, not to him. Philomena was cast as the lead in a Broadway revival and enjoyed instant acclaim. For the first time since his Green Card approval, Andre was forced to see her as an actress, to see their marriage as a play.

On opening night, her saw her passionately kissing one of her co-stars in her dressing room after the final curtain fell. He wondered when she had stopped kissing him that way. He wondered if she had ever loved him at all. Dejected, he fucked her understudy. In their bed. In the flat which she would soon own outright.

Philomena did not even care enough to call him on it, or on any of the girls and boys who followed. Andre wanted her to angry; he wanted to know that she had once been his. He was afraid to ask.

Property, rather than passion, kept them together past the three years they had agreed to. He did not want to let go of the life he enjoyed under the light of her star, she did not want to pay alimony. In time he found his own success, a sting of wealthy immigrants came to him for the drugs they had enjoyed recreationally back home. Martha Dandridge brought him on at Columbia and the wage gap narrowed. His envy faded. Sometimes he loved her, though never at the same times she seemed to love him. He never brought up divorce after her initial refusal. He never let her speak of it again. The resentment this fostered made it easier to pretend that she had never been the sole object of his affection, that his wandering eyes were never completely fixated on her posed figure.

The unfinished sketch became the lock screen background on every phone he had since owned, including the one he used to play her or women who resembled her for the powerful men who bought into the illusion he created; in the same way he had once bought into the one he had once paid Philomena to create. Sometimes he drank. Sometimes he cried. Sometimes he considered that he had never loved her, or Arnold or Peggy or anyone else. Maybe they were all just extensions of himself he felt particularly charmed by. Maybe he was completely alone in life and his thoughts no longer amused him as they once had. Maybe everyone else was interesting and he was simply and observer. Maybe he had ruined them all.

The last time Robert Rogers went to an AA meeting was the first he spoke sincerely.

Mena had a shift at DeJong’s that evening. It would be among her last. She was training someone new to take over for her, a boy with a full beard who retained his baby fat. Rogers had yet to
commit his name to memory. The struggling actress was moving out of the backwater, into the city, where -in her own words- she belonged. It would be years before she was on Long Island again. He would come to miss her, though he had no way of knowing this at the time. The circumstances of her imminent departure however had him livid. He knew that his old friend John Andre was responsible for the slight dip in his income -one that he collected rather than earned- and, through their mutual friend, that ol’ Johnny was filling in for whomever regularly led the meetings which he had not bothered himself with since obtaining his APA accreditation.

Rogers did not go to church. He did not know anything about the one this particular AA meeting was being held in.

He came directly from work. The meeting would not start for an hour. He hoped to talk to Andre before it began, but the doctor had yet to arrive. Some of the world’s good people had set up a table with generic brand icing filled cookies and room-temperature lemonade. Rogers stared at it, hungering for anything beyond what was on display. From the adjacent room he heard a deep baritone he recognized instantly and his hunger momentarily dissipated. He smiled at the irony. After two years, if Andre did not show up in time to interfere, he might yet get a worker -if not a replacement tenant- out of this exercise of patience.

“When did you get back?” another kid who was setting up folding chairs in a conference room asked.

“August. I’m at NYU now,” Jordan replied.

“Glad I caught you at fall break.”

“Me? Glad I caught you! Ben! Fucking gracing us small folk from New Haven.”

“You say that like it is on the other side of the world,” Ben teased.

“Other side? Nah man, you think Rome would have something to offer but it is just the same shit. People way more racist though.”

Rogers heard himself saying the Lord’s name in the head he shook. As he was in a church, he wondered if that counted as a prayer. “Same Jordan,” he sighed. He had assumed he had beaten that sentiment of the boy when he worked on one of his sites the summer before his senior year in high school. Race, Rogers maintained, was a fiction perpetrated by politics to keep the people divided and fixated on debating social policy initiatives, rather than on trade issues, things that he could reasonably assume effected the mainstream. As Rogers benefited from current social policies this gave him mild concern. If funds were reallocated from one project to another it might hurt his bottom line.

Paperwork, he thought.

It all came down to paperwork and to the people who were paid to process it. He wondered if government workers took home a greater share of taxes than he did for affixing their stamps to whatever form required it. Doubtful. He was honest. He worked with his hands. He housed and employed rough sorts of every colour and creed. Not that that was in itself significant. It was just another box to check on a piece of paper. Those would not disappear no matter how much time people invested in discussing the matter. When Jordan came back to working for him, he would need to set him straight again.

“Yeah?” asked another boy Rogers could tell was in need of a real-world education.
“Yeah. Segregation is still a thing. Not like with water fountains or public institutions or what have you but I couldn’t get into half the bars my friends wanted to go to because of the colour of my skin. God bless the USA. Least here you can sue for discrimination.”

“Is that what you plan on doing after graduation? Civil Rights? I bet you -”

“Man, I can’t even think about graduation yet, or law school. I deferred in pursuit of a high school language elective I know you’ll recall. I mean … I’ve a few transferable credits from the summer semester at Sapienza but I’m still a freshman at a state school, not like you Mr. Ivy League … Skull-and-Bones.”

“I’m not-,” Ben laughed. Perhaps realizing he was in the house of the Lord and not wishing to lie, he continued with a change of subject. “You could transfer to Yale, you know - if you wanted to.”

“Nah,” he smiled. “There is this chick - gorgeous, smart as fuck-” he said slowly.

“Anna? That girl from your civics class you were talking about?”

“Anna?” Jordan laughed. “She’s just a friend. She’s got … a lot of friends. How we met though. Kind of. I was chilling with her at the place up the road when I met Abby.”

He went on to talk about his latest conquest, though conquest was perhaps not the best word. What he described was more of a sustained siege. He could tell she liked him. She had recently let him meet her son. Jordan wanted to introduce her to his parents over Christmas but he did not know if she was ready for that step yet. Ben was hung up on the fact she had a child.

“How old is she?”

“Just turned twenty-one. Her son is five.”

“Oh.”

“Man, don’t be -”

“I’m not - I’m, is that what you are worried about? That your parents will disapprove?”

“I think they understand how biology works. Abby is a great mother and a strong woman who made the best out of a teenage pregnancy. She can just be a little … I guess private is the word I am looking for. Over-protective. She lives in this little bubble she knows someone is going to come around and burst and she is worried it is going to be me.”

“If you don’t mind the intrusion,” the unmistakable voice of John Andre droned. Rogers shoved a stale biscuit into his mouth and left the table. He had words for Andre. Furthermore, he had to intercede before the good doctor could give those kids whatever awful advice he had gleaned from his experiences flipping through one Freud or fucking another.

“Boy!” he called out as he entered the small conference room the drunkards would soon be using, its walls with children’s drawings of animals getting on the biblical arc. It was disconcerting. He wished he saved some of his own children’s doodles from when they were small and he was an important figure in their lives. Now they only called at Christmas. His relationship with his parents had been the same. It was the same way with John from what he knew. Rogers assumed that everyone who would soon fill the chairs the boys were meant to be setting up was in the exact same boat. He glanced at the boys, wondering if life somehow did not affect those born into relative affluence in the same way.
Jordan was shaking his head as if he could read Rogers’s mind.

“Everything I said about people being more racist in Italy … hey, Mr. Rogers. It’s Akinbode. Or Jordan, if you must. Boy is derogatory and just … dated. Come up with some new insults.”

It was not at all how he meant it. Jordan knew that before he turned down the internship Rogers had kindly offered to go off to Italy on an exchange scheme.

“Leave them be, Robert,” Andre cautioned through a clenched smile.

“Andre.”

“It is alright,” Jordan interjected. “That’s the way he has always been. You remember Ben, right? You bought us both beer a few times when we were still in high school.”

Andre said something disapproving. Rogers nodded without returning his attention to the kids. He used to buy beer for a lot of under aged drinkers. There was not much for teenagers to do in the backwaters and they would find their way to ale one way or another. It was better if they drank in their own basements or in public parks near their homes than looking for trouble in the city. At least he used to think that way before he realised just how ill lit the backroads were. He did not buy alcohol for children anymore, regardless of the mark-ups they offered to pay.

A man had to have a principle.

“My, my, look who we have here,” a square jawed blonde in a preacher’s frock said as he entered. There was something familiar about him Rogers failed to place.

“Hey Dad,” Ben replied.

“Reverend.”

“Jordan Akinbode, how long has it been?”

“A year I think. I didn’t get back too long ago.”

“Your parents told me. They missed you so much. We all did. You know, it takes less than an hour on Sunday morning to get here from your campus…”

So, Rogers thought, the abandonment of one’s parents did not in fact exclude itself to the proletariat. He looked at the children’s drawings once more. The dotted eyes of the various creatures all seemed to be watching him.

“They didn’t convert you in Rome, did they?” the preacher man asked Jordan after greeting the rest of the room. He laughed as he patting him on the back.

“He hasn’t been back all that long, pops. Leave him be,” Ben interjected whilst Jordan offered an answer.

“No. No, sir. I went to the Vatican twice though. Once to marvel, once in hopes of running into other American tourists. Most of my Sundays I spent playing soccer. There not much else to do when your living on a budget.”

“Soccer,” Ben repeated with a hint of disapproval. “Don’t tell me you think that is a sport now.”

“You run for ninety minutes, how is it not a sport?”
“It is a game at best.”

“The Beautiful Game,” Andre mused. Rogers wanted to tell him to get fucked but held his tongue in the presence of the priest. “It is rather curious. I myself had no interest in the game until moving stateside where it holds no predominance.”

“That explains everything,” the Scotsman spat.

“I mean, sport, game whatever, give me a goal and I’ll score.”

“You might try applying some of that confidence to your romantic entanglement,” Andre offered.

Ben explained the situation to his father. “Jordan is seeing someone who he wants to introduce to his parents but he is worried she will see it as moving too fast.”

“What were you planning on?”

“Christmas.”

The reverend thought it over for a moment. “Invite her to a small gathering in which they will also be in attendance. Don’t spring it on her and don’t make it too intimate. You can go back to your parents’ house in the evening for coffee. Don’t stay too long. Protest and say you want to go as soon as your mother pulls out the baby photos. Make her laugh.”

“How though? I was a damn cute kid.”

“Language,” the preacher warned, nodding at the cross affixed to the adjacent wall.

“Sorry.”

“I agree with the Reverend. Keep it casual.”

“Casual, John? Yer moving rather quickly though now ain’t ye?”

“I confess my understanding as to why that the brevity of our engagement is causing you concern, but rest assured Robert, I recognize how very blessed I am that Philomena has agreed to become my wife.”

The reverend congratulated him and asked if he had a date, if he had found a church. Salesman, like the rest of us, Rogers scuffed. Andre said that he had not though it looked lovely here. He asked if there had recently been a wedding. No, Ben responded. His older brother died a few years ago. His family always put up a small memorial. That is what the flowers were from. That is why he was home a few days before Yale’s fall break officially began. Rogers remembered where he saw the man before.


With that, he left. Once more, it was without a new tenant or an old worker.

He finished a fifth of rum before John Andre joined him. By the time the younger man sat down after exchanging a kiss with his bride-to-be, Rogers had long since lost interest in talking about her and the funds he was stealing in taking Philomena’s hand.

“Yer a shrink or something, right?” he asked as John sat down.
He raised his eyebrows and tilted his head slightly as if he was curious. He was not. He was more of an actor than a doctor and everyone knew it, but Rogers was pished right proper, and Andre was there.

“Are you buying?”

Rogers held his hand up for another round. “Leave the bottle,” he told the boy whom Andre identified as Brewster. When he left, the pair drank a glass of Whaler’s Original in silence before Rogers said, “I killed a kid once. Two years ago. The reverend’s son. The one the flowers were for.”

Andre nodded but did not verbally respond. Rogers went on to explain that he was driving home at night from a work site, taking one of the poorly lit side roads that lead to his home. He was exhausted. He knew he was driving at the posted speed limit because he had set the cruise control to 70 miles per hour, not trusting himself to keep his foot level on the gas pedal. He did not see the kid until after he hit him head on. He did not see him at all until his picture was on the front page of the local newspaper the next morning. He did not stop. He knew the boy died upon impact or would shortly after. It was too late. He had not seen him. In the days after the boy became all he saw. Sometimes, he still was. Sometimes Rogers wondered if he was in fact an alcoholic like all those poor bastards who went to Andre for advice; for sometimes he would drink until Samuel Tallmadge’s face went away, sometimes he would drink until it returned. Otherwise, he only drank as he had before - when the Rangers were underperforming. “As one ought,” Andre concluded for him. He then had either a great deal to say in response or nothing at all. Rogers did not recall and it was not significant.

That was the last they ever spoke of the incident.

In the years that followed, they stuck to discussing trial matters and built a sort of comradery around them. Rogers grew to respect Andre for his digression and assumed it was mutual when recently the doctor turned to him and said, “I killed a kid.” They were at the same bar. There was a half-empty bottle between them. The symmetry was shaking but Rogers offered what he could.

“You need to hide a body?”

“He’s not dead yet. I wish I felt something but I don’t.”

“There isn’t much a grey area between alive and dead.”

“You would be surprised.”

“Then do what you have to do.”

“Yea.”

What he apparently had to do was finish the bottle of plonk and tell him that Hewlett would likely be out for a few weeks but Wakefield could fold back if need be. Simcoe probably would not be playing on Sunday either and Rogers would thusly need to take the captaincy again if he were up to it. He was. Nothing more was said of the kid who was either dead or dying or of what role Andre had played in any of it.
Abe Woodhull worked for him sometimes. Worked in the sense that he performed manual labour, not in the sense that Rogers paid him anything for his efforts. The day after he crashed his truck into a tree however, he did end up reimbursing him for the replacement parts he brought by when it became clear that Welsh would not be returning.

“What happened?” Abe asked as he looked at the engine after counting the crumpled up greenbacks he had been handed. Rogers explained the work he would need to do to the engine. He did not mind showing the boy a thing or two about automobiles if he was interested. Abe did not have a car of his own that Rogers knew of but it might go some way with the missus.

“I meant-”

“Tree wouldn’t make way.”

Almost exactly as it happened a decade before, on the same stretch of road, someone limped out in front of him in the wee hours. He did not see him in time to break, but he saw him in time to swerve. Seeing that the man was injured, Rogers tried to call an ambulance, but the man protested repeatedly demanding, rather than asking “Don’t you know who I am?”

He asked what happened and the man said he had been beaten and taken captive by a terrorist agent. A sleeper cell. A convert. Someone who had had apparent training in some shit -stan country. When Fox News spoke of no-go areas in Paris and London, they damn well weren’t kidding, he’d spat. Europe was a mess and now those bastards had operatives in America, hiding out in dive bars when you would last expect them. Oh, he said, when Washington hears of this!

Rogers did not reply.

The man changed his tone slightly, if only for a moment. What happened to Peggy? Maybe they had her too. It was all Obama’s fault somehow. When the Republicans retook the White House – Rogers conceded that ringing the police was probably not the best of ideas. The man was clearly on drugs, and police involvement would do him no favours. He put his car in neutral, had the man sit in the driver’s seat and pushed it a quarter mile to his house.

His back, arms and legs were sore.

He had a drink and saw the dead Tallmadge boy.

In the morning, after he had given the man aspirin, orange juice and an ice packet, after he called the mechanic and sent the boy to the junk yard, he turned on the news. Nothing the man had said had been a lie or an exaggeration, excepting that the Al Qaeda operative that had come close to taking him alive had not captured Peggy Shippen. He would have called the cops then had he not nearly run the senator over on the same stretch of road where the Dodge that sat dented on his lawn had slain Samuel Tallmadge. Another Tallmadge was leading the investigation, and Rogers would be damned if he gave him any kind of lead on a cold case. He had his boys to think about. Where would they go if he went to prison? He wrongly assumed that the day would give him ample time to think of a plausible story for how he had found the senator. He should have turned his phone off. Andre should have paid him the sum he owed long ago.

“The statute of limitations for a hit and run in New York is three years,” Abe said when Rogers finished relaying the entire narrative. “You can neither be arrested nor convicted. But you can’t go to the police.”

“Why would that be?”
Abe explained that Tallmadge had paid Whitehall a visit in the morning along with two international operatives. From what he overheard through the open air-vent from his post in the garage under Hewlett’s apartment, the senator was last seen at DeJong Tavern, something that lined up with the account Rogers had been given. Through the combined espionage efforts of himself, Edmund Hewlett and Aberdeen Declesias, they discovered an international conspiracy around Arnold’s disappearance. Aberdeen did not know that Abe had been involved at all in the espionage as he’d pretended to be hungover in front of her, and Hewlett did not know that Abe knew he was guilty of attempted murder, as Hewlett was a fool. Rogers could not go to the police. They were all in on it, the NYPD, the FBI and all of their foreign allies, including, it seemed Whitehall’s own member of the landed nobility. While Abe did not personally agree with the senator’s politics, he was a patriot first and foremost and would not let a man who had served his country with pride and distinction become victim to Setauket’s little king.

“Hewlett?” Rogers scoffed. His appraisal of his fellow Scot was rather low.

“He was arrested for show after talking with someone back in England about the murder and immediately released,” Abe shook his head. “I am watching him. Someone has to.”

“Well ain’t that some serpentine shite.”

Rogers did not know what to believe, but until he could verify that what Abe said about the statute bore true, he would not be going to the police out of self-interest. From everything else Abe had explained, someone clearly had it in for Benedict Arnold. There was clearly a profit to be made.

Abe opened his mouth to speak. He suddenly found himself with a pocketknife against his neck.

“I like you, boy. But from here on oot yer reportin’ tae me.”

Rogers warned him what would happen if he told anyone, including his missus, about what they discussed. When he was certain Abe understood, he smiled, retracted the blade and repeated his line about holding Abe in fond regards.

“What are we going to do about Senator Arnold?”

“I’ll take care of it.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, my darlings, in keeping with the light theatrical theme, we have almost made it to the end of the first act. It will likely be a bit of a wait again before the next chapter, but I hope you will stick around. Someone is about to get their just deserts, and after that, we can really start having fun. I am curious who you think it might be, if you have any idea at all, but before I ask you to comment a response to my question, let me answer a few of yours:

Soothmoother - a Scottish insult for one who talks with a British accent.

Old Firm derby - a match between the Glasgow based clubs Rangers and Celtic

international break - when club football is suspended so players can wear the colours
of their respective countries

*City / United* - Manchester based football clubs

*Glasgow Rangers* - with 54 league titles, the most successful club in the Scottish Premiership.

*Queens Park* - another team called Rangers (I can’t resist. I just can’t resist. And yes, that is the club I’ve cited Simcoe as supporting.) Based out of London, they are currently 14th in the Championship and *oh my word!* I just realised that I am going to have to explain promotion and relegation to you. Next time.

*Sotheby’s* - a fine art auction house in London

*Freud* - the official translation is *joy*, but once again, I really couldn’t resist. *Joy / Cheer* are synonymous and I am such a dork with names.

*Pished* - Scottish for pissed

*Whaler’s Original* - a cheap dark rum sold in America. I liked the name, and associating it with Caleb in a small way.

*plonk* - really cheap red wine, not a brand, just a word.

Did I miss anything? Please be so kind to as to let me know.

As always, thank you so much for reading. Comments and Kudos are always appreciated, and I am still super curious if you have any idea about who is about to be subject to sentencing.

Till next time, XOXO - Tav

Up Next: Match of the Day (edit: j/k, it is an Annlett chapter, I know, I know, I always do this. Funny thing is the original ch. 15 was already half written. I know, I know, I always do that too. I am the worst.)
Ben Tallmadge got the call at two o’clock in the morning. By noon, the day had been too long. At six in the evening, no amount of saturated fat would suffice to alleviate his stomach from the pain of three cans of Red Bull and countless twenty-five cent Café Americanos from the precinct’s vending machine. He knew this from experience, but he persevered, taking another bite of the now lukewarm Chinese takeaway the District Attorney had been so kind as to send over to him and his team. Ben knew it was a bribe, but he was in no position to refuse. After sixteen hours of fruitless labour, no one had either the adrenaline or artificial energy left to carry on. He needed to settle his stomach. He needed to line it with enough carbohydrates that the next watered down shot of espresso he drank would not be immediately disgorged.

Braxton, Baker, Yilmaz, Sackett, Sanchez and Russo watched him from across the conference table as he chewed; waiting for him to translate the evidence, sworn statements and witness testimony they had spent the day gathering into a plan of action. He swallowed reluctantly. It was not that he had no such plan to speak of; it was that he could already hear their objections to it. He was too tired to employ niceties to suppress a protest; with any luck, his subordinates were either too tired to put up much of a resistance or had enough reserved energy between them to recognize how fruitless it was to fight him.

“Mr. Sackett,” Ben started when the door flew open. He rose immediately in greeting. The entire task force did. Where the men and women under his command would sit when invited to do so, Ben remained standing, occasionally pacing, for the duration of what had just transformed into a conference.
They had known each other for less than ten hours but it was already clear to Ben that his FBI contact Alexander Hamilton never failed to make an entrance. He was carrying a package of to-go cups, two canisters of coffee and a zip-lock bag filled with packets of cream, sugar and low-fat imitations of both.

“Your coffee is famously bad,” he laughed upon seeing the inspector’s expression.

Ben suddenly resented his colleague’s pep and enthusiasm, wondering how the FBI could possibly have intelligence on the status of the NYPD’s vending machine when they seemingly had nothing else prevalent to offer the Arnold Investigation. The partnership had thus far proven itself a disappointment. Ben had not seen or heard anything from Hamilton since they parted at Whitehall that morning. Three hours after he rang him to let him know that a suspect was in custody, Hamilton had sent over a civilian interrogator rather than return a phone call, and by then it had been too late to serve as anything but an insult. Hamilton poured a cup for Ben after having first served the two women present. Ben accepted it out of necessity, nodding at Hamilton’s explanation for his silence without hearing his words.

He pictured Hamilton laughing with Lafayette all day, feeding misinformation to the press the way one might throw crumbs at passing pigeons from the patio of a pricy café whilst Ben’s own troops bleed in the field. His soldiers did not seem to mind however. They had been bought by the coffee the same way they had been bought by the chicken chow mein. Ignoring the Assistant Director in Charge, he studied his subordinates, wondering who among them would be the first to betray him to Smith. They were stirring milk and sugar into their coffee and smiling as they toasted with it.

“Raise a glass to free-dom,” Yılmaz giggled as whispered to Sanchez beside her who snorted to avoid a chuckle. Hamilton did not share the constable’s hesitance and let out a full-bodied laugh.

“If it is my destiny to be constantly compared to anyone, it might as well be Lin-Manuel Miranda.”

He explained briefly to a jealous audience that he had actually seen the show twice with his wife, who, as luck should have it, shared the name of the female lead and worked in Child Protective Services. The coffee, he said, had been her idea. Evidently, she worried that the NYPD would see his intrusion into the investigation as stepping on their toes. No one said anything to dispute this statement and Ben found himself reanimated by the unwavering loyalty of his troops. The ADIC explained the work his department was doing in conjunction with other acronymic organizations to smoke the supposed terrorist out of their caves. Supposed was Hamilton’s word. The rest he seemed to have borrowed from Fox News. Ben’s whole team had seen the special report. He suspected that the DA had been correct and was trying to be helpful when she warned him that what - if any - information the FBI had on Arnold’s disappearance would not be shared with the boys in blue. He clenched his fist and swallowed his indignation along with another sip of Eliza’s thoughtful bribe.

“Alright, what have you got, Tallmadge?” ADIC Hamilton asked when he had finished quoting the right-wing media outlet at length.

“Regardless of the aftermath the victim’s disappearance is having on the global stage,” Ben started in a hard but level tone, “I believe we need to focus our investigation locally.”

“I fear that may be harder than you imagine. Concerning your primary suspect, I’ve been in contact with Section 6 and they have been less than forthcoming with assistance, as one might expect given the predominance of the Hewlett family. The ambassador was also uncommitted in his response to my request. I’ll send it up the chain of command but how effective -”

“Pardon, Sir. I am not sure any of that is necessary. As I’ve stated I believe we ought to spend more
of our efforts in and around the town of Setauket. Several witnesses place Arnold at DeJong Tavern yesterday evening. When CSI swept this morning they were unable to find a single fingerprint in any of the rooms open to the public. Everyone we interviewed stated that DeJong’s is never particularly clean, and fifteen years of health inspection records support this claim. Even the manager admitted that she would have been less shocked by blood.”

“What exactly about the crime scene suggest that the case is of local interest?”

“With every respect, Sir, what about a missing senator and an immaculately clean suburban dive bar suggests Islamic Terrorism?”

“Oh, we are of one mind there, Tallmadge, regardless of the podium the media has erected for these explosive reactionaries in the government which we are sworn to protect to spew from. You have more of my backing than you may imagine. That said I invite you again to answer; what was or was not found in DeJong Tavern that suggests that our search should be focused in Setauket?”

Ben rolled a clear writing board to the front of the conference table where his team was situated, inviting Hamilton to take his seat.

“The last Tweet we have from Arnold places him at DeJong Tavern at 10:03 PM, shortly before he was officially reported missing, as you well know. He used the social media platform to attempt to reach out to Peggy Shippen several times over the course of the evening. Both were expected at the Trump rally, neither were present. Miss Shippen voluntarily came to the precinct this morning and gave an official statement that she spent the night with a childhood friend, a Ms. Abigail Ingram, who as some of you may remember, enjoyed some recognition over a decade ago for living with the Shippons in the Governor’s Residence in Harrisburg during her teenage pregnancy,” he paused. Aside from Braxton who had brought him the background check, no one seemed to have heard of Abigail Ingram, or recognize her face from an ancient campaign commercial viewable on YouTube. Ben added a photograph of her next to the ones he had taped up of Benedict Arnold and Peggy Shippen.

“No? Moving on then. Miss Shippen’s statement is supported by the accounts given by both Ms. Ingram and her son Cicero. Now, if you will direct your attention to the map, this places Peggy less than a mile from where the senator was last seen.”

“Interesting,” Hamilton nodded with what seemed to be genuine curiosity. “Do we have anything to suggest that Shippen visited DeJong’s while in Setauket? Going on Arnold’s Tweets, it doesn’t seem as if he knew where she was staying.”

“Braxton, do want to take this one?”

“Sir,” Braxton affirmed, running his right hand though the back of what remained of his once full head of hair. He was two years younger than Ben, but owing equally to stress and genetics had started balding prematurely at nineteen while still at the academy. He had been shot in the line of service three years prior and moved off the beat during his recovery. It was unfortunate, he lamented, that it so happened that he had a hidden talent for the bureaucratic side of detective work. In uniform, he could wear a hat to cover the pale pink flesh that extended from his thin eyebrows to the backs of his ears. Inside, exposed, it served to reflect and magnify the glow of the fluorescent lights and the playful mockery of his co-workers. Clearing his throat, he continued.

“In speaking to Miss Shippen, I have no reason to believe that she had anything more than a passing acquaintance with Arnold. If, in contradiction to the statements provided by herself and Ms. Ingram, she did visit DeJong’s Tavern last night, I doubt it was for any kind of rendezvous.”
“Do you believe there is anything in either statement that should be contested?” Ben asked.

“I didn’t initially, Sir. But Edmund Hewlett, Anna Strong, Richard Woodhull and Aberdeen Declesias all place Abigail and Cicero at Whitehall between five and seven last night, a time frame over lapping the one given by Peggy and Abigail.”

“Not only that, Sir,” Yilmaz interrupted. “Hewlett’s statement was incredibly detailed and included the name of the pizzeria that Ingram had -according three of the four statements you yourself took -purchased dinner from. One of my cousins happens to work there so I took the inactive to call in and sure enough video footage places Abigail Ingram and her son at Pizzeria Roma early yesterday evening, without Peggy Shippen. I don’t know if it is significant, but she paid with a credit card registered to Jordan Akinbode whom I believe is Hewlett’s lawyer.”

“I knew it,” Braxton smiled, high-fiving Yilmaz.

“Good work, both of you, but we don’t know anything yet except a pizza was purchased and one or more of our witnesses is lying. Who, why, and to what extent has yet to be determined.”

“The proprietors of Pizzeria Roma are lying about being Italian,” Russo rolled his eyes. “What is that Yilmaz? 95th? Just so I can remember never to order from there in the future.”

“You’re lying about being Italian, Jersey Boy,” Yilmaz spat back, waiving a long finger directly under his nose.

Hatice Yilmaz and Michael Russo had been partners since Ben had joined the force. Russo was in his early forties, married with two young children. Though still handsome, his fitness level was waning after the birth of his younger daughter. His thick, wavy dark hair was overgrown, he seemed to have a five o’clock shadow regardless of the hour, and the skin around his eyes had long since become permanently lined and discoloured. Yilmaz, in contrast, was ten years younger and weighed about a hundred pounds less if Ben had to give an estimate. Petite, sleek, and still living at home as a result of having thus far failed her father’s expectation that she should marry a practicing Muslim; she reminded her boss of a small yipping dog that had never been informed of its size. In fact, she had served as the inspiration behind the name of Ben’s dachshund. When she was trying to teach him how to pronounce her given name, Russo interjected that he just called her Heidi; it was, after all, close enough. Ben stuck to calling his subordinate Yilmaz. “Heidi” lived in his small apartment on the fourteenth floor of a high-rise and, he thought as he watched Mike and Hatice argue about what constituted a pizza, had probably wet the floors by now.

“Braxton,” Ben said, rising his volume to drown out what might well turn into a Mediterranean race war if experience indicated anything.

“Abigail works at DeJong’s at the weekend when it experiences the most traffic. She, Anna Strong – the bar’s manager, and Caleb Brewster –who was working last night, all have keys to the property. Monday through Friday she works as the chief administrative assistant at Howe, Clinton and Associates -associates, apparently, only referring to one Dr John Andre, who, I gather, though a full partner, only works at HCA part-time having something otherwise to do with a university. It is um … a mental health practice on the Upper East Side.”

“I know,” Ben responded. Shifting his attention back to his two bickering sergeants, he asked, “Russo, Yilmaz, you took a trip down there after the talks I myself, and then Sanchez here with the support of the FBI contract labour Dr Dandridge, had with John Graves Simcoe, did you not?” He hoped his tone, intended for Hamilton, did not make Sanchez feel as if her contributions were unwanted. Thus far, through no fault of her own, they just been unnecessary. Simcoe was not a suspect. Ben was surprised the feds had even wanted to speak with him. He was still aggravated at
having been kicked out of his own office as a result.

“You want what I got on Andre or Simcoe first?”

“Let’s begin with Andre, if you believe you’ve found anything of relevance.”

“John Andre, born in London to Swiss immigrant parents, raised in Manchester where he later read phycology at University on scholarship, bringing him into contact with the same Martha Dandridge gifted to us by the FBI.”

“She didn’t mention it,” Sanchez interjected. Intrigued, Hamilton gestured for Russo to continue.

“Moved to the United States in the fall of 2005 on a work visa, and, get this, musical theatre nerds; has been married to Philomena Cheer since 2008.”

“Let me guess,” Ben said, “specifically since right before his visa was due to expire.”

“I’m not sure entirely, Boss, but I share your suspicions. According to every co-worker excepting Abigail Ingram, there marriage has been a rocky one, ridded with scandals and public affairs from both parties. Andre apparently has something of a drinking problem, which one look around his office would confirm on its own. That said, as of this very morning, he is apparently on a six-week sabbatical while he visits a rehab facility, apparently for the third time since his tenure at the practice began over a decade ago.”

“With regard to why we were sent with a subpoena,” Yilmaz jumped in, stressing the conjunction, “Andre has been seeing John Graves Simcoe as a patient for four years, Edmund Hewlett for two.”

“I took Simcoe’s record,” Russo said. “Born in Islamabad to English parents. His father was a military engineer working with the IAEA, his mother was an UN Goodwill Ambassador advocating against Pakistan’s then-in-development nuclear program. Needless to say, neither was particularly effective in convincing the PAEC not to detonate-”

“Facts, Russo?” Ben said flatly.

“Right, so after giving birth to little John Graves, Kathrine Simcoe experienced extreme post-parterm depression and, after nearly drowning her infant son while bathing him in a sink, returned to London. She seems not to have had any contact with the boy until ten years later following the death of her by then estranged husband. John Graves lived with his father, also called John, in Pakistan until 1998 when he -Simcoe Sr. - was the target and victim of a roadside bomb, the details of which remain classified. John Graves was the only survivor. Upon being discharged from hospital, he lived briefly with his mother until she took her own life in a prescription drug overdose; according the suicide note -which John Graves has apparently yet to read- for fear of otherwise harming him. She wrote in her farewell that after slapping John Graves so hard the she broke his lip when he didn’t respond to her calls – apparently, not out of defiance, he was deaf related to the bombing. Anyway, she said that she saw that, well,” he paused, studying the document, “to quote, whatever natural feelings of maternal love or instinct other woman are endowed with, I am not. Therefore in appeal to what remains of my logic, I take my life and, with luck, my hate with me, leaving everything else I possess to you, my son – which she underlined three times- in hope for a happy future that I’ve always known I could never take part in. John, forgive me. Someday you will understand that you are better off alone. Love, -crossed out- Mummy.”

“After that he went to military boarding school, studied economics at Cambridge, moved here after working at a London-based investment firm for a few years and has apparently been very
successful. According to both this,” Russo said, indicating to the file open before him, “and his police record, he has a list of minor offences, mostly related to disturbing the peace – in most cases with his fists. There are several incidences of his driving in the wrong lane, though those all mostly date back to his first few months in the States. Stopped seeing John Andre a couple of weeks ago, according to Dr Clinton’s notes, after Edmund Hewlett tried to kill himself using the same means as Mama Simcoe. Didn’t read the full record until I got back to the station and when I called to inquire further, Clinton was with another patient.”

“Yilmaz, I take it you did Hewlett’s file then? What can you add?”

“Nothing,” she stated plainly.

“I knew you wouldn’t read it -”

“There was nothing to read, look; most of what someone would reasonable assume had been in the file was either removed or never recorded to begin with. I did - with the permission of both Doctors Clinton and Howe - flip through some of Andre’s other patience’s records for reference. Andre is a note taker, the Hewlett file is the outlier, not the Simcoe one. Oh wait,” she paused, “there was actually something else. I think it might be relevant.” Clearing her throat, she continued, “Andre took yesterday off to help Anna Strong move her stuff out of her ex-husband’s apartment. Abigail was also there as well, as were Peggy Shippen, John Graves Simcoe, Jordan Akinbode, Caleb Brewster, Philomena Cheer, Edmund Hewlett and then Salah Strong, obviously.”

“You forget Selah Strong’s new bride-to-be.”

“Yeah, Major Najma Abboud.” Turing her attention back to Russo, whose eyebrows were raised as if to indicate suspicion, she added in a hiss “Mike, I swear to your God and my own if you make any kind of fucking reference-”

“Relax doll, I learn my lesson.”

“Clearly not sexism in the workplace,” Sanchez said under her breath.

“Right? You see what I have to deal with.”

Ben was embarrassed, he turned to the ADIC and thought to explain how tried even member of the task force was but was not given the chance to excuse their internal rivalries. If their behaviour was unbefitting of the FBI director’s presence as the inspector expected it was, Hamilton gave no indication of it.

“So they were all together at some point in the afternoon. I’ll make a few calls and find out what I can,” Hamilton said, having already begun to do so. “Out of curiosity, Inspector, how exactly does Hewlett factor into your working hypothesis? Is it simply his initial reaction to the crime scene?”

“No,” Ben said as he started to pace in front of the mock-up, now strewn with pictures, lines and notes written in his nearly illegible hand, “I had the pleasure of speaking to the third DeJong bartender, Caleb Brewster, directly about an hour ago when he came in to give a statement.” His gait quickened as he wondered why he had phrased that in such a way, though pleasure it truly was. He had spoken to the man as he would have any potential witness, and yet, in the course of twenty minutes, owing either to Caleb’s humour or Ben’s exhaustion, he found himself laughing as he agreed to go to what Caleb himself promised would likely be an evening of bad music. For the first time in years, Ben had weekend plans that he could pretend were not directly work-related. For the first time in years, he was excited about Saturday night.
“Caleb has something of an honour system set up during his weeknight shifts. He plays in a band called Culper Ring with Abraham Woodhull and Robert Townsend, and they use the bar to practice, finding it difficult to do in Woodhull’s garage for reasons relating to Japanese cartoons I am not sure I understand. On Tuesdays, the bar gets around 40 guests, most of them local to Setauket, some coming from the city to see the band play without having to pay a cover charge. Maybe.” He was rambling and he knew it. Hamilton was looking at him expectantly; Sanchez was chewing on the end of a pen. Sackett nodded. Braxton suppressed a smile. Russo and Yilmaz were openly grinning at each other. Baker, for his part, looked as if he noticed nothing amiss. Later, Ben decided, when they had enough of a break to justify the whole team going out for drinks, he would by Baker an extra round. He earned it. Twice today, now that he thought on it. Maybe, Ben considered for a moment, Caleb would join them and they would all be charmed by him too.

No.

Ben surveyed his co-workers again. Excepting Sanchez who was assigned to him that afternoon on account of having been in the wrong corridor at the wrong time, they were all trained detectives. He could not risk subjecting whatever he hoped to find in Caleb to them. They would see it. With the exception of Baker, he worried they did already.

“Tallmadge?” Hamilton asked. Ben wondered how long he had left them in silence.

“Right, yes. The way the system works, and it did -up until last night- is that the patrons are free to get drinks themselves during a set, provided they recorded their consumption on their coasters. Native Setauketians explain the rule to outsiders and can be trusted to make sure it is enforced.”

“Sort of black market.”

“I suppose,” Ben admitted. “Anna Strong places both her beer and liquor orders on Wednesdays and as such takes an inventory at the start of that shift. She states that everything has always been accounted for. This morning however, in addition to the lost and found box and the entirety of its contents, several bottles had been stolen. Three flashes of wine and a hard cider that both Brewster and Ingram attest Strong only orders for Hewlett, who it also so happens, is the only one who drinks it.”

“Magner’s.” Sackett interjected. “I had a look at DeJong Tavern’s digital records for the past year. The spreadsheet generated by their POS software confirms Brewster’s assertion.”

“Yes, and Miss Strong denies it. Here is where it gets interesting, boys. While I was questioning her on it, Anna Strong grew defensive, stating that she wouldn’t know if Hewlett was the only one who drank Magner’s. She certainly did not order it specifically for him. It had been on the menu since she began working there, and anyway, she had only really known Hewlett for two months. Having heard what she said she immediately started to back track.”

“Oh, shit.” “Wow.” “She pregnant?” “Classic GCM.” His subordinates responded simultaneously.

Ben cleared his throat and continued. “Hewlett’s visa expires in the summer, but I am hesitant to call this a Green Card Marriage for a number of factors.”

“Because we all know that Madame Smith would never let that slide,” Russo said to general snickering.

Less because of her mother than her father. Hewlett has been living in Judge Woodhull’s country estate since coming to America to pursue a PhD in Astrophysics. While I know that many of us have had hang ups in finding any record on him, Columbia was happy to hand over his student...
files. Perfect marks. Failed his dissertation. It doesn’t really add up. According to Woodhull, Hewlett surprised everyone when he extended his lease for an entire year, mentioning at the time that he would be moving his heretofore-unmentioned girlfriend into his small apartment. Not mentioning, however, that this girlfriend happened to be the daughter of the man who all but ruined the judge in a famous exposé.”

“William Smith,” Hamilton nodded with a slight smile. Ben had read the piece half a hundred times during the course of his studies at Yale. Hamilton seem to have as much to say on it as he did. Ben returned the nod as if he was accepting to dual of wits at a later date.

“He has another book coming out in November. I am inclined to question why an heir presumptive of a hereditary peer would be living in a 200 square foot apartment to begin with. Looking at social media, he seems to have no great love of this beautiful country of ours and up until mysteriously failing his dissertation and, Russo – attempting suicide?” Russo nodded. Tallmadge continued, “Hewlett had no intention of staying. I have a working theory, and of course, we will know more after we sweep Whitehall tomorrow, that his presence here may relate to Smith’s alleged questionable journalism practices.”

“That he could be using his own daughter as a spy, you mean?” Backer asked.

“Maybe. Something is going on that that makes me hesitant to say that Hewlett and Strong have a real relationship, or that their connection has anything to do with a Green Card whatsoever. Hewlett has yet to apply for a visa extension of any kind. How could he, under false pretence, living under the same roof as the State of New York’s chief justice, with the daughter of the city’s top prosecutor? Furthermore, if we are humouring their claims of love, why move Anna Strong into the same house as her high school sweetheart? Something is going on. In my opinion, it has either to do with the long standing Smith / Woodhull rivalry or the disappearance of Senator Arnold, which, I remind you all, happened on the same day that Hewlett and Strong moved in together, though we can’t restrict out search to the pair alone.

I think Arnold’s disappearance is part of a larger series of strangely interwoven relationships, many of which go back decades, some of which only go back six weeks or so. There is much about the main suspect I do not understand, and somehow there seems to be a series of lies being told around him to protect him-or whatever it is he is hiding.”

“Can I just say, I think it has something to do with Simcoe,” Sanchez said. New to the team and its youngest member, she had been fairly quiet up until this point. Both Ben Tallmadge and Alexander Hamilton motioned for her to continue. “He was pretty open in the interview about his childhood and everything Russo talked about, but he froze up when it came to talking about whatever Hewlett did when they were at school together, and he really seemed to be trying to defend his character, but couldn’t pull off the façade for long. I think also he may have a thing for Anna Strong. If that helps.”

“It does. I have my assumptions about that relationship as well. I feel that if these lies are going to crack, it will be along those fault lines. Since you seem to have a handle on this, tell me, Constable, have you ever worked undercover before?”

“I – no, sir.”

“Sackett and I set something up this afternoon with the DA and her daughter. Hamilton, I’ve already sent you an email. The rest of you aren’t going to like it, but the Smiths may need added surveillance and security in the coming weeks.”

“Forget the coming weeks, Ben,” Sackett said. Although Ben technically outranked him, the aging
eccentric needed not address him with formality. He was himself the head of the NYPD’s IT Department, for Ben, something of a mentor and friend. “Hewlett is on this way to Brooklynn according to the trackers we placed on both his car and phone. This is going down now.”

“Alright, brief Sanchez on her role and take Russo and Yilmaz in the van with you as back up. Guys – were taking no precautions so get your vests and riot gear, okay?”

The two sergeants high-fived each other. They would be less excited when they discovered what he was actually requiring them to do and how long it might take, but that task had just been delegated to Sackett, who also earned a round on Ben the next time they all went out.

“Braxton, Backer, you are with me. Hamilton?”

The ADIC stood up. After requesting that copies of the files that had been discussed be sent to his office, he asked, “Has anyone spoken to the Woodhull’s yet? Do we know where Andre is being treated?”

“Richard and Abraham yes, Mary no.” Ben answered. “As for John Andre -”

“No one at the office knew or would otherwise say.”

“I’ll get one of my men on that and we will reconvene tomorrow morning, shall we say, 11? Should anything happen or should you learn anything of significance ring me straight away. I am a light sleeper and Eliza is used to it.” He paused. “Tallmadge, in your opinion, should I prepare back up?”

“At this point it is not necessary. The NYPD can take care of its own.”

“Then I wish you all the best of luck.”

Chapter End Notes

You remember how back in chapter two Hewlett dramatically declared that he was not simply broke within his circles, he was destitute?

That was actually somewhat important and less hyperbolic than it seemed. See you soon.

(Comments and Kudos serve the sole purpose of making the writer smile at her email. Mine is connected to my student account and as you might be able to tell by my lack of recent activity, I am having a hell of a semester. You can do the thing, or not. Really I am just grateful so many of you are still here. Thanks for reading!)
The Presumptive (Pt.2)

Chapter Summary

Hewlett confesses, Anna tempts fate, Simcoe feels wronged

Chapter Notes

Welcome back, lovely faces. I think by this point you’d do better to ignore all of the promises I make about getting updates out. I have a full schedule this semester to contend with. Know that I miss you and think of you fondly in our time spent apart. ~

You may have noticed that I raised the rating to explicit – try not to get too excited, you may find yourselves just as disappointed as the figures to whom this first warning applies: sexual content, corporate corruption, infidelity, basic algebra, language (harsh and dead both), and length! This may just be the longest chapter I have ever written. Hope you like Hewlett, and hope you enjoy!

Night had long since fallen before Edmund Hewlett found himself ringing the doorbell of the District Attorney. Hours before, after finding Mary Woodhull in a drug-induced coma on his bed and thus exchanging a few choice words with the sweet suburban mother whom he otherwise considered above reproach, he took a quick shower. The thirty minutes that elapsed between Mary leaving his apartment to rendezvous with her meretricious lover and his endeavour to do the same were filled with quiet fretting over the multitude of regular worries plaguing his mind despite the day’s events. Donning his best suit and taking a deep breath, Hewlett slowly made his way down the hall to ask yet another favour of the Woodhull’s au pair.

Nothing in Whitehall had changed since the day before, since the two years Hewlett had been renting from Richard Woodhull and likely, for decades prior to that; yet he felt lost in the hallway that he had so often travelled connecting his flat to the rest of the house. Everything seemed new now that the environment felt hostile. It had been the same way at his ancestral home, at boarding school, at universities on both sides of the Atlantic. It was the same sense he now had in Simcoe’s flat, André’s office, and, should the tavern ever reopen, he imagined it too would seem now foreign.

Hewlett could hear Abe’s biting criticism in his snores when he passed the room with the bed Mary could not force herself to lie in. They had been empty words from a worthless man that he had let open old wounds once more. He was not going home. He had none to speak of; it never actively bothered him before. Perhaps it had once. Once, when life had been filled by fine things, when the forces of fate were contented themselves with the proletariat. Anna reminded him that he had then allowed himself to dream of home in its second meaning, but she was now lost to him, and Whitehall was reduced to its walls. Hewlett knocked on every identical, unknown door. He would be gone in a year. The building and its residents, he was sure, would forget him the moment his lease expired – but though time would likely erase the names and faces and all of the other
various places he had been acquainted with in the United States, he would remember the details of this particular hallway and its dozens of empty rooms from this day until his last. His search persisted for ten minutes before a door opened - two down from the one he was attempting.

The au pair’s expression seemed to match his mood. Tired, confused, yet determined. Her face confirmed his fears before she invited him into her small room; identical to all of the others save for the Haitian flag pinned up behind her bedposts, a poster hung over her desk explaining the English verb tenses and one of Abe Woodhull’s pitiful garage band covered in what Hewlett hoped were not lipstick stains taped to the backside of the door.

As she had that morning, Aberdeen tried to extract a price for the information she possessed.

He would have happily lent her his Jaguar for the entire weekend, but what she asked of him instead came as something of a surprise. An annoyance. A set back.

This was not to say that he would not have willingly met any expense in order to find his way back to his lover’s affections, but the au pair demanded time, which he had little of, and patience, of which there was less. To add to the offence, she had phrased her appeal for assistance in exchange for Ms. Smith’s address as something he felt could be easily and quickly seen to.

Namely, she asked him to advise her understanding of three algebraic word problems.

Initially, her request came as a relief. Half an hour into his impromptu lecture, however, he realized that Aberdeen required rather that he provide a crash course in what he considered basic maths. He had taught at the college level before, but always to students who had taken the subject out of keen interest rather than as a general education requirement. This was a challenge.

He stepped back, slowed down, and - caressing his temples as he let out an extended sigh - began to explain linear expressions in a single variable. Aberdeen took out a pen and - as she had done that same morning - seemed to record each word he spoke.

An hour later, Edmund Hewlett felt finally whole in Whitehall. He found himself smiling as his student correctly expressed the questions in her homework as the expressions of the functions and formulae he had explained. When she proved she was able to solve them, he was beaming, and not only because every known x value she found would bring him closer to the woman whom he had been dreaming of all the while.

“Aberdeen,” he asked when she finally closed her textbook, “might I yet trouble you for that address?”

“You are actually kind of nice when you need something,” she replied.

“I, ah – am I ever mean?” he asked, taken aback.

“Jordan says it is because you were raised in a bubble.”

“I really wasn’t,” he replied dismissively.

“Look, we’re cool, right? If I pay you, can you do this more often? The teaching? You are good at it.”

He was, and he missed it. He missed discussing mathematics in general. He missed discussions that were not cloaked in code. He missed the innocence of problems that contained solutions. He missed feeling as though he had arrived at, or was leading someone to, the right answer. He missed his righteousness.
“I would do so gladly at the price of your friendship,” he offered, “but it is after seven and I really must be on my way. Tomorrow - or whenever you have time - I would be more than happy to look at your syllabus with you and devise a tutoring plan.”

Aberdeen nodded, and for the first time truly smiled at him in the year since having made his acquaintance. He did not have time to return it before she started with another series of demands.

“Slick your ‘air back and take off your tie. Unbutton your shirt a little, you are looking like, ‘ow you say? They come to your ‘ouse and ask if you know about Jesus?”

Hewlett stared at her blankly. He had never met a Jehovah’s Witness in tailored Armani, and might have been more inclined towards conversion if he had. However, having just learned that this aspect his character were debated by people he had assumed he had been on friendly terms with had him shaken enough that he complied himself with most of her advice without comment or question.

“Better?”

“Your ‘air, do you need gel for it? I ‘ave.”

“Anna prefers it like this.” He smiled as her name left his lips, recalling how it felt to have her hands amusing themselves with his otherwise dull, dark locks.

“Yes but, you are ‘aving! Wait” she crawled over to where he was seated on the far end of her bed, ran two fingers through his hair and in a small but hard yank produced a number of greys. When she placed them into his hand, it caused Edmund Hewlett’s head to ache more than it did immediately after Aberdeen’s rather unseemly gesture. She claimed in her defence for having so rudely disfiguring him that Ms. Smith already thought that he looked a bit too old for her daughter. If this was being nice, Hewlett though, he has less of a problem being thought of as mean than he did minutes before.

He stared at the strands of hair in his open palm, wondering if Anna had noticed them and been too kind (or embarrassed on his behalf) to say anything, or if the room had simply been too dark. He thought to have it dyed but due to a problem he had yet to discover would have neither the time nor the means to do so in the coming months. By summer, the whole of his hair would shake its colour completely; owing to an almost all-consuming stress but allowing him to look more like a helpless fashion victim that the perpetrator of one of the largest market manipulation schemes in human history, as he would duly become. Part of keeping up appearances was achieved be design, at least half owed itself to dumb luck.

Sleeking his hair back for one of the last times that doing so would serve a purpose, he asked again for the address where Anna Strong was staying. Aberdeen said he ought to think about buying chocolate and flowers. She was stalling. He could not figure out why. After all, he was nice when he wanted something.

He had been reduced to begging by the time Aberdeen told him -with an exaggerated look of guilt- that she did not know it, not exactly. She had driven his car earlier and the address was in the navigation system. She chided that it surprised her that someone who seemed to know so much about technology and mechanics had not realized that it would be.

“I’m not thinking clearly, I fear,” Hewlett said in parting through clenched teeth.

“Then it must be love.”
An hour later Edmund arrived in Brooklyn with a speeding ticket and a heart full of short-lived hope. His $50 withdrawal request had been declined by two ATMs; a third refused to return his card and advised him to phone his banking institution. It was close to nine in the evening, and he would not be able to get anyone on the phone until morning.

Instead he tried to ring the man he had a very strong inkling might be responsible. Finding the line busy, he sent Simhoe a text reading simply WTF???, noting the contact name and remembering that they had been friends that morning. Muttering a few expletives and the actual surname of the man who mistook him for a fool, he counted the money in his wallet and walked into a drug store, emerging twenty minutes later with a bouquet of red carnations and a box of dark chocolate truffles decorated for a holiday that had weeks since passed.

When he reached the District Attorney’s street, he found parking on the far corner and decided to take it, believing a short walk would help him gather his thoughts.

He was mistaken.

When a careworn, dark-eyed woman answered the door in her pyjamas, he wished he had kept his tie on. At least that way he might stand a chance of hiding the flowers behind his back and asking if she had heard the Good News. Anything, he figured, would be an improvement on the monosyllabic, repetitious ah on which he choked.

“You must be Edmund,” Nancy Smith said without a hint of inflection.

“I … I thought it might be late, but I saw the light was on.”

“Are you trick or treating?” she asked dryly, eying the chocolate.

“Ms. Smith I -”

The door would have closed had his foot not halted its progress.

“Mr. Hewlett, let me make this simple. If you don’t evacuate the premise immediately I will have you arrested for trespassing.”

Hewlett met her eyes. Mirroring her tone, he responded, “I’m here to see Anna.”

“The 79th precinct is two minutes away Mr. Hewlett.”

“I am here to speak your daughter, Madame. No threat of arrest or humiliation is going to deter me from my objective. Please, might I come in?”

“Are you threatening me, Mr. Hewlett?” Anna’s mother swallowed as jerked her first chin forward, causing the second to disappear in its attempt to follow.

“That is the furthest from my intention, Ms. Smith,” he insisted. “However, I simply must speak to my fiancé. Take my words how you will.” Admittedly, this was getting off to a bad start. Handing over the bouquet, he attempted to start over, “Um, these are for you.”

She eyed the flowers without extending her hand to accept them.
“And here I was under the impression that your confidence was lacking,” she mocked. “Carnations.”

“I assure you it is not conceit that brings me here with a second-rate offering, I—”

“It is not the flowers. It is not just the flowers.” She rolled her eyes. Then, meeting his again, Nancy Smith spoke slowly and softly as if trying to tell him a secret, “Please leave. While you still can, please, just go.”

“What the fuck is she doing?” DS Yilmaz cursed at no one in particular. She sat in the back of a surveillance vehicle parked adjacent to the Smith residence with two of her colleagues. While Sackett fiddled with the equipment and Russo checked in with Sanchez inside via the constable’s earpiece, the younger of the two detectives sergeant continued to complain. “Why hasn’t she invited him inside? Why didn’t we make her wear a goddamn wire?”

“That is easily said in hindsight. Tell me Heidi, would you have volunteered to ask the boss lady to do so?” Russo scuffed, kicking the riot gear left to rot. He would have preferred to be in the vanguard than in a van, and as soon as the he asked the question he regretted not having asked the DA himself. At least then, he figured, he might see a bit of action, if only in the form of an irate prosecutor.

Sackett explained as they had smoked and played cards to bide time while they waited for the target to arrive, that Nancy Smith and her daughter had mounted a protest that rivalled the Boston Tea Party when he and Tallmadge had come to install the cameras and microphones throughout the house. The two women had been forced into compliance when Ms. Strong had all but confessed to the inauthenticity of her liaison with Hewlett. Ms. Smith, after arranging Anna’s immunity in exchange for their cooperation, agreed to speak with Hewlett under the guise of simply being a concerned mother. The hope was that over the course of the conversation something would slip that would allow for the Scotsman’s detention. Russo had his doubts. Hewlett had left almost nothing of a paper trail; nothing the NYPD was able to access. In his twenty years on the force, he was one of the smoothest criminals he had ever seen. A public figure with no public record, Hewlett had convinced a man whom he had stabbed and scared to defend the incident on his behalf. To the sergeant’s own mind, and that of his long-time partner, they would need far more than two reluctant spies, a few microphones and a rookie cop to break him.

Assuming, Sackett had said to the objections both Russo and his partner had raised, that Hewlett is not already broken. He is arrogant. Tallmadge told them. He’s trying to pull off immigration fraud in the home of the state’s Chief Judge with the daughter of the city’s District Attorney. It is obvious, it is dangerous, and it seems like he is using it as a distraction.

Yet Hewlett did not look broken. Or arrogant. Not from where they sat. Desperate perhaps, painfully determined. Russo thought about his two little girls at home sleeping in their beds, wondering what he might do if some fellow tried to use one of his princesses one day in the same way that Edmund Hewlett was using Anna Strong. He then wondered if the DA still kept a registered handgun in her purse.

“Yilmaz make a fair point,” Sackett said, clearly agitated. “We’ve left too much up to human error.
Russo, you want to take a walk around?”

Russo shrugged and reached for his ballistic vest.

“No, I think your silhouette will do the trick. Only Nancy need see you. If we give Hewlett reason for suspicion the ruse will fail and we may lose our only shot.”

Shrugging again, Russo asked if he should at least bring his service weapon. “If it makes you feel more like a man,” Yilmaz teased.

For his part, Nathaniel Sackett wished that Ben had gifted him with Braxton and Backer, though Russo and Yilmaz were better to have in the case of a hostage situation. The Jersian left without a sound and his partner split her gaze between his movements and the footage from the camera hidden under the wood ing awning of Nancy Smith’s doorway. Sackett checked in with Sanchez once more, advising her to stand ready. They had never worked together before, and she seemed nervous about her role. In the end, Sackett only trusted his machines. When a red light started blinking, he told Yilmaz to put on the headset and monitor Ms. Strong. He checked the cameras to make sure the two outside agents had taken their positions, closed his eyes, and waited for the programme to begin.

“You wrong me, Madam,” he said mirthlessly.

She was humbled. She was humiliated. If anyone had been wronged, as John put it, it was she herself.

Anna had taken upwards of fifty selfies over the course of the evening before finding two she felt could be rendered seductive with the right filter. After an hour of making minor adjustments to light, camera angle, expression and appearance, she spent more than thirty minutes looking at her exposed figure on three different editing apps, finding new flaws the instant the existing ones had been erased. The glossies she flipped though while waiting on checkout lines promised that every woman in their target demographic preformed the same feats in order to render a single image worthy of sharing. Anna had sent two.

Still, John Graves Simcoe did not seem appreciative or sound even mildly impressed.

She wondered if the running water did anything to disguise the nature of the conversation she was having from the officer she assumed was still lurking outside the bathroom door, or if it masked the sadness in her voice as disappointment.

Her advances had offended him. It hurt. Perhaps the pain in her chest was the accumulation of everything that had transpired since she had woken up that morning next to the man she had then been convinced she would share her life with; perhaps his rival’s rejection stung all on its own.

John failed to fall into a trap she had laid in the form of her naked body, and now he was on the phone demanding to know what exactly she took him for. He had a beating heart like any other man, a heart wanting only of love. Anna was being unkind, unfair, and frankly, it was unwarranted. She agreed with the assessment. She wanted to apologise. She wanted to retort. She wanted to be wanted, even if it was, -as he put it -frankly unwarranted.

“I’m ashamed of my conduct. You were being kind to me, thinking only of my comfort and welfare
and I responded with, oh John, I thought – you’ve always, I thought perhaps you might be open to

“Again you mistake me,” his anguish was audible.

Anna’s lip trembled. She knew she had taken things too far. For reasons she failed to understand, the joint task force had wanted to examine Simcoe’s supposed infatuation with her as part of their deeper investigation into the primary suspect. Tallmadge had asked simply for her to speak with him. He had not gone so far as to say flirt. She had sent nudes. Anna had hoped that the pictures would eventually make their way to Edmund, the way the pictures of his jovial celebration upon his release had made its way to her. He had not bothered to call and tell her he had survived the ordeal. He had not bothered to ask if she was all right, after she had lost the bar and her dreams along with it.

No one had.

Not when it would have made a difference.

“In my defence I can only say that I was still reeling from news of what is said to have happened last night in my tavern, from my sudden unemployment. I’m aggravated by my fiancée’s arrest, and you, with your text, you simply remind me of all that I’ve lost - particularly of Edmund himself.”

“Edmund?” The running bathwater did nothing to dilute his disgust, though, she marked, whether it was with Hewlett or herself he had left open to interpretation.

John had sent her a text hours before to ask if she was alright. It was difficult for her to imagine him, for all of his cruel words and cold stares, extending her fiancé a genuine curtesy, but that now seemed to inform his motivation. In the original message, he mentioned that he had spoken to Oyster who was a mess because he could not reach her. My concern is purely that of your safety and well-being, John had written. I understand perhaps better than most what a chore it is to speak to our mutual acquaintance, but if you provide me word, I should be happy to pass it along, provided, of course, that be your wish.

Anna noted the use of mutual acquaintance rather than your fiancé or my friend, as though he were unable to accept either of the more suitable distinctions. Perhaps he was trying to distance himself from the man whom he had just referred to using a private term of endearment, perhaps his aim was to not use Edmund’s name at all, that Anna may sooner forget it for her own sake.

She wished she could.

She wished she had called John earlier.

She wished he still wanted her the way she had assumed he always would.

She really wished she had not responded to his texts by sending him photographs of herself in the bath, and yet, she wanted him to keep berating her for it. His still-high voice was dark and dangerous when he was in a foul mood. Anna could listen to it all night. She looked at the showerhead. If Ben Tallmadge and his team wanted a show, she would give them one. She told him that Edmund was twice the man he was and turned up the water pressure.

“Are you -“she heard him shutter after a moment of her taking comfort in the hard, hot stream as it danced with his high, hurt vocals. It was as if she had again found a way to insult his newfound delicate sensibilities. “What is it with the women of this town?” John demanded rhetorically.

“Women?” Anna inquired. She turned off the faucet and sat up in the hall-full bathtub, the pool
around her growing colder with each moment he hesitated to respond.

“Understand my position, Mr. Hewlett,” Nancy Smith continued through a creaked door half-crushing Hewlett’s toes. “I knew only three things about you prior to your standing with a foot in my door, trying to bribe your way in to my home with a two-week-old Valentine’s Day gift and a gas-station bouquet. You stabbed a mentally instable individual in a bar fight; were arrested for the murder of Senator Benedict Arnold, and most damningly of all, have been for the past several months using my daughter. As I am sure you understand, I have no interest in learning more, and I would appreciate it very, very much if you accepted that there is nothing for you here. You let that opportunity pass. Leave my doorway and my daughter before you can do any more damage. She has been crying all night.”

Her words stung but did little to deter him. Edmund Hewlett would have traded his soul for another moment with Anna were Mephistopheles to materialize with said offer.

“Damage? Ms. Smith, with respect, I have reason to believe that there has been foul play. I have been trying to get in touch with dear Anna since getting my mobile back. If the blame lie with me than so be it, but show me the mercy of allowing me to attempt to right the wrong that was suffered in my name.”

“Such as lunching at The Newsroom with a few of your friends? Laughing jovially whilst she wept?”

His heart stopped. Anna was in the Bye-Week Group Chat with all of the others. She must have thought the absolute worst of him. He muttered the name of the man who had suggested they order a $200 bottle of port. Without pausing to respond, the DA continued, “Don’t get me wrong, I know how hard it is to get a reservation, I myself have been trying for months, but still.” She turned and yelled out to her maid to fetch her cell. When a girl appeared with the requested device, Ms. Smith showed him the photograph Simcoe had asked Robert Townsend to take of their send off to John Andre. “This is the only news she has heard of you all day since your arrest. You don’t seem as if you were at all concerned with getting in touch with her. She went to City Hall in an attempt to obtain a marriage licence in a misguided attempt to help you, Mr. Hewlett, after you’d form my understanding all but confessed to murder. Anna was so worried for your safety that even she sought out my help. Rare, almost worrisome,” she handed him the phone. He stared at the picture and sighed.

“Ah, I, it’s not -” what she thought? Hewlett stopped himself. Taking time out in the afternoon to mock a friend for taking measures to gain control of his drinking problem was probably worse than whatever assumptions Anna’s mother had drawn.

“I’ve known Jordan for years,” she said, taking her mobile back. “He managed to ring my daughter. So did John. You could have used either of their devices to call her if you believe there is something amiss wit yours. You won’t convince me that Anna was at the forefront of your mind at any point today, Sir.”

He did not know what stung more, the point she was making or that someone whom Anna had accurately depicted as having absolutely no interest in meeting him was on a first name basis with Akinbode and Simcoe. Maybe Akinbode had mentioned once over a quaint tea session that he thought Hewlett had been raised in a bubble. Maybe Ms. Smith was direct enough to have asked
Simcoe about one of a few of his small, faint facial scars and the demon had provided an honest account. Jordan and John, he thought. They did not even refer to one another with such familiarity. After the surprise of hearing his friends referred to by their Christian names lifted, he implored, “Please, call me Edmund.”

“I don’t think I shall.”

“Ma’am, I -”

“Please leave, Mr. Hewlett,” she pleaded. “Anna has finally ceased with her crying. I can’t – we can’t, can’t you simply leave us in peace?”

The door crushed against the foot he had propping it open. He winced. The pressure was released. The door swung open and Ms. Smith half-emerged, placing the full force of her burly frame between Edmund and the interior. Her expression failed to match her posture; with her quivering lower lip, she looked weak, sad and small. It was familiar. It was most unfortunate. The woman was terrified. Hewlett stepped back, trying to recognize that to her he was the sociopath who had spoken to Inspector Tallmadge, the man accused of murder, and not the socially awkward gentleman scholar, so easily bent by Anna’s attention. He questioned if her view could be altered were he able to simply explain why he had needed to meet with Simcoe that afternoon, how his promise to provide for and prioritise his fiancée’s pleasures justified his means. Love, he mused, could justify anything and required no defence.

Then perhaps she already knew. Perhaps she was simply attempting to force him into confessing himself on camera. Edmund Hewlett had never known reciprocal devotion of any kind, but he knew the rules of the game he now assumed the District Attorney was playing better than she likely dared to suspect.

“I, Ms. Smith I never intended to give your daughter any reason to grieve. To put it plainly … I love her. I’m sorry for what seems to have been a pattern of poor judgment on many fronts but I assure you, Anna has been, Anna is - she is without equal. I understand that I could never begin to deserve her, for no man could.”

“You’re right. Find yourself another fake fiancée.”

“Fake? Ms. Smith, that is quite enough. I have nothing but the most honourable intentions-”

“Of staying in America to finish your degree? She told me everything.”

“I’ll fly out tomorrow if it pleases her.”

“With what money, Mr. Hewlett?”

She looked down at the admittedly pathetic offerings he had brought to her alter. His eyes followed and he asked himself the same question. He should really try think before making lofty declarations. One day, he was certain; such talk would get him into a heap of trouble if it had not already.

Without warning, Nancy Smith joined Edmund Hewlett on the front porch. He found himself crushed by her tight embrace. “You won’t leave?” she asked, her voice cracking in a whisper. “Stay or go. If you’ve any sense you’ll take the latter option. We have eyes. I can’t hold them off for much longer.” He could feel her body tremble as they touched. Nancy Smith thought him a killer. She was petrified. Suddenly, he was as well. Her eyes justified the paranoia he was attempting to suppress when they met his own. He was now certain there was a police presence in
the vicinity. He had likely walked into a trap. Ms. Smith had been kind, for Anna’s sake, if not his own. Hewlett imagined that her reprimands were repeated warnings he had failed to heed. Still, if there was even a chance of reuniting with his beloved, however temporary, he had to take it. Whatever his other problems, due process would sort them out in the morning. Surely, preserving the hope and happiness Anna had offered was worth another night in jail.

“No, Ma’am,” he answered softly. “I have to see my dear Anna. I have to apologise for any tears shed on my behalf. That was never my intent. I love her. I pray that you know that I make my intentions towards your daughter clear and from the deepest and strictest motives of respect. Please. I care not for the risk this may place upon me, I assure you I offer no threat.”

Shaking her head, she cut him off at full volume. “Come in if you insist on making your case.”

“Thank you, Ma’am.”

When the door was closed behind them, he nodded at her knowingly. The District Attorney forced a small laugh. “Imagine, a prince deferring to me. Ma’am,” she scoffed. “You must truly be desperate. I’ll take the chocolates.”

They were Anna’s favourite. He knew from the experiences of bringing her multiple tokens and trinkets when he would visit her at the bar. Observing which she seemed to favour. He wondered how long he had been in love with her before realising it. Six weeks felt far too short.

“Those are for-” he started.

“Oh! I know I shouldn’t. Look at me. I’ve been attempting to diet since my son was born and all it has ever brought me is a constant headache that can only be cured by sugar. Maybe I am doing things wrong. No matter. You ought to know that Anna’s sweet tooth is inherited and the longer you stay together the – oh sorry, did you want one?”

“I’m fine,” he replied, hoping that unwarranted self-deprecation was not another feature of the bloodline. Anna was stunning, and if her mother served as an indication she would be every bit as beautiful in thirty years’ time. Women, for all of their mystery and allure were ultimately ridiculous in the manner they scrutinized themselves.

Nancy Smith pressed another praline into her mouth. Seemingly able to derive his unspoken fears from his expression, she said briskly after taking a third, “I hate myself for it. Look at what you have to look forward too.”

“I do,” he tried to smile. “Ah, look forward to getting to know you, Ms. Smith. Truly.”

“You shouldn’t,” she snorted back. “And you won’t. I’ve asked you into my home on the sole ground that someone on the street lingered a bit too long in the shadows for my comfort. We’ll have a coffee together, you’ll offer your defence and once I’ve destroyed it you’ll exit through the back as to not create anymore unwanted attention. As I’ve stated Anna has gone up for the evening. I refuse to let you disturb her peace.”

Hewlett’s heart sank. He ought to have anticipated this.

He followed her down a long, straight hallway, Persian carpets atop dark wooden floors, heavy furniture borrowed from another century. He could have been in any of the places he had once dwelled. He wondered if the interiors of all homes looked like this and if it mattered that memory destroyed the individual details of the places he had been. Ms. Smith brought him into a dimly lit study and took a seat in an armchair, gesturing that he join her in its twin. Edmund’s eyes danced
over the assortment of books, all of them looking to be legal in their nature. “Richard and Rebecca and William and I were all at university together,” she said as if that was explanation enough for her apparent lack of interest in subjects not pertaining to her profession. “Ah–” he started, before realizing that his gaze had landed on a photograph of his host with his landlord. He tried to recall what sorts of books Judge Woodhull read at home. They had discussed the Bard and the Bible, he had overheard Richard reading fairy tales to his grandson Thomas, but Hewlett had no recollection of what else sat on the shelves of his study. He wondered if he had never looked or had never much cared.

Ms. Smith called out to her maid once again, a girl with olive skin and curly hair who looked to be scarcely out of high school and asked her to make a pot of coffee. When the girl returned with the District Attorney’s request, Nancy asked her if she wanted to stay and have a cup with her and her guest. The girl politely declined. “Her mother was Anna and Hank’s governess,” she remarked to Hewlett when her servant had left. “Amusing how our lives have turned out. She raised my children and now I am raising hers. Josephine doesn’t just work and live under my roof, Mr. Hewlett. I am paying her way through college in addition to her salary and board. I am not sure what Anna has lead you to believe, but the Smiths are not in want of charity.”

“I was hardly under the impression that you were,” he replied, looking around the room, the few areas not covered in leather bound books were furnished lavishly with early American antiques and hand-drawn historical maps of both the city and of local waterways.

“It is rather curious, I feel as if I’ve been here before,” he remarked, making an unconscious estimation on the value of Ms. Smith’s possessions.

“Well, she drew a number of those. Anna. Talented girl. Sells herself short.”

“No one could argue that, Ma’am,” he grinned.

“And yet here we are.”

“Ma’am, I – I simply hate secrets within families. When I asked your daughter for her hand, it was not my intention to fall in love, nor was any of it my idea so to speak – and truth be told I was opposed to the whole of it from the beginning. I, I am still. Opposed to it. Since I’ve had the pleasure of knowing Anna, I’ve been in love with her. I understand how very ridiculous this may seem, given any number of factors, but I’ve never loved before, and now I fear the idea of wedding for any other reason is beneath me, and possibly outside of my immediate means, as I fear you can tell. I’m not here out of reliance, I hate the idea that Anna should be asked to lie on my behalf. It is how we came together, and as much as I would prefer otherwise it seems that fact cannot be ignored. I suppose that is what you’d rather hoped to hear me admit.”

“Do you smoke?” she responded, offering him a cigarette from a silver-plated etui.

“Anna has asked me to quit.”

“You should. It is probably for the better,” she said as she lit one. “Though I’ll be the first to admit, kid, you picked a hell of a week to do it.” After a long inhale, she returned to the subject of their shared interest. “I’m proud of her. Said she would quit on New Year’s Eve and hasn’t touched one since. I lasted all of three days. She is stubborn though, sets her mind to something -”

Hewlett smiled.

“But you know all of this. You’ve dated my daughter for what has it been, hmm? Six weeks?”
“I understand you apprehension, Ma’am. Our courtship has been rather short, but that hardly alters the strength of my sentiment.”

“Yet it seems you have invested quite a bit to buy her affections in return.”

Hewlett stopped stirring milk and sweetener into his coffee.

“I – I have. I cannot deny that either.”

“So tell me then, how exactly does a Scottish Lord wind up penniless in Setauket with designs on marrying a bartender for legal status?”

“Please, Ma’am. I have no designs on marrying your daughter for a Green Card, as I’ve attempted to explain. If Anna were to bid me farewell, I would find the means to leave this,” he paused, trying to recall if he had ever heard an American speak of their country without simultaneously singing its praise, “this … glorious land tomorrow, as I have also stated. My only motivation toward her is love.”

“But that is not her only motivation.”

“I fear not,” he admitted. “I can only hope to eliminate the problems in her life preventing her from accepting my proposal based solely on -”

“You have a lot of nerve suggesting that any blame rests on her shoulders.”

To his knowing, he had not suggested anything of the sort. Offended, he protested her assertion, “I’m not. Does it somehow come off as though I am? Madame, my problems are my own. I am here - ah, in America - because I failed to defend my dissertation and subsequently failed to then end my own life. Circumstantial evidence landed me in interrogation this morning, and poor judgement forces me to confess to you that my designs towards your daughter were no always as pure as they now are. I’ve been changed. By Anna. By the affection she has shown me. I wouldn’t – I simply couldn’t – place her in a situation that might later serve to her detriment. That said, I won’t call off our engagement because of your disapproval, nor will I marry her for my own convenience. Please, allow me to speak to her.”

“Mr. Hewlett, do you think it wise to confess to attempted fraud? Anna did request a marriage licence today.”

“No. But I fancy myself an honest man. I suppose that is my great fault. I’m not a con-artist, nor a killer, kidnapper, whatever the current angle the investigation is pursuing might be. I’m far from perfect, but I am a gentleman and a child of God, and hardly the monster you’d see me cast as. I love your daughter. That is the whole of why I am here. That is why I hope to one-day call her my wife. I believe, mostly, her motivations mirror my own.”

The District Attorney barely looked at him when he spoke. He followed her eyes around the room, noting where hers rested.

“You know what this is, don’t you?”

“I am afraid so.”

“And yet you persist.”

“DA or not, you are the mother of the woman I love, I’ll answer anything you ask honestly and to the best of my ability.”
“I’ll make you a deal. I’ll let Anna know you stopped by if you answer my question to my full satisfaction, bearing in mind that all of your personal, criminal and financial records have already been subpoenaed from your bank and your embassy.”

Hewlett’s heart stopped. He recalled that Nancy Smith had mockingly called him prince when she had invited him inside. It was over. The NYPD already knew, or soon would. It was too late to ring a barrister, and he was too invested in his latest scheme to consider retreat.

He attempted to bargain. “Madame, I will tell you anything you wish to know provided that this conversation and the papers that support my claims remain confidential.”

“I have no intent on making any of this public. Or are you specifically referring to the fact that you’ve clearly not disclosed the extent of your personal wealth to Anna?”

“My personal …” Hewlett shook his head. Perhaps they knew nothing. “At present, as you may well know from your … espionage, I have less than $2,000 in my bank account and no way to access it, Ms. Smith. Whatever factors you imagine being in my possession are works of fiction, some of which I am forced to admit I helped to construct. I inherited nothing from my parents when I came of age - contrary to popular myth, and it seems now that I never will.”

“Not counting your various businesses, land rights and estates, your father’s estimated wealth alone is somewhere in the range of £90 - £100 million. Your uncle has no heir, and his title -”

“Will go to my eldest sister and her husband. I spent myself out of an inheritance, though not in the way many assume. That is not to say, Ms. Smith, that I am in any way incapable of providing your daughter with the life she dreams of, nor should you consider me to be so. I ask your discrepancy only in respect to my father’s legacy. I … do not imagine that I can fully convey what it might mean for the thousands in our employ should, well, any part of the role I played be made public.”

“Secrets destroy families, no?”

“Is that a threat, Ma’am?”

“Why don’t you tell me your story, and I’ll tell you what you personally have to fear from me,” she smiled. “Cigarette?”

Nothing resembling normalcy had ever found a place in Edmund Hewlett’s early childhood. He lived on a large estate but spent most of his time confined to the few palace rooms that UNESCO did not consider worthy of World Heritage status. Then again, he amended - considering how much trouble he had been in when he tried to recreate the night sky on his bedroom ceiling - perhaps the family quarters were of equal merit but had been neglected in the £12 tour.

He had taken it once or twice. A portrait of an uncle - who supposedly lived with them but whom he had never personally met - greeted the guests upon arrival. Pictures of his parents, grandfather, and four hundred years of other people with whom he shared a surname followed. It lasted for about an hour and ended in a gift shop where for £40 one could purchase a decorative plate with the family crest. He never recalled eating of such a dish, and wondered why the tableware used upstairs was so comparatively dull. A young man behind a glass counter advised that the people who purchased such plates existed only to be displayed in glass cabinets. Edmund assumed for a long time that everyone else must also live on a World Heritage Site, remembering that his parents
had a plate of their own commemorating the marriage of the Prince of Wales to Diana Spencer. They had been in attendance. He only knew this because the family’s cook had shown him an old photograph in a glossy magazine.

Most of what he had known about his parents came from such photographs. He hardly saw them otherwise. His father worked in Edenborough managing the family’s business interests and his mother had an odd sort of unpaid position that involved educating world leaders about the AIDS epidemic. It always troubled young Edmund that these world leaders seemed to be the only people in the world they lead not to read the daily newspapers. Or perhaps they did. Perhaps they only read the glossy ones that included photographs of the more predominant members of the Hewlett family.

Nearly every gathering in memory started with a press junction. The family would be told what to wear and how to stand by a number of people who supposedly worked for them but gave them orders all the same, forming Edmund’s basic understanding of representative democracy; something, he admitted, which never much evolved beyond that initial assessment. The family would pretend to do something domestic for two minutes whilst reporters were let in to photograph them. Then, they would walk a few meters to the next arranged scene and engage in another pantomime, and then another. Two months later when the photographs were published - in the kinds of newspapers read by world leaders who were not aware of the AIDS epidemic and servants who were – Edmund would read that they had been celebrating Christmas. Ah! he would think.

Sometimes his parents were in residence during the holiday season as it appeared on most calendars. Sometimes they remembered that his birthday fell on the December Christmas of churches and peasants. Sometimes while in residence, they even feigned interest in their children’s lives and inquire as to their goings on. His older sister attended boarding school abroad – something Edmund would later be disappointed to learn meant only a few hundred kilometres to the south. The twins were then being brought up in a nursery in a building that cost £20 to tour. It was nice to see them all, even if the lack of attendants left them with little to discuss.

For the first ten years of his education, Edmund did not get to go away to school as other children did. Instead, having done something as a toddler that made everyone assume he was wonderfully clever, he was educated at home by private tutors brought from universities. This much, at least, he recognized was odd. He saw even at the time that it made him odd by relation, that most children did not spend hours debating scholars on the applications of probabilistic combinatorics. He was isolated enough to envy the outside world of which he had nothing beyond a textbook understanding.

The summer when he was fourteen, all of that changed.

Edmund woke up and - being unable to find his tutor - decided to skip breakfast and his morning lessons, which had evidently been cancelled without anyone bothering to inform him. Instead, he went on a horseback ride. He was unable to enjoy it, fretting the entire time over the trouble he would be in when his tutor discovered he was gone. He tried to invent the grounds which might excuse him his adolescence, but his lies and half-truths would remain unspoken. All of his professors had been dismissed the night prior.

When he returned to the sables two hours later he found his father waiting for him. Edmund lunged into something between apology and explanation that his father did not seem to hear. Instead, he was pulled into a tight embrace the moment he dismounted. Young Edmund found this odd in and of itself, given that there were no cameras and it was neither the yuletide of the first or second estate.
Edmund Hewlett IV, that is to say, the weeping father of the thoroughly confused younger Edmund who was not accustomed to open displays of emotion, was something of a maverick. Born sixteen minutes after his twin brother into the same privilege and wealth but without an official title (though in time everyone would come to call him Lord as a term of endearment) he had made his way mirroring the actions his brother took in politics in the private sector. Specifically, as it is relevant to our tale, this meant investing the whole of the family fortune in green energy projects decades before they ever became profitable.

If left to the forces of time alone, the Hewlett family, all of the companies they owned and all of these companies’ subsidiaries; all of the charities the underwrote; all of the tenants living in public housing on the family’s lands, and in private housing supplied for their employees at a reduced rate would benefit from his initiatives. But it was 1994, and before time could be allowed to continue, debts had to be paid.

The lives, homes and jobs of thousands of people, including the two Edmunds locked in a tense, teary embrace in the family’s stables hinged on a single failing enterprise. *If I declare bankruptcy*, his father explained, *I will be unable to further secure the loans for our family’s work to continue.*

_Then don’t_, the younger Edmund had replied. _Take me to the city. Show me your books. There must be a solution to all of this._

Edmund V had spent his short life in the company of numbers. He spoke their language. He took their advice. The solution they spoke of was one his sainted father would have never himself chosen. The numbers ruined any chance the two men might have otherwise had of mutual respect, but they saved the family. In name, if nothing else.

The solution was ignoble, but it worked. After having his father clandestinely sign the business over to him to avoid legally having to declare bankruptcy, Edmund terminated a number of low skilled workers, shuffled executives, and moved funds from charitable works to their banker’s coffers with a few strokes of a pen. He had no skill in business, and looked at the figures before him blind to everything else. Edmund spent an entire summer in the capitol, failing to fully understand despite his father’s protests that he was ruining lives. _And saving more_, he would scoff in reply, not really believing in his solution or himself.

By the summer’s end, however, time had largely proved Edmund’s numbers right. His father appeared on the cover of Forbes, credited for saving a substantial part of the UK economy form downturn, and finally getting proper credit for the way in which he merged his business ideas with his humanitarian ideals. He was hailed as a hero, and although he never spoke of his admiration, Edmund did truly idolize his father. Despite the setback, the man had taken measures since the onset of his career to use his wealth to help those in need, to fund the development of green technology and to otherwise improve the world in ways he thought he could.

Eventually the world caught up to him.

Eventually, however, was not in time to save Edmund’s trust fund. As with the majority of everything else he possessed as a teenager, he had gambled, doubled, and reinvested back it into the family’s various businesses, which by the time he was twenty were all individually earning enough to pay their own debts. It did not matter much to Edmund. After all, at the time he had been under the assumption that he would personally inherit most of what his father and uncle had worked to build.

“Which is not to say that I would not have taken the same actions had I then known what to expect from my life’s own trajectory,” he clarified to the woman who with any luck would one day be his mother in law.
Nancy Smith’s eyes darted around the room, always landing for a moment on the same places but never, he noted, directly on him. “Isn’t it yours still? All of it?”

“Before I went to school – ah, boarding school. Private tutors, which I only understood after the fact to have been a luxury, were no longer in question - as our household had to make a number of reductions. I – that is, my father and I, signed the no longer failing accounts back into his name. What could not be saved I took as a personal financial hit and made adjustments to my standards as not to go into debt.”

“Standard of living, Christ! You were fourteen.”

“Well, fifteen by the time these adventures had fully ended, but that is sort of the point, isn’t it? None of this can ever be made public. Understand, whatever your opinion of me personally, Ms. Smith, my family houses, feeds and employs thousands of innocent people who ought not to have the future of their livelihoods brought into question. Were my father’s reputation to be tarnished by the revelation that he isn’t half the businessman many consider him to be, the results could be disastrous even today. I fear there is nothing I could do to help, even if I were to be given the chance.”

“Why wouldn’t you be?”

“My father, among many others, thinks me a monster. I fear I cannot defend myself against this criticism. It is not that I lack my family’s surprisingly marketable sense of morality, but I – perhaps owing to my understanding of mathematics, perhaps to my early childhood isolation - I have not always acted on these instincts. Not in a way that has earned me any great sense of endearment.”

It was simply the way markets worked. In order for someone to win, someone had to lose, and countless bankers and businessmen who had correctly assessed the state of the Hewlett’s holdings had shorted one of their corporations before Edmund’s eye for numbers had forced a turnaround. When the next quarterly report was released, fortunes were lost on what was assumed to have been a safe bet. As a result, there were those who wished to see his father, Lord Edmund, ruined, including a number of banking institutions who held his debt. Were it ever to come out how close he had actually been to collapse, were it ever to be made public that a mere child had been forced to save him from his fall, Edmund’s father and the companies he championed would lose consumer confidence. How much their businesses would suffer depended on a number of factors over which there was no way to execute control, but all estimates were certain that it would include layoffs damning to the local economy. Edmund figured this was likely why the whole of the matter had never properly been investigated at the time despite the loud cries from London.

No one in the family knew of young Edmund’s involvement. His siblings assumed that after father saw what a coddled brat he had grown into during the time they had spent together in the city, Edmund had been sent to military boarding school which did little to straighten him out in the two years he attended. He did nothing to protest. What would come from it besides causing the people he loved to become embarrassed of themselves and of each other? Besides, he enjoyed school. He had developed a taste for authority in the offices of Edenborough, and another closed society allowed him to easily and fully indulge his addiction. This behaviour continued as an undergraduate, though largely because at that point Edmund had been under the assumption that adding further credence to his siblings’ jealous claims served some greater good. The largely empty rumours surrounding him protected his father’s image (which had always been his goal) and allowed him to ignore how lonely his existence was.

He explained to Ms. Smith that while it was true that he often featured in the type of newspapers he still assumed were chiefly consumed by world leaders who did not know about the AIDS epidemic
back in the eighties and nineties; he spent most of his nights alone in his college dorm. He had a lot of acquaintances but few friends, and even his professors – two of whom had once been his private tutors - seemed a little intimidated by him.

“Admittedly, these problems still persist. Even here. I have always found it rather strange. I – I don’t blame it on my upbringing, I know the fault lies in me, but I fear as though I was never properly socialized in my youth and never properly learned how it is that one is to behave around others. Just this very afternoon one of my closest friends insinuated that I was a narcissist and shortly before coming, one of my housemates told me that she thinks I treat people poorly unless I want something from them. I barely knew how to respond to either change. In truth I, well I live in constant terror of anyone knowing just how scared I am and I fear that to this day I may over compensate. Forgive me, Madame, I digress. To return to our story, when I was in my third year I had a massive stroke due to of a genetic condition, which Anna may have already mentioned to you. I spent the next two years at home without receiving a single visitor, mostly wishing that I were anyone other than Edmund Hewlett. I suppose by then it was too late to be anyone else.”

Physical therapy had been long and terribly expensive. Upon reaching the age of twenty-five and gaining access to her trust fund, his older sister assumed that the amount their parents had set aside for her owed itself to Edmund’s illness and supposed spending habits rather than to his intervention in making sure there was something left for her and the others to inherit. Edna wasted no time complaining that he would be the ruin of their house. Edmund continued to maintain that it would have done nothing to correct her assumptions beyond jeopardize everything else he had worked to preserve. He knew how things looked to his siblings from a distance. He could not resent them, it was either not in his character or he recognized that he too would have made the same sort of presumption had he not more information then he entitled them to.

Time passed, but Edmund’s overall relationship with his family did not improve with their fortunes. When he regained his strength, he returned to school and as much of life as he could reasonably manage. He had long ceased speaking with his father after getting into a fight about how secret their dealings ought to remain. His father had grown weary of his children’s endless squabbling, which seemed to worsen with each new sunrise. Upon hearing this, Edmund left the estate without much word.

Sometimes years passed without seeing any of his relatives with the exception of photo and press junctions. Ah! Edmund would think two months later, alone in a research centre with a microwave dinner and a birthday card signed by a few of his colleagues, so this is Christmas.

Occasionally he needed to borrow money. As it turned out, there was not a lot to be made with a double master’s in astronomy and astrophysics. He could - of course - have lived in squalor then as he did now, but to that time, he was still the heir apparent to his uncle’s dukedom and his father’s fortune, and appearances had to be maintained. Half of the family’s public image was generosity; the other half was the obscene wealth that allowed it. Edmund was comparatively broke much of the time.

The October (otherwise known as December) before he left the British Isles for those of New York, his siblings confronted him, stating that he was unfit to become the family’s representative. Above his parents protests he capitulated, begging his sisters and brother not to publically press the matter. It would be sorted quietly. They, all of them, had to present a united front. Edna tried to explain as kindly as possible all of the reasons why it made no sense for Edmund to remain, essentially, why he was an embarrassment. If my continued presence in these halls causes such discord, he replied sadly, I am prepared to leave them behind. He admitted she was right on all counts; they had workers, tenants, business and charity objectives to consider. I am happier at school anyway, he stated. It was neither a lie nor a misrepresentation of the truth.
And so, having fifteen years before burned through his trust fund on an investment in the future of a family he had since been forced to abandon all stakes in, he wished his lady sister luck with her new status, knowing that she truly did believe she was doing the right thing. And maybe she was. Edmund was proud but paranoid, criticism stuck to him and his mistakes were often magnified under the scrutiny of his own self-doubt. He was not a leader. He enrolled in graduate school on the other side of the world and left with the £90,000 he had in his own savings, hoping that by the time he returned with the only title he could now hope for, the animosity the world bore him would have diminished.

“Facilis descensus Averno, as they say.”

“I’m pretty sure no one says that,” Russo scoffed. After pacing under a street lamp outside of the District Attorney’s home, he had felt particularly charitable and gone to the 7/11 two blocks away on a quick coffee run. His colleagues were not half as appreciative of the gesture as he himself would have been. They spent the better part of an hour sitting together in silence. Yilmaz listening in on Anna Strong’s telephone conversation taking notes lackadaisically, Sackett contributing nothing at present to the investigation as all of the mechanics and recording equipment on which they were reliant, and he responsible, seemed to be in working order.

“I knew you weren’t really Italian,” his partner snapped, pulling one of her headphone off her ear. “Talking about my cousin’s pizzeria like -”

“It’s Latin, Yilmaz,” Sackett interjected. “Honestly, had neither of you an education in classical language?”

“I took two years of Spanish,” Russo offered, swirling the remnants of his now cold coffee in the Styrofoam cup he still held.

“ESL counted as a foreign language credit when I was in high school.”

“It is from Virgil’s Aeneid,” Sackett continued, “the decent to hell is easy - an early form of the proverb the road to hell is paved with good intentions.”

Russo rolled the eyes he could barely keep open. “I just want to throw it out there; this is why no one likes Hewlett. No one talks like that. Not even you when you’ve had enough sleep. This is so fucking boring,” he complained as he removed off his headset. “I’m just waiting for Ira Glass to interrupt all nasally like Up Next: Act Two – Venti, Vidi, Nothing in Your Jurisdiction. Stay Tuned.”

“There is no statute on corruption charges and he did admit to using charitable funds to underwrite a failing corporate venture,” Yilmaz offered. “We could give that to Hamilton to use as leverage in his dealings with the SIS.”

“Still not our jurisdiction.”

Sackett put the audio on surround sound and as Edmund Hewlett went off on a tangent about the classics, the sergeants complained that the worst of it was that they would be subject to hearing this again in the morning once Backer and Braxton had had a listen.

“Yilmaz, did we learn anything useful about Mr. Simcoe?” Sackett asked when it seemed that
Hewlett would be speaking at some length on a topic of little interest to the police force. She sat up straight with a small shimmy as if she had been waiting the whole night for him to ask.

“Okay, so Tallmadge and Sanchez were off in their predictions. Simcoe was not remotely interested in Strong’s very forward advances.”

“How forward?” Sackett asked.

“Nudes,” Yilmaz winked.

“I mean, that is clearly evidence we all need to look at,” Russo joked.

“Clearly, but later. I’m not done. Get this, Mary Woodhull –as in, the daughter-in-law of the esteemed Judge Richard -was with our hapless victim – slash – character witness and told Strong not to think herself entitled to every man she looks at. So then Strong was like whoa, hold up. What? Woodhull then told her, stay out of my marriage and my liaison; and Strong responded that she had no idea about Mary and Abe back when they had been roommates and then proceeded to judge her about Simcoe. She stressed his name as if she meant to be saying “eww gross.” So Woodhull responded that Strong was, wait – I wrote this one down.” She smiled and reached for her yellow block. “Such a self-centric little whore. Seeing as you clearly do not care for or about John at all, you should just buy yourself a vibrator and go back to pretending to give a fuck about constellations with your pallid virgin and leave the real men to me. Then Woodhull hung up.”

“Any of that there paraphrased?” Russo asked.

“Nope. Nice isn’t it? I almost want Müge or Narin to give me an excuse to slut-shame them like that now.”

“You’re a terrible friend.”

“You’re jealous that I have more fun both on and off the job,” she responded before sticking out her tongue.

“Yilmaz,” Sacket cautioned.

“You’re both jealous. Okay, but that was pretty much it. Strong tried to seduce Simcoe; Woodhull intervened, proving that the alibi he provided Officer Bradford was valid.”

“What alibi?”

“Simcoe was driving around Setauket early this morning. He was pulled over and said that he had just been in a motel with Mary Woodhull. The way she spoke to Anna Strong it seems legit.”

“Simcoe was in Setauket –and Connecticut -early this morning according to his own account?” Sackett clarified again.

“I put that into the report, Sir,” Yilmaz affirmed.

That altered matters.

“Let me call your boss and make sure he is aware of it.”
“What I really don’t understand, Mr. Hewlett, is how you can possibly take offence to Jordan’s assertion that you were raised in a bubble.”

“I well … I knew what was going on in the wider world - for the most part - without, that is, actually having taken an active part. Until I did. Ah, it was such a messy business. I daresay I am rather glad to have that all behind me.” He realised as he spoke that this was his truth. He was happier in misery with Anna then he ever imagined being at the head of an estate. Things had worked out. He would work things out. He would find his way back to her, of this he was certain.

“How much of this does Anna know?”

“Very little –at least from me. I told her about my medical condition, which unfortunately, is bound to have some effect on our lives together. As I’ve said, the whole business of inheritance no longer concerns me. As such, it has never come up in any significant detail. I don’t believe she knows I am -or rather was I suppose - highborn. In truth, I suspect it would serve is something of a turnoff, so it might suit your interests to grant me the opportunity to tell her.”

“Adamant, aren’t you?” Ms. Smith smiled. Somehow, be it through chocolate or honesty, Hewlett felt as if he was winning her over to his cause.

“On that point you may have me.”

“And your family? What will they say of your wish to marry an American?”

“I’ve yet to hear from my parents. They would love her instantly, of that I can assure you. My brother congratulated me on the match and I have no reason to believe that my sisters wish me any ill will. Ah - from a political standpoint a marriage to an American seems like a good excuse to announce the official abdication of my claim without causing too much lasting scandal or embarrassment.”

“You seem to have calculated all of this.”

“I fear that may be my predisposition,” he acknowledged.

“I’ll return your honesty with my own, Mr. Hewlett. I am not quite certain what to make of you, I don’t know if you’re suitable for my daughter, though not for the reasons I initially gave my objections.”

“Enlighten me then.”

“I don’t, for one, personally believe you are involved in Senator Arnold’s disappearance as I once did. However, I worry that your idea of love requires a certain relentlessness; you may yet prove yourself a dangerous man.”

“Dangerous? Madame, think not that I am without regret.” Determined he could accept; dangerous however was simply preposterous. He questioned what other stories she hoped to hear – what else, specifically – Simcoe might have confessed his knowledge of or alluded to.

“Brave words, Mr. Hewlett.”

“Brave or not you asked for an honest account of my crimes and I’ve provided you one that I hope meets your satisfaction. Now, please Madame, will you call for your daughter? I fear we have much to discuss.”

Anna’s mother nodded. She placed her finger over her lips and motioned for Hewlett to follow her.
Instead of leading him to Anna, she brought him to a large kitchen in the rear of the house that looked as if it had never been used and turned on the faucet.

“I have to make more coffee. Ours was growing cold.”

Hewlett did not respond. Ms. Smith made no more gestures that might suggest she had any intention of using the water for a purpose beyond drowning her words.

“I lied,” she said. “There is no paper trail, Edmund. Not at least one that the NYPD has been given access to. You poor dear, you are – or were - better at all of this than you allow yourself to think.”

Though he heard what she said, only one word registered. “Edmund,” he repeated, trying not to smile like a fool.

“Nancy,” she said, gesturing to herself and then offering her hand to him. He took it, noting how firm her handshake was – a symptom of the profession, he expected. Richard Woodhull’s friendly grip carried the same force.

“I believe you, when you say that you love my daughter, Edmund. That, however, is not something that is really left for me to decide.”

“Your right,” he agreed.

“You are not right for her, you must know that.” She caressed the hand she still held as if to express pity, sympathy, or sorrow. Edmund pulled back before he could make an adequate assessment.

“With respect, that is not for you to decide either.”

“You’ll only hurt her.”

“She will want for nothing so long as I breathe.”

“Whatsoever else you may well be, Edmund Hewlett, you are the chief suspect in a high profile investigation-”

“Law. Order. Authority,” Hewlett interrupted, translating the words on his family’s crest into English. “Ma’am, I believe that your judicial system is competent enough to serve its basic function. I had nothing to do with Senator Arnold’s disappearance. The investigation will prove that if it has not already.”

“Oh you poor boy. You have no idea how any of this of this works in the real world, do you?”

“You mean in America? No. But after two years of being told that I am in the greatest country on earth by everyone I’ve encountered, forgive me, but I expect a bit more of your laws and law enforcement than conspiracies of convenience.”

Constable Sanchez -alias Josephine the maid - snatched the earbud Anna was listening in on her mother’s conversation on after less than thirty seconds of complete silence. She switched the device she held to its communicative feature and asked, “Mr. Sackett, I can’t hear anything anymore, can you?”
Anna could not hear the response but she rose instantly when she saw the constable pull her service weapon out from under her skirt and take the safety off.

“Please stay here, Ms. Strong,” Sanchez said.

Anna called her actions into question. A minute before, Sanchez had had an arm wrapped around her, seeming to share in the sorrow and sympathy she bore towards her fiancé.

“What the fuck?” Anna exclaimed, “When exactly did your earpiece go out? He is a good man, the only crime he ever thought to commit was to marry me – the love of his life – and because he stands to get a visa out of it you plan to shoot him? You heard him, if I were to break this off .”

“Please stay upstairs, Ms. Strong. I have to check on your mother. If I don’t, Russo or Yilmaz will. They have both been working for twenty hours straight and proficient as they both are with firearms and hostage situations, mistakes get made.”

“Who is being held hostage here?” Anna demanded as she shoved past the armed officer.

She flew down the winding stairwell, down the long hallway and through the double doors that lead to the largely unused kitchen as fast as her feet could carry her, only half aware that she had just assaulted the cop who was trailing her.

Her entrance ended a conversation midsentence. Edmund embraced her, apologizing profusely for not being able to get in touch after his release. Anna began to weep from relief.

“Now, now,” he whispered.

“Ma’am, is everything alright?” she heard Sanchez ask.

“It is fine Josephine. Mr. Hewlett and I just wanted to make another pot of coffee.”

Sanchez nodded. From her peripheral vision, Anna saw her make hand gestures from the window above the double sink. She wondered how close she had come to losing him. Suddenly she felt her mother’s hand on her back. “Sweetheart, why don’t the two of you go upstairs? I’m certain you’ll have a lot to talk about. I managed to have the bugs restricted to the common rooms.”

The warmth of his skin made her feel colder as she connected the tiny dots inked into his pale, smooth chest, tracing shapes with her finger tips, imaging that she was instead combing them through a thick redwood forest – still breathless, still able to feel John inside of her. Anna closed her eyes to return to the sins she would never enact. Edmund seemed unaware. He barely seemed present. Anna wondered where his fantasies lead him when he held her. Perhaps to Mary Grant – now Mary Woodhull – if her history with men were employed as an informer. Then again, perhaps Edmund has no clandestine desires of which to speak. Perhaps that was why she was left to content herself with the dark imaginings of her rebellious subconscious.

“I thought they were freckles at first,” she smiled when she felt his hand graze hers, realizing she had been tracing the same picture for quite some time.

“Ah,” he replied. It was uncommitted. It was how they started. He was adrift; she was nowhere she wished to be. He apologised again.
Edmund had been hard when she had brought him upstairs, away from the world that would hang him for his affiliations to one all of her own; to her twin bed in a room filled with artefacts of the girl she had been and broken dreams of the women she had then hoped to become. His dark eyes sparkled as she fought with the nightshirt her mother had lent her, pulling it over her head, pressing her large, bare breasts against his trembling body the moment she emancipated them. The way he ginned as he held her –as he beheld her for the first time without the stain of shy reluctance - made Anna question if she had ever truly managed to seduce a man before. His breaths had been short and shallow as she unzipped his trousers. He looked down with caution and up with surprise. It had been the first time he had himself ever witnessed his canon mounted and in position.

Anna giggled at his phrasing, pulling him to her bedside. Edmund stumbled over the pant legs still around his ankles but managed not to fall. “This is happening,” he whispered, delighted, elated and every bit as nervous as she suddenly felt. Anna slid off her Sophie’s and her knickers whist Edmund climbed on top of her.

For a ten-minute eternity, they fought a losing battle. She grew sore spreading her legs as he fumbled against her, trying to force his way in. Anna whispered encouragements as she tried to keep herself moist with her fingertips. Edmund squished and squeezed his ever-softer member until his short-lived confidence gave way to self-condemnation. She sat up and kissed him deeply to temporally halt his tongue’s treacherous speech. When she was certain she had silenced his doubts, she started unbuttoning his vest and shirt, leaving a trail of light kisses as she worked her was down his surprisingly hard body until she reached his – disappointing - soft cock. It did not help matters when she attempted to take it in her mouth. He was completely limp and it seemed no amount of caressing could change that. Anna’s face must have betrayed her disgust; Edmund instantaneously became apologetic which did nothing to help the matter.

“It never lasts,” he lamented.

“It is alright,” she whispered. “Hush. Lie with me. Da mi basia mille, deinde centum. ”

Rather than covering her in kisses as Catullus originally requested, he lightly grazed her lip before citing something Anna knew to be from the same text about the brevity of light. How often, she wondered, did he spin desire into spurn? Could love truly blossom from an attraction she feared was –and was fated to remain – purely intellectual? He spoke to a side of her rarely recognized in the company they kept. Perhaps, Anna thought, her life was better so. She was happy pouring beer, happy –if not satisfied - with her base fantasies of the flesh.

Fantasy seemed to be all Edmund envisioned himself sharing in.

He did not cry openly, which she respected. He seemed to further resign himself to his fate, which she did not. He began to relay a story from mythology, or the ancient world that he deemed relevant to his plight. Anna was not certain. She was barely attentive, her unspoken fears about the sustainability of their affair screaming in her soul. At some point, he realized this and became silent. Anna escaped to her thoughts of past lovers, of good sex that had been too short and bad sex that had at least achieved penetration. She thought about John, about how dismissive he had been of her advances. She thought about him fucking her college roommate whilst he had left her to lie wondering how much of her fiancé’s impotence was pathological as compared to how much of it was simply a manifestation of his general repugnance towards that which love ought to normalize.

She wondered if part of John still wanted her. She wondered if there was a part of her not born from disappointment that had ever otherwise wanted John.

Edmund released her hand.
“I’m sorry, I can only imagine how hard this must be-” she stopped, regretting her wording.

“You needn’t apologise, love. You are a passionate woman and I … I can only hope to make myself worthy of your affections.”

Edmund’s passionate woman remark stung every bit as much as Mary’s self-entitled little whore. Perhaps they both had the same root meaning – Anna longed, as she always had, for that which was right out of reach. Her fiancé knew this without knowing it, or he was actively aware and simply chose to feign innocence.

“I’ll have insurance next month,” he continued, “and should my medication run out beforehand – which I daresay, I half expected it would have by this point – well, we’ll give it another go. I’d ought to simply, that is …” he trailed off. She followed his thoughts where they lead. Edmund all but claimed he would risk death if she were to suggest it might serve her fancy. Perhaps he truly believed in his unspoken sentiment. Anna believed just below his pale façade he still wanted to die. Yet he lived.

For her.

“You don’t need to give me the world,” she said gazing up up to meet his eyes. “Edmund, you’ve given me galaxies.”

“Darling,” he seemed to plead. He smiled weakly. There was something tragic in his expression, as if he could see all of her crimes against him. As though he forgave her – for her admission, for working with the police, for the daydreams she felt powerless against, for the resentment she bore him for a condition over which he had no control. It made everything worse. She thought about all the sum of that which he had confessed to her mother. Lying naked beside her after being humiliated by her lust was likely one of the bravest, most intimate actions he had ever taken. With her admiration, so grew her guilt.

“Where are we?” she whispered.

“I - forgive me, love. I don’t follow.”

“In your universe,” she whispered as she stoked his hard, hairless chest. His skin was still slightly damp from the excursion of his short-lived attempt to consummate their relationship. Anna’s fingers followed a line of stars unlike the others up his left bicep. She pulled her hand back in a jolt when she realized they covered a scar. He apologised. Again. Anna wondered how many times he had attempted to excuse himself in the past hour. “Please, Edmund. Stop.”

He blinked and gave a slight nod.

“Here,” he answered, touching her face lightly. “You’re the earth, Anna. You are the world. And we - we are here. Ah - more specifically, if you will,” he struggled free himself from her embrace. Leaning forward, he pointed to his left shoulder with the opposite hand. “The entire piece is a star map. If you were to look outside right now, were the city lights not interfering with our view, this is what you would be able to see. Vela,” he smiled weakly. “And here – Carnia.” Moving he hand back to his scar, he continued, “Pyxis. It is comprised of mostly faint stars; you likely wouldn’t see it with the naked eye … even out in Oyster Bay.”

Before she could stop herself, she asked, “Are we speaking metaphorically?”

“Are we?” Edmund echoed, continuing dismissively, “Come, I will show you. Not Pyxis, but I believe that even with New York’s light pollution we could make out.”
“Stay in bed,” she moaned. He declined. The blankets were cold without him.

“I – ah, as it were, darling, I’d really ought to be preparing for my departure anyway. Should I show you the stars before I do?”

My, she noted. First person singular. Her doubts, albeit unspoken, drove him away.

“Don’t leave, and don’t – don’t let me break your heart, Edmund. I love you. I’m sorry I just -”

“Darling, what is this talk? I’ll hear no more of it. You’ve had an impossible day by any standards and I know I’ve done little to make it lighter. I’m not leaving because of you – well – ah, not directly. I’ve a meeting before dawn I fear I can’t escape.”

“That sounds ominous.”

“I promise I’m … in control of the situation I am about to walk into. I’ll be back in the morning. Get some rest my love.”

“I am all but certain Tallmadge still has a surveillance van parked outside.”

“And?”

“Where are you going?”

“Why to exhume the senator and move his corpse to a safer hiding spot, now that I know a surveillance van in play,” he said dryly.

“You shouldn’t joke like that!” she scolded.

“You shouldn’t laugh.”

Anna had not been, but suddenly she could not seem to stop herself.

“Ah, it is all a bit ridiculous, is it not? Anna, I believe in the rule of law and the flaws of man. Which isn’t even to mention how easy it is to get lost in the Woods of Setauket while drunken in the dead of night. This is rendition; I am not entirely convinced that it has nothing to do with who my parents are. But now they know my sins and unless Cameron honestly plans to go forth with this silly referendum he’s proposed it is not as if your government can, or will do anything with the information I provided. Europe is too important as a trade partner and the Hewletts are too important to Europe. They are not going to risk their hand in these relations before TTIP is finalized.”

“You’ve sacrificed so much Edmund – and for what? To be labelled a murder on the other side of the world. It is unjust. And I’ve -”

“Can anything be said to be a sacrifice when it is done in the name of love?”

“Edmund, must you go?”

“I must.”

“Where?”

Edmund started dressing as he asked her forgiveness. He was bound by his word not to say, and he wished not to lie.
“Is there truly a difference between secrets and lies?” Anna retorted.

“I assumed you knew about my heritage, from Google if nothing else. I had no designs on misleading you. In truth, my dear, regardless of the expectations of my birth, I’m simply not heir to anything, and as such I felt no pressing need to mention it.” He paused, adding with a snort of comic irony, “Your living the highlights though, believe me. Small flat in a historic home, most of which we can’t enter; staging photographs to convince a disconnected audience of our stated relationship. When I stop to think on it, it seems I was born and raised to be an illegal immigrant.”

She smiled despite her best efforts not to.

“It won’t be this way forever, love. I’m going to … let’s just say that by pure happenstance I came upon a means of transforming your dreams of owning the tavern a reality and I’d be fool not to at the very least attempt to exploit it.”

Anna’s heart stopped. She would have preferred if he had just as dismissively confessed that he had somehow found himself a mistress to disappoint. No. Edmund Hewlett was shy, kind, decent and humane. He was however as the whole of his confessed history had proven, ruthless and hubristic when it came to business, or, as he put it, love.

She thought of Tallmadge, Hamilton, and the French spy she had only met briefly before he had been called away on more important business – perhaps something owing to Edmund’s idea of rendition. She thought of Constable Sanchez, about the implications she had made regarding Russo, Yilmaz and their service weapons. She thought of how cavalier Edmund was when he dismissed the threat the collectively bore him. She watched him as he button his shirt, lamenting that it had become wrinkled and brushing out imagined creases.

In that moment, Anna was afraid both for and of him. She feared the again amplified attraction she felt – and what that might imply about her character. More than anything, however, she feared his answer to the question she dared only to whisper.

“Please tell me this has nothing to do with the missing senator.”

He stopped abruptly and turned to meet her stare.

“It has nothing – well, you see, funny as it is, I, ah. Perhaps I should clarify.”

“Edmund!”

“Shh.”

“Clarify you should.”

“I overheard a conversation the Frenchman was having over the phone, that is - while you were being interrogated back at Whitehall. Given Setauket’s famously poor mobile reception, he spoke loudly and kept having to repeat himself and …well, I happened upon some information that may, at some point in the near future, be beneficial in helping to obtain -” he stopped abruptly and taking her into his arms, continued on another thought. “Anna, I have nothing to do with Senator Arnold. I’d no idea who he even was until he went missing, but there are people, people in positions of power who mean to benefit from the effects his absence from the American political stage will have on international trade and trade policy. Why should we not be among them?”

“Because you are a good and decent man.”

“Who otherwise has no hope of providing for you. Of … of making you happy. Don’t worry, love.
It is not as if this whole terrible business is not something of a routine."

It was exactly as she had dreaded.

“You have no idea what you are up against. Edmund, please, come back to bed. You yourself are enough, don’t you understand? Even … even with sex, we’ll get there and even if we don’t - did you not hear me when I told you that I would still wish to marry had you nothing more to offer than the man I’ve known you to be? I don’t understand, and perhaps I never shall, how given your past your idea of love is so wrapped up in finance.”

“So is yours,” he started laughing. Paraphrasing from one of their first conversations, Edmund choked, “Um, hi. I realize we are not all that well acquainted as it were, but I believe it might be to our mutual benefit if, it we were to – Anna, Miss Strong, I have a flat here in Setauket and I’d be willing to pay you a sum of $10,000 to consent to being my wife for a year or so. Well, that is, I mean, in a purely legal, platonic sense.”

“Fuck you.”

“That is the other half of the problem isn’t it?”

“Edmund!”

“Shh. Now, now.”

“You shh. When I told you I love you, I meant it. And haven’t I – don’t I put up with enough of your bullshit to prove it? You are so secretive, so-”

“What is there to say? I hardly knew myself after my dissertation. You are a beacon, Anna. You are the only one I …” he trailed off. He often did.

“Why do you find it so easy to say to the authorities but so fucking difficult to say to me?”

“Because I am broke, Anna. Because I broke everything.”

“Edmund. Look at me. I love you but I refuse to be the sword you fall on. Please, tell me what is going on. Tell me how I can help.”

He sat down. Cradling his forehead in both hands as he leaned forward, his elbows digging into his kneecaps, he spoke. “When I went to the ATM my transaction was declined. I have nothing, Anna, and I honestly might have done better to anticipate as much. I gambled what is or rather was left of my savings on a high-risk investment, and for the first time since, well in quite a while I can’t get in touch with my banker. Maybe he has my end game figured out -that in essence I’ve already beaten him, regardless of what happens to my personal finances. Then again, perhaps he is simply hesitant to speak of our joint entanglement over the phone. I suppose that is every bit as logical. Darling, it is not for you to concern yourself with any of this. Just please know that you are universally adored, and I consider it a blessing that I can count myself among those willing to fall at your feet.”

“How dare you, Sir!”

“Pardon?”

“What the fuck is going on? We’re engaged Edmund, you surrendered your right to sullen, vague musings the moment you asked me to share in your life.”
“You’re right,” he consented, and so he explained. He told her that since his attempted suicide –
language, she noted, which he had scoffed at the night before – their mutual friend John Graves Simcoe had been unhinged. “More so,” he clarified, “than usual.”

“Simcoe has been obsessed with a dark idea he has of me since first we met. I’ve spent decades
both heartbroken over him and half in love because —though it shames me to admit it - I’m just vain
enough to accept his canon. He wants to be the man he sees —or, as it seems I managed to shatter
our delicate equilibrium with half a bottle of Xanax - long saw me as, and damn it all! I can no
other options and I mean to let him. Be me. The me he knew back when I fancied that I knew
myself. How ignorant and arrogant we were in our shared youth.”

“I … I don’t understand. I thought you met in New York.”

“I thought we were content to pretend we had. It is unimportant. I have Simcoe back where I can
control him. I took a bet, and he took the bait. A lack of self-control, rather than outright greed
makes him as successful as he is,” he mused.

“Is Mary Woodhull involved?” Anna asked when she had grown certain that Edmund was
unwilling to volunteer any else concerning his pre-dawn duel. Maybe whatever crime the two idiot
Brits had conspired to commit while under heavy surveillance had more to do with John’s rejection
than she herself. Or Mary. Or Edmund.

He blinked.

“Mary … no. No. Why would she be? Ah – it is not really my business, but —she and Simcoe, they
are, ah, I’m not really sure how to put this. I fear I lack the suitable vocabulary.”

“Fucking?”

“Not exactly. Ah, it isn’t mine to tell but, as I’ve stated, Simcoe has been spiralling for quite some
time – something that in itself I mean to put an end to but no matter – he’s, well you see. It seems
Mary Woodhull is unhappy in her marriage to Abraham Woodhull; a man Simcoe had despised for
reasons I do not fully pretend to understand for some time now. He is pretending to have an affair
with her, and it seems they are both pretending that whatever it is they do in each other’s presence
has not led to at least some attraction. It is a rather messy business. But no. This is strictly between
Simcoe and myself.”

The word, Anna decided, was not in fact fucking. It was fucked up.

Edmund rose, kissing her forehead, and promising to return as soon as the fates allowed.

“Don’t go,” Anna begged. “I don’t you realize that you are the only suspect in a high profile
murder investigation. You are under surveillance. Forget Tallmadge. The FBI satellite in
Manhattan specializes in financial crimes. Alexander Hamilton has a background in economics –
you and John are going to get caught. Unless...”

“Unless?”

She hesitated. She tried not to think of the photographs she had sent or the work she had put into
taking them. She tried not to think of Edmund’s sorted history, of his illness or of the heart
medication that rendered him important. She tried not to think of how she had all but forced him to
test his limits, or her disappointment, of the fantasies that ensued. She thought only of the moment
they were in when she pulled him into a kiss she feared might be the last they would ever share.
Finding no other immediate option, she spoke.
“The task force is operating under the assumption that John has … romantic feelings for me.”

“He does. If you think I suffered no shame in -”

“Hush. Listen. You are going to have a fight. With me. Over me - with Simcoe. Make that seem like what you are leaving tonight to do and it will throw them off enough until we can work out a more sustainable solution, or until you are eliminated as a suspect.” Anna took a deep breath, “Forgive me, my love. There is something I fear I must confess.”

“Did you ever love me?” he repeated again when they had reached the doorway. “I would have given everything for you. Answer my question, Ms. Strong; I deserve at least that much.” Speaking slowly, hoarsely with tears in his eyes, he asked once more, stressing the adverb.

“Did you ever love me?”

Once more Anna failed to answer.

“Then it is perhaps for the best if we quit each other my dear. I would suggest, for your sake, that you might endeavour to quit that devil Simcoe as well.”

With that, he left - slamming the door behind him. He heard Anna collapse in the tears she was forcing and the creak of the floorboards as her mother rushed to her side. An engine started, as Anna expected it would, but no headlights went on and the van he knew to be in the shadows remained cloaked in darkness. Hewlett turned his back on the Smith household, pulled out his phone and typed.

<<Anna just told me about your little conversation.
I’m coming over. We have to talk. This has to end. >>

<<Did she mention the picture she sent? >>

Simcoe wrote back almost instantly, sending an attachment. He opened a photograph that caused him to blush and wonder how much of this was all play-acting. Anna was misusing a showerhead with a caption that she was thinking of him. Of Simcoe. Hewlett was too disgusted to respond.

<<Surprised this is coming from you. >>

<< Bring coffee. >>

<<And cream if you need it. >>

<<Oyster, still there? Bros before hoes, right? >>

<<I won’t tolerate this. She is to be my wife. >>

Hewlett put the mobile into his pocket. It buzzed again with what he hoped for the sake of their sorted friendship was a heartfelt apology. He read.

<<Hew … wait. I wasn’t kidding
about the coffee. I have nothing

at home and we’ve a lot got finish up. >>

<<Fine. Unfreeze my account. >>

<< It is after midnight your good.

Get the stuff from 7/11. They are open. I think. >>

Hewlett responded by turning off his phone. For a moment he closed his eyes, leaned forward and rested his head on the steering wheel, wondering how his life could have become so completely altered in the span of a day. He tried to calculate what time last night Anna had opened up to him about her dreams, how much time elapsed between him promising to make the a reality and her telling him that she would prefer to spend the rest of her natural life working behind a bar. He wondered if Senator Arnold had been killed by then, if he was dead at all, and if this was the same representative of the people whose penis he had seen on John Andre’s phone a few months ago. He wondered if that was what had finally forced Andre into at least making overtures of reforming his ways. He wondered if there was a Senator Arnold at all, or if this was all an elaborate ruse to trick him into admitting everything he had to Nancy Smith. He had not heard from his family in a while, and it might be in his best interest to ring his mum or one of the aides who helped his uncle and sister manage the estate to see if anything was amiss. He wondering if his paranoia was warranted; or if what he ought to concern himself with was the question of if he was on the correct anti-anxiety medication at all. His tension loosened and his head hit the steering wheel, causing the horn to go off. Hewlett sat up, rubbed his eyes, and decided that drinking coffee with a man his fiancée thought of during sex and evidently sent nudes to might just be his best option right now. He turned on the automobile with the push of a button and asked his navigation system where the nearest 7/11 was before realizing that he was parked not two blocks away.

Hewlett could see the glow of the neon sign from where he sat; bleaching out the light of all the stars whose glow had travelled millions of lightyears, only to disappear in the artificial luminescence of a city that never slept.

He understood their plight.

Chapter End Notes

Can we just like appreciate for a moment how hoarse poor Edmund must be at this point?

I only have one note for you this go around, the poem referenced here is Catullus 5, which you can find over Google, but I recommend investing the Peter Green translation if you happen to read poetry for enjoyment.

Comments and Kudos are always appreciated, as is your readership. Thank you so much for your patience with my sporadic updates. Come visit me on Tumblr any time, I’d love to hear from each and every one of you about anything you fancy talking about.

Till next time, XOXO – Tav
Up Next: Simcoes Before Hoes
The Press

Chapter Summary

Simcoe receives a dispatch from the Homefront, a set of compromising selfies, an answer to all of his various legal kerfuffles and … a kiss.

Chapter Notes

I said on Tumblr that I was going to leave this update until my birthday at the end of the month, and in essence, I have. This chapter is divided into uneven halves, the longer of which you will get when I get my cake. What can I say, it has already been nearly a month, and if Anna and Edmund get their own chapter, so too should Mary and Simcoe (and their missing corpse.)

Warnings: minor reference to the US 2016 election results, more financial intrigue than you ever asked for, extramarital affections.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He did not adjust his bid. By the time the newsstands opened in the morning, he would have no reason to.

Applebee’s had already withdrawn their interest, as had five of his other competitors. As it stood, Martin DeJong would be forced to sell his tavern to either Hewlett and himself or the sole other bidder for a fifth of his original asking price. There was no need to outbid. His esteemed colleague, it seemed, had already sorted the matter through family connections. Once the affiliation the property had with the missing senator was made public, Simcoe’s faceless rival would doubtlessly be forced into concession. The bar itself was all but worthless prior to the mess he and Mary Woodhull had entangled themselves in last night; by morning it would not merit the hundred thousand he had put forward to announce his interest.

It was reason for concern.

There was always the change that the police might chose to question his recent transactions. He could not tell them that Hewlett had tipped him off to the sale without drawing the authorities’ attention to their more nefarious combined venture, or worse - to his own lighting (and losing) of the fuse that caused the market chaos that allowed it. He had no other explanation for why he made an offer when he did. It would have been one thing if he were to attempt to sweep up land in Setauket after actual news of the investigation threatened to replace claims of ISIS sleeper cells, radicalized Bernie Sanders supporters, and any other elements the fundamentally confused American media could think of to baselessly accuse.

Now? Now he was damned. His bid would attract suspicion. FBI interrogators would cease asking him about association football, rivalries and bar fights of old and begin to dismantle the alibi he had
had for last night that, admittedly, had been too hastily constructed. Where would that lead? He thought of Mary Woodhull pleading for her son. Furiously driven, dutiful Mary, whose voice cracked as she imagined the sort of man her little boy might grow into if left to the custody of his grandfather. He thought of the smiling child with the bouncing blonde curls, who – unprompted – had politely thanked both him and God for the juice box and egg salad sandwich that Simcoe had purchased at the same Starbucks that morning. His lip curled. Mary Woodhull would not go down in the fight he had started.

If the police, their federal counterparts and foreign allies asked about his sudden interest in the tavern he was all but certain witnesses testimony could place him in the night before, he would simply tell them he had long been sold on its manager; on Anna Strong, whose love would soon be his to claim.

Perhaps not, he thought, reading the text message that accompanied the cover story that had by now been sent to print.

>> Isn’t that your girlfriend? <<

The photograph under the sensationalist headline showed Anna nervously accompanying DCI Tallmadge into a crime scene. With any great luck, he reasoned, the crime in question -which Edmund Hewlett had no hand in committing- would prove the stargazer’s ultimate fall. He would be sentenced to life in a high security prison whose walls would protect him from Simcoe’s wrath. Though unnamed, the article would serve to Anna’s humiliation. As seen from Simcoe’s bias, an assault on her honour was a far more grievous offence than any he himself had committed.

He thought to text her again, but she had yet to respond to his last attempt at reaching out and likely needed space to come to him on her own.

Then again, he thought bitterly, maybe he was giving her too much credit.

Maybe what he ought to do - or ought to have done months if not years ago - was ask her to marry him so that he might stay in this country that pretended to have been a colony but knew nothing of cricket. Maybe he ought then to wake her up in the middle of the night to look at some dots in the distant sky and make her do calculus and linear algebra whilst he muttered indiscernible phrases in dead languages. Maybe then – finally - she might fancy him.

The question that left him mute and stilled his ever-trembling fingers was valid. The answer, simply, was ‘no’, which only complicated matters further.

John Graves Simcoe had for quite some time the unfortunate bad habit of explaining that he had long been in a romantic relationship with Anna Strong to those who he imagined would never have reason to fact-check him. To his dental hygienist she was “a woman unmatched”, he had once told his barber “her beauty was equalled only by her passion”, and to his friends across the Atlantic he had claimed that he “planned to propose at Christmas.” These were not lies in themselves, but the premise on which he based his assertions – namely, that he and the lovely Miss Strong had been dating since she left her now-former husband two years prior was a fiction at best.

He found himself caught in a lie.

Simcoe imagined Anna’s name having come up over the years at various parties he had missed back home, her merits debated by people whom by their nature would always find her wanting. He imagined Edmund giving word to mummy dearest that he planned to wed himself to the same American law student - cum - beer wrench. He imagined the acting duchess then dispensing this information to her board of tacticians (which doubtlessly included the rest of her considerable
brood) and the lot of them scrambling to either suppress or politicise the whole affair by one of their preferred means. Silence. When employed properly, it was a perfectly adequate response; one that the Hewletts seemed to adore. He wondered if it had been more difficult for the members of the northern élite to quietly dine with the knowledge of a dead horse in their stables or ignore the reality that their prodigal son was slowly proving himself to be as much of what they deemed a public disgrace in Setauket as he had back in Scotland.

No.

There was no need for question.

He was looking at his answer.

Edmund was clearly regarded as a liability and the family proper seemed to have cut their loss. Anna Strong, though unnamed, was shamefully on the cover of a tabloid published by the media mogul to whom his ex-fiancée was heir. Doubtlessly, Effie Gwillim had consulted her roommate Ellie Hewlett prior to approving the publication. She always did. Ellie had likely responded with an empty smile that meant nothing and was therefore open to interpretation. She always did. Thus, the members of society who were privy to the news before it was published were already asking questions.

Questions, he feared, which not only delegitimized his idea of effortlessly slipping into the place his rival occupied at Anna Strong’s side, but -when mishandled - would make the story of his affair with Mary Woodhull less plausible. He took a deep breath and typed back a series of words that made so little sense he was still unable to accept them as being truthful.

>> I lost her to a Hewlett. <<

>> Pathetic. <<

>> Not half as much as fucking one. <<

Half an hour on Reddit had yielded a photograph of the sadist he had roomed with at boarding school cozied up to a socialite at a refugee determent camp. Clearly, their presence there had not been part of humanitarian mission. There was nothing to make of it otherwise; the two had loathed each other since first they met decades prior. Still, Simcoe knew enough of what his former classmates had done post-graduation to know to seek leverage should he ever need it.

>> Drugs or weapons? <<

He wrote back after waiting a minute for a response to the image he sent. He passed another five in silence staring mournfully at Anna’s puzzled expression while his man in London typed. The message, when he finally received it, simply read

>> Property. :) <<

“Property,” Simcoe swallowed, suspicions confirmed. So the coppers already knew. So they knew.

It was worse than he feared.

Ultimately, there was nothing to be done about the press. Anna Strong would spend a week or two as a topic of discussion among those who read glossy-covered tabloids as well as those who made sure the world kept turning when politically significant bigots disappeared in dive bars. Edmund Hewlett’s coup would eventually be received as a love story should it get that far and Simcoe would see himself villainized briefly before again dropping out of public interest.
Disgusting though it was, he did not have time to dwell. DeJong’s Tavern and the bid he had made had already attracted the attention of international security. Perhaps that had been Hewlett’s plan all along. Martha Dandridge had perhaps been correct in her assessment. He took a sip of weak tea that had since grown cold.

Simcoe read the word again. Property. It was a bad investment but a decent excuse. He thought of sweet Mary Woodhull, ruthless as any of the badges within earshot of the investigation. Her diligence had been their shared salvation, something in her smile that morning had been his and his alone.

Mary Woodhull would not go down in a fight he had started, not whilst he had any fight in him.

Simcoe wondered if he would be thinking of her quite as fondly if his ear did not ache as badly as it did. He wondered if the human bite was indeed infectious; if it was an infection that made him threaten the M16 and make feasible bids on worthless land to hide that he had conspired towards corporate fraud with someone early experience had shown would leave him for dead. Someone who, consciously or not, had laughingly reminded him of that fact two hours prior.

He started reading Abigail’s work minutes after Hewlett had directed him to it. Having sorted Tarleton via text as much as any man might and afterwards making a pale effort to heed his subtle warning, Simcoe pulled up the app he had used to download the work unto his tablet. Noting that he still had half an hour before he was scheduled to meet his partner in crime, he ordered himself a second cuppa and returned to reading slander.

He had only told one man the story of which a fictional account was now posted on a surprisingly popular website. Initially, he was keen to give its author her due; the work was witty and well written. He recognized the characters as mostly being comic colonial renditions of people he knew from the pub. The pub. He heard his fingertips as they pattered against the backside of his device. The pub. Though renamed in the narrative, it was still every bit the place he had beaten a man to his death twenty hours ago.

Simcoe asked himself if he would have recognized himself in the violent, vengeful garrison captain had he never made the acquaintance of Benedict Arnold. He wondered if everyone he knew long held this perception of him, that he was horrid, cold and cruel; that he took pleasure in empty violence. Dandridge clearly thought so, as did Tallmadge, and perhaps half of the precinct. John Andre likely thought so as well, and likely thought himself a genius for having come to this conclusion. He’d likely told his administrator of all of Simcoe’s secret traumas and public tantrums as he laughed and fucked her whist his wife waited up for him and her long-term boyfriend tried to give her as much space as she needed to come to him on her own terms.

That, or - perhaps even more morally abhorrent - Abigail had just gone through his medical files. Hewlett’s as well.

The Hewlett she wrote reminded him more of the one he had known as a boy, before he had learned to hide his brutality behind his brilliance. Reading about the major who whipped his subordinates for the most minor offences; who forced the townsfolk to unearth gravestones to build a barricade that he might torture and traumatisé an enemy he would rather not directly face, Simcoe questioned why he longed for them to return to those days. He wondered if as a teenager, Hewlett
really sat back twirling contraband wine in crystal glasses and making snippy remarks whist Simcoe justly wondered despite his derision if he himself was going to live or die.

He questioned if in the years since Hewlett had developed any sympathy for him at all.

No. Of course not. He had no pity or mercy. All of his fears were doubts pertaining to how others might see him. Yet, Hewlett did not have to worry. He had what he wanted; what Simcoe assumed everyone wanted. Whatever it was, Hewlett got away with it; and Hewlett was revered.

And I? Simcoe asked. Out of all of the people Miss Ingram knew, she had chosen to cast him as her story’s main villain.

Given recent events, perhaps he was one.

Conceivably, somewhere in Andre’s notes from their sessions - which she doubtlessly had access to one way or another- reference was made to his rage. If Andre had said anything to him at any point, Simcoe reasoned, he could have avoid last night in its entirety. He listened to doctors. He followed their fingers with his eyes upon instruction until they had finished that part of their examination. He took medication as prescribed. He was very good at this. If Andre had been a real doctor, Simcoe reasoned, he could have learned to let his disagreements go prior before letting them go too far. He could have calmly walked out of the bar last night, met Mary Woodhull on the sidewalk and offered her a cigarette and a few minutes reprieve from what must have been a tedious marriage. Benedict Arnold could have stayed inside. Stayed alive. Ruined American politics or someone else’s night by discussing his whist the Culper Ring ruined music.

Simcoe could have been whole.

His ear stung. He asked for some ice as he bought himself a third cup of tea, promising the barista one more that after more than twenty years of drinking the stuff somewhat religiously he still could not tell the subtle differences between Early Grey and English Breakfast. He looked at his phone. It was still too early to order anything for Mary, and he still did not know what she liked. He sent her a text. She did not reply.

Unable to return to his reading, he was still staring at his messenger when Mary arrived. She was early. In her cuffed skinny jeans and loose sweatshirt, she was lovely. He rose to greet her.

“What are you wearing?” she asked in the tone Hewlett had used earlier.

“Aren’t you going to ask me if I am alright?” he sneered back.

Mary gasped, unable to remove her eyes from Simcoe’s bloody, bandaged ear and bruise stained neck as he pulled back his thick red hair. Her lust was markedly misplaced. As she counted the kisses she had given him to herself, she unwittingly calculated how long it had been since her lips had last lightly grazed those of her husband.

Christmas?

She had been alone on Valentine’s Day, opting to spend the night watching Versailles with her French-speaking au pair as opposed accompanying Abraham and his band to whatever hole-in-the-wall was serving as their venue. He had invited her. She was every bit as guilty as he was for
letting blame fill the hole in their marriage love had once occupied.

Looking at John’s scars, she faulted herself for all of the sins she imagined her husband committing against her.

He smiled; she returned it hesitantly. At his beaconing, they embraced. It had to look real, Mary told herself as she pressed her small frame against his warm chest, closing her eyes as she inhaled his musky cologne, lingering between dream and disgrace for a moment too long until she felt his arms release her. It had to look real. It only felt real because everything else in life seemed to be a waking nightmare.

After ordering herself a small vanilla latté, she accompanied him back to his car. While changing his bandage - which she insisted upon against light protest - she told him the Thomas had mimicked the very actions that had resulted in injury that day at school and as such had suspended until the following Monday. She hoped the other little boy was as badly hurt. At this, Simcoe smiled again. Mary explained she had later told her husband and his father that there was an E. coli breakout in the cafeteria and no one thought enough to question it; or, what she reluctantly noted was more likely, no one thought enough of either her or Thomas to be bothered to do so.

“I’ve spent much of the day thinking about you both,” he piqued in reply.

“Extenuating circumstance aside.”

Their eyes locked and he stared into hers too deeply and too long as seemed to be his nature. Mary found it slightly disconcerting that she could not find any emotion behind them.

“How was your day otherwise?” he asked.

“Alright,” she answered.

The Arnold disappearance had reduced the reported embezzlement in an East African branch of the organization that employed her to a bullet point on page 23 of *The Times* and no other organization seemed to be running it. Neither was the internet interested. Mary had been praised for her work though she had actively done nothing with the intent of burying bad press. She used her good credit to step out early after the incident with her son, as Aberdeen and Abe were being made to wait at the police station in a classic Smith power play.

“She won, in the end. Anna’s mother, I mean. I talked to Edmund before heading out; apparently your manic pixie dream girl has moved on.”

“Don’t talk about her that way.”

Mary thought she had been generous, delicate even. She frowned. Simcoe continued. He told her in a tone she assumed he usually reserved for business dealings that after Hewlett had been arrested, he had gone to police headquarters to offer character testimony. By the time he was finished relaying what was discussed and where it left them all in the eyes of the law, the sky had grown dim.

“And then, whilst waiting for you to show, I was sent this,” he said pulling up a picture of the tavern on his phone. “From *The Sun*. From tomorrow.”

Mary read the accompanying article. There was not much context beyond that DeJong’s was the last place the senator had been seen. Police were making inquiries; an arrest was made, the suspect realised. “What does your … friend,” she paused, waiting in vain for a response, “mean with ‘property?’” she questioned, scrolling through the text massages that followed.
“That he assumes I’ll be looked into at some point over the course of this investigation because of my interest in purchasing the bar,” he sighed.

Mary worried there was something he was purposely neglecting to disclose.

“No need for concern, Mrs. Woodhull. I might clarify - Hewlett, presumably, asked his family for money before coming to me. Then he rung a friend in publishing after being refused yet another loan, alerting certain segments of society as to the actual location of the crime scene. No one will much care outside of a small number of oligarchs who are more excited over a faux pas on my part. The population at large will likely continue to have their imaginations wound up by islamophobia and nationalist sentiment. As it goes.”

“You are buying the bar?”

“After you did such a good job cleaning it I saw it had … potential.”

The fear Mary experienced while walking with Simcoe on a long stretch of road by the forest returned with force. She ought to have told someone – someone other than Edmund Hewlett - where she was going. She turned away as Simcoe started the engine, his fingers tapping against the wheel. If the passenger door had not lock automatically, she would have tried to escape. Why, she screamed at herself, why had she insisted upon searching for the cell phone Simcoe had so carelessly tossed out of this very window? Forensics would find his fingerprints before hers. If the phone were found, or any trace of her found on it, she could have dreamt up an excuse. Mary rolled the window down as the vehicle left the car park.

Feeling his unblinking eyes crawl over her, she started, “I don’t normally smoke but -” halting when he passed her a nearly empty package of Gauloises with a Bic stuffed inside. Abe, she recalled, had not confronted her when he presumably smelled the ash on her that morning when he came home after sunrise with a weak explanation. Mary lit a fag for herself and one for the man beside her.

“You are tense,” Simcoe observed after a few minutes of driving in uncomfortable silence. “I don’t wish to frighten you, Mary. Your protection remains chief among my prerogatives. I ought not to have shown you the article. I’ve let it put me in a rather unpleasant mood, I regret.”

“No, it is good that I know.”

Silence settled. Mary pushed the CD into the player it jutted from and remembering that Simcoe had somehow come into possession of an early copy of Culper Ring’s yet-to-be-released record, she skipped to the one song on the album she liked, something Abe had written while watching Thomas play. She swallowed, promising herself that life would soon return to normal, wondering if Simcoe was doing the same, wondering what he would do with his life after their ‘affair’ ended and she lost his number and time and the misuse of controlled substances erased him from her mind. She scrolled through the photographs on the phone she was still holding, noting that without any context he seemed normal. He probably was, she reasoned, under otherwise normal circumstances.

“Do I frighten you?” he asked as he pulled into a roadside car park designated for hikers.

“I frighten myself when I am around you.”

“It is not nearly as bad as it looks,” he smiled, adjusting his hair and collar as to cover his contusions.

Mary paused on one of the thousands of photographs she had scrolled through, “Who are they
anyway? The Hewletts?”

Simcoe avoided the question. “Oh, that with the paper crowns? That is from last Christmas. Old English tradition of playing with mild explosives at the dinner table. You don’t have them in America, do you – Christmas Crackers?” Without waiting for her to respond, he continued, “This may seem an odd line of inquiry, but are you much acquainted with sport in the proper sense?”

“I fear you have me at a loss, John.”

“Quite.”

He walked to the back of the SUV, proceeding to hand her a flashlight to carry and one to wear on her head, as well as a light reflective vest. “Hunters,” he clarified.

“You’ve certainly come prepared.”

“It has to seem authentic,” he said. “I, to be completely honest Mary, I am a little surprised that you did not think to bring any supplies.”

“Oh, you have me all wrong.” She opened her bag to reveal a blanket, scented candles, lubricant, fuzzy handcuffs and the condoms he had purchased at the petrol station the night before. “Were meant to be on a wild romp. It has to seem authentic,” she echoed, laughing upon seeing his expression.

“So, the Hewletts,” he responded, admitting that he was suddenly keen to talk about anything that did not lead him to imagine Mary and Abe tying each other up in the act. That she had never played out these fantasies with her husband despite her yearnings, Mary kept to herself. She continued to giggle but halted as Simcoe’s voice grew higher and expression hardened, “The Hewletts are neo-cons posing as bleeding-heart-liberals. The richest and most powerful family in the north. A Shakespearean tragedy and a dynastic mess. Our Hewlett –Edmund, that is – he’ll still be able to get away with murder despite his fall from grace. Spoiled narcissist who wants to show us all up. I’m certain that is half the reason that he is so anxious to give himself up as a suspect, that, or.”

“Or what?” Mary asked, remembering that Simcoe had all but framed him; remembering that Hewlett had framed himself. She took a step back. Nothing about John Graves was normal.

Simcoe took pause. He blinked - the first time Mary had seen him to do. He was nowhere, she noted, when his gaze was not focused. For a fleeting moment, his air of indifference felt forced.

“I am aware of how I sound when I talk about him. Mary, I assure you, it is not what you think.”

“I don’t think anything,” she lied, thinking it was in her better interest to run away without inquiring further.

“He tried to kill himself. Recently. I’m the only one who cares at all and I don’t know what to do with that. I’m over a barrel. Everything he has done since seems designed to my torment. I don’t know what to do with that, either.”

Simcoe stretched after putting on a jacket and asking if she was warm enough.

Mary felt the fibres of her borrowed sweater itch against her skin.
The woods were quiet at night. Aside from the sound of the occasional car driving by, Mary heard nothing. She expected the hum of insects, the short battle cries of nocturnal predators, the wind to whisper between the still-bare branches, twisted to hide the pathway from the sky.

Nothing.

The night was still. The night was silent. Simcoe, whose high, dark voice had filled the void for the past half hour, had not spoken since Mary had snatched his phone.

His response to the series of images Anna Strong had sent had been remorseful chastisement. “You wrong me,” he had said. No, Mary thought, dear Anna, you wrong us all.

She had not let Anna get much of a word in when they briefly spoke. Her pictures said thousands, after all. They said, ‘I’m thirsty and you are irrelevant.’ They said, ‘This is what breasts should look like.’ They said, ‘Watch out Mary, your husband could be next.’ Finally, they said, ‘I’m either unaware or uninterested that my fiancé could well be lying dead in the flat over your garage. There will be others to replace him.’

Mary pitied the depths to which her former friend had sunk. She pitied John, Edmund, and all the other men Anna might meet at the bottom.

As was evident from the selfies, Edmund Hewlett had never made it out to Brooklyn. Mary wondered if rather than heed her advice of chocolate and flowers he had opted for a heavy helping of the pills whose recreational usage he cautioned her against mentioning to John.

Now she knew why she had been warned.

Mary suddenly wanted very much to go home, cook a proper meal and ask her housemate if he wanted to dine with her and watch Star Trek or Torchwood or Downton Abbey or whatever might appeal to his taste. She suddenly realised she had no idea. They were in the same hell, she reasoned, all of them. It might be beneficial to make some effort toward one another.

Mary sent a WhatsApp to Aberdeen, asking her to make sure Mr. Hewlett was alive and if she was not too busy with her course work, to hang out with him for a while. She would compensate her for any hours spent watching Japanese cartoons or British drama.

Aberdeen wrote back that Mr. Hewlett just left, they had been hanging out, and if she might get paid for listening him talk about mathematics? Mary sighed deeply. She would slip her au pair a twenty. They were all in the same hell.

She looked over at John and saw that he was completely lost to the task. So far, their search had yielded no results. Mary gave a vague apology. She felt guilty in ways she could not define and was frightened to reflect upon.

“I’ve had girls look at me like that before. It not desire. It is not anything. She isn’t anything but hurt and you’ve made it worse,” he sneered.

“She will be fine. Girls like that get up again.”

“She lost everything over the course of a day. Because of me. Because of us. And you? You wound me madam.”

“I’ve let my envy of Anna Strong ruin my life before.”
“And mine. Mary! Why would you do this?”

“Why? Really John? Don’t you think her phone might be bugged? She is engaged to the chief suspect in the missing persons case involving the man that you and I made disappear. Our alibi is that we were in a motel on the Connecticut side of the boarder in the thrusts of a torrid affair. Thanks to you, Hewlett knows that much. It is only a matter of time before my husband gets word of it. You have little to lose, but I may stand to lose everything. And you would throw it all away on a selfie? No. It is fake. Even you know it is fake. From what you told me, Anna has never reciprocated your affections. It has to look realistic – from our side, if not from hers. I have to protect us. You have made that much clear. Anyway, if she is content to hurt you, I am not content to let her. Think of it this way, I raised your stock price. Now that she knows that I’m interested,” she paused for a retraction, “or, rather, thinks I am, you’ll be the sole object of her affection. Until another man crosses her line of vision. That is how it always was and as long as I am stuck in this town – and in that house - how I imagine it will remain. But fuck it. Call her back if you feel you must.”

“I don’t.”

“Really?”

Simcoe scratched at his wounded ear. “Mary, what I told Hewlett about us, it wasn’t -”

“Forget it. I raised your stock price and you raised mine. As for my marriage, who knows. Maybe Abe will be envious if he cares enough to listen to mentions of my name. We might then last until I can drag him in for another round of counselling and another few months after that. Then he will cheat on me again. With Anna. Or Sally. Or Caleb, or someone whose name I have yet to learn-”

“Or you could leave,” he said as though it were simple.

“Where would I go? Judge Woodhull would never let me take Thomas.”

Simcoe frowned. “When you said last night you half-stayed in your marriage because of your son, I assumed you meant that you wanted to raise him in a two parent household, not that you were afraid of losing custody. I’ll look into finding you a decent lawyer, mate of mine is one of the best, it is not his branch I’m sure he knows someone who can litigate on your behalf.”

“I love my husband, Mr. Simcoe. The problem is - as it has always been- that he doesn’t love me.”

“Then why do you stay?”

“Someone must. It is enough. I thought about it. My love is enough. For me. For us. I support Abraham.”

“Financially, emotionally …”

“People who live in glass houses,” she replied, referring to a friendship. He did not deserve it. John Graves Simcoe for all of his flaws had been nothing but decent to her under the most damning set of circumstances. She should not meet his concern with condemnation. Mary Woodhull felt guilty in ways she could not define and was frightened to reflect upon.

“Yea,” Simcoe nodded in concurrence.
They resumed their search for the missing mobile in silence, walking further and further away from where his vehicle was parked. He wondered if he should have taken the GPS out of it, but they had stayed close enough to the road that they could still see the headlights of the occasional car driving by. He thought about how afraid Mary had been of him the night before, how she threatened him with pepper spray and photographs of her child. She was now clutching his arm, though he had evidently insulted her in some new way he had not intended. He looked down at her, dressed in Anna’s clothing, wearing a scent that was familiar that he could not immediately place. Casual, comfortable, so unlike the night before. She was comfortable in his presence. He wondered why he allowed this to surprise him. He questioned when the last time anyone had allowed themselves to feel at ease at his side, and if he was truly to blame.

“John,” she whispered, “John look over here.”

Mary pointed to a single footprint etched in the dry soil next to two handprints that at first glance seemed large enough to belong to the senator. It repeated a few paces later, headed towards the road. Simcoe asked Mary to pull up Google Maps and find out how close they were to DeJong’s Tavern.

“It is a five minute walk.”

The trail lead him to a tree where he found dried blood.

“I believe that Arnold has an injured, possibly broken leg. He dragged it behind him during his escape, which might serve to explain why we found no footprints by the back entrance last night, as most of his trail seems to have been swept away. There is blood on the tree.”

He looked back and saw Mary nodding in thought.

“Stay behind me,” he said as he cautiously followed the trail. “I don’t want you to have to see -”

“We didn’t kill him, John,” Mary whispered, squeezing the hand she now clutched. “We didn’t kill him.” He glanced down at her, she smiled the way she had that morning.

Simcoe did not share her elation until they followed the trail to the road. He shined his flashlight ahead. On the other side of the street, a tree had been torn in two. “Stay here,” he ordered.

“I’m coming -”

“Mary, allow me to at the very least protect you from whatever may lie across the way. This past day has been trying enough without – there are some things that can never been unseen. Stay here. I won’t go far.”

The halved tree bore scraps of rust and white paint. Blood and tyre marks covered the pavement just before the scene of the crash. Simcoe searched for more direct evidence of Arnold in the nearby forest and foliage, but none followed. Benedict Arnold was dead. He may have lead him to his death but it was evident that he had not done him in.

Abigail was wrong. Her words were lies, that is all they were.

He was not a murderer.

Neither was Mary.
Someone else could suffer that guilt.

After taking enough deep breaths the detach enough from the immediate that he was able to remember once reading about breathing exercises in a pamphlet in Andre’s office when he had been made to wait (and, to become annoyed once more at everything he could connect to that practice) he jogged back across the street.

When he returned to Mary, she was on the phone with the police.

“What are you doing?” he mouthed, questioning if he might try deep inhales again but opting for a cigarette instead.

“Cleaning up a mess,” Mary answered when she finished. “Listen to me carefully. You and I met up in secret, as we have been doing for months. Always in a different place, always under admittedly weak excuses. When we saw the footprints, you remembered the text you received about an upcoming article your friend’s newspaper and asked me to search to see if DeJong Tavern was in the area. We followed the trail to the road and rang the police when we saw where it ended. That way, if any of our DNA is found out here, it will look happenstance. Working with the police adds to our alibi.”

Euphoric at Mary’s pragmatism, Simcoe embraced her. They were still hugging when the police showed up to quarantine the area and take their statements.

After his work was all but finished, Officer William Bradford walked back to his squad car to check in with headquarters. He repeated the story he had been told, noting for the record that it matched what one of the witnesses relayed to him last night. When he asked if there had been a recent accident on that road, dispatch told him that that last reported accident was a hit and run from a decade earlier. From when Samuel Tallmadge’s body was found.

To Bradford this was surprising. Not because he immediately recognized the surname as belonging to the Detective Chief Inspector, not because alone the scale of the crash looked as though it warranted record, but because a sedan drove past the police barricade so swiftly while he was waiting for a response that he found it unthinkable that more accidents did not happen on this particular stretch. Bradford had spent much of his career as a traffic cop, and after this one incident would return to giving speeding tickets and pulling over ethnic minorities at traffic stops that he would continue to promise were random and routine.

In the months and years that followed, he would brag to his colleagues about having assisted in the Arnold Investigation. He would wear this moment as a badge of honour when the Pennsylvania senator was later appointed Secretary of Defence under the Trump administration. He would use this as a pick up line, as an attempt to get a round purchased for him in the local pub, which, by the end of the year would have changed possession three times in quick succession and changed its name to Strong Tavern. The bartender would explain with a playful roll of her eyes the name was chosen because everything else in the town was already called Hewlett. Bradford would never make anything of that. Instead, he would change the topic back to himself, Arnold, and to real red-blooded American sports when a crowd came in to watch something he deemed prissy and European (words he considered synonymous.)

He would never know how close he came to apprehending the actual culprits.
Instead of giving Mary Woodhull and John Graves Simcoe a second thought, he yelled out to ask if anyone had clocked the vehicle that just passed.

“My husband. No. My husband just drove by in my father-in-law’s car,” Mary Woodhull pressed her lips together and sulked. “What is he doing out here at this hour?”

“Maybe he is looking for you,” Simcoe replied with feigned detachment. “We should probably head back.”

Mary ignored his suggestion, electing instead to succumb to the very paranoia she otherwise recognized as detrimental to the state of her marriage. She checked her phone, declaring that throughout the entire course of the night Abraham had made no effort to inquire as to her whereabouts. “What is he doing out here if Anna is naked in Brooklyn?” she asked rhetorically.

Simcoe did his best to ignore the slight against the woman he had long claimed to neutral parties was his significant other. He tried instead to console the woman beside him - who until a few minutes before had simply been his accomplice - as she clearly required. He put his hand on her small shoulder and gave it a gentle pat, continuing to awkwardly do so until she looked up at him, frowning, and said, “Maybe it isn’t Anna I need to worry about. Maybe he already has another. In fact I am certain of it.”

Simcoe wondered how anyone could honestly come to this particular assessment of Abraham Woodhull’s allure. To his mind, the grounds on which Abe and Anna had dated during high school owed themselves exclusively to Setauket’s population size. By Mary’s own admission, they had only married because of their child. Were Woodhull forced back into bachelorhood in his thirties, Simcoe was certain the ferret would have as little luck in love as anyone else he knew. He said none of this aloud, instead opting to pull Mary into a loose embrace and tell her, “He is a fool for not calling. You are incredible, Mrs. Woodhull. You saved us. Thank you.”

“It was a group effort,” she weakly smiled back. “I’m sorry I’m just – it is too much. Not just Arnold, everything. Anna moving in with Edmund, then breaking up with him not twenty-four hours later. Abe not coming home last night. You know what his excuse was? He said that he went over to Sam Townsend’s place to play chess with Rob. Chess! In the middle of the night.”

“Take it this way – in that case, he likely had a less pleasant evening than you and I. I know Robert Townsend from this restaurant my mates insist on frequenting. I would place money on the idea that he devastated your husband, which isn’t even to mention -”

“I really doubt that is what he was doing. It is just such a dumb lie to tell.”

“Perhaps then it is the truth.”

Mary pulled back, staring at him inquisitively. “Glass houses, John. Are you at all prone to believing in the good of mankind?”

She had a point. Simcoe thought the worst of people who glanced at him the wrong way while passing by. His friends were all enemies and his trust was thin. He did not believe Mary, for example, when she said that the love she bore her husband was enough to sustain her.

“Absolutely not. That said, my offer still stands. As I mentioned earlier, a mate of mine is one of
the best lawyers in the city-"

Mary shook her head.

“I, John don’t take this the wrong way,” she interrupted, “can we maybe do something normal? You and me. Together, at some point? No talk of what might have happened last night, no talk of love and rejection. Just, normal?”

“Normal?”

“The bar is pretty low,” she forced a small grin. “Maybe if you have time we can keep meeting for coffee. My office isn’t far from yours. You are kind. I know you have had problems with my husband in the past, I know I’ve hardly been generous to Anna, and you’ve been sweet all the same.”

“We started and solved a murder mystery. I think it gets easier from there.”

“Friends?” she extended her hand. He was loath to release it.

“Certainly. We’ll do normal. Together. Why not? I’ll read Austen and you can explain how I am misinterpreting her.”

“You can explain sports to me and be as patronizing as you please.”

Normal, he smiled. John Graves Simcoe questioned when he had last fanaticised about normalcy. The engagement, the fight, the loss, the kiss, the illegal envelope and the millions it happened to contain, the interrogation, the news, the periodical, or a combination of all of these factors had unsettled him enough that simple desires seemed unobtainable. It was a wish he could not put into words for when he tried he was always met with the apathy and indifference of those whose base goals were far loftier. Few recognized it as a privilege in itself. That day, Simcoe had wondered if he would ever again find himself in a situation that would allow him hope of that which had so long been absent from his life he questioned if he had ever known it.

Normal, he realised as Mary spoke of sport, was as improbable as finding an American able to comprehend the league table.

Though she had no way of knowing it, Mary Woodhull absolved him of all of the criminal activity he had reluctantly perpetrated since the moment they met. Numbers and figures began to form codes and formulae in his imagination. Should his recent trades and purchases require and explanation, he now had one ready.

“John?”

“Americans … Americans truly don’t understand sport and you can’t explain it to them. Mary, you’re a genius.”

“How so?”

Both unable to explain how a fundamental disagreement with a suicidal astrophysicist over what constituted as maths and a shared interest in the beautiful game had led to tens of thousands of heavily abbreviated texts sent since the start of the fiscal quarter and unwilling to involve the lovely Mrs. Woodhull in another legal transgression, Simcoe declined to answer in words. Instead, he bent down and kissed her on her forehead. She grabbed him by his hair and brought him down to her lips. He took her by the waist and lifted her up to his level, pressing her against a thick trunk for balance as he felt her squirm against his pelvis. When her tongue unchained his, she spoke.
“I don’t want to have an affair, John.”

“Nor do I.”

Gone were the equations he was making as she kissed him again. Gone were his usually present moral protests. It is just release, he told himself. Were just friends. I’ve kissed my friends before. It holds no meaning. That is all this is.

Only afterwards - after they spent another forty minutes walking the quarter mile back to his car, after discussing prose and poetry and dreams that feel apart, after attempting to explain the offside rule and reminding himself what he had to do when he got home - did he realise that his eyes had been open and on her the entire time.

John Graves Simcoe had been kissing Mary Woodhull and not someone he forced himself to pretend was Anna Strong.

Chapter End Notes

No contextual notes this go around (though you won’t be so lucky next time, go brush up on your knowledge of … never mind. No spoilers.)

Except for one. Early on in this chapter Simcoe was texting “a sadist he boarded with” – remember that when next we meet.

As always, comments and kudos are appreciated, as is your readership! Wishing each and every one of you all the best. I know you guys in America have Thanksgiving soon, and I hope you all have a lot to be thankful for. (German and UK readers too, naturally. Wherever you happen to be reading from, I hope it is a happy place.)

XOXO - Tav

Up next: Mary and Simcoe enter onto Ben’s list of suspects, Abe’s view on his marriage, Simcoe and Hewlett have it out, Akinbode is all too ready to desert and travel north, anarchy in the UK
Chapter Summary

Ben expands his list of potential suspects; Simcoe schemes against Wall Street, fights with his feelings (and in a more literal sense, with his friends ...); Abe compartmentalizes; Hewlett’s admissions effectively end the possibility of a happiness that could have been; and Akinbode conspires to reduce collateral damage. Meanwhile in Britain, an M16 agent plots with a drug lord to ensure that when an influential MP dies on Easter Sunday, there will be a smooth transition of power and business will continue as usual. The missing American Senator threatens their plot, as does the birth of a prince.

Gee … Benedict Arnold really did pick a horrible time to disappear.

Chapter Notes

It is my BIRTHDAY and I have Trigger Warnings galore for you this go around, lovely faces: Do you remember how back in nearly every previous chapter reference has been made to an attempted suicide? This chapter addresses it pretty head on, so heads up. Remember when The Three Lions beat Les Blues in one of Simcoe’s flashbacks? Hewlett sure does, and that comes up as well.

The end of the chapter contains extremely disturbing content. It is mostly about inheritance laws but honestly, if you are at all squeamish you may way to skip that section in its entirety. (Just maybe read the last line of dialogue.)

And … on to the basics: minor character death, murder, suicide, politically charged conversation, bad coffee, adultery, addiction, suspicion, rejection, violence, bigotry, misogyny, sex and sexuality, drugs, maths, football, corporate crimes, etc.

Still with me? Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was no evening traffic, yet the drive to Long Island felt like an age all unto its own. Ben Tallmadge sat on the passenger side watching the lamp posts blur and they sped past whilst an officer who was also familiar with the backwoods drove.

He knew the street quite well. Every autumn, he parked his car on the emergency lane of the same stretch, cleaning debris from his brother’s memorial as cars drove by impervious to his anguish and seemingly ignorant to the posted speed limit.

His parents could not bring themselves to visit the site of their older son’s slaughter on or in the weeks surrounding the anniversary of the event. Ben doubted that his mother had been on the road since the accident. She had not been his mother since. In the months that followed her tearful identification of the victim, she stayed in bed, curtains drawn, wallowing in her loss. Eventually,
his father stopped sleeping beside her. They still had separate bedrooms. It still broke Ben’s heart. He avoided the street whenever he could; adding half an hour to his weekly commute to the church where his father preached and his mother played lead the children’s choir.

When he saw the white cross bearing his brother’s name illuminated in the squad car’s headlights, he wondered when he had last prayed. Certainly, it had not been at church.

“I left straight way, when I got the call, Sir,” Baker started, “there wasn’t – I mean – I don’t know if this has anything to do with Arnold. The wreck must have happened after he was reported missing.”

“That doesn’t mean it isn’t connected. I grew up in a town like Setauket. Not far from here, actually. There are no coincidences, only connections and people with reason to want to conceal them,” he answered, exhausted. Ben felt like he had been giving the same defence of the scope of his investigation since it had been assigned to him. The words ceased to carry their meaning as they transitioned from comment into chorus. “As, I suspect,” he continued, “is also the case with our driver. We will get forensics out for analysis. If any trace of Arnold is discovered—”

“Sir,” Braxton interrupted from the backseat where Ben had left his bag. “Mr Sackett is on the line. Apparently, the Woodhull – Simcoe affair pans out, and Hewlett confessed to embezzling millions from a charity run by his parents.”

Ben blinked. It was not the news he had awaited or would have ever come to expect. From the sounds of it, his team had just scored yet another enormous victory for the side of justice. Another victory, he bemoaned, that had little or nothing to do with the case that his commissioner, chief, city and the country as a whole had set as his sole prerogative twenty or so caffeine-fuelled hours prior. He closed his eyes for a moment, questioning if his efforts would not have been better employed elsewhere.

“Phone?” Ben requested.

“Sir?” Braxton replied, knocking against the grid metal separating them.

“Tell him I will ring him back as soon as we are done here. No – tell him that too, of course. Also - tell him to forward an audio file of everything Hewlett gave up to ADIC Hamilton and the feds. If nothing else, it might aid in helping the director in his quest convince the embassy to release Hewlett’s records.”

“That is what they were thinking, Sir,” Braxton relayed after repeating his request. “I was advised to tell you tell you that John Graves Simcoe – who has provided two sworn statements to the police, one just now and one down at the station earlier – was questioned last night when he was found on the same road which the possible trail leads to and on which a possible accident occurred.”

“That doesn’t sound like mere coincidence,” Baker mused, echoing Ben’s thoughts.

“Russo and Yilmaz put this in their report, Sir.”

He turned back to the driver, “Baker, you live in Setauket, if I am not mistaken?”

“I do, Sir.”

“What do you know of Mary Woodhull?”

“Only that she is the one who lead us to the trail.”
“And she was Simcoe’s alibi for why he was out here last night,” Braxton interjected, being fed information from the phone Ben could not reach. It was useless to put it on speaker. The signal was poor, the speaker on the other end barely legible. Braxton continued to relay Mr Sackett’s words after asking that he repeat them several times. “Married to Abraham Woodhull, the son of New York’s esteemed Chief Judge. Works public relations for UNICEF. Dowed with Anna Strong during her three semesters at NYU around seven or eight years ago.”

Ben nodded, “So Mary Woodhull, a charity worker with presumably no training in forensics - while out on a romp with an illicit lover - found dried blood in low lighting, or, put otherwise, found a possible lead that CSI missed working the area all day?”

“Are you saying we are to treat her as a suspect?”

Ben cleared his throat. “Let’s see if we can’t get the ADA to extend the search warrant to the entire property.”

He could already hear the District Attorney, her assistant and the Police Commissioner urging him to tread cautiously. Judge Richard Woodhull was too powerful of a man to risk unduly antagonizing. The team had no solid evidence against his daughter-in-law that he could name.

Still, he justified to himself – a high-profile politician was missing.

As they pulled up to the second crime scene he has been to that day, Ben was all but certain that said high-profile politician was dead. He swallowed, “Alright guys - listen. After we finish here, I want you to both go home and get some rest. Tomorrow - Baker, I want you to trail Mary Woodhull, find out everything you can about her. Braxton, visit Columbia - see if you can coordinate with Dandridge. I want to get her take on good ol’ John Graves given what we have learned.”

____________________

*It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.*

John Graves Simcoe read the first line of the book that had just finished downloading and decided it was the better of the two novels he had started that day. The classics were classics for a reason, and though as he skimmed he first page, he still believed that reason to be the date of publication, he was willing to give Jane Austen a chance. Simcoe was, after all, a single man in possession of quite a good fortune – and he was in want as it were. He wanted normalcy. He wanted escape. He wanted to talk to someone who could make sense of it all - which was to say - that in spite of that which he suspected of having recently transpired in a certain private practice; he wanted to tell John Andre about Mary Woodhull. No one else he knew had the sorts of experiences that might yield sound advice.

He need not tell everything, of course. Not everything warranted explanation or evaluation. The circumstances under which they met were now irrelevant. Ironically, his strange relationship with Mrs. Woodhull had been easier with a body between them, a physical barrier to their loneliness and a threat to their liberty. With their hands washed of the greater guilty, they were just two people, too desperate to retain a connection that had lost its form and function.

He did not know what he wanted from her.
He did not know what to make of the kiss that he could still taste after four cups of Yunnan tea which he drank since returning to his flat.

He could think of nothing but the force of her soft lips.

Numbers and words alike blurred as he looked at them. He would have blamed it on exhaustion if his mind were not otherwise so alive and alert with undefined hope that he was tempted to characterize as anxiety. Perhaps it had been Mary Woodhull all along who had made him nervous. Not Arnold. Not Hewlett. Not Tallmadge, Dandridge, or the sadistic garrison captain of popular fiction. Accusation, blame, derogation, and slander, all of which he felt were baseless (even when presented with evidence to the contrary) were common enough themes in Simcoe’s daily life that he failed to internalize them. But Mary? Mary was extraordinary. Mary looked death in the eyes and announced she had a plan. Mary kissed with such ferocity that his neck looked as though it had met a noose. The kisses she gave him when no one was looking, when no one would benefit, it was those that ultimately robbed him of breath. Hours later, he had yet to recover his loss.

He needed advice, but Andre had checked himself into rehab, and Andre had long ceased being a friend - a distinction, Simcoe noted, which he did not assign lightly and was quick to revoke. In this case, he thought bitterly as memory recalled the last time he had brought the doctor a conundrum, it had been all too necessary. There had to be someone else.

Simcoe put down his tablet, minimized the stock ticker on his mobile and scrolled through his personal contact list. He found it full of functional adults who would not understand his clandestine and thoroughly confused questions of desire; and of otherwise close confidants whom he either could not speak to on this matter or whom could not physically or emotionally comprehend his dilemma.

His thumb rested on the doctor’s number whilst his other fingers tapped against the case without his being aware. The two had never – nor would they ever- have the sort of easy understanding that he had come to share with Hewlett and Akinbode. Given their slow fall-out, he could not simply ring and say I’ve something that might entertain you and expect from Andre attention and advice after an appropriate round of mockery and judgement. Akinbode, alas, belonged to the category of normal, functioning adults; Hewlett had been medicated into a monastic life; and Simcoe, by stark comparison, had grown embarrassingly stiff reading the work of a long-dead spinster and thinking of the delightful woman who had recommended the novel while cleaning up the scene of a crime.

Mary Woodhull was passion and pain, she was the personification of lusts and fears he had never recognized himself as having. She was salvation.

She was also, as his luck would have it, married.

She was married, he thought, to a man of humble means who for all intent did not seem to be in want of a wife.

The world was mocking him.

His friends would not understand.

He barely did.

Simcoe set the phone down, deciding it was better not to try to call the only man he knew in knew on this side of the world capable of feigning empathy for his plight. He hated him too much at the moment, he reasoned, to hear what he might have to say.
The predicament in its entirety caused him disquiet. He tried to escape from his thoughts by returning to his digital copy of *Pride and Prejudice*; reading without connecting, growing annoyed and ultimately deciding he instead needed a physical copy that he could mark and fold and bend at will. He resolved to purchase it at the bookshop where he had arranged to meet Mary the next day on their lunch hours. The prospect of seeing her filled him with a feeling he was hesitant to define. Experience, however, told him that she did not –and would never - feel the same way.

Mary repeatedly said she wanted ‘normal’, Simcoe decided that what he wanted was a real drink.

He looked in his refrigerator only to find a number of items that needed to be tossed away in the interest of public health. He stared at the continents, hoping he would spot a bottle of ale if he failed to blink. His efforts proved gainless. Among the wine and hard cider he had taken from the tavern (as no self-respecting man should think to drink grape or apple juice when there was otherwise beer to be had); Simcoe found a slice of leftover pizza from Monday and a bottle of flavoured Coffee Mate he had purchased for some pumpkin-spice-based American holiday. It had expired in January.

It gave him an idea.

He opened the icebox and removed a bottle of Linie Aquavit, which, together with a bag of frozen peas comprised his emergency first aid kit. Pouring a goodly amount into a lightly used mug, he opened a cupboard to retrieve a coffee pad only to find that the box was aggravatingly empty. He stared at the Norwegian schnapps and decided that without anything to dilute it, if he let the shot long enough it would grow warm and he would have to taste it as he swallowed. By this, he could and would not abide. He drank, letting the alcohol numb his tongue and send shivers through him as it descended.

He could still taste Mary’s cherry flavoured lip balm.

He could still feel her in his fingers. Fingers, he noticed, which were tapping lightly against the ceramic cup. Maybe this was what drove men like Andre to finish bottles of forty-proof. Part of him wished he could. He looked at his watch. In less than four hours, he would have to explain a complex code to Hewlett who would undoubtedly question the basis of his equations and to Akinbode who would undoubtedly tune them both out, making small, snide comments to himself. Simcoe thus did not have the appropriate window in which to drink away Mary Woodhull, nor was he entirely certain that he wanted to.

Again, he found himself missing John Andre. Again, he found himself missing the idea that he and Mary had been together responsible for Benedict Arnold’s death. Without an aim, they were adrift. Mary wanted ‘normal’, whereas he wanted to protect her from the threat of the people she claimed to love.

He paced the length of his open flat after pouring water in the electric kettle for a fifth and final cup of tea. His walls were bare, the few photographs and personal trinkets he kept remained stuffed
into the books he was reading at the time they were taken or were given to him. He had been meaning to do something about them for years but he had never found the time. The pictures did not need to hide in the text. The notes Simcoe left in the margins let him know enough about who he was when he first encountered the work and who he was afterwards. He decided as he had before that he ought to have more of a visual display of the life he had lived. He would never find time to decorate.

When he first moved to New York, he had purchased a grand piano, which now sat in the centre of the enormous living space as the sole object of personal attachment. He had never touched it. In London, he had inherited the same model when his mother had passed and assumed that every personal dwelling in the world must have been in possession of one just like it. Before coming to the new world, Simcoe had known that particular penthouse only briefly, having spent the rest of his youth in the barracks with his father and in equally undecorated dorms while boarding and while at university. His knowledge of other homes was as quickly exhausted. He had once been to a palace where two of his friends tied the knot and another had been raised; there had been a piano in the ballroom. The girl he had once assumed he would marry owned one, or at the very least, her father did. He did not remember much of anything about the time he had spent living with his ailing godfather, but he assumed – reasonably – that he must have also processed a grand musical statement piece. He could have been mistaken. Most of his American friends who came round seemed so impressed by his that he doubted they had ever seen one outside of a concert hall.

None of them knew he did not know how to play.

He’d ought to learn, he considered, recalling the conversation he had had that afternoon with an FBI interrogator. It would spare him the trouble of buying a string instrument.

Simcoe looked down and noticed his fingers were still. He was angry that this surprised him. Perhaps the self-appointed experts were wrong and tea did not contain the same amount of caffeine as coffee. Perhaps it was the city he was in. Perhaps New York was starting to feel like a proper home, even if his flat did not yet look much like one. Perhaps it was Mary - who he briefly allowed himself to imagine would come by one day to kiss him the way she had in the woods, to be sexual and sensual for no one but him. Perhaps she would tell him where to hang the photographs of the friends he half expected he would never see again. Perhaps she would even decide to stay.

No, he thought. He was wasting time. He should add the now boiling water to the tea bag and get back to work.

Unfortunately, there was not much to be done. His computer was still forming an anagram based on the slight alterations in stock price, the actual results of the last eight game days of the top three tiers of British football and that what his idiot Kloppoptimist co-conspirator chose to interpret from Liverpool’s lacklustre showing over WhatsApp. Simcoe had written the program at university for another intended application and it had served him well in the past. It had always existed in a legal grey area, but he had never stopped to consider the possible pitfalls beyond vague questions of morality that he had thus far been able to shake off before arriving at an answer. It was hideous, yes, that his work was being used to help Hewlett (and others like him) profit from political upheaval. Far worse, however, was that Leicester City had won three of their past four matches, all of which they were expected to lose. Simcoe curled his lip and checked the stock ticker again. It would not make much of a difference if VW did not take too big of a hit in the European markets in the next quarter. There were no perfect analogies, he told himself. There was only the hope that his
assessment of America’s understanding of real sport was truly as accurate as he thought it to be.

Simcoe would explain (if it ever came to it), that after failing out of graduate school, his dear friend and teammate had come to him for financial advice. Simcoe did not have the time, nor Hewlett the funds, to warrant his taking the broken scientist on as a client directly — but general advice was free to give and Hewlett had some base understanding of how markets functioned. They had elected to write to each other in code, not in an attempt to cover nefarious trading, but rather so that Hewlett might shield himself from the shame that Simcoe figured must come with inheriting the world and blowing it on clothes and cars. He would say these exact words to the police and Hewlett would sneer, stutter, and render himself unable to offer a contradiction. They would believe them. The slight ebbs and flows of the NYSE in recent weeks correlated well enough with recent upsets in the EPL that someone with no knowledge of football could be reasonably convinced that the texts they had been sending were about the stock (and not the transfer) market. The fact that the Oyster was often wrong in his predictions and legitimately took issue with the sort of maths used to forecast results in both data samples was a great advantage.

The program stalled.

Simcoe typed.

He liquidated some of his assets and made a number of quick investments he otherwise would not have, taking a slight financial hit. The program liked this. Hewlett would be livid, which made Simcoe laugh until he thought about Abigail’s interpretation of him and forced himself to concede that there might in fact be a bit to it.

He took a sip of tea that had grown cold and decided he would rather like to return to the book recommended by the girl who had unwittingly given him the idea for the cover. Even if he could not make notes in the margins. He had to escape from thoughts of Abigail Ingram and the nightmares her words evoked if he meant to help that serpent in his stated quest to help Anna Strong. Otherwise, he would simply break has he had before and as Andre — he reasonably inferred — expected he would again. Then they would all pay the price.

When he looked at his tablet however, a notification told him that he would not enjoy an escape to an eighteenth century English countryside estate.

Someone had outbid him on the sale of DeJong’s Tavern.

Someone had put up ten times his offered amount.

He recognized the last four digits of the account number, buried his head in his hands and loudly implored a deity he did not believe in for mercy.

“Hewlett. Non, non. Je prends un café noir, s’il vous plaît. Ah! Merci. Merci boucoup. Ah … Sorry. Hello?” said the man on the other end of the line. It seemed he had not woken him. Part of Simcoe was disappointed by this fact. Even in French, Eugene Hewlett had an air of effortless contentment to his voice that Simcoe had always resented. He could think of no reason beyond family name as to why he had instantly taken a disliking to the lad back at school, but he had managed to retain the resentment he bore him for over a decade. The entire family spoke in riddles, infuriating on its own, but more so when he considered that he had never once been lied to by a
single member. Not exactly. They dealt in silences and half-truths. Conversation felt like sitting an exam in multiple choice. All of the answers were correct; his task was simply to pick the one that best answered the question. When it came to Eugene however, he was never entirely certain what had been asked.

“Right. Look mate, we’ve business to discuss,” he said flatly.

“John? John Simcoe, is that you? Are you back in London? I’ll be north of Edinburg this evening, can I ring you then?”

Simcoe questioned if his own voice was that distinct and if the youngest Hewlett would be able to continue fabricating mirth if they were face to face.

“I’m in New York.”

“I say, you’re phoning at a most un-Christian hour. What time is it there?”

“Little after midnight, listen-”

“Look mate, love to catch up - I really would - but I have a flight in twenty minutes.”

“This won’t take long. You recently made a bid on some property in Long Island that I’m urging you to withdraw.”

There was a pause. For a moment, Simcoe thought the call had been dropped. He was ready to hang up and try again when the chipper voice returned.

“Ah, yes well. I’m not sure what to tell you there, save for it truly is a horrible investment,” he drolled. “Were my brother not so keenly interested I doubt -”

“I’m buying the bar for your brother,” Simcoe interrupted. “And his future wife.” He need not add that Anna Strong would be spared from becoming his contact’s relation if he were only to withdraw. For a moment, he considered that Edmund was in some way behind this - using Simcoe’s affection for Anna to get him to commit corporate crimes from which he could only stand to benefit, while at the same time using his siblings to ensure that his now-partner ultimately lost the bid for the bartender’s heart, regardless of outside factors. It would not be completely out of character, he reasoned, but if Edmund could no longer count on the support of a mother who adored him, he likely did not stand a chance with a sibling who by his own admission saw his name as nothing more than a career path.

“Fine,” Hewlett consented, “but not for a hundred thousand. I looked into some other property in the area and overnight prices have sky rocketed. I am not entirely sure what to make of it, except to assume that the Americans are sick, all – and yes, I am including you in the assessment. Listen, I don’t know if you’ve seen the news yet-”

“Oh course I’ve seen the news. Gene, what do you possibly want with DeJong Tavern? I’m working with Edmund. We have -or rather had- it sorted up until roughly an hour ago when you put your muggy hands in it.”

“Does Edmund know this? Odd. Well, best of luck to both of you.”

“I can’t match your bid at the moment,” Simcoe admitted after a deep inhale.

“Find me something else then. I have one point two million I apparently need to legitimize. Immediately,” the cheerful nonchalance vanished from his tone. “I say, you’ve really caught me at
a bad time. Fabie is due any day now, and I’ve been called back to Scotland because of something I just learned happened when I was five or six. Its bullocks. I’ve had to move my meeting with the Danes up as a result, which means I am flying to Copenhagen in a quarter hour to hammer out the most insignificant details of a shipping arrangement. They are going to hate what I am now obliged to say as the twin made some kind of deal with the devil a few minutes back that involves renewing a contract in Liverpool I was set to terminate. Happy though I am to hear from you, now really isn’t a good time for us to have a heart to heart,” he paused.

“I’m sorry about Anna. If she is or ever was your Anna. I would have called, but I’ll admit that I didn’t put it together until Effie Gwillim put her on the cover of a tabloid which I didn’t see until I got to the airport. I can’t really speak for Edmund because I don’t really speak to Edmund. Never have. Now it seems I never will.” Simcoe could not tell if he was dismissive or regretful. After a pause too brief for him to analyse what could have possibly been meant by never will, Hewlett continued complaining. “But with regard to the Tavern – I don’t want it. Not in truth. I find that things will look all the more suspicious were I to buy it now, but ignoring that – the only family member I can truly claim to care for is my twin sister and,” his voice grew hoarse as he lowered it to a whisper, “you know how she earns a living.”

Simcoe had his assumptions.

“So you are hiding blood money in a bar where a murder took place?”

“That is exactly what I said, but then I have no voice. Find me something else by the time I land and DeJong Tavern is yours.”

Mine, Simcoe thought, imagining for a moment the future he had long idealized for himself.

“There is a flat above my own,” he said. “It has been on the market for months.”

“Russian mafia then?”

“I think so, but unlike DeJong’s, no one died inside.”

“Problem is mate; neither I nor Elinor can legally enter the United States. What need would we have for a flat there? What about yours in Chelsea, decide to put it on the market yet?”

He had not. He felt suddenly gross at having been asked.

“Someone died there.”

“Yea, but long time ago, ‘innit?” Hewlett responded laughingly in Simcoe’s own phrase.

With that, Simcoe remembered why he hated Eugene more than he hated the other siblings. For all of his faults, Edmund by comparison took no great pleasure in making cruel comments. Edna and Elinor likely did, but were fair and judicious in their words. Simcoe took a deep breath and decided to follow the better example. This was business.

“Say it is a wedding gift.”

“Ah! For Edmund and Anna - what so you can hear them fuck? Christ John. That is right ill.”

“I doubt … fucking will be much of an issue.”

“Tell me, who are you more interested in?” he laughed again. Simcoe could hear in his cachinnations everyone in the upper echelons of society laughing about how he lost the love of his
life to an awkward virgin whom half his football team and his entire graduating class suspected of having inclinations towards. Suddenly he found himself again imagining Mary Woodhull, fearing the kiss she had given him would be as quickly dismissed as the one he had once given Edmund under a similar sense of elation. Fearing equally that it would not. It did not matter. If he could arrange a sale, which he was certain he could, the bar would be his and Anna along with it. It did not matter. It should not matter. But it did. He tasted Mary’s cherry flavoured lip balm and felt her weight in his arms.

“No,” Hewlett said finally after deciding that he was not going to receive an answer. “Don’t. Come back to London with your lover and surprise me there. I’ll go up to three mil on the flat and if you can get me real estate in Manhattan for that price I’ll hire you to manage my son’s trust fund. You have till I land.”

Simcoe blinked. The contract alone would ensure his promotion. He started to look for the number his former neighbour had left and continued making small talk.

“When is he due?”

“The fourteenth.” Arse though he was, the glee sounded genuine. Simcoe did his level best to match it.

“Congratulations. Have you picked a name yet?”

“Of course. Since prior to conception at that.”

“Please tell me it does not begin with an ‘E’.”

There was a reason behind this beyond aesthetic, as Edmund had once admitted. The Hewletts all had matching signatures to match their incestuous corporate dealings. It had been that way for centuries. It would likely continue for as long as the line lasted.

“You know it does,” Eugene confirmed. “Listen, I literally have to jet.”

“When you land and I’ve won,” Simcoe smiled, “tell me how you managed to get yourself banned from entering the United States.”

“That is a story that would have to be told in person. Come back or better - join me in bonne Paris. You know we could match your salary.”

“Right. We’ll be in touch,” he answered, thinking he would sooner die than give the suggestion of an offer any serious thought.

“Ah, wait,” he heard as he was about to hang up. “This is, I confess rather awkward – but can you perhaps keep an eye out for my brother? I don’t know exactly what he has gotten himself into and I never hope to learn – Ah, John, much as I loathe the fact that the two of you are closer than Edmund and I have ever been, please take a bit care, would you?” It sounded sincere, which meant little.

“It seems that has been my initiative since -” Simcoe started. He stopped. It was not his story to tell. He resented the youngest Hewlett for reminding him of an incident that he likely had no idea transpired.

“Right. There we are then. Jolly Good. Let me know about the flat. I’ll be on the ground at 8:50, which I know is something else in imperial units. I think you are meant to divide by two and then add thirty-two or -”
“2:50, Eastern Standard.” He would send a text with the number as soon as the call ended.

“Right. You’ve always been brilliant at maths. Sort it out the property for me by then and I’ll give you the bar and the account.”

“Cheers,” Simcoe replied. The line was dead.

Abe Woodhull woke up from a disjointed sleep. When he came home from running supplies to Robert Rogers (half of which he agreed were necessary to protect the senator and return him to health, the other half of which he felt simply constituted Rogers’s weekly grocery list) his wife was nowhere to be found. Aberdeen reported that she had gone to her book club when Abe inquired as to her whereabouts. He could have sworn Book Club fell on Thursdays, as the kitchen calendar confirmed.

He had spent much of the rest of the evening waiting up for her, trying not to worry about the threat Rogers made. Things like this did not happen in the America he grew up in. Statesmen with opinions that contradicted the objectives of the executive should not have to fear deadly repercussions for representing the views of their constituents. They should not have to take to ground, hiding from the police who were working in conjunction with national and foreign agents to assassinate internal opposition and perhaps then further justify a losing war. This was not supposed to happen in the land of the free. Americans were horrified and enraged when they learned that elected dictators – the Putins and Erdoğan's of the world – sanctioned murder to suppress dissidence. This was not what the founding fathers fought for. This was not the country he loved.

Abe had accidentally found himself in a position where he could make a difference if he could keep a secret.

He justly feared every word he spoke might raise suspicion, and though he would have preferred to go directly to his room when he returned home that evening, in the interest of protecting his family there was a matter that warranted discussion. He was cautious. If he misspoke, he risked putting the entire household in danger. Luckily, his father’s tenant had gone out for the evening, something that Abe considered – especially given the day’s events – was rather odd for the recluse. His suspicion grew.

Abe was careful when speaking to his father about the fact that he did not want Mr. Hewlett around Thomas, a sentiment he was surprised to learn his father shared (albeit for reasons that had nothing to do with a botched assassination attempt.) Richard Woodhull could be pleasant when they were in agreement, and Abe had spent half the night laughing and drinking in the company of his father until the realization hit him that he was not enjoying himself in the slightest. He had again fallen into (as he often did) the role was being pressed upon him – that of his older brother, a man whom Abe had spent most of his adult life trying, and failing, to emulate. When he felt that his father was no longer talking to him per se, he excused himself. He had to leave before Father was inebriated enough to say or imply ‘it should have been you’ and he was sobered enough by these words to agree with them.

He lay awake in bed, afraid to sleep and see his brother’s face, afraid to ring Mary as to her whereabouts, something he had never done in the past – something she had never given him reason to do. He feared that in telling her he was worried he would awaken her suspicion.
He had to keep this secret.

He had to keep his family safe.

Abe was not sure how long he had lied in wake, when he had fallen asleep, or when Mary returned. She was back, however, her back turned away from him, when he woke from the third dream he had had that night of his brother’s bloodied, broken body.

“Hey,” he said, “I missed you.”

“Who is she?” Mary responded in a whisper.

Abe saw his phone in her hand and snatched it back. His wife repeated her question. Abe again failed to answer. She was Benedict Arnold, injured and on the run from the government. She was the police, openly working in congruence with foreign enemies of the union. She was Robert Rogers, whose vague threats would be actualized should he speak. She was the fact that he had yet to figure out how to sort the situation without endangering his family.

Mary thought the worst of him. She always did.

For now, he thought, perhaps it was for the best.

“I love you,” she said

She didn’t, Abe thought.

She loved the idea of what his father wanted him to be and could not see beyond that. He, in contrast, saw her far too plainly. There were things he loved about her, things that sufficed a marriage. They were happier, he thought, than most people. He was happy because she allowed him to pursue that which she had lost the strength to fight. She was happy because of the status the union gave her. But she was not happy with him. She did not love him and he did not love her. He wanted to tell her all of this but it was the middle of the night and his mind, was (as always when faced with their potential martial problems) somewhere else entirely.

“I don’t feel the same way,” he answered.

“That makes no difference.”

He nodded, wondering what he had done. He found nothing suspect in his phone. He hated that he had to instantly delete anything she might grow jealous over, which was to say - everything. He hated that he had to live with her envy, hated that whatever failed to exist between them caused her to imagine he had vivid designs on creating pain.

He kissed her lightly.

She pulled away.

Mary was a liar, Abe thought. ‘That makes no difference.’ No. It made all the difference in the world to her. Abe was a liar, too. Mary’s fears were justifiable, if not off base. She cried as he kissed her again, promising things will be different as soon as they moved into their new house. She repeated that she loved him. Abe wondered what - if anything - she had found in his phone that made her so amendable. As she fell asleep in his arms, he wondered where she had been all evening, if she had followed him.

Rogers had to finish the house. Things would be different then. He would believe her when she
said *I love you* and he would convince her and perhaps even himself that he loved her too.

And maybe he would. Maybe it would be enough.

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Edmund Hewlett let himself into the flat with the spare key he now felt guilty for possessing. From the entrance, the entire space presented itself as by design. Simcoe was nowhere to be found yet Hewlett saw him everywhere – in the piano that he never played; in the sleek, modern furniture with dark colours and harsh angles; in the stacks of old books with spines so worn their titles were illegible. Open, yet unwelcoming all the same.

He had rather liked the apartment once; unlike Whitehall, it failed to remind him of the life he had one expected to lead across the ocean wide. It was like the New York of postcards, of the daydreams in which he still engaged despite the filth and fury - despite the chill of the streets and the people who walked them. It was foreign, yet had once almost lived in this space without walls. He had almost felt alive in the city to which it spoke. In the city where he had decided he would die. The flat reminded him of that. Hewlett had once clandestinely hoped for an excuse to stay in New York. He recognized now that he had always had plenty.

No, he concluded as he walked over to the kitchen area with the block of filter coffee he had purchased at Simcoe’s request. New York was not his home. It never would be. The only thing that was now more unthinkable than staying in these colonies was bidding them farewell. Perhaps he had it backwards. It was irrelevant. What was done was done. He had simply lacked the conviction to see his actions through and was now forced to suffer their consequences. As they all were.

From the massive sheets of mirrored glass that stretched from the recycled wood of the floor boards to the flat’s raised ceiling, he could see Simcoe’s long silhouette and the shadow it cast over the streets that seemed to captivate him. He called out to announce his presence but his would-be host did not return his greeting or turn to acknowledge it. Hewlett was far too exhausted to allow this to register enough to annoy him. He filled the electric water cooker and put a teaspoon of coffee grounds into each of the two teacups he pulled from the cupboard. In the largely vacant refrigerator, he found the Coffee Mate that had been purchased during one of his prolonged stints on his mate’s sofa and vowing death or glory poured it into his cup without looking at the expiration date.

“You have to wait for the grounds to settle,” he said in greeting, joining Simcoe on the balcony.

“What is this?” Simcoe sneered at the cup he had been handed.

“The ATM declined to return my card after it declined to give me cash, there was but so much I could accomplish with the change I had left in my pocket.”

“Fine sentiment, but I ask in earnest, what is this?”

“Coffee grounds, hot water, the sugar you’ll need to swallow. The 7-11 did not have the pads you normally use and I quite nearly died in my effort to obtain it. Thank you, Oyster - or however you wish to phrase it,” he paused. “We ought to discuss that, mind. I’ll need to be able to access what little funds I have left.”

Simcoe ignored him.
“Went that badly at the convenience store, did it? Robbery?"

“Drug bust.”

“Car park?”

“Attendant. Nice town, this. Now, regarding my available balance -”

“Remind me before I go to work, I’ll have them send you a new checking card - you should receive it in two to three business days. I’ll spot you until then. You’ll need to learn how to live on a reduced budget for the next few weeks,” he smiled, clearly getting a rush out of the pain he had inflicted. “I’ve reduced your withdrawal limit to $100 per day.”

“I have a speeding ticket I need to sort.”

“You might strive to live within your humble means,” Simcoe said with a perfected nonchalance. Hewlett wondered if he had this practiced out, as he himself might were the tables turned.

“Ah, you underestimate me now but wait until you taste the coffee.”

“Is it instant?”

“Close enough. It is a secret of higher education. I’ll remind you that I’ve been in college far longer than you opted to remain.”

“Yet I am the one with the degree.”

“I have multiple.”

“Have they gotten you far?” Simcoe’s voice piqued. Hewlett sighed.

“Taunt if you feel you must.”

He watched in anticipation as his sometimes-friend brought the cup to his lips far too soon, eyes widening as his throat contracted. Hewlett fought back a laugh. He had warned him about waiting for the grounds. Leave it to Simcoe to make an ill-advised charge.

“Oh bloody hell!” Simcoe shouted in regret. “You drink this? You truly don’t care if you live or die, do you?”

“There are a lot of anti-oxidants.”

“Don’t compare this to tea.”

“No. This stuff will actually wake you up.”

“Well, at seems we are in concurrence there.”

“ ‘Least we still have that.”

“Yea,” Simcoe said before finishing the remainder of the makeshift coffee in a single gulp, grounds and all.

“Smoke?” Hewlett offered.

“I’m out.”
“Here.”

“I thought you were trying to quit.”

“I am. I bought these for you,” he replied, pulling a box of Gauloises from his coat pocket.

“Seeing that the lecture in curbing one’s spending habits is, in fact, in order –” Simcoe began to scold in the mocking tone no one had ever thought to explain made him sound impossibly more effeminate. Hewlett clenched his jaw, determined not to laugh at what he assumed was a disability. He could be nice when he wanted something. Almost.

“Thank you for anticipating my needs,” he returned in the same girlish pitch, “might also be in order here.”

Simcoe glared at him but smiled when he saw the box.

“You bought my brand.”

“I brought a peace pipe.”

“So you did,” Simcoe agreed as he opened the package, offering it to him after he first lit one for himself. Hewlett raised his hands in protest until Simcoe asked about the lovely Ms. Strong.

“I don’t believe there is really that much to discuss,” he replied as he shook the lighter he had been given. The Bic was either partially empty or it was protesting the cold. It had not been a struggle for Simcoe. Hewlett clicked it five times before it produced a flame.

“Oh, Edmund - you underestimate my appreciation for schadenfreude.”

“I would rather not think about it. What is this ‘work’ of which you spoke via text?”

“No. Later. I’ve had the night from hell and I need a break. Your brother says hello, by the way. Will you tell us a tale then?”

“Ah, yes. Fine.” He spoke of how he had shown up with carnations and a heart shaped box of Mont Cherie with the words ‘Happy Valentine’s Day’ printed upon it; of how Anna initially refused to see him but her mother - now suddenly very interested in getting to know him after his arrest - interrogated him whilst Ben Tallmadge or his staffers listened remotely. “We talked for an hour that felt like ten.”

“What exactly did you say?”

“I confessed to every crime I’d ever committed or thought to commit.”

He did not elaborate. Simcoe knew. Their contemporary relationship was half-defined by an unspoken agreement to never acknowledge or discuss their youth. Hewlett remembered something Simcoe once said in response to a question a teammate put to them about why they never spoke about the mother country. *If anything good had ever happened there, we would not have found ourselves here.* His eyes had not left Hewlett’s as he answered with these words. They would not meet him now.

“What possessed you?” he whispered after a few minutes passed in uncomfortable silence while they finished their fags.

“You.” Hewlett responded simply. He eyed Simcoe with caution as he attempted to expand,
"You’ll recall, I’m sure, this very afternoon, when you told me that if our actions were discovered now, or decades later—"

"You paranoid little shite!" Simcoe exclaimed. Hewlett realised that he ought to have anticipated this inevitability. "I said nothing, nothing to that effect. We mostly talked about association football. You think I would be so foolish as to incriminate myself? I’m standing before promotion—"

"It was needs must. They have a subpoena. Well, later I found that they are in the process of securing one."

"You all but assured that eventuality, didn’t you?" Simcoe spat.

"I might clarify. I mentioned nothing of you or of our current understanding. Simply that I have had prior experience in such dealings. It’s not mere vanity, John. If we are discovered they will come after me and me alone. You’ve suffered enough for my sins. The police all already operating under the assumption that I’m enacting some degree of coercive control over you. I - there are times when I tend to concur with this assessment."

"Bullocks."

"Think what you will. You’ll not face imprisonment for my crimes. I’ve run from them for so long I’ve forgotten where I am going. You’ll find your way. You always do. Somehow."

Lighting another cigarette, Simcoe asked, “What happened to you?” It was almost pained.

"I grew up," Hewlett answered. "You didn’t. I don’t know which is more tragic, or if either would be tragic if we’d never met as adults."

At this, Simcoe grew silent and again refused to look at him. After a while, Hewlett went back inside.

"Want a cup?" Hewlett inquired twenty minutes later. Simcoe came inside, trying to hide the fact that he was shaking off the cold. His face and hands were as red as his hair from the chill of the night air. Without waiting for a reply, Hewlett added a scoop of grounds and sugar to a second mug.

"I could turn you in," Simcoe remarked.

"Ah, but you won’t. Not yet. By the time Akinbode gets here with the paperwork meant to make this all look legal, you’ll have had time to calm down." Only Simcoe could find fury in care and kindness. Hewlett wondered how much of the perception he may have just shattered was of his own making, and how much of it owed itself to the imaginings of a scared little boy who now towered over him.

Simcoe approached, standing close enough to him that Hewlett could feel his breath, rich with the scent of processed tobacco.

"You could call the police now," he continued. “Explain that you took $40,000 from my personal checking account without my signature expressing permission. Or wait. Call after we sign if you
still feel you must. It doesn’t matter much to me. You are a man of your word and I know that Anna will be cared for regardless.”

Simcoe grabbed him by the shoulder and shoved him into the wall. The crash caused the kitchen appliances to tremble, surprised and frightened as Hewlett himself was as Simcoe lifted him by the neck with a single hand. His feet kicked as they tried to find the floor. He could not breathe. It seemed he would die in New York after all.

The world stopped.

Simcoe wore no expression.

Hewlett resigned himself to his fate.

He stopped kicking. He tried to speak, attempting to forgive his friend and beg the Lord’s forgiveness for his own sins all at one, but the words he had to offer could not make it through the blockade. He felt the warmth of the tears his eyes involuntarily shed as they steamed down his cheeks.

Simcoe dropped him, shielding the eyes he could not close in his hands as he turned away, demanding to know Hewlett’s intentions.

Hewlett fell.

He could not speak as he coughed and gasped in a struggle for air.

The kitchen unit danced once more as he hit the ground. Everything hurt. He was half resolved to stay on the floor where he lied, but curiosity had the better of him and he sat up, if only to see if he still could.

“My intentions? With Anna?” he asked – still coughing - when Simcoe demanded them again. “I assure you they are pure. I – I love her.” It was difficult to say to Anna. It was impossible to say to John. As he had always expected him to should it ever come up, Simcoe returned Hewlett’s sentiment with a look of betrayal. He had been dreading this. He continued, “I want to see that she is provided for and I’ve seen from the beginning that I may not be the best equipped to provide her with the life she wants. Her window of opportunity was small; mine was smaller. I made due.”

“You love her?” Simcoe shook his head. “You don’t even love yourself. You want to know what I was doing outside for so long: looking at your car.”

“My … car?”

“When did you decide to sell it?”

“When I realised that I would have to fund another year abroad.”

“You never planned to go back. I had a look through the last few months of transactions whilst diversifying your portfolio. You never set up to have the car shipped back to whatever hell from which you came, or cancelled such a transaction. You planned … you fucking planned it. You lying little shite.”

“I never granted you any such permission-”

Hewlett rose, wishing that it was not in his true nature to be honest. He thought often about how painful it was for one to come to terms with having worshiped false idols. Unlike his father, he did not even want to be the man that he publically played it. He questioned if that was worse still.

Of course it was.

His actions (and Simcoe’s reactions to them) proved it. He spoke. “I have no answers that will satisfy you. It happened. I’ve tried to fit it into a narrative that I could tell myself to rid me of the pain of responsibility, but the truth is I – I don’t know. I’m not sorry, I wish I was for your sake, but I’m alive. Can’t that be enough?” It had to be. He had nothing more to offer.

“No,” he responded stubbornly.

“Simcoe, let’s -”

“No. It is not enough. Not when you claim to be in love … with her. She chose you mate. You! You figure the least you could do would be to attempt to feign an interest in actually getting out of this bloody business intact, for her sake – but you could give a shit, yea? Tell me is it enough to parade your empty conquest-”

“Do you think I take any great pleasure in flaunting my relationship with Anna in front of you? Shit. I’m mad for her. She is brilliant, resilient, hardworking, and determined in the face of adversary. She is the kindest most giving soul I’ve ever encountered. She is not afraid of her dreams. Do you honestly believe me blind to what an absolute treasure she is? I love her. She is not some empty conquest, how did you come -? Ah! She is not a conquest at all. It is rather uncomfortable, isn’t it? I know how you feel about her and how the entire situation must make you feel which is precisely why I have done everything to play down my affections. For your sake. Tell me, do you really want to know about every smile we’ve shared, the rush I feel when he hand grazes mine? I love her. I would lay down my life at her feet if she asked it of me.”

“But would you live?” For the first time, Simcoe truly frightened him.

Hewlett had never truly considered it. It occurred to him that the answer to that particular question – an answer he was not entirely certain he could supply – was the only factor for Simcoe. He imagined him pondering the possibilities for months in the sort of blind obsession that governed him when he found no other outlet. Perhaps it was an expression of guilt he was not ready to recognize; perhaps he was envious that he had no answer when Simcoe had clearly arrived at one; perhaps it was the fact that what was inquired of him was simply no one’s concern but his own, but Hewlett was suddenly furious.

“That is really what this is all about, isn’t it?” he spat back, narrowing his gaze.

“You are a coward, Hewlett.”

There it was.

“Perhaps you have me there,” he sneered.

“Stop. Fight for her, even if it necessitates fighting for yourself. I can deal with the fact that she chose you,” Simcoe said, “or rather, I could – I really, really, would like to imagine I could if you would only --”

There was nothing to fight for, the battle may have been won but the war had been lost from the beginning. Edmund Hewlett always seemed to be on the losing side of a crusade. Maybe it did not matter. Maybe Simcoe was right and it very much did. Either way, Anna would have her bar in the
“What?” Hewlett interrupted. “Honestly what? How do you expect me to fight when I haven’t a sword to wield? It is over. Anna and I. As it was always bound to be. We – I, we tried to - and I, I couldn’t, and she … ah, how should I put it? She had to amuse herself with thoughts of you,” he stressed the personal pronoun as if it were an accusation. “Yea, John. You are right, if you want to be. Part of me still prays for death.”

Simcoe stopped and stared at him hard before erupting with laughter.

Jaw clenched, Hewlett responded by inhaling deeply through his nostrils, reminded of Anna’s gut reaction when he had tried and evidently failed to explain his medical condition to her the night before. Maybe they deserved each other more than he deserved either of them.

“Oh, oh Christ. Hew. Okay,” Simcoe said when his stinging laughter subsided. “I never thought I would say this aloud, but I really wish John Andre were here. Of all the people on the planet, why should this fall to me? Listen,” he swallowed, “When you have sex, it is not like in the films. It is not a constant expression of love and attachment. Sometimes it is just like masturbation – that doesn’t actually mean anything to you.” Hewlett nodded, annoyed. “Right. Anna could have just as well have been thinking about a film star or friend or public figure, or even you, Oyster,” Simcoe continued. “No one is immune to fantasy, and if you at least kept her thinking about the act itself, you likely weren’t underperforming as much as you might think. Sometimes I am at it, wondering I remembered to put out the wheelie bins or not, hoping that whomever I’m fucking will hurry up and fake it so I can put my pants on and leave.”

Once more Hewlett found himself struggling to form a response. “Thank you?”

“It is weird for me, too. Don’t think too much on it. I deleted the photos after I forwarded them to you, by the way.”

“Ah, um. That is rather kind, I suppose.”

“I hope when you say you have the best intentions that you mean to stay – at her side I mean. She loves you. Somehow, she really does love you. It is only … she deserves to be loved in return. More than anyone.”

She did.

Anna Strong deserved all the love he had to offer.

The sentiment – especially given its source – meant the world to him. Still, Hewlett could not help but to question his rival’s motives. That simply could not be the point at which he hoped to arrive.

“Why are you – I mean, I -”

“Do you remember that time we kissed?” Simcoe asked.

“When you and I -?”

“I never kissed Anna,” he shrugged.

“Wait.” Hewlett replied. It was worse than he had allowed himself to assume. He had been dreading this talk nearly as much as he had been dreading being confronted with the realities of his suicide and those of an unjust punishment he had dealt nearly two decades before. He stared at the
man who, ironically or not, had referred to him as his best friend that afternoon, wondering how much he had hurt him – with and without intention. Hewlett bit his lower lip, took out his mobile and opened a Word document he had downloaded from his cloud.

“What?”

“I knew this might come up someday and I wrote a thing.”

“A … Thing?” Simcoe clarified, taking a step back. The distance between them was still uncomfortably close, Hewlett noted.

“A response, if you will. I–ah– I’m not always the best at choosing my words and this is rather delicate so I, ah yes, here: John. As a friend you mean the world to me and perhaps in an alternate universe we could have–”

“Oh, fuck!” Simcoe exclaimed, catching Hewlett off guard once more. “No! No. That is not what I am getting at– at all– but you might have answered my question in the worst possible way,” sounding sick, he took another step back.

“I spent a rather long time composing this,” Hewlett defended.

“I am sure you did, that is the problem.”

“I never meant to hurt you, John,” he continued reading, placing his hand atop Simcoe’s clenched fist in condolence.

“Remove your hand from mine before I’m obliged to break it.”

He did as instructed, continuing to read aloud.

“Christ, you are serious about this,” Simcoe muttered in disgust. Hewlett ignored him.

“If I had been in a better place, perhaps we could have found happiness in one another.”

“Well, then. It seems I’ve a tad less reason to hate Andre. How long is this going to take?”

He thought about it for a moment. “It was five pages on my desktop.”

“Fuck. Grab us a beer then,” Simcoe said as he pulled two bar stools from under the counter top. “I’m going to find a way to enjoy this.”

Hewlett set his phone down, opened the refrigerator and looked around for the beer Simcoe implied he had.

“You bought Magner’s … for me?” he asked, half grinning as he turned to face the man who was now sitting on a stool at the breakfast bar, choking on snorts as he tried to contain his laughter while silently reading from Hewlett’s device. He glanced up.

The question seemed to confuse him.

Simcoe stated, blinked (for what Hewlett concluded might have been the very first time in their history) and nodded very slowly in acknowledgement, as if the simple act of generosity over which Hewlett was inquiring caused him deep confusion. “I bought … apple juice? For you.”

“See? We could have been happy, John,” he teased.
“Sod off.”

“Do you want one? You don’t have any beer. Apropos,” he scolded, “why would you elect to chill red wine?”

Simcoe ignored him, as he often did when it came to matters of taste. “You know what - Fuck it. I’ve a bottle of schnapps in the icebox. Bring that. I’ll call out tomorrow. Work from home. I deserve it. Wakefield can write me a sick note if Human Resources asks to see one.”

“Wakefield is a paediatrician,” Hewlett replied, wondering if he had ever tried this route before.

“I can fake a limp.”

“What?”

“Pretend there is something wrong with my foot.”

“That is a podiatrist,” he shook his head in aggravation, reflecting briefly on the accuracy Simcoe’s statement gave to his speech to Ms. Smith about the importance of studying dead languages, “A paediatrician is a doctor for children.”

“You did accuse me of never having grown up not half an hour ago.”

“So I did,” Hewlett noted as he poured a cider for himself and a shot for Simcoe. “So I did.”

“Bring the flask. I’ve decided to turn this into a drinking game. For every vague reference you make to something archaic, I’m taking a shot.”

“You would die of alcohol poising.” It was not an exaggeration.

“Good. So are we done?” Simcoe asked, swallowing the shot before taking the bottle by the neck. Hewlett felt at his own bruised throat, questioning if drinking with someone with such a loose grip on control was truly in his interest. Still, it seemed there were done. Everything that needed to be said had been and their fight was finished on all of its fronts. He found himself smiling.

“Ah, I suppose, unless - Shit. Slow down.”

“You did not want any, did you?”

“What is this about then?” he asked, waving his hand around the schnapps.

Simcoe put the bottle down.

“I kissed Mary Woodhull.”

“I know?”

“What?”

“No a,” he started, grabbing at his injured ear. “It was not a fake just-for-show sort of thing. It just happened, without an agenda. I thought – or tried to think of it as - sometimes things do happen. People – friends- get excited and affectionate and ultimately it means nothing. I can’t stop thinking about her. I don’t know what to do. Especially now knowing that if you had been in a better place, we could have found happiness in one another.”

They both fought – and failed - to suppress a laugh. Hewlett was once more forced to admit his weakness when it came to words.
“I was being hyperbolic,” he said aridly.

“I’d rather hope,” Simcoe replied in the same tone.

Hewlett reflected for a moment, searching his soul for something to normalize the night they had shared in the fall and the one Simcoe seemed to be having now. In his defence, he had been drunk at the time. Mary Woodhull was at least a little knocked out on Xanax, something Simcoe did not need to know. He said the only thing that fell to him. “That Alli goal against France was something else though, wasn’t it?”

“Can’t argue that,” Simcoe agreed, seeming relieved. Hewlett blinked, surprised to have said the right thing for once.

“Was there a match tonight – Champion’s League or something?”

“No, we were … hiking. And anyway where would we have watched it, tavern being close and all?”

“Right, yea. Sorry. Ah, I’m not really sure how you sought to draw a comparison then, well with -”

“Wishful thinking that the kiss meant nothing to her, as I had rather let myself hope it meant nothing to you; that in the same way by tomorrow it would mean nothing to me. I don’t know how I can feel this way – I know I shouldn’t. I am certain she went home to her husband begging him to take her back.”

“I don’t believe Mary Woodhull begs as you put it,” Hewlett offered.

“I’m torn. I want to help her. I want to have her and I want to help her and I know that I can’t do both."

“I am not certain, you-”

“I am though,” Simcoe insisted. “Do you remember how I strangled you? I keep thinking back to the way I was portrayed in that thing you sent me this afternoon and if that is how people see me-”

“Is that a threat or are you honestly inquiring if I recall how you had me fighting for breath this very evening?”

“The latter and … I’m sorry?”

“Well,” Hewlett took a deep breath. “Anna wanted us to fight over her anyway. Says it will throw the cops off. And … I’m sorry I pursued Anna when I knew you to be keenly interested. I am sorry I took pains to minimise my growing affection for her in front of you. I’m sorry I can’t be more help with whatever is going on between you and Mary, my relationship with all of the Woodhulls is on the rocks, I fear -”

“Are you sorry about what happened back in January?”

“No,” he answered honestly. “But I’m alive and I hope that is enough. I am deeply sorry, however, about what happened when we were at school. I always have been.”

“I know. I guess I knew. For a while. You shouldn’t be though. I’m not sorry. I’m alive and that is enough. Drink?” Simcoe asked dismissively, offering Hewlett the bottle. He stared at it, indecisive. Simcoe then brought up Jane Austen out of nowhere. Hewlett took a sip of the Linie Aquavit. It was needs must.
“So are we good?” he asked. After months of tension, it finally seemed they were.

“Never,” Simcoe shook his head, reaching for the medicine, “Just better than everyone else as per your own world view.”

“Cheers then.”

The only thing objectively worse than watching his teammates fight was watching them genuinely getting on. The differences were subtle; there was no discernible reduction in ridicule and banter. All the same, Jordan Akinbode felt as though he was accelerating into a deeper inferno.

Above all, what bothered him in the small hours of this cold Thursday morning was the topic over which the two men across from him had decided to direct their conversation. From what Akinbode was able to understand, (as much of this was explained to him in what Simcoe insisted were mathematics and Hewlett swore was more of an imperfect science – to Akinbode, numbers either way) Hewlett had sold himself out in a misguided effort to spare everyone the consequences of actions they had willing taken to increase their own gains. This was due partially to an incident over which neither was exactly forthcoming. It was irrelevant.

Akinbode was concerned.

Simcoe swore, however, that since Hewlett’s second run in with the NYPD he himself had everything figured out. He had written a program years ago that he was now implementing to find false correlations between the league table and the stock exchange. Paired with the thousands text messages the two had been sending one another over the past two months, they could argue that they had been discussing stocks in code since the beginning of the fiscal quarter. The fact that they ‘officially’ went in to business the day prior had nothing to do with the information a foreign international operative may or may not have let slide. *Nothing can be proven,* they laughed.

They would link the program with their phones, setting a system up to send out automated coded text in a style copied from previous messages to comply with current market trends and possible speculation. They would buy burners to actually converse if need be. The program itself could then be readjusted to comply with any new information they might ‘accidently’ receive.

Akinbode was concerned.

He listened, worried over what he had gotten himself into. The more complicated a play was, the more opportunities it had to be fouled. He directed their attention to the next page and asked them to initial, wondering how anyone could possibly have created such a complicated system whilst as drunk as they both seemed to be; wondering if that, perhaps, was the only way such a ridiculous scheme could make sense to its innovators.

The apparent reestablishment of their explosive partnership were getting on Akinbode’s nerves in other, smaller ways. For example, Edmund Hewlett’s quick outbursts of supressed rage and frustration had found a new direction, namely his.

*They had Google you know. In the bubble you accuse me of being raised in,* he snipped.

Akinbode was not sure what exactly he had said.
He was not, it should be noted, entirely sure of all what his partners were saying to each other, either. Accent was only half of it; at least a quarter was obscure allusions to things they swore were British institutions.

*All I am saying is that in every crime drama, sans ‘Father Brown’, the priest is always the killer, ergo –*

*Reverend Tallmadge murdered Benedict Arnold. Must be.*

*Setauket is practically ‘Midsommer’.*

*Christfuck, you are right!*

*I go to that church,* Akinbode said through clenched teeth. *Don’t take the Lord’s name in vain. And that you guys know, in American movies the bad guy is always the stock trader.*

There was no hint of familiarity or comprehension.

*The main villain of ‘Luther’ was an astrophysicist,* he offered, glaring. *Let’s talk about risk and liability. If you will direct your attention to page thirty-seven-*

Alas, there was little attention left to direct. Akinbode stared at the half-empty bottle of alcohol Simcoe had once claimed was for medical use. He questioned if in drinking the remainder, he could force himself to be interested in the benign problems that seemed to be of more immediate interest to his friends than the massive act of fraud they were in the process of committing. They were calm, whereas his own pulse had not slowed since Hewlett tried to hand him an envelope in interrogation.

*I love and I hate. Why do I do this? Poetry,* Akinbode. *Something to reflect on in the kitchen,* Simcoe said in response to his offer to make them all a strong pot of coffee.

*Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior,* Hewlett added.

*I can actually tell that you are from Scotland when you put it like that.*

*Remember when you said that we were turning into Rogers and Andre? I’ve news on that front. We are officially and unceremoniously phished at four ayy-em.*

Akinbode did not understand a word Hewlett had uttered. He pretended for the sake of sanity that the little king had said he could drink a cup or five in his mother tongue. He walked over to the kitchen area, saw two teacups with coffee grounds in them and thought fondly of his time at university when his dreams had yet to fully take shape. He should have slept more back when he was at school, he noted. He never seemed to have time for it now.

Then, it had always been better to stay up until three in the morning than wake up at that hour. Maybe Simcoe and Hewlett were further evidence of this. He was almost ready to forgive them for apparently forgiving one another at what was a spectacularly inconvenient moment to his mind – the morning as a whole would have been so much quicker and simpler if they were not on speaking terms. He was almost ready to forgive them until he looked into the refrigerator on the off chance that Simcoe had purchased milk. There was none. He did not expect there to be. It was not that which troubled him when he opened the door.

Behind an expired bottle of Coffee Mate, Akinbode found three bottles of wine he knew his friend did not drink due to his moral stance on ale being superior. On the bottom shelf, he saw a six-pack of cider and the four bottles that it still contained. He nodded to himself. It was what Anna had
cited in a sworn statement had been stolen from the bar.

The electric kettle switched off automatically when the water finished cooking. Akinbode did not wait for the grounds to settle as experience advised. The coffee at the precinct was comparatively worse, and he foresaw that he would be spending a lot of time waiting in interrogation for Ben Tallmadge to get his shit together with clients he was no longer certain should be entitled to defence.

Without a word, he returned to the table. He knew where Hewlett had been last night, and Simcoe said he was off somewhere having sex with a married woman. He had no reason to doubt either of them. The refrigerator was probably just an act of British humour of the same ilk that allowed the entire team to find Easton and Wakefield hilarious. Akinbode thought them among the dullest men he had ever met. Then again, Hewlett seemed unusually keen on giving himself up as a suspect. Simcoe always seemed guilty of something.

“What’s wrong Akinbuddy?” Simcoe asked after he had allowed them a few minutes to read and sign standard forms they had both likely seen before in silence while he thought.

“Your puns get worse by the hour.”

“Harsh.”

“I don’t want to ask – in truth I don’t want to know – but it may be better if I do. What’s up with the booze?”

“It is a rather long story” Hewlett answered, “but we can suffice it to say that a complicated series of events that began with my making an attempt on my own life several months ago cumulated in Simcoe – willingly- reading Pride and Prejudice. I apologise for my demeanour but I assure you of the necessity of self-medication. It has been a rather long night, I dare say.”

Akinbode hoped that the entirety of what he had just been told was another joke that did not translate. “Pride and Prejudice?” he asked, testing.


“The Gaussian distribution?” Hewlett offered.

“Well, its not reading chic lit that is for damn sure.”

“Mary Woodhull said she wanted something normal,” he clarified. “With me.”

“Missionary,” Akinbode shrugged.

“No. She doesn’t want an affair.”

“She either broke up with you or told you in some kind of women code that she wants to run off with you. If you ever build an algorithm that can translate things women say into logical assertions let me know.”

Jordan Akinbode did not think he was the best person to give advice of this nature. He had only ever been with one woman and only knew the following things about Mary Woodhull: she employed Aberdeen, had been friends with Anna back before they met, lived with Hewlett and had evidently slept with Simcoe the night before.

He had never met her.
There was, however, some hope in the way Simcoe had said her name.

“Is that what the wine in the refrigerator is about?” Akinbode asked, eager for an excuse to give the ginger the benefit of doubt.

“What wine – oh. Oh. Yes. I purchased wine for my lover and cider for Hewlett, who swears that we could have been happy together.”

“You are never going to let that go,” Hewlett hissed.

“You clearly didn’t.”

“Simcoe – that is exactly the stuff that went missing from DeJong’s last night,” Akinbode interjected before the topic lapsed. “Make sure you take the bottles to recycling and that they don’t end up in the regular trash. I know Tallmadge’s team and I know that not everyone like to wait around for a warrant. I’m going to be in Albany for the next few weeks and I won’t have time to come back down here to deal with circumstantial evidence and stupidity,” he warned. Simcoe’s eyes widened and he gave a slight nod. Satisfied as much as he ever would be with the story behind the alcohol and Austen novel, his attention shifted. “Hewlett – what the fuck? Really, what the fuck? You tried to … kill yourself? Are you fucking with me? Abigail said you – shit.”

He had said too much.

For the past several weeks, his girlfriend had been publishing a series of stories set during the American War for Independence. Largely, Akinbode supported her creative ventures. He objected, however, to her inspiration and source materials, something he felt now obliged to admit to his friends.

“She made me the villain,” Simcoe complained.

“That is understandable though.”

“How?”

Hewlett pulled down his collar to reveal light bruising on his neck. Akinbode shook his head as he answered.

“Do you remember the circumstances under which we met? I was waiting for her to get off work and you were waiting for your first therapy session to begin. I was reading a FourFourTwo, we got to talking sport, and you admitted that you had been court ordered into anger management after you’d sent a senior citizen to hospital with a head injury when he fouled you during a pick up match in Central Park and the ref refused to call it. You bragged about this. Abigail can hear from behind the glass you know, and first impressions tend to stick with her.”

“Yea, but if you’ll recall I told all of this to Andre and he responded, gleefully –in this exact language – brilliant! I was thinking of putting together a soccer team. What position do you play? A month later, you joined said team. She surly didn’t object then. What have I done?”

“Oh, she did, and how.”

“He said ‘soccer’?” Hewlett clarified, thoroughly disgusted.

“It is called ‘integration.’”

“That confirms every suspicion I ever had about John Andre. Soccer.”
“Don’t take this the wrong way man,” Akinbode said as diplomatically as possible, “but out of everyone I know I’d say you would be the most likely to inspire terror in whomever you deemed your enemies to be.”

“Do you? Do I?”

“I’ll talk to her about it. I’ve been meaning to talk to her about a lot of things,” he sighed. “Hewlett, anything to add to this laundry list?”

“No,” he replied dryly. “I’m used to having people exploit aspects of my person for entertainment value. It comes with the territory. She gave me a telescope, which I appreciate, as my apparent first impression was that of an introverted, racist, paranoid and fully incompetent leader. I felt my character needed a redeeming feature so I am happy that mine came in the form of an external object, something to otherwise expound upon my apparent conceit and sense of materialism. If I suddenly and simply fell into awkward niceties, I think the audience would be confused. No, I have no problem with Abigail’s Major. I do however have an editorial note: the town isn’t being ‘occupied’ as she insists on putting it. It is simply incorrect. Historically speaking.”

It had been a long day.

Akinbode looked at Simcoe to say something uncivil and condescending. He was disappointed. Simcoe politely peeped his thanks and returned to reading the documents before him.

It was then he knew for certain that at some point between accepting the phone call from the police station and inviting himself into the stock scheme he had made a mistake. It was clear that something was amiss. His mind kept returning to the refrigerator. He looked between Simcoe and Hewlett, questioning who was covering for whom, hoping they could sort whatever they were not telling him before Tallmadge did. If they had anything to do with Arnold’s disappearance, they were beyond any help he was willing to provide.

“How are things between you and Anna?” he asked after the documents had all been signed.

“Despite the numerous unpleasantries this evening contained she’s asked me to come back for breakfast in the morning. Simcoe, that reminds me, I am taking your pizza.”

“It is from Monday.”

“I don’t think that matters to Americans.”

“He’s right,” Akinbode conceded. “Do you have plans afterward?”

“I have to come help with coding.”

“And Anna?”

“Why?”

“I want her to stop by my office in the afternoon. Now that I know she is licenced to practice law in the State of New York. I have a case coming up as you well know and a team of paralegals who have proven all but useless when under fire. Anna needs a job – for a few weeks at least, and I need assistant council. And you owe me. Have her come in for an interview, a formality. If she wants the job, it is hers.”

“I – that is really, very generous.”
Generous might have been an overstatement. He just had a bad feeling. Anna had been a friend since collage, she was deeply entrenched in every plan Hewlett sought to hatch, and Simcoe, who had a crush on her, had lost his damn mind. He allowed that it could have been coincidence, but since spotting the cider and wine in the refrigerator he knew he had to get Anna out of Setauket, at least until the police were given a chance to do their job. He had to reduce collateral damage where he could. Anna would become just that if he did not somehow intercede.

He stared at her when the recording had finished playing. She was objectively beautiful, he admitted, if one averted their gaze before she spoke. Her features were all too striking for a single face to contain. It was more apparent in motion. They were all like that, something he attributed to the fact that Edmund Hewlett had married his second cousin.

The informant pressed her wide lips he knew to be filled with collagen together, releasing them slowly in a subtle tick. It was nothing. It was a close he could expect to watching her come undone.

“Give it two weeks,” he assured her. “The Major will be subject to rendition in the … American sense.”

“You mean Guantanamo?”

“What else?”

“Do they have any reason to suspect her?”

“She’s a practicing Muslim with loose ties to the case’s only suspect. All the reason in the world.”

Tick. Tick.

He pressed on.

“The Department of Defence will get what they want, which is public support to keep the base open and less resistance against using drones within their own boarders. Great Britain, it turn, gets precedent from one of her NATO allies to do the same.”

“You are rather looking forward to Virginia, aren’t you?” she inquired without interest. It was five in the morning. They had spent the night driving from London to Edinburgh in the back of her Towne Car after he had accidently been copied on an email Alexander Hamilton of the FBI had sent to his boss containing a confession or some national importance. It had been wrong to give it a listen. If it ever came out that he had shared the information with one of his civilian informants his illustrious career would be over. She knew this.

“It is a job,” he said.

“But she is innocent.”

“And?” he nearly laughed, “Black lives may matter to some in crowded metropoles, but brown lives matter nowhere and to no one.”

“Did you eat a bad kabab recently, Ban?”

“Do you imagine I’ve ever eaten ethnic food in my life?”
“You’re repulsive.”

“Preferable to being in a constant state of denial.”

“Me? Ah - no. Darling, I know myself to be among the worst of the worst. It is a job, as you say. Still, Major Najma Abboud is innocent and you are mistaken if you think for a moment that I will willingly turn a blind eye.” She paused only briefly, adding again as if he needed a reminder.

The previous September he had seen her at the court-martial. She had been present while he was interrogating two prepubescent ‘refugees’ with a cattle prod. The first child shat out the bags of heroine he had swallowed. Then second died when one exploded inside of him. He never got to read the autopsy to discover if this had anything to do with the high-voltage charge he had been applying to the parts of the boy that determined his gender. Based on the reaction of his superiors, however, it seemed that it did.

Elinor Hewlett was the only civilian to give testimony. Her account made it seem that he had operated within the spectrum of international law, securing Britain from a threat to its people. The fact that he had taken liberties in doing so never passed her lips if it ever crossed her mind. He was let off with a warning. She had once again used her position to eliminate the competition.

Had it ended there, the matter of the missing senator would have been of no concern.

She had approached him afterwards, however, with an enticing quid pro quo. It was the first time he had smiled at her in the fifteen years that had elapsed since they had met one another at boarding school.

“Tell us another state secret then, is Senator Arnold even missing?”

“Does it matter?”

“I suppose not. So, that is it then. The NYPD thinks my brother a killer, the feds don’t care either way, and some innocent girl will be scapegoated for a crime that may not even have been committed.”

“I thought you might have more concern for your brother’s plight,” he challenged. She did. She was trying to bide time.

“How long have we known one another exactly?” she asked rhetorically, “Long enough, surely, that you must expect me to see through your bluff. No, to answer your original question; I did not know about the embezzlement. I imagine you have for a while however, or at least your bosses have, if they feel comfortable sharing this information. Are you perhaps hoping to work out a similar type of arrangement?”

“As the one my government has with you? No. We wouldn’t expect that. Not of Edmund.”

“Ungrateful,” she pressed her lips again, crossing her arms. “I supply to half of Westminster and as thanks I’m forced to further assist them whereas the rest of my siblings -”

She spoke without pause or did not speak at all. Sometimes she managed to do both all at once.

“To avoid what I am sure would be a lengthy prison sentence,” he interrupted, offering a correction, “You’re contracted to kill off the competition in the name of the state, and even with all of that fun to otherwise be had, you continue with that which got you into trouble in the first place. Ungrateful.”
“The Grampian peaks are always covered in snow,” she shrugged.

“Quite.”

“So what do you want from Edmund then? Does the government have more US Senators you want to disappear?”

“What we want from Edmund we already have. I’m warning you, Love, because the problem of inheritance this imposes is of some interest to me. From my understanding, your brother remains the heir apparent.”

“And? Have you ever spoke at length to my sister? They sound the same: father’s legacy and ah! our dependents and a whore! A Whore! My kingdom for a whore! It matters not who is wearing the crown; they will both wield the sceptre in exactly the same way.”

“To wit, have you spoken to John lately?”

“Which John?”

“Graves.”

“Ah -Simcoe? From school? No, I can’t claim that I have.”

“Same whore coincidently. Anna Strong. He has been saying for years that he has been dating her.”

“I doubt it is much of a coincidence. Come. You remember surely how he lusted for all that he associated with Edmund, with power. People rarely change,” she shook her head, “and people like us never do.”

“Exactly” he grinned back, “As I’ve said, the government already has everything we could ever want from Edmund. There will still be an investigation into your family’s finances, a formality. On the political front, however, you have until Easter Sunday.”

“Easter - is that when you are planning to act?”

She had not brought up her retribution request since first speaking of it. He wondered if she assumed he had forgotten or knew that he would not.

“I will likely still be in the colonies. Worry not, the punishment will still prove torturous.”

“How?” she asked.

“I acted the moment you gave me an opportunity to repay my debt.”

“How?” she demanded. He declined. He needed her tack too much to allow that her mind be otherwise occupied with the details of avunculicide.

“Did I tell you who will be leading the investigation? Ferguson.”

At that, she threw her head back in surrender; he found it rather offensive that her rare grimace was inspired by another man’s name, but she was gorgeous in her momentary misery, and he allowed himself to appreciate it all the same.

“Ferguson. I give routinely give you everything you need to bring down elements threatening to the establishment and you give me the only incorruptible cop on the whole bloody island in return?
We need to rethink our professional relationship.”

“Oh, I had nothing to do with that. Speaking of our professional relationship though, if you cannot ensure a smooth transition of power, we may need to rethink it indeed. I personally could not care less which of your siblings takes your uncle’s seat; however, being that your family’s corporate structure is intertwined with its politics, I have a few concerns. You are bound to take a hit regardless, but should Edmund inherit the crown market upset will undoubtable ensue.”

“He has abdicated.”

“We both know he hasn’t. Not officially. Make it happen or make your uncle officially declare Edna his heir. You won’t otherwise be able to keep all of your factories open and speculation indicates that the three you have in Liverpool would be the first to shut down. You can understand why I hate the idea of sudden, mass unemployment in my city, I’m sure.”

“I’ll keep the factories open. And the ports.”

“Good. I’ll get Edmund’s murder pinned on a towelhead.”

Tick. Tick.

“With respect sir, you truly mistake me. I believe in the rule of law,” the drug lord responded.

“That is easy to say when its consequences don’t apply to you. Oh, but Darling, they soon will. Your brother needs to publically abdicate as soon as possible. Or, was that already the plan – is that why he is courting a catholic divorcee? Does he know about me? About our arrangement?”

He was met with silence.

“I don’t wish for your family to experience any more instability than they will otherwise,” he said in an attempt to sound reassuring.

“Am I to take that as a threat?”

“More as an invitation. Work around Ferguson. Or kill him. Or bring him to ruin. I don’t care. Have fun. Do whatever you have to do to silence him, and for the love of God get rid of any cash you cannot explain. Immediately,” he pinched her cheek. She spat at him and reached to pull a gun out of her Birkin. Entitled. On instinct, he blocked her hand. “Now, now,” he teased, “I can make this go away. Your brother’s corporate crimes as well.”

“The timing is horrible - but - if proven true, at most he will get six months with two years probation.”

“Not if his other crimes surface.”

Silence set in. He knew something she did not and for the first time appreciated how much fun the spies must have.

“His other crimes?” she challenged, “The disappearance of the senator you and the Americans are planning to pin to the Muslim officer who was dishonourably discharged for having a sexual relationship with a subordinate?”

“That. And.”

“And?”
“Have you checked the markets this morning? I am certain Edmund has. John as well.”

“What are you talking about? Oh course John has, he is a banker.”

He declined to answer directly.

“Stabilize your family situation. You have three weeks and no support. Your uncle favours him, your parents clearly do, and with a son on the way, Gene likely does as well. Even with the recent changes to the laws, if there is a precedent of inheriting the next male heir within your family, I can’t imagine that he wouldn’t strive to set his child up for success. Your sister only has a daughter and she won’t have any more children at her age. Edmund won’t have any children at all. Think about it. I don’t want to see this play out in court or the press, and if you can’t find a way to sort things at home, there is always another option.”

“If anything happens to my brother or his friends our arrangement is off.”

“It won’t happen by my hand.”

“If it happens at all—”

“You should have bought the ponies. Or lent him sixty-thousand or whatever it was that he asked. Come darling - that would have been nothing for you to give.”

She bit her lip.

“Mother wanted him to return. There was nothing I or anyone could have done,” she defended.

“And now it is too late. Look into his most recent stock purchases. I am all but certain that the feds will. Fergie too,” he smiled.

“What are you talking about?”

“Nothing that a well-placed bullet can’t conceal.”

Chapter End Notes

I have so much that I could say about this chapter, but it is my birthday, so, though I never explicitly ask for comments and kudos, I am today. Send me some love. I’m 26 and were I to die tomorrow it would no longer be considered tragic or untimely by the media.

I will say this however; last scene was disturbing for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the fact that it contained no characters from canon. This is not going to become a thing. You won’t see (any!) of them again for a while, but you would be lost in Act Two if I didn’t include this now.
So, let’s get too it, shall we?

Translations:
Hewlett’s little brother orders an espresso in the beginning of the scene where he features.

Hewlett recites the rest of the poem that Simcoe (canonically!) started reciting to Akinbode, and no, that is defiantly not Scots Gaelic.

Television:
*Midsommer Murders* and *Father Brown* are both British crime drama of the ancient variety. In the former, the murderer isn’t always a priest but if there is a priest in the episode it is a pretty safe bet that he killed three or four people for some random reason. In the latter, it is the priest who solves murder mysteries.

*Luther* by contrast is dark, modern, and set in London and not in some fictional place on the English countryside. It is amazing. (Although I have love for MM too, I’ll admit. I’m old now.)

Maths:
The Gaussian distribution is how you figure out normality in statistics. I actually wrote this entire scene originally as a variant on this equation but could not get it to work in text form. If you are interested I can post a picture on Tumblr explaining.

Notable Persons:
Vladimir Putin- President of the Russian Federation

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – President of the Republic of Turkey. Fun fact! For the line of fanfiction that featured his name is a critical context, I could be sentenced to two years imprisonment as per Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code. *Rise up!*

Elizabeth Gwillim - historical Simcoe’s wife.

Ban Tarleton – another British officer during the American War for Independence. After the conflict which earned him the nicknames *the Butcher* and *Bloody Ban*, he returned to Liverpool where as an MP he was active in making sure the slave trade flourished.

(Richard) Ferguson – yet another British officer during the American War for Independence. Fun fact! Alex Rose stated the character of Edmund Hewlett was loosely based on this guy, so (no spoilers!) but that will be a fun dynamic to play with at some later stage.

None of the Hewletts ever existed, of course.

Name Based Puns:
I can’t take any credit this time, lovely faces. *Akinbuddy* was used with the permission of John-Graves-Simcoe on Tumblr (who is amazing, you should follow her if you are not already.)

*Kloppoptimist* is the combination of LFC’s trainer Jürgen Klopp and optimist. It is brilliant and so fitting for that whole fan base. I could go full meta on why Hew would be a Red in any modern AU, but I will spare you.

Football:
Is called soccer in the US. If you know nothing else about the beautiful game, I am certain you know that.

Leicester City FC won the league in the 2015/16 season. If you know nothing else about the beautiful game, I am certain you know that.

FourFourTwo is an English footy magazine.

Did I miss anything or anyone? Do be so kind as to let me know.

Otherwise, thank you so much for reading! I can’t believe this thing has nearly 1,000 hits! That is insane! Really, I am so grateful to you all.

We finally did it! We are finally 24 hours past Arnold’s disappearance (the day we have been on since 1. May OMFG) there is one more chapter before the curtain closes on this act. I will try to get it up by the end of the year but the way things have been going I can’t promise anything. If we don’t see each other before the year turns, happy holidays and take care!

XOXO - Tav

Up Next: Baker gets fouled, Simcoe and Mary get it on (Really? Really!), Akinbode gets the f(x)ck out of town, Rogers gets revenge, Andre gets his due
The Internal Conflict

Chapter Summary

Ben Tallmadge investigates and (over)analyses, loses a friend and finds himself a lover. Peggy Shippen polishes her lies with political spin. In the spring of 2002 Simcoe filed and promptly retracted a claim against Hewlett, the implications of which may be of some interest to the investigation.

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year, lovely faces! I hope yours has gotten off to a great start. I am sorry it has taken me so long to update, and I am sorry to come back with everyone’s least favourite part of this particular crime saga, namely, the policing. I had wanted (and have written) a longer chapter, pulling together all of the individual elements I’ve introduced thus far, and in a lot of ways that goal has been achieved (yay!) – As with nearly everything else I touch, however, I may have overdone it, and in the latest of countless edits, I’ve decided that forty pages of Hide and Seek is, to borrow form Miranda’s Hamilton, “too many damn pages for any man to understand.”

So, with that in mind, I cut it off about a third of the way in. Not entirely happy with how this works on its own, but somewhat satisfied with the idea that I am not about to completely overwhelm the reader. Fingers crossed that you will not be too bored or disappointed to see how the rest of this plays out (hopefully sometime next week!)

I don’t have any trigger warnings before we start but I do have to say thanks to each of you for giving this fic over 1,000 hits! So – Danke sehr! Ich hab euch lieb! Shall we, then?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He bent over, his lips locked with another man’s as he struggled to unlock the door to his flat. On his third attempt to blindly locate the key hole, he surrendered. Caleb Brewster pushed him up against the door, brushing Ben’s nose with the brim of his hat as he gently took the keys with his calloused hands. ‘Leave it on,’ Ben told him in a euphoric gasp when his guest made a move to remove it. The door gave way and Ben stepped backwards into the small apartment on the fourteenth floor, his back still against the barrier, his tongue still entwined with that of a man whose name was on his list of possible witnesses. He hated that even with the promise of intercourse; the investigation was still at the forefront of his mind.

When Caleb bent down to pet his dog –who, much like the Chief Inspector himself had taken an instant liking to their houseguest – Ben shut the door an turn on the lights. He instantly regretted this decision and attempted to apologise for the state of disarray. Case files and cartons from the Chinese place down the street littered the room. His dog had made good use of the newspaper that he had laid out. Allowed to bake in the artificial warmth of heater he had forgotten to switch off, the scent of shit and piss was choking. Opening a window, Ben explained that he had not been
home very much that week – stopping mid-sentence, not because of Caleb’s unconvincing attempts to reassure him that his place often looked worse, but because once again he found himself ruining his personal life with talk of his professional one. Caleb either had not noticed or had not yet learned to meet Ben’s frustration with anger, as everyone else had seemed to as of late. He wondered if his date would stick around to the point of resentment.

It was doubtful.

If Benjamin Tallmadge’s world had ever extended beyond his work load enough for him to have developed a type, he was certain that Brewster would not fit the bill. He drove a postal truck, lived in an old houseboat out in Oyster Bay, grew marijuana in his uncle’s basement and played in a garage band that occasionally held practice sessions directly underneath the bedchamber of one of Ben’s primary suspects. Caleb himself had an arrest record. He had a two-year degree from a community college. He had a smile bright enough to cause the sun envy. He had charisma. He had his fun.

He’d have Ben, too – as he likely had someone after every show - and leave it there. No breakfast, no number, no ‘we should do this again sometime.’

Ben considered himself far too boring to imagine he would be heartbroken over the brevity of the affair.

He watched the only man he had ever seen make a cowboy hat look downright sexy as Caleb’s eyes flashed around the rubble of his life, over notes and evidence from the cases he had been recently thrown off thanks to the city’s priority of finding the senator from another state. Cases Ben continued to work in secret. Cases that, if taken individually, might have left him without the knowledge that Caleb had an unpaid speeding ticket from the twelfth of February. He found himself wishing that he did not know all that he did about the man before him, that all of Brewster’s secrets could have been allowed reveal themselves organically as opposed to as a matter of procedure. But they wouldn’t, would they? Ben thought. There would not be adequate time. Caleb would move on by morning, if not before. By the next time Culper Ring preformed, he would have forgotten Ben, his apartment, the piles of books and bile and rubbish, the excited dachshund who was responsible for at least some of the chaos in which they found themselves entrenched.

Upon consideration, perhaps Caleb Brewster was exactly what Benjamin Tallmadge had long been looking for in someone else.

“Is that John Andre?” he asked, squinting at a picture Ben had tacked up on his wall which itself was a mess of notes and scribbles.

Then again, Ben thought as the part-time rock star continued to inquire about the lines he had thus far failed to fully connect; perhaps it was a mistake to bring his work home with him in either sense.

“This is wrong,” he stated.

“You sayin’ that as a virgin, as the son of a preacher, or as a copper, huh Benny-boy?”

“As a, as a cop – I’m not -” he stopped. Blinked. No one in New York assumed he was a virgin after the scandal that ruined his name four years prior.

“You think too much,” Caleb laughed, taking off his long leather trench and resting it over the back of the couch before approaching, slowly unzipping Ben’s slightly too-sung jacket as he
continued, “I know who yer dad is ‘cause Jordan’s mentioned it a time or ten. Told us all you went to Yale, too. Don’t look so surprised there, Benny – nothing is really a secret in a place like Setauket.”

“That has not been my experience,” Ben scoffed. His tone made him sound so formal, so distant, that he regretted having spoken at all.

“You should come ‘round more often then,” Caleb teased as he felt Ben’s cock stiffen underneath his kakis, bringing a grin to Caleb’s round, bearded face. “Spend a night on my boat. Stay the weekend, whatever.”

Stay, Ben heard. Stay. He almost protested that he could not swim. He felt he was drowning even now, tasting the beer on Caleb’s breath as it mixed with his own.

“I’m not -” he started.

“Ready?” Caleb asked, stepping back.

“A virgin,” Ben said, leaning over to kiss him once more.

“Aye, but you’ve not had me yet, now have you?” he winked. “Trust me; you’ve never really had a proper fuck. I’ll have you convinced of that before the night is over.”

Several hours earlier, going out had felt like a mistake. In his tight, beige-coloured trousers and bright blue cashmere sweater – just loose enough to disguise the baby fat he had never quite shed, just the right shade to make his eyes shine – Ben had both looked and felt out of place at the underground venue. In the dim, barely ventilated room filled with smoke and sweat there was an excited energy that he could feel but could not take part of - not with everyone’s eyes on him. Not when he recognised so many of the faces he saw in the crowd, most of them from previous police line-ups.

He looked down at his shoulders, conscious that although he was not in uniform, he might as well have been. DCI Tallmadge was as overdressed and out of place in the club as he was anywhere else. He found himself longing for the semblance of youth he might have enjoyed the weekend before if he had bothered to make plans; alas, his thirtieth had passed without fanfare, a watermark on his awareness that had failed to be marked on anyone’s social calendar. In the confusion of studded leather, steal toed boots and candy-coloured undercuts, Ben felt aged and alienated by an outfit he realized spoke of brunch and boredom. He felt alone. He muttered an apology - half to himself - as a heavily tattooed young woman shoved past, cursing him for her spilt beverage.

Even in the advent of the opening act’s newfound notoriety, there were far more people than Ben had anticipated at the show.

Culper Ring had received a fair amount of attention due to Fox News’s misinterpretation of the intent behind several of their recent Tweets - items such as >> If Obama authorised the use of drones on US soil it would be no problem to #FindArnold. << The internet erupted in mockery of Bill O'Reilly’s failure to see the irony in the misused hashtag Ben’s unit had coined – having cited it as public support for the bill the senator was championing before going on a seven-minute rant about the holes in national security. The band’s Twitter account quadrupled its following as a result, the count continuing to increase with every pert political post. Culper Ring thus earned
themselves a number of local radio interviews in the past week – serving to further the frustration of the NYPD, who thus far he had been unsuccessful in their attempts to contact either Robert Townsend or Abraham Woodhull for questioning.

The space grew denser, the inspector tenser, his mind again escaping to the dry erase bored in his office when the Woodhull’s au pair elbowed her way past him to position herself closer to the stage. He scanned the room for the girl’s employer. When his eyes coming up empty, he placed the singer’s wife with the man who had become the target of his inquiry. He knew his gut assumption as to Mrs. Woodhull’s whereabouts were of her own design; though try as he might, he could not rationalize why the young woman had actively endeavoured to give him this impression.

Mary Woodhull seemed to otherwise crave a semblance of stability; something the FBI’s contracted interrogator had attributed in passing to each generation being a rebellion against the one proceeding it. According to Constable Baker’s extensive -though largely unhelpful - report, the suspect had spent years in and out of the foster care system as a girl. As a woman, Mary fit a familiar profile; holding on to a dangerous, damning belief in the fantastic lies she sold the world and told herself.

A deviance with John Graves Simcoe did not conform to the domestic narrative she had written. Where one created conformity, the other thrived in chaos.

Ben had doubted the two were having an affair - physical, emotional or otherwise – from the moment he had initially encountered the claim during Simcoe’s first visit to 1PP. Days later, when individually pressed for detail concerning their activities on the night of Senator Arnold’s disappearance, the pair had been oddly explicit in their recollections. The descriptions they provided were identical, but beyond the verifiable fact that they had driven Anna Strong’s Escort to a motel in Connecticut, everything the inspector rather wished he had not heard appeared to be fiction.

“Fifty Shades of Graves,” PC Sanchez had remarked as she looked over the sworn statements.

“It was rather explicit,” Ben agreed.

“No, Boss, I mean – this is literally a scene from a book. Almost word for word if I recall correctly. I can lend you a copy if you want it for reference.”

“Actually,” he replied, “if you are up for genre reading, there is something a friend of mine told me about last night that I’d appreciate you taking a look at. It is a historical romance.”

Friend.

Ben felt a pang of guilt. He felt more alone in the crowded club than he had before the memory the term evoked had resurfaced. Friend was a stretch and he was at fault. He pulled out his phone and wondered if he would be pushing it if he rang again, having already done so twice since Jordan had stormed out on him the night before. Not that Ben could blame him - he had, after all, blatantly attempted to manipulate the man’s misery to gain some insight into an investigation he hoped to put to rest as quickly as possible.

Lately it seemed that all of his social calls rang of casework.

Lifting his mobile out of his back pocket, Ben saw that he had missed three calls, a text massage and a number of email since last he had last frantically checked the device.

Nothing from Jordan Akinbode.
Not that Ben could blame him.

He remembered refreshing his screen in increasing intervals outside of the club as he moved up in queue. While waiting in line, he had told himself that it was a matter of prudence; he did not know if he would have reception in the cellar of an old meatpacking plant serving as the night’s venue. In truth, he now acknowledged, he had been looking for an excuse not to go inside.

He now had a decent one to leave.

Two of the calls and the sole text came from DS Yilmaz; the other call from a UK number he assumed from the context of what his sergeant had written must have been his counterpart at Scotland Yard.

>> WE’VE FERG’S FILES!!! Call me, please -! <<

Ben expected his excitable subordinate wanted to apologise for the accusations she had made against him Friday morning. She could do so face to face on Monday after sweating it out over the weekend, he reasoned. He opened his email after sending a simple reply of >> Thanks. <<, finding that the cold case he had requested access to had indeed found its way into his inbox. If it contained the full medical jurisprudence, the two sworn statements in which he was interested and the interviews that proceeded them, he suspected he would have enough to convince his bosses to let his unit do a sweep of Dr Dandridge’s office. >> Good work. << he typed to the detective sergeant he had tasked with the acquisition, deleting the message before hitting send.

He felt himself smiling.

Ben briefly allowed himself to question if his elation came from having gotten his hands on a decade-old document in which Hewlett and Simcoe both featured – or - for having an excuse to leave before the music started. He looked up at the stage and saw the man he deduced was Caleb Brewster. He was captivated instantly at the sight of the drummer as he had been at the sound of his voice. Captivated, that was, until his phone buzzed seconds later with a series of emoji that lead him to conclude that Yilmaz and the rest of his task force were still at their desks. The text reminded him that on this night, as on every other, there were matters far more pressing that his own loneliness for him to contend with.

Making his way towards the restrooms where he hoped to find some quiet with which to make a call to Richard Ferguson thanking him for his cooperation, the inspector saw a second pretty face that caused him a decent measure of disorientation. She was as overdressed for the event as he was - her colour palette far too pale to pass for punk. Then, Ben supposed, the girl was used to standing out. Unlike him, she likely revelled in it.

“Miss Shippen,” he remarked, more statement than greeting.

“Inspector Tallmadge,” she replied with forced mirth.

“I was not aware that you were still in the city.”

“I,” she started, her forced composure fading as she spoke, “with everything they are saying on Fox about poor Benedict Arnold tweeting me before, well before …,” Peggy trailed off. Ben followed her thoughts to the assumptions they shared with much of the public. “I did not think it
was appropriate to return to Penn just yet. I’m certain you and the rest of New York’s finest will find the dear man soon … working around the clock as you are.”

She met his suspicious, inquiring stare with one of her own.

Ben narrowed his gaze.

“As the girl the news is claiming Senator Arnold expected to meet, perhaps more importantly as a citizen of the Keystone State which he represents with so much valour, I feel it is my duty to stay in New York for at least a few days more. I should like to be here for him when he is brought to safety should he require my comfort whilst recovering from his ordeal.”

“To clarify, Miss Shippen,” he stated, removing the stylus from his phone case for show, “you are waiting for Arnold at a concert put on by a local band profiting from their derision of my investigation?”

“To clarify, Inspector, you are looking for him here?” she seemed to laugh without smiling.

Ben glanced down at his phone, at the number he had intended to ring and the email he had intended to read whilst hiding in a bathroom stall from a world he no longer felt he could take part of.

“I came in hopes of speaking with a certain suspect,” he lied.

Peggy’s eyes widened slightly. “Well then, I suppose I should leave you to it.”

He met her attempt to exit with a challenge. “Four days ago you voluntarily came into the precinct, providing us with a statement swearing that you had no connection to Senator Arnold.”

“I mentioned that we had once met at one of my father’s fundraisers when I was but a girl,” she flippantly replied.

“By chance, Miss Shippen, do you happen to recollect if Abigail Ingram was with you at this event? From my understanding she was living with your family at the time, is that correct?”

“Abigail?” Peggy took a step back.

“How is she?” Ben asked quickly but with concern. He wondered if he wished the answer to indicate the extent to which Peggy Shippen was lying or to help him to patch things up with a childhood friend of his own.

“Fine. She is great.”

“Is she? Even given the break-up?”

“Break-up?” she gasped.

“Jordan is distraught,” Ben remarked. He felt his heart sink, weighed down by his behaviour the night before – behaviour he recognized he was again engaging in.

“I didn’t, my God. I assumed -” she stammered.
“Miss Shippen, I would like to ask you a few more questions at the station at your earliest possible convenience.”

“Sir, I, sorry, I just thought she was upset because her boss -”

“Is missing?”

“From my understanding he went to rehab.”

“He didn’t. My unit has been trying to contact him. We obtained a subpoena for every in-patient treatment facility in the nation and none of them report John Andre as a current patient. His wife-”

“His … what?” she inquired slowly.

“Philomena Cheer,” Ben paused, noting for the first time the light resemblance between the diva and the youngest daughter of a political dynasty. “Philomena Cheer informed one of my officers she has not seen or heard from her husband since Tuesday afternoon, meaning that the suspect has officially been missing since around the same time as-”

“You don’t think John Andre has anything to do with Arnold, do you? Oh, you can’t think that! He is a gentleman and a fine doctor, surely -”

Interesting, Ben observed. “I was not aware that the two of you knew each other.”

“We don’t. I barely know him at all from outside of Abby’s workplace stories. We met once, a few days ago, helping Anna Strong more the rest of her stuff out of her ex’s apartment.”

“Tuesday morning?”

“Afternoon. He rode with John Simcoe who could not find street parking.”

Interesting.

“He seems to have left quite an impression.”

“Oh, no, not really. What in heaven’s name makes you say that?” she twisted the end of one of her bouncing blonde curls around her index finger. Ben wondered if she knew how nervous she looked. He pressed.

“We need to speak to him. At the very least, we need to locate him or copies of certain files we believe absent from his office records. Records which, and perhaps you can correct me on this, Abigail would have access to?”

“I don’t know.”

“Then I should like to speak to her as well.”

Peggy crossed her arms. “Mr. Tallmadge, with all due respect, I am willing to do anything I possibly can to see that the perpetrator of this grievous offence against Senator Arnold is dealt with under the full extent of the law, but Abigail and John -” The speakers drowned her out as the amplifier connected with a buzz.

“I don’t believe this to be an appropriate venue for a conversation it seems that you and I need to have,” Ben shouted, putting a finger to one of his ears.

“I have nothing to say,” Peggy claimed when the ringing had stopped.
“Perhaps you will. I want you to try to remember if Abigail was ever at an event with your family where she would have had the opportunity to meet with the Senator, and - Miss Shippen, as long as you are in town for this very purpose, perhaps there is something you can do to assist-”

“Certainly,” she interrupted. “It would be my honour and my duty as a patriot, Inspector.”

Ben was weary of the political spin constantly present in her voice. Still, he thought, he might be able to use it to his advantage.

“Would you be willing to speak at a press conference, to make an appeal on Arnold’s behalf?”

“I’ll have my assistant phone your office first thing on Monday morning to set something up.”

“You can stop by the precinct yourself tomorrow afternoon.”

“Tomorrow?” she blinked.

“Two o’clock, should we say? Bring Abigail.”

“I don’t know if she,” Peggy paused, “given the break-up -”

“If it is a problem for either of you to get to 1PP I would be happy to arrange an escort.”

Peggy shook her head. “I’ll consider it a date. If you’ll excuse me for now,” she said as the lights dimmed and the frontman greeted the audience with the name of their city.

“Of course,” Ben nodded.

He followed her at a distance after she left, in part as a covert measure, in part due to the restriction of the terrain. When his eyes found her through the crowd, he saw that she had joined a man at the bar – the same man who, incidentally, had effectively gone missing on the same day as Senator Arnold. Ben nodded. It was beginning to make sense. He used the camera on his mobile to snap a number of photographs of the couple when it became clear to him that forcing his way through the masses waiting on the attention of the two over-worked alewives was futile – even when he showed his badge.

John Andre finished his long drink in a single gulp, perfectly composed. He rose and, putting an arm around the shoulders of Miss Shippen, escorted her in the direction of the door. By the time Ben had broken through the crowd, the two had disappeared. He saw that the napkin under Andre’s emptied glass contained both a pen sketch of Peggy and the doctor’s messy signature. Ben shoved the drawing in his back pocket, wondering if he could expect the same reaction from ADA Burr, to whom the Arnold Case had been reallocated, as he would have otherwise gotten from DA Smith about of the use unauthorised surveillance – a category which his photo series also belonged. He informed one of the bartenders that he needed to take the glass as possible DNA evidence, showing both his badge and his police ID. She in turn informed him that he would need to pay five dollars for it.

When Inspector Tallmadge forced his way outside minutes later, Shippen and Andre were nowhere to be found. He rang his precinct to explain that he needed eyes on the daughter of the former Pennsylvania Governor and a squad car stationed outside of the Ingram residence. Dispatch warned
him that he had better know what he was doing.

He did not.

He walked to the car he had parked in front of the building, took two evidence bags out of the glove box and individually labelled the glass and the napkin he had discovered underneath it. Afterwards, he attempted to return to the concert Caleb Brewster had invited him to, but the line had doubled since he had exited venue minutes before and his badge was no more help with the bouncer than it was against the concertgoers presumably trying to down out Robert Townsend’s riffs with drink. Defeated, he returned to his vehicle, sat in the passenger’s seat and took his notebook from the coat laying in the back after calling his counterpart in Edinburg as a matter of courtesy.

It was too late in every sense to call Jordan Akinbode in an attempt to make amends.

By the time Ben had made it into work at seven o’clock on Thursday morning, half of his unit had already heard the twenty-two-minute recording of Edmund Hewlett’s most recent telephone conversation. The suspect’s elder sister contradicted many of the assertions he had made about the circumstances under which he had left Scotland, sounding simultaneously injured and apologetic in her chastisement. Hewlett, predictably, made no effort to defend himself during the long-winded rebuttal to his claims, offering atonement in place of attack. It seemed to the inspector that his suspect often presented this sort of concession to his opponents. He viewed the tendency to retreat as tactic; Hewlett fell back in order to lure his enemies into an ambush. Ben assumed, based on the frequency of which he had encountered it in the twenty hours that had passed since first they had met, that this particular strategy must have served the suspect well in days prior.

Not this time, Ben said to himself as he starred down the two exhausted law-enforcement officers whose misfortune it had been to be standing with him in Mr Sackett’s small office. Neither Russo nor Sanchez attempted to offer an explanation or excuse for how the confession they had obtained the night before found its way into the public sphere. Ben clenched his jaw as he watched his subordinates exchange nervous glances, knowing that he himself would ultimately be held accountable for this misstep; wondering where the leak had originated and whom it might serve.

He already had an inkling.

Edmund Hewlett was far more cunning and capable than he let on. The night before in the quite of his flat, Ben had spent the two hours elapsing between restlessness and insomnia examining the transcripts and video footage from the initial interviews he had taken following the disappearance. Though it was a common move for solicitors to cite evidence as circumstantial, in this particular incidence Jordan Akinbode made a fair case – his client seemed guilty of nothing beyond bad timing.

Either bad, Ben had amended, scrawling notes in his moleskin, or extremely precise.

No, he decided, Hewlett’s conduct was not without design. That, however, did not directly suggest guilt. Having compared the Scot’s statement to the other he had obtained, Ben determined that in order to discover to what ends Hewlett sought to sacrifice himself, he had to continue to play into the foreigner’s attempted ruse. It further served his objective to follow the narrative he had been handed, for doing so invited a primary witness to operate under the comfortable illusion that he
himself was not being considered as a probable suspect. Straining over the edge of sanity in hopes of glimpsing his rival’s fall, the inspector reasoned, John Graves Simcoe was bound to slip.

It was difficult to determine if Hewlett intend to help or harm his friend cum adversary with the actions he assumed, or if the man even warranted an afterthought from the heir presumptive. The relationship between the two was one that both defined as having aspects of begrudging admiration and bitter antagonism, or, as they were likely to put it in the Queen’s English, ‘Lads are bound to have a set-to now and again, yea?’ Ben himself was curious to discover just how far he would need to aggravate this enmity before obtaining answers directly relevant to Benedict Arnold. The way Simcoe fidgeted on tape at the mention of his foe lead him to believe the battle would be short.

Or could have been.

The playback finished with the usurper advising the suspect that his admission had forced her to cede their brother to the tabloids, warning Edmund to tread with more caution while doing business in New York. She hung up - or the recording finished - before he had time to respond.

Ben bit his lower lip, nodding slowly as his thoughts gathered into a storm.

“Do we know what she meant? If anything pertaining to this inquiry has found its way to the press...”

“Daily Mail published the photograph Hewlett sent its editor yesterday morning as we expected they would, Sir. Noting has been written about the direction of our search. What Douglas-Chaplin referred to seems to be post-factual and unrelated to the case or to any of the confessions we obtained.”

Russo pulled up an article from BuzzFeed insinuating that Eugene Hewlett had left his very pregnant wife after discovering that he was not the biological father of the child she carried. Ben breathed a sigh of relief. The Hewletts were less threatened by scandal than they were by speculation. He had received a call at four in the morning informing him that youngest sibling had been detained in Copenhagen by the FBI for his involvement in a suspected money-laundering scheme concerning property in New York. Ben read the short article several times, dismissing it as a classic distraction tactic. He returned to the question of what Hewlett meant to hide behind the admission that had given the FBI reasonable grounds to examine his family’s business dealings within US boarders.

“Can anyone offer an explanation?” he asked.

“Last night after you told us to pursue Hewlett after he left the Smith residence, he pulled into a 7-11 to purchase coffee and cigarettes. While we were waiting for him in the van, we heard over dispatch that a 966 was reported at that location, at which point Yilmaz, Sanchez and I stepped in and arrested the clerk. Hewlett left the premises before an officer from the eighty-eighth arrived to bring him in. Maybe while the three of us were in the store he...”

“I was in the surveillance vehicle the entire time,” Mr Sackett interjected. “After exiting, Hewlett presumably drove directly to Simcoe’s. When we arrived at the address less than fifteen minutes later he had only just parked his car. It is extremely unlikely that he had anything to do with Edna Douglas-Chaplin obtaining our audio. I sent it to both you and Hamilton as per your instruction. No one else had access to it, and I would know if our servers had been compromised. The leak did not come from the NYPD.”

“I don’t doubt it,” Ben gave his mentor a weak smile before hazarding to inquire, “Where is
Yilmaz right now?”

Sackett shook his head.

“I think she is on the phone with Interpol,” Sanchez offered.

“The feds said they gave the case to a finance guy. The limeys, I mean,” Russo clarified. “Yilmaz found a restricted cold case from back in 2008 in the database that the same fucker couldn’t crack way back when. Anyway, name rang a bell for her. She is using that to try to gain access to the file as it was the only thing that came up when we searched Edmund Hewlett’s name. I don’t know if this is significant, but Simcoe was also a suspect in this case.”

“You might have checked with me first. I’m not okay with this. In the future, communication with our international allies and with the FBI needs to be coordinated through me,” he said.

Everyone spoke. He could not focus and then he could not hear.

The night before he had re-examined the footage on Simcoe’s attempt of providing character witness. He had not noticed at the time - perhaps because of the blood on Simcoe’s ear or the marks on his neck, perhaps because his fingertips never stopped moving - but his knuckles had been raw. Ben saw in the follow up interview that Martha Dandridge made no note of this either, or if she did, she had not questioned the blood on his hands, conceivably because she expected Simcoe to lie about its origin as she insisted he had about the bites and bruises having come from a lover. Ben noticed that -as Sanchez had mentioned after the interrogation- the only time that Dandridge had actively taken notes was when Simcoe spoke about his association soccer team. Was this a ploy, or had she, and by extension Washington, ulterior motives for conducting the interview?

Ben nodded, turned, and re-entered the bullpen. It was as loud as Sackett’s office had been. It was a hum, a hymn, a symphony. It sang. It spoke. It told Ben as he glanced from desk to desk, at all of his potential enemies within, to keep his suspicions to himself before making his next move.

At nine o’clock Ben heard back from pathology that the blood discovered last night in the vicinity of DeJong’s Tavern belonged to Benedict Arnold as he had both hoped and feared. After additionally being advised that the trail the victim left implied severe injury to his left leg, after briefing his entire unit of the possibility of a second vehicle being involved in the crash and being used to transport Arnold from the crime scene, after giving them their individual agendas, he sat down to make the telephone call he was dreading. Thanks to the unidentified hole in security, he had lost the upper hand in negotiations with Scotland Yard. He hated that his first contact would be in the form of apology. Ben looked the number his sergeant provided while explaining that her earlier conversation with Richard Ferguson had been civil and thus had done nothing to aid their search. He was too tired to reprimand, instead dismissing her with a slight wave as he dialled.

His counterpart answered after the first ring.

“You’ll have to excuse the background noise, Inspector Tallmadge,” Ferguson said after they had both made their formal introductions. “It is an absolute mad house in here today and if I were to step outside the possibility exists that these – pardon my tongue - bloody tourists could well overhear. My government has thus far failed to comply with what I imagine ought to have been a
basic request to close the palace to visitors whilst we are investigating its upstairs offices. Do you ever feel as though you’ve been set up for failure?” It was rhetorical, but relatable. Ben took a deep breath.

“That is actually part of the reason I am calling. The audio file my colleague at the Federal Bureau of Investigation sent that tipped off your search – I have good reason to believe that there has been a compromise in security somewhere in the chain. Edna Douglas-Chaplin made contact with Edmund Hewlett this morning with regard to the claims he made about how his siblings view him, quoting-”

“No, no. You needn’t worry yourself over that slip up,” his colleague broke in. “Tis I who ought to be apologising on behalf of my government. No mistakes were made on your end, Tallmadge. Put your worries to rest. I know who is responsible, or at the very least, I have strong suspicions.”

“Oh?” Ben hoped he would elaborate. He was to be disappointed.

“Let’s leave it at there are certain perks enjoyed by those deemed necessary evils by the forces that be. I’ll include in that the problems I have been told your team is encountering with regard to diplomatic immunity.”

“Is that why your embassy has not been forthcoming with Hewlett’s criminal record?”

There was a cut in the line. Ben listened to static for a moment, wondering all the while if he ought to hang up. When Ferguson’s voice returned, it sounded less mechanical. Ben assumed he had been on speaker.

“That and the reality that he has no priors,” he paused. “None that I can speak of. Tallmadge, I’ve been thinking on it - there may be something I can forward along. I came across, years ago rather, I – I only mention it because, well; this might be off base – or, perhaps you can verify, does the name John Graves Simcoe say anything to you?”

Everything, Ben wanted to say; instead, he replied with caution, “Simcoe came in yesterday to provide character witness after Hewlett was arrested in suspicion of Arnold’s disappearance.”

Ben could hear his colleague chewing on the end of a pen in the pause that followed.

“Curious,” Ferguson coughed after presumably devouring the writing instrument.

“Why is that?”

“I am simply surprised, and then, not surprised in the least. Several years back, it must be over a decade now, I was briefly assigned to an investigation of an attempted homicide when the brother of one of the suspects I was looking into on unrelated charges was found – bloodied, beaten near to his death. Simcoe and Hewlett, um, specifically your Edmund Hewlett, were the ones who rang the local police force upon discovering the victim. Your sergeant might have mentioned this already, we spoke on the matter about an hour ago.”

“We are not able to access the case files and Interpol has been uncooperative.”

“Unfortunately I don’t believe I can be of much assistance there, either. The case I was assigned to is of particular value to the French military; as soon as I uncovered that connection, grounds were invented for my dismissal. It was redlined several weeks later. I am not at liberty to say more. I can however-”

“Were they treated as suspects? Hewlett and Simcoe?” Ben interrupted. He knew the vexation he
could here in the Scot’s voice first-hand. He hoped he could get the man to vent.

“Briefly,” Ferguson admitted. “In the early stages of my inquiry I came across – something I can send to you, actually. A retracted claim that may well be of interest if you are being made to deal with their …. particular -”

“Bullshit?”

Ferguson gave something between a snort and a laugh. Ben was not sure if it was nervous, forced, or if his international ally was simply unused to chortle. “That is um, not quite how I would phrase it, but yes. Yes, something like that.”

Ben provided his email address. Ferguson continued, “Around six years prior to my coming into contact with him, a twelve-year old was found alone at Heathrow trying to purchase a one-way ticket to Pakistan. Naturally, Scotland Yard was notified for reasons obvious. The Counter Terrorism Unit dismissed the inquiry after several hours of interrogation – the records of which never existed, you’ll understand. When they were through, they brought the boy to local to make a statement with regard to how he wound up alone at an airport in London when he was meant to be attending school in York. Young John Graves originally claimed that he had been brought to a refugee safe house in Glasgow as a translator, sold out by a classmate when the location was fired upon and ultimately taken hostage for several weeks by a man who had been arrested for involvement in organized crime days before. The whole of it – gang warfare, the arrest - it had been all over the all over the papers, perhaps fuelling the lad’s imagination as the constable who conducted the London interview noted – um, wait, I found it and I am sending it now, we’re on page four I believe. That is – I was just looking at this last night, I have – well, no matter.” He took a moment to collect himself. “Personally, I consider Simcoe’s now-retracted claim far too detailed to be entirely fantastic, but by the time it made its way to my desk there was nothing to be done.”

“I am guessing the classmate was Hewlett, the one he said sold him out?” Ben refreshed his screen. Nothing.

“Quite right. Hewlett was naturally interviewed in follow up. Page seven.” Ben refreshed again, nearly smiled, opened his email and waited for the PDF to download. “He stated that he had shared a carriage on the train with Simcoe when leaving for the spring holidays but had not seen him since. Hewlett claimed –rather convincingly I’d imagine - that he had been worried, as had been the whole student body, when the boy did not return after Easter, though, I’ll note for you, as it was not recorded in the investigation, faculty never made a move to report the child as a missing person.”

“That sounds rather sinister. No charges were brought against the school?”

“Hewlett went on to suggest that the boy was disturbed and perhaps boarding school was not the best place for him after all. That might also be worthy of note. He never referred to Simcoe by name – even years later when I’d the opportunity to question him. Ah, but returning to Duke of York - Simcoe’s legal guardian then made him drop the claim when the school took the suggestion of expulsion seriously. He was made to repeat the year. According to school records which I gained access to in the scope of my later investigation, Simcoe was in fact made the repeat year six twice, the first for what his record cites as behavioural issues – making false allegations against a fellow student. The second time for linguistic problems; evidently, he once again fell into a silent spell, failing to articulate himself after his cries for help were ignored. He had, and may still have if I recall correctly, a speech development problem as it were, given past issues with post-traumatic stress -”

“I am aware of what happened to his parents.”
“Yes well, there you have it. I suppose I’d ought to let you carry on then.”

“No, no, I – I’m curious, how exactly did all of this play out in your later inquiry?”

“I questioned them both about the prior incident; they both flatly denied any recollection of it having happened.”

It struck Ben in particular that Hewlett sounded unapologetic in Ferguson’s version of events. He wondered if the inspector’s memory was clouded by prejudice – something he would later learn was most defiantly the case and most defiantly deserved.

“And this second case, the one that you worked -”

“I fear I am not at liberty to discuss it. I will disclose only my personal observation that there was something decidedly wrong with the way the two interacted with one another, and that it surprises me that they have remained in contact, while, at the same time, it doesn’t surprise me at all. I apologise that I can’t be of more assistance.”

Ben exhaled slowly.

“Are you familiar with Dr Martha Dandridge?”

“I’ve read her books, yes.”

“She spoke to Simcoe yesterday, suggesting an element of corrosive control being employed.”

“On whose behalf?”

“Hewlett to Simcoe.”

Ben could hear the chewing again, the grating sound of bone against plastic. He remembered a lecture Jordan’s father had given him when he was eight and lost a loose tooth to a Bic, recalling at the same time that he had plans the following evening he hoped the investigation’s focus on his friend’s teammates would not interrupt. He closed his eyes, thankful for the reprieve from an accent charming only in film, imagining his two similar sounding suspects sitting down to enjoy tea and ballpoints as opposed to biscuits whilst Ferguson continued to chew over his response.

“I’m afraid I’ll have to disagree with that assessment, though I didn’t read psychology at university and it is not mine to judge.”

“No, no, judge away,” Ben said. He sent a text to PC Braxton asking if Dandridge had agreed to sit down with Simcoe once more that he might lie about his ear, his knuckles and perhaps his relationships with Mary Woodhull and Edmund Hewlett. He received a number of photographs in return. Ben ignored them as they loaded and he listened, taking the handset back from his shoulder blade and readjusting himself to a more comfortable posture.

“From what I know of John Graves Simcoe he doesn’t do anything that falls out of line with his immediate interests – and certainly not at Edmund Hewlett’s bidding or suggestion. I always – you’ll have to take this with some degree of speculation, I always thought him, rather -”

“Guilty?”

“Capable. You’ll – I really ought not -”

“Please. We have very little to go on. It is imperative that I understand - as broadly as possible - the
connection between my suspects. I have nothing to connect Arnold to anyone in this city at all - beyond a few tweets to Republican hopeful Donald Trump and a few to a young woman named Peggy Shippen – a friend of a friend of nearly everyone I can place near the crime scene. There is something here, something that I am not certain has been hidden, but something I am not seeing all the same. Hewlett wants us to think him guilty of abduction – possible murder, and I don’t know why. I imagine, however, it has something to do with Simcoe based on the way he reacted to Hewlett’s name during my interview with him. I know you were removed from your investigation, but I personally keep copies of old files.”

“I can’t give you anything, Tallmadge. I was removed for misconduct – interrogating a suspect who was a minor at the time without first assigning an appropriate adult. You must forgive me for being so direct but my opinions are of little worth to you here.”

Fine, Ben thought, let’s stick to facts then.

“Why are these files of any interest to the French military?”

“I don’t have the security clearance.”

“Please. Anything you can offer -”

“Pathology insisted that the wounds the victim sustained were implemented with a heavy, blunt object. I never found the weapon they were looking for. In truth, I always assumed that John Graves Simcoe was capable of inflicting such injuries under certain circumstances – under these certainly. The victim had been released from prison a few weeks before the incident transpired. This being, mind, the same man Simcoe once claimed to have taken him as a hostage after a shoot-out in a refugee safe house. He is still in a medicated coma. The DGSE has asked my government to keep the victim in that suspended state and they have been happy to cooperate. At this point, I doubt we will ever know what happened that night. I would,” he sighed, “you might pursue a line of questioning with regard to the dismissed claim from 2002. I imagine disciplinary measures would be taken were you to inquire further about the file in the Interpol database. Be cautious. I’ll try to lend all of the support I am able to, but if you’ll excuse me I have twenty years of possible tax fraud to sort through, more pressure to see this through quickly and discreetly that I dare contend with, and a snake pit of suspects downstairs - unrelenting in their manners and niceties, all.”

Ben thanked him for the advice he had no intention of heeding. When the call had finished, he phoned Lafayette. His foreign ally either could not, or would not say anything about France’s intentions, beyond that if his government cleared it he would be happy to speak to the suspects about the matter.

He stared at his computer, looking over the dismissed report without truly reading it, feeling that he had already been defeated by the mistakes of those in his chosen profession. Simcoe had once wanted to be honest. Hewlett had noble reasons to lie. Ben himself was curious to discover just how far he would need to aggravate their enmity before obtaining answers directly relevant to Benedict Arnold.

Chapter End Notes

Hide and Seek should be back soon with the rest of Ben’s work week, Simcoe and Hewlett’s extremely confrontational breakfast, Akinbode’s heartbreak, and (far too)
much more.
Bad news is that I have an academic schedule no one would envy, a mother-in-law in hospital, and multiple sport and social commitments that are all eating into my ability to update. The good news is, the next chapter (part two of this chapter) is written. Mostly. I’m sure I will find areas for improvement.

Comments and Kudos and always appreciated, never necessary, but certainly serve to motivate me. Hope to hear from you and hope to see you again soon. XOXO- Tav

Up Next: “... and John - a final word of advice on how to properly fake a relationship, don’t be afraid to fall in love.” (aww!)
The Devil’s Advocate

Chapter Summary

Abe allows paranoia to govern his game theory in a high stakes match. Mary fights a losing battle against her growing feelings. Simcoe and Hewlett end their delicate ceasefire.

Chapter Notes

Hey lovely faces, what’s good? Sorry this update took (what? three weeks?) longer than I anticipated, and I am sorry I had to cut so much of what you were promised for the sake of flow. If you follow me on social media you may know that my academic plan is absolutely insane right now and that I doubt it will let up much for the next few months. Updates will continue to be sporadic (and somehow still late) because the fates in their cruelty continue to refuse me the joy that is endless editing.

Every three weeks? Every month? Were that I could tell you. Alas. What I can advise is this chapter carries with it some heavy warnings. You want to do the thing? Yo – violence, language, blatant manipulation, international intrigue, extramarital affairs, minor references to presumed drug use, medical malpractice, expired non-dairy creamer, dialog.

Notice how one of those was bolded? Your favourite character probably gets hurt. Tja …

Shall we then?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

However rare, there were moments Abe Woodhull was grateful to be living at him in his late twenties. When his five-year-old son started acting up whilst he was on the telephone with the producer of a local radio program about giving the station an interview, he was happy that his father was on hand to step into a parenting role. His comments, however, Abe could have done without.

“Seems he has been misbehaving quite a bit lately,” Richard Woodhull remarked. Abe nodded and held up his finger, knowing that the lecture would not end there.

The producer continued to speak as he looked for a pen to write down the address, taking the daily newspaper from the kitchen table as scrap. It pained him to see Anna Strong’s bewildered expression on the cover, the blurry photograph Edmund Hewlett had snapped with his mobile phone taking up a full half of the front page. He glanced quickly at his father when the producer mentioned they were interested in discussing the band’s take on the same story – the news item it seemed the whole world had become obsessed with - the missing person he and Robert Rogers had hidden in the basement of his condemned house on Setauket’s outskirts. Something of an insurance policy, as Rogers put it. Something to make certain Abe kept his mouth shut.
He could hear his own heartbeat quicken, fearing that the press was already on to them, for the future of the federal republic, for the safety of his wife and son, for the injured senator locked in a dark room with its asbestos, mould, and assortment of vermin. He feared the interview would attract the attention of the NYPD and the other assorted agencies; agencies that Abe concluded from his own unknown prejudice and paranoia were working in conjunction with the illegal alien who botched an assignation attempt. Who courted his ex and lived in his father’s home. With him. With Thomas. With Mary.

He feared what would happen if he refused go on the radio in attempt to promote Culper Ring’s upcoming album. He could not afford to turn down publicity, he could not afford to give Rogers reason to think he was not up to task. The Scot had told him to carry on as usual. Usual, as it happened, meant self-serving rather than self-preserving. Rogers had additionally informed him within the same half hour that he had murdered the Detective Inspector’s brother - that he had left a boy to die on the side of the same road where he had found the injured Arnold.

Abe feared for his family.

Abe feared for his life.

Abe levelled his voice.

He thanked the producer, and, after texting the details to Townsend and Brewster –whose collective tweets to the band’s account had generated the attention they were now receiving – thanked his father for substituting at the breakfast table. Richard Woodhull glanced down at the paper on which Abe had scribbled directions.

“Nancy Smith called to advise that the police are coming in to do an evidence sweep tomorrow morning,” he said, alluding to the article. Normally his father’s lack of interest in what he hoped would prove a minor success would have aggravated Abe, perhaps even pained him. He considered this with caution immediately after he responded, repulsed,

“The District Attorney notified you beforehand?”

Abe wondered about the legality of the move. He worried that if his father enjoyed such privilege in a land where all were equal under the law, Setauket’s little king would warrant the same concession.

Hope alone sustained him.

Abraham Woodhull was, as recent events had lead him to discover, something of an idealist. He could not believe the greatest criminal justice system the world over was corrupt to its core. There had to be an ally, someone on the inside of the investigation who wanted to expose the conspiracy, to correct wrongs and condemn the guilty as much as he himself did. There had to be someone he could trust to punish Hewlett and his abettors to the full extent of the law. Someone who, doubtlessly, would be as visibly angry about Smith’s leak as he was. Or so he hoped.

Abe looked at the time he had jotted down. Eight o’clock in the morning seemed an ungodly hour to be anywhere. It was made worse by the fact that he would be gone whilst CSI did their duty, that he would be unable to observe Tallmadge’s team, in order to determine who might be sympathetic to his plight.

“As a matter of curtesy,” his father continued. “Abraham, I’m bringing this up -”

“You think she told Hewlett too? Or Anna?” Abe interrupted, unable to listen to his father dance
around his misguided assumptions that he brought illicit recreational substances into their family home. Even if he were using –which he was not - Abe he would never expose Thomas to drugs and resented the suggested slight to his parenting. Though, he considered, as it was of Mary’s imaginings of the extramarital relations in which he was not, in fact, engaged, perhaps it for the best that his father thought him drugged. Best for him, for Senator Arnold, and for the man who held them both hostage by the secrets that they shared.

“Why the concern?” Richard asked passing over judgement in favour of condemnation.

You too? Abe thought, answering with a glare, hoping it would bring an end to the inquiry.

“Anna Strong will not be returning to Whitehall until Hewlett’s name has been cleared if her mother has anything to say in the matter. If I have anything to say in the matter she’ll not be returning at all,” Richard announced to Abe’s private relief. She, at least, was safe from him for now.

“It’s your house,” he replied dismissively.

“As long as they keep paying rent I have no legal grounds on which to evict them,” his father said after an extended pause.

“I’m sure you can find a loophole.”

The judge grunted in response. Abe was not sure if this was approval or agreement or if he simply needed to clear his throat. He had returned to ignoring Abe and making airplane noises to get his grandson to eat a few more Corn Flakes when Thomas bit him with a light laugh.

“Hey there Sprout, that’s a no-no,” Abe scolded, surprised at his son’s behaviour. Thomas rarely acted out. He had never been a biter, even as a toddler. Abe asked his son what was going on, if there was anything upsetting him, reminding him that we use our words in this house to express ourselves, not our teeth. Never that. Thomas began to talk about his mother. Richard spoke over him.

“He did that yesterday in school too. I called the office when Mary said classes had been cancelled until Monday due to a breakout of E. coli, to see if parents were being advised to bring the children to a clinic. I was told that there was no such breakout and that Thomas had been suspended for the rest of the week due to bad behaviour. Any idea why your wife would lie about such matters?”

“None.”

Abe thought about Mary’s apology last night. Maybe Rogers had made threats against Thomas to her directly. Maybe she had brought him home where she thought his father could keep him safe.

Mary did not know about Hewlett’s failed assassination attempt and for her safety, his, and that of their son, Abe needed to keep it that way. He rose from the table. He boiled an entire carton of eggs to feed to Arnold, telling his father was bringing them to work site to munch on as he replaced drywall, promising his son that they would to colour eggs for Easter together that night when he came home.

Home. The word lingered.

Whitehall was a home they shared with a killer.

A home they would all soon need to leave provided Hewlett planned to stay.
Abe wondered if they would be safer in their house on the outskirts of town with the vermin and the victim and the airborne toxins than they were at his father’s mansion. He wondered if there was anywhere in New York where they would be safe from his unlikely ally in the fight to preserve American values. He wondered if anyone on the police force might be sympathetic to the nation’s founding ideals which so many men had fought and died for, or, if America was entering a new age in which opposition to the executive was dealt with harshly by foreign agents as it was in nations as rich in oil as they were poor in human rights.

He wondered how far the conspiracy went and if there was anything that he, a college dropout with an almost-famous garage band, could possibly do to restore order to the world.

He was an American. He had to try.

It was the second morning in a row Mary Woodhull had woken up to the sight of her eyes stained with the mascara she had failed to remove the night before, black, blurred, with sharp daggers etched by her eyelashes into her dry, placid skin. After thoroughly washing her face of the smoke, soil and saline the night had left her with, she stared at the small imperfections she had camouflaged with cosmetic, at the new blackheads she blamed on her failure to remove it, questioning if the cracked façade she had woken to or the catastrophe it sought to conceal was more metaphoric of her mood.

Mary took a deep breath as she took out her makeup bag from under the bathroom sink. She knew how to clean up a mess.

Abe was still sleeping when she left for her morning commute. As were Thomas, Richard and Aberdeen. Anna and Edmund had not returned – at least, there had been no answer when she tapped lightly on the door – relieved at the absence of response. Six o’clock in the morning was no hour for the conversation she sought. It was no hour for words at all. She attempted to access Hewlett’s WC through the hall entrance out of habit. It was locked. She smiled. It was likely for the best.

After scratching the ice from her rear window, Mary drove away from Whitehall, feeling as though she too had never come home at all. She replayed the conversation she had with her husband the night before in her head.

“I don’t feel the same way.”

Neither, thought Mary, do I, my love. Neither do I.

As she crossed the bridge into the city, she considered as she often did on her morning commute all the places she might go if she did not take the Manhattan exit, if her problems would cease to exist in an altered setting. She wondered which of the fancy high-rises John lived in, if it would be too brazen to ring him and see if he wanted to meet for breakfast instead, if she should even meet him at all after the ferocity of their kisses had threatened the falsity of their illicit liaison. Mary felt a light tremble move from her lower pelvis to her inner thigh at the memory of his strong, wide-eyed embrace; of the way his body felt against hers without the senator’s corpse coming between them.

She had told him she wanted normal. This had been, and remained, a lie. But Mary Woodhull was accustomed to lying – to herself, above all. If she could nearly be convinced for the sake of her child
that her marriage had been happy and would be again, she could imagine the past two nights had not tempted her. Had not occurred.

With time she was certain, she could ignore the rush she felt when she saw John seated in the bookstore café upon entering. He wore a dark suit which made the marks on his knuckles burn, his long, fiery hair loosened, allowed to cascade over his shoulder to cover the contusions she had left on his ear and neck. He reminded her of the undead antiheros of the novels of her youth, the kind that killed and fucked and embraced the mad chaos of eternity, rather than the glittering virgins that occupied the absent thoughts of today’s teen readers. She wondered what books he had read as a boy, what shaped his subconscious desires – she craved the secret, vivid details of what they might entail. When she saw a copy of *Pride and Prejudice* creased by his long fingers as he poured over the words of her favourite writer, she wondered what works he consumed absent of suggestion.

Mary Woodhull did not want normal with John Graves Simcoe. When curiosity forced her eyes to drift to the pile of books between emptied cups of tea littering the table, she knew he would not lightly let her surrender to familiarities she fought so hard to control.

Aside from a colouring book he had presumably bought for Thomas (along with a juice box and a snack), the rest of his reading list seemed to consist of divorce manuals and self-help books targeting women much like herself. Her approach had not broken his focus as he studied Austen, having commandeered a crayon to his service, making scribbles in the text.

“I’m sorry, am I late?” she asked, apologising that her son would not be joining them as she gestured towards the booster seat on the stool she originally pulled out, across from the man she was now certain she would have done better to avoid.

He had - intentionally or not - left her with no choice other than to sit beside him, close enough that she could smell his musky aftershave. Close enough that she noticed the light scars on the corner of his lower lip made pale with time. He brushed her fingers with his as he sat the book atop the others. The guilt she felt the night before in her martial bed rose. She felt the rush of being lifted against the tree, the sensation of the same fingers curing against the curves of her posterior. She suddenly felt sad, though she could not say if the greater grief came from the presence ring on her finger or the shame she and John had brought to what it represented.

“Quite the contrary, Mrs. Woodhull. I arrived rather early,” Simcoe assured her. There was something off about his voice, not just the eerie yet enticing pitch she had grown accustom to. He was absent, disinterested. His unblinking eyes did not seek hers as he said, “I did not know what to get you.”

“Tall White.”

“Very well,” Simcoe chirped with a forced mirth, “If you’ll excuse me briefly -”

“I’m married,” Mary said. Sharply. A reminder to them both; though, to Mary’s chagrin, one John did not appear to require.

“Hence,” he replied with nonchalance, indicating to his purchase. Still, she noted, he failed to make eye contact.

Mary swallowed and forced a smile. She spoke, knowing that the words she had rehearsed in her mind on the walk from her office were now solely for her benefit. The night had been a dream.

“John, I have a son. I owe it to him if not to myself to make things work with Abraham. I’ve been
thinking an antidote about a lot since we parted: A man was walking to work one day when he was in a near accident. Seeing how quickly life could have been taken from him, he decided to alter his dramatically in pursuit of another existence. He left his job, his family, his town and moved somewhere new to begin afresh. Ten years later, the same man is on his way work, has another near death experience and realises that for all of his efforts, the life that he is now living is no different from the one he left behind,” Mary place her hand on the pile of books. “I can’t – John, it was shock. Last night. That is all it was. This isn’t what I meant when I said I wanted to start something normal with you.”

“You’re a fast reader,” she remarked when he returned with her small cup of steamed milk and expresso, a few packages of sugar and anther tea for himself.

“I’ll confess, I bought a digital copy of the work last night and got to chapter five. It is something of a tick, I prefer hard copies. I’ve always done this, mark passages and take notes as I read. My father brought me on it.”

“There is something romantic to it,” Mary mused. “Um, romantic in that -”

“I know what was meant, Mrs. Woodhull,” he replied briskly, quickly taking a sip of his beverage before the tea had been allowed to seep and cool.

“John. It’s Mary. Please. And, and thank you for the coffee. You’ll have to let me treat you next time.”

“The pleasure would be all mine, Mary.”

His tone suggested, however, that this would be their last meeting. Mary drank her coffee quickly. John sipped at his tea, electing to broad rather than speak. His elegant fingers tapped against the table. Mary tried to fill the time he made apparent she was wasting.

“Is that a British thing? The tea? I’ve never really seen Hewlett drink it, but then I never really see that much of Hewlett.”

“Hewlett is,” he stopped. Swallowed. “Or I suppose was – Hew was more inclined towards unfiltered coffee with flavoured milk substitute, but then the Scots are generally known for their poor diet. Do you require -” he started, offering her a package of sugar. She took his hand, rather than the package in it. Their eyes met for the first time that afternoon. His were as red and raw as the pair she had woken up to. Mary considered for the first time that the end of their affair, however short and spurious, was as difficult for Simcoe as it was for her.

“Thank you. For all that you’ve done and all you thought to do for me.”

“The offer of my assistance is always open to you.”

“I just need normal, John. I just need my normal, simple life to return to the way it was. I want to be friends. I want to read the romantic scribbles you make in my favourite books and go to your soccer games at the weekend and -”

“I want normal full stop, Mary. I don’t know how to put this in a manner which won’t upset you,
but you and I, we’re not afforded that luxury at the moment. As long as the investigation is ongoing, we have to be cautious. I have my own set objections to the whole affair, but for now it is needs must. At least whilst we are in public. I like you, Mary. I think it is possible if Tuesday night had never happened you would like me, too.”

Mary Woodhull fought a losing battle against her widening grin.

“I do like you, quite a lot at that,” she said.

It took a full minute for him to reply curtly, “You shouldn’t.”

As far as mornings went, his had been rather pleasant given the circumstances. John Graves Simcoe had woken up to a pounding headache and an ear swollen with infection. When he attempted to change the bandaging he had been assaulted by his own blood, dried onto the gauze, tearing further at his redden, pus-filled skin as he fought. He whined, winced, and once freed from bondage and bandage closed his pale lips into a light smile at the thought of the woman who had wounded him. The woman who he plans to meet that afternoon. The woman whose cherry lip-gloss he could still taste through the flavours of alcohol-rich stomach acid lingering from disgorgement and the mouthwash he struggled to believe could make his breath smell like mint.

The woman who wanted normal – who thought him capable of that abstract.

Simcoe looked in the medicine cabinet behind his bathroom mirror. Finding only the medication meant to level him, medicine that had fallen short of its promise and did not serve his immediate interest, he called out to his houseguest, suddenly grateful for his presence, or rather, his heart condition.

“Oyster, you have any aspirin?”

“Always.”

“Let’s have it then.”

When he got no reply, he walked out only to see Hewlett staring at the contents of his refrigerator, wincing in woe at the absence of options.

“I haven’t been home much this week,” Simcoe clarified.

“I know,” Hewlett sighed, closing the door and his eyes along with it. “We have to talk, John.”

“With given names?” Simcoe chirped mockingly. They came from the same world so to speak, a world where first names were largely only spoken at baptisms and funerals, where one’s sense of self was define by their place in a line of succession. Edmund Hewlett rarely referred to his own siblings by their hideously similar forenames, preferring to settle on the description of their relation to him. In a misguided effort to seem less given to classism, he afforded everyone the same distance, often against their protests. Simcoe, for his part, never complained. He liked the order and formality. He liked the way Hewlett half-hissed his cognomen as if it were a curse. He liked jeering him at practice and on the pitch its Captain Simcoe now. He liked watching Hewlett’s face twist with swallowed strife.
Hewlett wore no expression now, nor did he respond.

“Edmund?” Simcoe offered in diffidence.

Hewlett swallowed, spoke, or rather, stammered, “What you said last night - understand that I, ah that is - I don’t wish the significance of what was spoken to be undermined by what I am about to ask. Anna, I – I do love her. I have the truest intentions towards her, though perhaps not the purest means of obtaining my objectives. I mean to live,” he said, rubbing his temples. “For her, with her. I mean to live.”

“I’m concerned about where this is going.” He was concerned about exactly how hungover Hewlett was, concerned that given the respective mass to volume ratio of the liquor they had consumed in the morning’s small hours that he himself risked sounding comparatively ridiculous when he spoke to the lovely Mary Woodhull that afternoon.

“As you ought well to be.”

Hewlett was right in his request - more visual than verbal - they needed the cure of English breakfast meats.

“Aspirin?” Simcoe asked.

“Ah right, yes.” Hewlett walked over to his suit jacket hanging on the back of one of the dining chairs and took a slim package from its inner pocket.

Simcoe read the packaging.

“Yea, so I’m going to get us something to eat. Shouldn’t take these on an empty stomach. There is a bagel place down the street, what do you want on yours? Bacon? Sausage? Both?”

“That is ah, that is rather generous of you but -” Hewlett started, pausing as though he expected the strange twists of his exaggerated facial features to make a compelling argument for him. Maybe he was trying to translate something from Latin.

“Look mate, I’m not having another little heart to heart whilst I’m hungry. Here, why don’t you sit down and write up an argumentative thesis and I’ll pretend to either read it or to listen in earnest when I return. Bacon or sausage?”

Simcoe hoped Hewlett would leave on his own initiative by the time he returned; despite the fact that he had made him 3.8 million pounds richer over the past eighteen hours; despite the fact that he needed Hewlett’s help with the nuances of writing the program to keep their scheme going; despite the fact that Hewlett did not currently seem fit to drive. Something was off with him. Simcoe reasoned that he had enough to deal with.

“Cheerio’s,” Hewlett said, shattering the fantasy Simcoe had been enjoying of a morning spent without the presence of his sometimes-friend who spoke in riddles and dated references.

“What is a Cheerio?”

“It is a cold cereal,” he confessed, embarrassed. “Anna is insisting that I go on a diet. I’ve been forbidden anything that might help to cure a hangover.” Simcoe smiled. Not only had he evidently dodged a bullet but unpredictably said shot had hit Hewlett hard.

“Even Irn Bru?” he taunted, not knowing where he might find the cotton-candy flavoured Scottish cola should whimpering swell think to request it.
“That is a myth. That it cures hangovers. I have no idea about the cholesterol level.”

“Shame. So what is a cholesterol?”

“It is derived from the Greek meaning anything one might actually think to eat - breakfast meats, red meat, blueberry muffins, oddly. I haven’t had much time to look at Google since yesterday morning.”

“What is that then? Vegan or something? Bloody hell Oyster - that is it. That’s it. I’m done. Christ knows I have put up with a lot of your shit. To tally this year alone, I got Andre to get you a prescription of your heart medication whilst you were in hospital as your bottle ran out with your insurance. I spent hours texting you to make sure you were alright when I could have had more fun with any other app, I sat idly by as I watched you steal Anna Strong and I agreed to help you with your finances – again - even given how well that worked out for me the last time. You are a real piece of shit sometimes, Hew. To be honest, it is what I always liked about you - but God help me, if you go all vegan, gluten free, fair trade and organic on me we are though. A man has his limits. These are mine.”

“That is not what low - cholesterol is. Not - not exactly,” he paused, shifting slightly where he stood. “Ah, not to segue, but you honestly got Dr Andre to write me a prescription for something other than my Xanax? Is he qualified to do that?”

“It was needs must. The thought of you waking up in hospital without insurance, being forced to pull a Robeson just to cover your medical needs didn’t sit well with me. As far as Andre, phycology is just an excuse for the behaviours we can explain but cannot condone. Is the good doctor truly qualified to prescribe anything? The pills he gives out clearly are not doing much by means of sorting our innermost demons.”

“I … I had no idea. I suppose that explains why he has been keeping me at length.”

“That or guilt. The bloody charlataan,” Simcoe replied, thinking thanks would have been the more appropriate response on Hewlett’s part.

“That seems unfair.”

“Unfair is your continued insistence in casting me as the villain in your narrative.”

“No, John. If anything I’m the villain in yours.” The familiarity was new, disconcerting, the sorrow omnipresent as of late. Simcoe elected to ignore both in pursuit of the greater good.

“Right then. Make yourself a tea, fill up another apologetic treatise with reference to Hardcore History and Asterix and I’ll secure myself something to eat and try to find a Cheerio for you.”

“Did you remember the milk?” Hewlett asked as he looked sceptically at the box Simcoe had returned with forty minutes later.

“What milk?”

“For the cereal?”
“You don’t need milk,” Simcoe assured him. It had not occurred to him to purchase any. “You brought that non-dairy creamer into my house a few months ago. I’m positive you still have some.”

“I think it is expired.”

“American food doesn’t expire,” he corrected, thinking on the box of Kraft Macaroni and Cheese he had purchased upon his arrival when everyone he met had praised the American delicacy. He had not eaten it. It was still good. It would be for the next quarter century. He pulled it from the cupboard to prove a point. Hewlett silently seethed. Simcoe smiled, grabbing the Coffee Mate from its place in the refrigerator.

“Ah -”

“Oh. So it does,” Simcoe read. He could accept defeat so long as he was not made to pay its retributions. “Well Oyster,” he said as he continued to pour the thick, lumpy substance that barely qualified as a liquid into a bowl, “it’s blood in, blood out ‘innit?’”

Hewlett clenched his jaw and shifted his posture.

“That is actually, well that rather leads me directly into something you and I rather need to discuss. Grab us a cider?”

“You really want a drink after last night.”

“I think I am going to need it.”

Simcoe chuckled to himself, returning the flask of the dearly departed faux dairy to the top shelf and grabbing a stolen bottle from the bottom, imaging Anna’s anger directed at someone who to his mind truly deserved it.

“So when you see John Andre in rehab -” he jeered.

“Simcoe, I – I well, I suppose there is no easy way to say this. Understand that I mean this in all seriousness and with the greatest possible care. I need you to punch me as hard as you possibly can. The cider is for afterwards.”

Simcoe perked at the odd yet earnest plea. It was better than an overdue apology. Moments like this might convince one of the existence of a higher power. Considering the circumstances to which he had awoken, this was turning out to be a rather pleasant morning indeed.

“Appealing to my appreciation for schadenfreude are we?”

“The Coffee Mate is schadenfreude, what you’re laughing over is sadism, and no. I’m trying to help you. John, there is no easy way for me to say this - look at your hands.”

He did. His fingers twitched from neither anxiety nor anticipation.

“What am I looking at?”

“Other side.”

His knuckles were raw. He clenched his hands into fists, not intending on a fight, rather to keep his fellow ex-pat from observing his fear. His scars grew redder as the skin stretched.

“It’s not what you think,” he defended.
“I’m not a copper. It doesn’t quite matter what I think. But if you listen to me carefully and do exactly as I say, together we can influence what Tallmadge and his team infer from your ah...”

“The detective? Honestly mate, what are you on about? I’m cutting you off,” he said, trying to excuse himself from the discussion as he robbed his guest of the cereal and cider with a jolt.

“I already have bruises on my neck. Thanks to my arrest, your character testimony and Anna’s attempt at seduction, we can make the police think that the blood on your hands is mine – not, well, not Senator Arnold’s - that ours is merely a story of love and betrayal.”

“Arnold? Senator Arnold? Have you lost your fucking mind? Why would I -” he stopped. Parried. “As I recall Oyster, I’m not the one selling myself as a murder suspect.”

Hewlett straightened his posture and nicked his chin forward as his dark eyes narrowed slightly. He spoke sceptically.

“You rang me yesterday morning to ask for the telephone number of a woman you later wanted to convince me you had been in the throes of having a torrid affair with. The Austen was a nice touch, I’ll allow you that.”

“I later confessed to you that it was a fake affair to help her take revenge against her husband without the stain of a greater sin -” Simcoe began to object, pitch raised, fingernails burrowing into the flesh of his palm. He could handle Hewlett’s assumptions and accusations when they were directed at him. Alluding to Mary Woodhull was a step too far.

“Greater sin? Greater – Simcoe,” he hissed, “I have every reason to conclude that you and Mrs. Woodhull murdered -”

Simcoe hit him in the gut when he dared to speak her name. Hewlett braced himself on the counter, gagging and grasping for the air he had lost.

“Good,” he said when he regained himself. “Now do that four or five times more. Try to avoid the face. Anna and I still need to fake a great number of photographs for immigration.”

Only Hewlett possessed the vanity to baselessly allege one of a crime whilst openly admitting to his own. Simcoe shook his head in disgust. Why was he the only one this side of the Atlantic who saw this man for the monster he was?

“I’m having a fake affair with a woman I’m falling in love with,” he admitted. “That is why I didn’t have her number, I never expected it would go this far. I’m not going to fight you, Edmund. Mary, she sees the best in me. She thinks me normal.” This, he thought, after truly witnessing me at my worst. “Do you have any idea how difficult it is for me to think of myself as normal? Unlike you, I’m not keen on proving a constant disappointment.”

“I won’t press charges,” Hewlett continued, unmoved. “Even if the police think you are bloody mad they won’t be able to do anything to reprend you, and they won’t have any reason to look into you and / or Mary. Lads fight sometimes. Let’s prove it to these yanks.”

“I’m not a monster. And your right ill, you know that you paranoid little twat? My hands haven’t an alibi, I’ll admit – but can you truly think them capable or murder? You, who can call me your friend, who call yourself mine whilst mounting evidence to the contrary, you who -”

“It took me a while, but when Akinbode mentioned that the contents of your refrigerator matched the items stolen from DeJong’s inventory it was not difficult to put the pieces together. The erratic behaviour, the -”
“It’s bullocks. You are a coward, Hewlett. I don’t know what you’re playing at but if you truly thought me guilty of such a heinous act you wouldn’t be dining with me,” he pushed the bowl of Cheerio’s back, taking a bite of his grease soaked sandwich in an expression of dominance. If he hoped Hewlett’s mouth lacked space enough for rotten milk and words both, he was to be disappointed.

“I can handle you, Simcoe. Now,” Hewlett continued briskly, “I’ll finish off the cider after breakfast in order to numb the pain I’m sure you’ll take no small pleasure in inflicting. You’ll put the bottles in recycling on your way to meet your lovely Mrs. Woodhull. As far as the wine, divide it among the derelicts who gather outside of Trader Joe’s. I googled the label, it is the only grocer in the area to carry that brand.”

“You want me to play homeless or hipster in a Trader Joe’s parking lot?” Simcoe challenged, testing if this was an elaborate joke. He did not know if it was worse thinking that Hewlett thought of him in such terms, of that he was almost dismissive of the behaviour.

“Herculean task, I know. I’ll help you if need be.”

“After I, sorry, is this after I beat you up? Hewlett, if I were to actually hit you as you ask of me, you wouldn’t get up,” he sneered.

“You’re not a monster,” Hewlett echoed, “and this isn’t Glasgow.”

His tone was surprisingly sympathetic but his words chilled the air. Simcoe considered the possible outcomes of what might happen should he take the offer presented to him, not entirely trusting that he would have the appropriate incentive to stop at mere injury, tepid though his hatred was.

“And Tallmadge isn’t Ferguson,” he retorted. “This won’t work.”

“You don’t trust me?”

“Not you. Myself.”

“John –” Hewlett started. If Simcoe was a curse as it passed his lips, John was a threat.

“You don’t know what happened! Not then, not now. You weren’t there,” he stretched the last word, hoping with it to assign blame that in the end was not Hewlett’s burden, though he clearly carried it.

“I’m here now.”

“I’m not guilty.”

“I know,” Hewlett said, placing his pale hand on Simcoe’s bloodied one. “Akinbode and I had a conversation about appearances in interrogation yesterday, and you look – that is, your situation looks like rather – fuck. What I mean - and all I mean - is this: the matter remains that we have a lot to sort out before Tallmadge comes to what seems a logical conclusion and I have a means to an end. Can’t you understand without necessitating that I be more direct? I am trying to help.”

What Simcoe understood was the unspoken, shared reality that went better unacknowledged. Hewlett’s empathy for his plight forced him to concede that he, too, was terrified at the prospect of returning to the sense of isolation inherent to the realities imposed by immigration. The animosity that existed between them was a lesser demon than alienation; ego was usually enough on its own to expunge this notion from Simcoe’s active mind.
He had no idea what Hewlett’s excuse was for the allusion. He never did. It hurt to be reminded all the same.

“Believe me, he warned, tightening his fist as he felt Hewlett’s fingertips graze his knuckles, “you don’t realize what you are asking.”

“Anna told me last night that she fears she lost the man she loves to the worst within him when she woke me up to ask me to take out a business loan for her.” Oyster continued, lost again in his own narrative. “It’s possible she is right. I don’t want this, John - any of it - but I fear the only way out is to keep moving forward. Let me help you the same way you are helping me.”

Hewlett’s offer was incomparable with all that which Simcoe had willing done for him. Suggesting otherwise was a step too far.

“You know what the ironic thing about all of this is? I made some horrible accusations against Dr Andre so you wouldn’t need to resort to literally robbing a bank in order to cover the costs of your healthcare, and yet you - you arrogant, opportunistic little shite - roped me into an insider trading scheme involving information you somehow lifted from a French foreign agent with enough clout to get the leader of Mussad on the line. You then stupidly set yourself up as the prime suspect in the Arnold case to give you an excuse to keep the spy game going. Somehow, somehow you still have it within you to stand before me, accusing me of murder based on shaky assumptions and circumstantial evidence? I’m not a monster, Hewlett, but you sure as all fuck are. So no. I don’t trust you. I don’t know your end game with all of this. Frankly, I don’t know that you are decisive enough to have one.”

“Tallmadge has no logical reason to think that I committed any act contrary to common law, though he is of logical mind,” Hewlett responded calmly. “In all likelihood, the only reason I became the investigation’s primary target is the fact that yesterday morning all – including you yourself – had reason to believe my ultimate intention was to enter into a dishonest union with the daughter of the district attorney. Though, had Anna once mentioned that her mother-”

“And here I thought your epic love could withstand all obstacles,” interrupted, rolling his eyes. “I would have never been so quick to call the English press in front of a potential crime scene.”

“Why did you?”

“To see if it was back on the market, ah, rather, to insure that it would be by the time of our scheduled meeting. It was an error of judgement.”

“What made you so certain I would help?”

“I assumed us to be in love with the same woman and know you to have always been infatuated with this dark idea you have of me. You couldn’t resist,” he smiled. “You never bloody can.”

“This idea you think me to have of you is one you seem set on reinforcing.”

“That is not my intention. Everything I’ve done since, well since smoking outside The Newsroom yesterday has been for your own protection. For your own good. Don’t you get it? It is not entirely about the money. If they keep coming after me they won’t come after you. If we just give them enough plausible doubt they never will and you can be free to live and love or to pretend to yourself and to the world that there is no core truth to your lies.”

“So I can be free to help you increase your wealth and standing.”
“If that is what you need to think.”

Simcoe did think, Hewlett quiet clearly did not.

“They are going to find out about our little trading scheme. Tallmadge, Lafayette, Hamilton. You already ensured that inevitability, you damned fool.”

“Dandridge is under the professional opinion that ours is a corrosive bond. The blame falls with me and I’ll except full consequence should your algorithm fail or should they not buy our explanation.”

“I imagine that is easier to say when your ideas of law, order and authority have only ever had implications only for people who don’t have house words. This is America; it is a different beast entirely. How long do you think you can last? They will come after you, your family. If our own government can’t charge you directly with corruption they will get you on tax evasion for claiming charitable contribution on money that never left company control.”

“We have been more than overpaying out taxes for years. The cost has been covered tenfold, and that not counting the public services that only exist in Great Britain due to my father’s generosity. Do you honestly expect that the government did not already know? If they had any intention of moving they would have done so by now.”

“You have given them reason to go after you.”

“I’ve given them reason not to go after you.”

“They can still press charges for child abuse. To my knowledge, there is no statute of limitations for the evils I accredit to your father’s hands. The man belongs in jail. I know you know that too, deep down. If not perhaps we ought to be having another little talk altogether.”

“I’ll refuse to press charges if it even comes to that,” Hewlett deflected.

“The government could declare you mentally unstable – hardly a fete given your recent escapades – and sue on your behalf.”

“Opportunity cost. They won’t because it is not worth it to them to cover the court expense of losing a powerful ally. My family has nothing to lose. Even from bad publicity. With all the fear and speculation over Brexit, Arnold and the next ISIS attack - this winds up being a ticket item on page twenty-seven if it is even exposed. All I gave police is an excuse to keep me a suspect in their investigation. I can use this to keep lines of communication open with the French keeping you safe and … ah, adding to our pot as it were.”

“Are you mad? Honestly, what makes you think that Lafayette won’t just shoot you given what you already know if the DGSE ever discovers exactly what they let slip?”

“My brother’s wife’s father.”

They were in Glasgow. Simcoe coughed, tasting his first cigarette all over again while Hewlett frantically wiped the blood from the crutches he then used as the sirens turned the corner.

They were damned.

“It isn’t your army, Hewlett,” Simcoe corrected. “You can’t march to the gates of Rome and demand they be opened.”
“It is the most powerful combat force in the world and when it is loyal to one man you don’t make an enemy of him or his relations. Nothing is ever going to come out about Glasgow, just as one is ever going to tie you to Arnold.”

“No one is trying to tie me to Arnold! You don’t know what happened! I don’t know what happened. I don’t know.” That much, he admitted to himself, was half the problem. “And you always act like you do but if you did you wouldn’t be so fucking cavalier about it all.”

“I’m trying to keep you safe,” Hewlett repeated softly. Simcoe wonder who he was trying to convince.

“You’re trying to turn a damn profit is what you are doing. You know what the worst thing is about you – about all of you Hewletts? You truly believe in your own propaganda. How fucked, honestly how fucked must your mind be to have convinced itself that in recruiting my help in burning your own bloody house to its foundations that you are somehow saving me from the hand of the law? I’m not a murderer, Hewlett, though now I am not completely convinced that you are not. As long as you want to play with the past, let me ask - as I’m sure your coppers will - why wouldn’t the prodigal son of the so-said fair and righteous try to redeem himself by taking out a war hawk? We know you had every opportunity to do so given that Anna Strong is your only alibi, that she is only with you because you offer her some financial assurances you would be unable to deliver upon were it not for my assistance, it is already on record that you cannot please her. Tell me, Hew,” he spat, “is all this your attempt to prove that yourself a man to her given that you … otherwise lack the means?”

Hewlett’s thin lips twisted upon themselves before falling in surrender.

“I’m going to need you to hit me,” he repeated.

“What are you trying to prove?”

“Nothing! I’m trying to ensure that nothing can be proven. For once in your godforsaken life do as you are told. Make it like we were in a fight and let’s be done with it.”

“I’m not a murderer!” Simcoe insisted - at that point, it should be noted- rightfully. He pushed Hewlett on his shoulder with enough force to unbalance him, causing him to fall from his stool. Simcoe rose, offering his hand in peace.

“No. You’re my best friend,” Hewlett said as he took it. Only a Hewlett could effectively use a term of endearment as an insult. Only with a Hewlett could friend possibly be taken as one.

“I’m not a monster either, Edmund.”

“I neither said nor insinuated that you were. I think you’ve found yourself in an unenviable situation for which you’ve constructed a rather poor cover. Regardless of what happened, we are undeniably profiting from it and while I’ll admit that that much is on me, you ought to be more cautious.”

“I hate you.”

“Its mutual. Now hit me as though you mean it. For Mrs. Woodhull’s sake if not for your own.”

In that moment, as in many prior, John Graves Simcoe truly did loath Edmund Hewlett. He hated his vanity, his loyalty, his accuracy. He hated that he knew how to get under his skin. He hated that he let him.
“And what did you do?” Mary Woodhull whispered, her eyes wide with expectation. Expectation, Simcoe noted, not fear.

“As I was told,” he answered, afraid to let her down, afraid to give detail that would make her ever see him in the dull glow of Anna Strong’s headlights. At first Hewlett had continued to speak incessantly, long after Simcoe had ceased to truly listen. Memory, in her kindness would eventually erase the awful sounds his beloved enemy made as he cried out for mercy. Simcoe would never forget, however, the long silence that followed. Recalling with reluctance (and reluctant admiration and awe) the small eternity it took for Hewlett to sob out in pain, Simcoe felt sorrow, though at the time he could not name it as such.

“Shit, Mary I -”

“Thank you,” she said.

“Thank you?”

She kissed his hand. It ached from action and stung from sanitation. He wondered if she could taste the blood it had spilt or the steam that had fogged up the bathroom mirror while it fought its twin in the sink for soap.

“This isn’t normal, Mary. Forgive my falling short of your wants and expectations. Had he just left your name out of the discussion I have to think -”

“No, John, you’re right. It’s not normal. But it is real. My husband would never raise a finger to defend my honour. You assaulted your closet friend to defend our alibi. To defend me. Us. And he asked you to on top of it. You are a good person in a strange situation not entirely of your making. You did your best and you were honest about it. You are honest. With me. You can’t know what that means.”

“I didn’t just hit him, Mary.”

“Are you okay? Are you … and Edmund okay now?”

“Never. We’re just, as Oyster would disdainfully put it, we’re – he and I – we’re just better than everyone else. We were better. Were. I’m sorry I – I don’t know what it is I’m meant to do now.”

“Don’t worry. I know how to clean up a mess.”

“I know.”

He began to smile for the first time since leaving the flat. Mary leaned over to kiss him, gentle at first, but passionate. The last full sentences Edmund Hewlett might ever speak ran through his mind before her tongue parted his lips and the world beyond her embrace ceased to concern him.

“Then give the cops a reason to think that everything you and Mary have undertaken together has been permissible under New York law. And John – a final word of advice on how to properly fake a relationship, don’t be afraid to fall in love.”

And in that moment, he wasn’t. And neither, it seemed, was Mary.
I don’t have any contextual notes for you all this time, lovely faces – I don’t think that there were many (or any?) cultural or political references that I have not touched on previously, though feel free to correct me if I am mistaken.

I do, however, have a few shout outs this round: calamity-bean and mercurygray were super, super sweet and gave this little fic some love during #ficrecdays over on Tumblr. It was unexpected and really, unbelievably nice so thank you both once more for your kind words.

grumblebee saved me once again with her amazing cross-continental DJ-ing skills. Honestly how amazing can a person possibly be to recommend a full play list in like five minutes after being messaged about a random scene in a story they have never read and totally, completely cure one of writer’s block? The girl is a gift.

(And all of these individuals are far more gifted writers than I – go check their work out!)

In the event that you are keen after this chapter for a few Anna + Hewlett scenes that were cut, or want a Simcoe + Mary sex dream – have fun.

If you want to read something light about Hewlett and Simcoe just being lads, there is a H+S Christmas special of sorts. It is about getting to the bar before last call. That is seriously it. Enjoy.

Up Next: Either sex and fluff filled with porn and puns OR we will dive right back into it and check in with a character we’ve not seen directly in quite some time. Oh John Andre, what oh what have you been up to?

(I have a preference towards the former option, but I would love to hear your opinion if you have one!)

As always, thank you for reading, comments and kudos are always appreciated, never necessary, but they do serve my motivation.

XOXO - Tav
The Refusal

Chapter Summary

Mary and Simcoe explore the increasingly tempting idea of intimacy on the streets of Manhattan during midday traffic. Ben’s tactics (and sexuality …) get called into question by one of his sergeants. Hewlett refuses medical assistance; Anna gives him an ultimatum.

Chapter Notes

I am afraid this update may well read as filler, but after what we went through last time it feels necessary. So in lieu of apologising, let’s just do the thing, shall we?

Warnings include but are not limited to: descriptions of violence and injury, attempted honour killings, cultural / class clashes (say that five times fast), foul language, sexuality and sexual activity, the American health care system, immigration and … a Green Card breakup. *gasp*

As always, thank you so much for reading and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Would you really want me like that?” John Graves Simcoe asked as he thumbed through the book Mary Woodhull had purchased to aid in expanding their alibi with erotic detail. As he spoke, she imagined him loosening his tie, using it to constrain her to the nearest lamppost and taking her there - right on the streets of Manhattan for all who dared to witness, his bloodstained hands gripping her bare skin as he fought with her nylons and knickers, forcing himself within her with the ferocity by which he kissed.

Her heart skipped with the hope that he secretly harboured similar sentiment towards her.

“You’ve already proven yourself to be inclined toward brutality,” she speculated, smiling, half in spite of herself as she heard his pace quicken.

“Hewlett asked for it,” he muttered, grabbing her wrist. She felt he pulse quicken under the pressure of his calloused fingers. Mary spun around to meet his gaze. John’s unblinking eyes betrayed nothing amorous or obscene. The quick, shallow breaths she felt on her neck as his lips gently grazed it however gave him away.

“Did Arnold?” she whispered.

“In a matter of speaking.”

John dropped the tote bag he was carrying as he cornered her against the side of a skyscraper. The manuals and manuscripts he had purchased hit the sidewalk with a thud. He lifted her chin, drawing her lips to his, unwilling to meet them.
“And here I presumed you only read the critically acclaimed,” he taunted, his words tickling her cheek as they left his mouth. After slowly caressing her jawline with his long fingers, he let it fall with her hopes.

“Why don’t you kiss me?” she asked.

“You have the wrong impression of me Mrs. Woodhull,” he answered, eyes shifting down to the paperback erotica on the pavement.

“In the two days I’ve known you you’ve nearly murdered two men.”

“I’m a warrior, yes, but not a monster. You wound me, Madame.”

John created some distance between his body and hers, not enough for Mary to inhale without being infected by the sweet, strong taste of his tea-drenched respiration; without the musky scent of his aftershave testing her resolve.

“What do you like?” she inquired.

“Poetry,” he responded with a slight cock of his head as if inviting her to answer an unspoken challenge.

“In bed?” Mary clarified. John’s hard stare broke.

He smiled, “should that change my answer? Rhythmical compulsion leading to an elevated sense of excitement and imaginative pleasure. Tell me, Mary, have you ever really fucked someone or have you just read about it?”

He leaned towards her as he spoke, reducing the inch that existed between them to a fraction, disillusioning Mary to the limits of her will. She put her arms around his broad shoulders, pulling him into a tight embrace as he lifted her off her feet.

“I’d offer to let you see my personal library, except -” his bed was currently occupied. His fingers began to fiddle with the hem of her tight skirt the way they did with everything. She questioned if he was consciously of this as she felt herself moisten, imagining them in engaging in their nervous dance within her body’s private ballroom.

“You can poetry slam me in a hotel bed anytime, John Graves.”

Taken slightly aback, he seemed caught between laughter and confusion. He choked on a sound that would not form a word. He blinked. Mary was surprised to see that his eyes we capable of closing. She took advantage of the short eclipse to plant a quick kiss on the tip of his long nose. He smiled slightly but said nothing.

“That was horrible, I -”

“Attempting to retreat are we?” he asked, spinning her once before setting her down.

“On my poor attempt at innuendo.”

“Should that suggest the offer is no longer open?”

“No, no I -” she smiled. She stammered. She struggled. She surrendered as his lips moved to concur hers. The world stopped as their tongues entangled, as she felt his fingers force their way under her skirt, tracing the line of her lacy thong. She tried to stifle her moans by burying her face
against his chest as once again she felt herself pressed between him and the cold, mirrored outer wall of an Upper East Side high-rise, imagining foreign dignitaries choking on their gin in a hotel lobby as they glimpsed New York dry – sex and smog and sirens.

Sirens.

Sirens.

“Shit,” she heard her lover say over the otherwise deafening droll of a squad car turning the corner. He pulled his hand back, wringing to rid it of her secretion. “I live here,” John clarified as Mary’s head turned, eyes squinted as she tried to make out the figures she imagined crying over the short civil disobedience which she had fantasized about turning to scandal moments before. “No one is home at this hour. No one saw. And if they did, so much the better for our alibi,” he briskly continued.

“Is that all I am to you? An alibi?” Mary asked.

John declined to answer as his eyes followed an ambulance around the corner. The ringing stopped – the street resumed its normal hectic hum, but John Graves Simcoe seemed to hear in it a battle cry.

Mentally he packed a musket. “Go back to work, Mary,” he said, abandoning inflection. “Go back to normal however it is that you want it defined. We ought not to have come this way. We ought not to have – you’re married - I’m –”

“Stop,” she pleaded, grabbing at the lapels of his suit - both in an effort to keep him from making an ill-advised charge to the front and to keep him from stepping back from the cliff on which they found themselves, leaving her alone to face the fall.

“I want you,” she choked, afraid of the words she longed to say, afraid of the implication, the consequence, and the man to whom she spoke them. Afraid of his reaction, rejection, reprisal. John could shift in an instant from willing to warlike. Mary had yet to define for herself which side of him she found more enticing. When he touched her, his hands felt colder than they had moments before.

“And what I want for you I fear I am not presently equipped to provide,” he said, taking her face in his manic, effeminate manner, “what is it that you see in me? You and I met by hiding – and losing – a corpse. I told you not an hour ago that I –that Hewlett. That Hewlett …” he trailed off. Swallowed. Removed his hands from her cheeks and put them rigidly at his sides. Shaking his head of whatever regret filled it, he shifted, his murmurs momentarily taking a different tone. “Bloody Hewlett,” he moaned. “Naturally his final act of retribution would be to cock-block me once more for the sake of old time.”

John allowed himself time to properly brood over the consequences of his actions before turning his attention once more to the commotion at the corner. People were stopping to gape at a calamity city dwellers were normally keen to ignore.

Mary paused to consider how ‘bloody’ Hewlett might actually be.

The memory of Arnold hitting her bumper of the car she was driving two nights ago resurfaced.

She recalled the fear she felt with John in the motel room when they witnessed their victim’s face projected on every international new network she could name. She recalled the fear she felt in the woods, the shame at being faced with her co-conspirator’s humanity, the comfort she took in his
arms as she wept in the bleach-drenched bathroom.

“John, it doesn’t have to be that way -” she started as she threw her arms around his waist. He argued, but let Mary’s limbs linger with the rest of her lascivious offerings he did not seem to trust himself to accept.

“It does. Mary, I don’t know what I’ve done that convinces you I warrant your sympathy or affection. I wish I could tell you something that might explain if not excuse my recent behaviour but in truth, I don’t entirely understand my own actions though circumstance necessitated them,” he rattled. “Twenty years of court-ordered therapy have done little to curb my unrest but I - I know. I know I could have stopped before the point of no return. I could have but I didn’t and I hate that I don’t know why. It is all quite acerb, my doctor told me on Tuesday morning – pissed drunk, as per his usual – that Hewlett was one of the few people in my life for whom fear was not the sole driver of his friendship. But he ought to have been afraid of me. You ought to be afraid of me, Mary Woodhull … weary, at a minimum,” he paused in self-pity, again averting his attention back to the commotion at the end of the block. “Everyone else is. Though I suppose it is not difficult for one to see why.”

Mary retracted her arms so that she might cross them in indication to her almost-lover that the only force he had to contend with at present was standing directly before him.

“You offer me protection, assistance, affection, validation. No one else ever has. Ever, John. Let me do the same for you. Come back to my office with me. We will hide out there. Wait until this dies down. You can’t do anything to help the situation and if you charge into your flat now, angry that your mate rang the police when he swore he’d let it go -”

“You don’t know Hewlett the way I do,” Simcoe spat back, matching her stance. “We’ve been here before. He and I. A few times at that. For all of his indecision, the lad knows what he is about. He wouldn’t simply betray a cause he finds some identification in. Not unless his life or liberty were truly at risk, and even then I suspect him far too torn to act. Maybe he -”

“We will wait to see what happens. Out here,” Mary said, cutting him off before blind speculation could be allowed to dictate. “John, you’re quivering and I’ve seen how quickly that can take and ugly turn. Wait. There is nothing you can do for Edmund, but if you meant anything you said about protecting me than please, please wait. I need you, too. And you John, you really need me.”

“As you wish,” he acquiesced with a sigh. He snatched the tote from the pavement and the pair made their way cautiously to the corner of the building to take a better assessment. Three squad cars were parked alongside the ambulance in the fire lane, tourists and teenagers were snapping photographs with their smart phones. For all of the commotion Mary could barely make scene of the scene.

“What is all this?” she asked in astonishment.

“He said he wouldn’t call the cops,” John repeated flatly. “To be honest I’m surprised he even managed it. Maybe he didn’t; maybe he’s dead and the sirens we heard were a dirge.”

Maybe you’re right, Mary thought, recalling the fear she felt in the woods.

“Remember, we both thought we had killed Arnold,” Mary said, cautioning his expectations – perhaps his hopes.

John kept his eyes fixed on the row of emergency vehicles as he countered, “Benedict Arnold is an American war hero who carried his bellicosity to Capitol Hill. He can take a punch. Hewlett is a
pallid, sickish, skinny book-nerd who has never been in a conflict he couldn’t buy his way out of. But now he is broke and very likely broken beyond repair.”

“He asked for this, offered -”

“You needn’t remind me,” John retorted. “You think it doesn’t injure me that even in defeat he deals me a moral blow? I could have stopped. I could have, but I didn’t. I punched him until he hit the floor. I kicked him after that. Until he stopped talking. And then he kept screaming and the sound! I wouldn’t be made to listen to that either. I grabbed him by the hair and shoved his repelling little face into the radiator. Just once. That was all it took. I heard cartilage crack against metal and bone. In an instant, there was blood everywhere. He’d lost consciousness. I’ve broken noses before, I’ve broken men before, but I’ve never seen anything like this. There was too much blood for what the occasion ought to have allowed. And then it hit me and I panicked, remembering that he takes Coumadin, as if there was any way I could have forgotten - even in a burst of anger - given our recent history.”

John turned to meet her gaze, the absence of expression made all the more haughty by the lightness with which he spoke. “This all started because eight weeks ago I didn’t think he deserved to die. I berated another of our friends to use his pharmaceutical connections to ensure that didn’t transpire. And now look at us. Look at this.”

“What is Cou-ma-din?”

“Blood thinners, you’re on blood thinners for fuck’s sake!” Anna Strong shouted. “Edmund please, just let them examine you.”

After a soul draining, sleepless night, she had awoken in her mother’s guest bedroom alone with her fears. Her fiancé had not returned from his midnight rendezvous nor had he rung. The only message she had in her inbox was from Jordan Akinbode, requesting her presence at Wachtell Lipton as he, evidently, needed supporting counsel for a class action suit he was set to bring to trial, and she, for the time being, needed a job. Something in it sounded suspicious, but the argument was solid and the interview was in an hour.

Anna pulled something from Chanel from the back of her mother’s closet, a relic of a little black dress that seemed office-appropriate and seemed like it would fit. Fifteen minutes of struggle suggested otherwise, but after enlisting the assistance of Spanx, control-top panty hose and her mother’s bewildered Polish cleaner, Anna Strong had – for a fleeting moment – felt like she had won a war in the form of a zipper. When she tried to breathe and the conflict began anew. The dress was set on mutual destruction. She would surely suffocate over the course of wearing it – that is, if the underwire from her old bra did not take her first - but these concerns had to be silenced. She had split ends and dark circles to contend with as well an address in another borough awaiting her grand entrance.

The blowout she had attempted to give herself the night before unable to stand its ground against the hellfire of humidity, Anna twisted her hair into a bun as she did nearly every morning, affixing bobby pins to the places where her thick, loose curls were keen to spring out without warning. A quick glance in the foyer’s full-length mirror informed Anna that she was just as delusional about her physical attributes as the woman she resembled and whose clothes she had costumed herself in. ‘Little wonder Edmund can’t maintain an erection,’ she scoffed, again marking his absence.
He still had yet to ring.

He would not until she found herself in Jordan Akinbode’s office, shifting nervously a chair at his desk waiting for him to speak as the call went to voice mail.

“Why don’t you sit on the couch,” her would-be employer offered.

“The couch?”

Jordan gestured.

“Is it comfortable?” he asked after another minute had passed.

Anna was not comfortable at all. When she told him so he offered her a salary of sixty-thousand plus benefits without a single follow up question. “I really hate that couch,” he related after she accepted his offer. Something in it sounded suspicious, but the argument about the sofa was solid. He told her he would swing by Whitehall that evening with the case files which she would need to spend the weekend reviewing. He needed her in Albany Monday morning ready for a siege.

Anna wondered if her new found employment had been arranged by Inspector Tallmadge, who stood next to Jordan in a high school basketball team photo on his desk; by her mother, who spent the better part of the night before telling her to forget the tavern and move forward with her life and may have offered the man who had filed a class action against the city a deal for playing a part; or by Jordan’s girlfriend Abigail, who had been singing the same chorus to her for years.

Anna Strong felt her spirit wane.

Edmund Hewlett did nothing to quell her doubts.

“I have big news!” Anna announced to her fiancé over the phone, sitting on a park bench changing from heels into Chucks.

“Ah, concerning Akinbode?” Edmund enquired.

“Wait, you set this up?”

“No, no, no. It was, that is, Akinbode swung round this morning and mentioned that he had a position open and planned on giving you a ring. It is wonderful news Anna, that is, ah … if it is what you want.”

What I want, Anna thought.

Perhaps it was just his pace of speech, but something in the statement shook her.

Anna did not know if he had meant it as a question - if the past forty-eight hours called everything for question for him as it did for her. She considered her answer.

At the time, all Anna had wanted was to get out of these borrowed clothes, order take-out and watch reruns Sports Center while catching up on what her new workload might entail. She wanted to cuddle up next to her almost-lover, occasionally asking to borrow his calculator to check figures, exchange a kiss or respond to the broadcast - arguing over the commentators about what constituted a foul with a man from an island that clearly did not understand sport as a whole.

She had wanted to accept that she could not alone control what the future had in store. She had wanted her fiancé to call a ceasefire to his personal battel with reality. He tried to assure her in
frantic bouts followed by long pauses over her three-block walk to his mate’s flat that he now had their financial situation under control.

Without asking her to stay with him in Setauket.

Without encouraging her to cease the chance at hand.

Choking out a promise that she was on her way up, she disconnected the call – wishing she could just as easily disconnect from the cruel reality that faced her. Anna loved the law as much as anyone who’s husband-to-be was under wrongful suspicion of abduction and murder possibly could. She had been an exceptional student; she had no doubt that she would prove an exceptional solicitor as well if that were what was required. Her goals had not changed over the course of a short, strange conversation with a friend from university; Anna had hoped her desire to see them realized to sustain her though late nights and long distance on its own.

She was not getting any support from her partner.

She had wanted Edmund to continue to share in her secret dreams. She had wanted Edmund to believe in her as much as he had a morning past.

More than anything, however, she wanted to believe in herself as she once had.

Anna glanced at herself in the mirrored glass the covered Simcoe’s building. The reflection, or rather, the recognition caused her to feel ill. She looked in that moment something like the woman she had long tried to be. Sleek, slender, slouched over just slightly enough that her height did not signal her. She straightened her posture briefly, surrendered to the piercing underwire and to the self-doubt of youth.

She was as tall as most men she knew; she was soft curves covering a strong, sturdy frame. She remembered counting carbs and calories in college, the hair colour appointments, cosmetics, exercise regiments and every additional form of sacrifice and self-deprivation in which she participated to better resemble her physically perfect roommate. She remembered Tuesday’s dread upon discovering that Mary Grant was now Mary Woodhull. Her childhood sweetheart had ultimately chosen a petit, wisp of a woman over her, exactly as she had always expected he would. She remembered Wednesday morning, staring at herself for the first time since Edmund painfully explained that he was unable to love her physically, fretting that it was her body, rather than his, that was in the way.

The corseted creature staring back at her with her own wide eyes looked as much like Mary Grant – now Mary Woodhull – as any real girl could ever hope to. Anna felt hideous.

On Monday she had imagined herself gorgeous; on Thursday, she realised that she had been.

She untied her hair; let the breeze sing through it before gathering it again into a loose bun. Messy. Lazy. Hers.

She smiled.

In the lift, she imagined stripping out of the Chanel to her almost-lover’s somewhat hesitant caress. She imagined things eventually returning to the way they had been before learning that Benedict Arnold had last been seen in DeJong’s Tavern after hanging up her business garments for good. She imagined Edmund, their future wedding, the life he pretended to leave for the love he perhaps had. She imagined the sort of life she hoped they might one day lead together.

It was then she realised that her aspirations were antithetical to much of what Edmund offered.
After knocking twice, Anna played with the signet ring she wore on a necklace.

She wanted Edmund.

She wanted Edmund to want what and as she did.

Thirty minutes later, however, the only thing Anna Strong desired was for the man she loved – the man who swore before God and his might and righteous vengeance (in the form of New York’s finest) that he loved her as well – to grant her enough respect to recognize the validity of her more immediate, concrete concerns.

She wanted him to file a police report.

She wanted him to go to hospital.

She wanted him to redirect his quiet rage from Tallmadge to her. It has been she who suggested the strategy that saw his perfect face pummelled into a canvas of blood and bruises. He was not angry with Simcoe, or so he kept insisting. She wanted to understand why.

She wanted him to say something to the paramedic in response to the concerns he, Anna, and the six police officers present shared – something, that was, besides -

“I’m certain it is not serious.”

Anna Strong wanted to scream.

“Edmund!”

He gave her a pitied gaze. She turned away, unable to look at the battle scars wrought by her underestimation of Simcoe’s infatuation and aggression. Anna looked up, willing the tears in her eyes to evaporate before they again be permitted to pool.

“Love I … ah, well you see, there is the matter of health coverage. At the moment, that is I haven’t any -” Edmund stammered. “and I fear that anything the good paramedic might pronounce could prove … rather expensive.” Anna bit her lower lip, remembering what she had overheard Edmund explain to her mother. He let his siblings believe that their trust funds had been partially depleted to cover his extensive medical and rehabilitative costs rather than allow his father to face the shame of fraud and failure in their eyes.

She wondered if there was a part of him that believed the lie he himself had constructed. She looked to the medic for help.

“Alright sir, I’m just go’need you to sign this waver,” the emergency medical technician answered in a deep, throaty sigh. He met Anna’s confused stare with the tired eyes of having already worked an eighteen-hour shift as she began to chastise him for betraying the Hippocratic Oath.

“I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being, whose illness may affect the person's family and economic stability. My responsibility includes these related problems, if I am to care adequately for the sick,” he recited, taking the pen and clipboard back form a man he knew to be an illegal immigrant surrounded by law enforcement who understandably did not wish to add bankruptcy to what the paramedic himself suspected must be a considerable collection of concerns. “You’d be surprised how often this happens, Ma'am.”

“I’m appalled,” Anna spat, bitter in her defeat. She glanced at Edmund as she spoke. When he offered her a weak smile in concession, she had half a mind to step in where John Graves Simcoe
had surrendered to conscious. Her fiancé must have read the promised death in her stare, retreating a half step before darling to open his swollen lips.

“Ah, my dear -”

“Mr. Hewlett,” Tallmadge interrupted, “You are aware that under the Affordable Care Act it is illegal to be uninsured in the State of New York.”

Anna smiled at him, surprised to find an unlikely ally, surprised to find the law on her side.

“Ah – yes officer, you see the matter -”

“It is Detective Inspector,” Tallmadge glared.

“Yes, yes, quite right, DI … Tallmadge,” Edmund responded with practiced disinterest designed to degrade. “I do … have coverage, that is to say, I will come Monday once I fill out the required documentation with Human Resources when I begin my new job. As per the legislation you yourself just sighted, my coverage will retro date to the first of March. If need be,” he said to Anna, “I will seek medical attention the moment I know the billing address for the claim.”

“Not if you are dead,” she replied flatly.

“Oh Anna. Now, now,” he said. She could not tell if he meant to sound dismissive or soothing. He tried to put an arm around her; she stepped away.

“You have a valid work permit?” Yilmaz asked sceptically.

“Until the first of August,” Edmund answered.

“Mr. Hewlett, I want to advise you that come Monday the insurance vendor might deny the claim if you fail to file a police report,” Tallmadge said.

“I have no intention to take John to court of this little bout of nonsense. Lads fight, Inspector. No need to waste police time and in turn tax revenue dragging it out, would you disagree?”

“Regardless if you refuse to press charges or not there are other ways in which allowing me to do my job would play to your benefit, Mr. Hewlett.”

“Ah yes … your job. Tell me Inspector, is the NYPD so understaffed that their star detective should be made to respond to such a minor incident?” Edmund mocked.

“You know well why I am here. Mr. Hewlett,” the inspector warned. “You may be many things, but ignorant is not among them.”

“Though stupid might be,” his sergeant muttered, winning her a reluctant smile from Anna and a side glare from her boss.

“What I am saying sir, is simply signing the report verifying that your injuries were sustained in a drunken altercation with John Graves Simcoe -” Tallmadge started again.

“I have the right to refuse.”

“On what ground would you?”

“My sentiment exactly,” Anna whispered, nudging Edmund lightly. He winced at her touch.
“Sir -” Tallmadge began.

“I’m alright, I assure you,” Edmund cut him off in the same patronizing tone.

Yilmaz threw up her arms. “We’re not getting anywhere,” she declared, signalling for uniform to leave the scene. “If you change your mind, Mr. Hewlett, you have up to two years to file a report, though let me be clear, the longer you wait the more difficult of a time you are bound to have proving that you were under duress preventing you from doing so sooner. You have my number?”

“Yilmaz, that was not your call to make,” Ben said from the passenger seat in her squad car, noting the irony in that he was forced to remind her of the small fact that she had been passed over for promotion due to office politics. Four years prior, it seemed something Hatice Yilmaz would never forget. She had been – and remained, to Ben’s ire – the more experienced detective of the two of them. When this argument proved unmoving to the newly elected District Attorney years earlier, Yilmaz had weaponized a faith Ben had never known her to actively practice. As punishment for her protest (which had led to the formation of Muslim Officer’s Union that no one – especially the Human Resources division – had wanted) the still-sergeant found herself assigned to his unit. Ben had implored his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for deliverance from the decisions that he had no hand in making. He often still did.

“Guess what Boss, wasn’t yours either. Your little frog prince up there was completely within his rights.” Yilmaz hissed as she ignited the engine. “You know what your problem is? You don’t have any friends, Ben,” she said as though he needed a reminder. “Hewlett and Simcoe have every reason to hate one another. And they probably do, you might really be on to something there. But that line of inquiry is not going to lead to anything that will crack this case. Find out why they love each other instead. There is your motive.”

“They don’t,” Ben dismissed her. The vehicle jolted between drive and reverse as his subordinate attempted to escape sideways parking.

“Maybe not in the way the Bible teaches,” she said as she honked at oncoming traffic.

“What are you suggesting?”

Yilmaz stopped, put the car into neutral and turned to meet his gaze.

“They are guests in this country, these primary suspects of yours. They have different values and moral standards that you may hope to recognize but that you’ll never truly understand. You need to try, Ben. Especially with Hewlett, you need to try. Hate is universal. Love is specific. I’ve been a cop for over a decade, and I still think that love - or rather the fucking awful forms in which it presents itself - is the incitement behind most crime.”

Ben considered this fleetingly.

“So you buy Anna’s explanation that the fight was over her?” he asked.

“Not for a minute.”

“Then?”
“Unlike you, I was uniform when I started. One of my first calls when I was fresh from the academy was to the apartment of a family friend. I grew up with the daughter - beaten beyond fucking recognition after her brother discovered that she was in a relationship that their parents couldn’t approve of. I think it later came out that he had acted on his mother’s orders. Doesn’t matter. Shit like this happens all the time in South Paterson. What does matter is the brother was realised from police custody after charges were dropped. The girl survived, eventually married a man her parents picked out from the homeland and bore him three sons in as many years. Good for her, I guess. Still fucking close to her brother, too. And to her parents who commissioned the whole thing. It is bullshit, yeah?”

“Yeah,” Ben agreed.

Yilmaz did not seem to hear him, continuing without pause. “But you know what? I am jealous as all fuck. Not for the reasons you’d recognize, but because her family loved her enough that they were willing to potentially sacrifice their liberty to spare her from an embarrassment of her own making.”

“That’s -”

“Baba knows about me and Braxton,” Yilmaz confessed. “I can sleep in my bed at night knowing he would never move to end the affair, but you know? Sometimes I lie there with my eyes wet and open wondering what I ever did to warrant such scorn. Love isn’t the same for everyone, that is what I am getting at. Figure out what it is for Edmund Hewlett if you want to implement him so badly.”

As much as he suddenly felt for her, he felt she was fundamentally mistaken.

“But the law, the law is the same for everyone in America, regardless of colour, creed, gender, national origin -”

“But we don’t live in the same county! None of us. Not you, not me, not Hewlett or Simcoe or Arnold or to bring this round to someone you actually care about, not Thomas fucking Jefferson.”

Ben sighed, wondering if his indignation over the reassignment was apparent in his exhaustion to everyone who working under him, wondering if it was beginning to effect his work on a whole.

“You know I can’t even get into the case files that I myself put together?”

“Seriously? Did you not get Brax’s text? The case is yours again if you want it.”

Ben had forgotten about the images he had been sent while on the phone with Scotland Yard. He pulled out his phone, “We have to solve this one first,” he said, embittered, waiting for the messaging app to pull up.

“Honestly how did you ever make Inspector?”

“Yilmaz,” he cautioned.

She was silent for a moment as he looked at the images he had been sent of the invoice on Martha Dandridge’s desk.

“Can you drive any faster? I need to get back to headquarters. Immediately if not sooner.”

Yilmaz gave him a cheeky half smile.
“You know when I decided I wanted a career in law enforcement?” she asked as she turned the siren on, ignoring dispatch when they phoned to ask what the emergency was.

“When?” Ben inquired.

“After Nine-Eleven.”

It was not what he expected.

“At the mosque on Friday we were told to go up to every man and woman we saw in uniform and that them for their service. I don’t know if I ever believed in Allah the way I was instructed to but I sure as hell believe in America. And do you think that anyone has ever come up to me and said ‘Thank you for your service to this beautiful country of ours?’ No. I’m spat at and my credentials are called into question by everyone I meet. I still love my country and what it represents.”

“Maybe no one thanks you because you don’t push for battery charges. I needed a reason to arrest Simcoe. To formally arrest him and you blew it,” he answered as they pulled into the car park at 1PP.

“Aha! I knew it! I knew I could get you to admit it!” she laughed. “So Simcoe is the target of your inquiry. At what point were you planning on telling the team? Ben, we can’t support you if you -”

“Simcoe can’t know. And neither can any of his cohorts until we establish motive.”

“It is obvious isn’t it?”

He stared at her hard. “I don’t think you know what love is.”

“I don’t think your one to judge. Had my ass cheeks spread wide open in evidence this morning; when is the last time you did the same?”

“I didn’t need to know that and I resent the allegation.”

“I could have meant a girl,” she winked. “Let me and Russo switch. Let me handle Simcoe, if he is unhinged enough to bully his mate I am sure he will do something to give us grounds to bring him in. I could sort him in five minutes.”

“We are on the same page there, but Russo is training Sanchez; let’s let them have the easy victory. I need you to work on Ferguson, get me everything you can on the Hewletts.”

They shared a brief smile.

What he decline to add was that Russo was training Sanchez to replace her. Ben had recently written an evaluation recommending promotion. What he declined to add was ‘thank you for serving this beautiful country of ours.’ He did not know at the time of writing the recommendation that he had signed a death warrant. He would not get a chance to express any patriotic gratitude before her closed-casket funeral.

And Yilmaz - owing to her other virtues - would not provide him with one.

“Always the hardest assignments,” she complained. “Is it because I am the only one who figured out that you’re gay?”

“It is because you are the only one who doesn’t give a damn about being written up for insubordination,” Ben said as he slammed the passenger door.
They had been fighting for the past hour, which was to say, Anna had been – Edmund, for his part refused to engage. Her ammunition was rapidly depleting, he had yet to fire a single shot.

And yet he had won the battle.

And so he had lost the war.

Anna Strong fidgeted with the clasp on the necklace holding her engagement ring close to her heart.

“I can’t do this Edmund,” she said. “I can’t.”

“Ah, Anna -” he started. His lip was swollen, his front tooth chipped. “Can I be of any assistance?”

“Here.”

His hand caressed her shrunken waste as he spun her around. Anna shivered as he ran his fingers through her messy hair, lifting it off the back of her neck. She closed her eyes. He ignored the clasp with which she had been struggling, electing instead the zipper of her high-cut designer dress. She forgot her fury in his embrace. Anna held her breath. Edmund kissed her softly down her spine as it slowly presented itself to him. When the fabric snagged on her bra he pulled her body closer to his, pressing her breasts for give, electing to continue squeeze and stroke and whisper honeyed words after he had gotten over his obstacle. Anna heard him take short, sharp inhale as she rested her head back on his shoulder. Her soft hums gave way to a small shriek as the underwire took sharp aim at her heart. She explained, willing him to ignore it. He apologised while helping to free her from her undergarments the dress that covered them entirely.

“How can you be sorry for causing me discomfort? Look what I’ve done to you,” she said, afraid to turn around and do just that. Afraid to see his face.

She feared ruining the fantasy, waking up from the dream of the man who read poetry to her in dead languages and who stopped midway through to explain the finer points of Latin grammar; who laughed at her bad jokes and fixed broken things. The man who looked at the stars and dared her to look as well, who brought them even closer when she confessed she was afraid to climb on the tavern’s the roof. Edmund Hewlett had explained myths when she tired of maths, comparing her beauty to the goddesses and nymphs immortalized in the night sky. She had been afraid to love him then.

She had been afraid to be happy. She had been afraid of building happiness on what they both acknowledged to be a lie.

“None of this is of your making Anna. None of it.”

Lies, she saw now, were all they would ever have.

“I told you to make it look as though you were fighting over me. Me. And you – oh God, Edmund. What have I done? I can’t even look at you,” she said as saline dampened her cheeks.

“Then don’t,” he replied softly, wiping her tears, covering her eyes as he leaned over to kiss her.
Anna could taste the iron when their lips met. The paramedic estimated that he had lost a pint of blood. Not life threatening, she repeated to herself. Not life threatening. She pulled back, looking at the side his battered face. It had always been something of a mystery, a kaleidoscope, constantly changing, rotating, revealing. It was as though she never saw the same visage twice. She saw twenty in the span of a two-minute conversation. She would have given anything to see something even faintly recognisable once more.

Anna stepped away and spun around, brushing the hair she loved to tussle into the school-boy style that – even with its loss of pigment – made him look impossibly too young for her. There was a cut on his forehead as there was on his lip; the circles under his blood-flushed eyes were stained with saffron and indigo, his nose swollen and kinked.

“How could he – how could he -” she began to stammer again.

“It is not much of a stretch, physically speaking. Simcoe has a good ten inches on me and -” he laughed. He coughed. He winced.

“Oh God, Edmund, what happened?” Anna asked as she began to unbutton his shirt, seeing signs of strangulating and countless other contusions as she removed the blood-stained garment.

“I’m alright love, it is just cosmetic,” he replied. Dismissively. As he had to each and every one of her inquiries that afternoon.

Danger, Anna decided, was only attractive in the abstract.

“You’re not. Edmund, I’m not. Can’t you see that?”

“Love … Your plan – rather that is to say – the course of action that you suggested that served to inspire the route I took, it is working, Anna. Don’t you see? A few days from now we will all be able to forget this whole awful business with Senator Arnold. In a few weeks’ time we will have nothing to worry us at all. I promise you that -”

“I can’t. Edmund. I can’t. I can’t and I won’t. This was a mistake. Nothing you hope to offer is worth the risk of losing you.”

“You won’t. Darling, you won’t. I’m here.”

He wasn’t. That much had always been plain.

He was lost in some delusion of what it might take to make her fall in love.

Anna feared him, feared for him, feared losing him to an ugly ideal.

“I already have lost you! Jesus fucking Christ, look at yourself! You are not the man I fell in love with. And I … I am the one to blame. I knew. I knew from the beginning that I could never,” she unclenched the clasp on her necklace, catching the ring before it fell. “I should have never tried to alter the terms of our agreement. I should have never agreed to take part in your Green Card scheme in the first place. I love you. I loved you from the start.”

He pulled her against him. She mustered her reluctance but it proved a poor defence against the feeling of his bare torso against her own. She cried again into his shoulder, hating the people they seemed to reveal in each other. Hating his darkness, hating that he seemed so willing to accept hers.

“I love you, too,” he whispered. “I am certain that I have for far, far longer than I dared to let on,
even to myself. Anna, I know I’m not – that is, much experienced with romance or with women or relationships in general, but believe me when I say with all sincerity that I would do anything to add to your happiness, and with all humility that I won’t always get it right. But I’m trying, Love. I adore you and I would do most anything to assure you of that.”

“Is this how your love manifests itself, Edmund? You have so many high-minded notions that you can illustrate so beautifully with words but they might all have been better written in a long-forgotten romance novel from centuries past. You claim your intentions are born form respect, but it seems you haven’t the remotest understanding of that abstract. Respect would be hearing my pleas when I begged you to let the paramedic run a series of tests. Respect would be staying by my side, holding me last night when I begged you not to go to your business meeting. I don’t need you to buy my dreams for me. All I wanted – I’ll repeat, all I wanted was for you to apply for a line of credit with me. With me, Edmund. Not behind my back. And sure as all fuck not in a way that got you arrested for suspicion of murder and involves single-handedly slugging it out with a number of different banking institutions and agencies of espionage. Not in a way that involved asking John Graves Simcoe to actually pummel you to service an alibi!”

“Anna please, you don’t understand.”

She waited. No further explanation was offered. She tore herself from his grasp and turned away.

“And whose fault might that be?” she asked, picking her mother’s vintage dress off the floor. “You may well be an honest man but God damn I have never met anyone more vague. I can’t believe, I still can’t fucking believe that you never thought to mention anything about your youth to me, though you had no issue whatsoever over being open about your parentage with my mother. Why can’t you talk to me?” she pleaded. “Why won’t you?”

Edmund nodded and began to pace. Anna was nearly fully dressed again before he elected to speak. His voice was steady, practiced control over the pain his own admissions cased him.

“I don’t talk about home often because I fear I don’t have one to return to. I fear I never had one to begin with. I would rather have died in New York than gone back to life in Scotland. My father has barely been able to look at me since the stroke. My mother, her interest in parenting only began to manifest itself when I was bedridden and unable to protest. I suffer the resentment of the rest of the family and all who know us as a result. And I’m sorry - I truly am - if anything I told your mother in duress last night lead you to believe that by virtue of my blood line I ought to naturally possess some unobtainable standard of nobility which you’d clearly require of me regardless of my present means, which, mind – I have always been upfront about. Always.”

There it was. Anna swallowed. He resented her greed as much as she resented it in herself.

“I don’t talk about my past because it would only serve to further your disappointment and my shame,” he said.

“I’m not-” she started. Stopped. He had never lied to her directly. She could not continue to lie to him.

“And you’re right, Anna. You’re right. I am a victim to my own authoritative tendencies and though it was not my intention, my instinct was to do everything within my ability to seize as much control of the situation we woke up to yesterday morning as I could. And that is how my love manifests itself. I know you don’t believe me, I know it may not seem like it, but everything I have done or dared has been for you and you alone.”

“And that is what I can’t take. DeJong’s should not be the hill you die on. My dream of owning the
bar I mange –managed - doesn’t have to happen right away. I thought it did. I was wrong. Nothing is worth the expense of your liberty and safety. I’ve changed my mind. I’ve changed a lot. I don’t want your money, Edmund. I don’t want to want it. This – it, it is over. It has to be. I don’t like the person you make me and I hate the person I’ve made you.”

“You … you can’t mean that.”

She could not lie to him.

“You struggle to believe it, I know you do, but you have nothing you need to compensate for. Nothing. You don’t need to compensate me for loving you, and I should not be made to pay a price for that privilege. Furthermore, I can fight my own battles; if you respect me as you claim to, you’ll respect that. I got the job working for Jordan. Maybe I’ll work at the law firm for two years while I save up enough money to pay back my student debt and you establish a line of credit. Maybe it will be five. Maybe things won’t work out according to plan at all and you know what, that is fine. Because I know that you believe in dreams. And me. And Edmund, my love, I believe in you. And that is enough. For me, it could be enough.”

“Do you mean that?”

“I do. But I don’t wish to marry you, Edmund.” She fidgeted with the ring she held in her hand, “Not under whatever pretense we have arranged that makes you think that my love to you is tied to some idea wealth or class or legal status or whatever it is driving you to neurosis.”

She walked over and kissed him. He did not return it.

“Anna-”

“Edmund. I’m not going to take a knee and I don’t wish you to either. I don’t want ten thousand dollars. I don’t want half a million. I don’t want to be put on a pedestal while simultaneously being patronized. I want to be your partner. I want to be level with you as I ask plainly, will you be mine?”

He clenched his jaw. Swallowed. Then spoke.

“There are some things that you’d really ought to know.”

Chapter End Notes

... that seems like a good place to cut off.

South Paterson is an area of NYC also known as Little Istanbul, the largest Turkish-American immigrant community in the United States. Stories like the one Yilmaz told happen in Little Istansuls everywhere.

I have no further contextual notes for you this week, so lovely faces, it seems this is where I bid you farewell until academia allows (or demands) me to post the rest of this conversation (and the fifty-thousand to follow it.) I will get back to burdening you
with more plot soon.

Comments and Kudos and the things writers typically say about them, thanks for reading, XOXO - Tav.

Up Next: Dirty Laundry
The Laundry

Chapter Summary

Anna does laundry, Hewlett and Simcoe air theirs … and then Hewlett does it on the washer, and just about everywhere else in Simcoe's flat.
Ayyyy boy! Get you some!

Chapter Notes

Happy Easter!

I know it has been a while, sorry about that. Our last chapter ended with Anna Strong asking Edmund Hewlett what should have been a simple yes or no question. In this chapter, he takes his sweet time answering. Hew does have a way of complicating things … and I am not going to front, I don’t know that I managed to make him seem sympathetic enough on the whole this go around. He mentioned a few chapters back - lord help me, it has been so long that even I can’t remember when – that there was something tragic in that he and Simcoe knew other as adults. This update may offer an amendment, or at least some further insight to that observation.

That aside, this is a fairly heavy chapter. Should we do the thing? Oh, oh yes, we should.

Warnings: explicit sexual content, childhood trauma / traumatized children, abandonment, politicised and casual racism, human and drug trafficking, guilt, speech impediments, illness, immigration … and length. This update weighs in at just under 20K words and I am so sorry. I have no one to blame but myself.

That said, shall we?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Anna Strong was livid.

At her almost-love.

At his abuser.

At herself.

She continued to scrub at the silken shirt’s bloodstains against her former fiancé’s objections to her ‘assaulting a high-thread count silk blend with an acid and base simultaneously’ from his perch on the toilet beside her in the flat’s small washroom. From his new throne. The only one, to Anna’s mind, of which he might now be considered worthy. She barked back at him in a moment of pause, as she pulled her unzipped dress back over her shoulders, that he was fortunate the hydrogen peroxide he was convinced would damage his fine clothing was no longer being used to treat the
wounds to his face.

In this, it seemed, the two were in agreement.

In might well have been the only matter on which that could be said on this particular Thursday afternoon in early March. Edmund made another quip about the pain she had put him through in building a stint for his nose being worse than the punch itself. Again, Anna did not laugh, feeling that she herself had been made the punchline of a particularly cruel joke. She glanced at the signet ring she had offered back to him, unceremoniously laid to rest with the question it contained on the bathroom counter amidst more product than Anna cared to number. For a fleeting moment, she considered the hair oils and pore cleansers belonged to Mary Woodhull; that even when it came to faking love, her once-friend had her at a loss.

“How long have they been pretending to fuck?” Anna asked.

“Who? Ah – Simcoe and Mrs. Woodhull? Few days. Since Tuesday if I am being made to guess. Why do you ask?”

Anna did not respond. Instead, she pushed the sign of her sham and shame behind a bottle of scented soap after deciding to employ its content in her sanguine struggle.

“Oh, you really ought not, that is, I’d much rather you didn’t -” Edmund began to inveigh on his shirt’s behalf.

“Is that your answer then?” she barked, glancing between him and the place where she knew their ring to be.

“Um. Anna,” she heard Edmund swallow. “Love, you can’t possibly appreciate -”

“And who’s fault is that?” Anna spat. Her ex-fiancé looked down at the tiled floor.

There were few things that he could have said to her proposal to make her truly regret having given her heart and offered her hand. The manner in which he had responded, however, had done wonders to pull her out of the dream she had been in since he began to smile around her. The worries that had darkened the earliest days of their original agreement, the times when Anna felt herself falling for a man who seemed too interested and infatuated with his intellectual pursuits to pay her much mind, were returned with full force.

Anna adjusted her borrowed Chanel again, ignoring Edmund as he asked if she wanted help zipping it. She focused on the sound of the nailbrush scraping against his Armani; half hoping that Edmund’s shallow worries had warrant - that the material would unravel as easily as her expectations of him had.

She gazed at what she could make of her reflection in the mirror over the sink, hung too high for her to get a proper take of how red and raw she imagined her face as looking from the physical labour in which she was engrossed, from the tears she refused to let fall. She glanced over at Edmund on occasion. Sometimes he would offer a smile, a quip, a small remembrance of the man she had fallen in love with, of the man who might have one day loved her had she not impatiently, impulsively confessed her feelings to him nights ago in the same breath as a financial plea.

The latter, it seemed, was all he had heard.

In – or perhaps, Anna feared – as his response to her proposal, Edmund had confessed that he had gambled their marriage away on the tavern using her love as collateral.
“In order to ensure Simcoe’s investment, I agreed to the terms of his bet: if in twelve weeks the trust has seen a return sufficient to purchase the business, I will do so in my name, eliminating my need to wed myself for the sake of paperwork. You’d continue to manage it, we would –presumably – continue to date, and after my thesis I would sign it over to you. Should my ill-gotten market predictions not pan out, Simcoe will have the honour of purchasing DeJong’s for you. As of this morning it seems, however, that the former is the far more likely outcome of this little venture in which we find ourselves engaged.”

“Do you mean to keep true to your promise?” she had blinked, the words still setting.

“I don’t know that I can. At the same time, it would be impossible for me not to.” A long pause had followed, owing nothing, it seemed, to Edmund’s otherwise dithered speech or indecision. “If John can’t trust me at my word, we have a lot more at risk than simply … a marriage. Anna, truly this can wait, can it not? You don’t properly understand the situation we are in.”

“What about all the pretty promises you made to me?” she conjured.

“Have I somehow failed you in those regards as well?” he sneered.

Anna had again apologised for the nudes she had sent the night before to another man, for the hurtful things she had said after their love failed to manifest into a physical expression. Edmund looked dejected, but assured her that his feelings for her had not fallen victim to base attacks. That he loved her for who she was, all that she was, despite all that she did.

Pretty words. Empty ones.

Her phone beeped again with a new text message to add to the thirteen she had received since hanging up on Dr Wakefield, who, for his part, seemed otherwise more concerned with a fictive E-Coli breakout in a private kindergarten than with assisting her in the task of tending to a man too stubborn to seek professional medical assistance. The good doctor had apologised over Skype when Anna first rang, saying that his office was simply too busy with panicked mothers reacting to a complaint Judge Woodhull had made against the institution to give her live video instruction in bandages and braces. She periodically received a text or two of instruction when Edmund’s teammate tired of his toddlers. This too managed to annoy her. She had long since finished playing physician and was keen to ignore the text - as she had the past seven - until seeing it was from Abe, something she announced to her ungrateful patient as his eyes followed hers to the device.

“What is it?” Hewlett asked. If he refused to elaborate on the struggles that defined his friendships, Anna reasoned, so too could she.

“Take off your trousers,” she replied.

“Does this mean you forgive me?” he laughed.

“It means that there is a stain on your pant leg that needs removing.”

“Anna” he gasped. “These must be dry cleaned.”

“It is not up for debate.”

“No, truly it is not,” he agreed, raising an index finger as though he meant to scold her. “I fear I must insist on this matter -”

“Edmund!” she shouted, not for the first time that afternoon and certainly not for the last.
“If you truly want to spend the evening assaulting textiles, there is a pillowcase that looks to suggest Simcoe had intended to smother me before deciding it better to simply throw a bag of frozen veg on my face,” he said bitterly as he stood, making his way to the only doorframe within the flat.

Only Edmund Hewlett could manage to speak in such a manner, annoyed by the nature of her distraction technique, disinterested in the attempt that had been made on his person that necessitated it.

“Simcoe tried to suffocate you?” Anna challenged, trying to regain control of her own volume. “I’m sorry – how can you, honestly, stand there and defend him -”

“How can I not?” Edmund gaped. “It is the least of what he is owed.”

Their eyes met without connecting. “While you are out there,” Anna quipped, “do me a favour and switch on Fox News. I’m sure they are still running round-the-clock Arnold coverage. I could do to hear one of his speeches on ‘how immigrants are ruining this beautiful country of ours’ about now. For the first time I find myself in concurrence.”

“Yours. It is your country, Anna. Not mine.” Edmund removed his trousers and shoved them into her hands with a force she did not expect.

“What do you possibly have to gain out of covering for a man with no self-control?” she demanded as he again made a move to exit.

Edmund paused.

“Everything I do … everything I’ve done has been solely for your benefit. How do you fail to see that?”

“I never asked you to let John actually injure you.”

“I had no choice,” he said. Through he did not face her; she could tell he spoke behind clenched teeth.

“Because of a bet?” she stressed. She hoped he would note her equalled aggravation and dismay.

“Because if I fail to I could go to prison for the rest of my life. We signed an ironclad contract, you can take a look, Akinbode wrote it up. The bet is not in its contents but, ah! Anna, Darling - it was needs must; otherwise, our little trading scheme might raise unwanted interest. If the coppers start – never mind. The point I’m rather struggling to make is that I can’t let Simcoe pay for my poor judgement. Not again.”

“You’re not making any sense. None of this makes any fucking sense! Edmund how long exactly do you plan to let John ruin you?”

He spun around on his heel, speaking quickly, his words almost indiscernible under the stress of a hardened accent. “Ruin me? Everything I am I owe to him in a roundabout way. You simply don’t understand.”

“Whose fault is that?” she asked again, adding in warning, “Don’t make me your enemy, Edmund.”

“I didn’t draw the lines.”
Anna tried to step back. Having little room to manoeuvre she tripped into the counter, scattering some of Simcoe’s shiny bottles with a thud. Edmund reached out to her as though he expected her to fall. When panic passed his hands remained, tension turning tender.

“Ah, Anna,” he sighed, sliding into a kiss. All Anna could taste was the bitter burn of disinfectant. She pushed him gently, gracing his broken lip. The swelling, she noted, had greatly reduced. The sting, it seemed, remained.

“I know you think he is something of a brother to you,” Anna began. Edmund looked for a moment as though she had slapped him.

“A brother?” he scoffed as he realised her, took a step back and rubbed his temples. He paused for longer than he likely intended, his face twisting in anguish or disgust at Anna’s insinuation. He lowered his eyes as not to meet hers directly. “A second cousin, once removed, mum’s side, perhaps.”

Hearing his shame, she longed for his silence.

He spoke.

In 2002, Scotland was experiencing the renewed sense of nationalism born of devolution at the same time it was experiencing large-scale migration for the first time, due, Edmund reminded her, to a war an attack across the Atlantic began a year prior. A number of his father’s less profitable properties had been transformed into private refugee asylums and business flourished under the tax benefit this so-said charity allowed. Edmund’s personal investment in the new socio-political situation had been limited to echoes of the press: Holyrood’s policies were more welcoming than those of Westminster, the electorate itself more liberal, and so the experience and experiment with multi-culturalism would surely run far smoother than it had in the sixties in the south. He found himself in passive agreement with the general assessment and gave it no further thought.

That was until disenchantment set in across a portion of the population he had little to do with.

That was until the press began reporting on incidences of civil disquiet.

When he enquired if there was anything to be made of the rumours he saw in the local papers in his weekly letters home, Edmund was either ignored or dismissed. When high-minded liberal publications, typically loyal to the Hewlett family whose wealth had been re-established in green energy - which their respective readership admired - began finding fault with his father’s estate housing, Edmund’s interest in the project waxed. He started actively seeking a broader reading of the public pulse. He found a critique in the very last place he would have expected.

The Daily Mail had, for the past few years, no reason to provide the public with anti – Hewlett sentiment. The rag’s then-editor had previously been given financial incentive in the form of stock options to leave the family to their own devices. This curtesy typically extended to their business ventures out of shared economic interest. However, shortly before the Easter holiday, the tabloid ran a particularly sensationalist cover story stating that conditions in one of their more notorious estates had made the city of Glasgow into a hotbed of racially provoked violent crime. It was the sort of thing that startled a boy who had been forced to spend far too much of his youth studying basic boardroom warfare. The editor, it seemed, simply had more to gain from slandering his good
family name than he had to loose should stocks go down.

This alone had been reason enough for concern. Something had to be addressed. He had been keen to discover what.

At seventeen, Edmund Hewlett had no friends at school.

He held an arbitrary position of authority that did enough to conceal that sad truth and the social apprehension from which it stemmed. No one dared, out of fear of reaction or reverence for the courtesy royal title affixed to his name, to speak to him unless he opened the conversation, and on those seldom occasions, only in limited words certain not to challenge or offend. Having been raised with the same degree of deference, Edmund made nothing of it. It was therefor particularly startling to him when he asked York’s only boarder who might have been more social isolated than he himself was to act as a translator to be given the response –

“It would be a waste.”

The little boy’s pale eyes widened as he continued to speak softly in a voice that sounded as if it had barely been tested, “I don’t speak Dari or Kurdish. I take it you’re under the assumption that language and culture in places whose names you can’t pronounce is homogenous? You would.”

Edmund, taken aback by the acid in the response, stammered promises of the sorts of things he could offer which child might find of interest - horses and hunts, fast cars, blood sport. Promises he had every intention to keep. The boy, Simcoe, who seemed to think him an absolute buffoon, eventually agreed to come along on a short trip to the second city of the empire.

On the train from York to Glasgow, he bought him a meat pie and as many sweets and the boy could stomach. Simcoe cocked his head to the side and mockingly told him it all tasted like shite. Edmund smiled in spite of himself and ordered a beer, which he let the little lad take a small taste from. He said he did not like it, but it seemed to quiet him enough.

They sat in relative silence for the remained of the journey, Simcoe occasionally smarting about something, Hewlett sipping lightly as he tried to feign interest. He ought to have attempted to savour the taste for it would prove the last time he would ever order himself ale. It was the last time his so-said arrogance would manifest itself free of effort or anger, the last time he would have any sort of a relationship with comfort or confidence whatsoever.

“I imagine the same is true for Simcoe,” he mused sadly.

“Simcoe is always arrogant,” Anna retorted.

“Thanks to me, Simcoe is always angry. That night broke us both.”

Anna bit her lip as she tried to listen without offering further contradiction or correction.

When the two arrived at the estate turned asylum, Edmund explained, he had, for the first time in his life, the feeling that he had somehow underprepared. The two were greeted at the door by a ‘did your father send you?’ and ‘who might this be?’ to which, Hewlett, confused by the Queen’s English, glanced at Simcoe, who, for his part, repeated the questions back to him in the language in which they had been spoken.
“Yes, and ah – this is um -”

“I thought you Hewletts liked to keep it in the family,” the thin, bearded man who had greeted them responded with considerable offence.

“Ah, we do, this is ah, William Gordon,” the heir presumptive invented on the spot. “We’re second cousins, mums side. I thought I might need a translator. Ah, I see now that is hardly the case.”

“Billy,” the man started, continuing in what Hewlett assumed was Arabic. Simcoe answered, then turned to him and told him that the man wanted him to accompany his colleagues in the kitchen while the man had words with him in his bureau, adding once again that he did not know enough of the Afghan dialect to really be of much use.

In a bedroom being used in a back office, the man asked him if he was truly labouring under the perception that he did not know who John Graves Simcoe was - the news of the roadside bombing that had killed his father had made its way across the border to Afghanistan, after all. Did they, he questioned, not have news in Britain? Hewlett blinked. After asking if Simcoe would be safe, he, half-petrified, explained that it was because of Britain’s news that he was there.

In the conversation that followed, he learned that the street level conflict was corporate in nature. Namely, many the people the man trafficked into Glasgow happened to pay their fare in poppy, a market that had formerly been under control of the former soviets who had taken up residence in smaller numbers after the Iron Curtain fell.

“Apologies to your father for what he considers bad publicity, but nothing does wonders to silence talk of the trade like a well-spoken, malnourished brown girl in a hajib calling a city that considers itself liberal ‘racist’,” he laughed.

Edmund shuttered.

He learned that his father not only knew what was being run through his charity but was profiting from it. Seeing no other option but to pretend to renegotiate a deal he had only just heard of in hopes of making it out alive and intact, he did his best to read the queues he was presented - occasionally fumbling words on intention. It seemed better to be perceived as incompetent than naïve, though the evening told him he had long been both.

Before an agreement could be reached, their conversation was interrupted by the sound of gunfire. The man, who would be dead before morning, demanded to know from Hewlett if he had been followed. Hewlett had no answer; he had not thought to look. He left the gun he had been offered on the plastic picnic table used as a desk and made his escape through the back.

Simcoe, for his part, had not been so fortunate.

Hewlett spent the rest of the night and the whole of the following day looking for him after police gave a statement saying that all of the victims of the drive-by had been asylum seekers.

When he bought a Guardian at the station two mornings later, returning to his home in defeat, the incident was cited as being racially provoked.

The business section, however, showed stock in his father’s enterprise had increased in its considerable value.

Edmund Hewlett felt ill.
Over Easter, he could not sleep.

Feelings of guilt, cowardice and bitter inadequacy were fuelled by his father’s rage over the incident. He told him that it was not only his fault that a little boy was missing, but that he was solely responsible for the deaths of half a dozen innocent people who had come to this land seeking a better future. He was -under no circumstances - to inform the authorities of anything he had seen or done that night. Should he fail to heed the advice, he would surely go to prison. His father promised him that he would not lift a hand in his assistance, claiming that he would happily testify at his trial should it come to one.

And so, he had done nothing.

He neither rang the police nor slept for a fortnight.

Anna Strong stared at the swollen bags under his empty eyes, questioning if he had ever truly slept since.

“You were a child, Edmund,” she said when he’d come to a pause. “You neither knew nor in any way intended-”

“If I had any remnants of my youth going into Glasgow with a shell-shocked child whom the year had made an orphan, I left them at the estate-cum-asylum. I was an adult when I returned to my family’s summer residence for Easter. I ought to have filed a report, regardless of personal consequence,” he chastised, again turning his back on her. Anna reached for his shoulder.

“I know how you think. You were protecting your family too, their business, those they employ.”

“It is not how I think,” he confessed. “It is how my father does.”

The two had never directly spoken of the event, Edmund informed her, though he was certain - especially after reading the first few chapters of Abigail’s online publication – that Simcoe had issues resulting from that night that he simply could not resolve without professional assistance and prescribed medication.

Neither, Anna noted, could he.

“I tell you that I could not sleep for half a month’s time,” he replied to her assessment. “I don’t know that Simcoe - for his part - has been able shut his eyes since. He was taken under the false name I had assigned him at random and held for ransom. I don’t know exactly what he endured, but I know that he returned to school in worse state than he arrived. He had been traumatized by … by his experiences in Islamabad and then in London in short succession, to be certain, but –before, before Glasgow - he had not the behavioural issues that seem so ready to surface at the smallest slight. He was just a shit kid like any other.”

Anna nodded her forced sympathy. “What exactly did you say to him that set him off?” she inquired slowly.

“It was warranted, Anna. I just needed him to hit me. His knuckles were, ah – never, never mind that.” He shook his head in what she perceived as antipathy. “Simcoe did what I asked of him and he will assuredly be vilified for it; and I’ll spend a lifetime in silenced self-scrutiny. It is no use to apologise now, to try to justify it to John, who doesn’t hear me, or to you, who forgive me love, simply fail to comprehend.”

So he saw through her.
Anna narrowed her gaze. “You’re right. I never did understand what it is the two of you are trying to compensate for with your whole brutal take on ‘lad culture’. Isn’t that like middle class kids who speak as though they come from blue collar backgrounds and upload videos to YouTube about ordering fried chicken? I don’t get the appeal, in general, much less your particular interpretation, but Jesus Fucking Christ! Don’t you think it needs to end? You are adults now. John is apparently in therapy over it, why the fuck aren’t you? Insurance aside, I don’t deserve this, Edmund. I don’t deserve to bandage your wounds whenever you decide for whatever reason that your psychological scars had ought rather manifest themselves physically. And you know what? Neither does John.”

“I’m. You are right, on all counts you are absolutely right. It is not -”

“Why is this - whatever this is – so fucking important to you? Let’s just – why don’t you just call him, say you are sorry for whatever dickish thing you said even if you don’t mean it -”

“I do. I am sorry. I am so sorry for all of it. For then … for now,” he again began to berate.

“You shouldn’t be,” she said in a hard tone. ‘Grow up, Edmund. Life goes on. You are about to get your PhD in Astrophysics from an Ivy League University. John’s part of the Oxbridge elite and manages a bunch of hedge funds with great competence and success. The two of you are fine. You are just both too old to be playing war games against one another. Friends don’t -”

“I had a year left in York before I was meant to take my A-Levels, attend Oxford after serving my standard military duty,” he interrupted, still lost to memory. “I - ah, needless to say none of that transpired. Unable to shut my eyes, I stared looking through my old telescope at night. I decided just – just like that,” he snapped his fingers, “that I could not spend another year in York, could not return home and could not follow the path laid out for me. When Simcoe returned to school –alive, thanks be to God – and told the board of directors what I had done, I filed a counter-complaint against him, in hopes that he would be expelled and thusly safe from the sorts institutions like those tend to breed. Instead, he became the very archetype, following an example he thought I meant to leave him. I – for my part – I simply left. I sat my exams a year early and went to read astrophysics at St. Andrews, looking at the stars to provide a replacement structure for the one I’d thought myself to have known. Nearly two decades later and I am still looking,” he laughed to himself, echoing the sound’s irony by adding. “In New York, with Simcoe. Who now hates me not for who I am but for who I am not.”

“Don’t be so hard on yourself Eddie,” Anna castigated, “I’m sure he hates who you are just as much as you seem to.”

Edmund nodded his acceptance.

Anna stopped.

She could be so brash. So unkind. She was a disservice to herself and her cause.

She looked at the man who fought so gallantly for her dreams while crushing her hopes, feeling her again eyes fill with tears in regret at what she had just said.

His tragedy was he loved her.

Her tragedy was that his love was platonic at best – at worst, it was tied to the stronger love he reserved for his enemies.

His tragedy was that he could not distinguish between friend and foe.

And neither could she.
“Here it is flat, Love. That is not actually the worst of what I - or my family - put the poor lad through.”

It had cooled as soon as they arrived at her office where happy family portraits adorned her desk and walls.

He picked up the open-faced internal magazine by her computer, preferring its pictures of human suffering to those of her smiling in her husband’s arms. Mary herself seemed immune to the various images of Abe and the insidious looks they offered to John in the form of carefree grins. He felt her foot graze his leg in small attempt at seduction, causing him to fold it onto his lap.

She was happy before him.

She was happy without him.

If anything, he was in the way.

He sat in silence; surveying everything their fake affair threatened, everything that might be lost to her should he act on his feelings. He tried to ignore the divorce manuals in the tote he had carried in, the nineteenth century daydream of a novel and the erotica he had nearly enacted on the pavement below his flat and the corpse it contained – the second he had created in as many days.

He glanced at her. Stared.

He wanted to have her. He wanted to help her. He noted the contradiction in his thoughts.

Mary frowned at her computer. She called an intern to fetch her two espressos – no, not a doppio - two. Don’t they listen?

Simcoe smiled. She returned it. A girl blue hair and eyes enlarged by thick rimmed spectacles broke their extended gaze when came in with caffeine, asking timidly if there was anything else Mrs. Woodhull needed. Mary responded with the sort of forced kindness that cut like a knife that she had already tasked the unfortunate intern with recognisance that ought to have proven simple, asking through a pained grin if she might be able to explain why there was nothing new in her inbox which she could work from. The girl looked as though she might need a moment to cry on Tumblr over the interaction.

Simcoe fell all the more in love. For a moment, he let himself return to thoughts of her touch, of her cherry-flavoured lip balm that persisted though all the drink meant to rid him of her kiss.

It was no good, he realised.

At work she recalled the woman who told him to help her carry the senator they assumed dead into the dive-bar’s basement. The woman who then attacked the establishment with bleach when they came back to discover him missing, who made him feel both full and inadequate, who he longed to bring to laughter.

At work, Mary Woodhull was quite unhappy.

She would never, he thought, be happy with him.
“Imagine that … Ells getting me out of trouble,” Simcoe smirked as soon as the door had shut, her boss back where she belonged on the other side of it.

“Sorry I put you on the spot like that, I saw you staring at the piece and I knew – or assumed rather – that you know enough about corporate finance to fake it.”

“Oh? I wasn’t. I know her well enough to know that she did not actually write this op-ed, factually correct though it may be,” he paused, appreciating the irony of the disconnection. “You … don’t?” he asked sceptically.

“No,” Mary rolled her eyes and curled her tongue playfully. “I somehow don’t warrant the attention of an extremely successful, insultingly young English philanthropist -”

Simcoe interrupted with a cold laugh. “Ellie Hewlett is a drug lord. And a … Scot. Let’s not praise her charitable works too highly.”

“Oh, I have no trouble believing that. Industry is full of it, keeps people like me in a job though,” Mary sighed, pointing to the title listed under her gold plated name shield.

“Deputy Head of Public Relations,” Simcoe read aloud.

“Like I keep telling you, I know how to clean up a mess.”

He could not tell if her statement and the smile that followed were ironic or sardonic. Mary returned her attention to her monitor.

“She is Edmund’s sister,” Simcoe remarked after a minute.

“No,” Mary elongated, her rapid-fire fingers freezing on the words they had been in the process of typing.

“Sarcasm doesn’t suit you.”

“I’m not being sarcastic. I don’t see a resemblance and Hewlett never once mentioned that he has a sibling who works in my field, as a cover or otherwise.” She paused. Typed. Reflected. “It is messed up isn’t it – this job? I can fully and blindly accept that a pretty little socialite uses charity as a means of smuggling drugs into Britain but not that she has anything to do with my conservative housemate with whom she shares a surname.”

“Drug running, tax evasion and PR for daddy’s business,” Simcoe expanded. “I find it strange in a more general sense – investors aside, the majority of people who purchase into the whole idea of alternative energy are the first to take to arms on Twitter when corporations are treated as ‘people’ by the courts; yet they hold to this belief that their power company feeds the hungry and clothes the poor. The whole of it is a bloody scam.”
“Preaching to the choir. I hate this place,” Mary confessed. “And honestly? We are one of the better ones.”

“Or UNICEF is just staffed with better people,” Simcoe commented, pulling up a watchdog rating site on his mobile. “You’re finances are rated at just over ninety percent, transparency, however, seems wanting, so who can really tell?”

“Hm,” Mary considered the compliment. “That could well be.” She closed her eyes and smiled before facing her monitor again with a frown. “I wake up every day wishing I had used my savings to go to law school instead of funnelling them into house that I can’t live in, in a town I don’t like. To that end, I wish I had not been so easily persuaded to move in with my husband’s father who, how to put this – I’d like a lot better if I only saw on Christmas and Easter,” she sighed. “Sorry I– you know what I am dealing with?”

“Likely better than anyone,” Simcoe responded. He reached for a hand that had not been extended and that she did not offer in return. He retracted his.

Like himself, Mary had no relatives of her own. She had explained that she too had been raised in part by the state, as such, family and the normalcy it promised seemed define her principles whenever immediate circumstance proved a familiar setting. Simcoe questioned in the piercing screams that flooded his mind when these thoughts surfaced if things would have turned out differently for him had he been given much choice in the decision that left him single and childless. If forced family would have left him as compunctious as his comrade in arms. He wondered if Mary’s regrets were rooted or if they were simply reactionary to his continued self-insertion.

“No,” she clarified. “I mean here in the office. I’m gone for a half a day because my son bit someone and I come back to find a school in Nigeria that has been operating and collecting funds for five years doesn’t exist. Embezzlement is easy because, as a rule, the public doesn’t care. But here, in that same internal magazine you were flipping through when my boss waltzed in, there was an article last year about twenty-two girls the non-existent entity graduated that has since made its merry way onto Reddit. So there is a lie I have to retract on top of it. And no one did any research that might aid me in the cover-up. No one! All I have is these true believers weeping over their fair trade, soy triple shot lattés and peanut-butter-Sriracha sandwiches over the fact that NGOs are run like for-profit businesses are.”

“That is certainly,” Simcoe started, unsure how to continue as Mary’s speech further served to remind him that the world was so much vaster than the last few nights. He felt lost in it. In her.

“I was an intern too once. I shouldn’t judge. It is just frustrating. What if there really had been an E. Coli breakout at my son’s school? Nothing would get done around here. Pay is fine, if I were not the only earner in the family, but I so hate this job. With a bachelors in communications it is the best I can hope for though. I feel just – stuck. And then I meet you and …”

She paused, looking at one of the many photographs of her son and husband on her desk.

“Seems there is some truth between a lot of the lies I have been telling recently,” Mary mused. Simcoe did not know what she meant and was afraid to ask. He stared at her in silence.

“Still worried about Hewlett?” she asked as she tossed him a stress ball that looked as if it had suffered a share of abuses from her French manicure in dents that would never right themselves despite the elasticity of the foam. Simcoe looked at his hands, questioning, as he had been since his interrogation with Dr Dandridge, if they were in the process of betraying his apprehension.

“Hm?” he asked crushing the sphere into an oblong in his fist. The raw skin on his knuckles
stretched and stung. His hands screamed the last name that Mary had spoken.

“I’m sure if it were serious we would know by now.”

“As we know about Arnold?”

“Shh.”

“Forgive me, Mrs. Woodhull.”

He watched her look from him to her husband.

“Mary,” she corrected. “And John, about earlier, I am sorry if -”

“The blame is mine to share. Truth be told,” he mused aloud, “I bloody well miss England and its loosened moral stances at times.”

John Graves Simcoe spent his eighteenth birthday hold back the thick, black hair of a girl who had made herself sick on the sorts of things that held interest for wealthy children in restricted environments. After she had finished being ill, he flushed the toilet for a second time, in this latest occurrence holding her head under for measure as he gave a speech someone who had been legally a minor mere hours before ought not to have had any business giving. It made her sob as he predicted and so he hugged her, trying to provide the comfort and consoling she clearly required as she wept openly – not, she clarified, for a name in his narrative but for a species of migratory birds torn apart by industrial windmills in the North Sea. For herself and for her siblings.

A teary explanation followed per his request, the nature of which would give him pause with each new partner. He had had no trouble whatsoever believing what she had said, not only due to the clarity this gave to their more illicit interactions but due to his other, earlier experiences that owed themselves to the same bloodline. Experiences he shared and she empathised with. The two spoke until there was little else to say. They left their loose friendship in the second storey gents’ room when they gathered themselves up off the linoleum floor.

He did not speak to her again for the rest of the term.

He greeted her once on the first day of fall semester in his final school year – mostly, because she had been standing before him in line for breakfast. It bothered him that her twin had not returned with her, and after establishing his whereabouts (‘A Parisian lycée! Ah, isn’t it romantic? Mummy and Daddy either do not know or do not care now that it seems the line’s true heir will make a complete recovery’) Simcoe decided for himself that he was done with the family for good. The absent Eugene had been easy to pick on until recent events had made him object of pity; death itself had failed in its task to reduce the now legendary Edmund to a mere mortal; and as for Eleanor, well, she had been a decent sparring partner until they had both found themselves on the same side of a stalemate. They drank tea, exchanged a few jests and pleasantries, and returned to their fragile peace for a time.

Shortly before fall leave, Simcoe had broken things off with her best friend for the penultimate time. When she found him in the courtyard that afternoon, he told her he did not want to talk about it. She agreed. Instead, she handed him an invitation for a priced-plate event in which Scotland’s faux-liberal elite could toast to themselves over their vegan haggis for establishing a sanctuary for
the birds whose environment had fallen victim to green energy. Simcoe did not want to go. She handed him a newspaper article and a postcard from Paris that changed his mind.

“So do you want to help me kill three birds with one stone?” Ellie Hewlett smiled without smiling.

When he agreed to accompany her, he had no way of knowing how literal the girl’s words would prove.

The gala was Edmund Hewlett’s first venture back into society. He had not attended such an event since the stroke. He had always been awkward; only now, thanks to time passed in absolute isolation, he was painfully aware of it. He spoke in stammer to the few people whose names he was certain of, having never possessed a talent for that sort of information, afraid of confusing a Fitzroy for a Fitzgerald. After looking to his mother and assuring himself that she looked pleased enough by his efforts, he stepped out for a fag. Seeing no one else on the terrace beyond a few busboys smoking hurriedly while on shift – something he greeted with a glare – Hewlett decided the habit unfashionable and walked a good distance from the hall and the polite and proper people in attendance to partake in vice.

The autumn air chilled him as he laboured along a curving path, still on crutches, in search of a dry, quiet place to forget the party for five minutes while inhaling a Marlboro Red until its amber ashes gave way to grey dust and he would no longer have a weak excuse not to smile at strangers while he struggled to hold his food on a fork. He found refuge on a bank. He had not yet pulled his lighter from his pocket when he first heard a woman’s scream.

Hewlett, immediately forgetting his fag, his fears, his physical handicap, sprang – or rather limped – to attention. He followed the sound as quickly as he could to an otherwise familiar setting, a steeple turned stable when it would have otherwise fallen into disuse.

At first, he did not notice the bloodied server in the corner under the stone gaze of the martyrs who preceded him, the kicks and cries of the startled horses who found their home under siege. He saw only two shadows locked in a loud struggle. Without pausing for thought, he hit the figure who seemed the assailant with the hallow iron of his left crutch – needing the right to balance his frail frame – with the considerable fury of an otherwise anxious individual who had just seen his respective fag break so rudely interrupted.

He found himself on the stone and mortar floor within the same second.

Hewlett looked into the unblinking eyes of his attacker and found himself fundamentally confused. He knew the face but could not place it to a name. He had never processed a talent for such things. The youth seemed to contemplate him as well with something akin to horror. Hewlett ceased his slithered struggle to free himself from the chokehold, becoming aware that with every second he failed to do so he surrendered just how weak he had grown. Sickness and depression had reduced him from slender to skinny; his bone structure, in turn, transformed by the loss of forty pounds from gorgeous to ghastly, or so he had overhead over hors d’oeuvres. Hewlett felt spittle stream from the side of his lips he struggle for every second of control over. He twisted again from underneath the comparatively considerable weight of his adversary, hoping now only to free a hand that he might wipe his face of shame.

The boy, for his part, looked as if he had seen the face of death itself as he squeaked his name,
releasing the tension with which he had him bound to the floor.

It took him another moment to realise he was not the Hewlett who was being addressed. Then, very quickly, the entirety of the situation made itself clear.

His younger sister was rather bookish for a well-bred girl but only particularly intelligent in one, rather devious, fashion. She had somehow come to discover that one of her little school friends had spent two weeks in the company of a kidnapper owing to Edmund’s own, profound error in judgement. The man had, in the time lapsing between Simcoe’s escape and the cold October night of the gala, been convicted on unrelated charges only to see his sentence reduced due to liberal leaning policy and conservative budgetary constraints imposed on the penial system in slow succession. Upon his release, had recognized something in a face his younger brother had unwittingly made famous on the proper side of the Channel and upon his release sought to blackmail –

“Well, I,” Edmund paused. “Ah, that is, Love, due to the sensitive nature of what he knew, what I then discovered – I’m forbidden to disclose that much. I can only tell you that Eleanor, writing under the name of another of her … friends, agreed to the former convict’s demands, saying that she would pay him three fourths of the original sum he asked. She intended to instead see to his demise at an event where she knew the two people who had the most personal grounds on which to wish bodily harm upon him would be in attendance. I doubt she intended to actually involve Simcoe at all - it seemed it was me he resented, rather than the man who had held him hostage based on my lie. No matter, he followed her into harm’s way intending to protect her from whatever it was she had designed. The situation escalated and I arrived with my particular talent of taking things from bad to worse.”

“Edmund I am certain that you are being unfair to yourself,” Anna replied with widened eyes. 

He shook his head sadly.

In his severe chastisement of his sister, he ordered her to return to the dinner, find a corner to cry in if she insisted on making a disruption of herself and if anyone should ask, she was to lie for the preservation of her own liberty and tell that she had broken things off with her boyfriend. He stopped Simcoe from following, asking him if he was responsible for the blows the would-be blackmailer obtained in the skirmish.

“It was an accident,” he shrugged.

“Well,” Hewlett replied, believing the explanation out of thanks for its simplicity. “This is what we have to do.”

Thinking quickly, he took and inventory of the horses, all wild from the sound and movement and sent of blood to which they were not accustom. He picked the one who he guessed to be of the most value, calmed him easily, and lead him over to the body of the convict costumed as help. He then handed the reins to the boy to whom he had yet to identify himself by name. Hewlett clapped to startle the beast and told the lad to hold fast to the lead. Once the unconscious victim had received an additional kicking, he ordered that the horse be realised. Spooked, it ran from the stables. Hewlett took a moment to gather himself and then rang emergency services.

The boy stared and him all the while. Unblinking. Uncomfortably close.

“When we are brought in for questioning,” he said as he handed over a cigarette, “you are to tell them that when we snuck out for a smoke, we saw that white horse running wild and were unsuccessful in our attempts to capture him. That explains our fingerprints on the reins should any
be discovered. We were close to the stables. Hearing more commotion from within, we went to see if something was amiss and saw found the body. Perhaps he had been trying to steal the Arabian, ah, actually, that bit is of little importance and we would have no way of knowing. We found him in his present condition and phoned for an ambulance.”

Hewlett was unaware of it, but what he said chilled the boy and reaffirmed every suspicion he held as to Hewlett’s nature. He asked for a second cigarette after having coughed his way through the first.

“What is your name anyway, kid?”

“Billy Gordon. We are cousins I think, on your mum’s side.”

Hewlett blinked in recognition but did not respond, lighting himself another as well.

“The police believed us,” Simcoe said, “until forensic evidence came back to suggest a different narrative. Ells, whose DNA had been found at the scene was taken in for questioning. The copper – the detective rather - who had been assigned to the case, completely out of his fucking league, had something of an understandable grudge against her family. His own had lost its accrued wealth a few years prior when Oyster by some miracle I will never understand – possibly because he only ever offers details when he is pissed on forty-proof – managed to save the family business from folding. Embezzlement. As it were. Confessed to it yesterday. As it suits him. Always. As it suits him.”

“Always works,” Mary offered with a shrug. “Maybe I can get him to help me sort this fucking school then.”

“I’m sure he would jump at the chance of redemption, that is to say, if he wakes up. Upon reflection I don’t know that I wish him to.”

Mary pressed her lips together in consideration. Simcoe wondered if he frightened her. He wondered if he should be frightened of himself, of what he might finish when Hewlett again decided that he was no longer on-side. He wondered if his fears were best contained to the present. His friend might not make it until tomorrow.

“No offence, but it kind of sounds like he saved your life.”

“We don’t have capital punishment in the civilized world, but he ‘kind of’ did, until, that is, he felt it otherwise suited him to come clean about the entire incident. While we awaited our fate in the stable with the spooked horses, I told him some of what I am now sworn not to repeat about what treachery lead the ex-con to the charity function to begin with. It had nothing to do with me. Nothing whatsoever. Which is not to say that what Ells tried to do was wrong or that I would not have involved myself if not for the personal stake, but no matter. Hewlett went above Glasgow’s Metropolitan Police Department to the fucking Foreign Office and made the same sorts of threats that the man I’d beaten into a coma had. A few days later, I was taken from my school in York back across the border to Edinburgh to sign a statement indicating that the lies Edmund Hewlett thought up on the night of the gala were true in the eyes of law enforcement. We were spared sentencing but it could have gone very differently had Europe not been entering an economic recession. I don’t think he so much as took this into consideration. I don’t think he is capable of
concerning himself for anything outside of his own immediate interest. Then it was getting his little sister out of holding. Now … I mean, who the fuck knows?”

If it had anything to do with love, he thought, it only spoke of self. Simcoe’s insistence on this as a fact spoke only of survival.

“We are pretty good at hiding bodies,” Mary said.

“Too good,” he agreed uncomfortably.

“So what happened then?” she asked.

“Nothing,” he said, speaking rather high and rather quick. “When we left, he let me drive his Audi to a nearby pub, we watched a match on the telly, I didn’t drink so that he could, and after that was done we went out separate ways. Few years later I saw him at a wedding - somewhat ironically, we had both stepped out onto the terrace for a smoke. He commented on my French cigarettes being ‘rather dark’, an assessment I agreed with. We exchanged a few slights and then we exchanged numbers when we discovered through conversation that we would both be working in London the following month. I never rang and neither did he. We met here, on the other side of the world, two years back - first in a waiting room and then on the pitch and we came to … appreciate one another’s presence. And then he decided to die and I and you and everyone else in New York have to suffer the fact that he is incapable of standing to his own choices and,” he paused, “and I am the same way when it comes to the little prick. Maybe this morning has done enough to sort us proper. Even if he regains consciousness, I should doubt that things between us can resume as they were. Liability though he can be, I’m truly going to miss the shite.”

Mary thought for a moment.

“I doubt he said anything to the police. It has been hours since we saw them leave the flat. It is possible Hewlett was never there at all, that a neighbour called the cops when -”

“I don’t have neighbours,” Simcoe interrupted. “Most of those flats are owned by Russian and South-East Asian oligarchs hiding ill-gotten funds in real estate.”

“Still, if Tallmadge were looking for you, you would know. If Hewlett were dead or in hospital, you would know,” she argued. It was only then Simcoe realised just how torn up he must have sounded. He felt ashamed.

“Not necessarily. His insurance is expired and he likely no longer carries the card in his wallet. He probably changed his emergency contact to Anna anyway - he would be a fool if he didn’t. Immigration and all.”

Mary Woodhull sighed, rose from her chair, walked around to the other side of the desk and positioned her self vis-à-vis John Graves Simcoe, taking the abused stress ball and now-crumpled magazine from his blood-stained hands. She laid the items beside her keyboard and hoisted herself up a few inches to sit on the desktop, otherwise cluttered with memoirs of the woman she had been or had tried to be before they had met under the sorts of circumstances that served to scatter illusion. She crossed her legs, kicked off her heels, and shook her hair free of its elegant twists.

“And if I remember anything of Anna Smith whatsoever, which, mind, the pictures she sent you last night tell me that I do, she would be so quick to raise arms in retaliation that you would know.”

Women, Simcoe decided, were terrifying. Mary Woodhull remained calm, silently assuring him that he was normal and valid as he lamented over the lower points in the almost-friendship that
defined much of his adolescence and the whole of his outsider’s understanding of America. The mention of a long forgotten rival however transformed her all at once into a creature both base and divine.

When she teased him with a smile, the world ceased to matter. His concerns subsided. Mary stroked his leg with a stockinged foot. For a moment, the whole of his worldly cares reduced themselves to his stiffening member and the reality that she seemed to want him as much as he wanted her.

He wanted to have her, to help her.

He wanted that she could resist being as brazen and she was brave.

For he could not.

“Are you truly concerned about Anna Strong?” he asked, trying - and failing - to lower his octane.

“No. And personally, if I were you, I would be more worried about the sister. If she calls though, put me on the line, yeah? I want to get another take on this statement before I submit it to my boss.”

Simcoe snorted.

“I’m sorry, I don’t mean to sound heartless but you really need some perspective. Hewlett is not out to get you. From the sounds of it he never has been. You’ll meet up, you’ll get a few insults in that will have to stand in place of apology and then you’ll go back to supressing your emotions like functioning adults.”

“Like you?”

Mary pushed the photograph of her husband down.

“I wish it were that simple,” she said.

Their eyes locked.

“It can be,” he answered, posture straightening as his fingers slowly climbed up her stockings, imagining the skin underneath.

“No, absolutely, you are right,” Edmund spoke as he continued to pace. “There have been signs, of course there have been. You know how he is on the field. Hell, from what I’ve heard of how he is on the floor the man can –and often does – turn every interaction into a blood sport. But what does that say about me?”

Anna watched his feet and they travelled back and forth over the floorboards, always, it seemed, a step away from her with every word he uttered, regardless of his current cardinal orientation.

“Nothing,” she grieved. “I know you are both oddly offended by Abigail’s portrayal, but you know what troubles me about it? The parts that have no correspondence to real life. You are not his CO, Eddie. You are not responsible for his actions and outbursts and they do not reflect on you. What does is your continued excusals-”
“Every time he has looked to me for direction I’ve let him down in a way that has lead him to believe such behaviour is acceptable,” he stopped. Stared. Hard. “Look, Love, I only mentioned any of this so you would cease blaming yourself -”

“Really? It has nothing to do with the fact that I asked?”

“Anna -”

“You know what?” she said, returning to the bathroom to retrieve the ring she had left on the sink. “Forget it. Keep living with your damning secrets and toxic ties. Just, give me the pillowcase. Let me start a load of laundry and then I’m out. You can stay here tonight. Or in a jail cell. Or in a morgue. I don’t care. I’ll be gone by Monday anyway.”

Edmund did not move.

“I love you, Anna,” he said softly. “Things just, things became so complicated, so quickly, I lost myself to them, I fear. I’m sorry that it took me so long to say it, I’m sorry that I never said it enough, but perhaps, in the end, it is for the best. We truly ought to quit one another. You’ll get the tavern in the end either way, as I’ve explained; I’ve seen to that much.”

It was not what she wanted in the least.

“You are the only person who without question or pause would charge into battle in my name, expecting nothing in return. How can you be so quick to surrender?”

“You make a better argument than I. I’m sure while Tallmadge sorts out his investigation you’ll make a fine litigator up in Albany.”

“I don’t know. I couldn’t get you to answer my question.”

“Haven’t I?” he offered as he walked slowly to the suspended bedframe. He fought a pillow out of its bloodied sack as Anna answered his rhetorical.

“Not in a way that makes sense. I understand that your personal history with John is messy. That I knew before ever knowing the details. I don’t get what you are trying to protect him from by confessing to decade old crimes and asking him to kick the shit out of you. And don’t you dare, don’t you dare say that you owe him! I swear to you that is just taking a present problem and making it all the worse. You may a lack a lot of emotional intelligence but I think you wise enough that that much should be clear.”

“I am afraid I can’t answer you at all,” he said, again failing to face her. “Ah – Anna. Believe me when I say I wish I could. You are everything I have ever loved and admired, everything I ever found beautiful or fearsome or both. I cherish you, I cherish every moment I’ve even spent in your presence, but -”

“But what Edmund? What has John ever done that makes you love him so much more than you love me?”

At this Edmund spun around, approaching her as quickly as his feet allowed as he spoke.

“I don’t. I hate him most of the time, now more than ever if I am to be honest. What John has ‘done’ is set into motion a series of events that served to make me realise I’ll never be worthy of your hand, owing, I suppose, to how I meet crises when I find myself faced with them. Ironically, I’m sure none of it was intentional on his part, I’m sure ‘it was an accident.’ Still, he is left with the result he thought he wanted before any of this began, I’ll let him that small victory.”
“There is nothing going on between us!” Anna protested. “The pictures I sent -”

“I know, Love. I know,” he said calmly, as though the statement was a surrender.

“I don’t think you know anything. I think the love I have for you is worth so much more than whatever idea of honour you have that you would gamble it away on.”

He nodded slightly but otherwise did not respond.

Anna shook her head. She would never understand him, she realised. He would never let her.

For the first time she was grateful for the silence between them. Every word that he spoke seemed to deepen the trench that separated them. Her own came out like gunfire. There was no victory to be had. Their love would end in a stalemate.

Anna walked into the kitchen, divided from the rest of the open floorplan by a long island that doubled as a breakfast bar. On the wall that faced it, she found John’s washing machine.

Maybe I’ll stay, she thought as she heard Edmund searching for words and producing nervous stutters. At times, it seemed that he cared for nothing but his own agenda. At times that the whole of his earthly understanding was based on the other. His tragedy had always manifested itself as unbalanced or unrequited love, and yet he was too stubborn to admit to his heartbreak. He saw the best in everyone.

Everyone, it seemed, but himself.

When Anna opened the door to the washer, she felt Edmund’s shame was valid.

Anna reached in to remove the load of laundry left so long it had been largely allowed to dry, wondering, perhaps if it would not be better to add her former fiancé’s few garments and wash the entire mess again. Anna felt around, pulling a shirt out to see if it was drenched in sweat or stale soap, if it reeked or sport or sex or simply mildew.

She saw.

She asked.

She feared the answer and the man she sought it from.

“Edmund,” she said. “Edmund, what did you do to John?”

He looked over at her blankly and spoke with a hint of annoyance. “I put him in a dangerous situation only a selfish fool would ever think of bringing a little boy into and eight years later, in the same city no less, I forced him to help me cover up a crime and nearly sold him out when things were not going my way. Then I moved to New York, tried to off myself in the most cowardly way possible, despite knowing – despite knowing that... Ah. What is it really worth now? I proposed to the woman I knew us both to be infatuated with and manipulated him into helping me regain my former financial status in a manner that could see us both imprisoned or killed. I think that about covers it.”

Both, Anna heard. She swallowed. She hoped Edmund had spoken in earnest when he swore the fight they were in had nothing to do with her suggestion that they pretend to argue in order to throw off Tallmadge and his team while she worked out a way to sort their finances. She worried.

“I shouldn’t have to clarify this,” Anna said cautiously, holding up a blood strained QPR jersey.
“When you and John got into an –understandable – row, what the fuck did you do to him? Where is he? Is he okay? What the hell did you do? And forgive me but … how?”

“Oh bloody hell! The damned fool!” Edmund cursed as he came over. “One would think that upon committing the nation’s most publicised crime the first thing you would think to do is the fucking laundry. The man is beyond any assistance I can offer. Unbelievable. I bet, I bet,” he said as he practically tore the door off the refrigerator as he opened it. “No. Cider is still here but at least he brought the wine back to Trader Joe’s. At least there is that.”

Anna considered for a moment Edmund’s entire reaction to the odder than ordinary behaviour his friend had been exhibiting in the last few days. She thought of the crime scene - the tavern that only received a DOH rating of ‘C’ because she accentuated her cleavage during inspection - so spotless that not a single print could be lifted from any surface.

Edmund greeted the absence of cheap wine as the only luck he had had or could expect.

“Red?”

“Anna, don’t.”

“John doesn’t drink wine if he can help it and would therefore have no idea of how to store it. I don’t buy my white from Trader Joe’s. How many bottles were there?”

“Oh …” Edmund buried his eyes in his hands. It seemed he had been living with this knowledge for some time. The world stopped. Anna could here his shallow breath but felt as though she could not breathe at all. Edmund Hewlett knew what happened to Benedict Arnold.

His tragedy was that he could not differentiate between friend and foe.

His tragedy was that he still saw John Graves Simcoe as the little boy he had unwittingly put in more danger than he himself had known to exist.

Everything was bad.

Everything was bare.

But Edmund was blind.

“How long … have you known?” Anna inquired.

Edmund took a long while before electing to answer.

“Known? Since this morning when I actually got him to hit me. I’d suspected since yesterday at lunch when I noticed how raw his knuckles were. It is difficult not to, he … plays … with things when he has something to be nervous about. That and … and he is normally so keen to brag about a fight he had been in. Then I came over last night, saw the cider, asked him if he had bought it for me. The fact that he said ‘yes’ was indication enough that something was deeply wrong. Ah! Don’t look at me that way. Please. You don’t know him as I do. He is a good person, Anna. He is, he wouldn’t, if anything happened -”

“Edmund!” she shouted. “Do you hear yourself? Look what he did to you; imagine what he did to Arnold! Wherever he is now -”

“He is probably in a bookstore brooding over Lord Byron, tapping his fingers against the spine, with fifteen scattered tea cups around him, terrified that I have not gotten up yet. He is a danger to
no one but himself at this point,” he countered, almost disinterested in the immediate.

“We need to call the police.”

“We need to do the laundry.”

“Edmund!” she screamed as he pulled the detergent out from under the sink. “This is not your fight and you shouldn’t make it yours.” Anna reached out to him, saying sweetly, “We could be done with this. One phone call and we could be done. We could leave; we could go to your home – to Scotland.”

He took a step back.

“No. For all my faults Anna, I’d never seek to abandon a friend to his own fate. I’ve learned my lesson there.”

“This isn’t friendship.”

“It is all I know of it.”

“Why do you insist -”

“Because I’m selfish, Anna! Because I can’t let things go.”

“Why?” Anna demanded again as Edmund, still clutching the pillowcase stained with his own blood, sank down against the counter dividing the kitchenette from the rest of the flat.

“Aluminium, Aubergine …” he muttered to himself, gently pulling at the fibre of the sheet, failing to meet her gaze and she slumped down across from him.

Anna sighed, waiting for an answer that was long in coming, lifting her loosened bun to feel the chill of the metal appliance against her shoulder blades and the back of her neck. She ran her fingers along the lines created by the titles on the kitchen floor – together. Untouching. Platonic. It was then she realised once more that for all that Edmund had spoken, he had never answered her original question. Or perhaps, she feared, he had. She squeezed the ring she continued to clutch in her dominant hand until the crest it bore imprinted itself on her palm. She would never bear his name. Edmund’s face was masked by the cloth he examined. She would never see him through her own veil. Anna questioned if she had ever truly seen him at all.

She closed her eyes, listening to the hum of the evening traffic, of the refrigerator, of the central air. She listened to Edmund stammer and stutter, choking on syllables that should have been words. Perhaps, Anna considered, there was nothing to be said. Perhaps he had no more explanations or excuses to offer.

She longed for silence.

He spoke.

“Empathy. Ah, yes I – I rather think that is what is comes down to, Love. Though I confess I, that is, said aloud it seems more selfish than anything I can – and have – presented to you, that is pertaining to those equally lofty themes of guilt, fear,” he paused, “or debt. I’m woefully indebted to him. Every day it gets worse.”

“He tried to kill you. He killed a public figure. I’d say all bets are off,” Anna replied.
Edmund continued, not seeming to hear her simple logic. “Over here it is, oh, how should I attempt – you know, we both have ah, rather, well … rather pronounced speech impediments, Simcoe and I. It is awkward. Societally, at home, it is awkward, but here, here in America it is downright nightmarish. It is openly mocked, as though our accents were not fodder for farce enough on their own.”

At this, she blinked. “No one is -”

“It is really, it is a small example, but I have no one else. Believe me I, I hate him a decent half of the time – often, I swear, far more. Were I to, after a long, trying day, to take to complaining about another loop of a conversation with a local stranger; say whichever word de jour your culture has decided sounds comical in the mouth of a Brit, followed by laughter, followed by a second request. Well, another Englishman – most of the lads on our team, as it were - would either see an opportunity to make a joke at the expense of my admittedly posh upbringing. This, of course, is only when there was none to be made in how long it takes me to say any given word, of how my tongue seems to fumble it. And then I hear in it – in their collective response – all of the stifled snickers of everyone I used to know. Of everyone I never had the chance back home due to my disability. I’m twenty again, my tongue is heavy and half paralysed. I’m twenty-two and I’m staring at myself in the mirror, trying desperately to mimic the shapes with my lips meant to make syllables sound as they should but I can’t hear any difference. It is far better than it was but in my mind then, now, I hear only laughter. When I speak. Until I scream.”

“Edmund, it is not half as noticeable as you think,” Anna lied. “I doubt anyone, Wakefield or Appleton or any of your other lads, if they knew -”

“You are right, Love. I’ve nothing to complain about,” he responded dismissively, “Not by comparison. I was – I was isolated in a palace. John went through all of the same torment at boarding school, which, mind, is its own distinct hell all on its own. I hazard to even imagine, truly, how much worse it must be when strangers approach him and demand that he speak for their amusement.”

“Forgive me I cannot pity John in the slightest under present circumstance. Any circumstance,” she added, realising that she herself had asked both of them to pronounce words in the Queen’s English without much consideration, same as she had with any of the other invaders who sat at her bar. “We like the accent, it is charming, in its way. No one wants to offend you and I am sorry if I ever -”

“Or so I have been told by every American I’ve ever brought this up to. And while I appreciate it, truly, and I know in my heart of hearts that you are right, sometimes what I - what I suppose we all really need, is for someone who can relate to simply shake their heads with us, tell us they know but that we are being an absolute tit over it an offer up a round.”

“You are being an absolute tit,” Anna retorted in the cadence of BBC exports and British expats. For the first time since she had discovered the secret he tried to conceal behind others Edmund met her gaze. His eyes were empty, his countenance bare. When he silently handed her the case of the pillow he had nearly been smothered by, it felt as though he had pulled it from his pocket and slapped her face in an invitation to duel. It felt like a shot through the heart. Anna swallowed, wishing she could swallow her words. Wishing that Edmund would swallow his Scot’s pride.

Europe was about the past, it was about conflicts ending in stalemates, treaties that birthed new spats between the same players. America was about the future, about hope, about inclusion. It was the dream invented by man and God as an answer to the nightmare of the world of old. It was welcoming, if one was willing to be welcomed into it. The fact that Edmund was blind to this, that
he saw barricades and barriers in otherwise bustling streets. Anna decided, had little or nothing to do with how he spoke but what he said. She had finished listening. She wished she had words for her former fiancé which would not turn into weapons, into wounds.

She longed for silence.

He spoke.

“It is not only the matter of speech; it is not only the chore of talking that no one seems to understand. It is general. It is not fitting in. Not being wanted by the world you were born into and not quite being welcome in the one outside of it because of baseless envy and ill-assigned blame. Do you know what it is to spend every night in revision only to be told that your marks - that your university placement itself - was purchased by something beyond your own sweat and tears? Or to respond to unwanted and unwarranted critique dismissively and then be charged with classism, racism, whatever -ism is most applicable as well as many that are not applicable at all? To try and to fail and to be met with scorn by locals who wish you to just hurry your way through integration as though it were simple? And then bloody Andres of the world who make it seem so … ah! Do try to understand - I need, I truly need someone who understands where I’ve been. Where I am at. Simcoe is the only one in New York who can truly be said to, perhaps the only one in the world. I’m lonely, Anna. Sometimes, I confess I am, truly, deeply lonely. I refuse to be truly alone on top of that.”

Anna looked at the dried blood. The only one who was alone, as Edmund put it, was she herself. You had me, she thought.

“I almost abandoned him, you know. Not, not two decades ago. Recently. Two months? I almost – he had um.” He paused, shifted. Continued briskly with the bitterness of a man clutching on to the belief that effort was too much to ask. “Ah, never you mind. It is not my story to tell and to be perfectly honest it is one I wish I had never heard.”

“Well, now I am all ears,” Anna said. Edmund shifted again. Winced. She wondered if he noted the arid sarcasm in her tone, if he was in physical pain, or if it was simply too painful to recognise that he did not have a decent explanation for his continued defence of a monster. Simcoe in his thievery had sold him out long before Edmund had decided to step in front of a loaded gun that had not so much as taken aim. His eyes narrowed. Anna matched his glare. She knew herself far from innocent, but since naming her almost-lover’s demon, she had done nothing but try to help him slay it. Every moment they wasted in stale contention gave the enemy another chance to strike a fatal blow. Edmund Hewlett, patron saint of pointless redemption, would not see this until it was too late.

He sighed.

He spoke.

“Last year, he went back to London on holiday, fucked a girl we both know without a wrapper. There was a pregnancy scare; ultimately, she had an abortion without consulting him. I don’t know that he knows this.”

“And?”

“Ah, yes well, my role in all this - he asked me to read the report on his father’s accident, his mum’s suicide note. Just out of the blue, no explanation at first, wanted to know if he should have a go of it or not. And I did. And advised him he shouldn’t. He said he might have reason to expect a child of his own. Wanted to know if he would – if his parents ever … and I said, it doesn’t
matter. He would be able to rise to it, the challenge, I mean. Even if his parents …”

“What did it say?” Anna knitted her eyebrows.

“It doesn’t matter,” Edmund spoke, but not, she noted, to her. “What does is that where John might to this day not know the psychosis of his mum’s death, he certainly knows the circumstances. And then I, few months after being reminded of this tragedy, thought to swallow a bottle of Xanax myself. And he was the first fucking face I saw when I awoke in hospital. This bastard, he started in with probability and statistics. Immediately, almost laughing as though he was happy I woke up just so he could finally argue a topic we’ve long held fundamental disagreements about. And when I returned to Whitehall he would not stop texting me, maths, science, politics, football, cricket, any subject of he could imagine we’d naturally quarrel over, thinking – well, knowing - that I’d not try to make another exit before getting in the last word. Because he is fundamentally wrong – in all of his assessment he is so, so,” Edmund’s pace accelerated steadily until his mouth could no longer keep up with his thoughts. He paused. His eyes found Anna’s again. She found a soul behind them.

“It worked. It finally worked. After years of therapists’ couches and hospital visits, it seems all I ever really needed was for someone I otherwise intellectually respect to write me in earnest, arguing that statistics ought to be considered pure mathematics, as though the formulae -”

“Numbers don’t lie, people do,” Anna offered, interrupting him. “I have to admit; I never made it past Algebra Two in high school and took maybe one remedial course as a freshman in college … heh, eight fucking years ago now. You really have me at a loss when you talk about things like this.”

“No, no,” Edmund seemed to apologise as his face lit up. “I think you have it. More so than some of our acquaintances,” he smiled.

Anna shrugged. She wondered if she ever truly understood what he was saying, if confusion owed itself it accent, ignorance, on incompatibility. Edmund crawled over to her, placing his hand atop her own.

“I got over myself. Ultimately.”

“Did you?” Anna challenged, glancing from the once beautiful man beside her to the sheet he wanted to wash with all of the rest of his shame. With the rest of Simcoe’s sins. Edmund grabbed it gently away.

“The problem is, I – well, my successes have been countered by his setbacks. I fear I am to blame.”

“Listen to me,” Anna spoke sternly. “Hear me Edmund. Simcoe is not your responsibility. You are not his cousin, parent, CO -”

“I never -”

“I only mention this because you seem to forget that you were a child too when you both first met. Please, let us just call the police. Wash our hands of it and be done.”

“You know I can’t do that. For the very practical, secular reason that if Simcoe becomes the target of this investigation, I could go to jail for the rest of my life. In Great Britain it is not worth the opportunity cost to bring a charge against me, here, in an election year, the atmosphere is ripe to roast bankers and businessmen alike. We would not stand a chance.”

“If you remain the target -”
“Tallmadge isn’t stupid. I’m not guilty and sooner or later he will realise that if he hasn’t already. That Paki copper has, you can tell, it is no good. I just need to keep them distracted until Arnold shows up.”

“Dead?”

“No. Simcoe is brash but he lacks conviction as I think should be evident,” he said, gesturing to himself.

“Have you seen yourself? Do you hear yourself?” Anna demanded, hearing her mother’s deep smoker’s voice in its litigation tone as the words passed her lips, giving her pause. She felt her mind shift from prosecution to defence. She studied Edmund as he smiled weakly.

“I’m alive, Anna. And for all the shit we’ve been through, that we are going through, that is my fault – yesterday Simcoe still had the gall to call me his best friend. I don’t know that he meant it, part of me doubts that he possibly could. But truth be told, I rather suppose he is mine. He may be my only friend. He saved me from my demons though - by God! - it must have put him through hell to do so given the too familiar nature of my suicide. But he did. And who the fuck would I be if I didn’t make an attempt to do the same? To abandon him where he protected me? What would you do if it were one of your friends, Love?” he demanded.

“My friends would never hurt anyone,” Anna replied flatly.

“Have you ever read Abigail’s fiction?” Edmund choked back a bitter laugh.

“I didn’t think you would be so offended.”

“Again I ask, have you ever – no. No.” He rubbed his temples. “I have a more fitting example - have you, my dear, ever actually had a conversation with Brewster? After one drink? After two?”

“My friends would never hurt me,” she clarified.

He failed to reply.

Eventually, Edmund’s taciturnity was masked by electric hum. Anna felt his long, elegant fingers as they brushed back a stand of hair that had found its way to her face, only to be replaced by a reserved kiss. The white buzz blurred into void. Anna closed her eyes as she leaned against him, feeling his arm as it extended towards embrace.

“I beg to differ,” he spoke in a whisper of regret. “I think we can only truly be hurt by the people we love. I’m sorry. God Anna, I am so sorry. I never wanted, or intended any of this to get so out of hand. I – I need to take control before it is lost completely. Call it friendship, or folly, or what you will. I’ll find out what happened and I’ll … I’ll figure out what to do. I’ll fix things. I have to. But I - I’m so, so very sorry. Causing you doubt or pain is the last of what I ever would have intended. I love you so much.”

“Edmund -” she started, but words would not follow. She traced his jaw line, touching his lips where they had broken, backing at the stick of Neosporin, at the bruises she had managed to cover in her attempt to build a stint for his broken nose. At the contusions on his neck and chest, dark as the eyes employing her for grace.

“He strangled me last night. That was out of aggression,” he said. “That I will allow you. The rest, the scars that serve to frighten you the most, I asked him to do that this morning when I put together his odd behaviour, bloodied knuckles, the wine and cider he has stored in his fridge. He put up more of a fight not to hit me than he actually did … well, here. In the act. My point is - I
know him Anna, same as he knows me. Simcoe, he, he has these protective tendencies, he wouldn’t simply - even in a situation that might otherwise warrant it – there is something, or someone rather, whom he is likely trying to defend. I mean to help where I can. And yes, partially at least, for the most selfish of reasons.”

He meant friendship rather than freedom. Anna’s heart shattered with her reservations.

She bit her lip. “I don’t think you selfish. I wish you had more of that in you, if I am being honest.”

“No you don’t. You would cease to respect me if I surrendered the position of my brother in arms. If I failed to defend it. You would do the same for anyone you cared about. I love that about you.”

“If it were one of my friends - I think. I think I’d need a drink, before I even could think,” she conceded. Anna did not know if she was as noble as Edmund would have her. If he was noble himself or simply yet deeply misguided. She knew she loved him, she knew she shouldn’t. She knew that regardless of where this went, she would match his lengths.

“Last night was filled with libations,” he agreed.

“I can tell,” Anna said as she wrinkled her nose. “Around forty-eight fluid ounces of cider, a fifth of something hard and foreign, bad coffee?”

“Have you been spying on me again?” he almost chuckled.

“No, I am, however, a great bartender. Was,” she corrected herself, “was. Now I guess I will have to be a great attorney.”

“Between John and me, we will get the tavern back in your name. I promised -”

Anna shook her head. “Between you and John, I’ll be in court for the next decade at least. Did you ever try, I don’t know, just talking?”

“About what precisely? We’re British, darling, more show than tell,” he said, adding with painful acceptance, “Simcoe doesn’t hear a word I say, anyway. He never has.”

“Then I guess you know how I feel,” she muttered.

“What?”

“Did you ever try though?”

Unable to rid herself of the urge, she spoke.

She raged.

“Did you ever think it wouldn’t be simpler to say to one another ‘thank you’ or ‘I’m sorry’ as the situation allows, instead of, oh, I don’t know, stealing horses to hide bodies behind? Did you ever think, for a minute, that it would have been far less trouble to simply tell me that you have no credit history, no trust fund to fall back on? As opposed to ease dropping on a secret agent and getting a friend whom you know to be ‘in crisis’ to help you stage a community theatre production of ‘The Wolf of Wall Street’? Did you ever -”

“Did you ever find yourself in a situation where you would spit in the face of God Himself to bring a smile to the lips of a person you love?” he countered. Loudly. She had never heard him truly raise his voice before. Anna, however, did not note the volume. She noted the fixed verb. She
noted its tense. “Have you ever been caught between the impossibility of a task and the impossibility of refusing it?” She noted the blame. This was not about Simcoe. About Glasgow. About Benedict Arnold. This was not about battery, blood, or banking. This was - and always had been - about them. Anna heard her own heartbeat as her pulse quicken. The room filled with pause. For one, the silence fell into her control.

“Well, this one time I feel in love with a man who did not trust himself to love me,” she said after a moment that felt like an age. “I asked him to marry me as an equal and he told me he had already gambled our future off on my pipe dream.”

“I’ll not permit you to speak of the future you want and worked for -”

“The future I want is with you,” she spat. Softened. Slightly. “Your problem is that you don’t see one for yourself. You are not as selfish as you think, Edmund, but you are sure as fuck not as smart either.”

“Anna -”

“Look, I get it. You have a history. You have strong morals and stronger ties and I love that about you. I disagree with the very basis of your character assessment but that doesn’t mean I don’t sympathise with the decisions that –you’re right - I find myself unable to empathise with. But I don’t need to see your shining armour tested. All I need, all I want, is an answer.” She took back her hand from under his and held the ring he had once given her before his eyes.

“Is marriage still the question? Be sensible Anna, if anything should happen to me, and you are right, I’ve certainly managed to find myself in a position where that is a distinct possibility, I would not want your honour to be -”

“My honour?” she gaped. “My Honour is my own, sir. My heart is yours if you’d have it. Come what may. That is what love is, Edmund. It is not duty or obligation or fear or guilt or debt. It is not rushing to the front line under heavy fire. It is coming home from war. That is how I feel around you – home, whole, happy. Happy, Edmund! And if there must be a fight to return to that, well, it is one worth having.” She closed her eyes as she was draped in his caress. His skin was the softest she had ever felt. Her cheeks moistened, though she could not tell if from his tears or her own. He repeated her name with his pleas for forgiveness. All she heard was the sound of his heart, drumming louder as he began to trust himself enough to touch her in ways he otherwise found as foreign and daunting as he found New York. She pulled him ever closer, tilting her lips to meet his.

Anna backed. Wiping her lips free of disinfectant, remembering its the cold burn where they were and how they had ended up on the hard kitchen floor of a killer, arguing about the bloodied laundry that had been left to dry and stagnate in the machine. The machine he had her up against.

“I only took the bet because I never wished to marry for any reason other than love,” Edmund whispered, calling her back to the dream he seemed lost in. “And I love you Anna. I love you more than -”

“Than wealth or power or the illusion of both?” she challenged.

“Yes, and -”

She put her fingers to his lips.

“Yes is enough. Yes is all I want or need. The rest we can figure out.”

Edmund grinned, then pouted as Anna wrangled herself form the embrace. She found the
pillowcase on the floor and added it to the wash. Edmund stuttered his gratitude and astonishment.

“Is it too late to soak it, if detergent can’t remove the stain, we’ll have to dispose of the contents,” Anna answered with a wink. “We might anyway - I never could stand The Rangers and would be happy to watch the jersey burn.”

Anna held no opinions or allegiances to the second tier of English Football. Edmund knew this. He also know that what she meant was ‘if this matters so much to you, it matters to me’, which Anna appreciated. It saved her the trouble of having to admit it.

“I don’t trust John,” she continued, starting the laundry. “I trust you. Keep trusting me; I’ll get you both out of whatever mess you are in. You may have rank and your mate - not mine - may have field experience, but I am willing to bet I am a better tactician that either of you combined. And Eddie, I’ll take that last cider now.”

“I’ll take my ring,” he smiled before turning to make a step towards the refrigerator.

“No,” Anna said, reaching out, grazing his bum with her fingertips before he could take another step.

“No?” Edmund asked as he took her hand, turning around once more to meet her.

“Not just like that.”

“You told me not to take a knee!” he objected, shaking his head in disbelief.

“I didn’t tell you to take away the charm entirely.”

“What charm, pray tell?”

“What charm indeed,” Anna cleared her throat. “Edmund Hewlett, former prince, current prime suspect, eternal fool – you are the kindest, most decent, most noble, most infuriating man I have ever had the pleasure and stress of knowing. Will you do me the honour of talking me as your wife that I might claim spousal privilege under US Federal Common Law?”

“That depends; have these colonies nothing of attorney client privilege?”

Anna pressed her lips together as she thought. “Not in incidences of tort, to cite the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court’s ruling in Clark v. United States,” she responded mimicking his accent and the pace at which he spoke of the stars. Edmund blinked at her, choking to swallow a word she could tell was a gendered slut as he fought the urge to laugh. Maybe later Simcoe could tell him that he was an absolute tit, in thanks to her if nothing else. Anna broke into laugh at the absurdity of it all. She fell into Edmund’s open arms, dreaming of the day when her vast knowledge of the American legal system would only be called upon to force the man she hoped to marry to admit to his deficits.

“I confess then my near total ignorance to the subject,” he said as if reading her mind. “But that is … ah, quite interesting.”

“I don’t get your astrophysics stuff either, but I love watching your face illuminate as you take pains to explain it.”

“It is never a ‘pain’ as you say –”

“Edmund, stop,” Anna swallowed, regaining her composure from the exhaustion, anger and
euphoria that sought to deprive her of it entirely. “In all seriousness. I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Do you want to spend yours with me?”

“Yes, of course, I -”

“Good. Now it is your turn.”

“Same format? Right I’ll have a go of it, then. Anna Strong, once-and-future famous barmaid of a one-horse town, you are, absent of question or doubt the bravest, most beautiful and by Jove the most brilliant creature ever born to this earth. Can you, in your relentless, stubborn, and at times coldly judgmental manner, accept the love of the fool who stands before you? Did I, ah, did I get that right?”

“Yes,” Anna laughed. “And yes, with pleasure and with all my heart, yes!”

She slipped the ring onto his finger; he stretched out his arm to admire something he had worn for half his life as though it were a foreign object. Anna giggled again, reclaiming his attention.

“How do I deserve you?” he whispered as he pulled her into a tight and tender embrace.

“You don’t,” she teased.

“Ah -”

“Kidding, Edmund. I’m –oh!”

He picked her up, deaf to her small cries of protest and placed her on the washing machine, screaming and shaking and sending tremors though Anna as it started its run. Edmund explained in the awkward manner she realised that she had come to adore that he suspected a belt was loose as he slid her unzipped dress down off her shoulders.

“Edmund,” she purred.

“To forward?” he spoke as he slowly, lightly traced the line created where her bra met her skin, “It is only that, you had ah, been complaining about your undergarments as it were and I imagine that -”

“No I,” Anna gazed into his deep, dark eyes as they stared at her with an untampered lust too tameless for him to translate into words. “I would,” she paused, inhaling deeply as she felt his moistened lips graze her cleavage, “quite like to be rid of this.”

To her surprise and satisfaction, her breasts were liberated almost the instant she voiced the desire. Edmund cradled, caressed and kissed them – softly against the skin reddened by the rouge under wire’s assault, frenzied in places of pleasure. Anna let out soft moans, at first to encourage him, then without pretention as she felt herself moisten as the tip of his tongue danced around her areola. The disinfectant she had used to mend his lips tickled and tingled against her raw nipples after saliva and sweat should have seen them washed. Edmund stroked and squeezed with something akin to certainty until Anna ran her fingers through the back of his hair, pulling him to eye level, in her passion not quite as delicately as she had intended.

“No good?” Edmund enquired. Anna answered by inserting her tongue into his open mouth as he choked for breath. She wrapped her legs around his waist, feeling a pressure that left her in desperate want of that she knew to be impossible.

“Not as inexperienced as you claim?” she teased when he broke osculation.
“I’m a physicist,” he grinned, “I can figure out a simple clasp.” She noticed her bra had not left the hand he used to balance them both, the machine still engaging in epilepsy despite the pressure and weight she would have thought would silence it.

“That is not entirely what I -”

“I know what you meant. It doesn’t alter my – ah actually, speaking, speaking of physics, as it were, there is ah – I want to attempt something. May I?”

“What then?”

He backed up slightly, teasing her inner thigh with a slow brush as encouraged it to release him. His fingers climbed the bulk of black fabric collected at her waste. He tugged at it, his eyes meeting hers as he awaited permission. Anna was glad he did not see – and hoped he did not feel – the various undergarments the promised slow suffocation and a slender waistline.

“Let me,” Anna said quickly, pushing him back as she sprang to the floor. The machine grew louder unburdened. She glanced quickly at Edmund, who seemed preoccupied in his sudden annoyance, muttering to himself about there being a likely fire hazard. Anna let her borrowed Chanel fall with ease, as eager to be done with her as she was with it. Her shaping pants and control tops were less quick to surrender – aided by the moisture of her flesh, they were being as difficult to remove as they had been to put on in the first place. She silently thanked the potential fire hazard for allowing her a moment’s modesty; her cheeks aflame when she noticed Edmund’s attention had found its way back to her.

“Come here,” he smiled. Anna wondered why he would want to see her naked at all.

“Why do women do this to themselves?” he muttered as, with comparative ease he slipped his long fingers underneath her corsets, separating them from her dampened skin and removing them from her midsection. Anna took a deep breath. “Now, now,” said Edmund as he leaned to kiss her, robbing her of it entirely. His hands were still stuck against her hips. When they reached her panty line, they abandoned their original quest, Edmund, still locked in a kiss, trancing the length of her thong, seeking the warmth of the lips he had yet to meet. All of the oxygen Anna had deprived herself of for the day’s duration returned to her in a single instant as his fore – and index fingers entered her, his thumb fumbling for, and finding, the area to which her own were drawn in lust and loneliness.

“How –“

“Physics,” he said. “Ah Anna I, I’m sure this is – I…” He took back his hand.

“Don’t stop. Please, don’t stop,” she begged.

“I – I am not I … I think you should turn around, yes, yes, that is it,” he said, spinning her round and sliding behind her. He completed his liberation of her legs in a single swift motion. Edmund took the dress from the floor where it lie in defeat and folded it inelegantly on the loud laundry machine. “For your … here,” he said, bending her over the washer. The vibrations trembled through her as he spread her legs. Without allowing her a moment’s anticipation, she felt him enter. Anna cried out his name.

“Ah – oh, oh God, I ought to have,” her fiancé stammered, stopped in mid-thrust.

Anna broke out into laughter. “Edmund I, no, no please, don’t stop I -”

“I, of course I recognise that I’m not all that you … well, ah, that isn’t to say that I in anyway think
or mean to imply -”

Anna was mortified by the cachinnations that fell from her control. She attempted to explain through her involuntary cackles that she could not believe or accept that he had never been with a woman before. Edmund was embarrassed. Clearly, Anna thought. He seemed confused, when not completely scarred by her sounds. He froze within her. Anna prayed he had not gone limp. When she asked him to continue, asked him, in apologetic tones if he could, he complied.

“I really was not certain either if this arrangement could be functional as … such, but I imagined with the torque created between John’s washer and myself I might at least hope -”

“God, you really are a virgin, aren’t you?”

“Well … not as it were in this present moment -”

“Edmund, just tell me I am beautiful.”

“You, you are. I apologise sincerely -”

They were going to have so much to discuss after he had finished, Anna realised.

“So are you. Don’t stop. Don’t speak,” she commanded.

He didn’t.

Anna traversed her sexual memory in search of another incident in which she had been truly fucked by a man making love to her. With Edmund it seemed there was little division. The tender kisses he placed in the nape of her neck and between her shoulder blades were a contradiction to the way her pounded her against the makeshift vibrator with all of the fury, haste and cold desperation that seemed to define his business dealings. Her inner thighs trembled under his grip, crushing and compassionate all at once. He slowed to regain his composure the moment his *Ahs* began echoing her *Ohhs*. His breathing overwhelmed the gowns of the overworked, overburdened appliance. He stopped.

Apologising that he did not wish to finish before she did, he slid himself out from within her. Anna turned around to meet his still throbbing member, kneeling to kiss it and lick it free of remnants of her waters, which she could feel between her trembling thighs continue to shame the Hudson and its sisters for their flow. Edmund joyously pleaded for her to stop. Anna continued to tease, halting only when a surprisingly sweet taste reminded her that brilliant lover was never wrong in his calculations.

“You are perfect,” he told her as once more he lifted her on to the device, as once more she entangled her impossibly long legs around his soft but slender waist. He entered again. Each thrust serving to separate them, he told her to hold on as he awkwardly lifted her from the laundry. He was still within her as he moved to carry her out of the kitchen, laughing that this all looked far easier in pornographic videos. Anna compared herself to the women Edmund might fantasise about sleeping with, explained - as women are want to do regardless if they agree with the assessment or if it is warranted - that she was too heavy, there was no way he would be able to carry her to the bed. Edmund responded that it was the position and his relative inexperience at fault. She was perfect, but he had no intention of taking her to bed just yet.

With that, he crushed her against the flat’s glass outer wall, made colder by comparison to his heat. Anna’s feet found the floorboards as Edmund, arms and elbows braced against the wall began to take her against it. “No, no, that simply won’t do,” he commented after a minute’s action. “Wait
Anna watched him walk over to a chair his blazer was folded over and remover something from the pocked. She questioned if he was seeking assistance, concerned that he owed his erection to something obtained on the street. “No, my dear, I have not taken my heart medication in over 24 hours. I am fine, least in this respect. I fear in this particular incidence it is you, rather than I, in need of some ah – aid.”

When he kneeled to kiss her, she understood. He had taken a mint; his tongue caused her tender lips to tingle as he explored their folds. Between moans, Anna breathlessly insisted that he wasn’t a virgin. Edmund agreed once more that she was, in fact, now correct in her assessment, though in the morning her had been. Borrowing from her script, he bade her not to speak. Anna, however, was unable to keep from shouting his name as he shouldered his way between her thighs.

“I … I’ve never been kissed that way before,” she exhaled as he paused to breathe.

“Want to taste?” His words seemed to wink.

Anna drank the drops of salt and menthol from his wide lips as she collapsed to meet them. She stroked his member until it began to harden in her hands, whilst his were preoccupied with all of her parts deemed private. He knew how to touch she remarked again in the awe she felt incapable of escaping. “I never claimed to be a saint, love,” he responded.

Edmund carried her to John’s hanging bedframe, laying her on the hard mattress. It shook as he climbed up to join her. Anna’s eyes widened, remembering in the scent of the sheets that the two of them were not suspended somewhere free of eternity – of jealously, blame and consequence. She felt herself dam up again despite all of Edmund’s hard work as he climbed atop her. Anna forced a smile, constraining and releasing the muscles that surrounded his path of entry in a way that made him moan.

“Edmund, what if John should return?” she asked.

“To hell with propriety, I’m so happy right now.”

Anna closed her eyes.

Her mind again betrayed her lover to the loose tempered boy whose bed they occupied. Who would doubtlessly take the act as another betrayal at a time that otherwise necessitated trust.

Chapter End Notes

… you know they dead.

Quick shout out before I get to the notes, the ever-brilliant CalamityBean was kind enough to take the time months ago when I first started drafting this chapter to drop some of her vast equestrian knowledge on me. Apparently, it is very easy to spook a horse.

Some of the current events items that appeared in this monster of a chapter included devolution and racial violence in Glasgow, migratory patterns of birds being
interrupted by industrial windmills, money laundering in New York real estate, the revolving door between charity and business and collections for a school that never existed. I took a very loose, very liberal approach to them, but all of these things were admittedly lifted from various news sources which I am sure will show up if you want to throw a google at them.

IN OTHER NEWS!

Hide and Seek is nearly a year old! (Yay!) Now, I know that I ask too much of my readers as-is (how can the ships not be the most significant relationship in a fic? Have I never heard of genre? And oh, the plot – why so vast? Why so involved?) but I am going to ask that you help me celebrate by leaving comments / kudos. I feel so bad about it but …

I cannot even begin to express how grateful I am for those that I do receive and for the lovely, beautiful people who leave them. I love writing this fic, but honestly, the best part of it is the social element, and I would love to hear from you especially. As always, thanks for reading and I hope you enjoyed!

XOXO- Tav

Up Next: Anna and Mary vs. everyone
He did not ask when Simcoe opened the door to him with a painted smile and blackened eye. If he noticed Hewlett’s various cuts and contusions he made no mention of them, and nor did they. The two did not afford him an explanation for the various maps strewn out across the dining table; the statistical analysis he knew had nothing to do with the scheme in which he had become a willing participant. The girls offered him cider, coffee, powdered tea costing more per kilo than cocaine. He declined.

By the time he and the lads had driven across the border, stacked with four others in Simcoe’s Range Rover, he had begun himself believe that his friends were capable of temporarily abdicating from their own tremendous concerns in favour of his care. An hour into blanketing paper men with bullets, however, he saw that his captain was so removed from his surroundings that his basic operations had become as semi-automatic as the weapon in his hands. Hands, Akinbode hoped, were laden only with the left back’s blood. Simcoe’s speech was high and haughty, hastened and wholly detached from any of the short conversations in which they engaged. Initially, Akinbode had been grateful. He was weary of pity. He was weary of the word ‘fine’ and the questions otherwise forced upon him that required him to repeat it.

Beer was fine, as was the handgun, as was he over the breakup, at least when it was brought up. Most of his otherwise socially inept teammates had eventually stopped asking, either satisfied with his response or themselves responding to clear cues. A man who spent his Thursday night answering the patriotic call of opening a can of Coors Light by firing at a silhouette whose name he would not utter but whom all present could reasonably identify as the man who had fucked his now ex-girlfriend - based on where he discharged most of his cartridge - was most certainly not
‘fine’. A man working through to shock of having thrown his own life away was incapable of wording an appropriate answer.

Simcoe, however, continued to ask between comments that had little conversational structure and which would have made little sense to Akinbode even had he been in full command of his cognitive resources.

Curry, he answered, after they had been escorted off the premises and asked never to return, was fine too.

Clearly, Simcoe was not. Noticing the bruising others were content to ignore he knew that it, whatever it was, had nothing to do with him.

Akinbode was concerned.

The restrooms at the hole-in-the-wall Indian restaurant in the same strip-mall as the Walmart spoke to the pain and instant regret that Simcoe seemed to promise by ordering in Urdu. The man behind the counter mirrored and matched his teammate’s sardonic smile. Akinbode was ready to opt out of the ‘special menu’ when he witnessed Wakefield’s face twist -ever so briefly- into a look of absolute dismay. He had not seen the man exude so much raw emotion as this on occasions that would otherwise warrant it – his wedding, the birth of his child, missing a penalty kick and with it losing the league cup.

Akinbode wondered what was being said. He wondered when he had last heard Simcoe really say anything at all, and if anyone else had taken notice. His insults had grown empty and uninspired as of late, answers to his questions – including the night’s refrain of ‘how you holding up?’ – were met with vague gestures designed to veil disinterest. He hoped Simcoe was attempting to imitate Hewlett’s practiced distance - the very attitude Akinbode had tasked himself to emulate with every glance he made to his mobile throughout the evening.

In vain.

He was in agony.

Hewlett was aloof, Simcoe merely absent. Akinbode understood enough that he did not begrudge them the act; he resented, however, its duration.

He glanced at the half of their soccer team Simcoe had been able to rally for a short-notice road trip. His reservations took root. All of these men had been able to abandon their apathy enough to make a half-hearted show of their condolences. They were all disaffected. They were all in agreeance. They had been, it seemed, for quite some time.

Akinbode checked the phone again. Absent of alerts, he returned to the message he realised he had been reading in this friends’ eyes all evening. A code they had not intended for him to break.

They had all known this was coming.

He wondered for how long.

“You can’t honestly -” he heard Hewlett begin to protest after Simcoe paused at length only to
arrive on the word **cholesterol**.

“Oyster, that we are clear, when people accuse you of being an intellectual snob this is precisely
the sort of behaviour they are referencing to,” Simcoe said lightly. “How should I know a word in
my second language that I only learned hours before in my first?”

“I think it clear that is not my point of complaint but that you bring it up, given that the word is
derived from Greek-” he started, aggravated and indignant as were his expected norms. Hewlett
shot him a small, sorry glance which Akinbode met with a nod. He appreciated the honesty. It was
curious when he paused to consider it – Hewlett knew how to command and control perception. He
had more reason than anyone to maintain an appearance and yet this was the one he chose.

Akinbode had be ‘fine’ for three hours when anyone asked and he was exhausted from it. He
wondered what it was like constantly and continually be a number of untruths. He wondered if
Simcoe knew or suspected and if that helped him anchor his general animosity. He wondered if he
appreciated the target on offer to his loose cannon.

Hewlett seemed the only real shot he had left.

“I’m but trying to protect your lip from exposure to a spice that would surely prove torturous to you
even if were it not split open. I’m defending your fragile frame from the wrath your” Simcoe
paused and took a step closer to close the already small distance between them. Cocking his head to
contain a cheeky grin, he continued, “Why your … fiancée would doubtlessly deliver should she
discover that you disobeyed a direct order.”

“I think it curious that you find that I should be the one to feel emasculated by the fact that Anna
landed a hit on you,” Hewlett provoked with equal acid as he gestured to the contusion under the
captain’s eye.

“And I would ordinarily fault one for hiding behind a woman but if your aim at the shooting range
attests to anything it is that you are truly outmatched in every conceivable scenario,” Simcoe
replied, mirthless and menacing. “You are calculating Hewlett, I’ll give you that much. You’re
calculating. Naturally then, it would stand that you are, at the very least … aware that you’d not
stand a chance alone against me when you,” he paused to swallow his rising laughter, “when you
can’t even so much as take out a bloody sheet of paper with a semi-automatic rifle and a sales clerk
to help you steady it.”

At this even Akinbode entered into the echoes of laughter suddenly shrouding the small dining
area. He has barely so much as smirked since arriving at Simcoe’s flat early in the evening in
search of a drinking buddy, potentially finding four.

‘I broke things off with Abby,’ he had offered to no one in particular.

Simcoe had responded far too quickly by announcing they would undertake what he imagined to
be the American fashion of sorting through one’s grief. Hewlett, in a rare moment without a mask,
agreed to and insisted upon the proposed course of action before Akinbode could stage a proper
protest. It was as though they had been planning this manoeuvre for some time.

An hour later, he had found himself with half of his association soccer team at a shooting range in
the Outdoor Sports Department of a Walmart Super Centre in New Jersey, drinking away the past
decade with lukewarm beer from the establishment’s in-built supermarket whilst Simcoe
challenged anyone to throw them out.

Initially, Akinbode had been grateful for the distractions he had been given until he realised none
would absolve him of the mounting guilt of leaving the woman he could not help but to still think of as ‘his girl’ alone with an expiring lease.

“It is the jacket and the shoes though, ‘innit?” Eastin said of Hewlett’s questionable attire as he helped Joyce push two tables together to accommodate the shooting party. “Right let’s take a run through. When I went to have a piss, I saw a man in the toilets shaving his legs over a urinal. There was a meth-head pleasuring himself with a stuffed animal, a battalion of elderly woman in motorized shopping carts stacking up on wine coolers and cake mix, which isn’t even to mention our esteemed captain getting into an argument with a bunch of farmers who, I suppose, wanted to actually buy a gun.” At this, Simcoe shrugged, offering a smile Akinbode thought to at least be genuine. “But you Hewlett?” Eastin continued. “You alone can be said to be the embodiment of the modern American mess.”

Under his tailored blazer, Hewlett wore the pink away-kit of the other Merseyside team – the one he loathed based on an allegiance – paired with denim shorts that fit him like breeches. He looked like an absolute fool, even in New Jersey. There was likely a story behind this, but Akinbode was willing to let it be. Enough was said by the fact that otherwise fussy Edmund Hewlett had come out without a thought to his vanity to hear him say ‘fine’ and hope it was, or rather would be, true.

“Congratulations on your successful integration,” Wakefield remarked with his typical torpor.

“I’d argue that successful integration would involve being able to hit your target in a country where the right the bare arms is always fodder for debate,” Simcoe taunted.

“I’ve not taken it m’self, but I’ve heard that shooting is a primary component of the US Citizenship Test.”

“It is, as a lawyer I can attest to it,” Akinbode replied to Eastin’s statement as he took a seat at the end of the newly erected banquet table, wordlessly inviting the others to do the same.

“What is the deal Hewlett, has it been too long since you’ve gone on a proper shoot on your family’s ancestral grounds?” Robeson asked in an intentionally poor approximation of Hewlett’s forced posh accent. “Or can you only take aim at pheasant when tea and crumpets with the Queen and PM are promised to follow?”

Hewlett choked, Akinbode presumed, on the offence he had taken. Crafted as the rest of his constant performance was, he could do nothing to confront his own pride when it was on the attack. Akinbode glanced at the clock on the wall hanging in the filthy, partially exposed kitchen, disappointed, then delighted, that it no longer kept time. He pulled out his mobile again in order to use its stop clock to see exactly how much Hewlett’s tick had been aggravated. No alerts. No replies. He was developing a nervous condition of his own.

“Ah … my family,” Hewlett, paused, “we never engaged … well you see. My father. That is, ah. This is rather, ah,” he stammered, raising a hand to rub his temples. “It is quite embarrassing. My father is a vegan, you see, he didn’t believe in such … escapades. That is … I’ve hardly ever held a weapon.”

“Managed to shoot your own horse though,” Simcoe muttered.

The laughter stopped. Conversation started abruptly and from all directions, most of it commentary on all this revelation explained. Hewlett, for his part, sat silent, looking ready to kill again just to watch something bleed. It was a pity, Akinbode considered, that the monument to the Second Amendment, the miniature museum of its modern interpretation, had closed at eight o’clock. He check his phone again, deciding to shoot off another text if Walmart’s corporate policy prevented
him from firing off anything else.

With this, he found himself the object of attention once more, hearing a chorus of objections over the light percussions his fingers made on the touch screen.

He took no heed of their calls for a ceasefire.

Akinbode was concerned.

He stared at the photograph of Abigail he had saved as his lock screen; taken on one of the rare occasions she had permitted him to stay the night. She smiled at him over her shoulder, her hair still covered in the silks she wore to sleep, comfortable, confident, content in a way he so rarely saw her. She had always hated that picture.

He would always remember her exactly as she looked that morning. He would always remember feeling exactly as he felt when he assumed there would be many more to follow.

Akinbode ran his index finger over the device to tell her for the twelfth time since storming out of the rented town house that she could stay with him until she and Cicero found another residence. That she could stay indefinitely. That they could work this out.

Her response had been - and remained - complete silence.

It spoke. He could not bear the sound.

By the time supper had arrived, Akinbode was confident that no one could tell if the swelling in his eyes was a reaction to of sorrow or spice. Simcoe ate the curry with comfort, Eastin with appetency, Wakefield with caution. Joyce, who had opted for the yellow variety -which the server called ‘white’, simply ate dinner. Robeson, whose fondness of foreign meat, Akinbode assumed, extended only to ‘bangers’ and ‘toads in the hole’ had tried dipping one of his chicken nuggets in the sauce that had been offered to him before requesting ketchup.

Hewlett, perhaps owing to his family’s values, perhaps only to what Simcoe chose to name as concern for his well-being, ate only a salad with marked dissatisfaction. He commented that it was mostly lettuce to further mocking jeers of ‘Ah! But it is quite American! Refreshingly so.’ Akinbode tried to lose himself in the mindless conversation without adding to it.

He overhead in the light chatter something that reminded him of a conversation he had had with his reverend around the time of his confirmation. ‘Brotherly love,’ Nathanial Tallmadge challenged him to consider in the context of a larger theological theme, ‘is misunderstood. It has nothing to do with comradery. When we examine The Bible, relationships between brothers are often marked by conflict and jealousy – in fact The Good Book tells us that the first murder was an act of fratricide. Can you remember why?’

At twenty-nine, he no longer could. He wondered if it would not have served him better to have simply gone to church. Not only tonight. Akinbode questioned if it would have been better to have sung the Lord’s praise every Sunday morning for the past three years as opposed to having passed a ball with his present dining companions on a rented pitch. He studied their faces. Somehow, despite or perhaps due to various locker room conflicts, these men had become his family, his brothers-in-arms. He wondered if he loved them on some level and if he did, if the sentiment was
more akin to Cain and Abel or to the popular definition that emerged in the Enlightenment and had been propagated by the bloody revolutions born from its doctrine.

He questioned if in essence the both conceptions spoke to the same envy he suddenly felt swallowed by. He did not want to speak of Abigail. He could think of nothing but her. He hated everyone at the table in that moment. Everyone who was putting forth a solid effort to heal his heart or at least distract him from his festering wound. It was not working, and it could not work because their lives had not been reduced to a door slammed in a fight. They all had lives they had yet to turn their backs on.

They had no bloody idea.

“Oh it actually gets worse, lads,” Hewlett announced as he removed his bespoke jacket, the only article of a designer suit, he told, which Anna Strong had not managed to ruin in the laundry.

“Simcoe is the sort who would keep a medieval torcher device on hand for just such an occasion.”

“You give me far too much credit,” Simcoe smiled as Hewlett turned around, revealing the name on the back of the jersey. “The jean shorts I happened upon one day while passing through China Town, and yes,” he informed Hewlett, still without much inflection, “I bought them specifically because I knew their presence in my wardrobe would upset you. The shirt though,” he said, shifting his attention back to the masses, “mate of mine from school actually wore that thing ‘round unironically until Rooney transferred to United after two seasons with the first team. He gave it to me to burn, not wanting to destroy the Everton emblem himself, and I, having the proper sense not to touch it at all, let the thing sit at the bottom of my wardrobe for years. I was honestly surprised to find it still among my belongings.”

Eastin held up a finger and, upon having found what he had been searching for, handed his mobile along to Simcoe who met its glow with a grin. He put his other arm around Hewlett’s bruised neck and shoved the device into the field of vision he forced upon the man with his grip. “I’m rather presently surprised that you could use it to get yourself featured on the People-of-Walmart site,” he chirped. “I suppose that is one positive of still having the relative height of a twelve year old at … how old are you now, Oyster? Every time I look away and then look back at you it seems as though another hundred or so of your hairs have abandoned their pigment.” Still clutching Hewlett’s head in a deadlock, he began twisting the ends of the smaller man’s too-long hair around his triggered fingertips. Akinbode wondered if this was intentional, if he meant to belittle with a caress, or - as with everything else he did with his hands when otherwise stimulated - Simcoe simply had no idea or control.

Hewlett gave him an awful look but made no move against him. Curled over his ears, his hair, which had whitened considerably since the stress of surviving a suicide, resembled a peruke. He looked like a ghost; rather, he looked like an unfit eighteenth century garrison commander held hostage by the mutiny of one man. Akinbode had to look away upon recognition of something he had once read with scorn.

“Oh I would feel right comfortable with that prognosis; I haven’t seen Simcoe take his eyes off you for months,” Wakefield asserted.

“Years,” Joyce corrected.

“Since you joined the team.”

Hewlett managed to free himself from Simcoe’s chokehold. “I suppose that is … rather accurate,” he agreed with audible guilt.
“I can but attest to it,” Simcoe concurred, seemingly unaware that his cold gaze remained fixed. “Frankly I wouldn’t mind seeing far less of you than I have as of late.”

“Trouble in paradise?” Akinbode asked mordantly.

“Yea … so our own Oyster here is no longer a virgin. Which is why I forced him to don the 2003 / 2004 Everton away kit.”

It was a poor choice of wording.

The silence that followed was quickly taken by various remarks of men pulled from their psyches by a sudden shared sense of sardonicism.

“You have some strange fetishes.”

“You all owe me money.”

“There was a betting pool going on for this?” Hewlett demanded.

“How much would you have sold yourself for then?” Simcoe inquired. Still, Akinbode noted, not averting his attention from his mark. He wondered if this was conscious or deliberate, if his established norms were so aberrant that the two assumed they could be fixed and fitted into a cover with little effort. He wondered if this explained Hewlett’s nose and lip, Simcoe’s eye. He wondered if it worth it to take the time to explain that fist fights did not rapidly devolve into banal mockery on this side of the Atlantic.

He wondered if it was worth it at all.

He wondered when he had stopped caring.

“I … I wouldn’t,” Hewlett stammered. For once, everyone seemed to see through his façade. The man was to be had for the slightest hint of affection. Akinbode looked again to his phone, hoping for a beacon in the form of a blinking light. Maybe they were all so easy. Maybe that was what made sitting here listening to faux foes stage a fight so laborious.

“Then why even ask?”

“It seems as good a method as any to weed out the traitors among us,” Hewlett announced in a huff. “And you are, all of you, absolute serpents. You think we, he and I, together – ah, that we made love … to each other? I come out here with a broken nose, Simcoe with a blackened eye and not one of you think to ask, ‘hey lads, alright then?’”

“I afforded you every bit the attention your latest row could possibly warrant,” Wakefield replied. “I told you that if you lost a litre of blood due to those wounds it is likely that you are over medicated and I play golf with a cardiologist that I would be happy to refer you to.”

“Can you do that?” Hewlett blinked. “Write referrals for adults?”

“What adults? Hewlett, the reason no one asked if either of you were all right is because this sort of behaviour has become predictable. Seeing you over Skype this afternoon reminded me that it was Thursday and that I needed to pick up the dog from the kennel on my way home.”

“There is something to that,” Robeson thought aloud. “You always pitch your battels midweek so you’ll be over it by Sunday.”
“Strategic,” Joyce agreed.

“But dull for the lot of us,” Akinbode added. He found himself as incapable of feigning further interest as he had been in fabricating responses at the shooting range. Getting buzzed on piss warm beer while emptying one magazine after another inside of a mega store was the opposite of ‘fine’ no matter how many times he said it, no matter who cared to ask. Eventually he had asked them all to stop. Eventually they did. Except for Simcoe. Who asked again.

This time, he declined to answer.

Akinbode took another bite. Eyes watering, he swallowed quickly and without chewing, and glared at his captain. There was a decided difference between enjoying spicy food and being dead to all stimuli. Simcoe belonged to the latter. He ate as if he failed to taste. He spoke as though he read from a script and kept forgetting what line he was meant to be on.

He wondered why it had taken him so long to notice, if he only did now because of Abigail’s book, because of the break-up he should have seen in the subtext long before he had. Simcoe smiled and continued speaking. High, haughty, with far too much pep and haste then the conversation should warrant. Akinbode hated the caution Simcoe become. He hated what devastation looked like when worn by survivors. He wondered if there was much left of the man himself to resent.

He recognized that had no logical reason to resent any of them.

He could not help but to do so.

They had no bloody idea what he was going through.

How could they? Each heart fractured and fragmented individually in response to how it had been hit. None of them had ever loved as he had. None of them had ever sworn off ‘forever and always’, yet everyone was wrestling other demons with the handicap of having come into contact with Dr John Andre. Though at the time neither he nor anyone present knew that their problems and personal short-comings were being exploited or how much blood stood to be shed as a result, Akinbode looked at shattered men and saw them as such.

Still, he resented them. He resented that his problems paled in comparison. He resented that despite this, not one of them seemed to know pain, or, at least, none were as naturally given to raw reactions. Maybe it was a cultural standard. Maybe he alone felt the weights of choice and circumstance.

Akinbode had just broken up with the woman he had spent a decade with, the woman who for the last half of it at least he intended to one day call his wife.

Wakefield saw children all day but hardly ever saw his own, working hundred-hour weeks to pay back his debts to Harvard.

Eastin had seen his transportation business dry up in the past year, his investments in city-issued taxi licences reduced to the value of an average lift on the Uber App, something he was involved in a class action against, a suit Akinbode thought sure to fail. He would be financially ruined within the year.

Robeson needed legal recourse more than anyone else at the table. He had spent half his life on a commercial fishing boat, setting every penny aside, only to see his entire savings taken by the cancer that should have taken his life. When he could no longer cover COBRA payments for his insurance he had come on the rather inspired idea of staging a bank robbery with an unloaded rifle,
knowing that if he was arrested and went to federal prison the state which had made it impossible for him to access affordable coverage would be obligated to cover his chemotherapy.

Ultimately, though unburdened by further medical debt, he paid a far too heavy price. Unable to move out of the halfway house he had been sent to because Robert Rogers’s threatened fire him from the construction job he supplied - the only one Robeson could find with a criminal record- if he should, he was bound in a form of slavery his court-appointed case-worker assured him was legal. It had been the source of constant argument between him and Joyce, who had been begging him to move in for the past two years.

Had been.

Joyce would be in Mumbai where the curries would be hotter or he would be made redundant come September when the IBM call centre he managed shifted overseas. Now the two just argued over Robeson’s drinking problem, which Akinbode did not begrudge him.

Hewlett had left a life of privilege and excess to live in a rented room on the other side of the ocean. He served some sort of self-imposed penance for what Akinbode imagined must have amounted to an unforgivable sin by protecting the interests of the few he found dear. Akinbode wondered if the man took any satisfaction from slipping into what he had heard were old habits on behalf of Anna’s pub, or in playing foe, foil and fall guy as needed for Simcoe.

Simcoe, whom, Akinbode was all but certain, had recently killed a man.

“Dare I inquire?” he heard Wakefield ask.

“Oh, after lunch yesterday I went to provide Hewlett with character testimony and ended up talking to an FBI interrogator about the time he stabbed me with a butter knife and I left him naked in the middle of the woods,” Simcoe peeped happily. The man, Akinbode decided, was completely insane.

“I love how you say that so casually. This is why no one among us is shocked or even interested when the two of you take to sex or savagery to sort out your differences,” Eastin muttered.

“For the love of -!” Hewlett threatened to explode. “We didn’t have sex with one another,” he shuttered. No one, other than Hewlett himself perhaps, had taken the accusation in earnest or would have much cared if their two teammates had in fact experienced a moment’s self-awareness. They probably would have been keen to ignore the matter if in fact they afforded it any merit. It was merely amusing for all of them to watch Hewlett, who otherwise shot for elegance and eloquence, flounder for words whilst throwing a fit. Not for Akinbode. Not when he had not put any money on it recently. Not when for whatever damned reason of love or hate or guilt the two rivals could simply not walk away from each other. Not when he had just walked out on the most important person in his life. He hated them. All of them. The enactors and the enablers like.

Akinbode glanced at his phone.

“Simcoe simply walked in on me in the act and insisted that I pay the price he then set,” Hewlett swallowed, trying to regain his calm.

“And that is all you did?” Wakefield, a fellow Red, remarked on the jersey, paying no mind of the visceral damage his friend had endured. “You’ve lost your edge.”

Simcoe shrugged. “I found myself in the odd sort of situation in which -I confess you may be right-I often seem to find myself these days in which I was torn between wanting to high-five Oyster and beat the life out of him. I think after nearly two decades we arrived at a balance, wouldn’t you
“agree?” he asked, flicking the tip of Hewlett’s bandaged nose with his middle finger.

Akinbode did not.

He tried to numb out their nonsense as he had tried to do all evening. He tried to lose himself to it to forget that Abigail was lost to him. The casual banter provided him with reprieve from the spotlight, from the empathy his friends tried to force upon him and from the contonym ‘fine’. It should have given him base comfort if nothing else that his criminal cohorts were refined enough in their routine that they could convince a room of the people who knew them best that their respective arsenals were low on artillery and could excuse this light casualty within reason.

He wondered if this behaviour fit Mary Woodhull’s definition of normality.

He wondered how it became theirs.

He pressed a button on the side of his phone again to illuminate Abigail’s smile. She had yet to return his text. He continued to listen. He heard her reasons why.

The argument had started when he brought up his friend’s reactions to their fictionalized selves in an attempt to aid his own fight against the ways she had chosen to characterize him. Abigail put her hands on her hips and tasked him to provide her with an argument that Hewlett was not proud, paranoid and given to self-dealing; or, that Simcoe was not obsessive and deranged in a manner that manifested itself in an inexorable lust for violence. Akinbode inquired if she saw him as controlling, as domineering, as possessive. She asked him what he thought – to which he responded that he thought the sole individual to whom she had afforded any positive representation to was John Andre.

And then it was out.

And then it was over.

And now he saw in his friends that she had taken less licence than he had wanted to allow.

Akinbode wondered if in the course of their relationship he had been as blunt, forceful and given to lofty expectations as she had written him. He wondered if his novelized self ever felt as though he were in command in the post she had relented to him after another fight over the same work caused him to accuse her of adding to the racist sentiment that lingered in American culture after centuries of slavery and segregation.

He wondered if his character ever had it in his mind to simply walk away from a situation he saw that he could not control.

Akinbode wanted to leave immediately and without explanation.

“I am bored of your standing rivalry as a whole. It was more interesting with a clear and defined point of contention. Hewlett, I assume then you had a taste of the untouchable Anna Strong?”

“Had a taste? Sir, she is to be my wife.”

“Simcoe, how do you let him get away with that?”

“Well I, I’ll admit my interests shifted upon seeing what a relationship with the future Mrs. Hewlett would actually entail. Our own Oyster here is the primary suspect in a high profile murder investigation and she is demanding that he break with his vices when he needs them most. As for me, I’ve sought and found my jollies elsewhere.”
At this, everyone cheered, whistled and wanted details.

Everyone - that was- except for Jordan Akinbode.

“Mary Woodhull?” he snapped. “Do you really think that something appropriate to discuss on the
day I found out that the woman I’ve been with for ten years, a woman I spoke for in all but name,
was fucking her boss all the while?”

Simcoe blinked. Akinbode had never know his eyes to shut. “No I-” he started. Maybe it would
have been an apology. He did not want to hear it. Any of it. Not anymore.

“And Hewlett, do you really think I want to hear about your brush with happiness for a second?
How do either of you think it makes me feel -that is makes any of us normal blokes feel - that you
can waltz in, set your eyes on not a girl but rather on the paperwork a marriage would provide you
with and find eternal happiness from that?”

Hewlett rose. Akinbode met him. Leaning over the table he continued, “I have been trying,
working, fighting and bleeding for a decade to obtain the same ideal that was suggested to you two
nights back. ‘Why don’t we marry for love?’ Maybe run tell Anna that that is the capacity you truly
lack. I always thought the dick thing was pseudo-symptomatic to some degree but you can’t well
cover for the fact that you don’t have a heart. And John?” he returned, “Bragging about banging a
married woman with a little kid? Honestly? You both make an absolute mockery of the intuition or
marriage! Yeah, keep thinking its ‘fine’ to go about as you do; thinking that you are only hurting
one another but at some point, at some point you are going to need to remove yourself from this
concept that the whole damn world is restricted to the spaces you occupy in one another’s. You’d
better hope to God that your paper-brides, illicit lovers, that fucking anyone else is still around
when you do. If you do. We are all bored of this charade and let there be no doubt between us - I
know what you are trying to achieve from it.” Hewlett’s jaw descended slowly. Simcoe stood.
Akinbode spoke.

“It is bullshit that either of you can find something akin to love. The world doesn’t revolve around
you two, the longer that people are around you the clearer that becomes.”

He knocked on the table to say goodbye to the others and walked outside to order himself a ride
back to the city. He would not show up for Sunday’s match or any of the ones to follow for the rest
of the season.

No one ever rang to check up on him.

Including Abigail.

Chapter End Notes

I have a lot of notes this time, lovely faces, and not a lot of time, so let’s just get to it,
shall we?

Penalty Kick: a type of free kick awarded when the foul occurs inside the offending
player's penalty box (that square drawn in front of the goal.)

League Cup: The trophy given at the end of the season to the team who has accrued
the most points (by the way - 3 for a win, 1 for a draw, 0 for a loss.)
Merseyside (Derby): I am assuming that as period drama fans you love history and hate sport so I will try to make this quick, the Merseyside Derby is the longest running in the Prem, dating to 62/63. Half of the rivalry is based on the club’s proximity to one another, they are on opposite sides of the same street. Until the mid-eighties it was called the ‘friendly derby’ and complete fan segregation was not enforced but then things got really out of hand. Today the fixture (Liverpool vs. Everton / Everton vs. Liverpool) sees more red cards than any other match in the Premiership.

(Wayne) Rooney: One of England’s most famous footballers. He began his career at Everton before moving to Man U where he had a very successful run. He is currently a reserve and I have heard rumours that he will retire at the end of this season. So an Everton jersey bearing his name would truly be “medieval” in football terms, in which 90 minutes can feel like 100 years if your team is down. I am obligated to mention the one thing you are required to know as a person of culture, he once banged a grannie. There is a song about it.

United: here, Manchester United

First Team: Professional soccer clubs have multiple teams, the first team is the one that plays in the highest league, the second is typically associated with younger players from the academy.

Away Kit / Colours: When a professional soccer team plays at home (in their own stadium) they wear the standard uniform – the one you know from promotional photographs. When they play an away game (at a different stadium) they wear a different colour jersey. If this is too similar to the home team’s colours they have what is called a third kit. Here, Everton’s home jersey is blue and their away jersey is pink.

The Reds: another name for Liverpool Football Club (and their supporters.)

Bangers and Toads in the Hole: English sausages and I am sorry for ruining your appetite. You deserve better euphemisms.

As always, thank you so much for reading and I hope you enjoyed. Comments and Kudos are always warmly received.

XOXO - Tav

Up Next: The Tactical Foul
The Tactical Foul

Chapter Summary

Mary attempts to comfort her new friend through heartbreak while she herself suffers the emotional consequences of sleeping with an accomplice. Hewlett offers unsolicited commentary on the affair. The next morning, Anna finds how easily even the best-laid plans can go awry.

Chapter Notes

So lovely faces, I actually managed it - two updates in the span on a single week! With this posting, we are oh-so-close to the climax of this arc (thank whatever God you pray to, for heaven knows I am.)

As always, I have a few warnings before we start: light bondage, asphyxiation, questions of consent, extramarital intercourse, breakups, body image, jealousy, liability, legal speak, light references to mathematics

And, as always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

-Thursday Evening-

Mary Woodhull was enamoured until she came to recognise that what she envied was what she knew.

The woman before her spoke without remorse about the end of a relationship. She realised after he slammed the door that for her it had been over for some time, or so she told with indolent indifference. She had lost interest in him long ago. Now, after their latest fight, she knew that to mean that she had also lost interest in the idea of ‘them’.

This, Mary thought, was how her husband must think of her.

If, doubt echoed, he thought of her at all.

Mary wondered if she had ever thought of devotion before that afternoon. Their problem was not that Abe changed with time or that she had. It was that something had been wrong before there had ever been dilemma to define it.

The problem was that Mary Woodhull loved her husband. The problem was that this thought had first truly occurred to her whilst she was giving herself over to the temptations of another man.

She had shouted Abe’s name whilst John fucked her over her desk, his calloused hands quick to cover her mouth for the offence. She gasped for air. She grasped for certainty. She remembered how she felt during their walk along the dark Setauket side-road, made bleaker by the bare, twisted
limbs of the trees that lined it - rejecting spring as they stretched from the rotting leaves they had shed in autumn and reached to join the blackness of the sky. Made bleaker still by the body they both had expected to find in the bar’s basement where they had left it, still wrapped in a bloodstained tarp and awaiting its disposal.

Mary had been terrified then.

The man who had walked a few paces ahead of her seemed to cast a shadow without light to aid him. He seemed to create the darkness that covered, distorted and consumed. He seemed then to belong to it. Beneath humming fluorescent lights, however, he seemed broken between angry and absent. Mary wished her original fears had instead manifested, for John’s sake if not her own. She imagined he might be in a better place if he had killed her before their sins had taken on this shape.

She could still feel him inside of her as she shifted where she sat. Crossing her legs out in front of her, she felt his member impale her once more. Theirs had not been anything like sex with her husband, to which she suspected memory of being far too generous. John Graves Simcoe fucked as he fought, and Mary questioned if there had been much of a difference in what they had done together. That afternoon he had bent his long frame over her desk, kissing hard as he pinned her shoulders to the large calendar that covered the solid mahogany – strong enough to support them both. He unzipped her skirt as he slid her towards him, the garment sticking to the same plastic frame that grabbed at her desktop, shoved up to her waistline as she spread herself for him. She wondered if he had done this before. No, she decided. This was all about her. Until it wasn’t. Until she let him know in a single word that for her it was about someone else. Someone absent. Someone enshrined.

John became vicious. It was better. It felt honest. Punishing. Gratifying. Mary let herself embrace the frenzy of his reminder of exactly who he was, a man whose morals conflicted with the moments that had come to define him. His hands slid from her treasonous lips down to the base of her neck. His fingers failed to dance as they deprived her of air, growing tighter around her throat as each angry thrust sent tremors through her. Mary mouthed his name. He released her from his hold and told her to scream it. He did not seem to hear her when she did.

John was looking at a photograph of her husband on the wall; at the man she wished he was - despite having long wished that her husband was someone else. Some better version of himself. Someone altogether different. Mary pulled at her lover’s tie - asphyxiating him, forcing him to face her, to face himself. She used the means of bondage to pull herself to his lips, which tasted of his acid tone. He told her not to stop; he wanted to be as deprived as he felt depraved. She spit and watched him fight a smile as her saliva trickled down his cheek. Mary tightened her grip.

He finished shortly after she had begun to choke him once more. Afterwards he said nothing as he pulled up his trousers, tucked in his shirt and buttoned his blazer. He returned the photograph of Abe and Thomas - which she had turned over to reassure him when she herself had been sure - to an upright position. Mary began to cry. John wordlessly offered her a handkerchief but made no move to comfort her further, perhaps unwilling, perhaps unable. The two walked back to his apartment building in silence as deathly bleak as the night when they had expected to bury Benedict Arnold. John broke it when they reached his block to tell her to run home to her husband. Mary responded that if Hewlett was still upstairs and injured she did not want to leave him exposed to all of John’s misplaced resentment, realizing in her companion’s posture that she was only making it grow. She, in truth, had forgotten about her housemate and the secrets that he kept until they reached to corner.

She had no idea why she had followed him and so she found herself lost.
Mary Woodhull felt guilty. She had betrayed her vows; she had betrayed the idea she had of herself. John had fucked her hard enough to end her fantasy of fleeing her loveless marriage. To stop her from imagining her marriage to be loveless. For she loved her husband. The problem was that he did not love her.

‘Do you think love is always one-sided?’ she asked as he unlocked the door to his flat, cautioning her again to return to Whitehall by evoking her husband’s name. He refused to look at her as he had since she’d first spoken it. Since she screamed ‘Oh, Abraham!’ in his arms.

‘I should hope so,’ he replied without inflection. ‘Otherwise it just turns to hate.’

When he opened the door to find two lovers tangled in his sheets, there was little question to which of them he might be referring. Mary lingered, lost in a lie. As he walked in ahead of her, her heart broke open, revealing to her that underneath its desperation and deceit, she had genuine feelings for him – conflicting, yet very similar at their core.

With a name, a word that had meant nothing until she spoke it, she had betrayed him as well.

“I am not sad that things ended,” Abigail explained to all those who had gathered on the canopy bed in the middle of a rented room barely big enough to contain it. “I am sad about the way things ended. It’s not about John Andre, you know? It wouldn’t be even if I’d actually had fantasies about him that came even close to mirroring those Jordan clearly has about the two of us having engaged in. It is just about him and me personally and he will never fucking understand that now. He just going to go back to objectification and expectation and thinking that is love when it’s not.”

It was the only sort of love Mary knew.

It was ‘enough’, as Abe had put it the night before. She wondered how long it would continue to be. She wondered if it was already over for him, if he was waiting on her to slam the door. If he had, in fact, never indulged himself in the ways she imagined and accused him of – in younger, prettier, taller girls with tanned skin free of cellulite and stretch marks, tight in all the ways she had been before childbirth had left her sexless. Abe swore to her, God, and anyone he thought might listen that the life of an aspiring musician was far less glamorous than she imagined. She should come to one of his gigs to see him standing in the corner of a nameless bar that pretending to be a stage, usually in front of a small audience of burly, bearded truckers who only ever asked to buy Robert a beer.

She should come, he said.

He was innocent, he swore.

Mary continued to check his phone, never discouraged from her doubts by a lack of evidence, never satisfied with his honesty.

She was shamed by the speculum she now saw.

Abe was Abigail in every way. He was an artist whose partner discouraged his pursuits; he was also, as Anna’s best friend narrated in a story that Mary had heard a hundred times before with a different cast of characters, seemingly guiltless when seen outside of the constraints of their marriage chamber.
Abigail Ingram had not slept with her boss. Two years ago at his wife’s annual Hanukah party, he had kissed her cheek and she had turned her head just enough for his lips to meet hers. That, Abigail told the group of women who had convened to comfort her, was as far as she ever went by way of betrayal. That was all she confessed to in argument. Jordan imagined there was more to it. Mary yielded him no great sympathy but understood him all the same.

“Do you know what the worst part was? He accused me of writing a favourable portrayal of Andre in this series of short stories I publish over Amazon.” Aberdeen’s eyes widened. Anna bit her lip. “I write Andre as a self-centric womanizer who is aware of but unwilling to do anything about a crippling drinking problem and will step on or sleep with just about anyone in an aimless search for success,” she explained to Mary. “I’ve afforded that man no special treatment – society has. How damaged is our cultural mentality that such a character is received positively, while the girl I based on Anna, rather on the rumours surrounding her, is considered a whore?”

Anna and Mary shot one another a sideways glance.

Before Abigail arrived with a bottle of bubbly after dropping Cicero off with a friend, before Aberdeen had put Thomas to bed, the two had been lying where they now sat, the TV on – louder, than it otherwise needed to be in order to mute conversation, as Anna flipped through a few manuals Mary had taken from the judge’s legal library. She asked Mary repeatedly to reiterate parts of the story she had told on John’s balcony earlier in the evening until Mary said she felt like she was already on trial. It had been a joke. Anna did not laugh. She continued to thumb through the text, seeking from it legal refuge they might all need should any aspect of tomorrow’s plan go awry.

‘It won’t,’ she tried to assure them both. ‘It can’t.’

But it could. And though it remained unspoken, they both recognized that Anna, who was taking the larger risk, had little hope of reward. Anna, whom Mary had called whore the evening prior. All of her convictions about the woman had altered earlier over the course of a single conversation. Mary anguished over every unkind word she had ever spoken to or about Anna, over the reality that the two of them had ever stopped speaking.

‘I wonder if I could have been as good as you,’ Mary said, not specifically in reference to New York and Federal Law.

‘Better,’ Anna assured her, squeezing her hand. ‘I became a lawyer literally today. I’ve been working at a bar full time since I graduated law school, keeping various LSAT prep books behind the counter and eyeing them on occasion to give the impression that I was deep in revision. I failed at this. If I seem good, consider it is only because I have been pretending to struggle with the material for so long. But you? You would be a senior partner somewhere prestigious by now.’

With Anna’s background, she would have been one shortly upon graduation had she so wished, but she had instead been wilful enough not to sacrifice her dreams for the sake of convention. Just for people. People undeserving of her grace. People like Hewlett. Like John and herself.

‘You’ll have to teach me how you got the place so clean when I reopen,’ she later laughed. ‘If I reopen. Maybe I can get above a C from the Department of Health.’

‘I was a straight A student,’ Mary said. It was not conceit. It was regret. Anna seemed to hear it. She pushed the book she had open between her and Mary and began to explain what she was looking for and how they could best utilize this to ensure their liberty remained intact.

It was sweet. It was sobering. Mary saw once again how similar their situations were. Anna was a
Green Card to Edmund; Mary had been a pregnancy test to Abe. They were both trapped by actions not of their own, which they could not otherwise condone.

‘It will never stop, you know,’ Mary said. ‘I’m married to a man like the one you are about to wed and it will never stop, this. He is always going to needlessly get himself into trouble, he may try to calm your fears but he will never willingly heed your advice.’

‘He is a good man, Mary,’ Anna said, slightly pained.

‘I’m sure he is. Please … understand, I am not saying this to be cruel or patronizing. I just don’t want you to end up where I am, in a room with no exit.’

‘I was talking about Abe. And it’s not too late, Mary. You can still study. Once we solve this problem we can figure out all the others.’

She wondered if Anna knew or had guessed how far she and John had taken their aphrodisia in service of an alibi.

‘Do you think all problems have a solution?’ Mary asked, already having arrived at an answer.

Hers did not.

But Abigail’s did.

She needed a place to live but was unlikely to find something suitable within her price range by the time her lease was due. Mary and Aberdeen had both already offered Whitehall, but when Mary went to speak to her father-in-law about offering her new friend a lease, he had been unrelenting in his insistence that she submit to a rigorous two-month application and screening process, sour that William Smith’s daughter had ‘snuck’ under his roof. Sour that he had no legal grounds on which to evict her.

Richard Woodhull had shown his hand. Anna’s alcohol induced ire showed Mary how she might yet play it.

“What the actual fuck is that supposed to mean, Abby?” Anna snapped. “If you have something to say to me then -”

Abigail leaned forward from the pillow on which she was inclined, “You let men use you, Anna. When you were with Selah you did not for a moment think you were the only one and you knew he wouldn’t give you anything except this idea that you were worthy and worth wanting – feelings that should come from within. I’d say it is the same with Edmund but you’d take everything from him without remorse and call it love.”

“You have a lot of nerve to judge my love life right now,” Anna replied – harder, Mary assumed, than she intended.

“I’m not judging you. I’m happy for you, if this is really what you want. But the fact remains that you don’t know him the way I do.”

Mary recognized Abe once more. She saw that Abigail, who could speak of her life without
connecting to it but addressed what she saw as her friend’s problems with heightened concern. She seemed to know of something she could not relent. Mary wondered briefly if she was referring to Glasgow - if Hewlett or Simcoe had, at any point, relayed their story to this Jordan and he in turn had betrayed them to his then-girlfriend.

It was something, Mary thought, that she herself might do for a moment’s attention.

“How can you afford not to be?” Abigail pleaded.

“Because I am in love with him!” Anna defended.

“That is your tragedy.”

It was, Mary quietly agreed. To love was to be damned. Mary did not think Abigail envious of Anna’s predicament, and imagined that if she knew all that it entailed they would be having another argument entirely. Anna was diving head first into a high-pressure career no one but she, John, and Edmund knew she did not want in order to support her fiancé though his second attempt at defending his thesis. Mary knew from experience that dreams disconnected as soon as they were put on hold. It was not fair. Anna was by all accounts excellent at manning and managing a bar and if that was what she wanted to do she should not have to put on a suit because a man over thirty could not hold down a full time job.

And that, Mary considered, did not even touch on the clear signals Hewlett sent that his friends were far more important than they should have been at this stage in his life. But then same could be said of Anna. Of John. Of Abe. Of Abigail. Of everyone but her. Mary Woodhull had no friends. That, she knew, was her tragedy.

She looked up from her nearly empty glass of wine and noticed Aberdeen had turned her attention from Blair and Serena to the real-life best friends suffering love and heartbreak against a Manhattan backdrop. She was looking to her for help.

“I’m sorry,” Anna retreated, “I’m not taking sides here, I’m not. But I am hurt by many the ways you chose to describe me.”

Mary cleared her throat.

“Listen. Anna, go down stairs and get us more wine. Richard will ask you what you are doing in the kitchen. Tell him how upset you are about mean things Abigail said about you and Edmund. And about your father, why not. Tell him that you can’t say anything because she just broke up and is probably more upset then she is letting on, not having a place to live and all. Hopefully, she will move far away. Put the idea in his head that her presence is making you miserable. He will appreciate that. Then we will get Edmund, who is high on his shit-list for the time being, to say the same thing when he gets in. Tomorrow I will get up early, make breakfast, have another talk with him about Abigail and Cicero. He will probably wave the deposit and let you store your things in the double garage just so that he make Edmund park his precious sports car out in the weather and announce to Abe - without having to speak to him - that he can’t have band practice there anymore. He is petty like that.”

Aberdeen clapped.

“If that is how you want to sell the lease to your husband’s father I am not sure -” Abigail started.

“Oh, he will be in Albany come Monday for court. You needn’t worry.”
“No. Just me,” Anna said. “I have an early morning,” she sighed as she got up. “And I think you all have had enough wine.” She took off her soon-to-be husband’s thick rimmed reading glasses, threw a wrap over her bare shoulders, put on slippers and left.

Whilst Anna was in the main house and Aberdeen otherwise preoccupied with a dated teen drama, Mary and Abigail spoke. They came from similar backgrounds. Mary had grown up in foster care, Abigail’s mother had kept it together just enough to not have her daughter taken away, only to kick her out when she discovered she was pregnant at fifteen. Abigail had gone to live with the staunch Republican Shippen family due in part a political ad campaign; Mary had married into the Woodhulls because Richard insisted that his only surviving son ‘do the right thing’.

But Abigail, she thought, was stronger. Stronger than herself, stronger than anyone else she knew or could think of. Abigail still worked towards her goal of being a novelist despite the pressures of being a single mother with a fifty-hour workweek. Mary looked at her like felt that she objectively had no reason to complain. She had a husband, a home, an au pair. She was inadequate by comparison.

“I can’t believe that anyone would ever idolize me;” Abigail laughed for the first time that night. “Anyway, everything is relative. I wish I had the ties that you do. All I have is my son and myself.”

“You have friends.” Mary commented, recognizing the acid in her tone to be envy.

“So do you. Anna can’t stay mad. Ever. Aberdeen here,” she tapped the girl who remained hypnotised by the ostentatious on-screen wealth, “worships you. And I have little choice but to consider you a friend, drinking your wine as I am.” Abigail winked. Mary smiled.

It had been twenty minutes. Thirty more would pass before Anna remerged.

“Sorry,” Anna said returning with Riesling. “We had a little talk, Judge and I. About my ‘whoring’.”

“That sounds promising,” Aberdeen mused.

“Anna you know that is not what I think of you,” Abigail apologised.

“Yeah well,” Anna lamented as she removed the cork, “apparently Richard thinks I can do better, too.”

Mary wondered if he was on any new drugs and if he still left his medicine cabinet unlocked now that Hewlett had blocked her from abusing his. Hewlett, who she realised, she had come to esteem as an individual – absent, of course, from the ways in which he had manipulated her once-and-current housemate into helping find Senator Arnold and hide the circumstances that lead to his disappearance.

Mary studied Anna as she spoke, her wide, dark eyes emitting light as the danced around the other
girls and their wine glasses. In the past two days, Anna Strong had moved into enemy territory, lost her job, watched as the love of her life was arrested for a heinous crime he could not have committed, nearly lost him once more upon his release while trying to protect him and prove his innocent to Tallmadge. She had discovered blood on John’s clothing, after he had already spilt quite a bit of Edmund’s, and she was still able to accept them all despite their flaws. She offered to help.

Mary recognised she was using her just as Edmund was. Just as she used everyone who entered her life. She choked on the memory of John, deaf to everything after hearing her husband’s name spring from her lips.

“You alright?” Aberdeen asked.

“Just swallowed the wrong way,” Mary answered.

Anna continued relaying the belittling, sexist comments Richard offered her, saying that she could not wait to surprise him in Albany next week. He would not be free from her there, either. She apologised to Abigail saying once more that she was not taking sides, she just needed a job and Jordan offered her one.

“I don’t care,” Abagail claimed, the melodic character of her voice dropping every time Jordan was so much as alluded to. “I mean I do, Anna I think that is great for you. I think it is about time you moved on with your life and your career. I think it is good that you are still friends with Jordan and I’d never expect you not to be. I mean, you are going to feel like you’ve been sent to a prison ship working for him but,” she stopped. “I really shouldn’t joke like this. He is a good man. He just never transitioned from Mr Right Now to Mr Right and I should have ended things earlier. Now nearly a decade has gone by and I feel nothing about the break up.”

Mary wondered if Abigail was lying for her sake or theirs.

“Maybe you are in shock,” Aberdeen offered. “I’m in shock.”

“I’m not even surprised. I don’t know what I thought I was going to do. Moving in with him. I never wanted to; it just felt like a logical progression. It felt like that would be enough. I would like to say I am better than this but here I am - a little disappointed that a ridged, cantankerous old man doesn’t think my best friend is enough of a harlot to offer my son and I quarter,” she laughed. Then she cried. Then Mary joined her. Then Anna. Aberdeen joined the hug but not the sobbing. They remained in each other’s embrace until Abigail’s phone rang again. The twelfth time she refused to answer.

“You know what I could really go for?” Anna said as she poured the last chips Abigail had brought with her into a bowl. “Ice cream. Probably the last thing I need but …” she trailed off as she reached for her own device, presumably to text Edmund.

“It is a break up tradition, isn’t it?” Mary said. Anna nodded and grinned at the shared memory of countless twenty-something who had passed through their dorm. Of the well-stocked mini fridge with half eaten pints of Ben and Jerry’s, labelled not with the girl’s names but with post-its describing the events that inspired them to end things with their latest lover. ‘I missed you,’ Mary mouthed. Anna mutely returned her words while Abigail spoke.
“I wouldn’t know; I’ve been with the same guy for nearly a third of my life. I should have eaten much more ice cream. I think,” she paused to agree with herself. “Loads more.”

“I’ve never dated,” Aberdeen confessed. “But I can run down and check if we ‘ave any. Not that any of you ‘ave to go again”

“We don’t, and don’t start. Dating that is,” Mary cautioned her. “Men are not worth the drama.”

“True, Anna said. “I used to be as thin and pretty as Mary and … I mean, it is so weird, it is weird isn’t it? I knew I was getting fat but I did not actually realize that I had gotten there until I really started thinking about the wedding. It used to be my greatest fear and now that I know myself to have achieved it, I am like, oh hey. What is a thousand more empty calories? I am sure I can still room to fit them.” She slid off the bed and began striking poses, laughing all the while. Mary hope it was because she knew how ridiculous her claims were. Anna Strong was one of the most beautiful women she had ever laid eyes on. She had thought so at eighteen, she thought so at twenty-seven. She could neither believe nor accept that the woman she had long half-considered a rival thought the same of her and indicated as much with a roll of her eyes.

“Girl, I know,” Abigail agreed, “Jordan started dropping hints that he was getting ready to propose last Christmas and I swear I looked in the mirror and I was suddenly 10 years older and twenty pounds heavier and here I am eating you out of house and home. Tell Eddie Hew to pick up some cookie-dough on his way back.”

“Neither of you are fat!” Mary gaped. Abigail and Anna both laughed. “Honestly, I would kill to look like either of you.” She meant it. Mary had, after all, killed for less.

“Says the only woman who manages to have a kid, spend half a decade with a guy and still be high-school skinny.”

“I love you for saying that, Anna, I do, but I swear it is not the case. Look how much loose skin I have,” she demanded, lifting her tee-shirt to her navel. “Okay, I am on the low end of the yo-yo right now, but what is the point? My boobs always abandon ship way before my thighs or my belly and it isn’t as if my husband notices either way,” she paused, the playful mirth leaving her. “At all. It is not like my husband notices me at all.”

“I am sure he finds you beautiful. I spent my entire freshmen year trying to look like you and the past two days – really, despite all of the other stress I have been under – feeling like I have failed at life itself just looking at you. Abe just … he doesn’t say those kinds of things. He never did to me either when we were dating in high school.”

“Because he doesn’t think them … about me anyway,” Mary insisted. “Do you know when he last paid me a compliment?”

“Take it as an excuse to eat more ice cream,” Aberdeen offered.

“I did,” Mary blurted out. “I did. This afternoon. At my office.”

Aberdeen shrugged. It occurred to Mary that the non-native speaker missed the euphemism. She wished that had been the case with Abigail, with Anna. Especially with Anna.

“Is that why …” she trailed off before whispering to the Saviour, abusing his holy name several times before stating what was already obvious. “Oh, shit, Mary. That really … that complicates things.”

Aberdeen’s jaw fell, suddenly conscious of the conversation she unwittingly incited. “Does this
mean you will get a divorce?” she asked in horror. It was not a value judgement, Mary told herself, it was her au pair’s way of inquiring if she would continue to see Robert Townsend periodically. Still, it seemed the girl expected an answer. Mary bit her lip. She had none to give. It occurred to her for the first time that Abe could now well be the one to walk out on her. Tears rushed her eyes.

“You don’t need a man,” Abigail said forcefully, putting her arm around her. “But if you want two, you shouldn’t worry about judgement or condemnation for something a guy would be applauded for. I got you. We got you.”

“I got you, too.” Mary answered. She rested her head on Abigail’s shoulder.

Anna reached for her phone.

“If you think I can’t keep a secret … No. Edmund just wrote me back, he says he has to stop at a petrol station because he is not allowed back into Walmart.”

“Walmart?” Aberdeen asked and the same time Mary inquired what petrol was.

“The one in New Jersey has an indoor shooting range in their sports section,” Anna answered. “It bothers me on multiple levels that John knew about it. That that is how he lets off stress, or thinks Americans do. Or both.”

“I guess it is better than a strip club,” Abigail muttered.

“Oh Abby -”

“I don’t need a man. I don’t need for Cicero to be exposed to men like Jordan. I know you all think am too protective but you were not there,” her voice broke and she began to weep. “You weren’t there you don’t know. It was awful. He was awful!”

“We are here now,” Anna said. “And I am so, so sorry that you are hurting like this.”

Mary wondered how genuinely she could possibly mean that. She hardly socialized, but she heard enough of Anna’s name over the past few weeks to know that the girl had been slandered as a whore -possibly due to the surprising influence of Abigail’s online publication- when she had been nothing but loyal and committed to the man she claimed to love. Yet Anna, clearly, did not resent her for this. Mary herself had walked out on Anna six years before, had left her alone with a lease that had ruined her credit. She had suspected the absolute worst of and from this woman who seemed to bare her no malice, who did not judge or begrudge her for anything in their past or present.

Mary could see why John had been in love with her.

When Hewlett arrived an hour later with four pints of Ben and Jerry’s, she could see why he loved him, too. Suddenly she felt wanting for friends. She thought of how mean she had been, how little she deserved the sympathy of anyone in the room, and looked at her boarder with tear-stained eyes.

“Ah … what, what did I walk in on?” the Brit stammered, his strange face twisting as he evaluated
what he must have found a curious visual.

“Blair wants to be with Chuck but she wants ‘im to say ‘I love you’ first and ‘ee won’t” Aberdeen
brushed him off as she took the ice cream and distributed it, adding for clarity, “because men are
stooopid.” Hewlett looked uncomfortable. Mary thanked God that someone had been paying
attention to the scripted drama still playing loudly on Hewlett’s PC.

“Oh you … you were not kidding about wanting to do that then,” he said as he glanced at the
television before his reddened eyes darted between Anna and Mary. He leaned over to give his
girlfriend a light kiss, taking his glasses from where they now rested atop her head. “Give me uh,
just a few minutes to shower and then I suppose … I suppose I will be downstairs if anyone should
need me.”

“How is Jordan holding up?” Abigail asked hesitantly.

“Exactly as one would expect,” Hewlett answered, meeting her eyes with a fixed glare. “He went
off and then walked out. Now he has his phone turned off but we have all found from experience
that it is best to leave him to his own devices in this sort of situation. It is how he behaves on the
pitch every time the ref makes a bad call.” He emphasised the last two words by saying them
slowly, gaze narrowing again.

“Strikers are divas,” Anna translated for Mary.

“So are defenders,” Abigail quipped. Hewlett frowned, his fine-lines sharpened as he inhaled
deeply and dramatically to indicate offence. Mary wondered if he wanted for words or if Anna had
fired a warning shot in the form of a look.

“I make a better translation,” Aberdeen declared. “All soccer players are little bitches. Nice legs,
Eulett. Euh … what ‘appered ‘ere?” she signalled to her own face with a circular motion of her
hand.

Hewlett brought his to his temples.

“Right, yea … Edmund is still fine, Aberdeen …” he started. “Look, it has been a really long day.
Let me just collect my pyjamas. I’ll shower and then join Richard and Abraham in the drawing
room. As you would have me do.”

“Sweetheart, that’s not -” Anna said. Hewlett took something from his dresser.

“No, no, Love, I do understand,” he bent over to kiss her once more, whispering something with a
slight smile. “Ladies,” he nodded.

Mary saw him glance back at Anna from the door to the bathroom. Though she had shifted her
attention back to her friends, her presence seemed to give him such peace. For a moment, Mary
found him charming, almost beautiful in the soft light of realised love. When he noticed her, he
smiled awkwardly and turned away.

“Wait,” Mary said. “We do need you, actually. Can I have a moment alone?”

She hopped off the bed and pushed him into the small water closet. Hewlett turned the faucet on.
The old pipes sputtered before they sang.

“It is not about that actually,” Mary hissed. “But as long you bring me on the topic take off your
shirt.”
“Pardon? Madam, I say -” Hewlett’s eyes widened before shutting several times.

“I am going to hide it conspicuously under the mattress for Tallmadge and his team to find tomorrow,” Mary explained, her voice low and light.

“I don’t follow.”

“If you wore that to the shooting range you have cartridge discharge revenue on it and we have ourselves a red herring. It will get picked up in the sweep because it looks out of place – personally abhorrent and nefarious amongst your other belongings; your bed has a Liverpool day-blanket on it and you have that heinous, metal ‘This is Anfield’ shield on your wall. A rival jersey will stand out, especially if we are to make a half-assed effort to conceal it.”

“I’m impressed,” he almost smiled.

“I can google,” Mary answered, letting herself become rather taken with her natural talents. Forensics, she assumed, would have a field day searching for a weapon that was never fired, at least with relation to Arnold.

Hewlett swallowed and forced his peculiar lips into something she guessed he meant her to find reassuring. It had the opposite effect. Much like his fiancée, the war had come to him, though unlike Anna, he did not appear particularly suited to it. Overpowered and overwhelmed, he stood to defend abominable actions not of his own hand. Mary questioned what he possibly stood to gain from it. She found herself unable to accept her housemate as either a hero or a martyr despite having seen the past two days transform him into both.

The former price who refused to abdicate, the failed physicist who somehow forced himself to rise to the fight must also have something he hoped to win. Mary considered all he stood to lose, not yet recognising the care that had taken residence within her qualm.

“Ah, if – if that is all,” he licked the cut on his thin upper lip.

“Are you alright?” Mary inquired. “Edmund, if you are at all nervous …” she trailed off. They did not have a Plan B.

Without offering a direct answer, Hewlett turned to the mirror take out his contact lenses, explaining while his fingers fidgeted to find the thin, transparent plastic that his eyes were only red because he had left them in for so long. He adjusted his thick-rimmed Ray Bans over the bandaged bridge of his nose before looking for the salient within to quarter his preferred shields.

“Now then,” Mary said. Hewlett muttered something she did not quite understand before removing his glasses once more, struggling to stretch the neckline of the jersey enough the it did not brush his broken nose when he went to lift it over his head.

“Wait,” Mary said, pushing him gently away from the medicine cabinet. She took a nail clipper from inside and cut the collar, advising against Hewlett’s concerns that it really made no difference if the garment itself suffered a slight casualty. It was merely something else the police could busy themselves with while he and Anna gathered and analysed enemy intelligence tomorrow morning.

Hewlett looked horrible; his bruises darker, deeper under the florescent light than they had appeared when she briefly saw him bare in the fading sunlight that shown throughout John’s flat in the late afternoon. She could comprehend why her partner in crime had thought himself to have committed an act of amicicide; staring at Hewlett, she remained lost to the logic of it all. Though she understood that it was necessary that the police believe the blood of John’s hands belonged to a
friend rather than a fugitive, she wondered what her housemate had said to mark him in that moment as an enemy.

Neither had told her that he needed only to speak her name to illicit such savage instinct.

“Ah … yes I, I had rather ought to start hitting up the gym … or the hospital,” Hewlett laughed, embarrassed of his physical condition and present state. “Is that all, then, Mrs. Woodhull?”

“It is Mary, please,” she corrected, “and no, what I wanted to talk to about, it is about Abigail. She needs a place to stay and I thought you might convince Father -”

“No,” he said sharply.

Clearly, he and Anna did not share the same politics. Mary wondered how much of a problem that might prove for the happy couple.

Hewlett, however, though stubborn, was good-natured at his core and therefore no challenge to break down. Mary explained that Abigail needed a place to stay, Whitehall had rooms free, but since the whole debacle with Anna, Richard was being quite particular about lease practices. She needed him only to tell her father-in-law how miserable that woman made him –

“To be fair she has written absolute slander about my friends and me,” he defended.

“To be fair you and your friends … Edmund,” she said bluntly, finding that she need not provide any more of an argument.

“Mary,” he matched her. He sighed. He swallowed. “Fine. I will talk to him but it will take me a while. I have something I need first to do.”

“Shower?”

“Well … that and. And,” he paused. When he collected his thoughts, his words were calculated rather than cold. This gave Mary a chill. She crossed her arms to mirror his stance.

“As long as I am being forced out of my own flat into the study, I intend to hide old papers, notes I have no need of any more photographs of people I barely know within various books throughout the library. It is important and imperative that Abraham sees me doing so. That way, he will insist that the police - who have a warrant for the whole house - make a sweep of that room.”

“What is the point?” Mary asked slowly.

“In the first order, I believe it will buy me more time tomorrow morning in the event that I require it for any unforeseen reason.”

“Are you nervous?” Mary asked again. Again, she received only obfuscation.

“Richard will surely protest to the search; if he is hiding anything sinister he will unintentionally direct police attention to it through posture, through whatever direction panic navigates his gaze.”

“I thought you considered him a friend,” Mary muttered as she took a step back.

“I did and I do, but last we spoke both he and his son made rather offensive remarks about the woman I intend to marry and insofar as I am concerned that is one friendship over should this behaviour continue.”

Mary considered herself quite fortunate that, at least in Hewlett’s presence, she had kept things
civil between Anna and herself. She counted it a blessing that they had begun to repair their long
forgotten friendship, for more reasons now than her own recognised loneliness. Though Hewlett’s
features softened after his short outburst, she saw him anew. He was fit for battle if he believed it
just.

She saw that his tragic downfall would be in his faith in man.

“Um … if anything should come out of it, if he is hiding anything that is, you’ll be … ah, Mary,”
he stammered. “Do you see? Must I say it aloud? The Woodhulls only hold sway when their name is
in good standing. That is simply how power works.”

Divorce. The word he sought but would be damned to speak was divorce. She wondered how much
John had revealed about her.

“I am not sure I am comfortable with the assertion, Sir,” Mary spat.

“Then I am not the one you should tell.” He paused. His face twisted rapidly from defence to
disgust. He reached out to her, then, thinking, he retracted his hand before risking contact with her
shoulder. He turned away. “Mary … I don’t,” he was barely audible yet he seemed to scream. “I
truly don’t want to ask you this … but Simcoe has been behaving, that is. I suppose it better to
simply be out with it,” he said slowly before falling into silence, made longer by the flow of water
that filled it. “Were things between you entirely consensual? I don’t, I don’t think him capable, that
is, but given your reaction to my scheme, given recent events, I think you may have been crying
earlier before I came in and I – Christ Mary, if … if something happened, Arnold aside, we’ll need
to involve the authorities.”

“Oh my God,” Mary gasped. Hewlett continued to speak. She neither heard no attempted to listen
as she again traced John’s petulant post-sex behaviour back to her cry, this time guided by his
implied line of thought.

“Of course it was consensual,” she interrupted after a moment; grateful for the running water she
fancied had drowned parts of a speech she was happy to leave unheard. “I initiated it.”

Hewlett sighed, relieved. “I suppose this is all a tragic misunderstanding then. As long as you were
not hurt,” he shook his head, judgement replacing worry, “I think you both should shake hands
when next you meet and agree to move on without incident.”

“I have to call him.”

“I don’t think that best. I’ll speak to him tomorrow. I can handle Simcoe and his black moods. He
is home right now, readying his flank for when we strike at dawn. Allow me to sort this once the
battle has been won. Once he has lost his fixed point of concentration.”

Hewlett spoke as though he knew what tomorrow would bring, as though he did not consider that
he himself would be the war’s most likely casualty. He spoke as though he had any idea what to say
in order to console the blind rage of a broken heart tempered only by shame and self-loathing. No.
Mary had to call him. She had to see him. But she had no words. Everything she felt, everything
she ever might feel, had been reduced to and refuted by her husband’s name, a name that echoed in
her mind.

And John’s.

“You don’t know. You can’t, Mr Hewlett … Edmund, I -” she stammered, not knowing her own
voice or trusting it to speak for her.
For all of our sakes you have to end this,” Hewlett insisted. “I can’t … I can’t control him with you leading him on like this. I need to … please, can you understand? None of this will work, none of this can work if he is fighting windmills when there are actual dragons to slay. I, Mary … Simcoe, that is, he is my best friend - if I am being made to shame myself through honesty - but I, but he’s … the entirety of circumstances defining your connection ought to explain enough on their own.”

To this, she again took offence and sought to offer an explanation. “I’m in love with him,” she realised aloud. “I’m not leading him on; I am in love with him!”

Hewlett rubbed at his temples. He listened to the sound of the faucet, of the water that had grown cold. Mary listened to her own racing heart. Faster, louder than it had been when she had followed John through the woods, half-anticipating never to see dawn. She recognised the noise as fear. Perhaps, after a moment, Hewlett heard it as well. He mounted an attack in her moment of weakness.

“Ah -”

“I don’t appreciate the scepticism,” she said of words he had yet to speak.

“You are using him without regard, and I don’t appreciate -”

“I’m married,” Mary reminded sharply.

“What you and Abe have … that is not what a marriage is.”

“How dare you,” she said, though she knew him to be right. She would not and could not, however, allow the self-righteous little man before her, whose general disinterest in others had left him alone until middle age, who owed his wealth to divine right and his romance to whatever was left of it, lecture her on love.

As he retorted she considered in shame that equalled her enmity that he knew more about amity than she herself ever would. Hewlett was, and long had been, acting only as a friend. Sometimes friendship was sympathy, sweets and quips and quoting shows you all had seen a dozen times; sometimes it was calling out your comrades on their personal failings.

Hewlett was caring, she noted, though not particularly considerate. Again, she found herself concerned for Anna. Again, she found that all of her thoughts had manifested in the repetition of a single name.

Abraham.

“How dare you, Madam. From my understanding of events, it was you who hit the senator and came up with a failed plan to hide his corpse. Simcoe is … protective. He can’t help it. You manipulate that for your own devices and then run and hide behind a legal status leading him to believe himself a bloody rapist, an affront to his morals. To society. He is … dangerous, Mary. To all of us now. But that you already knew.”

“You don’t understand. You can’t,” Mary answered. She did not understand herself. “You are not married Hewlett. Not yet. It is a happiness that only exists from outside.”

“Don’t presume to lecture me about the institution of marriage when you feel imprisoned by it.”

“You know what it is to be in love with two people at once,” she said, evaluating as she spoke that he very likely did. Mary shifted, trying to bring him onside. She spoke calmly. She spoke as though
she was trying to calm him, though, she noted, he had not once raised his voice. “I shouldn’t love either of them but I love them both and I hate myself for it. For what I said. For what it lead John to think of me, of himself. And Abe. I love my husband. You don’t understand.”

“You don’t know what is it to love,” he answered.

“What is it then?” she challenged.

“It is ah … it is charging into battle and feeling like you are coming home from war.”

“That from Anna or The Iliad?”

If Hewlett caught her mockery, her seemed to take it as a compliment. “A paraphrase of both I fear,” he smiled in self-irony. “Come. Cheer up, Mary. We will all help each other out of this. We will get through it. Simcoe will be fine by the morrow and tonight … I’ll talk to Richard about Abigail and … do you happen to remember her son’s name? Ah, no matter,” he stopped; stared at her for a moment and offered a short apology which she accepted while telling him he had, in truth said nothing to necessitate it. They were all under tremendous stress. And it was all her fault.

“No,” he said. “I was out with my lads tonight, something we’ve not done in quite a while, and I came to realise that sometimes, sometimes that is, life just gets ahead of you as it does us all. I was rather reminded of a verse from Homer’s Odyssey -”

“Please … please don’t, I’m already tired,” Mary tried to smile.

“Ah, very well. As you’d have it, Madam.”

Mary turned off the faucet and told him she better get back before all of the Ben and Jerry’s was gone. “I’m sorry again. About everything I’ve put you though, about what you are being made to do.”

“Nonsense. I’m certain that in my future role as a son-in-law I’ll be asked to look at the honourable District Attorney’s computer every time she needs something installed. I might as well get some practice it,” he smiled. “Ah … Mary. I know it’s, it’s not my place, and understand it is not just because of Simcoe that I say this -”

“Why do you do that?” she interrupted. “Why do you all call each other by last name?” Mary wondered if the distance was intentional, if it had existed before Benedict Arnold had met the bumper of the vehicle she had borrowed. She swallowed her guilt as she awaited a response. Hewlett blinked, taken off guard.

“It is um … with Simcoe and I it is slightly complicated and has to do with public school etiquette, but as a general rule - rather curious really - aside from myself, Rogers, Joyce and Akinbode, everyone on our team was christened as John. We call John Andre by both of his names because it is how I gather he introduced himself to those whom he met in AA. Everyone else gets specified by their last name for clarity and uniformity, respectively. Or we refer to one another by choice expletives and slurs. It depends on who we are playing.”

Oh.

“I can’t imagine you cursing,” she said. She could not imagine soft-spoken, bookish Edmund Hewlett going to bars or participating in blood sport either. She wondered if he enjoyed it, or, if this too, had simply been thrust upon him.

“Really?” he laughed. “Well then, speaking of absolute cunts, to return to what I was saying, when
I finish speaking to Richard, my offer still stands. I’ll make a right proper foe of him if you would have me do so. Ah ... Quid pro quo, talk to Abigail. Tell her to call Akinbode in a day or two just to sort things over once they have both had a chance to calm down.”

Maybe she did not know him at all. Maybe he was in truth considerate, just not particularly kind.

“You’ll ruin your standing … in this house I mean, if you make to search worse on Richard.”

“He insulted my fiancée; I have no intent to stay here,” he paused, biting at his lower lip. “Use your window. It will be difficult to open another.”

“You don’t understand,” Mary repeated.

“About how Richard can be?”

“About … love. When this is all over, next year or in the fall, will you return to Scotland?”

“No. Setauket is Anna’s home and Anna is mine.”

“I hope you mean that.”

“I do. More than anything I do,” Hewlett smiled. When he spoke of her, he was beautiful despite his contusions, cuts, despite his chipped tooth and curious bone structure. She felt ugly by comparison.

“In the future, you shouldn’t, you shouldn’t put her in danger of,” Mary reached for the faucet again, lowering her voice to a whisper. “Anna deserves so much more than to be strung along on your plan to save your enemy from himself.”

“I didn’t want to get her involved. I had hoped to shield her from all of this,” Hewlett stated.

“She doesn’t want to see you hurt,” she spoke from the pain of experience. “Listen, Edmund. Listen to your wife. She wants to protect you, too. Let her.”

Hewlett nodded. Mary could tell she was being ignored.

“I’m pleased to see the two of you were able to reconcile,” he said.

-Friday Morning-

>>Where are you?<<

>>Reconnaissance Faire<<

Anna replied with a smile as she found dragon and princess emoji to accompany her message.

Mary Woodhull, or so WhatsApp told her, was typing.

Anna Strong stared at her phone for a few seconds more as she imagined her new housemate’s perfect French tips in a frenzied panic, furiously reworking her thoughts into refined words that
would arouse no suspicion.

>>I am beginning to loath puns.<<

Mary answered at long last. >>John know that?<<

>>I haven’t the heart.<<

>>WHAT ABOUT EDMUND<<

>>???<<

She did not have an answer. Anna stared at her screen for a moment until it went dark. She examined her reflection in the glare, wrinkling her nose slightly. Mary Grant – now Mary Woodhull – had re-entered her life on Tuesday afternoon. By Friday morning, she had fallen back into the habit of adhering to the beauty standards she set. Anna remembered and returned to figuring out who she was by process of elimination. She had long since crossed ‘runway-ready redhead’ off her list. Standing in stilettos and a borrowed suit that suggested sex in the boardroom with the way it clung to her curves, her make-up paradoxically light yet alluring, Anna Strong was not trying to be her beautiful former roommate; she was serving as a signal. As a spy.

Anna liked the look itself and the looks she was getting. Unfortunately, man’s shallow nature was the extent of what the morning had assured her. Mary was right in all that went unsaid. This was taking too long. Anna doubted how much longer she could continue serving as a distraction.

“Oh,” she said, realizing she had yet to answer her mother’s question, “its Mary. Looks like her plan worked out. Abigail has the place.”

“That won’t be weird,” the district attorney remarked.

Anna never considered she would find herself in a situation where her mother’s rather intruding comments would prove a welcome inclusion in their conversation. The two were getting dangerously close to the door at the donut shop, having waited outside on the pavement for the past two hours. This was taking too long. Anna feared that Edmund had been discovered. That her own cover was about to be blown. She could only hope that her mother mistook her now visible angst for embarrassment or hunger as the conversation allowed.

“Um,” Anna muttered. Her phone buzzed again as she slipped it into the Louis Vuitton Aberdeen - of all people to own such an expensive handbag- had offered to lend her the day before. Again, her eyes darted down the street as she continued her response. “I’m not taking sides. I don’t think either Jordan or Abigail expect me to.”

Nancy Smith lit a new cigarette with the butt of the one she had just finished. She was growing restless. Anna was surprised that she had yet to enact the nuclear option – in this case, insisting that instead of waiting for designer donuts they visit a chain. She had already brought up that Dunkin’ and 7/11 both stood between them and her office - the very office Anna was tasked to delay her from as long as possible.

For now though, her mother seemed preoccupied with passing judgement. Frankly, though grateful that the disapproval gave her grounds on which to place her discomfort and apprehension, Anna failed to understand what she had done to warrant it. She had invited her to breakfast, boasting that she got a new job at a prestigious law firm. This meant that for the next few weeks she would not be living with Edmund, saving her mother some face for as long as her fiancé remained a suspect.
This meant that she was, at long last leading the life her mother had long lamented she was not.

But Nancy Smith did not seem pleased. Some people, Anna thought, simply never would be.

“I mean your new best friend, your old best friend -who is married to your high school sweetheart-all living in the same household as your fiancé, while you are going to be off in Albany with Abigail’s very recent ex. It is like a teen drama in its third season. Just when I am beginning to think you kids are growing up,” Nancy said sceptically after a long exhale. Anna crossed her arms, trying to ignore the sharp scent.

“Jordan is my boss now, Mom. It was never like that between us anyway. Abigail and Mary get along famously with each other … apparently. They are both apathetic towards Edmund at best.”

“And at worst?”

At worst? At worst she watched Mary wordlessly condemn Edmund for the flaws and faults she was too vain to own in herself. Abigail, meanwhile, had written him as one of her principle villains and had grown agitated at her own inability to convey to the now considerable audience something that was simply not there; neither Edmund Hewlett nor the figure she based on him was anywhere near as evil or deserving of criticism as she seemed to think him. The thought of a majority of faceless readers who had been charmed by the characterization of her soon-to-be husband made her smile.

“Are you reading *Turn* by chance?” Anna asked.

Her mother frowned. “Do you imagine I have time during a normal work-week to read self-published fiction online? I heard your father talking about it this morning on *The Gabfest* though and when -”

“Oh God he didn’t!”

“Haven’t listened yet?”

“I um,” she answered in a small voice. “I’ve been meaning to but -”

“I know, love though I have for the father of my children, I still would have been more interested in Emily Bazalon’s take on *Zubik v. Burwell*. Still your dad-” she continued. Anna reddened. Her father was a famous court reporter who had apparently just told a far larger audience than the one made up of exclusively of legal nerds of which he was accustom about Abigail’s on-going periodical, thinking it political satire. Evidently, the regular hosts had agreed and echoed the recommendation he gave at the end of their popular podcast. Anna vowed to unsubscribe the second she got home.

“Mom you, um, you have to talk to him,” Anna swallowed. “To dad. For me. Abigail is writing that under a pseudonym and the whole thing is loosely about, well, me. It isn’t satire. It is just about people in Setauket and the rumours that take root.”

“Oh that is brilliant,” Nancy said, her dark eyes gleaming with the hatred she bore her hometown.

“Its not,” Anna answered flatly. “It is part of the reason she and Jordan broke up. He was angry that she made them slaves-”

“It is set in the eighteenth century, right?” he mother winced. “I mean that is historically accurate.”

“Mom!”
“Ignoring the sins of the past does nothing in the way of correcting their repercussions.”

She was right. But so was Jordan.

“I guess that is what she thinks too, but his critique goes deeper. Jordan’s dad moved here from Accra for university - Akinbode is a Ghanaian name which she didn’t bother to change - though she did so for her white friends - and he was in a way last night when I saw him over a line where his character spoke of being Maasai which he says perpetuates a misunderstanding that African culture is homogenous.”

“Didn’t he visit all of once for his grandmother’s funeral?”

“Still. They had, according to Abigail, a bit of a fight about it – not for the first time. He was angry about how nearly everyone else was written too, and accused her of only being generous to John Andre and then … made more accusations down that line.”

“And?”

“What ‘and’? She confessed to having kissed him once and they broke up. But look, you can’t read this book. There is a sex scene between me and Edmund. And one between me and Abe – which no, isn’t happening and yes, I take issue with. I just don’t want to really say anything because I am the only one in our little group who has shown her any support in this thing that is worth so much to her that she would let her future fade in light of it.”

Anna figured this was because she was the only one who understood. Suddenly she felt her feet ache in Mary’s Jimmy Choos, aching to again stand behind the bar she had gambled everything to tend. Anna had Edmund who believed in her, and John who imitated his good intentions. Abigail, though witty, poignant and publically acclaimed for her part-time talents had no real encouragement within their ring. Her ex-lover had been her harshest critic.

“Wait, you ‘take issue’ that it isn’t happening or that there are still rumours about you two that inspired someone you know and trust to write about it?”

Anna took issue with the implication. “Seriously?” she gaped. “Mom, he has been married for six years. I was married. Now I am engaged.”

“How is the sex with Edmund though?” she asked in the same hard tone.

“In the book or – you know what, no. It is private. Not something I want to talk to my mom about on the middle of the sidewalk and not something I want my dad reading about and then recommending to forty thousand podcast listeners. You have to talk to him,” Anna begged. “You have to tell him that Anne and Edward are…”

“I knew it,” her mother smirked.

“I … thought you hadn’t read it.”

“I haven’t, I knew that you had … you know,” she winked. “You are absolutely glowing today.” Sweating. Sweating was the word she was looking for. Anna wanted to vomit, die, or preferably both. Not, however, before ruining everyone responsible for making her stand signal on a sidewalk; waiting to give word that her fiancé had made it out alive and intact, hearing the worst sting of words she had ever been made to suffer by her own mother in the meanwhile.

“Yeah well, Mary Woodhull owns stock in MAC,” she muttered. “They make a bunch of things for that.”
“So, when can I expect grandbabies?”

“When we are not living in an above-garage flat in the same house as my friend who fictionalizes my sex life, my friend who happened to fuck the same boy as me while we were still undergrads and is currently married to him, the resulting child, his au pair and oh, oh, lest we forget, Judge Woodhull,” she snapped, hearing her mother’s sentiment for her situation in her own appraisal of it.

“Yeesh,” the older woman sighed behind clenched teeth. “Yeah. Two of you are always welcome at mine, you know.”

Anna allowed her imaginings to wash over her face in the form of a sneer. “No offence, but that would somehow be worse.”

“Why? A lot of millennials live at home. It is almost socially acceptable these days.”

“Wait, Mom are you … are you supporting this now? Me and Edmund?”

Nancy Smith lit herself another cigarette.

“I think it is a little fast but, it isn’t, is it? You are so … reserved, Anna. Not shy exactly, but stubborn. But not with him. And look, I really shouldn’t say anything but I rang Martha yesterday.”

“Dandridge?” Anna clarified.

“She put together a bit of a working psychological profile after her interview with Simcoe.”

“Oh that is something to go on,” she managed to spit out sarcastically before feeling her heart stop. John’s resentment was warranted and had purchase with those looking to prosecute Edmund. She glanced down the boulevard, packed with every face but the one she sought. Maybe it was already too late. Maybe it always had been. Maybe she had helped set a trap.

“Before you judge-”

“Mom, what is wrong with the NYPD?” Anna demanded. “The reason you have so little to go on is that there is nothing, nothing that could possibly tie my fiancé or his friends-”

“He is a good kid. I hesitate to even imagine the fear and stress he must be faced with but - Anna I, I can’t get into it because in truth I should not even know but, I guess I will just leave it at he seems like a lost soul, but one with a strong moral compass. He is reserved too, like you, but not with you. Wednesday night, he knowingly walked into an ambush hoping for nothing beyond the opportunity to apologise to you for the morning’s events. He looks like a wimp but that shit takes balls and for that matter, so does opening oneself to love in the first place. I think it possible that you bring out the worst in him while exposing him for his best. Martha agrees. And I’d trust her opinion of everything. We do hot yoga together,” she paused, noting Anna’s sceptical stare. “Sometimes. When that skinny bitch instructor who doesn’t wear deodorant in a room she goes to sweat does not throw us out for talking.”

“And you guys got all this from a series of interviews pertaining to criminal intent?”

“Not only.”

Her mother fell silent, failing to elaborate.

“Mom?”
“What do you want from me, Anna? I give you my blessing and support to go off and marry your literal frog prince, who, by the way, is still under investigation for the disappearance of Benedict Arnold, potentially fucking with my chances of re-election in two years -”

“In two years! Ma. No one ever throws out a standing District Attorney. Least of all for being incorrupt enough to recuse themselves from a matter due to familiar ties.”

“They do in Georgia.”

“I think our electorate looks a lot different.”

“Yeah well anyway,” he mother continued dismissively, “at the risk of great personal and professional repercussion, I’m telling you to marry the little dweeb if he makes you this happy.”

“He does,” Anna smiled. “More than anything. He does.”

The evening before Anna had been lying naked in bed with her lover, exhausted yet euphoric as they watched the sun set over the skyline, buried by the blankets and burdens that belonged to John Graves Simcoe, momentarily absent from and immune to the disquiet of their sorrows and surroundings. ‘You are not at all what I imagined you to be,’ Anna purred as Edmund’s perversion presented itself in a two-fingered trick.

‘Ah … I hate to disappoint you Love, but it so happens that I am exactly that what you envisioned. I’ve been laying here for twenty minutes or so, desperate to shower, afraid you’d … laugh, as, as you are,’ he cooed back. Anna silenced her tittering laughter by leaning in for another kiss.

‘You set yourself up as the primary suspect in a criminal inquiry to save your friend; take on myriad of international three letter acronyms in a bar-fight - or rather fight for a bar- that you plan to stage on Wall Street; you invite a man to all but send you to your saviour in order to elaborate an alibi; yet you are afraid on my mockery? Priorities, Eddie.’

‘Ah Anna, you have no idea how intimidating it is to talk to a beautiful woman.’

Before he could compare her to nymphs that lent their names to celestial nebulae as he had before, before his charming compliments could cause the old gods to conflict, Ares manifested in the flat’s doorframe, taking the form of the owner of the sheets they had sullied. He had called for Edmund’s blood. Anna instinctively drew her bow in defence.

‘As I always suspected, Oyster, you hit like a girl,’ Simcoe mocked before Anna, hearing a challenge to her sweet prince’s integrity punched again, this time throwing her opponent off-balance. Edmund cringed but came to her aide, putting himself between them as he sought to explain appropriate conduct in the construct of combat to an audience wanting and willing to tear each other to shreds. He implemented order against chaos and calamity. He kept her, John, and by then Mary who had mounted her own charge in check.

Edmund Hewlett was not built for battle but he was bright enough to organize a truces and treaties. She was lucky to have him. They all were.

“Yeah he is … he is perfect,” Anna smiled.

“I don’t know that I would go that far. But he knows what he has and is willing to work to be worthy of you. Which will take a lot of work, mind.”

“Go easy on him,” Anna pleaded. “He has been through a lot recently.”
“Oh I know. I know and I can’t begrudge him that. Any of it.”

Her mother looked forlorn. Vulnerable. She did not know what Dr Dandridge had conditioned her to assume.

“Eddie and I are in a good place. I mean fine, not everything is ideal but I can smile knowing that I’ll have him at my side. Or in Setauket rather, living with my best friend, her son, his French tutor.”

“French tutor?”

“Aberdeen. You met her on Wednesday. Hattian, knows how to drive a stick. She is also Mary and Abe’s au pair.”

“God I am so glad I live in Brooklyn where I don’t know my neighbour’s names,” her mother commented in the tone she reserved for Setauket, never having seen the charm in small town life.

Anna smiled, “and I have a hotel room to look forward to for a few weeks. With the bestie’s ex-y.”

“Few days tops,” her mother winked. “Adams is litigating for the city.”

“Oh, thanks for your vote of confidence,” Anna blinked.

“You have my full faith and support but I have city revenue to worry about. I can’t let you kids off too easy.”

“That is the thing, Mom,” Anna objected, awed by how easily she fell into the role circumstance forced her to play. “I was looking last night and the city could ultimately generate more of a return if it gave into our client’s demands.”

“If that were true Akinbode would have sought a settlement,” the district attorney replied after taking a moment to consider it.

“He is seeking a senior partnership and wants something high-profile. Anyway, doubt he crunched the numbers with an economist and a physicist.” Anna lifted her chin in recalcitrance only to see the gesture mirrored.

“A fruitless attempt to apply y = mx + b to everything in the universe with a four percent margin of error in either direction then?” her mother returned.

Anna swallowed. She wondered if DI Tallmadge had somehow managed to bug her friend’s apartment in the twenty minutes he spent there trying to insist upon Edmund the need to file a report the day before.

Though Anna had asked Edmund to look over her mathematics late at night, he and John had been engaged in calculations widely removed from her current court case when she and Mary had come back inside from the balcony to where they had retreated when Edmund demanded a parlay with his rival.

‘It is all about delivery,’ Mary had agreed as she lit a cigarette, explaining almost apologetically that she did not normally smoke either anymore when Anna told her she had quit. ‘You’ll forgive me that I don’t trust you to be in there right now. It isn’t personal. They, those two, just have a lot to sort out. I suppose you and I do as well.’

‘I don’t quite think so. I haven’t seen you in six years, Mary. Six years. And now we meet again in
And so they marched. Anna told her what she knew and how she had come to discover it. Mary filled in the gaps in her information until Anna caved to her sudden craving and took a fag for herself. They watched the sun expire into the city’s skyline and street below illuminate in response in relative silence, breathing the toxins in an attempt to kill the bitter tastes of the sin and error born from Edmund’s other chemical dependency that Mary had been keen to mimic. Anna was glad to know her again. Mary had not changed much with her name; she was still prone to putting on airs, to preserving through pretending that all was right until a brush with reality created enough friction to set her fictions aflame.

And oh, how brightly she burned.

They spent the better part of the next hour developing a plan. When the two returned to the room the size of twelve they found Edmund bent over printed topographical and road maps the pair had printed, in the middle of offering an impromptu mathematical lecture - unwelcoming of question, feedback or debate. John was visibly aggravated at this constant he had at least in part created. Holding a bag of no-longer-frozen veg to his injured eye, he fought for Edmund’s pen.

‘Christfuck Hew-man Gottlieb, you can’t use the Poisson Distribution here because it doesn’t properly take into account the probability of one incident begetting another.’

‘I assure you it is the maths Tallmadge is using to navigate -’

‘It is not because he at this point has no idea that he is looking for an independent actor.’

‘Let’s keep it that way,’ Anna said at the same time Hewlett asked if Simcoe was certain in his claims.

Theirs was a difficult code to crack. Anna wondered as she watched them ignore her in favour of applying analysis to criminology if this was an argument or a heartfelt apology.

‘Listen,’ Mary interrupted, creating order by making a mess of the maps she pushed onto the floor as she sat at the table beside her. Edmund rose, first to pull out the chair across from him, then kneeling to gather up the evidence of their efforts.

‘Uh, Mary, we, or rather I, am attempting to work out -’ he started, trying to control malice cutting through his voice.

‘Where the cops are in their investigation? We have a better idea,’ Mary replied with a thin smile.

‘Because it is more likely that Tallmadge is employing the Hawkes Process, naturally operating under the idea of connectivity?’ John suggested meanly, though not, Anna supposed, to Mary or herself.

‘How about we work with real numbers,’ Anna offered. ‘My mother get into work at 6:50 every morning. It takes five minutes for her to turn on her computer, another two for her to sign into the system.’

She and Mary proceeded to excitedly explain that Anna was to arrive in elegant but flash clothing, with coffee from the bodega Nancy Smith swore by and an offer of grabbing donuts from the hipster place on the corner with a line that would already be stretched around the block. She would bring her employment contract as an excuse for celebration.

‘And this is key, I won’t be wearing the engagement ring which is no longer in my possession. That
will be sure to grab her attention and excitement.

‘What’s this?’ Simcoe asked, afraid to look at her cleavage with Mary present, although, Anna noted, he had not the nerve to so much as glance at the ginger beside her.

‘Don’t get too excited.’ Hewlett answered. ‘Agreement or not, I am going to wed this woman.’

‘That is actually part of the plan,’ Mary intervened. Anna would never understand why she seemed to have a personal investment in this particular partnership.

‘I’m happy for you, Oyster. It is about time you started taking some of your own initiative, you might however avoid sounding so smug about it. It is unbecoming of your current rank and station.’

There was something off about the way John spoke; something not in line the ways in which she had grown accustom. There was a stimulated, sprightly character to his tone, he seem disinterested in his words, in theirs, in the situation that bound them and had brought them to his table. He looked at Edmund for a reaction, for a queue on how to act. Edmund brushed him off with a flick of his wrist, sighed and spoke through clenched teeth, ‘Continue, my love.’

‘I think you can all attest to the fact that my mother is one of the most intrusive people you have ever met. I won’t call her back tonight - no matter how many times she rings - and I’ll appear with enough intrigue to distract her while the system is loading. If we time this right, I can make her forget she is logged in before getting her out of the office. Tallmadge and his entire team will be at will be at Whitehall. I’ve never know my mother to schedule a meeting before nine, and even if someone does walk in, Edmund, you can just say you are IT, which is a branch the city largely has to outsource anyway because they can’t afford to pay anywhere near private sector wages for full time employees.’

‘After Anna takes Ms. Smith from the office,’ Mary took over, ‘you’ll have about an hour to get into all of Tallmadge’s cases and copy them to a jump drive. We will be able to see how he works and how far, or far off, he is in the Arnold disappearance. You can do that, right?’

‘I helped calculate the flight path trajectory for a solar powered space probe involving a gravitational assist,’ Edmund replied dryly.

‘Is that … is that relevant work experience?’ Mary asked to the sound of John’s laughter. Anna had been wondering the same.

‘My dear, I am but certain I can manage to copy a few files onto a jump drive.’

‘Good.’

‘You’ll need to clear the session’s history after that and lock the computer so my mother won’t expect it was used in her absence. Afterward, go to the same bodega, pick up two coffees, and um. Say you are on your way to visit John at work. To apologise.’

‘No one is going to believe that,’ Simcoe interjected.

‘Ah … au contraire mon ami, tis you who have repeatedly proven yourself incapable of remorse.’

Edmund looked to Mary. John looked down, despondent, deaf to the arrhythmic sound of his digits fidgeting against his chair.

‘Edmund, you are going to apologise,’ Anna insisted. ‘At least that is what you are going to say
because there is something unnerving about the idea of the two of you just hanging out.’

The men looked at each other and nodded that this was fair criticism.

‘Anna is going to call out to you from wherever she is on line,’ Mary continued. ‘She will ask for
the coffee, you will stutter an excuse and then concede. While you hand her the paper cups, pass
her the jump drive discreetly. Anna will then bring it to my office where I will make a copy over
UNICEF’s hyper-secure server. Depending on how much material there is, I will divide it up
equally. Edmund, in the meantime, you’ll go to your embassy and then to the planetarium to fill out
whatever paperwork you need to with HR. Afterwards, call Anna. The two of you will meet up at
City Hall to apply for a marriage licence. There, Anna will return the original, which you will
bring to John. Then, together, we can come up with a plan to find Arnold and clear ourselves of
suspicion and guilt.’

‘Fine,’ John said. ‘I just want this all to be over.’

‘Agreed,’ said Edmund.

‘Good,’ Mary asserted. ‘Me too. Anna, if you are up to it, we can hang out in your room tonight,
I’ll teach you how to walk in heels and we can find something attention grabbing for you to wear
while we try to figure out the particulars of how we are all going to sell the alibis when questioned.
We will put on a DVD or something to eliminate any threat of Richard or … my husband walking in
and overhearing. Men are generally put off by femininity not designed to grab their fancy and we
should have some level of privacy.’

‘Gossip Girl and Prosecco?’ Anna smiled. ‘It will be just like old times.’

Mary’s eyes widened. ‘We have never seen the last two seasons together and if we have that
playing in the background the men will surely allow us our privacy while we figure out our next
few steps. Good thinking on multiple fronts.’

‘What about me though?’ Edmund inquired.

‘My condolences,’ John laughed patting him on the shoulder.

‘Speaking of next steps,’ Anna said, ‘I need to text Philomena. I need to text everyone. Edmund,
John, you really went too far with this cover. We have to reschedule our INS-gagement party. If
you want to keep playing the fake-affair, we can take pictures of you two at the same time. Once
everyone’s bruises fade, of course.’

‘Sorry, what is an ins -’ Mary started.

‘It is a party where you get all of your mates together and take photographs to make it look as
though you have been dating someone for a significant length of time to show to an immigration
official,’ John said. ‘The coppers already have Hewlett stating on record that he originally
intended to marry Anna in an act of immigration fraud, so forgive me but I fail to see the point.’

‘Not under oath,’ Edmund said.

‘It is all a game to you isn’t it?’ John spat. When Anna noticed he had shifted his attention to
Mary, she realised he might have been asking something else entirely.
Anna glanced down the street again. Seeing nothing, she was ready to surrender, to return to camp and discover for herself what had gone so completely wrong. “Ugh, you were right, Mom. This line is taking forever. Maybe we should just go to Dunkin Donuts or something.”

“I have been waiting for a cronut for two hours, Anna. I am no backing down now.”

Anna sighed.

“Anyway baby, I told you it would take forever.”

“I heard about a study recently that says waiting is meant to stimulate the senses, making food taste better than it otherwise would.”

“I’ll have to try that if I ever find myself in a situation that warrants cooking. But again,” her mother seemed to brag, “I live in Brooklyn where that will never be an issue.”

“You are really trying to get me to move in aren’t you?” Anna asked, hoping that for all the traits she had inherited, the inability to remain inconspicuous had skipped a generation.

“Is it such an easy sell? What are you still doing in Setauket? You two will be working in the Upper East and West Sides, respectively. Why condemn yourselves to a two hour commute with traffic?”

“I don’t know how long it will last,” she said, trying to temper her mother’s expectations. “Wachtell Lipton.”

“Jesus, Anna. You are working for one of the most prestigious law firms in the city. There is no shame in losing to Abigail Adams in your first round of litigation, none in your twentieth. That is just the way it goes sometimes. You won’t lose your job … oh my God,” she pushed Anna aside and called out, “Oh my fucking God! Edmund? Edmund! What happened to you?”

“Darling! Ah, Mrs. Smith, h- how are you this fine morning?”

Anna spun around to find herself in her fiancé’s arms, a light kiss planted on her cheek.

“And?” he asked.

“How are we? Bitter,” Anna said of her mother. “She is trying to talk me into moving to Brooklyn. With her. What ae you doing here? I thought you were going to your embassy.”

“Oh, well I admit our present predicament is far from ideal, Mrs. Smith, I will have you know I am working on -”

“Edmund, what happened to your face?” Nancy interrupted, clarifying her original question.

“Oh,” her mother said dismissively. “No I get it. Lads fight, yea?”


“Sure. Right. Fine,” Nancy said in quick succession before grabbing on to his shoulders, pulling him down to her level and kneeing him in such a manner as to ensure that he remained bowed.
“Not lads who plan on marrying my daughter,” she said as she straightened. “Am I making myself clear, Mr. Hewlett?”

He did not reply; he writhed.

“Mother!” Anna shouted.

“Now, promise me you will never – never -do anything to cause my daughter anguish again.”

“I … of course,” Edmund squeaked.

“And you will love, cherish and protect her for all of her days?”

“Yes. God,” he begged though the worst of the pain had surely passed. Satisfied, Nancy’s roar softened to a purr.

“Is that from D’Angelo’s? Is that for me?” she asked of the paper coffee cups, half of their contents spilt on the pavement.

“It was meant for Simcoe but I can’t well go visit him now as he will think I am mocking his voice for the next half hour. Good God, woman -” he said in a high shrill.

“You can never let it go can you?” Anna said, supressing a laugh.

“You can have the coffee if you so desire,” he squeaked.

“I thought you wanted grandkids, Mom,” Anna grinned, taking the cup she was handed and the jump drive with it.

At this Edmund blinked. Then smiled. First at her, then at his future mother-in-law as he told about his revised offer from Hayden Planetarium, promising Anna that they would someday get to back the life she saw him beginning to envision. Her mother asked a few questions about his family, leading Edmund to say that while he had a certain duty – one that mostly involved posing for photographs with visiting dignitaries when he was in residence – his heart was his own. Either they would accept his decisions or they would not, but he had made up his mind. It must have pained him. He had yet to receive a response from his parents, his siblings angered on financial grounds and completely disinterested in his personal life. Edmund smiled through it for her sake.

“Setauket in Anna’s home,” he said, squeezing her hand. “I plan to make it mine permanently.”

“There is nothing in Setauket,” her mother countered.

“You needn’t stand on line for breakfast all morning,” Edmund parried.

“Where can you purchase breakfast in a town like that?”

“There is this tavern I am rather fond of,” he smiled at Anna.

Anna looked at him pleadingly. She had already spent hours lying to the only family she had left in the state, and while she was certain she could keep up much of her ruse indefinitely if need be, she could not pretend to her mother that the breakfast at DeJong’s had ever been worth having. Not today. Not with the promise of cronuts fixed in her mind.

“Take caution, Edmund,” her mother warned again, noticing the expression Anna knew herself to be wearing. “Whatever it is that you are after, take caution. I won’t see my daughter get hurt.”
“Nor will I, Madame.”

“Good,” she smiled. “Then we are in agreeance.”

“I should say that we are.”

“Anna,” she said, lighting another fag for her neurasthenia. “Do you know how to make an Aslan Sütü?”

“Excuse me?”

“When you didn’t call me back last night I went out with a DS to inquire about all things ‘Hewlett’ and after breaking down four hundred years of history and what felt like an eternity of modern politics she ordered me that. Can you make it?”

“It is just Yeni Raki with water and ice,” Anna squinted.

“Thought I would throw something hard at you. No matter. Make me one when you reopen your tavern,” she commanded.

“Mom?”

“Oh come on, you really think I didn’t know? Anna they print the bar results in the newspaper. I’ve been waiting for two years for you – rather than fucking Inspector Tallmadge – to tell me that you passed. Two years for you to tell me that practicing wasn’t your long-term goal anymore.”

“Mom, I don’t know -”

“If I seem disappointed it is only because of the knowledge that my daughter feels she has to be so secretive around me. Feels that she can be,” she smiled. Softened. As did Anna, whose eyes filled with tears. “I’m on your side, baby. I just wish you would let me be. Now, Edmund, why do you have to visit your embassy?” She missed nothing. Anna wondered if she too had spent the morning giving Edmund cover – or at least reasonable doubt. If that was why she had been smoking so much.

“I’m seeing if I can get help in applying for a special work visa,” he answered. “I organized a new arrangement with Hayden Planetarium last night, in truth I was offered a position last year but I, that is, I had a better offer with the European Space Agency at the time and, ah - regardless. It is full time with benefits, $70,000 annually with I realise doesn’t even begin to – but when, or rather if I manage to defend my thesis I could -”

“Your thesis will be nothing, Eddie. Meeting your future mother-in-law is hard enough when all you have to worry about is picking out a bottle of wine. When you are planning to commit immigration fraud, are under suspicion for the disappearance of a prominent politician and your fiancée is the only daughter of the city’s top lawyer, well I hazard to even imagine. Getting through that convinces me you can get through just about any interrogation. That said -”

“No Edmund,” Nancy corrected, “it sickens you that anyone else could imagine you would do such a thing. But hard truth – people always will, regardless of how you obtain your legal status. That said why make it harder on yourself? You needn’t apply for extra permission, you meet all of the requirements of section 319 A of the Immigration and Nationality Act -”
Edmund looked at Anna, slightly confused. “When you ladies do the legal speak, I confess I have some difficulty keeping up.”

“You know how I feel then when you explain the solar system? With numbers?” Anna teased.

“I, ah, I suppose that is deserved.”

“What my mother is saying is that if you still plan to marry me, which,” she said cuddling up to him, “I told her you do. As equals. You can live and work in this beautiful country of ours without applying for a special visa through your embassy.”

“To be more exact what I am saying is that if you wait until the afternoon to get yourselves over to City Hall the place is going to have turned into a Methadone Clinic and you’ll never escape the wait. Especially on a Friday. You’ll miss your appointment with HR, and mark me, if my daughter is forced to take a job she thinks herself overqualified for to make ends meet.”

“Mom, its not-”

“You will too, Edmund. Am I understood?” she insisted.

“Yes, yes Ma’am.”

“Good. So seeing as we have the embassy thing sorted out and your breakfast plans have already been cancelled, would you like to join us?”

“I uh, I shouldn’t. Anna is making me otherwise adjust my diet, you see. Smoking too. It’s been rather a Herculean set of tasks,” he said uncomfortably.

Her mother gave her a hard look as she passed Edmund a pack of Marlboros from her purse.

“Jesus fucking Christ, would you Hew –lett this man live a little? It is you yourself who told me to lighten up, that he has been through a lot lately. Surely he deserves a donut for his suffering and his efforts not to.”

And so, for the first time in her adult life, Anna Strong heeded her mother’s advice. Because the operation had hit a set back in the form of Edmund getting lost on his way to a bodega, she would be a full two hours late meeting Mary, who, at that point would not have the time to strategically divide the work as she would with her assistants and interns.

Sitting in City Hall, curled up in the arms of her lover as they waited for their number to be called, Anna looked at the bridal magazines Mary had commandeered from a colleague’s desk for her, allowing herself to dream of the day and the ones that would follow.

She had no reason to suspect that her happiness would be so short lived.

Chapter End Notes

Let’s unpack the assorted cultural references, shall we?

**Gossip Girl** is an American television series that ran from 2007 until 2012. It focused on a group of wealthy teenagers living in Manhattan’s Upper East Side whose lives were under constant disruption from a website that posted their scandalous secrets.
Serena, Blair and Chuck were three of the main characters.

Ben and Jerry’s is American ice cream. Though we import it here in Germany, I have never had it due to the outrageous price tag. Not sure how it ranks comparatively to other ice creams available in the United States, but here me out on this one – it is a frozen thing with a cow on the package. What a completely appropriate food for Hewlett to have to go searching for, or? *side note, there is no problem in the world that can’t be fixed by bingeing on GG and junk food with your girlfriends. None.

Anfield, home to FC Liverpool is the sixth largest football stadium in the United Kingdom.

The Gabfest (shortened from Slate’s Political Gabfest) is a long running weekly news podcast. Emily Bazalon is one of its three regular hosts. When one is absent, another reporter stands in. To close the program they go off on personal tangents on whatever they find worth drinking over.

Zubik v. Burwell was a case being heard by the USSC on whether religious institutions other than churches should be exempt from the contraceptive mandate two weeks after the events described thus far in H+S. I think it was thrown back to appeals a few months later.

The Maasai are an ethnic group in Kenya and Tanzania, located in East Africa. One of my best friends is from Nairobi and takes personal issue with the Ghanaian name. So much so that we don’t watch Turn together anymore. (We watch Gossip Girl and complain about boys, politics, and cultural appropriation as one does.)

“A fruitless attempt to apply \( y = mx + b \) to everything in the universe with a four percent margin of error in either direction then?” the problems with astrophysics and economics combined into a single joke. I deserve at least a pity laugh.

Hew-man Gottlieb Herman Gottlieb is a mathematician played by Burn Gorman in the 2013 sci-fi / action film Pacific Rim. Burn Gorman exists in the H+S universe, which is akin to ours in every way save for the fact that horrible puns often go unchecked.

Poisson Distribution / Hawkes Process means of statistical analysis adopted by criminologists. In this case, Simcoe is correct that Tallmadge is more likely to be implementing Hawkes, but here is the thing about the Poisson Distribution that is incredibly fitting to canon Hewlett – it was originally developed by the Prussian military when they wanted to account for the number of deaths-by-horse. Go on, tell me maths aren’t fun.

Yeni Raki / Aslan Sütü is the national drink of Turkey. A clear liquor turns white when it meets water, called “the lion’s milk”. Make yourself a glass before Erdogan causes further damage to the economy by shutting down the manufacturer (there is no talk of the happening as of time of publication, but who knows, this was a long chapter, maybe he has turned the republic into a caliphate by now. I am sorry for always getting so political in the notes. You all deserve better.)

So!
Has anyone noticed how long it has been since Hewlett has had a POV? Does that sound like a preview of the next chapter? Nah. Just an open question and one I urge you to keep in mind. Next time we will check back in with Abe and Simcoe and see how they are dealing with the infidelity.

Until then, I have this theory I want you guys to help me test if you are up to it:
In academia, nothing is more infuriating that getting a reply from a professor reading “Okay. Thanks.”
But on AO3? That would be brilliant, or so I assume. Let’s put the hypothesis to the test.
(Okay no, but really, thank you guys so much for reading, I really, truly hope you are continuing to enjoy.)

XOXO – Tav

Up Next: Ways to say ‘I love you’ when words are not enough
The Whistle

Chapter Summary

In the final scenes of the first act, two of Inspector Tallmadge’s subordinates discuss the case and their boss during their sweep of Whitehall. Meanwhile, Simcoe suffers a mental collapse and Hewlett clarifies his intentions.

Chapter Notes

And here we find ourselves, lovely faces. There is something rather bittersweet about bringing the figurative curtain to a close. I want to thank each and every one of you who has stuck with this story this far (over a year now!) and tell you from the bottom of my heart how much your support has meant to me throughout this time.

What I don’t want to do, however, is provide my usual list of potential trigger warnings. You’ll encounter nothing in this chapter that you have not been faced with before, either in my writing or in the source material. As much as I intend to solve a few mysteries with this update, I wish to leave you with element of surprise and suspense going in.

That said; I hope that I have managed to write you something honest and entertaining. I hope you enjoy, and I hope that you will return for Act Two now that the stage has finally been set.

It was around five o’clock in the morning when it first occurred to him that he had not bothered to change the sheets. This was not remarkable in itself. There was a maid. She would come tomorrow. Or he would cancel. Yes. He would cancel. He tried to close his eyes again, to return to vacuity uncontradicted by a perception of place.

He lied in bed with the scent of his enemy’s sweat, his sex, his sanguine fluid. He lied in bed with the sickness and sadness of solitude. He could not shut his eyes.

Out of instinct, he reached for the telephone in the vacant space beside him, finding it smothered beneath a pillow. Suffocated. Strangled. He squinted at the man reflected in its black screen. He did not recognise himself. He did not try. He typed. He typed until it no longer occurred to him that his fingers were trembling beneath the weight of what he had done.

He stopped. Set the device aside. He had nothing to say and no one to speak to. This, it occurred to him, was the first morning since the suicide that his phone would be silent. He heard instead the sounds of the street; the city dwellers for whom day was dawning, those who had not, in effect, died several months ago when someone else had chosen to swallow a bottle of crushed pills.

His eyes were wet when he tried to shut them again, wetter still when he grabbed for the other pillow – the one that had lost its case to the washing machine with all of the other bloodstained
cloth the flat contained. His own face smothered, he screamed. He sobbed. He did this until he felt nothing remained inside of him aside from the consciousness of sorrow and sin and the sense of self-loathing they together bore.

He reached for the other phone, the one that would have been on the receiving end of the text if he had anything to say for himself, if he had anyone to talk to, if he had not kept the device overnight to program automated responses in conjunction with an algorithm. He read the series of generated messages and realised he could not clearly recall a single conversation he had had with his rival as of late. He looked to the device’s cloud storage; found, read and reread the five-page letter of rejection which he had thought rather amusing the morning before. It was a deception that was easier to decipher while squinting, struggling to adjust his eyes to the screen’s white glow. The letter spoke of all of that which he was sorry to recognise as the only thing that he had ever longed for. He tasted his own sick rise from his stomach as he read in words that were not present that he was loved.

Or had been.

Once.

He lied in bed with the scent of his enemy’s sweat, his sex, with the stains of his split blood. He lied in silence, numb to the street noise of morning commuters, with secrets and truths unspoken. He had nothing to say and no one to listen. He tried to close his eyes. He tried screaming again but heard no sound. The urban symphony subsided; fading in a buzz to absolute blackness, the world keen to leave him to a familiar, damning isolation marked by a psychosomatic disorder. Someday, he thought, stress would surely render him stone deaf. He questioned if anyone would be around at such time to notice. Maybe everyone already knew from the intensity of his stare – afraid to blink, to miss with his eyes what his ears neglected. Maybe they knew from his pitch or lack of depth perception. Maybe he was good at hiding his recurring deficiencies. Maybe no one cared enough to call him on it, or maybe they did and he simply had not heard.

It had all worsened as of late. He wondered how long this spell would last and if he cared to recover. He wondered what the woman he loved had said after crying for her husband. He wondered what demons existed within him that allowed him to continue the act. Continue at all. He wished it all to end.

He rose to make himself a cup of tea, taking the expired Coffee Mate from the refrigerator. He was deaf to the sounds made by the formerly fluid substance being jostled in its container as he shook it, pouring what still flowed into a cup he found by the sink. He did not hear the electric kettle go off with its light, nor the sound of water being poured into the coffee-stained mug. He sat and watched his tea steep, mixing with the thick milk substitute, missing his father and Pakistan, missing London and the concept of family he had twice expect to find there. He missed the ideas he had long had with regard to abandonment. He missed the victim he long played at and the hero he had long thought himself to be.

He missed texting; at least, he missed the idea that he did not need his contender’s constant quips to maintain a certain calm.

He missed having someone to talk to and something to say for himself.

He missed ‘normal’, but more than anything, he missed having a basis on which to define that abstract. He sat in silence and watched the tea steep; inhaling over its scent all of the vital signs left stagnant in the air, signs of life he had quite nearly ended without a moment’s self-reproach. He opened the door to his small balcony. The day was dawning and John Graves Simcoe was dead to
“Have you found anything?” Braxton asked from the doorway connecting the rented room to the house proper. His tone suggested that the rest of the unit had seen their morning go to waste as well. Yilmaz found solidarity in his tired stare, if little else. They had all been taken for fools.

The plan to break the investigation’s public target by applying pressure had thus far proven unsuccessful. Hewlett’s flat looked as though it had hosted a party the night before. The mess he left seemed designed to mock her and the rest of the squad. She looked at the myriad of emptied cups and cartons with envy, spiteful of the support she saw in the unkempt room.

“Nothing conclusive that ties Hewlett to Arnold,” Yilmaz sighed in return. “I found an old Everton jersey hidden under the mattress – planted, likely. Another damned distraction,” she spat, realizing as she spoke that a reference to Merseyside meant little or nothing to her colleague, allowing for his lack of interest in sport. This, too, annoyed her in the moment, as she was certain it would later on when she would surely be tapped to explain it – to him, Russo, Sackett, and likely Tallmadge himself. It would be no use, she reasoned, to even try until they had all had another two cups of coffee and five hours of sleep.

“But here, look at this,” Yilmaz offered, forcing herself to smile in the closest approximation to kindness she could manage on three hours’ rest. She held up a sketchpad for her subordinate’s consideration, one of twelve she had found among Hewlett’s curiosities.

“What am I looking at?” Braxton squinted.

“A sketchpad from 2014.”

“I’m still not sure what I am looking at.”

“These are all drawings of Anna Strong,” Yilmaz responded, flipping through pages upon pages of inexpertly rendered dark-haired beauties in styles borrowed and blended.

“Rather poor ones,” Braxton said blandly. Yilmaz, aggravated, clenched her jaw, exhaling slowly through her long and crooked nose. It was not that she did not share in his general assessment; it was that he failed to assess. Feeling a sudden stain of sympathy for her superior - who, in addition to all of the average stress afforded to him by his rank, was now made to manage a team of detectives too exhausted to be truly inquisitive - Yilmaz had to remind herself that days had passed since Braxton had seen his own sheets. Like her. And Russo. And Baker. Sanchez. Sackett. And Tallmadge. Detective Inspector Benjamin Tallmadge, she thought, likely never went home at night, even when there were no prominent politicians hidden somewhere in the dark.

It was beginning to show in his work. It was beginning to effect the team.

“Here is something recent,” she prompted, handing Braxton a book bound with mostly blank paper. “Hewlett is improving – look at the hands- you can tell.” He glanced quickly at the drawing. Without comparing it to an earlier rendition, he reverted his eyes back to her, unimpressed with either the progression of the search or the progression she claimed to see in the quality of her subject’s sketches. “What this says to me,” Yilmaz clarified, “is that either Hewlett is lying about the duration, nature or intent of his relationship with Strong, or-”
“Or that he went back and drew her quickly to trip us up. Wouldn’t put it past him,” Braxton interrupted. “Honestly, what would be the point about lying about an intention to commit immigration fraud?”

“One,” Yilmaz answered, crossing her arms and lifting her eyebrows, “it gives him an alibi for the time frame in question. Two - it potentially reduces Anna’s role in the Arnold disappearance. We already have more than enough evidence to show that she is unsympathetic to the senator’s politics. Three - it provides us with a certain amount of distraction, which - a case could be made - is all Hewlett intends. Look at how much time we have already wasted with him.”

“A distraction from who or what exactly? Anna? You can’t think -”

“Simcoe,” she clarified, “according to Tallmadge at least.” Yilmaz took a step closer to her subordinate and sometimes-lover. The sergeant spoke in a hiss as she pointed between her eyes - widened with warning and yesterday’s winged liner, and his - suddenly alert with interest. She realised instantly from his expression that she had been correct in her assumptions - Tallmadge still held most of his squad at length.

Yilmaz grew furious.

“We aren’t having this conversation, look at me, you understand that right? We aren’t having this conversation, but Ben is of the mind that if we put Hewlett under enough pressure, one of them – either he or Simcoe - will break. After scouring over your intel from yesterday, I would tend to agree with him, but the sweep …”

Braxton nodded slowly.

Her voice low and level, her gestures and expressions the equivalent of the sorts of profanities screamed at animals trained for blood-and-betting sport, Yilmaz continued, “I don’t know what he is after keeping the whole unit in the dark. He can’t possibly expect any of us to do our jobs effectively if he doesn’t trust us-”

“Maybe he doesn’t trust himself,” Braxton suggested. “Personally, I would like to see this Hewlett go down, for anything we can pin him with, really. I just got off the phone with Agent Church form the FBI’s London outpost. That is actually what I came up here to tell you.”

Yilmaz perked. There was a part of everyone assigned to Special Crimes who wanted to see the Scotsman hang for interfering with a criminal investigation – something that, as things stood, would be difficult to bring to trial. Unless the FBI could do what her squad’s English equivalent was prevented from, however, Edmund Hewlett and the whole of his family would suffer little if any consequence for assisting in a cover-up.

“Oh, way to go,” she smiled, crossing her arms again as she awaited an explanation form the division’s resident bureaucrat. What Braxton lacked in inquiry he made up for in organization. Yesterday, she had briefly considered delegating the red tape she had been shown by Scotland Yard and Interpol down to him before thinking better on it. His talents would be wasted on such an assignment. There was, as Yilmaz - and no doubt the Met - saw it, nothing licit regarding Ferguson’s appointment to any investigation involving the Hewletts. He himself seemed to recognize this. In both incidences - now, and in the 2008 case in which both Hewlett and Simcoe had been suspects - Ferguson had rightly attempted to recuse himself; both requests had been denied. This, Yilmaz knew from experience, was so the British courts could discredit any evidence found in the course of his investigation, a reality of which she was certain Ferguson must be aware. This, and the simple fact that the inspector had every conceivable reason to want to watch the figurative house burn, would be the key to breaking him; to gaining access to the old case files.
There was no above board way to go about it.

Such fell into DS Yilmaz’s skillset.

DC Braxton, by stark contrast, processed the stamina and perseverance she imagined it required to wait on hold, to otherwise navigate the Bureau’s ridiculous touchpad hotline. He seemed the only person in the entire world of policing able to make A and B connect through a straight line, the only one who knew how the mythical form to make that happen was labelled and where it was located. He had her upmost respect in that measure. “How long did it take to get through?” she asked.

Braxton cleared his throat before giving her a grin she might have thought cheeky had she not known him as well as she did. “Church called me because I emailed her for follow-up to yesterday’s arrest. Eugene Hewlett has been in custody for nineteen hours now. The press has already taken note and published an explanation of sorts. It came way too soon. There is a leak somewhere.”

“BuzzFeed? I’ve seen it.”

“What she and I both found curious,” he continued, “was that when the snippet went online he had only been gone for two hours or so; too early for anyone to otherwise question his whereabouts or try to cover them. The explanation for his disappearance is so in keeping with his public persona it seems to have been written beforehand; the release was just too perfectly timed. Clearly, it is a cover, but a terribly risky one from a public relations perspective unless the organization somehow expected him to be absent at length. Maybe he wrote it himself, directly after disconnecting with Simcoe. That’d be something, huh? Kinda feel bad for the guy.”

Yilmaz was not entirely convinced of wider conspiracy. It was too common of a move for the family to make.

Five hours of research the afternoon before had shown Constable Sanchez and herself that the French edition of the online media portal adored scandals involving Paris’s princely socialite. It was true that exaggerated stories of his antics usually found their way onto the site coinciding with events that would prove more difficult for the family and their business to navigate if not for the pulchritudinous focal point on offer. It was tragic, in a way. From what she could tell, there was little basis in truth to any of the rumours the press promoted. Eugene Hewlett had undergone a gastric bypass as a minor, the result of which, the coroner confirmed for her, would make it difficult for him to consume half the substances to which he was accredited. There were no wild parties, none, at any rate, that he could take an active role in or what have want or energy to incite.

There was something sad to it from every angle. Shy, sulky Edmund had been forced into the position previously; existing solely to be envied until illness rendered that particular narrative unprintable. Resulting from the stroke, his little brother had been forced to lose the equivalent of ninety pounds in the span of seven months to serve as an eventual stand-in, a mere decoration at the social events he was made to attend in a demonstration of his surname’s predominance. Yilmaz wondered what Eugene was like when not being forced to bear the burden of his brother’s absence from public life; she wondered if even he knew anymore. She wondered if Hamilton was right to assume a link between his latest brush with the press and the rising prices of Setauket properties.

She closed her eyes.

She considered.

She remained unpersuaded, reasoning that if the article was planned, it had likely to do with the
Copenhagen shipping contract that fell though in favour of the extending one with the city of Liverpool. The Hewletts showed a clear preference for a public crisis to a fiscal one and this negotiation could prove detrimental to stock price and shareholder interest should it receive much attention in the days after it had been brokered.

Based on past human interest pieces coinciding with what might otherwise corporate upset, Sergeant Yilmaz believed this was nothing more than the regular course of business. If history was being called upon to serve as any indicator, the Hewletts, their attorneys and their advisors, had perfected the art of playing the press, or rather, getting the press to play along. Payoffs were probably involved somewhere.

Still, she considered, there was a certain specific that rightly raised alarm. Why state that the prince was taking an extended retreat from his immediate family, from public life? There was no way of knowing how long he would be detained, and, insofar as Yilmaz knew, no way of anticipating the arrest. She handed it to Braxton and Church; there was something amiss. But a leak from within? There had not been time for that either.

“Could his counsel have been the tipoff?” she suggested.

“No,” Braxton said. “Eugene Hewlett isn’t entitled to any here. No one outside of our squad and our foreign and federal colleagues has any way of knowing about the arrest. He did not get a phone call. When he was sixteen, you see, Eugene went on a Green Peace expedition with his mother. ‘Save the Whales’, you know?”

“And because they are officially classified as a terrorist organization…”

“The Feds can keep him for as long as they deem necessary without giving him access to a solicitor. A lucky stroke. Or, I suppose for Copen-Hewlett, an extremely unfortunate one. He was questioned about the content in the blurb by the way. Apparently, it checks out. Almost. He’s known from the onset that he was not the biological father of his wife’s unborn child and went as far as to take formal measures to adopt it. All and all he has been surprisingly forthcoming. Of interest to us, or, of interest to Hamilton – two nights ago he transferred his child’s trust fund into Simcoe’s management. He also purchased -or tried to, all of his transactions have since been delayed - DeJong Tavern for an Anna Hewlett. Who doesn’t exist.”

“Yet.”

“An apartment that appears to be in the same building as Simcoe’s –apropos, the one Hamilton really thinks is the key to a larger money laundering scheme- seems to have been purchased for the same lady. I would otherwise think he is telling the truth, but where did the money come from? We are talking several million he can’t seem to explain, though he proved open and candid when other transactional questions were posed to him.”

“You think he will be tortured? By the Feds I mean.” Yilmaz asked after a moment, still stuck on and sickened by the fact that a man was being held without the possibility of legal recourse. It felt so foreign and yet so familiar. Her mother had lost her tongue as a young woman to the Jandarma İstihbarat Teşkilatı when a jealous neighbour claimed to have heard her speaking Kurdish. Whether or not she had not was of no regard. There had been no process, no appeal and, in effect, no justice for either her mother or for the state she had then been forced to flee, made mute and marked as a political dissident. Her story had given a younger Hatice strong belief in America and in the land’s legal process. She began her career believing the US better, believing that American justice was always just. Every day with Special Crimes, every day her department was forced to work with agencies outside the NYPD, served to test her faith.
“Far be it for me to criticize how intelligence operates overseas, but the only reason to charge a minor who just happened to have been drug out onto a boat with intent is if you mean to do them in when it becomes politically convenient,” Braxton shook his head. “Guilty of money laundering or not, I don’t think the Hewlett the feds have will ever see the light of day again. If our Hewlett is not guilty in some way, what is his baby brother dying to protect? The only reason they are even looking into this is the confession you guys got on surveillance. Eddie Hew knew what he was doing, he knew the consequences - you can tell. Honestly, I hope he goes down. For whatever. Sorry to say it but I really do. How could anyone possibly have so little regard?”

There was something tragic to looking at law enforcement this way; in thoughtlessly commenting that they hoped a man would hang for a crime he could not have committed because it might serve to validate a needless death. There was something tragic in that this sentiment was shared to some extent among all members of the squad.

Yilmaz shook her head. I’m better than that, she told herself. I have to be for America is better than that. She repeated this in her mind several times before speaking, the morning’s new mantra. She must refuse to betray the law she had sworn to uphold and enforce for the sake of convenience or personal conscience. She hoped that their colleagues at the FBI would see things the same way.

Ben Tallmadge, it seemed, could not – caught on an endless crusade like the preacher’s son he was.

“There the only reason we are looking into his confession is because he handed us a distraction,” Yilmaz corrected. “I don’t think there is a large scale money laundering operation going on, and if there is I truly don’t think Edmund Hewlett knows anything about it. I really, really don’t think that his past financial problems have anything to do with Arnold. And I don’t think Tallmadge is thinking at all,” she paused, letting a steam of hot air escape from her nostrils in a huff. “To be completely honest, I imagine the only part of that evidence you gathered from Dr Dandridge’s office that our esteemed boss is paying any attention to is the invoice from Pfizer. I am fairly certain that if he took notice of anything else we wouldn’t be here at Whitehall right now.”

“Oh I know,” Braxton agreed, “he is pissed.”

Yilmaz nodded. It was not that she did not empathise. It was not that she did not understand the base of Ben’s obsession.

Nate Hale had been a hero; now he was nothing more than a photo on a desk.

If it had been her instead, Yilmaz reasoned, if she and Russo had been working a complex case that had seen her partner killed; if she had gotten an unexpected break in it only to be thrown off hours later, she too would likely tried everything to get herself reattached.

Everything, she thought, save for ignoring the investigation to which she was currently assigned.

No arrest was going to bring Ben Tallmadge’s sole friend back. Nothing would. Her boss, however, could never be convinced of this. As Yilmaz saw it, this left her, Russo, Braxton, Baker, Sackett and Sanchez to find Benedict Arnold on their own.

They were wasting as much time at Whitehall as they were with assisting the FBI, who, she noted, had thus far done nothing to assist them aside from providing refreshments when the partnership had been announced.

Yilmaz cleared her throat loud enough to startle Braxton.
“Andre was really on to something with his research. Now for the impossible task of proving that to Tallmadge,” she sighed. “You’re right, you know. You’re kind enough not to say it, but you’re right. I need something more conclusive than these fucking dated drawings. They do indicate to us that Hewlett has lied to us, though. Probably about a number of things. I think we need to get Anna into interrogation if we really want to put him under pressure. Sweeping here clearly isn’t doing the trick.” Yilmaz shut her eyes again and uttered a number of curses she did not bother to translate, eventually continuing, “I swear he is trying to ruin me. Ben. I’ll never be promoted if I bring the daughter of the fucking DA in for questioning. I’ll never be promoted because our little cunt of a boss is forcing me to lead the charge with this case.”

“That is what you want though, isn’t it? Authority?”

“What I want,” Yilmaz insisted, “is to find Arnold.”

“Are you sure there is something to this?” Braxton asked quietly, if only to chastise her for how loud she had grown. He flipped sceptically through a third sketchbook pulled from the wardrobe. “Odd place to keep them.”

“It shows he obviously loves her and has for some time. That is what this whole thing is about, you know. The suspects, the study you uncovered. Its love.”

“Fear,” Braxton corrected with reference to the title of Andre’s research thesis.

“No. Think about it for a second, Andre has been conducting an extended closed study on a group of men by systematically exploiting the effects of personal stress on field performance. Simcoe has accrued more cards since Hewlett’s announcement that he planned to return to Europe, something remarkable when you considered that the team played in less than half their scheduled matches in the last half-season.”

“English?”

“More fouls.”

“Okay.”

She was not sure he understood.

“He – Simcoe - is acting out on his fear of abandonment, specifically one he has grown accustom to. One that has served to define him. Meanwhile Andre seems to have done everything in his influence to make the situation permanent and irreversible while trying to tap the desired reaction.”

“Why would blatant violence -” Braxton started, angered by the implication.

“I looked it up. Martha Dandridge has a long history with General George Washington. The Pentagon, which also underwrote this research as you noted, is currently working on a deal with certain pharmaceutical companies to improve mental health under TriCare. As what we have seen of Andre’s study suggests, here, by improve they mean … exploit. I am willing to venture that this is why everything in Hewlett’s file is either missing or classified. But alas,” she sighed. “No convincing Tallmadge. No point now. We wasted our one search warrant on Whitehall. Now that the case has been delegated to ADA Burr, I mean. Shit, you know?”

Braxton sighed.

“Kevin?” Yilmaz asked.

He scratched at what remained of his hair. “What bothers me as a sort of inverse of the evidence you found suggesting that Hewlett has been in, or has been harbouring ideas towards, a relationship with Ms. Strong far longer that he admitted to in interview is that I found nothing - absolutely nothing- linking Mrs. Woodhull to Mr. Simcoe. She seems a sentimental sort. I figured there would be a card, a receipt, new underwear, something.”

“I’ve yet to speak with either of them but according to the transcripts they have been taking efforts to be very discreet.”

“But then why tell us repeatedly that they are having an affair? I know what discretion looks like from personal experience,” he stopped. Their eyes had a conversation about things she knew he did not –and would never - understand about her parent’s culture. At least, she reasoned, he respected it most of the time. “Uh,” Braxton stammered, “in this case, both parties appeared … um, proud is not quite the word I would use when describing their affair but I am failing to find an alternative.”

“Satisfied?” Yilmaz offered.

“Something akin.”

“A legitimate emotional reaction to confession,” she began to argue. “Especially if we take into account that they have taken pains to leave no evidence – oh. Kev, no. I know where you were going with this - it calling their alibi into question - but CSI found no evidence at DeJong Tavern, either. We have nothing.”

“Can’t go to Ben with that.”

“No. I need something more than logic and absence to grab his attention away from the Pfizer invoice. He hasn’t actually, actively listened to my input in longer than recollection allows. I doubt he will bring either Simcoe or Woodhull in for a follow up until he has driven the former half-mad no matter what angle we approach this from,” Yilmaz ranted. She had no way of knowing that their boss’s tactic had already succeeded. Still, it would be Sunday afternoon before they had grounds on which to subpoena Simcoe - by which time one of their number would be lain in a hospital bed from which he would never rise as a result.

“We could make him think he thought of it on his own,” Braxton suggested. ‘We’, Yilmaz assumed, meant ‘you with your fancy bachelor’s in philosophy.’ She declined.

“Leave that for the John Andre’s of the world. I have an actual job to do. One that involves finishing here and then going to Columbia and talking to every professor who ever knew Edmund Hewlett. Maybe I will find an excuse to check in with Social Sciences whilst there.”

“Do that and you’ll get stuck to the torrid non-affair between Mary Woodhull and John Graves Simcoe,” Braxton jested over his own misfortune.

“An improvement to flipping through two years of sketchbooks wondering how hard it can possibly be to draw a human hand,” Yilmaz laughed.

“The real mystery.”
It was different from silence. Silence was definable. Deafness, by contrast, was deceit. It was marked less by the absence of sound than it was by the various stimuli that served to substitute. Whereas the rest of his department had a team meeting that morning, he spoke only with his boss, afraid of missing something crucial if he averted his eyes to the others, all of whom, he felt certain, could not peel their eyes from him. He knew he interrupted on occasion. He knew his colleagues thought him completely inept. He knew himself, however, to be capable, regardless of the sort of criticism so often directed at his character. He made a constant point of conducting himself so-civil insofar as to inspire apprehension. As such, on this morning, the morning his phone had not and would not ring, the morning when he could not hear it if it had, no one perceived anything amiss. Though it seemed a particularly extended episode, it was not the first time he had lost his sense to stress.

This, he realised, should not have come as the comfort it did.

When the meeting was over, he returned to his office without a word, reading the messages sent between his phone and the one that he reasoned ought to have been claimed by this point. He read and he wrote to avoid what he refused to recognize as worry. He worked. Sometimes he found himself staring without seeing, looking to white walls absent of numbers that signalled the passage of time. He stared until his passive thoughts became active, until he could almost hear the sound of his fingertips—simultaneously prancing and pounding against whichever surface they touched. It was not enough to mute the sound of Mary’s screams, pained, frightened pleas that had been playing in his mind since he dared to touch her.

It had not been mutual. Escaping murder, ignoring marriage, had made him into a monster.

None of his mates, it seemed, would mourn the man he had been.

He stared until he saw in the framed poster that hung opposite his desk the back of one of his closest friends as he left the diner last night after calling his sin for what it was. He stared until he remembered the pictures of Abe and Thomas, Mary following him home that she not be forced to face them with tear stained eyes. He stared until ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’ simply read ‘Confess’. And then he looked away. It was taking too long. He looked back at his phone and back at the one beside it. The one he reasoned ought to have been claimed by this point. He read. He wrote. He did this until he could almost hear Hewlett’s brisk, irritating little voice.

“What the devil is wrong with you?” the Scot seemed to demand via a text over who would be sitting on Stoke’s substitution bench tomorrow.

He tried to think of a root answer to a question he knew had not been phrased.

“Simcoe!”

He looked up and saw his beloved enemy before him, breathless and beaten. Edmund Hewlett looked decidedly defeated. He had done this. He had done this and thus proved Martha Dandridge wrong. Just as he was ready to call the match for himself, he was forced to consent defeat. Hewlett, he realised, was readying for a fight. He wondered how long, and how loudly, his name had been called. Rather than expose a recurring deficit by inquiring how long he had been standing there—ever indignant, in his upright, pretentious manner, hands folded before him in high political fashion - Simcoe simply accused him of being late. Which he was. It was after four.

“I’m getting married,” Hewlett replied, handing him a folder from City Hall as though it were an excuse or explanation. Simcoe flipped through the first few pages without interest. “So you are,” he said. It was a meaningless statement, as were the congratulations that followed. Hewlett spoke. Simcoe wanted a cigarette. He wanted to return to the quiet that had given him quarter for the past
eleven hours. He wanted Hewlett to sit and this he said aloud.

“What is that?” he asked, eyeing the package placed on his desk with suspicion.

“Lunch,” Hewlett clarified curtly. It was after four. Simcoe handed him his phone, lock screen lit lest this fact be disputed.

“To be more exact?” he inquired lightly.

“Mary Woodhull made you a quiche this morning.”

“Mrs. Woodhull … made that … for me?” He was as loath to speak her given name as he was to hear it, to know it. He examined the pasty while he unwrapped it from its baby-pink baking paper. It looked like an apology, or rather, like an accusation she could not bring herself to make. Hewlett stammered; Simcoe retreated to a sullen silence liken to that which he had created following Mrs Woodhull’s utterance of Mr Woodhull’s sobriquet the night before.

“She got up at about five, saw that Abe had purchased another two dozen eggs and decided to do something with them out of spite.”

“Care to elaborate?” his voice grew higher with each elongated syllable. Almost piercing. Hewlett’s shifting visage made it clear that Simcoe made himself the object of his own attempted mockery through the way in which he spoke.

He said nothing to that regard. He needn’t.

On its own merits, his dear teammate had by every measure a rather ugly face - absurd, asymmetrical, sickly pale with scars left by an adolescent battle with acne. Still, Simcoe had cause to begrudge him his strangely good fortune for he envied the wounds Hewlett could cause with the slightest sneer. Simcoe stared at him blankly, feeling his own expressional arsenal too comparatively depleted to return fire. How often, he wondered, had he surrendered his entire garrison to a gargoyle’s grimace?

Hewlett then grinned, satisfied. Simcoe felt again off guard.

“From what I understand,” Hewlett continued, “it is a sort of pie in the American understanding: crust only on the bottom, filled with eggs, onions, bacon -”

“About the eggs,” he interrupted, insulted. He knew what a quiche was. He failed to reason, however, how Mrs. Woodhull harboured such a hatred for a basic source of protein that she had spent the morning baking. For him. But maybe that was the point. He looked at the dish. No one had ever put this much effort into saying ‘no’ or ‘no more.’ He loved her for it.

“The eggs? I am fairly certain ‘hardboiled’ is the only dish our mutual acquaintance in question is familiar with making,” Hewlett answered, “that is to say, in a rather loose sense.”

“He not top them with Beluga Caviar then?”

“You mock now, but, the young Mr. Woodhull typically cooks up a carton or so on whatever day he decides to start his week, refrigerates them and then seeks to reheat them with his morning or mid-afternoon coffee.”

“That is suspicious,” Simcoe commented.

“Of what?” Hewlett sputtered, again with a taxing scowl, though, this time, not directed at him.
“Repulsive is more the term I would settle on.”

“That he buys so many of them.”

“That is ah … a recent development,” Hewlett continued, arid yet aloof, “Mrs. Woodhull thinks there might be another lady in the picture.”

“Because of … eggs?” Simcoe straighten his shoulders to the back of his chair. He took a deep inhale, again wishing it to taste of tobacco. If he were to be given actual evidence that Abraham Woodhull could, in fact, convince a woman – any woman - to have sex with him; if he were lead to discover that the attraction had anything to do with hardboiled eggs; Simcoe vowed he would surrender to the mad injustice of it all and confine himself to a monastery for the rest of his days.

“Ah … precisely my thoughts on the matter,” Hewlett commented on the disgust Simcoe guessed himself to be projecting.

“So … the problems between the Woodhulls then are breakfast-based?” he asked, hoping he had managed to modulate derision as opposed to desperation.

“Their marriage only became a matter of my personal attention or concern upon discovering Mary was your accomplice in the entire messy business of Tuesday night,” Hewlett replied, curt, crisp and quick, “but I imagine their problems must run a bit deeper than that if she is entertaining the possibility of your offer aloud.”

“My offer?” Simcoe had very nearly forgotten the promises he had made the previous afternoon as poorly as the early evening had gone. He had wanted to help her. Instead, he’d had her. He had never felt worse. “What did she say?”

“Nothing. To me, nothing. To Abigail,” Hewlett sneered as he said the name, “that she envied her confidence in walking away from a relationship that was no longer serving to fulfil her.” His eyes shifted to the side.

The two then shared a moment’s silence, signalling solidarity with the friend with whom they now, otherwise, found themselves estranged. After due respect for Akinbode’s plight had been paid, Simcoe continued to inquire with caution, “And she … Mrs. Woodhull … still wants me to help her do that? To walk away?”

“She wants you,” Hewlett said after what felt a long while.

“She doesn’t,” Simcoe stated. That much seemed fact.

“With respect, no one is happier with the sorts of problems losing a corpse creates than they otherwise would be - unless, that is, they were keen on their partner in crime,” his rival returned, rubbing his temples as he spoke.

“She called out Abe’s name while I was fucking her.”

At this Hewlett looked up. Blinked. As suddenly as care surfaced in his eyes, it turned back into chastisement. “And?” he baited, “Anna laughed at me. Actually laughed. Most mortifying experience of my life and as you well know, there have been many contenders.”

“Well … that was to be expected,” Simcoe felt himself smile at their definitive refrain of self-deprecation and schadenfreude.

“Fair,” Hewlett conceded with a shrug. His thin, pressed lips hesitated upward. Simcoe shook his
“It is different with Mrs. Woodhull. It is … not what you think.”

“Ah … she made you a quiche, Mate,” Hewlett said as through he expected it to prove a convincing argument.

“With her husband’s eggs,” Simcoe spat, “As she let me fuck her in her husband’s bloody name.”

It happened as he had her on her desk, clothing still on, her heels digging into his back, nickers and nylons at her ankles, pencil skirt hitched up to her waist. With her legs squeezed around him, she was tight enough that he could forget she had had a child, that she was married, that this was wrong.

She moaned.

She was faking it.

She thought him a fool.

The wall behind her desk suddenly felt like a hundred pictures of her husband when she then called out his name like a plea or a prayer.

‘Oh, Abraham! Abe! Oh God!’

Simcoe heard in it an insult. He studied Mary – petit and rather plain - not the sort of woman he would ordinarily feel any sort of attraction to. But this was not attraction anymore. This was anger. He covered her mouth and gazed deeply into her dampening eyes as he devastated. Harder. Harder. Harder still, until he was certain that she would struggle to breathe even without deprivation. Until she became convinced that she was not gently making love to a man out of obligation. Until she knew beyond a shadow of doubt that she was a sinner, too. She screamed with pleasure. She screamed his name. She screamed. She screamed. Until he heard nothing.

He remembered who he was, where he was, and what he was not to do. He finished anyway. Afterwards, she cried. He had not heard a thing.

“Were you not the one to tell me that as long as you could keep them thinking about the act itself you were doing alright?” Hewlett belittled him. It was banter. It was what they did. There were not words for what had happened between himself and Mrs. Woodhull, and if there were, Hewlett would not try to normalize it in this way. He would condemn him, and he would be in the right.

Simcoe wondered what Mary had said, if she had censored her confessions to keep Hewlett on side. He wondered what caused Hewlett to stay. He wanted to ask, though he did not want to know.

“That is more for casual sex,” he smiled. “For people you don’t care to call the next day. For shits like you.”
“You would call me the next day,” Hewlett winked.

Simcoe considered realistically, reflecting upon experience, that would have texted Oyster instead. Constantly. That he would have gone mental until such time that he received a response. And then he would repeat the process. It occurred to him painfully that their ongoing debate had not just been for the sake of his suicidal sometimes-friend. The realization that Hewlett had come to that conclusion some time ago was at once corroding and comforting. No. It was neither. It was simply what they did. It was ‘normal’; if he was forced to define an abstract with another, it was ‘enough’.

But it was different with Mary.

Mary wanted more, but she did not want it solely from him.

He did not want to talk about it.

“Yea … but only because I’ve no one else in this whole bloody continent with whom to watch The Championship,” Simcoe replied, dry, desperate to change the topic before he slipped into depression over things too late to take back.

“Do you have any one in Britain keen on second-tier footy?”

“No, but there I could just walk into a pub.”

“Speaking of,” Hewlett said, pulling the jump drive from his jean’s pocket. “Let’s see if Tallmadge found anything of note at DeJong’s.”

Simcoe nodded. The only positive he could find in Hewlett and Anna concluding that the blood that stained his hands belonged to Benedict Arnold was that he might never again find himself alone with Mary Woodhull. Something returned to him from the rejection that had provided some measure sanctuary from his haunting recollections. *We could have been happy had I been in a better place.*

He pulled out his laptop with the memories of the nights prior, wondering if a version of that sentiment could have ever held true for him and his original accomplice, if they could have been happy had they found the senator in the basement where they had left him. If they had no reason to ever contact one another again.

He wondered if, now that he knew her, he would or could find happiness in anyone else.

He looked at the quiche.

Simcoe felt worse than he had sweating in his suit, requesting that she strangle him with his necktie in an attempt at asphyxiation rooted in Draconian Law. Worse than he felt when she realised he was enjoying it. Worse than he felt when her lips pressed against his, lips that still echoed, still tasted of another man’s name.

For Mary he had been an escape. However short. He longed to again be the place she ran to. He loathed that, for her, he would gladly fill that void if it were emptiness she offered. He loathed that he would prefer to be nothing to her as long as he was with her, even if she was not with him.

He had to end this.

He stared at Hewlett and the word ‘obsession’ the profiler had used returned to him until it was all he heard. He had no argument to serve as a defence. He had not ceased thinking of Mary since she had blinded him in the headlights of an antiquated sedan. He wondered if he had ever so much as
truly crossed her conscious mind.

He had to end this.

Hewlett, he noticed, was speaking - doubtlessly about himself or on some interest only an un- or under-employed thirty-something who had first lost his virginity within the past day could possibly have found time to invest in. Simcoe swindled in his chair, moving to better read what he struggled to hear. He watched, hoping hatred and envy to return him from the mental paralysis of paranoia.

Hewlett glanced at him, as though he fully suspected that he was being ignored, something he seemed to feel ease in accepting. Simcoe wondered sometimes if he knew. Sometimes he would say things like ‘When you talk ... you make it such a challenge to listen,’ or ‘I fade in and out.’ Sometimes Hewlett would say things like ‘You never hear me when I speak,’ which was an exaggeration, but then Hewlett had always been prone to melodramatic language. He wondered if he knew, he wondered if he could recognize it now if he did. Sometimes, Simcoe considered, he did not even realise it himself until it had passed.

He watched his adversary’s lips part around the pretentious words which Simcoe imagined Hewlett pretending to himself properly distracted from the peculiar shaped mouth that spoke them. He realised in some short time that his unlikely ally was still on about the past glories of Liverpool FC, a topic which Simcoe found about as dry and dated as the Peloponnesian Wars – which had been his initial assumption.

“I would go so far as to say that I hope you make it to the final so I can see you crestfallen when you enviably fail to take a title,” Simcoe interrupted merrily as he uploaded the files from the jump drive. “It has been too long since I’ve heard the mournful cry of the liver bird.”

Hewlett sighed. “No accounting for taste I suppose.”

“I’ve half a mind to make you wear that old jersey to the grand reopening.”

“Though I have no doubts with regards to your designs on my torture, I don’t imagine that we shall ever get it back from evidence. Mary hid it under my mattress saying that the cops would be certain to grab it in their sweep.”

“Why would they?” Simcoe asked.

“I have a day blanket with the rival team’s logo on my bed and a shield hung above my desk. It will look suspicious existing amongst my possessions at all and provided they bring it to forensics cartridge discharge residue will be found on the garment, confusing the cops and buying us time if nothing else.”

“I think the cops are a tad too confused about sport for that to make much of an impact, but Mrs. Woodhull’s clever thinking impresses me,” he paused. She did not want him. She could not and there was no point discussing it. “The blanket the reason you decided to fuck at mine?” he shifted meanly. “Too much of a turn off?”

Hewlett gave him a slight smile. Again, with a look, he won the round. Simcoe retaliated with a glare, questioning whether it would be better to purchase an industrial sized vat of bleach with which to scour every surface of his home, or to simply burn it upon return and give the whole affair a fitting finale. The maid would not come tomorrow. He would spend another week sleeping in soiled sheets.

“Did they not ask you a great deal about the beautiful game when you went in to clear up a few
fine points about that time I stabbed you only to find myself in hospital with hypothermia?” Hewlett asked as they waited for the files to finish their transfer. It was an effort to concede some ground. It was an apology, if he were looking for one.

“Aye … Good times,” Simcoe replied, realising he counted episodes of senseless bloodshed among his fondest memories. This gave him pause. “Do you think it the mutual animosity aspect?” he asked without offering any additional clarification. He wondered if hatred was the only shared sentiment he would ever experience, and then, only sometimes. Only when Hewlett had something to gain.

Simcoe wondered if he was ‘projecting’ in part. He wondered if there was even such a thing as projection or if it was only a three-syllable word that therapists used to fill a fraction of their hour.

He opened the folder marked ‘Dandridge’, curious to see what she had to say on the matter.

There were more PDF documents present in the file than he anticipated.

And they were all in John Andre’s handwriting.

“Let’s call Rogers; if anyone knows Andre’s whereabouts it would be him. I imagine there is a rather … rather logical explanation for all this -” Hewlett stammered quietly, almost to himself after half an hour had passed.

“I think this is the logical explanation for everything!” Simcoe shouted. The room shook.

Hewlett took a step back. He winced. He spoke.

“Ah … Yes I … it would seem-”

“We’re not calling Rogers,” Simcoe reiterated. “We’re not going to look for Andre. Because mark me, Edmund, if I ever see his face again I am going to kill him. I’ll fucking kill him,” he put more weight into each word he spoke.

Hewlett did not respond. Simcoe then felt as though he spent the next half hour crying and screaming and carrying on in the way a child might. Instead, he just sat staring at the monitor, at Hewlett, at the wounds he had inflicted the day before, darkened by the night that had found its way in and demanded quarter. He wondered if his sometimes-friend was in more pain than he was letting on.

He remembered the way things had been before the past summer, before Hewlett first announced his intention to return to Scotland. He had been ‘normal’ then. They both had. Until Andre had found a way to rob them of that. Them along with the rest of the team. Simcoe had evidently given information he had not known himself to possess. That he currently did not know how to process.

He sat.

He skimmed.

He studied.

Hewlett placed his hand atop his own to settle the fingers beating out a death march on the arm of
the chair which he had made into his drum. Hewlett had nearly died and the fact that he had not
gave him hold Simcoe feared might never loosen. Because Hewlett was selfish. Because Hewlett
was scared. Because Hewlett assumed the same was true of him.

Simcoe thought back to when they were children, to the two weeks he spent in the back of a van
wondering if he would ever know freedom again or if he was meant to die there, a little more than
a year after it would have been appropriate. He thought of his father promising him they would
stop and get ice cream for his birthday later that afternoon. He remembered staring out the window
in the back seat of the Jeep, bored out of his mind, unable to appreciate that it was the last time he
would be able to relax in any kind of vehicle.

He had not spoken much that morning.

He could not after.

He remember his mother’s flat in London, knowing she was screaming at him, not knowing what
she was saying or if he was meant to respond. He remembered trying. He did not remember if he
cried or not. He knew he had not when Hewlett tried to die in the same fashion. He remembered
screaming, talking, reading aloud, filling a damning silence with anything but the machines that
beeped with life but sounded like death.

He heard a familiar buzz. One that came and went but now, it seemed, would never leave. He
looked up at Hewlett. He could not hear him speak yet, he heard him for the first time. Simcoe
missed the way things used to be between them. He missed who Hewlett had once been. Simcoe
missed Pakistan and his father, he missed London and the idea of family he had twice lost there, he
missed his friends back home and the idea that he had any here.

Everyone was afraid of him now.

As they well should be.

He had come close to murdering a stranger he had disagreed with over drinks. He imagined
Arnold’s pummel face as Andre’s, as the man who had wanted Hewlett to give into his demons to
watch how Simcoe danced with his own. To see how what he chose to call ‘fear’ worked on the
human psyche. To see his name on a study.

Simcoe would show him what ‘fear’ truly was, or so he vowed again before throwing up. He felt
Hewlett holding back his hair as he handed him a waste bin.

“I’ll kill him,” he repeated, tasting the acid eroding his words. He remembered the first time he had
been ill on this side of the Atlantic. On oysters. He turned. “He almost killed you. I almost killed
you. Yesterday. I couldn’t stop. You tried to kill yourself. And do you know what, Oyster? You
killed us. Killed me. Whatever it was that was holding me back despite all the other bullshit I have
been through – half of it simply by virtue of knowing you - stopped with your heart on that hospital
bed. And I can’t even blame you anymore! There is no justice to it. And here now I’ve gone and
met all of Andre’s expectations of me. I beat this man, this man I’d met an hour before all but to
his death because I hadn’t liked what he had said. Then I had the audacity to sleep with my married
accomplice. Whom I just want to help out of another bad situation. She wants ‘normal’. I can’t give
her that and the worst of it is I could have once. I could have if not for-

“You have to get over this,” Hewlett spoke, grabbing his cheeks and forcing him to face him. He
was slow, clear, questionably short and precise. “I’m weak and indecisive, you were always right, I
always bloody have been. But I am here. I’m not leaving. Do you understand? We won’t let him
win. And you -you are better than this. You are better than Andre. You have a name. Make sure he
never does. Discredit him. Disprove his hypothesis. Rise above whatever he thinks of your capacity
to -"

“I’ve already proven it.”

“Not if Arnold is never found.”

“Pardon?” Simcoe stared.

Hewlett swallowed. “He is wrong you know. Andre. It isn’t fear that forces people to act in
impossible circumstances. Its love. You don’t see it but you saved my life. And for all the many
ways it is worse, and Christ sometimes I swear I -,” he scowled. He stopped. “I, I diverge … for all
the many ways you find of making it unpleasant, my life is ultimately better because you - for
whatever godforsaken reason - continue to insert yourself into it. I mean to keep you there if it
means finishing what you and Mary started. I have to,” he nodded, assured. “It is what’s done.” By
which, Simcoe assumed, he meant ‘it is what you would do in my place.’

He was not certain that he agreed with the implication, nor was he convinced that Hewlett meant
anything of which he spoke.

“This won’t redeem you,” Simcoe said, leaning back away from his rival. “Or me. It won’t change
any of what has happened.”

“But it will stop it from surfacing,” Hewlett insisted with a firm expression. Firm, Simcoe thought,
but not tense. “I don’t think either of us need redemption. I think we need to take certain measures
to try to protect the rest of our team. I think we need to find ways of preventing any additional
evidence to surface in support of this hypothesis. I think we both need a cigarette,” he bit his lip.
Simcoe nodded. “Finally,” Hewlett said, “I think it clear that Doctor John Andre vastly
underestimates me. It is not redemption I seek, John. It is revenge.”

So it was.

Simcoe smiled caustically. He had always been right on some level about Hewlett, that he was still
the same lad who had limped from his sickbed to shoot his own horse in its head beneath his
practiced politeness and pretentions. Hewlett mirrored his smirk.

Simcoe read in words that had not been spoken what he was sad to again recognize as all he ever
wished to know. “You’re right mental, you realise,” he said, pulling a pack of Gauloises from one
of his desk drawers. He rose to retrieve a bottle of whiskey from one of his cabinets along with
three of the four tumblers he had received as a set – a souvenir the friend he had boarded with for
six years of his schooling sent along to America when business had unexpectedly brought him to
Scotland a winter past. “Anna’s going to murder you for this,” he said after filling two cups with
sprits, lighting a fag and ashing it in the third.

“Maybe,” Hewlett conceded. “She let me have a donut earlier so let that stand to the presence of
hope.”

“Has that cholesterol?”

“Presumably.”
Part of John Graves Simcoe would always wonder at how little the files and the conversation that followed altered his relationship with Edmund Hewlett for the few weeks that remained to them. It was short-lived and marked by the same snide stares and cruel quips, but for the first time he saw their strange endearment in enmity as being equal. Perhaps, he would consider long after ‘too late’ had passed, it always had been. Hewlett spoke but he did not hear him and he did not stare intensely enough to follow. Instead, he let the drink numb and burn as he swallowed, thinking of what he had to fight for rather than what he stood to lose.

“We’re good, right?” he asked after a while.

“Never,” he was told. “Just better than everyone else.”

It felt an accurate assessment.

**Part I – The End.**

Chapter End Notes

… It has been a while since we have actually had a Hewlett POV, hasn’t it? Gee. Wonder what he is thinking through all this...

I am sure that somewhere within this monstrosity there is a term I ought to define or explain, but I am going to leave it this round. Instead I am just going to thank you for reading if you have made it this far. I recognize from the lack of response that the past two chapters came as something of a disappointment to the majority of you, and tempted as I am to apologise, I would rather just thank you all for sticking it out with me despite that.

They say write what you know - honestly, I am surprised I found a way of relating to an audience with Hide and Seek, full stop. I really can’t tell you enough how appreciative I have been of the level of acceptance this weird ode to immigration has gotten. Lately, however, I feel that I have been unable to connect with you in any meaningful way. And that is fine. But this may well be where we are meant to part. So thank you, once again. It has been an absolute pleasure writing for you over the past year. As always, all my best.

Comments and Kudos are more than appreciated - they motivate me to continue. And no, I am not done, not by far. This is just the half time whistle. Cheers.

XOXO – Tav

Up Next: Anyway, here’s Wonderwall
The Stand In

Chapter Summary

Aberdeen blows Hewlett’s transmission and Townsend’s cover. Abe watches his entire life blow up before him.

Chapter Notes

We are back with the beginning of **Part Two** of this tome, lovely faces! And I’ve managed to hit you with something for the first time in what feels like an eternity that weighs in at (just!) under ten thousand words. Congrats on my brevity, I believe, may well be in order. XD

But first, you want to do the thing? Of course you do. Possible trigger warnings may include: self-loathing born of sexual orientation, marital troubles (jealousy, control), extramarital affairs, international economics, Black Lives Matter / Blue Lives Matter, lightly referenced police brutality, espionage, materialism, rejection, the side effects of copious amounts of caffeine, drug use, and that very particular, acute pain of having your hair braided when it is done right. **Zu Risiken und Nebenwirkungen bitte fragen Sie Ihren Arzt oder Apotheker.**

As always, thank you so much for reading and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Abraham Woodhull was so tired it felt perverse. The cool air damp with morning mist made his dry, bloodshot eyes burn all the more. Blinking sharpened the contrast more than it lessened the sting. He looked at the number plate, at his fingers, at what Robert Rogers thought of as his work. Abe was getting nowhere. He adjusted his position, shifting his balance from his toes and kneecaps to the first thigh to meet the cold cement floor of his contractor’s home garage. For a moment he simply sat, taking comfort in the chill that climbed from the oil-stained concrete up through his spine. He looked again at his fingers – tips calloused, red and raw from the set he had played at a sold-out city venue the night before. His nails, he noted – not for the first time that morning – were kept too short to be of much use to the task at hand. Abe pulled an extra pick from the pocket of his ripped, dark wash jeans and with it a fragmented memory of Mary smiling, commenting on its colour when she had first seen it among hundreds of others in a candy jar at a local guitar shop. Abe had bought it – a twenty-cent splurge - winking at his then bride-to-be. He had bought it back when they used to do things together. Back when he was trying to be someone else. Back when it seemed it might prove successful in that venture. Back when his ideals had yet to form and Mary’s had yet to be called to question.

Abe used the old pick to pick at the vehicle registration sticker on the number plate of his wife’s Jeep Liberty, due to expire at the month’s end.

Once he found his way in, the tab peeled off easily, aided by the moisture of the morning air-thick
in the uninsulated garage - just as Rogers said it would. Abe rose, taking the decal to the work
truck the man he hesitated to think of as an ally wanted it on.

Though there was little else he could say in the his praise, Rogers lived a far more interesting life
than Abe’s own had proven up until the morning before. After driving back to Setauket from his
gig with two bags of take-out for the missing senator they meant to move to another safe house as
precaution, the Scot told him that he worked out a deal with one (of the perhaps three) Broadway
sensations Abe could name without effort; a deal allowing him to store his work-truck in the
private park house attached to her Manhattan home for a few weeks.

“Worth mair than thes propertee,” Rogers commented, “a city parking spot. Ridiculoos.”

“You doing work downtown?” Abe asked, hoping to attach himself to something paid.

“I don’t want ta leave anythin’ ’at can be considered evidence roon whare tae fuzz is lookin’,”
Rogers explained. “They’ll nae be checkin’ in oan mah hen mukker, ‘at much is assure.”

It made sense – it made about as much sense as Abe could make out of an accent thickened by a
night of whiskey. Rogers went on to suggest that they switch registration stickers as Abe’s was
about to expire – it would buy the Woodhulls three extra months on renewal and give Rogers
grounds on which he could explain why he needed to park his car away from prying eyes.
Philomena had sounded distraught on the line when she rang asking for a favour, he said. She did
not question the demand Rogers gave her in exchange, but she might. She always might.

“Forge me, but how do you know Philomena Cheer of all people?” Abe asked.

“Hoo dae ye nae?” Rogers gawked.

She had worked at DeJong Tavern ten years ago, a time - as Abe reminded Rogers in his rebuttal -
when he had been too young to drink legally yet not so naïve as to think of trying to sneak into the
only watering hole in his hometown of eight-hundred souls with a fake ID. The Scot laughed,
telling Abe that he was smarter than he looked.

“Hey, it okay if instead of putting your sticker on my plate I take Hew’s? That will give me until
August to sort it.” Abe asked when Rogers returned with what he considered breakfast – orange
juice, black coffee and two non-descript white tablets that could have been anything from
ibuprofen to oxycodone. Abe frowned. This was a poor excuse for a halfway house, an even worse
answer for a hide out.

“Thocht yoo’d boak at eggs by now,” Rogers defended the meal on the tray he set on the floor
between them.

“Though you people did toast and beans and that.”

“Might in tae sooth,” Rogers shrugged.

“Can I at least get an ‘Iron Brew’ then?” Abe muttered, trying to seem worldlier than he knew
himself to be.

“Nae. That’s got vitamins,” Rogers indicated with his eyes to the juice.
Abe took a sip. “I don’t need the pills,” he said when the Scot cautioned him not to be too quick about it. “Save them for your boarders.”

“Thankless fuck,” Rogers replied, “thocht yoo were tryin’ tae pass yerself for a rock star.”

“I can’t much drink after a gig what with the … the package,” he said, lowering his voice to a whisper. At this Rogers laughed hardly, advising him that there was nothing in this world of the next he could code as ‘package’ without having it sound illicit.

Abe agreed after a moment’s reflection and asked permission to take Hewlett’s registration stick for his own again. Again, Rogers laughed, “Yer tae worst criminal I’ve ever in mah life met, so ya are.”

“Is that a yes or a no?” Abe straightened, making his still-raw throat produce a harder sound. He was not a criminal. He was a patriot. He was only here to do Rogers’s bidding until he could figure out a means of helping an American war hero out of a hostage situation without getting everyone he loved killed in the process. He glared at the Scotsman as he continued to peel at the registration sticker with the pink pick that reminded him of the boy he had been and the girl he had now all but lost.

“Take it,” Rogers knelt for a moment and slapped Abe on the shoulder in comradery, hard enough to leave a lingering sting. After Abe traded his decal for Rogers’s, Rogers’s for Hewlett’s and Hewlett’s for his own, he took one of the two pills he hoped to be an aspirin and swallowed it quickly with a gulp of still-hot coffee. “Atta’boy,” Rogers congratulated him. “Get it down ya.”

Rogers explained all the while that it would take him weeks to repair Hewlett’s transmission. He did not have the tools for it and he would need to order a replacement for the clutch. He said all of this while shaking his head, doubtlessly trying to imagine how so much reckless damage could have been done to a flashy sports car owned by his ever-cautious compatriot.

Abe knew but wished he did not.

Rogers continued to speak but Abe was suddenly far away. He was in another garage on the nicer side of town, the place where he had found himself two mornings before when DI Tallmadge’s team had come to sweep his father’s country residence for evidence linking Edmund Hewlett to Benedict Arnold’s disappearance. He was precisely where he was standing when his world effectively ended, when he heard through the vent that his wife was being treated as a suspect, and that the alibi she had provided – an alibi the detectives could not disprove despite their best efforts – spoke of her having given herself to another man at the time in question.


“Did you say anything to my wife?” Abe interrupted.


Abe said nothing in reply.

He had hoped for a confrontation. He had hoped to hear the same sorts of threats he imagined Rogers making against his wife, making her run into the arms of someone even more unhinged in hopes of immediate protection. But Mary did not flee from her problems and Rogers never bluffed. If she knew of Arnold’s whereabouts and her husband’s involvement, Mary would be dead.

Of that, he was now certain.
Abe remembered calling her the night of the disappearance after band practice. He remembered waiting, waiting until he ordered another round, until he heard another of Rob’s snide comments about his skill at chess and decided to take him at his challenge.

He remembered winning.

Days later, he remembered what it was to lose.

For a moment, he considered that Mary must often feel this way, broken by perceived betrayal – seeking answers for his absence and arriving at her own. He was bitter. He was not the man his wife had thought she married - sentiment present circumstance now forced him to confess within the once-quiet confines of his crazed mind. He could not keep pretending to her, to himself, that he was his older brother, that he was anything like him or that he ever truly had been.

There were times when his long-lived lie felt as though it was the only truth he had.

Abe Woodhull had been a wunderkind. He had been his father’s favourite until Thomas was made holy by the holes put into him in a violent act of vicinity. Thomas had happened upon and armed robbery which he had then tried to stop as the direct result of teenage Abe having accidently texted him the wrong address at which to pick him up at after his track meet.

Thomas’s death had not been instant.

Abe’s had been.

He remembered waiting alone in hallway outside his brother’s hospital room where his father held the hand of his first-born, unable to let go long enough to give Abe time to say his own farewells. His father waited for the inevitable with Thomas and the machines that kept him alive for forty-one minutes after the surgeons had told them there was no hope.

He passed away at 1:26 AM. Abe had been dead for nearly an hour at that point, yet none of the doctors or nurses present took any notice.

Sometimes Abe would find himself alone driving back from a concert, note the hour, pull off to the emergency lane and say to himself all of the things he could not say to his brother years before. Sometimes he would repeat ‘I’m sorry, so sorry.’ until the phrase became monosyllabic and ceased to have meaning. Sometimes he would cry because he missed his brother. Sometimes he would cry because he could not remember him clearly. Sometimes he would cry because he missed his sense of self. Sometimes because he hated the man he had let sudden loss turn him into more than he could ever possibly put to verse.

The months after Thomas Woodhull’s death had been empty. Abe could not keep up in the university classes which he once excelled in without effort. Often he failed to attend. His father had been too distraught to voice his disappointment, to say much of anything. Abe began to hear in his silence ‘I wish it had been you’. He shared the sentiment. He switched majors sophomore year. He joined a fraternity. He did the sorts of things Thomas had done while at Columbia, and in so he felt the loss of his brother again. And in so he felt lost to himself.

And then he got a call from a girl he did not remember giving his number to.
And then he got married.

And he had been happy then.

And so too had she.

But it was harder to pretend to be another boy for sake of the woman he was living with, for his father, for himself, when life otherwise demanded that he be a man. Abe loved his son, he loved his wife, but two years and twenty odd ‘who is she’s into their union he had found that he could no longer pretend to himself that he would ever be in love with Mary Grant, now Mary Woodhull.

Every time the question was raised, he became less responsive to it. Abe had broken things off with the dark-eyed girl he dated in high school when it became clear to him that no amount of prayer or sin would ever be enough to ‘correct’ his sexuality. He had not given her an explanation for fear that she would out him in her anger.

He sometimes thought he owed one to his wife.

That he owed her at least something in return for the lies she told herself to normalize him.

They had been married for around four years when she first brought up separation. Abe feared the freedom it would give him. He feared what was left of a relationship with his father would evaporate, that he would never have a proper relationship with his son, or, as he had told Mary, that his father would work out a custody agreement with whichever justice was overseeing the proceedings such that Sprout would grow up without a mother. Like he had. Like she had.

That he would never have let that happen did not enter the conversation if it had ever entered her mind. Maybe she thought him that selfish, and maybe, when it came to his family, he indeed was.

For all of Mary’s questions and quiet seething, for all of her accusations and outbursts – it had become clear to Abe over time that he was the ‘jealous one’ in their marriage. And why wouldn’t he be? As he saw it, he was the only one with anything to lose should they part.

Four years into their union the Woodhulls began going to couples’ consoling. It did not work because Abe was not honest, because as the son of a conservative state justice who had written acidic descent against New York’s Marriage Equality Act in 2011 he could not be honest, but he had given enough to make her say. To make ‘them’ work.

They were married for five years when they bought a house together - that is to say, when Mary bought a house at his bequest and Abe convinced his father to co-sign on the mortgage. They were two weeks away from moving in when their property failed to pass inspection.

They had since been living with his father, his father’s lodger, and their own rapidly accruing debt.

Abe hated his father’s home. He hated Hewlett. He hated that the other childhood prodigy who had come to replace him had had no problem throwing himself into his studies or into drugs or drink or whatever else he had on hand when faced with personal tragedy. He hated his lies. His honesty. He hated that Hewlett was so much of the man whom he might have otherwise become if he could have overcome himself that he was now engaged to his ex.

But on this particular Sunday morning, what Abe really hated about the boarder, was the Jaguar XJR now sitting in Robert Rogers’s garage.
When Abe came home on Friday night, which was to say, when Abe came home at three o’clock on Saturday morning after a night of trying to help Arnold piece together exactly what happened since he had arrived in New York, Mary asked him, as she always did, where he had been, who ‘she’ was, and why he had not answered his phone.

He had offered Robert Townsend as an excuse. Rob was always a safe bet. Rob never did anything unless forced, and only then with extreme reluctance and noted dissatisfaction. It had seemed more than reasonable for Abe to assume that Rob had been in his apartment the night before after getting off from work. And Rob would cover. With or without question, Rob would cover. He was one of the two people who knew that if Abe was late coming home, it was usually because he had needed a few minutes to try to pull himself together at some rest stop. That he needed a few minutes to convince himself to continue being the man he thought Thomas might have been so that he might prove a good and decent role model for his brother’s namesake when he made him breakfast and took him to school in the morning.

Rob would cover. As he always had. But then this happened often enough that there would be no reason for his wife to ask for any verification.

And Mary hadn’t.

When Abe then tried to bring up what he had overheard from Hewlett’s quarters that morning, or rather, a morning past; when he tried to approach her about a statement she had given the police, Mary gave him a chaste kiss and told him curtly that everyone in Setauket was being treated as a suspect until they had been ruled out. He himself as well. There was nothing to worry about. Let Tallmadge do his job. With that, she turned over and pulled more of the blanket to her side of the bed.

He did not pursue it. Much in the manner that he then felt confident Mary would not openly question his own false alibi, he let it go. He had no choice. She let out a snort that she thought mimicked a snore well enough, indicating that everyone in Setauket was being treated as a suspect until they had been ruled out. He himself as well. There was nothing to worry about. Let Tallmadge do his job. With that, she turned over and pulled more of the blanket to her side of the bed.

And if she happened to ask, Rob would cover. As he always had. Of this, he had been confident.

When Abe got up at four hours later to make breakfast for his family as he did every Saturday morning, however, he found the whole number of them in the kitchen along with ‘the Hewletts’, surrounding a sobbing Aberdeen. Surrounding the hysterical Haitian au pair who was about to dispel the rumour of Robert Townsend for Mary, for him, forever.

Aberdeen bought three $16 cappuccinos at The Newsroom and had been treated to a forth when she began relaying the story of how she had come to possess Edmund Hewlett’s imported sports car. Robert Townsend was otherwise a seemingly difficult man to impress – he had little need for the sorts of niceties that white people took as polite and everyone else found utterly patronizing. He had never forced his lips into a smile absent of feeling – but he had smiled, if only for a fleeting moment, when he saw her approach his bar in her borrowed dress. Of this, she was certain; for she had made certain there could be no other possible or plausible outcome of her efforts.
She had spent the better part of the morning at her friend Zipporah’s flat having her hair braided while Thomas laughed at the faces she made under distress the way he had at the silly expressions she had made with at him intent when he was just a baby. Now, it was involuntary - Aberdeen felt as though she was being scalped. ‘Beauty is pain!’ the girl she sat with in her history and chemistry courses at community college warned each time Aberdeen spoke in French – correctly guessing the Haitian’s outbursts to be a array of curses of the Vodoun variant. Unfortunately, there was no spell she knew of that worked as well on hair as two and a half hours of Zipporah’s fingers.

‘Beauty is pain!’

She arrived back at Whitehall mid-afternoon and, after making Thomas a late lunch and playing with him on the swing-set until he grew tired enough to nap, she took a quick evaluation of Mary and Anna’s closets, texting them both over WhatsApp to ask if she could borrow a few choice pieces. As much as she had enjoyed the sentiment of sisterhood she had shared with the girls the night before, she did not wait for a reply. She had already shortened the hem and taken in the waste of Anna’s vintage Channel to insure that it fit her exactly as it had her new housemate by the time Anna sent her a >> Go for it!<< with a ‘thumbs-up’ emoji two hours later. In Mary’s black patent Louboutin’s Aberdeen felt nearly as tall as the Statue of Liberty. She felt like the city she loved. The city, she feared after night had fallen, that for all of her hard work and suffering she might never get to see.

Aberdeen eventually knocked on the door to Hewlett’s apartment to find the two women whose clothes she wore looking as distraught as she felt. When she asked where Edmund was, Anna began to weep, causing Aberdeen to worry that something terrible had happened to her housemate – and, of more immediate concern, to his Jaguar, but she did not to bring this up. Instead, she offered to see if they had any ice cream left. Anna cried harder. Mary seemed to understand and so Aberdeen decided it was best to pretend she did as well. She sat on the edge of the bed and watched the rest of the Gossip Girl episode that they had all been engrossed in the night before. And the one that followed.

When Hewlett eventually came back at around nine – two hours! – Aberdeen informed him, after he said that she could use his wheels, she speed into the city, less interested in where he had been and what had been holding him up than he seemed to be in disclosing his secrets to the two women who wanted them.

As for Aberdeen, she already had nearly everything she ever dreamed of in Hewlett’s keys. She bought herself a souvenir by intentionally speeding through a photo-enforced intersection – something she happily thought she would later change into her Facebook profile picture so that all of her friends in Port au Prince could see how well she was doing. How she had made it in America.

Robert Townsend did not compliment her when she arrived. He did, however, bring her the first of the three coffees she had paid for herself and the salad she had ordered because conventional dating wisdom told her this was what was done – that men believed women did not eat and that they needed to have this misconception enforced for their own egos. Robert said ‘Very good, Mademoiselle’ when she ordered and when he brought out her plate – three pieces of lettuce with apple slices, a single crushed walnut and something that tasted like a vegetable but that she could not identify beyond that. Yes, she thought. Very good. But wasn’t the verbal construction ‘well’? She would need to consult Abigail – the only writer she knew or had frankly ever met - at some later time when the single-mum was not boxing up her townhouse while eating ‘literal’ or ‘figurative’ ice cream. They would be living under the same roof soon enough. She would ask then. Afterward she would tell Robert Townsend about the difference between ‘good and ‘well’ if
it turned out she was right and he would appreciate it - or so she reasoned - because she had once overheard him correcting Caleb Brewster’s grammar. From what she knew of the English-speaking internet, grammar was the sort of thing educated people spent an awful lot of time correcting in one another. It was ‘manners’, as Mary would say.

She overheard Robert arguing with an older, portly man that it was not his job to serve drinks, though he may from time to time. Aberdeen looked at herself in the mirror behind the bar. She looked at her emptied cup. She looked down at her borrowed heels – a size too small for her – and wondered if she had already been the cause of a fight. Oh course she had. She was a ‘Very Good Mademoiselle’. Perhaps that was what Robert had meant. After winking once again at her own reflection, she caught a glimpse in the mirror of Peggy Shippen sitting at a table in the corner. She considered waving –for the sake of manners- until she recognized the man Peggy was with.

“Ee is meant to be in rehab! And she! She is meant to be in Philadelphia!” Aberdeen said emphatically to Robert when she turned back to the bar. She had not heard him approach, but there he was – looking gorgeous in a black cashmere turtleneck pouring a glass of wine; watching her watch them. Aberdeen explained without awaiting a further prompt how on Tuesday night, Peggy had gone out on a date with Dr André if only for the purposes of trying to get information about Hewlett with which to convince Anna to reconsider. She pulled out her phone, showing the series of texts that confirmed the interaction.

Robert glanced at the device with what Aberdeen interpreted to be genuine interest.

“The next day,” she whispered, “Dr André resigned from ‘is research position at Columbia due to something … how you say … conflict of interest? And ee left ‘is job to fix ze problem ee ‘as with alcohol. But I think not that ee does this. No. I think not that ee comes back to work either. Abigail said that ee might lose ‘is credentials and eet might be ‘er fault but she said not why. And Peggy!” she snorted. Jordan had once remarked that Peggy Shippen started the #BlueLivesMatter hashtag on Twitter, which was enough for Aberdeen - who spent much of her free time retweeting every report of police violence in minority communities that she could find - to deeply mistrust the former governor’s daughter. She saw Robert gazing into her eyes with his bright intensity. Aberdeen knew in that moment that she should say nothing further if only for the reality that conventional dating wisdom informed her that politics were best discussed after promises had already been made, but she was here and he seemed intrigued and she had nothing else. “Peggy … well you know, every major media outlet reports that she ‘ad arranged to meet that night with Senator Arnold. On Tuesday!” she realised as she spoke. “On the night ‘ee disappeared and she was with André.”

It occurred to Aberdeen that she might also report this to someone, that this was something important. That the cops did not know. Peggy denied the interaction with Arnold had ever taken place, the same way in which she denied using social media at all, but that was to say nothing. This might interest the police or, at the very least, the public opinion makers. “Euh … your friend, ze one there,” she pointed, “Ee ‘as a newspaper in zis very building, does ee not?” Robert suddenly seemed very far away. Aberdeen took a photo quickly, discreetly, before putting her phone back into her expensive handbag, which she left on the bar for display.

“I’ll take care of it,” Robert said, before offering her the glass of wine that he had intended for the good doctor gone dry.

“I shouldn’t,” Aberdeen smiled. “I’m driving. I’ll take another coffee though.”

“I’ll join you.”

And with that, until the morning after, until the man whose car her ‘date’ would later wreck asked
her to repeat every detail about John André and his date, Aberdeen had all but forgotten the pair completely.

At 3 AM on Saturday morning, Aberdeen raced at 207 mph to the academic institution she attended part-time - in part because she wanted to see what 510 PS could do on the open road, in part because after four cups of coffee she really needed to use the restroom but had not wanted to say anything to Robert back at the restaurant. She imagined what the engine’s full potential might be, that was until she glanced at her passenger who himself seemed assured in that moment of certain death. The deceleration to 70 was surprisingly smooth.

“Better?” she winked. Robert did not answer. “It will be your turn in a minute,” she said.

Robert Townsend had been extremely interested in the car, or, moreover, the way she had come to acquire it. Seeing her opportunity to truly impress him, Aberdeen told the story of the obnoxious Parisian having a very loud conversation with someone in Tel Aviv – and also, she thought, others, but she had not remembered their names and had forgotten to write them down.

“Write them down?” he asked.

“I … Mr Eulett … euh … Edmund, ee asked me to take notes, they were speaking in French, you see. I think ee assumed the conversation was about Anna, who this La Fayette had just been interrogating with ‘Amilton – you know – like ze musical?’ Robert nodded. “And ze, ze ‘andsom one who Nancy Grace says is a rapist. From NYPD.”

“Tallmadge … and he’s not. He was acquitted.”

“That doesn’t mean much though,” Aberdeen argued. “Eulett will be acquitted too. I think. Ee has ze connections necessary.”


In hindsight, it had been a bad time to hand over the keys in her school’s dimly lit, otherwise empty car park. She considered not returning after she went to use the toilets in the gym that was never locked, but Aberdeen reasoned that she had a nice car, new weave, and that this might well be her only chance at destiny.

Two minutes into teaching Robert Townsend to drive a stick, too flustered to tell him to release the clutch, the car would not move.

“EULETT! I’M SO SORRY!” Aberdeen wept loudly, blowing through yet another tissue. Mary continued to hug her. Anna turned to the three men seated on the opposite side of the breakfast table, her dark eyes widened with warning, bulging, begging her bridegroom to speak up.

Edmund Hewlett sighed deeply. “Ah - as long as your, as long as you’re alright Aberdeen, that is
all that matters … I suppose. It was good that you called a tow truck and had them bring the vehicle to Rogers.” Abe heard him continue under his breath, “I don’t know that I can afford a shop at the moment.”

“Eet is not alright!” Aberdeen dry-heaved. “Eet was ‘orrible! Ze date only got worse from there. Rob, ee would not let me order an Über on my phone, ee said ee would order a ‘special Über’ and I thought at first he was being a gentleman but ee, ee, then ‘ee -’ she began to sob once more. Richard Woodhull rose. He brought her a roll of paper towels from the kitchen counter to use as an alternate to tissues – to flimsy to fight the flood. After thanking him in French and blowing her nose twice, Aberdeen continued. “Ee took out ‘is badge.”

“His what?” Abe gaped. He suddenly found himself searched across the table though he remained seated, his feet on the floor.

“‘Is badge! I knew then that ee was only trying to use me for information. Jordan told me not to say anything without an attorney present and this I told ‘im.” She crossed her arms. “But I don’t even know that Jordan can be my lawyer anymore now that ee ‘as broken up with Abigail and I don’t want to take sides in this just like Anna isn’t taking sides in this - but what if I need legal representation?” She looked pleadingly at Abe’s father. “It is too late for me to be all ‘bros before ohs’ -“

“What precisely was said?” Judge Woodhull asked sternly, more, Abe saw, as a means on concealing his concern that in chastisement.

“I know my rights,” Aberdeen insisted.

Hewlett rose. “Your honour, with regard to the conversation Aberdeen and I overheard the Frenchmen having in the foyer on Wednesday morning, from what we understand, what … what Aberdeen wrote down, the international community seems to have as much vested interest in recovering Senator Arnold as we in America do,” Hewlett offered diplomatically. “Aberdeen,” he turned to address the au pair from behind clenched teeth, “I hardly think -“

“When ze ‘special Über’ showed up,” Aberdeen interrupted to Abe’s great relief - himself more interested in her telling of events than in more of Hewlett’s lies - “eet was two men in nice suits who identified themselves as Agents Cato and Mulligan and called Robert ‘Agent Culper Jr’ – Culper, like our street with an added adjective. They were both wearing bespoke suits – like the kind Eulett, euh, sorry, Edmund wears normally. I got in the car with them because I was afraid something worse would ‘appen if I didn’t and set my phone on record.” Aberdeen dramatically raised her hands to her breast as she straightened her posture. “My death, I thought, should at least mean something. Robert told me, well here, listen -“

She played a gritty recording on her mobile of Robert Townsend explaining that around a year ago his government had purchased his way into an establishment suspected of printing counterfeit money and sending it abroad - hundred dollar bills that had made their way primarily into the floorboards of peasant homes of countries like North Korea. He finally had enough evidence for his bosses – he indicated to the other two men - to organize a raid. If he had acted independently tonight, he would have risked blowing his cover and a year’s worth of preparation. He was not working the Arnold investigation, but he had consulted with his bosses and they thought the tidbit Aberdeen had offered about Peggy and Andre worthy of passing on to the ADIC. Anything she offered his colleagues would be kept confidential and was on a voluntary basis, but the law required him to advise her that if she were to sign a sworn statement it could serve as testimony and would have the weight of a legal document.

Aberdeen stopped the recording or it stopped on its own. As everyone’s eyes danced around each
other in tempered fear and anticipation, Aberdeen’s remained fixed on the judge, and his on her.

She spoke.

Aberdeen told that she was then brought into a room in a building in the city where she sat for 40 minutes with the two Über drivers in designer suits while they tried to convince her to tell them what she had been in the process of telling Mr Culper Jr. Aberdeen had remained silent. Eventually the man who identified himself as Mulligan left, she saw him arguing with Robert through the thin window on the door, though she could not hear what was said. Agent Cato told her he had never seen anyone take the right to remain silent so seriously, and while he commemorated her, she should realise that she was not in any trouble. She was not under arrest nor was she under suspicion, but any information she had, that she was willing to share, might save lives.

Aberdeen asked if she could leave. Cato asked her if she would wait for a moment, at which point he pulled out a folder and she discreetly hit record once more on her mobile when she in turn pulled a bottle of water out of her Louis Vuitton which she left on the desk for display.

“Play it,” Abe urged her. Aberdeen looked between him and his father and swallowed.

On the muffled recoding, Cato spoke into his own tape that he was showing her a photograph of Judge Richard Woodhull before asking her directly if she knew this man. Aberdeen said nothing, but the dragging of aluminium against linoleum could be heard. “I just got up,” she said. “Eet was ‘orrible and I’d nothing to tell them.”

As Aberdeen rose, Townsend, alias Culper Jr entered. He told Cato to put an end to it and took escorted his best-friend’s au pair out of the room they had elected to use for interrogation. Aberdeen cringed at the words ‘best friend’s au pair’ again when she heard them over the grainy audio. In that moment, Abe pitied her and wanted to tell her that she was also a ‘very good mademoiselle’, whatever the fuck that meant.

Townsend, Aberdeen relayed after pressing stop, apologised for the evening, as did Mulligan, who offered his hand and his card in case she changed her mind. Aberdeen squeezed the hand she had been given tightly, recognising that he was the sort of man to return the gesture with equal force. His Rolex slid from his wrist to hers without his noticing.

Robert Townsend followed her outside.

“I can walk,” she insisted when he offered her a ride. “There is a twenty-four ‘our pawn shop two blocks from here and no one will question my trade because I am wearing nice clothes and I just want to go back to my nice car and my real friends taught me that everything is about appearances and you do not look so good as you did some ‘ours ago, Sir!”

“A pawn shop?” he asked, wondering, doubtlessly what that had to do with anything.

She held up the Rolex.

After a minute had passed in silence, he asked, “You have a real talent for this sort of thing don’t you?”

After a minute had passed in silence, she inquired, “Does Mr Woodhull know?”

“No. I’m – it will be over for me soon. Let me, let me make this up to you.”
“And did he?” Mary asked, squinting.

“He gave me two ticket to ze Culper Ring concert tonight. Oh, I can go, can’t I? Not for ‘im of course, for ze music.”

It was the nicest thing anyone attached to his household had ever said about his passions. “You are a very good mademoiselle, Aberdeen,” Abe smiled at her, trying to sound reassuring though his heart was racing. She would get over this. She had friends she could be honest around. When she smiled at him, Abe felt his isolation stronger than he had moments before.

“And I can take someone from you with me. If you want,” Aberdeen glanced about the table. Thomas reached at her from his high-stool. “Not you my sweet, you are too small.”

“I’ll go,” Richard Woodhull offered gruffly.

“Dad!”

There were three things in the world of which Abe felt entirely certain – he had to save the senator, he had no one whom he could trust to help, and he did not want his father at the concert tonight. Abe was already faced with the impossible dual tasks of cajoling Caleb Brewster into an impromptu rendezvous with the detective inspector and confronting Robert Townsend, alias Culper Jr, about his day job - all while ensuring that neither of them understood his game plan. If they discovered what he and Rogers were hiding, Abe could not trust their safety.

He did not need his father around. He could not risk losing him.

He had already lost too much.

“Darling, ah – might I then trouble you for your car this morning?” he heard Hewlett say. Abe turned in his chair to face him. “I, that is I need to go downtown. There is something that Simcoe and I simply must see to -”

“Now?” Anna asked, angered.

“I fear it cannot wait.”

Anna shook her head slightly in confusing but gave an affirmative answer, telling him the keys were on one of the hooks by the front door. At this he rose, thanking her as he kissed her cheek. When she asked where they were going, however, he declined to respond.

If Abe were to extend to him the benefit of doubt, he might attribute this silence to the fact that Mary had interrupted Anna as she was speaking - grabbing Hewlett’s attention seconds before it registered with Abe.

Mary repeated, “I’ve been texting, I’ve been calling, I have half a mind to go there myself if I don’t hear something back from him soon. Please, please, Edmund, tell John that,” she stopped. “Tell him to -”

“John Graves Simcoe?” Abe asked. He repeated the name several times, with each iteration he could hear his voice growing louder. Thomas began to cry and Richard, scolding his son, brought him out of the room.

“Abraham!” Mary finally answered. “He is my financial advisor. I have every right to speak to him
“Ah, Mary I, I should doubt highly that it is what you … imagine. I understand a bit of what – honestly it, it is not that I want there to be secrets between us,” he looked at Anna, at Aberdeen, then, slowly, at Abe, “in this household, but I fear it – it is, this, with Simcoe, it is really none of my business,” he sighed, “and so I am making it my own. A pattern I’ve admittedly fallen into as of late. Ah, at any rate,” he continued with forced mirth, “I am sure he will ring the instant we have this all sorted. I swear to you – his lack of response - it is nothing of what you might be thinking. I simply do not believe it my place to elaborate beyond that. Forgive me.”

“And what might we be thinking, Hewlett?” Abe asked, looking at Mary. “Is Simcoe your ‘financial advisor’ as well?”

“As a matter of fact,” Hewlett gave a quick nod before turning on his heel.

“Does ‘financial advisor’ mean the same thing as ‘ice cream’?” Aberdeen asked. Mary and Anna both met her with wide eyes. Abe narrowed his, told his wife in his exit that he would make breakfast tomorrow instead, and took off after Hewlett.

“Take me with you,” Abe demanded as the Scot elegantly climbed his way into the car the girl they had both known biblically had owned since high school graduation.

“Excuse me?” Hewlett stopped, rose, blinked.

“I need to go downtown. I need to see Rob right away. You heard that recording, my father-” he clambered as he tried to catch his breath.

“Abraham,” Hewlett cautioned. Abe took his name as the invitation he did not suspect Hewlett would otherwise extend him and opened the passenger door. Hewlett cleared his throat.

Abe spoke.

“My father is now under investigation because you -”

“What? Revised in his study on Thursday night? Lower your voice, Abraham, you forget yourself,” he said sharply. Hewlett got into the car, and indicated for him to do the same. Once the doors were closed, before the engine started, Hewlett reversed the accusation, stating that had Abe not been so vehement in his demands that the office be searched, the police would have never wasted their time and resources in that part of the house. Abe listened, wondering how Hewlett possibly knew of his ardent insistence on the matter. He had left the house hours before Tallmadge came with his team.

Hewlett looked beaten, exhausted. His once-pale visage looked like ink split on parchment, staining stretches of his skin with a tint nearly as dark as his eyes – which Abe had never known to reflect the slightest hint of light. He wished Hewlett was wearing tinted glasses in order to spare him from the taint of whatever he had suffered since last the spoke three mornings before. He wished he could look away, or that Hewlett would.

When his father’s tenant stopped speaking at one of his awkward intervals, Abe told him to drive. They both watched the road. Hewlett’s pace grew less erratic. Though he wore no wounds, Abe
imagined his own appearance had worsened considerably since he had been confronted with the sort of secret he had not had years to practice hiding.

And now he had another. Robert Townsend. And Hewlett knew his name as well. He spoke lightly in an effort to reassure Abe. It had the opposite effect. Abe was glad for the road. He was glad for the distraction of the same trees blurring by time and again. They were driving in circles, he realised after what felt like too long. They were speaking in them as well, Abe thought, when it felt too late.

“As far as the FBI is concerned,” Hewlett said. “I imagine them to be bluffing. Clever as Aberdeen is at times ... ah, it is unlikely that they did not realise when a recorder was in play. Ordinarily, all personal effects are handed over before an interrogation, no matter how informal. I would not put too much into this. I venture that you made something of an annoyance of yourself yesterday morning for Tallmadge and the Special Crimes Unit. They will realise in short order that you are of no particular significance and drop all inquires the moment you cease yours.”

The last phrase sounded like a threat. Or it didn’t and Abe was looking for contention. Hewlett circled the block once more and stopped in front of Whitehall. Abe again insisted that he be taken into the city. They were both going to Manhattan. Hewlett repeated that he did not know how long his business would be.

Abe worried his business had to do with Robert Townsend.

“I can find my own way back, then. We have to talk, you and I.”

“Very well,” Hewlett swallowed as he accelerated. “I apologise, Abraham. You are right. I made an assumption about your behaviour and used that to further my ends. The sweep, however, was clean - as I think it safe to say we both ultimately knew it would be. Your father is not at any risk. Regardless of what was said in anger on Wednesday morning at your breakfast table, if I thought my designs threatened your father in any way -”

“What are your ‘designs’? Honestly, what the fuck are you even still doing here? One minute you are planning to return to Europe and the next you’ve extended your lease, added another name to it and the same day a senator goes missing,” he said with unmasked accusation. “Then you tip off the press to the possible location of the crime scene – and again, like at Whitehall – there is no fucking evidence! But Anna lost her job because of you! Do you get that? You singlehandedly got De Jong’s shut down.”

“That is quite enough!”

“I don’t know how you expect to benefit but even if you are being honest – even if you have nothing to do with Senator Arnold - you have put my friends, my family at risk, Mr Hewlett, do you fucking understand that? The cops plan to interrogate Anna again – and Mary, Mary, my wife Mary is herself a suspect,” he paused. “And so is your mate John. Did you know that?”

“Abraham, you truly fail to appreciate -”

Abe tallied on his fingers. Hewlett had at least ten close friends christened John yet had not paused for an instant to ask which of them the NYPD had taken an interest in. He must know from which last name Abe meant from Mary. From Mary and her ‘financial advisor’.

“Yesterday,” Abe informed him, “while two of Tallmadge’s subordinates were searching your room I hung around in the garage - under the air vent where you can hear everything that happens. I know what my wife told the police.”
“Yesterday morning while the police were searching Whitehall,” Hewlett countered with a slight smirk, “I was down at 1PP gaining access to all of their case files. Trust me, it is not Mary they are after. If anyone, it is John Andre. I think perhaps you have met him a time or two?”

John Andre.

Abe held his breath. Of course! John Andre. Abe could forget Simcoe. Mary was good and honest and everything he himself was not, and it was tax season after all. He could forget Simcoe, he told himself again. The name Andre was familiar. Andre … André, as Aberdeen said it? No. He knew it from Rogers. He knew it from Arnold.

“You spied on the police,” Abe said after they had pulled onto the highway.

“As did you,” Hewlett replied, adrift. It was as though he had forgotten that Abe sat beside him.

“I don’t know what business you think you have here but it needs to end. Are you a foreign agent? Is that why you made Aberdeen take Rob out? Like Peggy did with André? Fuck Hewlett, I don’t know what you are playing at - but Aberdeen, she is just a kid! And how did you know? About Rob? I didn’t even know and I’ve know him for years, I – who the fuck are you?”

“I’m a man who finds himself deeply embedded in a situation not of my own making but with disastrous potential for all of those I hold dear unless I do something about it. Aberdeen acted independently of me. I allowed her to borrow my car because she is a friend and because she asked and because,” he paused, “because I had no reason to believe that she would be so reckless as to do thousands of dollars of damage to my transmission.”

“So you are mad then?” Abe scoffed to himself.

“Furious,” Hewlett said without sounding it. It made Abe seem all the more paranoid and
hysterical. He wondered how much the words he spoke betrayed him. “What good would it have done to add to her worries though? At any rate, it is far more important that she is alright, or that she will be. Poor dear.”

“What did you really have her translating? Who are Mulligan and Cato?” Abe inquired in a single breath.

“I have no idea,” Hewlett answered the last question that had been phrased.

“What did you have her translating?”

“Benedict Arnold is missing,” Hewlett said as he drove over into the emergency lane, slammed on the break, causing the car to screech to a halt. “No one in law enforcement believes him to be dead, they believe someone is giving him quarter somewhere in Setauket and mean to keep it that way in so long as it benefits the US in international relations. Now … Can I trust you?”

“Can I trust you?”

Hewlett nodded. “Try not to interrupt,” he said as he merged back into the eight o’clock traffic. “Simply listen. I will not repeat what I am about to tell you, what I – or rather, what Aberdeen overheard,” he took a deep breath. “While the NYPD is investigating the missing person case, there is international interest at play that means to profit from the instability this messy business is causing to the stock market, as such things tend to do. The longer Arnold is missing, the stronger Europe’s hand will be in negotiating a trade deal that our combined parliament and your congress have been working on since the Bush Era. Unforeseen problems within the EU – namely, the rise of right-wing nationalism –.”

“Fascism.”

“That has parallels in this beautiful country of yours,” he continued, annoyed, “threatens to rip the trade union apart. Great Britain is already threatening to withdraw, and if they should, France will surely follow, and then I suppose there is the threat of having the Federal Republic of Germany with a number of client states,” he mused, “which if history serves as any indicator -.”

“What has this to do with Arnold?”

“If the Euro remains slightly, though not significantly, stronger than the dollar, if there are economic reasons to remain united, Europe will. That is what the French are trying to ensure, and America is letting them profit to this end from Arnold because America needs this, too. So much of your economy is based overseas that you need a strong, solid trading partner that Europe can provide. Deals like these take decades, as I am sure you can well imagine, and this one in particular threatens to be undone by a war in the desert … essentially.”

“You mean by the refugee crisis in Europe becoming a strain on its resources and finances?”

Hewlett nodded. “Which is where Arnold enters the picture indirectly. Abraham – do you have any idea who Dr Martha Dandridge is?”

“I’ve read two of her books, back at university,” he lied. Abe knew her name from Breitbart and Fox. He knew her name from hearing Arnold mention it a few times, but that was to say nothing. Robert Rogers instructed him that the only thing people did in prison, rehab, or any other service the state ran to segregate society’s undesirables, was make yet more drug connections. As such, his medical cabinet was filled with any number of painkillers - prescription and otherwise - at all times. It was for that reason he insisted on moving the senator to his place from the safe house that
had served them over the past week, despite Abe’s voiced concerns. It was a ‘precaution’ – by which, Abe supposed the contractor meant that it provided them with a steady means of making sure Arnold remained too drugged to plan an escape.

Still, the Pennsylvania representative was good for a semi-coherent conservative rant every now and again.

Hewlett became flustered as he continued.

“She – Dr Dandridge - was working on a study with Dr Andre that I – that I found out about yesterday, through more … illicit means. Its goal seems to be understanding ‘fear’, and understanding how that can be weaponized. It is apparently how the terrorist operate and now the Pentagon seeks to use their own tactics against them as traditional methods have been failing all of NATO's efforts thus far. But something went wrong and I imagine Arnold came to offer a correction.”

Suddenly much of what Arnold had to say made sense.

“Benedict Arnold as the chairman of Senate Armed Services Committee would have knowledge of and access to that,” Abe said under his breath. Hewlett clenched his jaw.

“He likely was here for a review of the project. Um. Something, something – and this was what I was able to get directly from my search yesterday - something recently went disastrously wrong within a related closed study and ah … the pharmaceutical funding is threatening to pull. Arnold’s presence in New York City, the Trump rally, his having nothing else officially scheduled – not common for a politician I imagine – that is, I now believe that he was likely here to – well, that he was here in in relation to - I, I fear he might have since become the victim of his own weapon. Which is why I need – I need to find him.”

Abe had overheard the coppers talking about a Pfizer receipt and an obsession of DI Tallmadge. He thought about texting Caleb right away. He had to get a man on the inside, someone who could talk to Tallmadge directly, win over his sympathies. The police no longer had any reason to trust Abe himself, which, he supposed, looking over at Hewlett, might well have been the possible assassin’s intent. Abe constructed motive – Hewlett, as well as his European Union, likely profited from the market upheaval that Arnold’s disappearance caused. He likely benefited from the research as well – perhaps a wealthy relative was also a sponsor or he knew someone in service? Or maybe Hewlett was a terrorist as Arnold seemed to think. But Hewlett had never mentioned Pakistan or any other majority-Muslim country for that matter.

Abe swallowed. Questioned his own line of thought. Why would Hewlett tell him of any this? And what should he tell Brewster to get him onside enough to seduce Tallmadge –whom the drummer laughingly claimed had tried to flirt with him over the phone - that would spare his friend from the knowledge of Arnold’s hide-out?

And then Abe remembered the context in which he had heard the word ‘finance’ thrown around quite a lot recently. He remembered the other John and the alibi that his wife had given police. That is what he would have to tell Caleb. That he feared his wife was cheating with a man he considered might well be capable of murder. He wondered how Hewlett had come to attain all of his various contusions.

Abe longed for the secrets he had spent a lifetime concealing. He longed for his life to return to normal, even if normal meant misery.

“Where is the rest of the information coming from?” Abe asked after Hewlett pulled the car to a
halt in front of The Rivington Gazette building at his request. “You could go to jail -”

“It was Anna’s plan,” Hewlett answered without answering.

Abe could not let his high-school sweetheart marry this man.

“How dare you involve her,” he spat.

“Believe me, Abraham. I tried everything not to, she involved herself.”

“And that is why you trust me to keep silent,” he realised aloud.

“I trust you to keep silent because I trust based on your recent … undertakings that you have as much interest in figuring out a way for us to all get out of this as I do.”

What had he noticed?

“Take me with you then,” Abe said as he refastened his seatbelt. He had no reason to trust Hewlett but he had few other options.

“No.”

“If you are planning on finding Andre … André, perhaps I could be of some assistance. I’ve done so for Robert Rogers in the past.”

“This isn’t about a gambling debt. Or even about Andre in the larger sense. Get out,” he ordered. "I have to ambush Simcoe while I still have time on my side to launch a surprise attack and you would only be in the way.”

Chapter End Notes

I have few if any contextual notes for you guys the go-around, but what the heck, I’m loquacious:

Voodoo, or **Vodoun** is the official religion of Haiti – which, by the way is the only nation in the western hemisphere to have defeated three European super powers and the only in the world to have gained its independence as the result of a successful slave uprising. The history (particularly of the 18. Century) is **fascinating** and nearly everything of Aberdeen’s H+S character and plotline is in some way derived from it. (If you feel you want to read ahead …) Her name is taken from the first and forth seasons of AMC’s Turn.

While many of the economics discussed in this chapter are loosely based on the news cycle circa sixteen months ago (at time of posting, who knows when you are reading this) that bit about **fake hundred dollar bills finding their way into the floorboards of North Korean homes** come from around 2011. Robert Townsend having any knowledge of an underground counterfeit operation being run out of a restaurant attached to a newspaper comes from an episode that aired around a year ago. Funny, that.

And for my fellow Europeans, **Breitbart** is an online, neoconservative media concern.
So! How much are you guys loving the final season? I was in former Yugoslavia for a few episodes, but I am caught up now and want to scream about it with each and every one of you. Hit me up any time in the comments or on that other hellsite I have linked in my profile.

Finally, thank you so much to everyone who commented on the last chapter and to everyone else who simply read. I appreciate all of your support more than you can ever imagine.

Hope you are having a lovely summer! XOXO – Tav

Up Next: a love story in five acts
The Promotion

Chapter Summary

On their last morning together, Anna and Edmund discuss metaphysics, maths, murder and their upcoming association football match as they plot to save the world or, at least, get out from under it.

Chapter Notes

Hey, lovely faces! I’m back again – this time, surprise, surprise (no, really!) with an entirely too long scene that became its own update. Okay, I suspect there is nothing new to that but this time, we focus on Anna and Edmund being a relatively normal couple (…just helping each other deal with external, existential doubt, making bad jokes and uh, having a lot of oral sex. Evidently.)

Don’t worry. It is still the same slightly-fucked Hide and Seek you know and tolerate.

That said – before we do the thing where I warn you about potentially upsetting material, let me give a quick shout out and offer all of you a recommendation. No. Recommendation sounds to my non-native ear a tad too trivial. What I have to do is hook you guys up with some required reading:

Law & Order & Authori[tea]

Celebrates the second anniversary of its publication date this week and I strongly compel each and every one of you to leave this page (right now!) and go give it a read (… and comment, kudo.) I don’t know that its author CalamityBean and I have much overlap in terms of readership, but even if “Annlett” is not your thing, the beauty of her prose is enough reason to fall in love (as I did, with the English language) when I discovered this gem a few months after it was first published. You’ll feel yourself completely immersed in Calamity’s Setauket, feel the warmth of the steam of expertly brewed tea as it touches your lips before you taste, and where it gets really transcendent – even if you are a decidedly non-tea-drinker as I am - you’ll enjoy it.

Every last drop. The characters, as she depicts them are especially compelling; they come to life and force the reader to interact with them, their feelings and struggles in a way that is rare for any form of fiction. The plot is itself intriguing – and I can’t possible stress this enough without getting into spoilers – even if you are not otherwise keen on love stories, there is something here for you.

And the best part? The title itself is a pun.

So, go – run off, and read something truly worthy your time. My Setauket will still be here when you are done. And honestly? It probably would not exist without the influence of LOA, which is only to say that reading that work made me want to
become a better student of the English language, which forced me into using it regularly rather than just look at verb charts until my eyes bleed. Being the little maths nerd I am, this is pretty much the highest compliment I can give.

So!

**Warnings include but do not limit themselves to:** light sexual content, mild existential crises, misdirected anger and accusations and puns. Bad puns that will (heartbreakingly-! No, I’ll not spoil it. You have to get to the end of the chapter.)

As always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Anna let the moment linger. She felt the light pull of his long fingers as they gently combed their way through her hair, her loose curls as tussled and tangled as their bodies had been the night before. Edmund was humming softly, subconsciously, as he did from time to time - a symphony that stirred her pulse as it tried to match his rhythm. Eyes still shut, Anna cuddled herself closer to him. The sound ceased. Some things, she thought, were simply too precious too touch. Too easily broken.

Not them.

No. She and Edmund were eternal. But moments were fleeting and Anna Strong was not yet ready to greet the grey dawn of the day she knew she was fated to bid her fiancé farewell.

“You awake?” he whispered.

“Do I have to be?” she groused.

“No … no, Love. Certainly not, if you would prefer to rest. I – forgive me if I -”

“Did you already shower?” Anna wrinkled her nose as she pulled her frame up along with her heavy eyelids. Resting her back against the headboard beside him, she allowed herself a rare giggle as she watched her lover’s face twist itself from awkward apology to hesitant delight. He still looked like Edmund when he looked at her that way - lips parted, gaze lowering slightly as his grin grew. Life, Anna considered as a blush crossed her cheeks, seemed less a series of connected catastrophes when he laughed. The world still *made sense* as her friend Peggy had said of Edmund’s bright smile when first she met the man, back when love had seemed to Anna more a fleeting thought than a force. Back when she had assumed and could nearly accept the reality that her feelings may never be returned. How removed her prior fears felt from present; how small her current problems seemed when compared against past doubt.

The memory of the Pennsylvanian cautiously evaluating Edmund through Abigail’s venetian blinds now felt as though it belonged to a previous century, rather than to what had scarcely been a week.

No, Anna realised. Not even.

It had only been six days.

It had been an aeon.

She had always been – Edmund said to her bafflement at the brevity of elapsed time – the
Andromeda to his Perseus, his fortune and fate. ‘Always’, he repeated for measure, teasing that he
would never otherwise use such an abstract to describe what could be expressed as a definite
integral.

“Always,” Anna smiled back, shaking her head at the rest of it.

There must have been a point where they had not truly been a couple. Or perhaps there had not.
Perhaps there simply existed some interval before the points at which they had made declarations
of love and had been forced to defend them. Now here they were. And they were eternal. And time
itself, Anna thought, must be a trick.

The room swelled with sunlight. The whole of the above-garage attic space that had been
converted to an apartment at some stage between the parts of her childhood spent playing at
Whitehall and the present seemed to glow - bathed in and brightened by the radiance from a tiny
window partially obstructed by a telescope. Their setting paled when she looked upon her lustrous
lover, and then, when their tired eyes met, it seemed altogether non-existent. Anna wished for
distance to later feel as illusionary as time and space, but with this thought, the continuum once
again showed itself to be tangible.

Nothing was certain but the moments they shared, but moments were fleeting, and the morning
was not theirs alone.

But he was here and he was hers and he, too, refused to consider their love has having finite
dimensions. That would be enough comfort and solace to sustain her through an extended
separation. Just enough. Just. Anna bit her bottom lip as it began to tremble, closing a cut before
her fiancé could see it bleed.

“Hm?” he puzzled, drawing his thumb across her chin. Anna smiled, feeling his un-moisturized,
lightly calloused finger find the corner her mouth. He wore thick-rimmed spectacles rather than
contacts; he had yet to shave his morning stubble. Anna wondered if he had ever before been this
unassuming with anyone else or if she was the only one privileged enough to see him without his
pretty pretentions put on display. She wondered how long it had been since he had known peace.

Edmund’s hair was slightly damp - undulant and dishevelled without product to smooth and
straighten. He muttered a string of monosyllables when Anna twirled a strand between her thumb
and forefinger, complimenting the thickness and texture she rarely was given chance to appreciate.

“You’re beautiful,” she said softly.

“I’m -” Edmund flustered, unable to agree or to arrive at an adjective of his own. He gently pulled
her in as he sought to parry, “You, you are kind. Ah - I do hope I did not wake you, my dear.”

“Mmm. Mmm,” Anna lied. She smelled mint and manufactured musk when she leaned in to kiss
him, taking pause as time revealed another of its deceptions within the peculiarities of her fiancé’s
face. “What time is it?” she asked as she turned away quickly, half in order to grab her phone with
which she meant to check her loose estimation of the hour, half out of embarrassment as she
remembered Edmund’s stated disgust with morning breath upon seeing it saw it reflected again in
his sharp features.

That particular conversation had taken place the previous Wednesday, she realised. Less than forty
minutes before the rests of their lives fell apart.

Only four suns had since risen.
“Hey,” Edmund said lightly as he tickled the back of the back of the neck. “Give us a kiss?”

On which day of the four, Anna smiled to herself, had he seen the light of dawn? She felt the bed shift as Edmund adjusted his weight, leaning forward to kiss her shoulders. Anna absentmindedly scrolled through the morning’s news and social media notifications, as had long been her habit.

“Don’t you want me to brush me teeth first?” she protested playfully as he turned her head, pulling her lips against his own.

“Darling,” he replied, parting with a cheeky grin, “I don’t ever want us to leave this bed.”

“Oh. But we must,” Anna lamented, bat at him with her free hand as she quickly skimmed through the series of messages still causing the light on her mobile to flicker. “It’s match day.”

Edmund sighed.

Edmund spoke.

He was normally keen to spend his Sunday morning engaged in sport – which, admittedly, was to say he was happy to put on a kit and watch from the back line as his more-eager mates pretend to play soccer, if only because it reminded them of home or homes they had known in semesters spent abroad. Seeing her still snoring in bed after he had emerged from his shower, however, had countered and conquered his resolve to spend the short time they still had in extended company.

He was content to leave his jersey on the dresser where it rested.

“I don’t ‘snore’. Girls don’t snore,” Anna corrected, the tip of her tongue then emerging through pressed lips.

“Still,” Edmund smiled, thinking it better not to offer confutation to his claim, “Today. It’s not about them, it is about us.”


It was very much about ‘them’ she suspected, despite his sentiment.

It was about the vacancy Edmund had been tasked to fill by those who reminded blissfully unaware of the battles he had unexpectedly found himself fighting on their behalf. It was about the team’s embittered captain. It was about the bruises that blotted his face and chest. It was about the terrible secrets he had tasked himself to keep. It was about the truth of the things he had said in anger the evening prior:

‘The worst of it is, were I to have been told a year ago - five, ten, eighteen bloody years ago - of all of the troubles I’d find myself faced with today, the only matter that would fail to truly impress me is the reality that Simcoe managed to kill a bloke of some political significance, lose the damned corpse, frame me and then force me through an act of conscious to organize the cover-up. Its bullocks. The whole of this caring for someone you rather can’t stand, its -’

It was exhaustion.

It was the result of the actions which Edmund had once easily assumed anyone else would take if confronted with his circumstance.

It was disappointment. It was doubt. It had wounded Anna to hear him speak in terms of defeat, it nearly killed her to hear him now use her as an excuse to abandon a duty he would have once felt
herself bound to.

Edmund had put the whole his faith in higher humanistic principles. He had been hurt.

Anna would not permit another challenge to this conviction.

She had found in his faltering convictions a war worth waging.

Edmund’s assumptions on man’s nature, as much as the actions he took, made him admirable. Made her love him. It was the reason Anna felt she had to ensure that they made it out to the pitch this morning.

She knew herself, however, to be base by comparison.

Anna wanted, in truth, to stay here, timeless, comprehending rather than contemplating the concept of eternal love – countering his talk of mathematics with her metaphysical musings, making the morning about the two of them as she clandestinely held it ought to be. But in forcing herself, in forcing Edmund to otherwise carry on for all the people counting on them would give some credence to his more cherished ideals.

That was what he needed.

That, she realised, was the standard which her fiancé held others to by example. Had not the friend he claimed he ‘couldn’t stand’ - and who, for his part, matched and mirrored this very sentiment - saved Edmund’s life without want of acknowledgement or thanks? Had not that action alone disproven the whole of John André’s hypothesis?

Everyone who truly knew Edmund Hewlett, Anna decided, was made better by that virtue. He needed to hold himself to his own high-minded morals that the rest of them might when they all needed to most. Today, Edmund needed to be the leader she knew him to be. He needed to survive for all of their sakes.

“We’ll have forever,” she said.

“Forever,” he echoed.

Yet their buzzing devices told that time still existed as more than an abstract or romantic ideal for those counting the minutes until kick off. As it now stood, she and the player who had been appointed interim manager had a little less than two hours to make the drive across town to the field behind the local high school as they had every other Sunday since the one on which he had proposed putting a ‘platonic’ union on paper. Edmund pouted when she announced this. She felt her own face falter.

He was not ‘casual’, she realised, in his unassuming, dandily dishevelled appearance that matched with his present demeanour, but rather, he was a casualty. A corpse, still pretentious in pretending that he could convince her otherwise by any measure of kisses or compliments.

Or maybe it was himself he was trying to fool.

“Anna, love, please don’t think less of me when I say that I’d rather not,” he said, the tenderness of his voice transformed into a torment of which he would not speak.

“I couldn’t,” she said as she gripped the hand he rested on her kneecap. “But Edmund, I need you to show me, to show everyone, the strength of your convictions. I need you.”
“You have me.”

It was not the moment they were lifted from, he said, but rather several that had preceded it. It was his sudden, unexpected appointment. It was the man he was replacing in this role. It was the man whom he had been with when a majority of their teammates had come to this decision without weighing their consideration or waiting for their consent. It was Captain Simcoe.

For Edmund, Anna sometimes worried, it always was.

Edmund had had surprisingly little to say on this or any other matter concerning his whereabouts the morning prior. He had returned to Whitehall in the late afternoon with no answers to her, Mary, and Aberdeen’s ‘Where is Abe?’, ‘How is John?’, ‘Where have you been all this time?’, ‘Why didn’t you call?’ and ‘What is with the Oreo’s?’

To Anna’s question on whether he had known or not about his new role on the football team, if it had anything to do with why he had left the house in such a hurry, he had offered, ‘You’re all familiar with our shared past or with Abigail’s prose on the subject,’ perhaps only as supersession for the answers he could not be made to give. ‘Simcoe and myself,’ he continued, ‘how to put this? I am afraid there is some truth to that particular assertion if no other. We two simply cannot share authority and we cannot leave our resulting quarrels on the field. At the same time,’ paused, ‘it is not as though we are in any position for me to refuse the appointment, for there might be something in the files Andre kept that might serve us all in our … our larger battle, as it were.’

This silenced Anna. Aberdeen asked again about the cookies. Edmund blinked. He looked to Mary as though he sought permission.

‘I’m curious as well,’ she spat. Anna, however, could ascertain from Edmund’s posture that words had been exchanged which he was reluctant to repeat. She had reason to doubt that they excluded themselves to team-politics. Anna wished her friend’s caution to prevail against her growing concern.

She had spent the morning alternating between calling and texting Abe, John and those who knew them as the result her husband’s abrupt exit. Mary would take any answers she could get; she would trade the whole game for them. Anna shook her head in warning. Edmund only shrugged.

‘Simcoe um, that is, Mrs. Woodhull sent him a quiche yesterday and he … wanted to return the pie-tin,’ he addressed the au pair, slightly perplexed. ‘Ah – cultural norms, that is, owing to where he spent the formative years of his youth, dictate that a plate should never be returned empty, but Simcoe has no idea how to prepare anything. Which, I suppose is of little surprise, I don’t believe he had ever so much has been in an American supermarket prior to today’s little outing. He was rather taken by the selection of snack biscuits he found as compared to what is on offer at Tesco and, not knowing what Mrs. Woodhull might prefer, decided to buy up the whole lot. Um, having been wrong on your coffee preferences?’ he squinted at Mary.

‘They are something of a delicacy in Europe,’ Anna added, trying to give the women who flanked her context and comfort as allowed. Edmund nodded. She could not tell if he was agreeing or not.

‘Okay,’ Aberdeen replied, having apparently lost interest somewhere in the explanation. Turning to her employer, she asked, ‘Can I ‘ave some?’
‘Hundred. Calorie. Packs,’ Mary said to Edmund in hard tones as she sent Aberdeen upstairs with enough pseudo-nourishment to sustain her throughout her entire undergraduate career. ‘He might have known that if he could be bothered to ring me back, read and respond to my texts.’

The tension in her tone caused them all to stiffen.

‘Mary, forgive me but I must ask that for the moment you desist in your efforts to make contact,’ Edmund responded hurriedly. ‘Simcoe - for reasons I simply cannot go into - is unable to answer his phone and while I am quite certain he has more than a lot to say to you, he would rather not do so over text. And I would rather not be used as your go-between,’ he said sharply. Softening, he added, ‘Wait.’

‘Then where is my husband?’ Mary demanded.

‘Oh, there I truly have no idea. I did try ringing him before driving back to Setauket -’

‘He never answers. Never. But John did. Before … before John did.’ Mary took a breath to collect herself. ‘I don’t understand and now you too would ignore me as I stand before you.’

‘Believe me when I tell you that I wish there was more I was at liberty to offer.’

Anna did not know if her friend meant that John had not called since ‘before reading what Tallmadge’s team had taken of the Dandridge/André research’ or ‘before we had sex.’ Both were horrible conclusions to come to, but where her own heart bleed, Mary’s seemed only to harden.

No. It sought to blame.

‘Edmund Hewlett,’ she started, ‘this morning you and my husband left in rush without a word as to your plans save for the fact that they involved my, my – the man who has tried to help me out of every bad situation of my own creation. I have not heard from either of them since and you brush aside my concerns as though – You know it wouldn’t surprise me if Abigail was on to something when she -’

‘What are you hoping I’ll admit?’ Edmund gaped as Anna made a mental note not to direct anyone else she knew to the stories that were making her best friend famous in literary circles and infamous elsewhere. She swallowed. He spoke. ‘That Abraham Woodhull, with whom I’ve hardly had any contact in the past year in which we have both been sleeping under the same roof, suddenly, and with very little cause, decided to meet up in the night and devise a plan to, what? Kill Simcoe?’

‘With everything else I’ve seen fall apart, with everything I now know about you it wouldn’t come as much of a surprise,’” Mary countered. “Where the fuck is my husband, Edmund? What did he do? What did you do or think of doing to the men I love?’

‘Please,’ Anna cautioned, ‘both of you, listen to yourselves!’

Edmund however, elected to continue to address his latest indicter condescendingly, ‘Should I say that our plan failed as anyone who has ever met my mate could reasonably expect it to, and that now your husband and I – our poorly written allegiance shattered – are attempting to murder one another to keep a “secret” some forty-thousand Amazon readers are in on? I don’t know what the lot of you discussed on Thursday evening, Madame, but I do not appreciate the accusatory tones in which you’ve spoken to me since.’

‘You know Anna and I read the same study that you and John did. That Abigail likely saw as well at some point. She may have acted unethically but she wasn’t wrong in her characterization of you,
sir. I have every right, every reason for concern. And Edmund? Something I really wish you had taken from the plot – we don’t have curtesy titles in America. We threw out all ties to the aristocracy when you threw up your hands in surrender at Yorktown. And even if we were still a part of the Commonwealth, you would still have no right to speak to me as though you were my better, or speak poorly of my friends, you vain, proud, paranoid piece of -’

‘Mary!’ Anna shouted. ‘That is quite enough!’

‘Your friends?’ he asked. ‘Your friends have no right to make and spread assumptions about me and mine.’ Edmund buried his brow in his right hand and began to pace, speaking at a slower one than his feet travelled.

‘John. Ah. He loves, you, Mary. He is dealing with his own shit that has nothing to do with you or any of what you two have been faced with this week. As for Abraham he … he has my sympathies if nothing more. He discovered this morning through a narrative about a damned automobile that one of his best friends is not exactly whom he has been presenting himself as. I trust the source of this information. Aberdeen, forgive me, just doesn’t care enough to lie to any of us. Abraham is probably talking things over with Robert Townsend … who makes conversation difficult on his own merit. Though … I do suppose to Mr Townsend’s credit the reality of his being an FBI operative could explain all but the undue sarcasm. It is understandable that your husband needs to get his head together on this. Haven’t we all been there recently? How do you think I felt when I realised that my own old friend … well. I suspect I needn’t advise you as to the details of that unfortunate episode.’

It took Mary a moment to respond. When she did, she could only produce a muted, ‘He said he loved me? John?’

Edmund tried to smile. ‘He said you wanted normal.’

‘Yeah,’ Mary agreed.

‘Wait. Just – with Simcoe. Just wait,’ Edmund advised. ‘You know more about him in the four or five days since you met than most people ever get. Let him retreat to his defences, keep a few secrets to himself for, well, three to five business days is I suppose all he really has. And then give it time for it to feel normal, whatever exactly you mean by that. He has not written you from his narrative. He just has to find his voice again.’

‘Why do you get to know these things? Whatever it is you refuse to tell me?’

‘Because I know how to sustain a siege.’

The exchange left Anna again wondering why every conversation around John Graves Simcoe devolved into loose war analogies in less than two minutes, but Mary seemed satisfied enough with the answer to lay down her weapons. To call a ceasefire. To – suddenly Anna herself felt unable to think outside of this widely accepted construct.

She pitied her co-conspirators all the more.

Mary, Anna thought, the angry and once-eager recruit who now wore battle scars manifested in eyes red from filling the silent moments she found for herself with sobs. John, the poet-warrior lost for words after surveying the casualties left by the actions he had been ordered to carry out. And Edmund, her beloved Edmund, the diplomat who had watched the bomb drop despite his better efforts. Who had tasked himself with the debris.
Anna wondered where it left her. Where it left them. Where it left their shared cause.

But Edmund would not elaborate.

He would instead smile to reassure her and the world would make sense the way it had not since the night before.

On Friday evening, Edmund had not returned late, nor exactly drunk, but something was different, something she could not reduce to the whiskey and cigarettes she tasted in his too-hard kisses.

He hardly spoke.

He had accepted it, he said finally, after letting her curse and cry and question why he could not bring himself to care about the case study she knew him to have read.

There was solace, he said, in the screams in his psyche that offered some semblance of structure. He had wanted to sob but could not bring himself to in front of Simcoe. His strength was a fallacy and a façade, blessedly one he had long been in practice of putting on for other people.

‘I’m not other people,’ Anna told him.

‘I’m not sad. Not ... not for myself, at any rate. I’m sad for John – ah, Simcoe and Andre both. Though in all honesty, I am not even surprised. I once believed that science allowed for order,’ he said without inflection, ‘that the laws of the universe must also be reflected in the hearts and minds of man. But you see ... there is no order. No justice. I’m not entirely certain when I ceased to believe in these constructs, nor am I sure how I could have ever been fool enough to accept them, to think that others dedicating their lives to study sought the same.’

‘Edmund!’ she had wept.

‘Do you know how most research gets funded, Love? Through the suggestion of military application. Even within the space program, I – I truly believed myself to be different. For man to be different. But we all destroy in pursuit of discovery. And now I find myself tasked by circumstance to ensure that Andre’s study is rendered useless in that regard. That all relies on finding this Benedict Arnold first, though I confess I find myself every bit as lost as he, ah ... in a more figurative sense, mind. No. No. That is secondary.’ He seemed to speak to himself. Anna listen.

‘What is of greater importance is moving on from this and making sure that my friends – Simcoe, everyone else on the football team who was used in the research, are able to do the same,’ Edmund stopped. Met her stare. She could not recognize him in that moment. ‘But I am no good with people,’ he confessed, continuing, ‘I was never properly socialized at a point where it would have made a difference. And when it comes to Simcoe,’ he paused, shut his eyes lest they reflect the emotion that briefly overcame his voice, ‘I suppose the signs were always there, it just took me too long to take notice.’

He would not expand.

‘John is one of the ... nicest people I’ve ever met,’ Anna thought aloud, ‘paradoxically one of the most difficult to get on with.’
‘My only shot at helping him would be to catch him off guard somehow,’ Edmund seemed to agree, ‘to stage an ambush. The problem is that I’ll never break his walls by firing upon them.’

‘You might not be able to break them,’ Anna suggested, ‘but I should think they are relatively easy to scale.’

‘What do you mean?’

Anna hardly knew herself. And Edmund did not seem to know himself at all in that moment. She rose to embrace him where he was sitting on the far corner of their bed. When he moved to return the gesture his restraint and resolve faltered. He grasped her. He cried and cursed in a dialect that she had difficulties with but, in the context of the afternoon he must have had, had little trouble comprehending. He felt himself break.

Anna felt something else entirely. She felt that Edmund’s greatest strength had not yet deserted him despite his disillusionment. He had nearly died, but rather than seek refuge with his demons he had risen to offer those who deserved it least hope of redemption. In the heart Edmund tried to hide, or rather, hide from – Anna found hope. She found the humanity he saw in others, that he inspired in her.

Suddenly, she saw a plan.

Her lover would have to handle this with the tactics that had proven themselves before. He would need to trick his friend into waging open battle in the field where Simcoe was at his best, though it seemed they would both rather run their war as an attacking retreat.

‘Edmund … I don’t know what you are planning on doing with John, but, pains me though it does to let you in on my own little secret, DeJong’s isn’t the only tavern in the area that shows soccer at the weekend.’

‘You’re right,’ he replied after considering her suggestion. ‘By Jove, Anna, you are brilliant.’

‘I do hope that much was never in question,’ she smiled. She saw a flicker of happiness in his eyes that did not extend to his lips. Anna began to tell him a story from the Aeneid she was certain he knew by heart, all the while plotting and planning small ways to restore his ideal of order.

On Saturday evening, in the privacy of their room, Edmund’s sprits seemed raised. When Anna asked how her scheme had gotten off, however, he relented only that Simcoe was too angry at the rest of the association team, at The Dons, and at the world to be truly cross with him. Edmund thanked her again for providing a plausible premise for his plan as he gently kissed and caressed her, tugging lightly at her the over-sized shirt that by then clung with sweat to her curves, suggesting that she take it off so that they might pack it. She looked stunning in it, after all, it would be a shame to leave it behind.

Anna, who had been working all day to put her life back into boxes whilst Edmund was off - apparently trying to put someone else’s life together - knew he spoke to her in earnest. She laughed it off. Flirtingly, he continued to praise her, comparing her to the figures of myth who had since leant their names to constellations. Anna smiled when she recalled all of the times Edmund had tried to point out pictures in the night sky—sketching them poorly when she confessed she was unable to connect the dots, laughing afterwards at his own hand, back then. Back before it had ever
dared to touch her.

She had loved him from the beginning, as Abigail had accused.

But Abigail had been wrong, she realized. Beginnings could not exist where time failed to. She and Edmund were eternal.

After they carried the last of her essentials to the car, she took him up on his suggestion of removing her clothing.

‘Forgive me, my love,’ he whispered against the back of her neck as he unlatched her bra. ‘I meant no offence by way of comparison. How very dare I quote the poets of antiquity, the prophets who have seen God and His angels when I seek to describe you, for they had never seen such beauty as yours and would not have been so pretentious as to even to imagine it. It could well be that despite everything that ever was outside of this embrace, I am the most fortunate man to have ever lived.’

He smiled as he lifted her, carrying her the few feet separating them from the bed they would share for one last night.

‘Are you back to believing in humanity?’ she inquired hesitantly between hot, wet kisses that extended from her mouth down to the lips only Edmund’s had known.

‘Humanity? No, that would be ridiculous. But I believe in myself. My friends. And more than anything else, I believe in you.’

‘I believe in us.’

And for the rest of the night, they were all that existed.

———

But morning had since come with its reminder that the wider world had not forgotten them.

“Can’t play. I’m sore,” Edmund whined as he moved to stretch. “Ah, not … not from Simcoe,” he added quickly with a wink. His various scrapes and bruises suddenly seemed sharper in the shade of the discontent her insistence on sticking to their routine had summoned to his visage. Anna stuck out her tongue teasingly as she gathered her hair back into a messy bun, shaking her head at her lover as she tested the tie’s commitment to its task. “Want me to kiss it and make it better,” Anna purred, trying to bring a smile back to his once-beautiful face.

“Might be worth a try.”

“When I first saw you,” Anna cooed as she climbed on top of him, pinning his shoulders to a pillow, “I thought you were the devil. Now,” she said slowly, sensually, “I am all but convinced.”

“The – the devil?” Edmund blinked.

“An absurdly handsome import with a smooth, rich accent-”

“Am I a demon or a whiskey in this recollection?” he chuckled, causing her to echo his laughter. Anna consented that she was bad at this part. But, she challenged, so too was he. At least she had never stolen from Ovid in an attempt to sound sexy or worse, scientific. At least, he offered, the two of them could remind one another that life was not as serious as they were both want to make
it. When Anna at last collected herself, she continued, “Dark hair, a dark stare and a dark suit ... I was instantly infatuated from the moment I laid eyes on you.”

“Infatuated or intoxicated?”

“Both I suppose.”

“How terrible for you.”

“It was. Seeing you at the weekend, so mysterious, so reserved so -”

“Awkward and out of place?” he suggested dryly.

“You belong here, Edmund,” Anna answered far too quickly, her voice deeper, harder than she had intended.

“In hell?” he countered, laughing – his widening lips again making sense out of the senseless wider world, “I do. I am certain I do. Last Sunday, ah, last Sunday, Love, I awoke to far fewer things that could well land me a life sentence, but then,” he stopped, shifted, softened. “I wasn’t next to you, the most brilliant, beautiful woman I’ve ever had the honour of knowing. I’ll take that trade.”

She could still taste herself through his mint mouthwash when their tongues met and time again ceased to matter. “As to the devil thing,” Anna whispered into his ear, “none of that – not the murder, not the insider trading, not the espionage, not the documents you found - nothing that happened outside of ‘us’ has me convinced that I’m about to wed the price of darkness.”

“No?”

“That tongue of yours on the other hand, so clumsy with words and yet so very conversant with my clit, why I could stay here all morning if you swore you’d bring me to sin.”

“Ah -” Edmund choked as red joined the purples and yellows of the contusions that coloured his cheekbones. He did not have much experience with woman from which to draw, but Anna could control him with a bit encouragement. What he could do, he could do quite well. The more he knew that, it seemed, the more he felt confident to try.

“And here I recall you once telling me that physicists knew little of biological science,” she continued to tease.

“I,” he smiled as he closed his eyes, “I likely did say something to that nature. But this,” he said as he reached down beneath to covers, placing three of his fingers inside her, “is more of an art.”

“And you the master,” Anna said, awkwardly pausing as he continued to titillate while she talked, causing her to take deeper breaths at erratic intervals.

“Oh … I’m really not,” he claimed as though he suspected that most men could compensate in the ways he did. As though they ever lasted any longer as he was presently able, as if afterward they considered doing anything beyond congratulating themselves for expelling their seed with a nap.

Edmund had had a few short relationships with various men and women that involved, as he put it, some small measure of physicality. Anna had had sex with a number of guys, a number, she told him with a wink, which she would not give if asked, but she had never before made love. Or been loved. Or loved as she loved him.

“Oh, I’d beg to differ. You, Edmund Hewlett, fourth of your name, are nearly everything I ever
hoped I would find in a man. Certainly the only one who has ever lead me to orgasm.”

“Really?” he blinked. “No, no, that can’t be -”

“But it is.”

And it was.

But both of their phones buzzed at once. Anna reached. “Leave it,” Edmund sighed. “You promised me some solace in form of stimulation.”

“Oh did I now?” Anna smiled. Stopped. The phones chimed again simultaneously. “Eddie, what if it is John?”

It probably wasn’t. She had gotten a few texts from him over the past day but doubted from the content that he was speaking to anyone else.

“Simcoe?” Edmund hissed, practically spat. “Oh, it is defiantly Simcoe. And I, for one, could very well stand to get through one bloody morning with hearing his annoying falsettcoe. Come back,” he begged as she pulled herself off him in order to address whatever matter he was keen to ignore. “I’m certain it is nothing of an immediate importance.”

“You know … the obstruction of justice in the service of fraud stuff that the two of you do in your spare time? That I can live with. It’s the puns.”

“Because they force you to confess that my tongue is – however occasionally – as well acquainted with the words you accuse me of butchering as it longs to become with your anatomy?”

“I wish this was not the way your arrogance chose to present itself. No, not arrogance,” she paused- “Hubris. Hew-bris. Christ, man,” she laughed “what have you made of me? To think I once relied on wit!”

“What I have made of you? Hopefully,” he grinned, “a happy bride who is not yet satisfied.”

“Edmund,” she paused as she read. As she reminded herself that time was real. “The match. Shit. I need to shower. We need to get ready. Fuck.”

“We’re staying here,” Edmund calmly replied.

“What? Edmund, we’ve been through this. I need you and you need to gather yourself together.”

“Anna – I swear to you I’m not, and never was upset. Your plan is working,” he smiled. “We can take the morning off.”

“You promised.”

“I said that you have me. Not that I was going to surrender my last morning with you to go watch Simcoe and Tate beat up on a team at the bottom of the table.”

Anna shook her head, “We’re playing Middle County. That is what all of the fuss is over.”

She saw his dark eyes expound however briefly before he shut them, and, with a slight involuntary shutter shook away or succumbed to what she supposed was the same memory of the 5-1 defeat his team had suffered in the fall that seemed cause the rest of their squad to quiver over WhatsApp.

It was a bad day in which to replace the former manager. It would have been regardless.
“Check the listings? I’m fairly certain were up against Terryville. At home. We can skip. You and I. Anna … I um. We actually talked about this yesterday, briefly. Ah, our esteemed captain and I, that is. A loss or draw will do nothing to affect our ranking, and the only way we will advance in the table is if both Middle County and Suffolk mange to lose their respective games.”

Anna crossed her arms.

“And to the greater point,” Edmund continued briskly, “none of this is truly of any significance because it is not as though we’ve any hope of promotion or threat of relegation in this league whatsoever.”

“That is no reason not to play,” Anna answered. Part of her had been looking forward to the one part of her week that had managed to stay –mostly- to schedule. She needed this. She knew that Edmund did as well. Anna pulled a pair of knickers and a sport bra off her otherwise emptied dresser, and after putting on deodorant and taking a quick bath in sparkling ‘cherry-blossom’ body spray proceeded to dress.

Edmund spoke.

“My fiancée leaving for Albany in the afternoon certainly is.”

“Don’t remind me.”

Fate had only afforded them five nights. The first in each other’s arms, the second in separate boroughs, the third with her friends in their room trying to accomplish with Gossip Girl what he and his had failed to attain with guns across the border, the forth in bouts of silence and sorrow and the fifth intertwined with each other and all of the secrets they were now bound to keep.

Tonight would leave them with the solitude with which they were both long acquainted. It was not fair. But they were forever. They were stronger than circumstance.

He did not ask her to stop or to stay, which she appreciated. Instead, he said, “I love that about you, you know? Your commitment. It is admirable and worthy of aspiration.”

“It is a quality then which we share,” Anna blushed. Edmund, frowned as he turned to check his phone. Anna pulled herself into a pair of lycra leggings, humming Blue is the Colour as she put on the fitting jersey. They had agreed by their third date not to discuss politics or Premiership preferences. At present, it seemed an easier argument if one was to be had. But Edmund seemed not to hear her. He must have been questioning a great many of his own commitments as of late. Regardless of if he was able to see it, Anna knew that he remained moral, principled, giving and good – that he still expected to find these rare qualities in others. The task was reminding him of that.

“Tell them ‘no’ before the ‘official’ vote I’m sure John will insist upon. If you are really worried about acting as team manager.”

“We discussed it. Yesterday. He won’t. And it wouldn’t make a difference. It is not exactly a highly sought after post.”

“Will staying home make any difference then?” she challenged.

“I suppose you a right. Anyway – this whole dynamic. Me as acting as manager, he as captain. It is only for a month.”

He did not elaborate and she did not push, certain someone would tell her at the pitch. Edmund
forced a grin, which turned genuine when she returned it, throwing him a jersey from one of his drawers to wear to the field.

“Come, we really do need to get ready. My mom is going to meet us there, which,” she laughed, “I realise as I speak is no incentive for you to get your ass up, but she – she used to come to all of my games in high school and when I played JV at university. She likes it. Maybe. She likes screaming at me and my teammates more.”

Edmund nodded, his near-black eyes beaming.

“And I was never exactly nice about her being there, but now,” Anna continued. She realised in his reaction that he did not have the same norms within his own family. At present, his parents had said nothing about his desire to stay in America, to work at Hayden or to marry her. Edmund seemed thrilled at the prospect of being yelled at again by a woman who had already forced him to suffer some measure of abuse. But despite their bad start, her mother wanted to know him. Which was more than Anna could say of Edmund’s own relations. Suddenly she felt as if there was nothing to say at all. “I mean … she is bringing me a box of knock-off heels I have at her place so I can look like a ‘real adult’ when I stand in front of Judge Woodhull’s bench.”

“Where are we going to fit them?” Edmund interrupted. Much of what three cars and a postal truck had transported from her ex’s flat was now stuffed in the trunk and backseat of her old sedan. As it was, they were due for a very uncomfortable ride to the capitol. He seemed distressed at the thought.

“Isn’t one of your masters in engineering?” Anna challenged, noting to herself that it had likely proven less of a task to put that probe he was often on about into Jupiter’s orbit than it would to get ten additional pairs of ‘Jimmy Choos’ from Chinatown into her Honda Accord in its present mess.

“Alright,” he said, getting out from beneath the covers. “I’ll see what I can do.” He bowed with faux chivalry as she tossed the rest of his athletic wear to – and then at – him.

She then watched him as he dressed - slowly, deliberately, as he always did. As much as she loved him bare, there was something almost more intimate about seeing someone who always wore designer suits donning a pair of old sweats.

“Sexy,” Anna winked.

“Shut it,” he smiled. She knew he knew that she meant it when she saw him blush.

“I’m proud of you. You know that right?”

“Proud of me?” Edmund asked. “My dear, whatever for?”

Anna kissed him on the way to the bathroom to brush her teeth, wash her face, and gather the last of her toiletries for her husband-to-be to worry about fitting into her four-door sedan.

They would have forever, she smiled, but they would get things right long before.

“Part of me is actually looking forward to my mom yelling at the squad,” Anna said as she emerged, fresh-faced and a bit too eager to take on a decent opponent.
“I doubt it will make much of a difference,” Edmund shrugged. “Terryville is twelfth in the league to our third, which means Ronald coe will see it as an excuse to hold onto the ball too long regardless of what is being shouted at him – from pitch, bench or, as you say, side-lines.”

“You’ve never seen my mom when her side is losing,” Anna replied, ignoring the pun in hope of self-preservation.

“I have,” he countered. “My friends and I have somehow managed to best the DA and every other individual usually referred to acronymically all throughout the week. But I’ll not see it today. The only chance our opponents will have at scoring is if Rogers gets bored and steps out of the box. She has invited me over, by the way –dinner sometime this week,” he lifted up his mobile as evidence. “She has been rather … pleasant. Um. Almost.”

“She loves you,” Anna said as she scrolled. Edmund had written her to ask how many show boxes she planned to bring, advise her as to their travel plans and ask how she was. Her mother had asked Edmund if he was drunk or dyslexic by his fourth typo, but beyond commenting on his grammar and spelling had been cordial, and not just by her standards. Anna did not want to admit to herself how much it warmed her heart to read this short exchange, for she felt she might well tear up at how surprisingly supportive her mother had been of her choices as of late, and waterproof mascara was a blatant lie. Anna did not want to admit how awfully she had longed for the woman’s approval. “Trust me; if she didn’t adore you she would leave no room for question.”

“See? Sorted. The shoes shouldn’t be too much trouble either,” Edmund said.

“We are still playing Middle County in an hour. Mom will probably flip -”

“Relax. We’re not.”

“They changed the schedule.” Anna stressed, pulling the browser up on his phone. It was not that she wanted to give her husband-to-be an added grievance, rather that she wanted to prepare him for a battle that would show them no higher ground. Middle County was at the top of the table. They would likely finish there.

Bye-Week had just lost their only striker.

“They can’t possibly,” Edmund brushed off her concern, “I checked the by-laws. It is far too late for that.”

“Did you think to check the posted schedule?” Anna demanded, opening the website on his mobile device.

“Oh … when, when did that …” Edmund mumbled. “Give me a moment, I -”

He took his phone back from her, called the organizers as he - to Anna’s wonder – readied himself in the bathroom, fixing his hair, ridding his face of stubble, and putting in his contact lenses one-handed with a certain elegant ease as he stumbled through a basic telephone conversation. He reported a few minutes fancier that two games had been switched because a field had flooded in last night’s storm. As he said this, he suggested a few positional changes that they could use to make up for their present attacking deficiencies, looking to her for her opinion. She loved the value he placed in her words, but could only offer, “You’ll make a good manager, Edmund,” to this particular situation. She could already hear the petty arguments that would ensue in the gent’s locker room regardless of what was or was not done.

“Better than John Andre,” he sighed, “at any rate. At least there is that.”
Perhaps it was apprehension about the match or the doubts thoughts of her mother always brought forth. Perhaps it was that for all of her efforts to ensure that her friends were all right or would be, Anna had forgotten about her own emotional needs.

Perhaps it was simply that she had always been quick to anger, but when she heard the name John André she felt her hand squeeze itself into a fist.

“You should have let Simcoe kill him,” she told Edmund, “Friday. When you found out what he had done, what he seems to be in the process of doing and Simcoe was enraged right proper. You should have just let him do what we all know he does best and concerned yourself with the cover up.”

In the moment, she meant what and he could tell. Edmund shook his head. Anna just shook.

She looked at him, at all the scars he had acquired over the past few days, at those she’d yet to ask about and those she couldn’t see. Thanks to André and his misplaced priorities, she nearly lost him before she knew him. And what a loss it would have been.

Time itself, Anna realized, was not a trick thought it certainly enjoyed playing them on her. Anna had spent nearly three years gazing at Edmund from across her bar, at times with interest – sexual and otherwise. She wondered now why they barely spoke before the cruel twists of fate that André had engineered had given them cause.

“Do you think it would have made a difference, if we had gotten to know each other before …” Before what? Anna asked herself. She and Edmund were eternal but they had been strangers to a point, what difference could it have made it that point was shifted on whatever sort of graph her finance might otherwise use to create order out of the acts of existence?

He was still here. He was here and he was hers.

She still had to know.

“In which manner?” he asked.

“Do you think I could have stopped you, stopped -”

Edmund frowned as he crossed the room, clasping both of her hands together in his.

“Oh, Anna. Now, now. We – ah, the team, really everyone it seems that Andre has come in contact with as of late - we may well have fallen, but we will rise, together. Hear me. Your plan will work and we will rise. The only thing we need to ensure to assure that eventualty is that we all keep our heads level. He won’t win. They won’t win, whomever ‘they’ entail. For it seems I already have,” he spoke as his lips grazed her own. “In two weeks, I’ll have the honour of calling you my wife. And if everything I’ve been though, everything I’ve survived lead to that end. I, I might well be a better man for it.” Anna nodded, feeling her eyes flood.

His heart had not assumed in hardship the doubt and disillusionment he expressed.

He was here. He was hers. And he was right.

They could all rise to task. Black and base as she knew herself to be at times, Anna believed him when with wide eyes when he spoke of the strength of the human spirit. When he spoke of love.

“It is your plan too, Edmund,” she said. “And I’ll have the honour of calling you my husband. I love you. I love you so much. Sometimes I think I always have.”
“Ah, Anna. It’s mutual,” Edmund wiped her cheek and after a moment, smiled cheekily as he stated, “I do fear that we will need to find another magistrate to initiate our ceremony, however.”

Anna wondered how her fiancé had ever come to the conclusion that he lacked anything by means of socialization as she realized that he, without a second of judgement, was able to offer her comfort and calm. He allowed her her anger and acknowledged its validity without feeding it. It was the sort of acceptance she was unable to extend to herself; Anna would often spend weeks fretting over a misdirected outburst, letting worry find her in moments that might otherwise have been serene, demanding to know how she could have lost her temper with such little forewarning. How she dared. There was a hypocrisy to it, and Anna hated that although she told her friends they needn’t ever apologise for allowing a bit honesty to escape their constructed façades, she never felt as though the same standard applied to her. Perhaps it was her proximity to prominence in which she had been raised, perhaps, she thought as she gazed at Edmund, that was what allowed him to so easily accept the full range of who she was – what she wished she was not as well as what she tried to project.

He smiled and her tears turned to laughter. He smiled and the world made sense.

“I’m sure in Albany that will be no great issue, finding a magistrate, that is,” Anna replied, having let a few minutes lapse to gather herself. It had been a long, difficult week on both of them. Edmund likely needed to hold her just as badly as she needed to be held, to be the hero who let her embrace the spectrum of her own humanity. “Thank you for standing up for me last night, by the way,” she added, unable to find the words for all she wished to say.

Edmund shook his head a bit, looking upon her with complete adoration. Anna realized that he did not merely accept her flaws, but rather he loved her fury and frustration. He loved her for all that she was, all that she may ever be. He looked at her and saw no reason for shame.

He defended her. He let her be strong in her own right.

Judge Richard Woodhull had made a few choice remarks when he saw the couple repacking Tuesday’s boxes into the back of her car. After Edmund told him in no uncertain terms that he was never to speak to his wife in such a tone, Anna casually remarked that she was headed up to the court of appeals to litigate a class action. It was the nearest she had ever come to causing death. And Edmund was proud of her.

“You did a well enough job on your own,” he said.

“Because I had you beside me.”

Smiling, she shook her head, ending the resolve of a few loose stands of hair to remain in position. He blew a wisp that had fallen into her face away, lips puckered in such a way as to suggest a distant kiss. Anna pulled him tighter and spoke a secret over his shoulder, “I never wanted to be a lawyer exactly, but I am so looking forward to arguing in front of his bench,” she confessed. “With Scalia’s seat vacant and Woodhull believing that this could prove his second chance at a congressional hearing, he will have to appear objective. And it will kill him. And I will smile as I watch.”

“As you win,” Edmund corrected “I - I wish I could be there.”

“Then put in for leave on Monday.”

“So soon? I’m only just starting the job.”
“Six weeks of argument, it is what Jordan told me to expect. Your HR department should be understanding if you give them enough notice.”

“Akinbode means to actually litigate for six weeks? Really going for that promotion, huh?”

“You two still haven’t spoken?” Anna swallowed. She wondered briefly how much of the break-up he would bring into work with him. Jordan had not mentioned Abigail once since last she saw him in person at John’s flat a few evenings before. He had not mentioned Edmund, Charles, or any of the multiple Johns who had attempted to cheer him up afterward, either. Caleb had not heard from him. And he barely talked to her. He did not just break up with Abigail. He broke up with everyone.

“There isn’t much to say,” Edmund shrugged. It had been a long week.

Anna still had no idea what had been said between the half of the team that had driven out to Jersey to cause her college buddy to slam the door on them as well. She hoped they were not all in some sort of dispute. Given what she assumed had been André’s latest write up, it was conceivable.

If they had been playing Terryville as planned, there probably would have been time to discuss it before – and during – today’s match. If they were still guaranteed the easy victory, Anna thought, there might have been more that she could have done to help her teammates and her cause.

She could still help Jordan, she told herself. She could still do that.

“Well, things will be different by the time Jordan and I get back to Setauket,” Anna said, hoping to assure them both. “Until then you’ll keep an eye on my team, won’t you?”

“As of around one o’clock yesterday they became my team in a semi-official sense. I have little choice,” Edmund answered. “If you’re asking if I will still play without you here to kick my arse-”

“No. That I can do over Skype,” Anna smiled. “I mean my kids. My youth team.”

Edmund took a step back, grimacing.

“That’s … ah, Anna. I know it futile to continue to argue against one trained in the craft, but honestly, Love, I see this as only another opportunity for disaster. Why won’t you just appoint me coach?”

He had a valid point. Anna too had some reservations about leaving a bunch of eleven and twelve year olds to the care of John Graves Simcoe. She would not have had as many if John could be bothered to answer his phone, but as careful as Edmund was to use his as little as possible so not to disrupt the algorithm buying and trading stocks which they had set up, the new coach seemed deaf to all other matters of importance.

“Because, Honey, you don’t even want to manage a group of your closest friends,” she stuck out her tongue. “Anyway, John has some prior experience. He is good with kids -”


“More importantly,” she said, “it will give him an excuse to hang out around the crime scene without harming Abe or Mary Woodhull. Plus, Pip’s father works for the FBI, Thea’s for the NYPD, so if either of them ever get pulled from a game or practice without notice we will know if the police have anything to actually give us concern … without having to trick my mother again. There is no way we’d be able to pull off Friday twice,” she paused. “If I put you in charge, both kids stop playing altogether given the current state of the investigation. It is not you they are
ultimately after and not you we need to have a way of tracking police interest in. Plus, it might be
good for John, you know?” she cringed slightly, “Something to take his mind off, well –
everything.”

Edmund quietly considered her assertion, brows knitted as his lips tucked themselves into one
another. After a moment of tension, face relaxed, he nodded his agreement and adoration. “You are
brilliant. Anna, you’re absolutely brilliant. I -”

“I’ve been thinking on it though, there is another way we can use this arrangement. My kids need
new uniforms, and we obviously need to find Arnold before anyone else does. You and John and
Mary can organize a fundraiser, something door to door.” According to the maths the stock broker
had worked out with the physicist, the latter of whom had in turn taken great pains to explain to her
after all tears had been shed on Friday night, their victim must still be in Setauket. By the time that
Mary and John said the accident had actually taken place, state and local police had already set up
checkpoints near most highway ramps. Someone, it therefore stood to reason, was hiding Arnold in
this backwater, someone with as much if not more to lose then their lot.

They could negotiate his release, Edmund had claimed. They could speak to Arnold, find out
everything they were missing from the study that he would have access too because of the senate
committee he chaired, and then use its very existence to blackmail their way into an agreement
involving all charges against their friends being dropped. Edmund had told her that he had
managed to convince John over whiskey that he meant to kill Arnold upon discovering his hideout
- a lie he invented primarily to keep his sometimes-friend from killing their other shared enemy in
cold blood, which, Anna still maintained in her heart of hearts, he ought to have condoned. They
had gotten good in hiding corpses and misleading police forces, after all.

But Edmund’s vengeance was civil, constructive, even chivalrous. André would be buried, his
career ended, regardless if details of his unethical case study were released or not. Of more
importance was that no one else would be hurt – be twisted into a modern embodiment of evil in
hopes of better fighting its equivalent in foreign lands. The cause itself was just, but for her
husband-to-be, it seemed at time to just be about saving one man from himself.

“Abraham expects that I have some hand in this whole messy business,” Edmund said, “He, too,
will follow at a distance door-to-door, both of us - all of us. Perhaps it is for the better he believes
Mary to be having an affair.”

“She’s not?” Anna asked, perplexed.

“She’s not … sure?” Edmund offered with equal sentiment. “The point is,” he continued, “He’ll
confront me. Abraham. If he sees anything I miss, which I am but certain he will, he will call me
on it.”

Anna shook her head. If Abe, if the boy she had grown up with and once loved knew what had
really happened, he would stop at nothing to aid in her plot. Anna hated that his marriage was such
that his wife was afraid to speak to him over what seemed any matter not involving their shared
son. Abe deserved better. They both did.

But Mary, for all of her problems, was not being lead on or lied to.

Anna saw nothing good coming from the alibi John and Mary insisted on perpetuating. She saw
nothing good in allowing one of her oldest friends to think that the man she was marrying, a man
who lived under the same roof as his father, wife and son was so much as capable of considering
such an act against the laws of man and God as murder. They would get on, she thought, if they
were forced to know each other, Abe and Edmund would get on.
“We should tell him.”

“We can’t. Anna, he is too rash, too volatile, and with what is going on -Mary and Simcoe, ah, it is simply not our business to directly make it his.”

“You asked me a few nights ago what I would do if it were my friends. Abe and I aren’t on the terms we once were, something I am as much to blame for as he is, but I can’t let him get hurt in this. I can’t. You of all people must understand.”

“I won’t let anything happen,” Edmund tried to assure her. “Please if you trust me on nothing else, trust me on that.”

“I don’t want to risk that you put yourself into a situation where he could hurt you, either.”

“Right now he is more concerned that his wife is sleeping with my mate and hurt that one of his closest friends kept something from him, which, in truth he had no reason or right to know. He may think me a murderer, but at present, his mind is elsewhere. If I can handle Simcoe, I can handle Abraham. I’ll be fine, darling.”

“But Abe won’t.”

“I’ll make sure that he will.”

“How?” she demanded.

“By doing exactly what I am doing now. By making certain that he stays as far away from Simcoe as I can keep him,” Edmund sighed. “For a month. That is all I need.”

“Can’t you try … try befriending him? Maybe?” she asked, certain they would get along if they took five minutes to get to know one another. Certain that her own life would be simpler if they did. “You really have a lot in common; you just fail to see it. He is smart. Abe is so, so smart. He has lead the same sort of life that you have if you stop to think about it for even a moment .”

“Anna we are never going to get on, he and I. We needn’t, the same as you and Wakefield will never be friends. There is nothing wrong with that.”

“Because Wakefield, rude as he is, doesn’t actively think that I am a killer and I’m not participating in a lie to make him think, among other things, that his wife is having an affair. You see the difference?”

“It is only a month at most, Anna. Then Abe and I can go back to the casual dislike we had before.”

“And you plan on using him in the meantime?”

Edmund did not answer. She would need to change tactic.

“I have an idea,” Anna said after taking a deep breath. “As long as we are in the practice of employing members of this household without their knowledge or consent, we could use more eyes to search without knowing what they are searching for. If we got Aberdeen involved -”

“Anna, she is a child,” Edmund interrupted. So he still knew his morals when they matched his interests, she thought darkly.

“I’m sending the kids I coach door to door with Simcoe to look for traces, Aberdeen is a smart girl,
she will be fine. We will start … trying to get public support going for a campaign to monitor police, make them where body cameras, something both my mother and of Aberdeen’s Black Live’s Matter allies want.”

He nodded.

“Abe will be looking for traces that could connect me to Arnold. How will she know what to look for? We can’t tell her. We can’t.”

“You are right. But. If she sees anything at all, she will tell you because she enjoys gossip. Maybe she can convince some of her friends to go with her, maybe Abby will write about it,” Anna expanded aloud. “We can get Mary to use her job to figure out what charitable causes have the best chances at opening doors and she can get some of her interns together and try to raise funds for UNICEF. You and John can use statistics to figure out which tactic works the best on each block. If we come across anything suspect, we will keep hitting the same street with different spies. It is an election year. People are used to this. We can all check each other while Tallmadge fights with Burr to get a single search warrant. And important causes will get attention,” she added. “In the end, everyone wins. Except maybe the police. But I can’t pretend that I don’t think Tallmadge deserves it on some level, given what he did to Sarah Livingston and all.”

Edmund rubbed his temples, searching his mind for recollection. He had not lived in America at the time, Anna remembered, and even if he had, he was not the best with names.

“You are the greatest tactician I have ever known,” he said when it seemed he would arrive at nothing else. “This plan. I’ll see it done.”

“You aren’t half bad yourself. At least,” she chided jocosely, “You are the most manipulative son of a bitch I’ve ever met, anyway, and I grew up around lawyers, judges, and politicians of all stripes.”

“Oh, is that so?”

“In fact it is, Mr. Hewlett.”

“Well, I would argue that you forced me against my will out of bed this morning, and being that I am quite nearly the most stubborn person I know, I would say that we are on par, Mrs. Hewlett.”

“We are fated,” she smiled.

“We are. Ah, Anna – I am going to miss you so very much,” he paused. Looking at his bag, he added, “We all will.”

“Not to overstep -”

“You couldn’t,” Edmund interrupted.

“Okay. As long as I am giving my opinion on everything and everyone, you could easily play Tate in my position and use Appleby as a forward and then I wouldn’t be missed at all.”

Edmund shook his head, telling her that Appleby was solid in the centre, but unless he was playing next to someone as creative as Simcoe he was ineffective. Tate was inconsistent. He wished he knew more Americans to fill the offensive roster while she and Akinbode were off in Albany.

“It could be easy,” Anna said, “You could try, I don’t know, just try being nice to Abe for a change. He is fast if nothing else.”
“And stick him on a battlefield with Simcoe?” Edmund snorted. “He wouldn’t stand a chance. Bloody hell, the season would end there. John would be benched as a result of his behaviour for several matches at least and we rather need him for as long as we can keep him if we want to finish near if not at the top of the table. Which,” he rolled his eyes, “means nothing, admittedly, as there is nothing to be won with the league -”

“When you put it that way, I really am worried about leaving my youth team in his hands.”

Edmund laughed. “Don’t let my concerns become yours; it is only for a month. How much damage can he do?”

“In a month I don’t know, but in six weeks he’ll have his own Simkid Army,” Anna smiled.

“By next year, we’ll be forwarding a YouTube video entitled ‘John Graves and the Simvisible Children’ to everyone we know.”

“You shouldn’t joke like that. My pun was bad, yours crosses a line.”

“You started it. You gave him the team in the first place.”

“For tactical reasons. Your just making sport of it,” she stuck out her tongue again. This time he grabbed it with his.

“Its football. I have high hopes of it one day receiving official ‘sport’ status in this beautiful country of yours. Maybe it is for the best that you brought on an Englishman to serve in your absence. Simcoe is excited about it, and for what it is worth, I don’t think it the worst idea. Tactical advantage aside, it serves as incentive for him keep in line. For a month.”

“Six weeks,” Anna frowned. If five days had seemed an aeon, what would a month and a half feel like? He would visit, of course, whenever he could, and they would Skype every evening. But time was real and time was illusionary and time was often cruel. Anna wished she had given into her demons. That she had spent the morning with Edmund’s expert lips between her thighs, hiding from the time she loathed to see passed. But he needed normal as much as any of their other allies in this fight. And they were eternal. Time would pass and she would return and Anna planned to make the most of the meantime. “It will be six weeks at least,” she reminded him, wondering how long he thought a ‘month’ to be. “I know; I hate it too. Jordan plans on dragging this out as long as he can before we negotiate a settlement, and Adams is keen to let him – unrelenting as she is.”

“I know, I, ah, I meant with the whole Sim-coach situation you’ve laden these poor children with.”

“Excuse me, Sim-coach? Fuck. You need to stop, because if you don’t then I will start doing it, and I am going to see the bloke in half an hour by which point I am sure I will embarrass myself with something akin to ‘Lovey weather, isn’t it? A bit sim-cold but the sun-coe is shining. ’”

“I didn’t know you were that in-coe-rrigible.”

“I hate you!” Anna laughed. “Stop!”

“It seems I must,” he said humorously. She raised an eyebrow. “Anna, um. About John. The thing is … he is standing for promotion. Mentioned it earlier in the week but with everything else, we didn’t have a chance to properly discuss it until yesterday at the ‘lesser pub’ you suggested,” Edmund spoke quickly, detached. “He has to fly back to London in April. Already has his ticket. It is ironic. He put in for it back in December, not thinking it possible that he would get a transfer back to the City at all. With his hedge fund preforming as well as it is at the moment and with everyone of any significance trying to transfer things into his management after my brother did so
with his unborn son’s trust, Simcoe is all but assured a spot - either there or in Asia,” he paused. “It’s ironic he - he put in for it after I told him that I was leaving, and is now essentially getting it because of the information Aberdeen and I gathered from Lafayette. And now I am staying indefinitely, in part because of everything he did to make sure I survived my ordeal. Life just works out like that, I suppose.”

It explained enough of why John had failed to ring Mary, of Edmund’s attitude upon returning to Whitehall the pervious afternoon, enough of his subtle yet contagious melancholia.

Anna once again felt her suppressed rage try to surface, thinking that had John simply given his departure as grounds for his curious behaviour, he could have speared her fiancé the knowledge of his role in Arnold’s disappearance. They could have had more time together.

But she and Edmund would not have gotten to one another half as well from quizzes found in the back of women’s glossies.

For all of the problems they now faced, Anna thought, she would not trade them for the pain of her past doubt.

“He is really leaving?” she asked. “Was he going to say anything? Were you?”

“It would be too risky. If he makes a big show of it, Tallmadge could move to block his passport as he did mine. Anything that happens afterwards almost doesn’t matter – Great Britain won’t deport to countries with capital punishment and he – and my family which he has considerable ties to – are simply too valuable at present to the economy for my government to pursue charges. I told him to go. I can take care of things here.”

“Does he want to stay?”

“I don’t know if he knows himself. He told me that when he thinks of the island, he thinks about a rather hideous medieval mural that takes up most of the dinning area in the palace I once stood to inherit. How a whitewash would be such an improvement, how UNESCO kept us all stagnant. How stuck in time past Europe has become because of foreign tourists. I’ll give him that he is right, it is a rather hideous piece that plays meanly with the general ambiance.”

“What does - what does that even mean?”

“I think he sees his future in America, not because he has any great love of the land or its customs, not because I am here and mean to stay, but because he is always looking for a fight. That is the problem. Part of the problem. That’s is why I told him he has to go, take chances as long as they’re still on offer. He might not get another.”

Edmund continued to speak without inflection, as if their story was already over, as if it belonged to centuries past. Time was a fallacy. Time was a fact. Anna was not certain which half of this duality was more damning.

“You are going to miss him aren’t you?”

“It is for the best,” Edmund answered. “No. I don’t know that. I don’t know if I even think that. It is simply the order of things. He’ll miss me. I think. No matter, after we finished sorting his larger problem, he pestered me until I named him my best man. So that is one last hurrah for us. I am sure he is only doing this because he has something cruel in mind for a stag that will doubtlessly involve a kidnapping-cum-assassination attempt … for the sake of old time if nothing more,” he swallowed. “Yea. I’ll miss the wanker. Around ten percent of the time. The other ninety I’ll be
“glad to be rid of him.”

“No you won’t.”

“No, I won’t,” he agreed. “But time is linear and life orders itself in a forward direction. There is little to be done for it.”

“Is that what you were doing, the whole time you were gone?”

“No. There was something else we needed to take care of. Something I was right not to trust him to handle on his own. But it is sorted. Either he will tell you today before the match, it will be apparent on its own, or he or I or anyone else for that matter will let you know sometime early next week. It is of a medical nature, you see, and he … well, he kept my secrets.”

“Jesus. Is he going to be okay?”

“I mean that is … relative? To be honest I’m still not quite certain how you seek to define that in terms of Simcoe.”

Anna thought about it. Without arriving on a means of clarifying her question or its intent, she said, “You know, I think. I think you are wrong. I think you have been wrong for many, many years. I think John is so much better off for having had you in his life.”

“I,” Edmund started, unsure of himself or her assessment, “I, ah, I did my best. With everything, I did my best.” He gave a weak smile. Goodbyes, Anna thought, were always more bitter than sweet.

“You had a little ‘broment’, yesterday, didn’t you?” she teased as she turned, grabbing her sport bag and making her way to the door.

“No Anna, that would be ridiculous. We had a ‘coement’.”

“I hate you. The puns! They needs to stop,” she said without weight.

“They will.”

Anna hated the certainty she heard. The only thing, she said, that was assured was the moment they were in. That, and their love, and the fact that they were about lose to Middle County FC.

“I’m sure you are right,” Edmund said.

She wasn’t, as time would soon tell.

Bye-Week would win their match three to one. It was everything else that would be lost in ninety minutes plus overtime.

Chapter End Notes
… what a terrible plot twist, huh? Don’t worry, nothing exactly works out according to plan as you, oh dear reader, have well come to expect. Puns will continue to play a role; Hewlett and Simcoe are by no means the only ones who substitute them for wit.

So where is Simcoe? Where is André? What happened to Abe? And for that matter, now that we’ve brought the narrative through Saturday night, how oh how did Caleb’s fake-date with Ben go?

Oh, have I a lot to tell you. And I am really looking forward to it.

But first, it seems I am off again, this time to Poland. And upon return my diary looks full for the rest of the summer. But when I come back – if you can believe it – there is another (two year!) fic anniversary for another writer brilliant beyond compare that we will celebrate with a scene* she encouraged me to write. No spoilers. Yes spoilers. It is a rather drawn out, disturbing bit about male masturbation. I have the best internet based friends and I mean that with my whole heart.

*CalamityBean suggested in a comment on (yet another!) fic I wrote around Simcoe and Hewlett that Simcoe ought really to have his own child army. I can’t remember the exact context but I am thrilled that I finally got to employ it … in a timely fashion, it seems. So thanks!

And thanks to everyone who takes the time to comment - it really makes my day and sometimes serves my inspiration.

Anyway, as always thank you so much for reading and I hope the last days of your summer are wonderful and well-spent.

XOXO- Tav

Up Next: Abe has an eventful morning, Ben *seriously* should have thought more of this through, Simcoe has some weirdly sexual pre-game rituals, André stuck around a bit too long - but at what point am I going to decide that I’ve reached a good cut off? The real cliff-hanger, I know. Cheers.
The Mess

Chapter Summary

John André faces the consequences of his actions, Robert Rogers attempts to profit from the same chaos, and Philomena Cheer helps bring about her husband’s ruin by attempting to avert it.

Chapter Notes

Tuesday I said, and Tuesday I had *every* intention of, but it is past midnight in Koblenz and I am way past tired. I will come back and do the whole notes thing tomorrow night, but for now –

There are probably trigger warnings for this chapter. I know what I am about, you probably do as well, and here you’ll find nothing worse than that you have already been exposed to in this tome.

Happy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the small hours of Monday on the seventh of March, Robert Rogers seemed as though he had again spent the night in the company of Samuel Tallmadge, who, ten years prior, had been transubstantiated by a roadside accident into a bottle of single malt. John André longed for the Scot’s long-time drinking buddy, for the liquid that seemed set on his manifestation. Liquor had a habit of always being preferable to those present, regardless of whose memory it may conjure.

Plastered, André had seen Peggy in its daze. He had seen a future with her. He had seen the girl his wife had once been and had felt like the boy he faintly remembered himself as once being. But now he had been dry for nearly a day and his hopes were fittingly parched.

André shook though he sweat, his head pounding with the pollutants that wine would otherwise have prevented. He envied Rogers who could continue to rely on an ability to moderate his substance abuse. He envied the illicit that helped him laugh through the lies he told. Presently, the Scot was in the process of explaining to Philomena with something resembling pride that he needed to keep his truck in at hers for a few weeks, providing the excuse that the tags were expired and, in its current condition, it would fail to pass state inspection. He pointed, smiling at a sticker André assumed he had stolen from one of his tenants. His wife nodded a bit unsure, too tense to be tired at an hour that would otherwise inspire exhaustion. She asked Rogers through a forced yawn why he could not keep it in his own garage, given that he had a lift and the sort of tools that might prove useful to his predicament. Robert responded that he lacked the parts, turned to André and added that he did not have the *spare cash* to fund the expenditure or the necessary workspace given that Hewlett had ruined the transmission of his imported Jaguar. But one problem solved another, he said, slapping the back of his pick-up hard enough that he had to shake the sting from his hand. When he finished gouging his compatriot for the repairs he had begged him to make, he would be able to afford to fix up his own vehicle to Uncle Sam’s liking.
André guessed it would take Rogers the length of the Arnold Investigation to work on Hewlett’s car, if in fact it was parked in his garage as he claimed. Robert seemed rather satisfied with the story he had concocted, which, André reasoned, he had every right to be. His wife knew little about automobiles, and even he did not understand enough about their inner workings to question the details Rogers provided about Hewlett’s. The white work truck that had killed a boy a decade before would stay out of sight of the Special Crimes team his younger brother now lead so long as DI Ben Tallmadge continued to limit the scope of his search to Setauket.

John André did not mention that he was a target of the same investigation. He did not say anything. It was their turn to lose.

It served them right.

Philomena had embraced Rogers as though she had been expecting him when he had shown up a half hour before. It was too affectionate for his liking. It was an act. With Mena, he thought, it was always (and had always been) nothing but a bloody act.

André like to imagine at times that the affection in which they had once held each other had been in earnest - at least on his end - but in the new light of the past few nights, he hoped this was a lie he had half-convinced himself of to serve his conscious. She had not removed her stage make-up before returning to ‘her’ penthouse that had once been ‘his’, that had once been ‘theirs’ until it had become the set on which they entertained their whims in the form of varied lovers. André could not recall the names of any of his own casual liaisons, though those of his wife had engaged in over the course of their marriage had been scarred by her screams into the folds of his absent mind. He imagined her screaming Rogers’ given name, he imagined the Scot the reason she continued to wear the face of the twenty-something she played on Broadway hours after the final curtain-fall. Even in the dim light of the park house, André could see the otherwise fine lines of her face magnified by the powder that had settled into them after four hours of singing about the traditions of religious minorities in Imperial Russia. Up close, she still looked forty. She still looked spent. Yet he was still in love with who he had assumed she was when back when she had looked more like Peggy Shippen.

No.

He had been in love with the character she had created for immigration officials and chosen to play for him on occasion.

But Peggy? Peggy was real. By comparison, even his text-based affair with Arnold had been.

Philomena twisted a strand of her bleach-blonde hair between two fingers, laughing as Rogers recalled something of little significance. He smiled back as though he really expected to exchange STIs with her when he finished loading the luggage in the boot of her Lincoln. It was this face, André thought. The one he had spent a decade trying to put to paper and an evening trying to capture in his new lover. It was the look Peggy had offered him without attaching malice, the one given she had given to convey affection rather than conceal scorn. He had not seen it on Philomena in years. But then, maybe, that was only because he had been standing too close, waiting in the wings while she took centre stage.

She had come home on Saturday night after playing Tzeitel for the sixth time that week to find that the sketch of her younger self, which had kept in the bedroom closet for a decade, was now framed and finished with the more refined features of the former governor’s daughter. By the time John had returned with Peggy from the underground concert they had been forced by propriety to leave before the opening act, it had found its way into the porcelain bathtub along with much of his clothing, the entire contents of his liquor cabinet and a lit match.
Philomena Cheer evidently preformed even when she had no audience. She preformed even when she could expect no applause. Peggy had been moved to tears by her ‘jilted woman’ act and ran at the word ‘married’ which his wife used as though it held any meaning when applied to them. André had tried to follow the Philadelphian out into the street but had forgotten how quick tourist were at hailing cabs. As a New Yorker with an Uber App, he himself was shamefully out of practice. Alone, he had not wanted to risk following her back to her hotel, to Abigail’s rented townhouse, to Whitehall, to the airport.

And so he waited. He waited in ashes of the life he had fought for with the literal form they took. He waited for the police to take him in his own fortress rather than risk exposing Peggy wherever it was that she sought solitude.

What would you have told her? Philomena questioned later, when Saturday night had transformed into Sunday morning though the streets remained black and bare, the world completely still - save for the hands on his watch that remained in rotation. That you married me for a Green Card? That you refuse to grant me a divorce?

She had made her point.

He signed the papers.

Still, she did not smile and neither did he.

I love her, he said.

You met her six days ago, she insisted. You love the version of her you created for a catfishing scheme you began to engage in … around the same time you decided to kill one of your patients. Was that to convince the government to keep funding your research should pharma pull? Oh, but it isn’t your research anymore, now is it, John André? John André, she had repeated, trying to sound ironic though she lacked the intellect for such a fete, in love.

He did not reply. There was nothing to say. ‘Love’ held no meaning for Philomena, no more, he reasoned, than ‘marriage’ did. He wondered if he was to blame. He would be happy, he thought, if he were about to divorce himself not only from this woman, but from the ideals he would always associate with the way she once looked at him. He did not love Peggy. He loved the memory of a character Philomena used to play. He loved his wife.

He hated the moments that existed only to remind him of that.

John André looked at the no-fault divorce agreement, at his signature and Philomena’s, at the other names printed on the thirty page document. Anna Strong was listed as her lawyer, a man whose number he had long had but had never dialled as his. There was some irony to it, he thought. Anna had probably copied her own papers, changing dates and names as a means of thanking Philomena for hosting an ‘INS-gagement’ party for Edmund and herself. He wondered if either woman had any feeling about this, if either had any feeling at all. He wondered how long the young couple would be able to pretend that they loved each other and what exactly it was that they pretended existed in one another that allowed such an illusion to manifest.

André wished he could name what it was about the woman he had come to loathe that reminded him of the wife he had once loved. He wondered if it was better said that both love and hate were fallacies born of human failing – that the only thing true in life was fear.

He studied his signature in the documents he held, wondering at how hard it had been to affix. He thought of the ease in which he had signed countless receipts for prescription refills, of the deals he
had made with pharmaceutical representatives that had proven his downfall. He looked at
Philomena, or rather, at the woman who wore her aging skin and recalled something a former
patient had once told him in relation to one of the many paradoxes of human interaction neither
could defeat with reason.

‘Pardon - love him? Do I love him? How can you even ask? He is everything to me and I have the
feeling that I am far more to him. What he does not understand, and I’ll add - what you don’t seem
to, is that if we were together – ah, that is to say, in any sort of romantic understanding - we would
be reduced to just that. Together. Of course I love him. Far too much, at that, to risk countering
‘together’ with ‘apart.’ And ... among a multitude of realities not entirely of my choosing, he hates
me for it. And to be perfectly honest I hate myself, and John, though I confess, I love the mess we
keep fining ourselves in.’

Months ago, André had not known how to respond. Maybe the fool had been right on some level.
Maybe that was all there was to it.

Love was a play that had been poorly cast.

Philomena was meant to be in his centre stage, and perhaps if she had never played the role of his
wife he would still be able to love her for who she was rather than hate her for who she was not.

Maybe he was simply too close for the illusion to sustain. Maybe it had for this long only because
he had found a number of understudies to preform when she refused him.

Philomena spoke as though Peggy was the reason their curtain was closing.

Peggy, and the women who had come before her, André stated, were the reason he had stayed long
past intermission. The reason he could almost believe her when she said ‘I love you’ now. ‘And I?’
André had told her in words he had heard in a previous act, ‘I love the mess we keep fining
ourselves in.’

‘I don’t,’ Philomena had answered. This too, he thought, was only an act. Only this time there
would be no encore.

“Ye shoods hae come, John,” Rogers said as he opened the passenger side door. André attempted
to take a seat but he pushed him back. “Haw dae ye hink I’m gettin’ haem?”

“After,” Philomena said. This was the first thing that had made sense since he arrived downtown,
though, to be fair to his company, he had no great expectation of logic at four o’clock in the
morning from anyone. “I may need your help,” she said briskly, glaring at her husband to get into
the back seat. “It is what we agreed to.”

“I am admitting myself voluntarily,” John offered. Philomena started car, letting the engine growl
for her. She was probably trying to save her voice for her next performance, that, or it had long
since been spent yelling at the man whose legs Rogers was in the process of shortening by forcing
his seat back as far as it would go. He watched his friend and former tenant as she attempted to
drown out her husband with smooth jazz, but decided almost instantly that the sounds of a tenor
saxophone interfered with her ability to put her luxury sedan in reverse and returned the radio to its
regular decibel. When she noticed his eyes, she met them with a glare. Regretting that the door to
DeJong’s had been barricaded by a police line and that he would not – for related reasons – be able
to invite her into to his home for the drink she clearly needed after they had driven John to the rehabilitation facility, he reverted his attention to the back seat and repeated, “Ye shoods hae come.”

“Where, pray tell?” André asked without interest.

“Th’ match yesterday.”

André sighed, putting on airs of exasperation. He left the accusation otherwise unanswered until the song ended where the day’s weather prognosis began before inquiring, “How bad?”

“Three – One, for us,” Rogers answered gruffly. He then grinned slightly, seeing a reflection in the rear-view mirror of John’s brow folding over itself in a fit. He wondered if he had put money on it, if he had accrued another debt by betting against his own side, or if he simply took offence at the idea that the team he had founded had found some measure of success without him.

“I wasn’t needed, clearly,” he said.

“Ah, yer were. Someain ooght tae hae bin thaur tae balance it yer boys.”

“John isn’t exactly good at ‘balancing’ anyone these days,” Philomena chimed in, “And Sim-coe and Hew-lett are-‘nt-…”

“They are not my boys,” André interrupted her rhyme. Returning to Rogers, he continued, “You won. Where is the problem?”

At this, Robert Rogers laughed, kneeling the dashboard and hugging his chest as he did. “We didn’t win. Uir esteemed keipin is it fur th’ rest ay th’ season, tois ay uir best players quit an’ we hae nae hiner ay replacement, havin’ lost Woodhull tae injury.”

“Woodhull?” he asked.

“Aye. Ye shoods hae come. If ye was aboots, ye shoods hae come. An’ principle.”

After a moment had passed, André said almost solemnly, “I wouldn’t have been welcome.”

It was a fact Rogers could not have disputed even if it had been within the scope of his interests to try.

“Aye, but at isn’ th’ point noo is it? Hud ye bin thaur tae play in th’ center we coods hae played Strong as a forward, nae hud tae use Simcoe as a false nine an avoided half ay th’ problems’at created. We coods hae finished it wi’ a clean sheit, withit anyain gonnae hospital ur jail. But nae. Auld John was thrang.”

“What processed you all to nominate Hewlett to manager?” he snorted in response, assigning blame where Rogers did not see personally see it, at least not for the reasons André seemed to allude to. If he had a problem with the appointment, it was likely that Hewlett had played a prominent role in seeing that the pub (which, he noted to himself, the former doctor no longer had any business frequenting) had closed its doors. Rogers assumed outside of Abe Woodhull’s unhelpful input that the reality of this had more to do with a match than an attempted murder. Edmund Hewlett had, as Rogers inferred from a place of reason, failed to graduate and failed to die, much to the annoyance of his noble family who had sent him across the ocean without a guard, presumably to make the latter the more likely outcome of his experiences abroad. Now the once-heir-presumptive planned to marry a patriot princess, whose pedigree would be far less impressive in the eyes of the British public were Anna working behind a bar rather than as a barrister.
Having grown up within the Hewletts physical spear of political influence, Rogers might have imagined the family had arranged the whole affair from afar – the engagement to the DA’s daughter, the disappearance of the senator and the subsequent new role she was bound to fill in New York society as a direct result of a DeJong’s Tavern shutting its doors for the foreseeable future. The family had a reputation of being remorselessly calculating, but in light of recent events, it seemed a risky bet, even if it was one designed on diversion. André mentioned Simcoe offhand, and Rogers remembered a story the ginger liked to tell about a horse, knowing only the half of it. But the facts remained. Edmund Hewlett was no leader, and ever before tying himself to an American, Catholic, divorcée, there were now enough protections in place from his elder sister’s better efforts to spare Scotland from any real threat of his inheritance. Edmund’s choice of a bride had made his ascendency it all but impossible on its own. Unless.

Rogers thought again of the horse Hewlett had shot through its skull and of all of the whispers that were buried along with the beast fifteen years ago, half-wondering who he might begin to blackmail when it seem so many bets were being placed by many with so much more to lose.

John André pulled him back from the scheme he was starting to concoct by again phrasing the question Rogers had not entirely considered.

“Made heem coach? He looks th’ best in a suit. Fairly sure ‘at is hoo these things ur decided in th’ Prem an aw,” he said of the appointment. It was, after all, the excuse that had unanimously been agreed upon, if only in order to save everyone on the team the embarrassment of admitting they were all a little afraid of Simcoe and thought it better to let Hewlett ‘sort him’ (as he long claimed himself capable of) rather than risk confrontation with the captain directly.

“Hospital and jail … You certainly got the leadership you voted for,” André responded, again trying to feign boredom with the world he was leaving behind.

“Hewlett wasn’t th’ problem. They changed th’ fixtures in th’ wee morn hoors an’ we played Middle Coonty withit a proper striker.”

“Akinbode was a no-show? Hm. And yet you say ‘my boys’ are the problem,” he murmured.

“Yoo ur th’ problem, John. Jordan ended things wi’ his burd coz ye apparently slept wi’ ‘er. Is wa he did nae come.”

“Oh, Abigail too?” Philomena smiled through a series of words that seemed to taste sour on her lips.

“Mena, Ah didne pure techt anythin’ wi’ ‘at,” he tried to apologise.

Philomena Cheer’s fingers tightened around the steering wheel until they turned white and Rogers wondered if he ought to at least offer to drive.

“Were getting a divorce,” she said. She had been seeking one for years. Rogers wondered what, or who, had broken André’s resolve to refuse. He wondered if that was why she had been crying when she had called him, if the two had spent the weekend saying goodbye. If after all of this time, farewell somehow felt too soon. He thought about inviting her back to his place – Arnold or not-for drinks or drugs or some combination of the two that might help her ignore her newfound sorrows. He hoped they would pass because there was nothing he otherwise could do.

“I’ll flin’ ye a ceilidh when ye gie it,” he said to André. “Won’t be much ay a party, nae fur ye. Nae
fur us. Yoo’ve nae personality when yer sober, John. but 'at is somethin’ tae celebrate. A breakup. Apparently th’ kids dae it at Walmart these days.”

“You can throw me a party instead,” Philomena said.

“Aye, Pet.” Rogers reached over to rub her right shoulder when they reached a red light. Philomena purred and pouted her lips, blinking at him with girlish gratitude. He guessed she had received no amount of understanding or apology with André’s acceptance of this turn in his fate. He shifted to face him.

“I didn’t sleep with her,” André said sharply.

“You don’t sleep with anyone, John. You just fuck them. Like you fucked us. And your team. And Dandridge and yourself,” Philomena said sharply, paused, adding almost musically, “And Peggy.”

“If Abigail said as much,” he sighed, burring his eyes in his palms as he continued to answer Rogers’ allegation, “it is only because she is having cold feet about moving in next month with, I might add, good reason. Rather than be honest, she afforded Jordan and enemy in a form other than himself. If anything it was an act of mercy.”

Rogers could stand many aspects of André that others found themselves unable to, but this almost-friendship only extended to the line he drew at hearing the integrity of his boys being insulted behind their backs. André had lost any professional privilege he had once had of providing unwarranted commentary on such matters months ago if Simcoe’s subtle accusations were to be believed; he had lost any personal stake in any of this when he had failed to show at a match against the league’s top ranked club without do reason.

“Oh yer ur foo ay it, ye ur,” Rogers spat. “Didn’t they tak’ yer licence?”

“There will be a process,” André replied, failing in his efforts not to sound defensive.

“Ain tens tae testify against ye, ye dobber.”

“Simcoe and Hewlett get in a fight then?”

It was not the fairly standard question but the manner in which he asked. John André seemed desperate for information, if not about the match, than about the team’s leadership. Ordinarily Rogers was not inclined to pay much mind to the warring factions outside of Sunday, but ordinarily he did not find himself in a position to possibly blackmail them both for enough money to retire to Alaska or some other place he romanticised due to the fishing and felling documentary-dramas that a number of his tenants were emotionally invested in. André must know something - personally, professionally, or otherwise. Something enough to send him into hiding the same day the public had lost track of and thus gained interest in Senator Benedict Arnold.

Rogers had begun to consider and calculate ways in which he might press him a day before when Woodhull stumbled through an explanation about how he thought Mrs Woodhull was sleeping with John Graves Simcoe of all people. Evidently, she had said as much to the police on the multiple occasions her whereabouts had been questioned, giving Woodhull what he felt was an excuse to send a man in to spy on the detective inspector. Rogers knew then that he his first step would be eliminating Abe from the equation, and in reflecting on how this might be efficiently accomplished, he recalled the first thing Arnold had said to him when they had met on the side of the same road where he had left the other Tallmadge to die. It was the same line that Woodhull had been repeating in relation to Hewlett; that which Simcoe had likely spent his couch-time talking over with good old John André.
“Well Simcoe did,” he answered the former doctor with a grin. His almost-friend nodded slowly, his eyes widened, attentive. He seemed to know that he was at an auction. They were bidding on the same item but it was for Rogers to set its price.

“Ah mae a’ mentioned offhain tae Woodhull ‘at Simcoe was born in Pakistan after th’ fifth or so time he mentioned the place. Huvnae bin keepin' up wi' all th’ bark. Did th' missin' senatur hae somethin' tae dae thaur? ‘Terrorits’ tryin' tae kill heem mebbe loch they did tae Simcoe's daddy? Nae matter. Created problems Ah hud nae forseen.”

“Robert, whatever it is that you are playing at you need to stop,” André cautioned in a way that bordered on concern. “You need to stop.”

He had him. “An’ why is ‘at, John?”

“Because my soon-to-be-ex-husband fucked the wrong people over in pursuit of his ego,” Philomena answered for him, her jaw as tightly clenched as her knuckles. “You want to know why John wasn’t at your little soccer game?”

“Aw, Pet. Ah think Ah awreddy dae.”

Dr Martha Dandridge was right, Philomena thought, greeted upon entry by a sketch of the woman her husband evidently hoped the girl he was having casual sex with would eventually grow into. She stared at Peggy Shippen’s coquettish smile, wondering at the innocence it attempted to hide. She had met the girl the Tuesday past, voiced her only hours later, and though it now mattered little, she questioned how many small details she might have changed in her performance if she had been afforded the benefit of a longer rehearsal. She studied Peggy and wondered if John had truly done the same. No, she decided. He did not care who she was, he cared about what he wanted her to be – for Arnold, for himself.

Peggy Shippen, Philomena decided, was a child and she could not expect more from her than wilful myopia. She could however hold her husband to a higher account, even if it seemed that neither Dandridge nor that woman’s personal contacts at the Pentagon, nor their foreign and domestic allies, nor John’s little administrative assistant and her insultingly young friend from back home in Pennsylvania ever would.

There was not much she could do to convince the world of all that she as a younger woman had been warned against by Rogers and had been too naïve to accept, but she now found herself uniquely positioned to make sure that Peggy at least would be spared from what Dr Dandridge had diagnosed on Thursday as John’s ‘compulsive desire to destroy.’ There was something repulsive in his arrogance – something she saw in his art as well but could not immediately identify. Philomena bit her lower lip. Only John André possessed the sort of pretentions that allowed him to court the affections of one of the individuals both DI Tallmadge and ADIC Hamilton had interrogated in connection with a disappearance in which he held most—if not all- of the blame. Instead of protecting Peggy by accepting responsibility and thereby clearing her good name, John further incriminated her by boasting about the affair, exaggerating its rationale by bestowing ‘Peggy’ with a physique that she, his wife, had once possessed.

With a calm she rarely found herself in command of, Philomena removed the frame from the wall, allowing it to fall and its glass to shatter. She looked at the shards and thought it better to leave
them were they lie. John could further bloody his hands when he returned with his lover from wherever they sought solace.

In the floor-length mirror of the master bath, she hugged her cashmere sweater-dress tighter to her curves, comparing her body to what it once had been. Nothing seemed to have stayed fixed or firm, but rather than feel crushed by the weight of time that had begun to manifest itself on her thighs and midsection, Philomena felt lifted, lightened. She smiled and saw the faint lines beside her lips deepen as her cheeks and eyes began to glow. She was pretty still, but she was also was older, more accomplished and acclaimed than the fictive girl John André continued to recreate for his ego would ever be. Philomena Cheer had won a Tony on her third nomination. She sung to sold-out theatres each and every night yet remained close friends with all of the people back in Setauket who had loved her on the way to stardom and long before. She was kind, open and generous. She was never keen to exclude or allow people discomfort in her presence. As such, Philomena had never once questioned her beauty and she was not about to start.

Someday, she thought, she would not be able to find any physical resemblance between herself and John André’s armature rendition of youth. She saw shame in his pursuit of this ideal, that this was what he considered ‘art’, what he considered ‘essence’ instead of ‘purchase’. The idea that beauty could be seen at all was an illusion that far too many found compelling. Perhaps it was that she had spent twenty years in stage make-up, had worn the faces other women night after night in order to tell their stories; perhaps it was the weight she had gained and lost accordingly to fully embody the various characters she had played. Perhaps it had nothing to do with profession at all. Perhaps it was credit to her parents that she was not prepossessed with standards that could be short-lived at best.

Philomena Cheer was beautiful. She was every bit as beautiful barefaced, without the so-said benefit of cosmetics as she stood before the people who called her André as she had been back when she had gone by her maiden name, Freud. Beauty, she considered, was a character quality rather than a physical state; something she hoped Peggy had been born with enough brains beneath her bouncing blonde curls to understand. She was not the girl in the picture. Neither of them were. If anything, the sketch could only said to be symbolic of John and all of the ideals he would never be able to emulate through fault of his own actions. It was ugly.

Dr Martha Dandridge accused him of craving the ruin he ran from, which seemed to Philomena something that ought to be punished rather than protected with a prescription he would swallow as an excuse. She calmly sorted through his closet, picking out the costly items that had been purchased with her wealth and fame, folded them neatly and placed them into the porcelain tub in the master bath - attached the bedroom they had not shared in years. She took the expensive liquor from the cabinet (as well as the cheap stuff John both preferred to drink and preferred to hide throughout the penthouse) and poured the whole of it onto the pile she had erected. Finally, Philomena found a matchbox in one of the kitchen drawers with a set of numbered birthday candles that had never been opened. She used one of the matches to light the edge of the drawing that had taken John André a decade to finish and dropped the girl - who seemed in her final moments to be as ugly as the man who had dreamt her - atop all of the pretty things her husband pretended constituted a personality.

The empty bottles she saved.

An hour after disassembling the smoke alarm, after opening all of the windows to let in the cool and cleansing air of almost spring, she threw them at André when he came home from nowhere, crying on command and compelling Peggy to do the same. Much to Philomena’s shock, within seconds her sentiment substantialized and she began to sob through the monologue she had written and memorized whilst she waiting on John and Peggy to return with catharsis.
She liberated the Penn State student from the same illusions of love that had once charmed and chained her with the show she staged. An hour after the girl had left; Philomena secured her own deed of manumission, as had been half of her design.

She did not smile.

She did not know why she was sad, if she continued to be convinced by her own portrayal of a tragic figure, or, if she was instead moved by John’s performance.

‘I love the mess we keep fining ourselves in,’ he said when he finally peeled his eyes from the agreement she had paid Anna to write up months before when the barmaid had been working on her own.

‘I don’t,’ she answered. ‘I loved you once, just not enough to justify the way I came to hate myself for it. Never enough for that.’

He spent the rest of that Sunday silent and sullen; clutching his sides when the cramps came to call for the alcohol his stomach had become accustom to. Looking at him caused her to feel sad and sick. It caused her to question if her soon-to-be-ex had become as much a victim of his study as he had made a select few of his subjects. She cried and he tried to comfort her and this kindness darkened the cloud that hung over their last day.

Dr Martha Dandridge had organized an alternative to Philomena’s idea of rehab, allowing John certain resources to rewrite parts of his original research proposal in ways that worked to serve to needs of Washington at the request of a man of the same name. Seeing the man she had once loved shaking for the poison that had since become his predominant feature, it seemed to Philomena less a chance at redemption than it did an act of revenge. She held him and allowed herself to be held by him for much of the rest of the morning, ceding the Sunday matinee to her understudy.

Philomena took the evening performance, unable to spend a moment longer in her husband’s presence, but rushed home as soon as she had gotten out of costume, only to have her face and character criticized after she refused to reduce herself to pretending to be whomever he thought she had been in her mid-twenties. John had wanted to fuck her over his piano, telling her in his advances how much she still looked like Peggy when she wore her hair up. He stunk of sick and cold sweat. She hoped she had done enough to make sure the girl was gone if he should ever be permitted to come back from Martha’s padded prison.

John André was being denied the help he so clearly needed to cleanse himself of sin, but the tyranny of Washington seemed suddenly far too tame. She sent a text to Robert Rogers begging him to come earlier than they had agreed upon. For all the ways she had found herself conflicted throughout their final act, Philomena felt certain it was past time to bring this curtain to a close.

Dr Martha Dandridge had not met with him when he had shown up at Columbia on Wednesday morning, fifteen minutes late for their meeting. On Thursday, André took the first train. He waited in the wind and rain for what felt like hours for her to arrive, for her to roll the window down from the back seat of a government issued vehicle, raise her eyebrows as he approached and say with a chilling nonchalance omnipresent in academic circles, “Inspired. I am sure you realize by now that the police are looking to you for questioning. Given your strict adherence to schedule, I’m quite sure Tallmadge would never think to search the places where you are meant to be.”
He had tried to apologise for the day before, citing public transit for his tardiness but she would hear none of it. Martha turned her head, pressing a button below the one she had used to open the window in order to close him out.

John André saw his reflection in the dark tinted glass and in it a boy from a blue-collar, immigrant background, born into a world society subsequently told him at every success and setback of youth that he had a duty to escape.

And he had.

He had made them all ‘so proud’, or so he liked to pretend.

He liked to pretend that his story had ended at the point where others like his all seemed to, when he had gotten his degree, moved to America, married a woman he had believed himself to be in love with, wherever his life might have transcended into myth or local legend.

He liked to pretend that he had served some larger purpose, that he had done his part to feed the loose, liberal, and ever so slightly condescending concept of ‘first generation day-labourers, second generation doctors.’ He like to pretend that social mobility existed in such a way anywhere in the Anglican world, that hard work made it easy, that the honorific that now preceded his name made him part of that which he had been told to want. Part of him still clung to the fantasy that having obtained a norm he had believed existed in youth made him somehow worthwhile, if only when compared with someone less given to fantasy. Someone who still lived in subsidised housing, who, André noted, existed for him only as a hypothetical, much in the same way he hoped he existed to the people back home whom he supposed were ‘so proud.’

He liked to pretend that the faces he had forgotten still knew him, but only as the narrative he had nearly transformed into his CV:

‘John André is a doctor now, a Ph.D. whose research helped to end the War on Terror,’ adding – as much in threat as in encouragement ‘and if you work very, very hard, you can grow up to be just like him.’

And both parent and child would believe this to be true.

For the poor, myths always were.

Maybe, André thought, he had been better off back when he needed to believe in such stories, back when he believed them based in fact.

There was a side to success that no one spoke of, perhaps because they did not know, perhaps because they could not imagine it to be true. You never stopped needing to prove yourself. He was English in America until he wasn’t, until ‘where is your name from? It doesn’t exactly sound British’ and immediately, ‘I read in your canton women still don’t have the right to vote’ and, with scorn, ‘certainly would explain a lot’ as though the place were as real to him as it was to his parents and to readers of human interest pieces in left-wing publications.

Perhaps the flaws he had in his behaviour towards the fairer sex had foreign undertones. Perhaps ‘foreign’ itself was a fallacy. People spoke of ‘common culture’, but no one said and no one knew that their varied ideas of ‘normal’ existed only from without and that privilege carried with it all of the same psychological traumas as poverty.

Once you ‘had arrived’, there was nowhere left.

There were no myths or legends left to comfort or compel.
There was nothing but a pressure to prove that you belonged.

No, he amended. Not that you belonged. That you were better. Because that was your duty. Because that was the duty of everyone who had spent what should have been a childhood immersed in study at kitchen tables under the watchful eyes of mothers who would never be as fluent in the language or material. The duty that came with lent books, a vague concept of one’s parents’ sacrifices and a desire to play outside with their schoolmates. He was better than them, his mother said, as all such mothers did. He would work harder and have a better life. He had believed her, because faith always finds purchase with the poor. But thirty years since, John André was still every bit as lonely as he had been back when he had also believed in the idea that ‘better’ was sustainable.

He had become a psychologist wanting to understand the interactions he had lacked and longed for in his youth, that he was told would come easily after he had gotten to the place his parents and everyone they shared a commonality with pretended existed in the interest of their children. André now threw lavish parties for luxurious people but found himself unable to directly partake in the joviality; instead, he phrased questions to his guests that often served to create a collective discomfort. André felt he had exceeded every expectation placed on him but he could not remember the last time he had ever had a real conversation. His research had long since seen an end to that. Now, standing outside his former partner’s office building, he saw in his reflection that it had all been for naught.

Sometimes he felt he would have settled to have more people talk to him as Peggy had, as a person. As though he had nothing to hide and nothing to prove. In New York, he was an outsider among outsiders. He was an immigrant, and on that basis, he would always be isolated to an extent.

John André stared at a face he wished he did not recognise it as his own, for he saw someone who could justify death with a deadline, someone who had come to defend that decision.

He wished he felt more shame.

A man emerged from the driver’s seat to open the door for his passenger, who, after hanging up with whomever she had been talking to on the phone (‘Six months is far too long, my love.’) thanked her chauffer warmly before making a passing comment at - rather than to - André about ‘southern hospitality’. He extended his umbrella over her head, receiving a small smile for an effort that left him exposed.

“I realise you have had considerable time to think, as have I,” she said as she unlocked the back door to her office, inviting him to enter.

“Martha, please. Allow me to -”

She raised her hand, bending four of her fingers together in slow succession, signally for him to sit in the stool adjacent her cluttered desk. Dandridge hung her Burberry Mac on a rung behind the door; André had already folded his atop his lap. He studied its fibres as he waited for her to break the silence, wondering if he should hang the garment, wondering if he should have offered to hang hers – if this was what was done in Virginia and if coats were even worn down towards the warmer end of the Eastern Seaboard. She sat behind her desk, took a quick inventory of her workload – a red light blinking on an archaic answering service, a computer screen that cast a blue glow over her in the second it took the operating system to start up. She behaved as though he were not there, and perhaps, André thought, he wasn’t.

When she finally spoke, little of the maternal warmth he had come to wrongly associate with her was present in her tone. This was the voice, he realised, that she used in Washington, the one used
to testify at congressional hearing and supreme court cases, as chilling as a rain storm in winter.
“As I am certain you are aware,” she said, “the chairman of Senate Armed Services Committee who was here to review our research has gone missing, which provides you the opportunity to reevaluate your findings before we submit it for review.”

“Our,” André elongated the pronoun. “I thought that my contributions had been dismissed, that I was -”

“Fired? You were,” Dandridge affirmed, adding with a painted smile, “And then one of the subjects in your closed study was arrested in connection with Arnold’s disappearance.”

“Who?” André blinked, though he had an immediate assumption.

“Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to speak with the suspect while he was in NYPD custody. The Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI’s New York field office felt that he has a lot to say,” she sighed, “as he often does … to put it delicately – though, despite the fully unnecessary hold up, I did have the opportunity to interrogate Simcoe who later came forward as a character witness.”

André involuntarily twitched at the name. “To clarify,” he squinted, “Simcoe was not the man Tallmadge and his team arrested? Forgive me I, I don’t wish to insinuate anything about the integrity the Detective Inspector brings to his office, nor about your own investment in my findings, but out of anyone on the team, to be perfectly frank, out of anyone I know – John Graves Simcoe is the clear -”

“No,” she insisted. “In light of what the subject told me in relation to Edmund Hewlett, I spent the rest of the day rereading your most recent reports before advising the Pentagon in a professional capacity as I had been asked to. What I told the Secretary of Defence last night and what I am now telling you now, is that it is my opinion that while your thesis was, technically, right all along, you were solving for the wrong variable. I’ve arranged something of an opportunity for you to rework parts of the equation you seek to present – that is, if you should still be willing to do so.”

“…”

“Before you answer, John, you’ll forgive me; I’ve not yet had the benefit of a proper coffee. It is possible that I phrased that as more of a question than it perhaps truly is. George Washington sees a certain value in this project and is prepared to make concessions to you in order to see its legal implementation. Should you refuse, I fear that – why, alone as a patriot - I’ll have little choice but to comply with Tallmadge’s demands to view the full extent of your files.”

André swallowed. He knew what card she held and whom it threatened. Robert Rogers, his oldest friend in America, his only friend in the world, had killed the inspector’s older brother in a hit-and-run accident. Though he had never been a patient, as a part of the team he was part of the study. André had taken enough detailed notes after drinking sessions with Robert and the ghost he carried. To allow Tallmadge access to his research would not only damn his career prospects, but would damn his friend and all of the derelicts he referred to with some measure of affection as ‘his boys’. Robert Rogers was a scoundrel, but as bad as he was, he provided a safety net society was not willing to extend. If the truth were to be uncovered, Robert and all of his boys would suffer the effects of a system that did not want their presence or precipitation.

John André considered the pseudo-moral argument he had come prepared to give. He could justify letting a manic-depressive spiral in order to expedite a situation to better fit with field conditions. He could justify the death of a single individual if he felt it had the potential to prevent thousands more. Hewlett would die early, regardless of what he did or did not do in the scope of his research,
in the scope of his practice. He thought of the profound guilt and sadness with which his patient spoke of love. He could justify an act that would afford meaning to a life unlived.

It was not that he was hesitant to comply – not that he would have been had the liberty of his closest confidant not been threatened. Martha Dandridge surely knew this, which surely meant that she had an ulterior motive in making her threat. The longer André sat considering the stakes, the more solidarity he felt with the character witness to whom his partner had spoken.

So he asked.

“When you state that I solved for the wrong variable -”

“Hewlett didn’t die, did he?”

“No, and I fear I may be to blame for that fact as well.”

“The NYPD already searched your practice, John. You’ll lose your medical accreditation. There is nothing I can do, from what I understand a process as already been filed with the AMA. The DA mentioned during hot yoga this morning before we were kicked out that she will personally see charges brought against you for prescribing medication in conflict with federal law. Which … brings me to something I need to ask. Anna Strong-”

“She is um -”

“The daughter of a close personal friend whom you have engaged in immigration fraud. Hewlett admitted as much last night. He also admitted to corporate corruption in an odd rendition of ‘I shot the Sheriff’, on Nancy’s couch with full knowledge that he was being recorded, and though this serves our purposes, what do you suppose his are?” she asked slowly, stressing the pronouns.

“I’m sorry, you have me lost. To begin with, Hewlett can’t really be a murder suspect. It is not him. He would never engage in violent crime. No. Even knowing Simcoe and what constitutes his sense of humour … I can’t imagine what you or anyone I law enforcement was told that would lead you to that conclusion.”

“Pretending you are concerned about the fates of your … friends as you seem to wish me to, Hamilton asked the police chief to assign Ben Tallmadge to the Arnold case. He has a 76% record, which before you ask, is exceptional – most detectives stagger at around 40% of their cases being solved, and in policing, forty is a good place to be. But I digress, that is not why they gave him Arnold to work. No. On the morning he disappeared, Tallmadge got a break in a case that ties our esteemed pharmaceutical colleague Thomas Jefferson to the Oxy epidemic the city has been struggling with for years. Tallmadge lost a partner to that case. His mind is elsewhere. His whole team hates him, and while I am sure that his work will result in a successful recovery – it bides the federal government time to see several of its agendas through legislation -including the implementation of our research- while public support for such measures is accordingly high,” she paused, “without anything looking terribly askance. Hewlett, and I suppose by relation Simcoe, will be fine. They are veterans of this game, and supposing that either has anything to do with the disappearance, there is already a proxy in place.”

“You think Hewlett killed Arnold?”

“If I thought Arnold was dead we would be having a different conversation.”

André nodded. He could not tell her that he had a hand in the disappearance, that Arnold had gone to meet him, or rather, to meet his version of Peggy Shippen. She continued to speak but he found
he could not focus. He felt he was looking at a puzzle whose pieces could not be combined to form a picture. André knew it to be by design, that this too was part of Dandridge’s analysis. He had no choice but to comply as much as reason allowed.

Still, he could not focus on what she was saying.

So he asked.

“Let me answer your question with the one I originally phrased,” she offered, raising an eyebrow. “What precisely compelled you to choose Anna Strong for your immigration scheme? It seems to me as though there is not a single other individual in the greater metropolitan area who might prove more of a potential risk.”

“I honestly did not consider Ms. Strong’s parentage in making that suggestion. In truth, it was purely economic, at the time she was living on the couch of my administrative assistant who will be moving to Brooklyn with her boyfriend at month’s end. Anna needed a place to stay -”

“No. No, that is not what I meant by ‘risk’. You see, I asked Simcoe about Anna as well. I think you set Hewlett up with her with the expressed intent of forcing him to hurt his best friend.”

He had set them up to restore the power balance in his own favour, but he was not fool enough to confess to this meaningless act of vanity that had failed in its desired objective.

“I did,” he said.

“Though I have to tell you that I think Simcoe would be profoundly hurt by the idea of Hewlett spending his life with anyone other than himself, it was a clever play. You asked me what I meant with variables – and we already know how ‘x’ is defined, and, perhaps of greater importance,” her eyes lit up, “how he defines himself. Maybe he was in love with Ms. Strong once, maybe it was always a lie to cover another,” she paused, reached into her purse and removed a yellow notepad. “When I asked him about that relationship,” she said slowly as she flipped through the first few pages, “he answered … and I quote ‘Anna? Nothing to tell … We went on a few dates, a couple of months back. Never slept together. I suppose you are going to suggest that I am in love with Hewlett as well?’”

André felt his stomach turn. “It has … it has come up before in our sessions,” he said diplomatically.

“I told him it was corrosive bonding,” Dandridge winked.

“Interesting. I understand why that would be tempting to assume-”

“But you think theirs is among the healthiest adult relationships you’ve seen in private practice? So do I. Under normal circumstance, so do I. I did in the moment what I thought would yield results. As did you. You have just been looking at the graph the wrong way – here.”

She took out a pen, flipped to a blank sheet and began to draw him a visual. This, and the algebraic terms in which she addressed the problem served to unsettle him with envy at the apparent ease by which she had gotten Simcoe to open up.

“We are solving for a function of (x), and this particular ‘x’ is fairly easy to define, at least in psychological terms,” Dr Martha Dandridge stopped writing and started listing on fingers she tapped lighting against her desk. “Orphaned young, watched both of his parents suffer violent deaths – his mother’s at her own hand. He was abandoned at a boarding school that trained him for a military career, only to graduate and find himself unable to enlist because a psycho-symptomatic
problem with his hearing prevented him from passing both the med and psych evaluations. I am not surprised he finds himself in fistfights now and again. He is scared of something he struggles to identify and so he lashes out. But what I want to know, is what is the value of ‘y’ when ‘x’ does just that. Because you’re right, Hewlett isn’t given to physical violence under regular circumstances, but fear can turn anything as you state in your hypothesis. I suppose what I am asking is this: what is Hewlett afraid of more than anything else in this world?” Her fingers stopped waltzing and began a war march. “What keeps him up at night, John?”

“He killed a horse, shot heem reit up tae fuck,” Robert Rogers said from the passenger seat of Philomena’s Lincoln.

“Hewlett?” she clarified with a small snort.

“Hoo dae ye nae ken thes story, Pet?” he gaped. “Lest time it was brooght up th’ laddie chibbed his best mukker ower it. Reit in th’ heart.” He clutched his fist dramatically to his chest and clenched his eyes shut dramatically, though he knew true death to look very different. The performance wasted on a woman whose eyes were fixed on the road ahead.

“Hewlett?” she stressed again, clearly still captivated.

“What Robert is referencing is the incident at DeJong’s in the fall of the past year,” John André said from behind him with practiced boredom. “From what I gather there was a beer pong tournament at which Simcoe gambled and lost Hewlett’s clothing. I understand that they had made it to the final few rounds, and even with the benefit of a proper British upbringing, were both well past plastered by this point - but yes, Simcoe mentioned the horse in question and as a result found himself with a cut he then forced his attacker to cauterize a week or so later. Wakefield does that story far more justice that our dear Robert is doing this one.”

“Guid oan heem,” Rogers exclaimed, “Ah cooldnae gie a shite abit th’ knifin’. Woo amoong us hasnae wanted tae stab Simcoe every noo an’ again? Th’ issue Ah tell ay is th’ cuddie an’ way he killed it.”

Edmund Hewlett noted the incident as among the most traumatic of his life, which from what Robert Rogers understood of the boy’s life seemed bullocks. Hewlett had, according to Simcoe, gotten himself up in the small hours of the morning and murdered a mare in cold blood. To hear the perpetrator tell it, the animal had been slated for death after it had thrown its rider and she had lost the child she carried in the fall. He had done it a mercy.

There was more to the story, as the tabloids of the time told it, as he told Philomena now. In the early 2000s, the Duke of Argyll was killed during a tour of Afghanistan. The most widely circulated whisper was that this had been done by The Crown to show that the other English prince was in real danger, that royal service tours were not merely photo shoots. More conventionally, it was simply used as an excuse to show the younger price giving an obituary in a British dress uniform as opposed to getting drunk in a Nazi one.


In Scotland, the cynicism and speculation shifted where it always did in hard times - to the Hewletts rather than the Windsors. Word on the street was that the prominent northern nobles had
their cousin killed because he had discovered evidence of their human and drug trafficking operation which in that era was considered ‘common knowledge’ rather than ‘baseless rumour’.

Rogers still doubted there was any validity to any of it.

He thought there was a far more credible explanation in the fact that people died in war. While the Duke had not been a proper soldier in the sense that a serviceman would have understood it, he had nevertheless managed to secure himself a seat in Valhalla. The tragedy was that he left behind a wife who had discovered her pregnancy only after she had lost the baby to a riding accident while staying with her late husband’s relatives through her sorrows. The tragedy was that there had been countless doctors on hand on account of Edmund’s illness who likely saw the signs that she had been carrying. Who, Rogers insisted, now emphatic, likely had said something to one of the little ladies of the house. Edith, Edna or Ellie – it did not matter which one - had taken indicative to give the young widow an animal likely to buck under the weight of a rider it did not know.

“Eleanor could not have been much older than twelve or thirteen.”

“Dornt matter. They ur aw radge. Bin since birth. E’en ur Edmund is a killer.”

That, both Andrés said, was pure speculation. This, Rogers countered, was not. It had been a perfect murder. Edmund, upon being told the horse would be put down, shot it before any potential autopsy could be performed, not wanting the beast to suffer a seizure as he had. The duchess, distraught, could then do little to see her lands from being swallowed by her late husband’s next in line.

There was talk, he told the American among them, as there had been since unification in the eighteenth century, of the Hewletts leading a separatist movement - of slowly but surely grabbing all of the land in Scotland until they could motion a succession. Rogers found this unlikely and said as much. They moved on with the times, and as such, were now simply a global business conglomerate that enjoyed the noble privilege of not having to pay taxes on their lands, which, as a result, and had allowed their enterprises to grow exponentially.

Rogers laughed over the opportunity he perceived. Presently, the Hewletts’ corporate finances were in questions of the kind that warranted an audit. From what Abe had relayed to him, one of the children had already gone to jail over it. They let that happen, the family proper, same as they let the newspapers - many of which they owned in all but name - print ever measure of shite to distract from that horse.

“Th’ horse Hewlett,” he clarified, “ur Hewlett is aye talkin’ abit.”

John André looked perplexed, and rightly so. Rogers had made much of the story up as he told it – in the style, he suspected, that most conspiracy theories were concocted. Still, Edmund had shot an animal, and at the price of its blood, his family had secured a small county that gave them dominion over the western half of the country (for what little that was worth in a parliamentary system of government that operated in a state that had been under occupation for three hundred or so years.)

What he gave André was an offer.

He had enough to blackmail John’s boys with the missing senator, the intelligence that Woodhull had brought him from the police and the common knowledge that seemed to escape the former doctor entirely - that his lads would do anything to protect each other from any threat that they did not personally pose. It was a pride thing that probably referenced some Greek tragedy or another in nomenclature.
“There are two horses in the stories Simcoe tells when he is buzzed,” André explained. “Don’t get excited, you have hardly uncovered a conspiracy of the kind—”

“I’m nae lookin’ fur a lot, John. Business is deid in New York an’ I’m gettin’ up thaur. Th’ Hewletts ur undergoin’ an’ audit an’ a body ay them has awreddy gain tae prison fur ‘at fact. If Ah can convince them ay whit Ah ken abit th’ cuddie they used as a hitman, they will buy mah silence, hopefully givin’ me enaw tae retire tae Alaska.”

“Oh no, are you still watching late-night History Channel?” Philomena laughed.

“Still dreamin’ ay findin’ th’ Northwest Passage, Pet.”

“How do you know this?” André inquired slowly, “About Eugene Hewlett going to prison?”

“Whitehaa was th’ site ay a polis search, Woodhull overheard gab ay his guidwife an’ Simcoe an’ sent his cheil Brewster tae th’ inside tae spy an’ see whit th’ polis gart ay ‘at union. Nae result. Sae in a trade fur th’ information he provided me, Ah broocht heem tae th’ fitba match tae confront th’ cheil himself, mentioned ‘at he was frae Pakistan - which is a buzzword fur fox bark followers. He is convinced ‘at Simcoe - rather than Simcoe’s ain better half- is responsible fur th’ disappearance ay th’ senatur. Ah don’t caur either way, mind. If Ah can convince them in their hoor ay distress ‘at Ah can prove they planned a mudder -”

“Does Edmund Hewlett know about his brother?” André interrupted.

“Nae,” Rogers grinned.

“If you can make sure he finds out and keep me informed of his and Simcoe’s movements while I am away … I have made connections in the past few days who I am sure can make it worth your while –who can have you seeing Russia from your back yard if that is that you truly want.”

“Ah don’t make deals wi’ men fa lae their debts unpaid.”

André reached into his back pocket.

With that, Robert Rogers secured himself the two-hundred dollars he had been owed for the past three months. It could have been easy but for the presence of Philomena Cheer, who in that moment began to wail as he had long thought she might.

“Don’t make deals at all! John! Do you not understand? This is why you are being sent where you are. You need to stop. I don’t trust Martha for a minute. They are going to kill you for your involvement in this and I am sick – I am sick of watching you pad your fall with innocence. Robert,” she turned, “I’ll co-sign a loan, I will do what you need to stop you from spying for these people. They have their own. But right now,” she swallowed, “right now I need to pull over and I need for you to drive. Can you do that?”

“Whaur ur we gonnae?” he asked as he stroked her shoulder.


Chapter End Notes
…well shit.

Like I said, I’ll go about the notes tomorrow. Until then, do you have any for me?
Cheers - Tav
Chapter Summary

Tallmadge’s counterpart in Edinburgh discovers that damning evidence was sent from his email as he otherwise rots amongst the ruins of his life.

Chapter Notes

Let me preface this chapter by confessing that I am going against the good advice various professionals who hate my prose were kind enough to give – namely, that I’d do better not to divide these 40, 50 page chapters that demand a lot of the readers, and not just in length. I did this before in June, (the Akinbode, Mary + Anna, and Simcoe POV chapters that were originally intended to be read as one) posted within the same week rather than as a single unmanageable chuck – something that to judge from comments (as one tends to) did not work for many of you. So why given the benefit of experience and expert advice would I elect to have another go at it?

Well, because after giving the matter far too much thought (as one tends to) I simply decided that a few of the POVs I have been getting ready for you guys should be consumed in single portions. Things are about to start moving rather quickly within the larger narrative and there are certain details of backstory it just seems time to have out of the way. We’re doing it a bit different this go around, namely, the two principle characters do not appear in person … and, neither does anyone else from the canon source. ‘Tav,’ I hear you say, ‘do you mean to tell us that you’ve posted 7,500-some-odd words of auxiliary figures talking about plot?’ To which I can only answer: please, when you have skipped this over (which you are more than invited to do!) don’t later communicate to me that you are confused about the frights breaking out between Tallmadge, Hamilton, Layfette and assorted company. They will be back along with Simcoe, Hewlett and the Culpers sometime in the next week or two.

So who are we meeting this time? No one exactly new. Richard Ferguson made his first appearance in chapter 19, Eleonore and Eugene Hewlett in 18, Ban Tarleton in 17 and Elizabeth Gwillim allllllllllll the way back in chapter 7, if I am not mistaken. Fabienne Bouchard and her father have been alluded to in many of Simcoe and Hewlett’s conversations, as have all of the aforementioned others.

This is something of an interlude. I promise it won’t become an all-too-regular occurrence.

So! Still with me? Potential warning include but do not limit themselves to: recreational drug use, extortion, human and drug trafficking, broken marriages, life at the poverty line, Cold War politics, press scandals, betrayal and possible police corruption.

Still (still) with me? Then I hope you enjoy!
Richard Ferguson had a small, overpriced, one bedroom flat in the outskirts of Edinburgh that he shared with an octogenarian actress who had recently begun to service her long-laden talents to play up the dementia with which she had not been diagnosed. He had yet to admit it (and likely never would) but his mother’s theatrics helped with the overall logistics of her care. She had daily visits from the SCIAF, Caritas volunteers to play the role of dutiful child to her aging-mum before an otherwise empty house.

Richard himself was usually at work, and the times he was not, his mind was preoccupied by questions he had not yet found the answers to at the office. From time to time, he would come home to find a brochure from the same charity that he relied on to bring his mother a warm meal lain out besides those that had preceded it like Victorian calling cards on his IKEA coffee table. They advised that the organization would be happy to relieve him of the few artefacts that remained of their estate in the form of still-boxed items he had no reason to display and otherwise had no room to store. Though tempted for a time by the tax-benefit, Richard allowed the offers to collect with his mother’s boxes, with his old case files, with the dust that blanketed what had once been their lives. He told himself he was not nostalgic, but were he to look around his apartment as a detective rather than as its reluctant resident; he would have reach an entirely different conclusion regarding his own past attachments.

Though he did not have a bedroom door behind which to retreat in search of slumber, Richard had a ‘bed’ in the area between the WC and kitchenette; or rather, he would have, had he trusted that the partially rusted metal frame he had found in an alleyway would sustain itself were he to transition it from the upright position that designated it as a ‘couch’. He had an ex-wife, and she had custody of their two sons - neither of whom he had seen in the past six months save for in the frame where smiled at him from a coffee table cluttered with charity brochures and with his mother’s medication. Most of the pictures that hung in his home were cut-outs from the sorts of magazines and tabloids in which his usual suspects often featured. They covered both the opposite wall as well as its boarded up window that he had never bothered to replace after his flat had been broken into a year before, taking a kind of compliment in the thought that some stranger mistook him as having something worth stealing. From where he was presently laying, Scotland’s richest family seemed to smile at him with the sort of familiarity one would anticipate from a row of photographs on a living room wall. No, Richard thought as he tried to adjust the pillow beneath his head in his hundredth attempt to make his makeshift bed fit for rest. The Hewletts did not smile. They laughed. They mocked him openly as he had long been convinced they did amongst themselves. But then, at four o’clock on this particular Sunday morning, he could not blame them. There was nothing in his life that did not seem a joke. His boys were probably echoing in the cackles he could almost hear, but he did not turn back to them to check.

The living area was bathed in the blue glow of his silenced mobile device as it flickered with some sort of notification or another. The bank? he questioned. No. It was Sunday. They would resume reminding him of how much money he did not have on Monday during regular business hours, and by then he would be back in a sixteenth century stronghold with weak reception and forty years’ worth of financial records containing numbers with tens of zeros behind them as opposed to the single digit that defined his status. All of the documents he and his team had to go on bore identical signatures, all of which had infuriatingly been written by different hands. The task would have proven impossible even if justice existed as a possibility. When Richard shut his eyes, he saw numbers without context and his mind tried to organize them in some sort of meaningful way or at least arrange them to the information to which they correlated. It was no use. His phone continued to light up the room in regular intervals, spelling out in Morse Code that Americans had no concept of time zones. Maybe, he thought, Hamilton had changed his mind about Eugene Hewlett and
would release him to his custody as he had requested days before. Maybe Eugene’s brother Edmund had finally been arrested and was being held somewhere where his surname afforded him no special favours. Maybe, Richard scowled as he reached for his phone; there were no horses in the United States for the prince and his lackey to hide behind.

Richard swiped his finger across the screen and squinted to adjust his eyes to the two-year old photograph of his sons that he used as his lock screen. They were aged five and seven when the picture had been taken. That had been the last time he had been able to afford to take them on holiday he thought sadly. That had been before circumstance had caused him to frequently fall a few days behind on his child-support payments and had thus lost him the partial custody he had then enjoyed. That had been before his ex-wife had moved in with her current boyfriend, before his children had begun calling another man ‘Dad.’ That had been before his own father had died, before his mother had lost their family estate to her late husband’s debts, before the bank had decided that, as his father’s heir, it fell on him to settle them. That was before he knew the extent of what had been lost in an attempt to short the family who had bound his beloved country by the last of the three words carved into the stone and steal of every structure they owned:

**Authority.**

He glanced again at the collage on his wall and imagined the shadows his phone created in conjunction with the hour as conspiring to conceal the brilliant grin a criminal-cum-cover girl that haunted him even on nights in which his eyes were shut. It was the same way she had looked at him when he had arrested her for extortion and attempted murder a decade before, the way she had looked at him upon her release mere hours later. There was something disconcerting in counterfeit cheer, in masks that manifested without regard to circumstance. It both mocked him and robbed him of the punch line. He saw her even when he did not, but every actual glimpse served to remind that she saw right through him.

The shadows that had shielded him from this constant affront took shape danced with his delirium. In his mind, he saw his demon in the very ballroom he had commandeered for the course of his current investigation. There, she laughed and smiled simultaneously the way normal human nature might dictate. But the smiles of the Eleonore Hewlett he had long known were mum and her laughter came without mirth. Maybe, Richard considered, she had learnt to substitute that particular sound for the screams she could not otherwise silence. He wondered at his level of fatigue when he realised that this flicker of a fantasy had forced some small measure of sympathy from him. He tilted his phone towards the wall, looked at the faces who shared her sharp features and felt a certain angst he could easily accredit but struggled to name.

Richard shook his head from the tricks shadows liked to play in the dark. He should not have had a cup of coffee while waiting on the bus back to the city. He could not find sleep in his slightly caffeinated state, but strange dreams had set upon him nonetheless and seemed content to pursue him through the night. He returned fire until they faded back into the familiar blackness that bore them, where fantastical notions concerning the amity of old enemies existed and waking fears fled. Barely blinking, he watched and waited and wasted until the only notion that survived to plague him was that he ought not to have sought sustenance at a convenience store after midnight. He already had more than his share of monsters to contend with without those born from chemical dependency. This case was the coffin in which he imagined his career would be laid to rest. Once it had, once Ellie Hewlett and her equally devious relatives had again evaded arrest, he imagined he might sell what he could of his mother’s remaining possessions in order to support the children he never saw. The rest, he thought vaguely, he would give to charity. He knew the number by heart.

When the detective’s eyes returned from nowhere to the screen of his smartphone, his boys’ smiles had been obscured by a list of names and news items that were meant to interest him more than
slumber. The overactive Daily Mail app (which he had only downloaded out of a recent interest in its editor, one of the Hewletts’ primary shareholders) told him that a Broadway diva had filed divorce against her husband who for some undisclosed reason was famous in social science circles. Or infamous in New York society. It did not concern him either way. He scrolled and saw to his surprise that the one of the Windsors had said something crass about one of their cousins wanting to wed an American. At this, Richard frowned. It was the first time the Mail had made any allusion to Anna Strong, whom he only knew from a confession and from the Thursday cover of the paper edition of the same news source.

Unnamed and uncited in the caption as being the bride of Britain’s prodigal heir-presumptive, she had been introduced to the public in a picture that now hung on his wall amongst her would-be relations. He would never meet her, and for the duration of his case and long thereafter, she would exist for him only as the woman giving her photographer a bewildered look from the car park in front of the tavern where, according to the Mail’s in-chief (in a rare example of responsible reporting) Senator Benedict Arnold ‘had last been seen’ the Tuesday prior. Maybe, had Edmund Hewlett not been the man behind the camera, the paper would have gone with ‘was murder’ as other sensationalist outlets since had. Richard clicked on the link, and found only a blurb under a picture of the Duke of York with his mouth open as though he meant to put food into the space the media sought to fill with words. As he had almost expected, the name Anna Strong was nowhere to be found in relation to Edmund, Andrew, Arnold or otherwise.

At some point in the next week or two, however, DI Richard Ferguson would be forced to stand facing a gallery of reporters to advise the press at large of the related investigation he was conducting into the laundering scheme Edmund Hewlett had confessed to whilst being informally questioned by New York’s District Attorney about the missing senator. Either preceding or coinciding with this announcement, Elizabeth Gwillim would tell world of the semi-literate that the primary suspect in the Arnold Investigation was fake-engaged to the daughter of New York’s top prosecutor. She would name Anna Strong as the woman who worked in the bar which was proving the lynchpin to both cases, in a building now owned by her future brother-in-law, by one of the Hewletts who owned everything. Except -as Gwillim had once insisted to him when pressed- her loyalty. Richard had seen economic upsets become scandals when, as Gwillim put it, she needed sales to make up the value temporarily lost to her in stocks. As one of Britain’s richest women, it seemed unlikely that this alone was what motivated the orphaned heiress turned entrepreneur.

He wondered if her former fiancé still served as her financial advisor, and, if so, if John Graves Simcoe expected a monetary or merely a moral victory if events were to unfold in the way Richard foresaw. He questioned if he considered Simcoe brave or brash, and wondered if he had enough of either of those enviable qualities within himself with which to force a certain closeness to the noble family needed to ensure their demise, as was clear to him that Simcoe had done at least with Edmund. He speculated that the lad had this Anna Strong paying some role in however he had designed his long-overdue revenge for a lifetime of injustice suffered in servitude of Law, Order, and above all Authority. He simultaneously questioned how many of Simcoe’s other mates were in on his plot or stood to profit from it; to either cash in the insurance cheque or to simply warm themselves against the flames consuming the ancient house. The family did not seem aware of the fire ready to engulf them, or maybe they were laughing along with its cackles, having collectively forgotten how to scream. Maybe some of them were in on the joke.

Though he did not imagine Elizabeth Gwillim currently slept any better at night than he did, Richard decided to wait until a more Christian hour to ring her to see if she would be willing to disclose this single detail of her finances without a subpoena. It would not make a difference, he thought, beyond satisfying a base curiosity, and even then, it would raise more questions than provide answers. Simcoe managed funds for both Edmund and Eugene, after all. And Effie never offered clear information or explanations, regardless of what was being asked.
‘I know what you think of me,’ she had teased and tested when last they spoke in a practiced tone that tasted sweet regardless of the rot her words often carried. The detective inspector had tried to protest his professionalism, having called her in relation to another case. ‘I-know-what-you-think-of-me,’ she seemed to sing over him, ‘because-I-told-you-what-to-think. And you believe it –that I am silly and superficial - only because you think yourself above it all, and ah! It is what I adore about you, Darling. Always have. But before I allow us to stray too far from the point I want very much to impart upon you, did you know I hold a Master’s in English literature?’

He had. He knew she held one in Art History as well. This, he imagined, helped to explain why out of all of the blood-soaked picture books that pretended to be newspapers, hers consistently made itself superlative in the realm of sales. ‘My, my – you do your homework. Then perhaps you already know the answer to a question I’d rather intended as rhetoric: Do you happen to know when detective stories became so prevalent? Or, for that matter, would you hazard a guess as to why we Brits just fell so hopelessly in love with them?’

‘I confess my ignorance,’ he admitted.

‘It is when the public stopped believing in God in large part. The detective came to represent the Deus ex Machina that would otherwise have been lost to the stories society seeks to tell about itself. I always found that fascinating, especially now … you, in light of your current line of inquiry. Just to extrapolate from the Latin, God from the Machine, I think if you take that for a moment in its most literal interpretation, you’ll find your answers obvious.’

She had said this to him a little over a month before, but a day did not pass without him pausing to consider her words. There was a difference, or so she had told him, between her truth, his truth, and that which the public perceived as being true regardless of whether or not there were any facts to support it. Gwillim explained that wherever possible, she tested several versions of the same story online before publishing the one that had attracted the more attention in accordance with an algorithm her ex had programmed during his brief stint at university. Within the year, this was the way all media would openly acknowledge itself as having been generated, but at the time, he had responded, ‘That isn’t news.’ Gwillim paused for what had seemed to Richard a rather long while, his neck and shoulder craned to support the handset cradled uncomfortably between them.

‘What makes you think your truth – or rather, the one your superiors expect you to arrive at, is more relevant than that of my readers?’

‘I’m not looking for truth, I’m looking for justice,’ he stammered in reply, shaken by the honesty of a sentiment he had never considered existed within him.

‘Tell me, Fergie,’ Gwillim hummed. ‘Are you a vengeful god?’

Richard thoughts drifted back the boy he had once arrested and to the war he seemed to secretly be waging against those who had wronged them both. Wronged them all. No, he said to himself in response to memory. Though I certainly pray to one. If Gwillim believed there was any validity to the world-view of her readers, she likely did as well. She had due cause. He would call her tomorrow and see if she had any more light to shed on the discrepancies that seemed so common between truth and honesty, if Simcoe still advised her finances and if they had spoken since either investigation began.

Preoccupied with thoughts of the past, he could not seem to shut his eyes.

Richard stared again at his wall but the shadows were still. Perhaps they had found the slumber that eluded him. John Graves Simcoe was not directly part of his case and therefore not present in his collage. He suddenly found himself struggling to remember what the lad had even looked like.
A fellow ginger? Or was that Tarleton he was thinking of? Though the man in form remained cloaked in umbra, Richard could clearly recall his piercing voice, though it was said such was the quality of character most easily dissolved by time’s passing. A birth defect? he wondered briefly. No. Simcoe had sustained some considerable damage to his hearing, but the detective inspector could not recall how. He looked back at his phone and wondered if the then-falsely-accused had any happy memories to retreat to as he returned to the lock screen of his mobile, to his sons building a castle from sand that would never fade or fall into ruin. Not for him. Not like everything else seemed want to.

A list of missed calls obscured the base of the structure. One number he had saved as ‘Tallmadge – NY’, the second he had to Google and the third was blocked and untraceable. Probably, Richard thought, a creditor. No. That made no sense, logically or logistically. No one who rang fourteen times a day did so without providing a call back number, even if it was to one of the centres so overrun by other business that he had since learned the various rotations of their hold music selections. He shook his head. He had settled his scheduled payment on time this month. He was being paranoid. Fourteen-hour workdays and two-hour commutes on public transit tended have that effect on the mind.

The listed number, he saw in his internet search, was registered to the British Embassy in Washington. He found it was not one he could dial back and in searching for an alternative, thought it better to wait until Monday, when - thought it would statistically be no more likely that it was at present he would find anyone able to direct his call- the recording that played in constant loop for the calls lost in limbo would direct him to the website as opposed to inform him of business hours. The Embassy was closed on weekends, which caused Richard to think that he was in the wrong branch of service altogether. The fact that Tallmadge had also rung him up from New York City on a Saturday night told him the sentiment may have been international among inspectors, except that Tallmadge’s call had lasted for all of three seconds. Either he had dialled him by mistake, or he realised on the first ring that it had been around two in the morning in Edinburgh when he had tried to reach out. He hoped it was the former. He hoped this particular misery of lying awake in isolation save for the ghosts of inquiry was an individual trait.

He checked his email to be sure. There was nothing from Tallmadge. One of his sergeants, however, had been in touch. Thank you for your assistance, the subject line read. Richard inhaled slowly.

He was initially tempted to take the statement as sarcasm, but his heart filled with dread when he saw that he had afterwards received a missive from someone named Rochambeau. It was the first time - and consequentially the last - the name would appear in his inbox. In light of Yilmaz’s stated gratitude, he rightly presumed this was more likely a French operative wanting to remind him that he had been sworn the secrecy on a matter of state than it was a Nigerian prince wanting to save him from financial freefall. Richard could suddenly taste the sort of metal which science instructed was adrenaline and decades of service put as pistol being pressed against the back of his throat. Once more, Richard found himself wishing that his patriotism took the form of answering phones in a foreign office - Monday through Friday, from nine until four.

With the hesitation of a man who knew what he was to find, he checked his outgoing mail. An attachment had been sent to DS Yilmaz of the NYPD containing all of the old files from the case that had effectively ended his career. The file contained photographs from all of the physical evidence, plus the notes he had taken but had never shared with his colleagues.

He called his counterpart in New York and found the line was dead.

He next tried the sergeant someone had been in communication with in his name, again arriving at
nothing. It was midnight in New York, but owing to paranoia and personal habits, Richard was unable to comprehend that his foreign colleagues might well be asleep.

In a panic, he then rang the mother of his children and begged her to board a plane. Anywhere, he said, but France. Or, in light of recent events, Mali or New York. He wouldn’t see his children again, she told him. This much he had reasoned before he made the call. He asked if he could speak to them. She replied that it was five in the morning, adding in response to his plea to ‘at least tell them that Daddy loves them’ that though he may have been her sons’ biological father, he was not their ‘dad’. Once she hung up, Richard spent a goodly time screaming into a couch cushion he had been pretending was a pillow, knowing his ex-wife was right, praying that she knew she was as well and that the words she had just spoken in anger would manifest in her heeding what he well suspected would be his final words of warning. When he had gathered himself together, he buried the picture of his boys in the blackness of a drawer, hoping that they would always be as they had in that moment, smiling together, their arms wrapped around each other’s backs. Hoping that they would grow to be nothing like him.

Richard erased their image from the screen of his phone by pulling up his address book once more. He had seventeen numbers for the same person, a figure which was in itself, he suspected, no accident. He tried the last of these that had called him, inhaling slowly in rhythm with each ring, hoping to create enough calm to prove convincing. The first three times he filled his lungs he felt the serenity he sought – thereafter he found that he was out of breath. The room seemed to contain less air and whilst suffocating in the seconds that passed between sound and dead silence, he considered that Lady Eleanor had been the first to suffer the fate he felt certain awaited everyone who knew why a human smuggler was said to have attempted to ‘steal a horse’ on the night he first made the acquaintance of those who now lined his wall and window. The ringing was replaced by the light static of woken slumber. He heard a faint but identifying ‘ah’ from a speaker searching in a darkened room for orientation. Deciding it was an act, his worry turned back into anger before he could register that he had been concerned for the well-being of his age-old enemy. He pulled himself up and felt pain trickle down his spine as his vertebra individually adjusted to their new freedom from the thin futon mattress. Hatred filled him. He felt her in his bones.

“This is off the record,” Richard said before she could speak her surname. “You have anything on you? I … I can’t sleep,” he admitted, adding sharply, “You know why.”

>> Anything on me? Are we referring to diacetylmorphine, Inspector Ferguson?<< she seemed to laugh. He was certain that she was not smiling. >>Come – you don’t honestly believe that I’d dirty my hands … or lands. Just as I don’t honestly think given your purse, personality and perceived morals you would risk interacting with an enslaving substance, especially given that I myself fund every public addiction clinic on the island. Or … are you secretly keen on my face? That it? Is that the reason you have my picture on your wall? No, Inspector. That is not the game we are playing.<<

He had used in the past while undercover; though that distinction would ordinarily imply that his employer had sent him. It would have been more accurate to state that he had spent some of his nights stuck between wanting to forget that he was a cop and wanting to forge a kind of closeness to the one constant in his life who thought him above vice, which was easier to accomplish with a needle stuck into him. Ellie did not know this, or she did without letting it affect her judgement. There was an unrecognized irony in their relationship most exemplified by the fact that she saw the best in him. She spoke as though they shared a ‘common truth’, as her best friend might put it. This, of course, was impossible in every sense. Richard hated himself whenever he rang, and he rang her more often than he rang any of his other personal or professional contacts - sometimes, it seemed, just for the paradoxical comfort of knowing that she was still around. He wondered if she too saw this as a cry for help, if she knew how much she hurt him by answering or if she knew
how confounding he found her honesty.

When Ellie Hewlett was sixteen years old, she had learned from a classmate that part of her family’s considerable wealth had been accrued in the lucrative opium trade resulting from the First Anglo-Afghan War. According to her own account, she and a few of her classmates had taken blood-thinners her younger brother had stolen from the elder on the rare weekend they had reason to visit their ancestral home. Ellie had stolen a handgun while in residence she claimed had been used to shot a thoroughbred through its skull and had been in the process of suggesting that the six of them make a game of it when Simcoe spoke up. He fought her for the weapon and in short time she bleed quite a lot on account of the pills she had taken. He dragged her into a water closet and helped her to clean up her face and her act, as it were, by choking her with toilet water and crying her about his mum. He told her that she did not want to die. Not really. Not like this. Ellie argued until she agreed and somewhere in the course of offering an explanation for which she was not asked, Simcoe conceded his sympathies. He shared a sense of suffering at the hands of someone with the same surname. Her elder brother –he of the blood-thinners – had taken him to a ‘safe house’ as a translator and sold him out to a rival faction when they found themselves under fire.

Ellie admitted to having spent a large part of the summer that followed attempting to understand the power structure of this branch of the family business. Somewhere along her search for answers had found herself positioned to execute a coup of sorts. She never elaborated what ‘sorts’ of trouble she had found herself in. ‘No trouble!’ she had insisted when this first came up years later, in the same charming tones that chimed like coins won in a dangerous game of chance common to all she had attended boarding school with. ‘Johnny made me swear I’d never hinder my intellectual capacities with such a wicked substance. I think he well might kill me if I did,’ she joked without laughing.

‘She doesn’t even drink coffee anymore,’ Effie Gwillim later confirmed. ‘Honesty, our Ellie is the dullest drug lord I’ve ever in my life known and I’ve my fiancé to thank.’

He found it incredibly sad that though they were all so quick to claim her, no one else in her life seemed bothered that ‘their Ellie’ squandered all of her talents on creating societal disharmony. He sometimes spoke to her about this, wondering if Simcoe, in whom he had so much faith, had ever attempted to further his intervention. Wondering then if he was bold or brash enough to succeed where his better had often failed. Ellie Hewlett had spent the decade since carving out a monopoly by campaigning against the then widespread practice of prescribing oxycodone and killing off or commandeering any illicit competition. She ran various charities to combat substance abuse, which seemed counterintuitive until one took into account that her family enjoyed tax credits and allowances from a government that could not otherwise save the people it was sworn to serve from the vices, as Ellie put it, ‘they would partake in regardless.’ At least in the centre, she reasoned, she was able to execute some measure of control. Richard was hesitant to extend the benefit of doubt. His boss once told him that he was the only man in law enforcement who saw the marked decrease in drug cases as a net loss. In truth, when he looked at the ‘drug problem’ in general and his own in specific, he saw only a girl content to damn the world to be the victim of her circumstances. This did not stop him from ringing time and again, even where there were no pressing matters to discuss.

“I just had to ring my ex and tell her to get the kids on a plane,” he told her flatly.

>>An impromptu holiday? At five o’clock in the morning? I suppose that is how those things usually work out, isn’t it? You’ll forgive me,<< she yawned, >>I’ve only just -<<

Do you think? she asked, it seemed, in earnest.

“How did you do it? How did you come into my home?”

I didn’t, she yawned again, inquiring, Are we still off the record, Love?

“Sure,” Richard responded. They had done this dance before. Someday she would misstep. Eleanor Hewlett had always been honest in word if not deed, a quality he was open to admit he would have found admirable on some level had it existed in anyone else. Someday, he was confident, she would say the wrong thing at the right time and he would be ready to meet her with force. He, or the French, or Simcoe - assuming he was not exhausting his efforts on the Hewlett whose gun sat on his mantel.

Maybe she already had miscalculated in form of the email she had sent to Sergeant Yilmaz, presumably in an effort to save the same old friend who had inadvertently gifted her with a small empire from suspicion. It was with this thought that Richard first actively realized he considered Simcoe to have been behind the Arnold disappearance. He wondered how many times he had seen the word ‘law’ in combination with ‘order’ and ‘authority’ before it had ceased to have any meaning for him as a cop. He wondered if he would have retired his badge long ago if not for the protection it had afforded him until this morning.

Ellie sighed in a rare crack of composure.

One - or perhaps more - of your Caritas volunteers is fulfilling some community service requirement set by the court for pretty theft as opposed to paying a fine. I’ll confess, I’ve known this one in question for quite some time and I was rather cross at having my expectations betrayed with such blatant disregard. Such a bright girl, otherwise, truly a shame, she lamented, I do so hope the other hundred-ninety-nine hours she is required to spend in service to the poor and sick will do something to sort her out, but then my concerns don’t interest you.

“They do when you admit to using a heavy-handed court ruling to the end of extortion and espionage,” Richard countered.

I thought we were off the record? But it is rather curious - having a think on it, I can nearly hear you in my dreams, she continued hurriedly, Knowing how keen you are to tell anyone who will listen what a dreadful person you think me to be -

“I told no one, Ellie – about any of it. Christ, you played yourself. Why?”

Well you told your mum, certainly, and I had my insider feed her the same line. ‘Ah, Lady Eleanor is such a demon. And such an incompetent one at that! She deserves to be punished for putting that killer into a coma!’ And so on, and so on she said, her octane lowering to a base line. Evidently, Mummy Dearest was quite helpful in getting … DS Yilmaz, is it? the information she was after. Breaking into your email server was logistically easier to work out.

The information DS Yilmaz had not known she was after was Eleanor’s own account of a crime she had committed as a minor in the name of a military commander who had most certainly been in the capacity to clear up the matter on his own had it been brought to his attention.

At the time in question, Ellie’s twin brother Eugene was dating Fabienne Bouchard, the daughter of the man who had recently taken command of the French Foreign Legion, consequently, the first General in the unit’s history to have been promoted through its own ranks. According to propaganda that had since passed into myth, when the current Le Père Légion naturalized and was given a new identity in exchange for his spilt blood, he had elected to stay in the armed forces,
declining to offer of a more comfortable command with the regulars. In the time that lapsed between Captain and General, Émile Bouchard lost half of his face to heavy shelling, the love of his life to sickness, and nearly every trace of his former life to a system that fed its ranks on the promise of exoneration.

Before he had been a celebrated soldier in command of 7,000 men who had sworn their allegiance directly to him, Bouchard had known, and had been know, by a different name, albeit one that evoked a similarly dangerous connotation.

Jaensch Krawczyk had been born behind the Iron Curtain and had, until the collapse of communism, made a living in the illicit export of his own countrymen. When his niche was nullified by politics in the early nineties, he sought to carve out another in the city he had then found himself, but found heavy competition in another group of Cold War casualties, Afghans who had seen their country stolen by religious fundamentalists the Americans had propped up to assist in their skirmishes with the Soviets. Krawczyk blinked for a moment and had opened his eyes to find that he had been edged out of his old market. He thus joined with a group of formal rivals from Eastern Europe to get in on these new trafficking route, only to sell a number of them out months later before heading to France to wash his hands of sin in the blood of whomever the west decided was democracy’s enemy de jour. He left behind a number of powerful enemies in the form of imprisoned compatriots, one of whom would shoot up the Afghani safe house twelve years later while on parole and kidnap the Urdu-speaking ‘cousin’ of a price – who, as it happened, was not nearly as profitable of a hostage as he would have hoped.

But Krawczyk, nicknamed and now officially titled ‘the butcher’ did not concern himself with any of this, not even a year later when his only begotten child began attending the same military boarding school as the boys who had found themselves in so much trouble with the criminal networks he had once sold out. The incident had been of no concern to anyone who had been outside of Glasgow itself that night. That was until The Daily Mail, at the urging of its then-eighteen-year-old owner, had published a series on the General’s daughter once she had left England for university. Fabienne had become something a public interest piece overnight when her boyfriend, a year younger, made a romantic hero of himself by following her back to France before obtaining his A-levels.

The gods of old had a great sense of irony. Because a bill for softer sentencing championed by Eugene Hewlett’s uncle in the House of Peers had become common practice, because Elizabeth Gwillim had aged into her inheritance, and because there was so much to be made from what the junior editor saw as a love story, Fabienne Bouchard found herself on the cover of nearly every print tabloid in Britain by the time her first semester at the Sorbonne had started. Because she so resembled her father, her problems quickly proved themselves to be greater than seeing herself reduced to a subject of gossip across the channel.

By October, she was receiving daily threats from a more dangerous opportunist than her former friend from school. The man who had once gone into business with her father, who had once kidnapped her friend John for ransom and who had twice been released because of a policy proposal from the uncle of the boy who shared her bed, claimed he would surrender the name Jaensch Krawczyk to any media outlet willing to pay the price he set it if she would not. Fabienne knew from Elizabeth’s stories of shareholder meetings the severity of the threat. She knew from her father’s mouth that there were more wars then men to fight them. She knew from his general disposition towards her boyfriend that he considered leniency foreign states extended towards criminals the reason enlistment had flown from a flood to a trickle. If the commander’s prior convictions were made public, panic would set in across the service men. All of their wars would be lost as a result.
This was what Edmund Hewlett had explained to the Foreign Office after his younger sister collaborated the account John Graves Simcoe gave DI Ferguson under duress. Simcoe told of the attempted blackmail, of finding out that his friend and classmate planned to pay a portion of the proposed fee for her future sister-in-law. The Eleonore Hewlett, meanwhile, said that she had had every intention of creating a situation that would permit her to kill the would-be extortionist in self-defence, but that Simcoe had intervened on her behalf before it had gotten to the point of true physical danger.

There was an irony in that had the information come out any other way, all would have been exonerated without incident. Because they had each individually admitted to possessing information that threatened a military ally, however, their continued safety was tied to their sworn silence over the whole affair, as was Richard’s. There was an irony in that he would have lost his job had this very truth not come out as it did, having subjected the then-legally-underage Ellie to interrogation without appointing an appropriate adult. There was a tragedy in that in inadvertently saving him from being sacked, the information he had come to possess chained him to his post. He would never be promoted.

Now the good people of the NYPD knew that Simcoe had beaten a man quite nearly to his death with his bare hands, and more dangerously, they knew the reason why. Richard wondered if this had been part of Ellie’s aim.

“Simcoe is trying to frame your brother for a crime he likely did not commit,” he tested.

>>Ah … good luck to him with that, << she commented without interest. Richard knotted his brow as she continued briskly, >>Now, Fergie - you’ll excuse for a moment what you think you cannot forgive – I am about to make a wild assumption about you based on that moral on your back wall. You’re rooting for Simcoe’s success in this what you’ve named as his current venture, aren’t you? While there is nothing I can do from where I am to make that scenario that exists solely in your head any more likely, if you’ll be so kind as to use your … limited influence to help me where I’ve none, I’ll … put a detail on your children if you truly deem it necessary. I don’t. For the record, I truly don’t. But then I’ve had more to do with Père Boucher over the course of the past decade than you have. I wouldn’t give Rochambeau too terribly much of your mind.<<

He wondered if she had read the email as well, and if so, how she could be so cavalier with regard to its content.

“It is not just me. It is Yilmaz, Tallmadge –neither of whom I can reach – it is everyone they work with. It’s Simcoe.”

>>Lafayette isn’t reckless. Or maybe he is but I should doubt that he is stupid besides. The most he can do from his current position is redirect the police. Ah … you can help with that as well. In fact, that is why I’m entertaining this discussion,<< she paused, >>Does the name Selah Strong say anything to you?>>

“He strong does,” Richard answered, looking at the darkness that covered the pictures that covered his wall and window, seeing Anna all the same and sharing in her confusion.

>>Anna’s ex. A soldier or sailor or something,<< she clarified. >>He recently moved down to Norfolk. Um. There is a Norfolk in the Americas as well. One of the Carolinas?>>

“Virginia,” he corrected.

>>Christ that is even worse. His new fiancée, Najma Abboud, served a few tours under Benedict Arnold before he was elected to the senate or she was dishonourably discharged for sleeping with
a subordinate. Which ever happened first. Now, I know through a mutual acquaintance of ours that the Yanks are attempting to use the senator’s absence as a means of ensuring that Arnold’s defence bill becomes law, and they have it in their minds - or at least Ban has it in his - that the best way to get public perception onside of something as fully ridiculous as using drones to spy on their own citizens is to convince them of some intellectual contagion. Terrorism. An easier sell with an Arabic surname at play, to be sure. Before you think to inquire, I don’t know what happened to Arnold, Inspector, I don’t know if my brother or his boyfriend were involved, but I have it on authority that the feds want to frame an innocent woman for a supposed crime. I’m prepared to make it worth your while if you make sure they can’t. Name your price, Inspector.<<

Richard Ferguson hated Eleanor Hewlett. He hated her mirthless laughter. He hated the life she lived, the realities that assured his ruin with each of her successes. He hated that she extended limited regard she seemed to have for her own life to the good people inversely affected by the information she felt herself free to share. More than anything, however, he hated that he had to question if she was truly the villain in his narrative or anyone else's.

“Do you believe Edmund shares your particular dedication to 'Law. Order. Authority.'?”

>>It depends if you think any two people would chose to define those words in the same sense.<<

Chapter End Notes

If you find yourself saying, ‘Okay ... geez Tav, that was [whatever your assessment], but you could have done more to make your original characters likeable.’ Oh boy, do I ever have a series of recommendations for you. I cannot get enough of Reinette_de_la_Saintonge’s gorgeous prose and poetry and her (much different) interpretations of Elizabeth Gwllim and a Hewlett sister are the things of envy. Please, please, please go treat yourselves to The Colonel's Portrait and Roses and Thistles, I promise on my life it will be the best part of your week as it often is of mine.

So then … contextual notes!

SCIAF is the Scottish branch of Caritas, an international charity which Google informs me is known both as CRS and CCUSA in North America.

The French Foreign Legion was created in 1831 for foreign recruits. Though part of the French military, allegiance is sworn to the Legion itself rather than to France. After three years of service French citizenship is granted, or, as in this case, when someone is injured in battle due to a provision rather poetically dubbed "Français par le sang versé".

The first Anglo-Afghan War lasted from 1839 to 1842. The Afghans won.


The Daily Mail is a real newspaper, it is privately owned, though clearly not by Simcoe’s long-dead real-life spouse.

There is a City of Norfolk in Virginia, on the east coast of the United States and a County of Norfolk on the east coast of England. Both sites serve some military importance (USN and RAF, respectively). Keep in mind (and then forget, until I
remind you again in another ten chapters or so that last we saw Tarleton he was on his way to Virginia. We will never see Najma. Take that however you will for now.)

I think that is it. Am I missing anything beyond offering up a whole-hearted apology for such a disappointing chapter? I am sorry. I felt it had to be this way. Let me make it up to you. Give me another chance. We can make this work. (…but can Ben and Caleb??! Find out next time!)

Here is a preview if you are thus inclined.

XOXO - Tav
Chapter Summary

Caleb proves a bright spot in Ben’s otherwise awful week.
Until he doesn’t.

Chapter Notes

What’s up, lovely faces? I’ll tell you, because I am back way sooner than I ever expected to be. The good news about this update is that I have finally gotten to use parts of the Akinbode / Ben confrontation that has been on my hard drive for … I don’t really even want to think how long. The BETTER news, at least for me as a writer, is that in the thirtieth chapter of my fandom magnum opus, I finally get to lay bare a clue I left for you on page two of the first. Did you catch it? ;) I think it has been referenced in everyone’s POV by this point.

Okay, okay – but that brings me to the BEST news, for me personally, as a reader. Namely most of my mates have posted or updated glorious fic this week and I simply cannot wait to read, kudo and comment. So if my notes are a bit short, you’ll understand, yes?

One thing we won’t skip is the standard acknowledgement of potentially upsetting subject matter. Warnings include: religiosity, sexuality, office stress at every level, body image – oh. And there is a short(ish) sex scene.

We good? Let’s go!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was 10 AM on Sunday morning when DI Benjamin Tallmadge awoke to the familiar sound of an electronic device demanding attention in the way a small child whose vocabulary had been reduced to a monosyllable by a sudden stimulus might. It was 10 AM on Sunday morning and DI Benjamin Tallmadge, dreary and dreamy, swiped his finger across the screen he found beside him in hopes of silencing it for five minutes more. The gesture did nothing to quiet the alarm, but Ben closed his eyes in defiance, looking for sleep but finding instead the catharsis that came with having spent the night in the arms of someone who sought to understand him on his own terms. He felt his sprits rise though his body lay still, sore from a night spent under the weight of the man he heard making chit-chat with his dachshund in the kitchen. He could smell coffee over the meat and eggs he heard sizzling on his stovetop. For the first time in what felt an eternity, pleasure overwhelmed his sense of purpose. He was falling in love. It was 10:02 and Ben laid with his eyes shut. The phone beeped again. The world could wait five minutes more.

Five minutes he thought, blissfully unaware that he was designating and defining the timeframe in which his happiness was fated to last. When the frantic beeps finally forced his eyes open, he would quickly realise that he was not in fact falling for one Caleb Brewster. He was not falling at
all; rather, he had hit rock bottom somewhere over the course of his current investigation.

It would be five minutes before Caleb transitioned on paper from witness to suspect. Fifteen days would then separate him, his guest and their growing affections for one another from the ‘when’ in which it would officially ‘cease to matter.’ For the morning that then remained to them after everything seemed lost to the conventional chaos inherent in sharing a comforter with a near stranger, instinct and experience would inform the Detective Inspector that his tenure with Special Crimes was coming to a close. Ben would hear his internal demons as they shouted out in a voice too akin to his own the self-same reasons Hamilton, Burr, and - in a particularly cruel twist of fate – Akinbode would later cite during his formal deposition:

Gross negligence.

Gross incompetence.

Gross abuse of power.

In fifteen days, Ben would not be positioned to defend himself against these charges. He would surrender his badge and service weapon without much of a fight, having already fully ceded his certainty to scepticism. Afterwards, Ben would not retreat to his own soiled fortresses, but to those of the man whom, in five minutes, he would come to learn was an enemy spy.

In that moment and those to follow, Ben could not anticipate that Caleb’s name would not once be brought up in the dismissal he foresaw. There were snakes in the garden, yes, but the man in his kitchen who had spent the night in his bed would ultimately save him from their venous bite. But for the next five minutes, none of this mattered. None of this yet existed in a way he was conscious of. Nothing did. Ben laid and listened, hearing the sound of his pulse quicken to match the melody Caleb hummed to the hound, hearing bacon sizzle, coffee brew and eggs burn. Caleb Brewster had come back with a mess of a man to a mess of a flat and chosen to stay with him through the night, fourteen stories removed from reason.

The phone rang again at 10:05. It took more than a minute of the same swelling pitch for Ben to realise that it was not the din of his alarm.

At 10:07 on a bright, sunny Sunday morning in March, DI Benjamin Tallmadge was fated to mentally register that in spite the semblance of domestic bliss surrounding him, he was in hell. He heard Caleb shuffle around in his kitchen in search for a clean plate and could not decide if the sound he then felt himself swallow in response had been a cry or scream.

Ben Tallmadge once believed in law and order with a religious fervent that in spite of his Pentecostal upbringing would otherwise have failed his psyche. Although there had been pervious incidences throughout the course of his career that might have given root to seeds of doubt, their flowers failed to bloom until the Friday prior. When they at long last opened themselves to the sun, they stank of a corruption of the worst kind, of cracks in the façade of the judiciary system in which malfeasance was not only invited to grow but encouraged to flourish.

Aaron Burr, the ADA who had been assigned to the Arnold Investigation after Smith’s abdication from the case, had been unsympathetic to each argument Ben and his senior staff presented in hopes of getting him to sign off on a series of additional search warrants. The DI had spent the
better part of the past hour trying to explain that the lack of evidence at Whitehall gave ground for his team to continue the line of inquiry they were currently pursuing. The country estate was the residence of one of the case’s prime suspects as well as two of its persons of interest. What was found and -more critically- what was not brought a number of alibis into question.

His unit had wasted hours that morning searching Judge Woodhull’s office at his son Abraham’s insistence that Edmund Hewlett had hidden evidence in that room. What Hewlett had ‘hidden’ in and amongst the library’s legal encyclopaedias and assorted literature seemed only to be the contents of his recycling bin – half-solved equations on crumpled graphing paper, receipts for ordinary purchases, photographs obscured by the fade of time and memos containing thoughts that were no longer urgent. Initially, Ben had imagined the younger Woodhull as working either directly or in conjunction with Hewlett to lead the Special Crimes team from personally damning evidence which, admittedly, might have nothing whatsoever to do with their case. Abraham’s wife Mary had given an account that she was having an affair with John Graves Simcoe – could her husband perhaps have bought himself more time to cover up anything that could support her claim? Ben had asked. Certainly, the scandal - should it be proven or made public - would sully the family’s standing in the deeply conservative circles in which they travelled. DC Baker however had found nothing to tie Mary Woodhull to her supposed lover – something noteworthy even if one was not taking her husband’s odd behaviour into account.

Slightly removed from this concern was the questionable discovery of her fingerprints (and those of her supposed lover) on the one item in the attic-turned-apartment that pathology had elected to treat as evidence – a soccer jersey caked in invisible gunshot residue that had been ‘hidden’ under Hewlett’s mattress. CSI advised that multiple weapons had been fired by whomever had last donned the Toffee’s away-colours. DS Yilmaz had explained that it seemed to her a bad and blatant attempt to lead them down another rabbit hole, based solely on her assessment of a sporting rivalry in a midsized city across the Atlantic – something Baker, Sanchez and the external assistance Ben sought from Google and Wikipedia also spoke to.

The inspector however was interested in the jersey on its own merits, removed from the details of those involved in the gang-style street-and-stadium violence that had grown around a sport so dull as to lend itself to the pursuit of such entertainment. It was not the team emblem or the fact that it evidently clashed with Hewlett’s flashy commercial support of a rival franchise, it was not the gunshot residue or that it was hidden, but rather that it was so easily discovered. Unlike his sergeant, Ben was of the mind that instead of aiming to distract the police unit he knew to be all-too-eager to book him for any slight, Edmund Hewlett was subtly and intentionally trying to point them in the right direction. As Police Constable Sanchez had reported to him after she had sat in whilst Dr Martha Dandridge interrogated Simcoe, the only time the federally-contracted psychologist seemed to take notes was when the witness spoke of his involvement in an association soccer team.

‘Of added interest,’ Ben explained to his boss, ‘on Wednesday, DS Russo here uncovered medical records of nearly all of the players whom Simcoe captains in his search of John André’s office, excluding only Hewlett and someone I gather from Sanchez’s recollection is named Roger.’

‘Perhaps,’ Russo suggested, ‘one Robert Rogers of Setauket, a contractor working on a home owned by Mary and Richard Woodhull, and for whom Abraham seems to preform odd jobs from time to time.’

Burr did not offer a response or any other indication that he had been listening. Russo shifted, shooting Ben a discouraged look as he transferred his bulk and balance between his feet.

Yet to be deterred, Ben continued, albeit increasingly agitated at the complete absence of interest
in the findings of this case from the one person positioned to give him the tools he needed to solve it. ‘DC Braxton,’ he said, ‘saw the same names scattered among the files he found and photographed on Dandridge’s desk at Columbia. Whatever she might be to the FBI,’ he sighed, ‘we know she is involved in a research project with the psychologist who took to ground the night Arnold went missing and we know she is -for reasons we have yet to learn- keeping many of André’s records confidential.’

‘Out of the question,’ the ADA answered before one had been asked.

Ben knew his unit was on the verge of tying it all together, but unfortunately, this was where the discussion often had a habit of ending with Burr. The ADA reverted to reminding them without the courtesy of feigning concern that his office had received and angry phone call from his right honourable colleague in New York’s Court of Appeals as though this gave his inaction any justification of which to speak. ‘Had DA Smith been left in charge of proceedings,’ Ben spat, ‘my team could get to work rather than dancing in circles with a forced and false sense of loyalty. Everyone is equal under the law. If doctors Dandridge and André are covering something related to Arnold’s disappearance, they are susceptible to a police search. It should not come into consideration who their friends are in Washington,’ he insisted, ‘if anything; the fact that their project seems to be receiving Defence Budget funding which Arnold and his senatorial committee would have approved is all the more reason to look further into the files found open in a university office.

‘The fact that one of Dandridge and André’s test subjects happens to lease a flat in Judge Woodhull’s residence should not eliminate him from suspicion or Whitehall from being treated as an area of interest. Everyone,’ Ben stressed again, ‘is equal under the law. This is America, not some post-soviet oligarchy in which exception can be purchased through personal and financial connections. Before the District Attorney removed herself from the investigation to avoid any conflict of interest or possible claims of corruption,’ Ben nearly shouted, ‘she saw to it that a search warrant was written for her own daughter’s apartment. The law demanded it of her as it now demanded it of her successor, Mr Burr, Sir!’

‘You think Nancy doesn’t play the games you stand here and accuse me of?’ Burr challenged. At this, Russo lowered his gaze. Ben did not have to look at Yilmaz to know that she was rolling her eyes in his direction by means of silently indicating her agreement. He hated that his promotion to inspector had been at her expense, he hated that the ADA’s obfuscations and empty objections underlined her insubordination while adding credit to the argument from which it stemmed. Yilmaz was right, he admitted to himself. He owed his current position to the mishandling of the investigation of Sarah Livingston’s death under Smith’s predecessor. The justice system was broken. It occurred to Ben that he was in the wrong job altogether, though the same might be said of the man set on making his harder than need be. He narrowed his gaze, wondering if it might be worth it to hear Jordan out the next time he brought up retiring from the force and joining him in fighting institutionalized acts of injustice at his prestigious law firm, paradoxical as his plea sounded at its surface.

‘Sir, the photographs Constable Braxton took in Martha Dandridge’s office -‘ he started.

‘Are not to be treated as evidence as they were obtained without a warrant,’ Burr warned.

‘Sir,’ Ben said, again with more assertion than his boss’s hardening expression advised him his current position allowed.

‘Refresh me, Tallmadge, how many years has it been since the DA’s now-ex-husband published his famous article exposing the hypocrisy and questionable legality of many of Judge Woodhull’s
rulings? You must have been in college at the time.'

It had been a rhetorical question. Ben responded regardless.

‘High school. Though it was required reading at university -'

‘I don’t know that DA Smith and Judge Woodhull have ever discussed it,’ Burr interrupted. ‘I highly suspect however that it effected his decision in a number of cases Nancy has since argued before his bench. But there has never been any retaliation from her office. Until now. Why?’ he demanded as though he thought any answer relevant.

‘The warrant she had written is not a ‘retaliation’ against Judge Woodhull, as you put it,’ Ben objected. ‘His tenant is a suspect in my investigation. His daughter-in-law Mary has given my team reason to question her alibi as well, and I hardly think that Nancy Smith would step down from her role in the investigation on the condition that a warrant be issued were she -’

‘Anna Strong took a job as assistant counsel to Jordan Akinbode in the class action he is bringing against the City of New York,’ Yilmaz interjected, inching ever-so-slightly forward. ‘Any newfound affection Nancy may have for her would-be son-in-law aside, we all know she wants nothing more than for her daughter to follow in her footsteps, and so long as we are speaking honestly about our esteemed colleagues, I think it very likely that Woodhull will consider the City’s warrant against his property during argument. ADA Adams had this in the bag and now-’

‘Sergeant, are you suggesting that DA Smith intentionally sabotaged one of her subordinates?’ Ben barked.

‘I am repeating - as I was told over drinks last night - that the DA saw a chance and she took it. I happened to mention that my assignment informed me that Anna wanted to buy the bar she has been working in for the past several years and-’

‘I sincerely hope you were not talking about the case as I hope the DA was not asking about it.’

‘You have too much faith in the system, Ben,’ Yilmaz shrugged, her bony shoulders seeming to sharpen into blades. Ben wished he did not agree with her assessment nearly as much as he wished she had not chosen this particular platform on which to play power politics and prove her prestige before a man Ben should not have need to bring onside.

‘You don’t have children, do you Tallmadge?’ Burr asked, continuing as though he spoke to a minor, ‘Methodology aside, Yilmaz is right. Smith was all but forced to dissolve a marriage to a man she loved over his fight with Richard Woodhull and let the matter rest until she could use it to her advantage. Now she is in the process of punishing him for his behaviour towards her family since William Smith’s exposé was published by forcing a rule against her office. Woodhull will be widely criticised for his resulting opinion or -less likely, descent - which won’t help his chances on staying on the short-list for Justice Scalia’s replacement. Meanwhile, I imagine, as no doubt does my boss, that her daughter Anna Strong will fall back in love with the law, seemingly obtaining an easy victory out of an improbable case. But you? You’ll have made a number of powerful enemies if you continue with your -forgive me - undo interest in Whitehall and its residents. You found nothing connecting Mrs Woodhull to your other suspect – much less to Arnold and the only thing keeping Hewlett under suspicion is a jersey from a soccer team you can’t imagine him supporting?’ Burr chided. ‘His family contributes millions to the City of Liverpool’s economy, all of the various club paraphernalia could be coincidental, could correlate to the people his parents do business with rather than indicate sympathy to whichever mid-table outfit the town houses,’ he scoffed, shaking his head. ‘Even if there is gunshot residue on the garment, it tells us nothing without a weapon – which I will remind you, you did not find. Not a Whitehall, which, according to
Judge Woodhull, you turned over itself. Not at DeJong’s Tavern, where - Christ Tallmadge! - according to pathology, no evidence whatsoever was found to suggest that a gun was in use. But go on. Keep looking for a reason to lock up the DA’s son-in-law. See what happens.’

‘The entire property seems to have been washed with bleach’ Ben began to protest.

‘Which would do nothing to erase trace elements. I checked with CSI on this. Did you?’ Burr demanded.

‘Sir,’ Ben started, inhaling deeply through clenched teeth. ‘You don’t find it at all suspicious that a bar that barely manages to pass its heath inspection each year -'

‘I don’t know what you are looking for, Tallmadge, and I am not convinced that you do either. I know for a fact however, that if you continue threatening the families of the District Attorney and the Chief Judge of the State’s highest court that whether it be it tomorrow or in three decades, you will retire as an inspector, not as a chief – as you ought. Keep your eye on the ball, Ben.’

‘Forgive me, Sir, but for the purpose of this conversation and this case, the projected trajectory of my career is entirely irrelevant. Leave them to their inter-family drama – I would not characterize Whitehall or DeJong’s as lacking sufficient evidence.’

‘Um. Boss,’ Russo nudged him. Ben nodded for him to continue. ‘Mr Burr, to return to what you were saying about Liverpool and whatever business the Hewlett family has there … do you follow soccer by chance?’ Both Ben and the ADA stared at him, confused as to why this was being asked, and Ben, at least, confused by its inquisitor. Like himself, Russo was a red-blooded American, someone who might be described as a good-ol’-boy had he a different zip code. His interest in any given sport correlated directly with the number of concussions that could be produced in gameplay. Ben looked at Yilmaz whose gestures told him that she did not know where this was going either. Her bones formed themselves into blades again in a wordless expression of ignorance. Feeling awkward and unnerved at the sight of his second’s concealed weapons, he turned back to her partner, telling himself to trust in Russo’s intuition.

‘Only insofar as my daughter plays,’ Burr replied, still perplexed after a long pause.

‘On a team coached by Anna Strong, is that right?’

‘Until recently.’

‘And who coaches it now?’ Russo asked as though he already knew the answer.

‘John Graves Simcoe,’ Burr said, addressing Ben instead of his subordinate as through he expected a challenge from the front rather than one of the flanks.

‘That doesn’t worry you?’ Russo replied rhetorically, causing Ben to fight a smile as he watched one of his sergeants wield the internal opposition’s preferred oral device against him. ‘No, that doesn’t worry you. Phillip Hamilton plays for the same team … which means two city kids get driven out to some backwater twice or three times a week despite there being four-hundred-seventy-eight teams in their division within the downtown area. I don’t want to get into the why of that exactly when there exists a larger question of both yourself and the Assistant Director In-Charge of the FBI’s Manhattan field office being so comfortable … almost cosy with our case. On the topic of appearances and conflicts of interest … maybe you can tell me because the FBI has not been helpful here – why isn’t Hamilton’s office, and why aren’t you personally willing to take Simcoe or Hewlett seriously as suspects? Is there a legally valid reason why we might be able to eliminate them as well?’
‘Hamilton …’ Burr stopped where he began.

‘You used to have a practice together, if I am not mistaken. Is there something of a Woodhull/Smith rivalry in there somewhere?’ The question was not relevant, but Ben raised his eyebrows with Russo’s when Burr seemed on the verge of capitulation.

‘Hamilton’s interest are in line with Washington’s … George Washington’s’ he clarified after a pause. ‘The Sec Def has asked us, rather, he has asked Hamilton to hold back on this one. I have no choice but to trust them.’

Ben clenched his fists tighter until his fingernails began to burrow themselves into his palms.

‘Is that the real reason Smith stepped down?’ Yilmaz asked. Burr did not answer her. ‘Your job is to find Arnold,’ he advised the team quietly. ‘Not to dig into the intricacies international defence … possible trade interests …’

‘Burr, what do you know?’ Ben demanded.

‘That you need to do as instructed,’ he warned once more.

‘How am I supposed to do anything without support?’ Ben shouted back.

‘Thallmadge, I advise you to leave me office.’

‘Don’t worry boss,’ Russo whispered as he took him by the shoulder and directed him towards the door before he could offer a career-ending retort. ‘I know how we can hope to beat them at their own game.’

‘I don’t even understand what they are playing.’ Ben replied loud enough that he was certain ADA Burr could still hear him from the other side of the glass-pained door.

‘Tiki-taka from the sounds of it,’ Yilmaz said, ‘but I think what my partner is proposing would be better put as kick-and-rush.’

‘Soccer,’ Russo summarized.

Ben squinted in slight-disbelief, questioning briefly if he had ever seen any statistics on the sport’s capacity for closed-head brain injuries. ‘Mike, Hadi, I have to be honest, I don’t understand the analogy,’ he admitted. ‘And I don’t follow the game.’

‘Oh I don’t either, Boss,’ Russo said, hitting Yilmaz on her shoulder. ‘As to analogies, I personally wasn’t making one.’

‘Sanchez!’ the New Jersian boomed once they were back in the ever-hectic bullpen after an elevator ride on which his partner dutifully explained that ‘tiki-taka’ was style of play characterized by short passes, largely associated with the city of Barcelona or some soccer team that wore its name. Russo chided that the joke only worked if she did not have to explain it without giving Yilmaz time to inform them as to what she had meant with ‘kick-and-rush.’ Ben felt that whatever it was, it sounded a fitting punishment for everyone upstairs.

‘Ayy! Sanchez! Need you for a minute,’ Russo bellowed again as they approached his cubicle.
At the sound of her surname, PC Letty Sanchez stood up with a jolt and addressed them with a salute. ‘At ease,’ Russo laughed, but his trainee waited for Ben’s order before lowering her hand and relaxing her posture. The inspector smiled in spite of himself, looking at the rest of his team who had not risen from their desks or done much in way of greeting. He wondered how long it would take before he could expect the same show of respect from the young constable he had commandeered from another unit on the basis that she had needed to take a bathroom break when he had needed someone in uniform. Ben Tallmadge was highly secretive by both nature and profession. Having forced the new recruit to ‘hold it in’ while Simcoe waxed poetic about a horse and the boy who shot it, he was reluctant to return her to whichever beat she had originally been assigned after basic training. Letty was nineteen, wide-eyed and untested. She had never attended college, never left the city, never worked a case and never learned to drive. Ben would not have so much as read her application had she requested a transfer. Now he could not let her leave. When she returned his smile, Ben felt his face fall. Letty Sanchez was nineteen. She had yet to understand that far from a promotion, Special Crimes was a prison sentence.

‘Tallmadge?’ He glanced over. DC Braxton held out a Styrofoam cup of half-eaten instant ramen in his direction and kicked the bottom drawer of his filing cabinet as though he meant to suggest there were more inside for the taking. Ben shook his head as he heard his stomach audibly protest his refusal. Four years of routine eighteen-hour days spent largely behind a desk had already caused his trousers to contract uncomfortable around his thighs and torso. He avoided mirrors most days, and on this day in particular, he was subconsciously counting calories he had yet to consume. He equated each anticipated energy unit with the whispers he caught on occasion,

- It is like, is that a gun in your pocket or do you need to check your dryer setting? –

- Every time I see Tallmadge, I am reminded of the music I listened to in high school. –

- Do you think his wife does his shopping, or do you think he just squeezes himself into her skinnies? –

Ben’s stomach growled again and Braxton repeated his offer. Again, he politely declined. Russo cleared his throat and Ben did his best to rid his id of natural impulse and his ego of conscious doubt and desire. He had bigger problems than his bum and other awkward budges his trousers accentuated, or so he reminded himself as he came to realise how very much he was dreading dinner. He had a nineteen-year-old constable and a sergeant who imagined that after only two days with the most demanding unit on the force she had something to contribute. Ben sighed and waited.

‘Sanchez, why don’t you tell DI Tallmadge what you were telling me and DS Yilmaz earlier,’ Russo said.

‘Um … about the football.’

‘What did I tell you about the misuse of that word?’ he scorned.

‘S-sorry … that is what you were asking about though or -‘ Sanchez stammered without removing her eye’s from Ben.

‘Go on, Constable,’ Yilmaz smiled encouragingly, elbowing Russo as she hissed, ‘don’t be mean, she is already nervous.’ Ben noticed the way the junior officer was looking at him and could guess why, suddenly feeling ill at the suggestion. Her light brown eyes unconsciously alternated between his face and the polyester/cotton blend pants from a suit he had gotten at Primark but wore now with a more elegant blazer – as though that made much difference. Sanchez smiled as she began to speak. Ben felt lost for words. Girls had not been interested in him when he was young and naïve
enough to hide magazines full of naked ones in his nightstand because it seemed normal. Or maybe they had and he simply had not noticed in an era when everyone wore dark-wash skinny jeans and his eyes fell to the same place he now seemed to force those of his colleagues’.

Ben hoped his sexual preferences were indeed the stuff of office gossip; that Yilmaz would out him to the young constable with the casual ease in which she had brought up the subject of her own sinful adventures in the squad car yesterday while driving back from Simcoe’s flat. Ben was not comfortable addressing such matters. Yesterday had been the second time in his life he had ever taken part of that short discussion, a discussion he had never once opened.

‘Look … I know and I am cool with it, I mean we cool … but I’m not interested,’ Jordan had told him years ago in the locker room showers, trying to avert his eyes from the boner Ben had not been aware of until the moment all of his mental energy found itself employed in trying to wish it away. He coughed out an incoherent string of apologies which had seemed to his fellow tenth-grade an invitation to compile every pamphlet he had ever come across addressing etiquette for ‘LBGTQ Allies’ into a single, awkward sentence. Ben had interrupted, begging him not to tell his father when he saw him later at their Confirmation classes.

‘I ain’t going to mention this to anyone,’ Jordan said quickly, forcing himself to laugh to lighten the mood. He had stopped abruptly when the blood Ben had prayed out of his penis began demanding refuge in his cheeks. Seeing him blush, his friend tried to backtrack, increasingly cautious of each word he spoke, lest he land on one of those belonging to the ever-increasing list of terms deemed offensive by a community of which he was not part. Jordan was not afraid of him or something that he had yet to experience as a closeted fifteen-year old in a small upper-middle class suburb. Jordan was afraid of saying something that might cause him shame. He was trying to be kind. ‘It is like that for me too, um, with race – not that, I mean,’ Ben stuttered, unsure if he could say ‘race’ or not. Jordan then laughed genuinely as he told him to relax. ‘I knew you were white a full decade before he knew you were queer.’

To his then-teammate’s word and credit, they never spoke of it again.

Yilmaz, thankfully, had given him no such assurances.

Ben did not want to tell Sanchez for the same reasons he did not want to tell his family. He was not even sure he wanted her to know. Once she came to know him, her interest would be sullied without his having to say anything that might strain their working relationship the way ‘your feelings are inappropriate’ or ‘you are way too young for me’ might. He saw the Lamb of God hanging from the constable’s neck, Christ suspended in his final scene of dying on the Cross for the sins of all mankind. He glanced over at his second, at the silken scarf she wore around her’s, knowing that she would have used it to cover her hair if she had had time to make it to Mosque. Ben felt a twinge of jealousy pierce though him. Everyone on his staff came from a deeply conservative background, but the inspector felt he alone bore the full weight of the societal expectations assigned to him at birth – in his case, by his father’s occupation.

Even if the reverend suspected, even if he could eventually accept his son as he was, Ben could not expect the same of his flock. He feared their judgement more than he feared The Judgement as it is written in the Gospel according to Luke. He hated that he knew the book and verse offhand. He knew them all that way. It was inherent.

Baba Yilmaz, by contrast, who insisted his daughter keep a misbaha in her purse, knew she fucked an infidel during office hours. They talked about it openly and Ben hated this, too. He wondered if it was easier for an RN than it was for a reverend, if a biological background helped in what a theological one hindered. He wondered what either man had to say about death. He wondered if he
would ever be capable of talking about it at all.

Not many people knew that his former partner on the force once wore that same distinction in a domestic sense. There had been no conversation between him and Nate – no ‘Are you? Me too.’ They came together and found answers where Ben had always expected questions to exist. They came together and then his world fell apart.

The funeral service had been held in his father’s church. Ben had not been invited to sit with the Hale family. He had not been invited to speak, which he considered was probably for the best. ‘I loved him’ would have soiled Nate’s memory, his father’s house of worship, and, in the political climate to that time, Ben’s further career chances on the force. Sometimes he sat in the same pew he had on the day his partner was buried, looking at the cross suspended in front of the stained glass window combining to cast a shadow in the same shape over him. He wondered if the funeral had been when he began questioning scripture. He wondered now what had kept him from questioning the culture and teachings of the increasingly dogmatic state he had chosen to serve as a police officer.

Ben blinked a tear from his eye. He realised that Sanchez had been speaking all the while and that he had not heard a word. His eyes darted up from the crucifix half-buried in the young constable’s cleavage, now certain of Christ’s judgement. He cleared his throat. ‘Could you repeat that?’ he asked. ‘Sorry I … I haven’t slept.’

‘There is an officer’s team from another station in the same league that our suspects play in. Sanchez knows a few of the guys from her time on the beat and Yilmaz knows the organizers from her days in NYU’s MSA. If we can get them to rearrange the game schedule we can test how Simcoe acts under pressure – Hewlett too, if Dandridge won’t tell us and we can’t find André,’ Russo said, audibly annoyed. He smiled as if he meant to assure Ben his frustration was not with him, adding in a tone that did not change to match his expression, ‘No warrant needed. No going upstairs to get what is otherwise easily given.’

‘From what I gathered, that is what the Dandridge/André research is focused on, Sir – the psychological effects of fear in a closed social group; here, highly educated men with high-stress jobs and an established history of violence as it is reflected in their individual and team performance on the pitch,’ Braxton said.

‘They have a lot to be afraid of this week,’ Mr Sackett muttered.

‘Sanchez, this team … is it known the league over as a copper team?’ Ben asked.

‘I wouldn’t know, Sir.’

‘They are, at least they were when I was playing,’ Baker interjected.

‘They are called the NYPD Blues, I can’t imagine that most miss the reference,’ Yilmaz said.

‘It won’t work,’ Ben said as he began to pace. ‘No. Simcoe is too smart for that. He won’t overreact if he knows we are testing him … It won’t work if we go to watch the game they would otherwise be playing either. Between them, Hewlett and Strong know all of our faces. Sanchez – clever thinking, truly, but -’

‘Sir, to adjust on Sanchez’s idea,’ Baker offered, ‘I used to play on a different team that has faced up against Bye Week. I am sure I am still on their roster. Being that I have never personally met any of the suspects in the case, unless we are counting Abraham and Richard Woodhull, I could … do some undercover, if you think it would help. My accent might.’
‘What position do you play?’ Yilmaz asked. ‘You would need to put one if not both of our primes under pressure without having it look like -’

‘I’ve never played as a striker but -’

‘You don’t need to score; you need to fuck up Simcoe’s ability to do so. You need to foul him if you think you can safely manage it. From what he did to Hewlett, the man seems out for blood at the slightest offense. Get him carded early, get him to try to address the call at half time and clock him for attempting to assault an officer. Hewlett will likely voice some objection and you can invite him to do so down at the station.’

Ben liked the idea less the longer the discussion lasted.

‘I want a hand-written sworn statement from both of them as soon as possible,’ Sackett said, averting his attention but not his bi-speckled eyes from Braxton’s computer. ‘Tallmadge, take a look at this and tell me what you see.’

Ben walked around to better view the screen; Braxton surrendered his chair. There were digitalized copies of the evidence collected from Richard Woodhull’s study on display. ‘I don’t think this gives us anything conclusive on its own,’ he said after studying the monitor for a moment.

‘No? Compare these to some of the text messages Hewlett has sent over the past month.’

‘I am not sure what I am reading,’ Ben admitted.

‘Exactly. I don’t think Hewlett always is either. He exhibits a number of errors common to dyslexics. Except,’ Sackett smiled as he pulled up a different file, ‘when he is texting John Graves Simcoe. And this is quite a recent development. Look at the time stamps. I don’t think him capable of composing such flawless text with such speed.’

‘Spell check, perhaps?’ Ben suggested.

‘I thought so at first, but when he writes other people – slower, you’ll note, than he corresponds with Simcoe -’

‘He often confuses or omits vowels and misjudges which consents are repeated,’ Ben squinted.

‘It is my belief that Simcoe is somehow texting himself using Hewlett’s device. From what I understand he is something of a poet.’

‘Not to interrupt, but when we interviewed him a few days ago, Simcoe said that he was held back in school due to linguistic difficulties,’ Sanchez said.

‘I think that might have more to do with oral than grammatical issues,’ Russo commented to her.

Ben nodded. ‘No chance we can bring them both in now to ask what that is about?’

‘We don’t even have a warrant to monitor their mobile devices,’ Braxton said. ‘Normally it is not difficult to obtain, even after the fact -’

‘But the bureaucratic system is hardest to hack when it has already been corrupted,’ Sackett mumbled, voicing what they were collectively thinking. They had no choice but to proceed with the proposed manoeuvre. Ben still did not like it at all.
Between Burr, Sanchez’s plan, Sackett’s linguistic discovery and having his second call him aside to tell him to ‘handle his shit’ in reference to the way she noticed him staring at the newest member of their unit, Ben Tallmadge was an hour late for his belated birthday dinner with his best friend from high school. When he arrived at the restaurant, he found Jordan Akinbode already buried deep in a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon. Without looking up, Jordan greeted him with the words ‘Abby and I spilt.’

‘God … Jordan,’ Ben stammered as he took his seat. ‘I am so sorry. Do you want to talk about it?’ He nodded and for the next thirty minutes told Ben in more words than marked his usual standard that the woman he loved, the woman for whom he had purchased a home on a quiet street, the woman whose intelligence and strength of character had inspired and influenced him over the course of his higher education and career advancement, that the same woman had been fucking her boss all the while. He had evidently used much the same language with Abigail when he had gone to speak to her about the content of a novel she was in the process of publishing in which she all but slandered their entire circle of friends. Anna was a slut. Simcoe was psychotic. Hewlett a sociopath. Richard did not love his son and Abe did not love his wife. Peggy and Aberdeen were interchangeable, both insufferable narcissists in a fashion Abigail argued was common to all women in their early twenties. And he? He was cast as an illiterate slave who put far too much expectation of a character based on her. Abigail said it was historically accurate, to which he replied that it had nothing to do with their history. ‘Oh you think?’ she said.

‘I do now,’ Jordan mused into his wine glass, adding, ‘She is not returning my calls.’

‘Have you tried her boss? The one you say she was sleeping with? This Dr John André,’ Ben asked on instinct, coached and cultured by a decade on the force to consider the fracture in his friend’s love life might play into the reason New York’s finest could not locate a key witness. His cases often overtook his ability to connect to the situations that played out before him on a human level. Ben and Jordan had been in this situation before with the clients and quotas, but the people Jordan had previously represented against charges Ben brought on behalf of the City spent four-hundred dollars to spend an hour in his business suite as he silently reviewed their corporate expenditures. They were not people whose company Jordan sought in his deepest sorrows. This did not register with him as his attempts at comfort became increasingly corrupted by his own ambition with each subtle inquiry.

By the time a second bottle had been opened, Jordan came to realise that they were having entirely different conversations before it entered into Ben’s consideration that he had not left the office.

‘I’m curious,’ the detective inspector said of the shooting-party, ‘When Edmund Hewlett was with you at this Walmart … in New Jersey … after he had been instructed not to cross the border - in your presence I might add - was he, by chance wearing an Everton jersey – maybe one a bit too small for him?’

‘I can’t fucking believe you,’ Jordan replied slowly in an exaggeratingly flat tone. He leaned back in his chair, balancing it on it hind legs as he coldly confirmed in a baritone so hard and heavy Ben felt physically constricted by the sound, ‘Yeah. Yeah –the suspect- was wearing a pink Everton jersey from two-thousand-two and a pair of jorts Simcoe’d picked up in Chinatown for the sole purpose of pissing him off. Hew’d apparently been forced into these garments when his fiancée threw an eight-hundred-dollar suit in Simcoe’s machine, thereby ruining and robbing the suspect of his choice attire. The owner of the apartment refused to lend him anything else to wear when he returned from work or wherever with his illicit lover only to find that his bed was occupied by his
oldest friend and the girl, I gather, he meant for poor Mary Woodhull to substitute. There was a set-to. Simcoe punched Hewlett and Anna hit Simcoe. Can’t speak to wheatear Mary took part in the melee or not but what I can say definitively, is that when I got there, the suspect – proud, poised, princely Edmund Hewlett – didn’t give a shit about looking like an idiot in front of all the world and his mates on what must have been one of the worst days of his life. Spent most of the night just making sure that I was alright. Not asking me about legal matters. Nothing like that. It’s funny ... you know, I was so pissed at Simcoe last night. At both of them. At all of them. Angry that they asked me how I was holding up, thinking like – damn bitch I was with this woman for ten years! For ten fucking years! Practically raised her boy as my own and,' he stopped. ‘But they were being friends. I see now that I had no reason to expect the same from you, Inspector.’

‘Jordan I -’ Ben started. The sudden thought that Simcoe and Hewlett had been in a fight hours before whenever Jordan swung by the former’s flat hindered his attempt at apology. He did not know if he voiced this concern with the narrative or not, but shortly after his weak extenuation Jordan rose, pulled a crisp a hundred dollar bill from his wallet and told Ben that the next time they saw each other it would be in court.

‘Not for this,’ he spoke darkly as he paused passing Ben on his way to the door. ‘Whatever you think, my lads are innocent. Even if they weren’t, we both know I am too good a barrister to let it get that far.’

He did not watch Jordan leave. There was no sense in following him when he was in no mind to forgive. Ben looked at the bottle, at Jordan’s undrunk fourth or fifth glass and the remnants of his first. He looked at the menu from which he had still not ordered, at the uneaten breadbasket that ordinarily served as a barrier from the unpleasantness of extended company. He felt uncomfortable in the restaurant. He never went out. Even now, the table felt longer, empty of all forms of elegance and extravagance. He might was well be at his desk, in one of the interrogation rooms, or better still, alone on a pew in his father’s church under the dark shadow cast by the symbol of God’s glory. Ben glanced at his mobile and set a reminder to write Jordan a decent apology tomorrow at midday. He frowned as he began to mentally construct the way in which he would express his sincere –

Sincere? Ben wondered at his own phrasing, deciding that this, too, was a form of social conditioning. ‘Sincere’, even ‘sorry’ felt false. Ben Tallmadge had barely slept in days. He had been given charge of a highly public case, the solving of which was marred by political manoeuvring, personal ties and private interest. His name was subject again to slander in the news cycle for crime of which he had been acquitted. He had been removed from an investigation into the opioid trade he had been working on for years, an investigation that had caused his partner his life and yet his colleagues resented what they perceived as his failure to regain focus. His only outside friend parted with vague threats when Ben spoke of his own troubles, asking for help in the only way he still knew how.

But no one asked him if he was alright. No one, except for the waiter, to whom Ben replied that he would quite like a beer and whichever variant of meat and potatoes he had thoughtlessly elected with a nod when he tired of listening to the boy recite a list of specials. ‘That,’ he said, ‘and a pen if it is not too much trouble.’

By the time his steak and starch arrived, Ben was on his second beer. Filling a page of a notebook he always carried with him, he had finally landed on what it was about Jordan’s exit that so unnerved him. Jordan Akinbode practiced corporate law strictly, save for a divorce agreement he printed on company letterhead for Anna Strong but had not had a hand in drafting. Jordan had never defended someone on charges of kidnapping or murder, and yet he was so self-assured with ‘my lads are innocent. Even if they weren’t, we both know I am too good a barrister to let it get [to
court]’ that Ben’s gut told him the confidence was not forced or accidental. Hewlett had already confessed to corporate fraud, the plural form he used for friend suggested that Simcoe was in on his current scheme. If could figure out what Hewlett and Simcoe were doing, he could figure out why Hamilton, Lafayette and Washington seemed happy to hinder the Arnold investigation by any means possible. But Burr was right. For now it served him best to play along. Humming a tune from the Broadway musical and imagining his office-enemies in the roles that borrowed their names, he texted Hamilton to see if he had could have anything sent from his office, curious to what the feds might request.

Satisfied, Ben finished another beer and devoured the contents of his plate past the point of satiation, discreetly unbuttoning the trousers set on showing – as all of his did – how far he had strayed from the arbitrary scale number society deemed ideal for his build, or rather the one he longed for. He had never been able to bring his height and weight into balance, even as a boy. ‘It is baby-fat’ his mother told him in middle school as she pinched his full cheeks. At thirty, he knew that it wasn’t and felt fairly confident that he had known the same at thirteen. When he returned to his flat that evening, he had a proper shit and after taking his hound out for hers, Ben stood half-naked in front of the bathroom mirror, decided that despite the short physical excursion he was still ever-so-slightly chubby and given his lifestyle likely always would be.

It didn’t matter. The blues and blacks he wore at work were slimming enough and it had been years since anyone, aside for perhaps his new constable, had wanted to see him naked. She would be over it within the week. Ben Tallmadge had no one to impress aside from the stills of suspects he had hanging in the corner of his living room. Given his lifestyle, that would likely always be the case.

When Caleb asked ‘Is that John Andre?’ in reference to the attractive British-ex-pat beaming in an old police photo taken years prior after a drunk-driving accident and now fastened to his living room wall by double-sided tape and multiple post it notes, Ben knew better than to answer ‘Do you know him?’ He knew this from the tens of texts he had since sent to Jordan, from the disciplinary report Yilmaz’s conversation with the DA had forced him to file. He knew this from the bylaws and he would soon have this knowledge reinforced by experience. DI Ben Tallmadge knew alone from common sense that he should not discuss this investigation with those outside of the Special Crime Unit.

But Caleb Brewster was in his apartment and Ben would entertain any fancy of fantasy if it meant he would stay and stay interested. Though the reality he had come to associate with and eventually recognize as himself existed somewhere in the darker parts of his mind where he had hidden all of his doubts, Ben could comfortably ignore its cries. Caleb Brewster was a drummer who had just played a sold out venue and decided that of the thousands of people screaming for a fraction of his affections, he wanted to go home with the man he found outside in the passenger’s seat of an illegally parked car who had not even made it through the sound check. Ben had been buried deep in Ferguson’s correspondence and the questions it raised for tomorrow’s manoeuvre when Caleb knocked on his window. On instinct he had reached into his back pocket, expecting city ordinance would excuse him a ticket at the sight of his badge. He was met instead by Caleb’s laughter, his smile and the creases left by joy in the corners of his dark eyes that filled them with light. ‘Can I take you home?’ he had asked.

Ben took himself by surprise when he unlocked the door and offered his address to the beautiful
stranger. ‘I work for the postal service,’ Caleb informed him when he started to give directions. ‘I'll find it in – shit what is the rate – three to five business days,’ he teased, slapping Ben's knee as he laughed at his own joke. ‘It is unmarked squad car,’ Ben returned in reaction to the man’s physical warmth. ‘You can turn on the siren and go as fast as you want.’

At home, he was consumed by private dread. He had never invited a date back to his. He never invited anyone inside in any sense. The apartment stank as though he had figuratively been dead in it for five years. More exactly, it smelled as though he had abandoned his dog for fifteen hours and his rubbish bins since the last frost. Caleb told him he thought too much as he opened a window, inviting him to come out to his houseboat in Oyster Bay sometime. To spend the night. The weekend. And then he told him that he was a virgin. That he had never truly been fucked because he had never been fucked by him. Ben had never heard a more compelling and convincing argument. ‘You think too much,’ Caleb told him again.

And he did.

Ben spent the next ten minutes hiding behind the bathroom door, trying to squeeze out of kakis that had not fit him any better when he bought them a little over a year before in a brazenness that only seemed to manifest in the three days between making a New Year’s resolution and falling short of self-expectation. He prayed Heidi’s excitement would distract Caleb enough from the fact that his apartment was littered with old take-away cartons and the cockroaches they likely attracted. He hoped his hound would help him ignore her scent, still stagnant in the room she had been kept in all day and in the old newspapers that covered its floors.

Caleb knocked.

Ben bit his bottom lip, certain he was about to be abandoned, all offers and invitations retracted.

Without waiting for an answer Ben was not about to give, Caleb entered, finding him with his kakis stuck halfway between his thighs and his waist, his face reddened from struggle and shame. ‘What’s this Benny-boy?’ he laughed, winking. ‘You think I don’t enjoy a challenge?’ He forced his hand down the back of Ben’s trousers and pulled him into a tight embrace which he then locked with his tongue. As wonderful as Caleb was just to speak to, Ben far preferred his mouth in this employment. Pleasure trickled and trembled down his spine as a full beard tickled his cheeks, chin and chest. Once Brewster had freed his cock from its cloth cage, Ben lost track of the rest of the garment. He remembered stepping out of them after he had finished, Caleb’s warm mouth and wet lips still around his sex long since he had swallowed his seed. (‘delicious but didn’t want to wear it in the whiskers,’ he would later claim as he stroked and curled its ends.) He was beautiful, and Ben, who had been enamoured from the moment he first heard his voice over the line, was overcome with the desires he had long suppressed or otherwise denied himself. He watched Caleb fuck him over his sink in the mirror he had never know to contain anything but isolation – the blue bags under his eyes, the ‘baby-fat’ and the occasional blackheads he could charge as accomplices to what he now knew to have been loneliness. Now he saw Caleb. Hsaw himself with a lover and saw that for all of the differences he would begin to tally once the act was through, they were perfect.

‘Damn son. And here I thought your ass looked good in those pants,’ Caleb panted as he squeezed and stoked the side of it between thrusts. ‘I am going to throw them out, donate them,’ Ben said, half-screaming from the new pleasure he found in tightening his posterior in nervous reflex. Caleb moaned, telling him to stay like that if he could. Just like that. ‘You severely underestimate just how much of a neurotic mess I am,’ Ben laughed. ‘I can do this all day and night.’

All day and night was not needed. Caleb came shortly after he found himself restricted and asked to
have a second go of it later. Ben answered with a kiss. He answered by quickly tidying up his apartment as best he could while getting Caleb a glass of water. He answered ‘Do you know him?’ and in doing so, felt that his new lover was taking an interest in his life that had failed him for so long.

‘Only through work,’ Caleb nodded. ‘Uh-side job at DeJong’s. Been workin’ there for ten years on an’ off. When I started, he used to come in all the time. Fucker.’

Ben questioned the expletive used presumably as a descriptive noun.

‘Nah, he ain’t the worst of ’em. The ex-pats who call that place home now. Philomena – local fucking legend – was pouring there when I first started. I know André more from back then. Back I guess when this was taken.’ Turning from the picture to Ben, he raised an eyebrow and asked, ‘Keep something to yourself?’

‘Sure.’

‘So she is an actress, right? Famous now and that. Well Broadway-famous.’

‘I know her, or rather of her,’ Ben answered. Philomena was not present on the home edition of his trace-interview-eliminate diagram. He knew what she looked like from Twitter and Times Square and wondered how much more famous someone from the world of theatre who had yet to be contracted for a Disney sound-track could possibly hope to be. Maybe one day she would voice a princess and have every girl in America from three to thirteen attempting to sing impossible areas after her, but for now she was just the wife of a witness and Ben was frowning, finding himself back at the office wondering if Braxton or Baker had found time to follow up with her.

‘Not a fan of the Fiddler revival?’

‘No, not I’ve heard it excellent. It is not that.’

‘Sure it is. But Mena’s best work was before a ... more limited audience. ‘Bout a decade back she was priced out of her post-college flat and couldn’t go back home – nothing tragic, folks just went down to Florida when they hit an age when that stage of dementia starts to set in. So Mena, desperate and destitute, moved into to Robert Rogers’s halfway house, throwin’ on ah’ layer or five of stage make-up every time a caseworker came round, sellin’ herself as an addict. And it worked! For three years, she fooled the system into to payin’ her rent and share of utilities. Legend. Meanwhile my dumb ass is out here workin’ two jobs – three with the band, just tryin’ to keep gas in my tank so I can take my uncle to the doctor each week,’ he said, still smiling.

‘John André gave her her second such gig – I guess when she got sick of cleanin’ up after the rest ah’ Rogers’s ‘boys’. Married her in a Green Card scheme and paid her to live in his penthouse. Hear she owns it now and is fixin’ to kick him out. Probably deserves it ... Broke all our hearts when she left, it did. Business at the bar suffered too ‘til they hired Annie as a replacement. Crazy what we will all do to make rent though. But I probably don’t need to tell you that, palace you go here.’ Caleb knocked on the wall, causing a Post-It to fall. Caleb squinted to study it as he picked it up.

‘It is not normally this way, this messy I mean,’ Ben lied, his cheeks flushing.

‘Relax Tallboy. This isn’t the dirtiest house I’ve ever been in by far. I mentioned Rogers’s place, right? Worse now that it is just him and half his construction crew, I’d reckon. Anyway,’ he winked, ‘for that bathroom mirror alone I’m sure it’s worth whatever you’re payin’’
‘Four-thousand?’

‘Shit.’

‘Right?’

‘Roommate?’

‘I had one,’ Ben answered. The question reminded him that while he knew a lot about Caleb Brewster from police records and public access radio, his lover knew little to nothing about him. No one did. No one else had ever asked. Ben took a deep breath. ‘I … was promoted not long after I lost him and it’s not a stretch financially anymore, but the place has not felt like home since.’

The light amusement which he had come to assume over the course of the past hour was omnipresent in Caleb’s person evaporated that instant.

‘Oh. Bad break up?’ he asked cautiously.

‘He died.’

‘Shit. God, I’m sorry, I didn’t -’

‘I volunteered it,’ Ben excused him. He knew such talk was too heavy for a first date, if a night that had begun as a failed intelligence operation could even be classified as such. ‘It was … a long way back. Fuck, I’m sorry, I’ve never talked about this before and here I am telling the first guy I’ve slept with since. And I shouldn’t have said that either. I – I don’t get out much,’ he stammered.

Caleb sighed as he put his arm around him, again offering his smile.

‘You got a beer?’

‘I have some whiskey.’

‘That’ll work.’

Ben told him about his life since he had ceased living it. He told him about Nate’s funeral, about his father gently telling him to move on, about the widow he had met in a bereavement group online, about how Sarah died three days after the first and last time they ever met with his DNA still inside of her, about how that had marked him as a public enemy and paradoxically had led to his promotion. He told Caleb about the problems he had at the office, about how the old quarter-coffee-automat was no longer producing a strong enough drink to help his team work around the clock, around the bureaucratic bullshit that ought to be charged as an accomplice when not a co-conspirator in the crime he was currently investigating. He told him about the crucifix half-buried in Sanchez’s tits, about how he hoped Yilmaz’s complete disregard for censored speech would lead her to some crass office-wide outing. He told him how he wished he still enjoyed the same kind of relationship with his parents that his men (and women) all had with theirs.

He told Caleb about his mother who had barely left her darkened bedroom since his brother Samuel died in a roadside accident. He told him of the shame he felt in front of his reverend father and whenever he looked at the symbol of his faith. Sometimes, he confessed, he saw the Cross and felt nothing at all.

‘I’ve never been much of one for organised religion myself,’ Caleb said. ‘But take that how you will. Uncle Lewis always told me that you can’t believe in anything without questioning the validity of the doctrine. Maybe that is what you are working though.’
‘That was smart of him, of your uncle.’

‘Not the kind of shit they like to hear in public school though, that is for damn sure.’

His grades had not been good enough for university, which said nothing to his intellect. From what he told him, Caleb had had a tumultuous childhood marked by instability and eventual abandonment. He had moved in with his uncle when he was fifteen, he said, after his parents kicked him out for the reasons that now found him cuddled up with Ben on his sofa.

‘Just to clarify, I was in a shitty garage band with Woody back then too,’ he winked. Doubled over in laughter, Ben asked in absolute admiration how Caleb could be so cavalier on topics that would cause any lesser character to cry.

‘I mean … truth is it is not as though I was ever wanting for nothing. Uncle Lewis and I are close, and I’ve Annie, Woody, Abby, Rob - I guess, when his Quaker ass feels like showing up, Jordan, John -’

‘Simcoe?’ Ben interrupted. Caleb’s shoulders tensed as he brushed him of to pour them both another shot.

‘Fuck no!’ he exclaimed. ‘I meant Wakefield’s low-key stoner ass. Guy is a successful physician – I’ve herd paediatrician and podiatrist both- but at least once a week he is up there at the orchard watching Wheel of Fortune with my uncle while they smoke out of an apple. Great guy. Can’t equate him with the people who have a common passport and first name. And between you and me, of the English Johns, Simcoe is the last and the least.’

‘Oh?’ Ben shuttered as he took a shot, hoping his awakened interest in Setauket’s weekend population was not transparent. If it was, Caleb neither commented or cared and Ben felt as if not more loved but this little indulgence than when Caleb stopped to kiss him, run his fingers through his loosened hair and wonder at how Ben could be so unaware of what he saw and called beauty.

‘Never got on with him,’ Caleb elaborated after downing his own drink. ‘André started bringing him into DeJong’s … around four years ago? Don’t remember and would rather forget. I think the first time we ever talked he’d come in on his own – lookin’ for Annie no doubt – but as she had no mind to serve him, he bought a beer from me and in an attempt to make his presence less awkward asked if I could put on some soccer match. Told him the sport was for girls. He came out with some stats and suggested that maybe American women just needed to play against ‘real men’. Understanding why Annie felt so uncomfortable alone in a room with him, I told this fuck that I knew he was a math guy and all but he sure as hell did not want to talk numbers with me, if you catch my meaning. Shut him right up. He was more cordial to us after that. For a while, anyway.’

‘What happened?’

‘Hewlett.’

‘An enabler?’ Ben tried.

‘Not exactly. Annie fell in love with him and we all – and by ‘we all’ I mean, you can ask anyone in Setauket and the surrounding towns – just thought Simcoe was jealous. I mean you probably already know this but turns out Hewlett tried to kill himself back in January and for a while, Simcoe was the only one who knew. It worked something weird in him, it did.’

‘The going theory around the office is that the two were lovers.’

‘Simcoe and Hewlett?’ Caleb gaped. ‘Pfft! You think you are closeted. John Graves is about as
straight as they come. I can see it though, ‘truth be told, in some strange way I can. Routine attempted amicicide not counting.’

‘Amicicide?’

‘The killing of a friend? Learned that one from ol’ Eddie. He is always adding drama with obscure nouns. Surprised it stumped you though, Mr Skull-and-Bones.’

‘It didn’t,’ Ben defended, taken aback, deciding it best to wait to address Caleb’s assumption about his membership in Yale’s almost-secret-society until he knew if he was kidding or not. ‘I’m just wondering … has that ever happened in DeJong’s Tavern to your recollection?’

‘I mean once during the beer-pong tournament last Halloween. Not since. Now they know that I am always ready to bring these guns to their bitch-ass little knife fights,’ he said flexing his bare arms and kissing the muscles that protruded. Ben smiled and Caleb then kissed him, too.

‘Nah those two though … they mostly just talk calculus with one another – fucking calculus! Like these shits somehow landed the one subject of conversation capable of striking fear into the hearts of all the locals while making them sound even more like pompous fops than their dandy accents already do and just went with it. But Eddie is with Annie and um … word about town is that Simcoe has something going on with Mary. Mary Woodhull.’ Caleb became serious as he spoke her name. Without smiling, he filled Ben’s shot glass to the brim. None of this struck Ben as odd and insofar as he registered the shift, he did not try to reason it. Having exhausted the topics of his non-existent personal life, the detective inspector was left with nothing else of which to converse. Although he had considered the concept of ‘too-soon’ on and off throughout the evening, it no longer bothered him that he felt an emotional connection to the man beside him. Caleb was friendly. Caleb listened. It was more than he could say for most of the people whom he had known all his life.

‘We are trying to figure out what, to be honest,’ he admitted, victim to forty-proof and pheromones. ‘I have heard a lot of witnesses to an affair I can’t find any physical evidence of – the defining characteristic of every bloody element in this case. Truthfully, I wonder sometimes if any of it happened.’

‘Abe has um … he has been down about it. For a while now I guess. Just drives around these days, listening to Springsteen, wallowing in his guilt. Personally I’m torn up about the whole affair,’ Caleb said. For the first time that night Ben heard the sadness he expected to find in his lover’s other narratives – that he had come to look for in all stories told occupationally or otherwise. ‘On one hand, I get it. He married the wrong woman. And Mary … she deserves more form life than he will ever be able to give her – but the thought that she would seek some kind of sexual or emotional fulfilment in Simcoe just makes me ill. Man is an absolute creep. If you believe me on nothing else, believe that. He is a creep. And he is cruel.’

‘How so?’ Ben asked, placing his hand lightly over Caleb’s clenched fist.

‘One time Simcoe is at the bar with some shot glass – sippin’ from it like he expected it to be hot or something,’ he said with disgust. ‘I guess that is how they do it in Europe but he is the worst offender. I told him jokingly that he could just drink it, that we had more – and then this bastard pours the remainder out and tells me my rum taste like piss. Top shelf stuff! When I wiped it up with my bar towel, telling him to pay his tab and leave, he grabs my hand, squeezes and says that he wonders how long it will be before the palsy sets in. My uncle suffers from it, you see … so I told him I hoped there was something genetic about burning in an exploded Humvee. Simcoe releases my hand and as I am shaking it off says, ‘That was a very rude thing to say- as though he expected an apology. I am not proud of taking that shot … but
that – Jesus, that is what Simcoe brings out in everyone without cause or reason other than he is lonely or bored or both. Been worse lately ... after Hewlett did, or tried to do whatever he thought he wanted to do to himself. Pills. I think. I know, I mean, I have heard it from everyone over the past few days. But it is still no excuse for Simcoe's shit. At any rate, I hope Abe is wrong - I hope Mary isn't bearing the brunt of whatever he is decidedly not working through.'

Ben nodded. They sat in silence for a time.

'How can anyone be depressed while listening to Springsteen?' Ben wondered aloud, still thinking of Abe Woodhull through the light daze of liquor, unable to formulate a more exact question at this hour about Caleb's bandmate and his broken marriage to the pretty redhead on his wall.

'Have you ever really listened to his lyrics? How can anyone not?'

Caleb proceeded to sing him a few verses of a song that he had not heard in at least five years.

'You have a gorgeous voice,' Ben told him, now confused that he was used as backup vocals in a crap band whose 'singer' did little more than scream when he was not letting his base do it for him.

'Yeah? Comes from living in an ugly town.'

The next Ben thought about Abraham Woodhull was at 10:07 the following morning, having mistaken Caleb's mobile for his own. Dreary and dreamy, he gazed into the blue glow as he tried to silence the device's monosyllabic scream by opening the correlating messaging app. A text from Jordan allowed his blissful delirium a moment's delay. His friend had accepted his apology - insincere as it had been. That, or purely in light of his other friendships, he saw that sometimes an unavoidable overlap occurred between one's personal and professional lives. Ben felt forgiven. He felt as though they had not fought at all.

Delighted, he opened the message to read:

>> Keys are under the mat if you need a place to crash tonight.

Place is empty. No utilities.

But yours if you need it. In Albany. <<

and, sent seconds later:

>> Please tell Abby to call me next time you see her. <<

Ben sighed. He had not been the intended recipient. Ready to put the phone down in search of his own, it buzzed again, and again, on reflex, Ben hit the button on the side of the screen to illuminate it one more.

This time Ben had no illusions of absolution. He saw that he had been wrong in an assumption the flickered across the top of Caleb's lock screen, so ridiculous he had to read it twice. And so he did.
He returned to the app he had just closed and saw that Abraham Woodhull, the college dropout who drove around his backwater asking himself if dreams were lies when they did not come true, had a far less melodic way of phrasing questions he had come upon on his own.

>>He doesn’t know???

>>How<<

>>Did you find anything?<<

Caleb had responded earlier that same morning with a photograph of Ben’s taped up T.I.E. diagram, including close ups of a few Post-Its that had taken his interest. He remembered falling asleep on the couch. Caleb must have carried him into bed. He must have taken them afterwards.

It had all been planned, Ben realised.

It had all been fake.

Ben heard Caleb in his kitchen and swallowed a sob, a scream or both. “What are you still doing here?” he called out. He wanted him out of his house.

“Thought you might like some breakfast, Benny-boy,” Caleb chimed as he carried in a tray toppled high with eggs, toasted bread and breakfast-meats along with two cups of coffee. The way it was arranged, Ben thought, it seemed as though he had meant the meal for them both. He wanted him gone.

“No I mean, what are you still doing here. You got what you came for last night, didn’t you?”

Caleb looked genuinely confused by the accusation. “I … I mean shit, I know I came a little soon, but last night I … I thought we -”

“Last night never happened,” Ben insisted, anticipating a disciplinary action. It was over. It was better this way. “You and your friend Abe. You are so off,” he spat.

“Ben, no. It’s not-”

“It is Inspector Tallmadge,” he corrected. “Call your friend; tell him to meet you down at the Manhattan station. I can send a car and a uniformed officer if he is not fit to drive. While you are on the line, tell him to relax. Simcoe was, in fact, born in Pakistan – excellent detective work there, but he is not a ‘secret Muslim’ whatever the fuck that means. If anything, he is the most godless man I have ever interviewed. But then I haven’t had the pleasure of you and Mr Woodhull in interrogation yet, so I suppose that remains to be seen.”

Caleb put the breakfast tray on Ben’s nightstand only to have the phone forced immediately upon him. “It woke me up. Unlike you, I didn’t mean to look,” Ben said. “Is Culper Ring’s guitarist involved in the little operation as well somehow?”

“No. Abe told me not to tell him. I don’t care about the case. I care about you. The only thing I asked you about – the only thing he wanted me to try and find out was if his wife was sleeping with Simcoe. And I just said that you didn’t know. That he should talk to her. Which is what I told him last night before the gig as well.”

“Well it looks like he found his own answers. Secret Muslims,” Ben scoffed, muttering to himself, “I can’t wait until this election year is over and the media stops giving Donald Trump so much unneeded attention.’ To Caleb, he said, “I hope you did not think I was kidding. Call your friend. I
have a mind to charge you both with attempted obstruction of justice.”

Caleb, hesitant, began to dial. There was no answer, or so he said. Ben took the phone back to try his own luck when another text was sent from the same conspiracy theorist.

>>>Can’t talk. In the car with RR. Explain later.<<

   >>>Are you fit to drive, Woody?<<

   >>>DI Tallmadge wants you to meet him at 1PP. Offers to send an escort.<< Ben typed back.

   >> Hold him off. I have to talk to Anna. I think

Hewlett is one of them, too. <<

Ben began to write with his index finger that Hewlett was a Calvinist and that he – Abraham Woodhull - was living in a county founded on the principle of religious liberty, but something his reverend father had once commented about the particular protestant denomination to which the suspect belonged stopped Ben’s finger before it could wave the American flag over WhatsApp. He thought about the texts he had seen the day before, realising only in hindsight that they were coded. He could guess at what Simcoe was attempting to conceal (beyond his friend’s learning impairment.)

“I … I have to get to the office. I think I – I think I know what they are up to,” he whispered to himself, frozen in revelation.

“Simcoe and Mary?” Caleb asked, kneeling before where Ben sat on the side of his bed to meet his eyes.

“Simcoe and Hewlett,” Ben answered. “And they are going to tell me in about an hour to avoid assault and obstruction charges exactly what it is that Hamilton and his little Frenchmen have gotten us all into.”

DI Ben Tallmadge smiled in spite of himself. He texted Abe again, asking him to meet him at the station. If nothing else, he had him to thank for the few moments of joy they week had shown him.

Chapter End Notes

**Kick and Rush** is the English style of football. It is fairly physical and as I think of lame digs I can make about England and football in general … I am reminded that we are going into an international break this weekend. Sadness. At least I have a lot of good stuff to read. ;)

**Misbaha** are Islamic prayer beads. Traditionally it is 99, mostly it is thirty-three, and
you just can keep count when you praise Allah post-prayer. Fundamentalists don’t use these. A Christian rosary is similar.

**Calculus** isn’t really that scary. It is the mathematics of motion. You would think given the branch has its modern origins in England the national side would be better at calculating the trajectory of a projectile … such as a ball … than they have always seemed to me to be, but then I am spoilt. Okay I got a lame dig in. I am mostly mad because I have had to revisit so many (specific, often dull) old games while writing this thing and other works in the series. But actually, for all the clues I threw out at you in this update, you want one more that will probably confuse you again? Here goes – I wouldn’t mention the Liverpool / Everton rivalry as often as I do if it were not of some importance. Something else? You don’t have to know anything beyond that it exists to start piecing parts of the UK side of the puzzle together. Ooooookay, moving on!

**T.I.E. diagram** stands for trace-interrogate-eliminate, and it described one of those spreads you have seen on every cop-show you have ever seen.

And that is all I have for you. For a few days anyway. Comments and kudos *always* encourage and inspire me, beyond which I just like keeping up with you guys. What are you all getting into this weekend? Trouble? Let’s hope. <3

XOXO - Tav

Up Next: My Name is Red[coat]
The Exit Strategy

Chapter Summary

The British Ambassador finds himself faced with a crisis of conscious as he weighs the wishes of a would-be ex-pat against the advice of his military attaché. Ben misplaces his faith and trust in Arnold’s kidnapper. Anna recalls the events leading to John’s attest on the road to Albany.

Chapter Notes

So, lovely faces, it seems that we find ourselves (unexpectedly!) in the midst of what the fandom has dubbed ‘Simary December’. I AM THRILLED. I am also (sadly!) not able to participate in the festivities with this update, deciding that an epic love story deserved its own chapter rather than forcing it in with some pretty shady political manoeuvring and um … sport. They appear! They are together! There is a moment! … but it is short lived. That said I want to first take the time to recommend the works of these lovely authors if you need more of a fix: rapid_aphaty, greenofallshades, ooWandering_Ghostoo, Reinette_de_la_Saintonge, and Maryassasina. Go check them out!

I want to come back as soon as possible to round out this arc, so hopefully I myself can join this great list of contributors before the year TURNs. Otherwise, Simary 2k18 anyone?

Okay, but back to now, we have a plot heavy chapter ahead of us (finally using a few of the scenes I first wrote in August … 2016!) so let’s do the thing.

Warnings include but are not limited to: Police brutality, sport injury, irresponsible press, political manoeuvring, sabre rattling, cartels, bad business, incompetent leadership, Europeans (ew, right? XP), race baiting, gambling, battle scars and amputations … and, as I am certain you have gleaned from the summary, there are a few additional historical appropriations you’ll met in this chapter, both in person and periphery.

Still with me? Wonderful! Love you lots and I hope you enjoy!

He felt he owed him an explanation, but Detective Inspector Benjamin Tallmadge found that he could barely move his tongue. He sat on the edge of his bed, the same bed he had shared with the man the morning had reviled to be an enemy, paralyzed in his profound awareness that everything had been lost in a game he had not wanted to play. He felt the mattress shift under Caleb’s weight as his one-night stand sat down beside him, placing a hand on his shoulder while offering a kindness Ben barely registered, did not deserve and did not respond to.

Hat sat.
He stared.

He started to make a mental list of everything he now had to account for and accomplish before the day’s end. He had to contact his constable’s next of kin. He had to file a medical claim. He had to file an incident report. He had to open an internal investigation around the woman who had just rung him from the field. He had to delegate the Peggy Shippen press conference to Sergeant Yilmaz. He had to call Russo in on a Sunday. He had to call Ferguson back when he arrived at a reason as to why he had not heeded his Scottish counterpart’s warnings. To that end, he had to examine a decade old medical report against a recent series of x-rays. He might then have to explain to the ADA that he wanted to charge a suspect based on evidence from a case to which he should not have had access. Ben Tallmadge felt the burden of the information he bore.

He sat on the edge of his bed with the man he had nearly loved, the memory of the one he had lost and the reality that blurred every distinction between them: Ben, as DI Tallmadge, had to contact his constable’s next of kin to advise them that he had been injured in the line of duty.

“So you want me to drive you to the hospital?” Caleb asked.

“I spend around one-hundred-twenty hours at work each week,” he stammered in response as he began to calculate in his head. “Three years Baker has worked for me … that’s … eighteen-thousand seven-hundred-twenty over twenty-four … nearly eight-hundred days by the clock in this man’s company and I have no idea if he is married, if he has children, where his own folks live – if they are even alive. I have to ring his next of kin and recite … I have to tell them. I … have to tell my team. I failed them all. I’ve failed people I am not even sure exist, whose names I ought to know by heart,” Ben berated himself. Caleb Brewster put more pressure into the half-hug he was giving him. Ben felt as though the walls themselves were constricting. He heard himself choke, swallowing the pressure that wanted to escape his chest in the form of a sob.

He had to call Baker’s next of kin.

He had to continue the search for the senator while clandestinely redirecting his line of inquest so that he might stop a single incident from becoming serial.

With an officer injured on an unauthorised assignment, solving what he saw as the real mystery could prove more challenging that it had seemed when he had woken up that morning. What the powers that be were hoping to gain by hiding evidence of where Arnold had been and what he had done prior to what Ben had been ready to write off as a bar fight was difficult to piece together without the support of the ADA and without the trust of his unit. Reasonably assured that his recent actions would fully deprive him of the latter and would see his federal and foreign aid become his active enemies made the task he had bestowed upon himself impossible by ordinary means.

Ben thought about the pictures his lover had taken last night, pictures that had ended the affair far sooner than he would have hoped. He looked up at Caleb and said in a solemn tone, “I think I failed you, too.” At this, he felt the tickle of Caleb’s beard over his eyes as the drummer’s lips lightly graced his forehead.

“Hey … Buddy, that’s not -”

“Caleb, I can’t … I can’t do this. I need to get some air - I need,” Ben said as he shook last night from his shoulders and stood. He took a deep breath and held it in as he considered every possible consequence of what he was prepared to ask. “I need you to call your friend Woodhull again. If he is still determined to engage in espionage … I have something that he can do that may help us both.”
It was slightly past noon on Sunday and Anna Strong found herself wishing that time was tactile as she watched the world blur from the passenger seat of a sedan packed full with most of her possessions. Her kneecaps hit the bottom of the glove box with every knot in the pavement, pushed forward as she was by the various bags and boxes crowding the boot and back. A glance at the car’s driver told her that he was faring no better, balancing the wheel between legs that helped him to steer, his prominent hand half-occupied with tapping the mobile phone on the dashboard - a dated app with dated maps that necessity had tasked with navigation. Anna turned back to the adumbration eighty-miles-per-hour reduced the road to, recognizing the familiar and filling the rest with the same anger that had followed her here from the field.

There was nothing special or especially scenic about this particular stretch of the I-90. It was patterned with orange cones and signs that spoke of workweek delays due to road works that had since long outlived their anticipated October twenty-fourteen completion. Sunday afternoon saw this section of motorway transformed into something of a museum, an open archaeological site where the faint remnants of decade old campaign promises existed as lane closures and plastic urinary facilities that towered behind the guardrail beside littered lunch bags, cigarette butts and machinery Anna could not hope to name. No one was around to repair the failing infrastructure, to hold a sign to oncoming traffic cautioning the crawl of vehicles to further decelerate – yet that was exactly what she wished for: For Edmund. For herself. For time. Anna wanted it all to stop. She wished it were still morning, that her fiancé’s pleas to spend their last sunrise together entangled in his Egyptian cotton had not gone ignored. She wished that she had not insisted on playing in an association-league sporting fixture, clinging to the semblance of normalcy which she naïvely hoped to find in it.

Edmund had barely spoken since seeing his first-ever red-card in the eighty-seventh minute.

Thirty-five had since passed in the car, slower, Anna noted, than the lampposts and power lines seemed to at ten over the designated speed limit. The radio signal had given out when they had pulled onto the interstate and, rather than search for an alternative, Anna had pushed in an old CD which theretofore sat half-suspended within her stereo. Edmund said nothing, but made a face expressing that he held Alanis Morrissett in about as much regard as ever other man she had ever known. Anna sighed. Defeated, she turned the device off altogether. ‘I can’t control Simcoe,’ Edmund confessed as silence then fought to settle. ‘You can’t blame him,’ Anna returned. And wasn’t it ironic. Another roadside exhibit of how New York’s taxes were being spent flickered by, same as the last several. Same as the next dozen they would see on their weekend tour of gross government misappropriation. The broken road would lead them nowhere. Anna thought bitterly that she preferred the orange pallet of abandoned infrastructure to the one blue and blood which the state defined as ‘justice’.

Despite what was written on the overhead signs that almost matched the Google map her fiancé had open on his phone in the absence of an inbuilt GPS, he was not driving her to Albany. In his mind, he was already on his way downtown to the police station. That, Anna reasoned, or he was already there, talking to Tallmadge with refinery that he had not wasted on the referee-cum-arresting officer.

Perhaps, she thought, he was instead employing the same colourful language of which she had once thought him incapable in the war his mind seemed to wage. His fine lines deepened with his frown. Edmund seemed to be reliving the last moments of the massacre in silence. He seemed
frightened, fragile and paradoxically ready for a fight.

Anna closed her eyes. Though she did not think of sport in terms of statistics the way her fiancé and his best friend were given to, she might have easily foreseen the end of the game. She might have cautioned the captain at half time to regain control of his baser instincts, save for the fact that she shared them. Up two-nil with a reserve squad and a new coach no one had initially put much faith in against a club they had never beaten, she had wanted to win as much as everyone else in the locker room. They had all been half-blinded to a series of questionable calls by their unprecedented success, unable - or simply unwilling - to calculate the potential costs. All, she realised now as she had then, except for Simcoe. Anna had quickly dismissed his detachment as the pride and professionalism that made him unequivocal on the pitch. Were only she able to see the match in those early moments as a mere manoeuvre in the larger game she and her friends had been playing all week, she cursed herself; she might well have been able to avert the inevitable.

She shifted her weight where she sat, the sport bag on her lap reminding her of Mary, who after demanding that she be taken along to see the man refusing to speak with her, had spent ten minutes that morning in the same packed car exchanging giggles about a ‘cross-country road-trip’ they had planned on taking their freshmen year and had indeed attempted over the winter break. The girls had only gotten so far as the Jersey Turnpike before the ‘check engine’ light put the brakes on their adventure. ‘If I recall, we fit out whole dorm into the backseat,’ Mary told Edmund. ‘Hopefully you both had your safety-belts on,’ he replied, not bothering to disguise his displeasure at the addition they had picked up on the stairwell. ‘Setauket is crawling with coppers. What if we should be pulled over? I already have two unpaid tickets to my name and -’

‘Oh, we could help out there,’ Anna purred teasingly. To her friend, she pouted with extended lips, ‘Oh Mary, you’d kiss me were someone to knock on our window, right?’

‘Oh Anna,’ the smaller woman echoed from her lap, ‘We would be snogging already if I trusted it wouldn’t distract Eddy from the road.’

‘It would distract from you alibi,’ Edmund murmured. Mary took this as an invitation press him for substantive details as to what happened when he saw John the day before.

Simcoe had yet to answer any of her attempts at correspondence. Anna assumed this was because he had plans to leave for England within a month - plans which presumably did not include the married woman he met at a crime scene and seduced on the cold trail that they had returned to find. Edmund had informed them curtly as was his manner when faced with fragile topics, that though his sometimes-friend had quite a lot to say, he could not bring himself to do so over text and that he was unable to call. Anna knew from experience that the captain did not like conversing from a distance – any distance - sensitivities around his voice compelling him to speak quietly while positioning himself close to the point of mutual discomfort. She had seen that morning that Mary was so desperate to contact her partner in crime that she could not give a care as to how Simcoe himself – or any of the sins she equated with his name – may sound.

Anna wondered to what extent Abe’s absence was playing in Mary’s appetence, unconcealed and half-crazed. He had not come home from his gig the night before. He had not called or sent her a text. ‘Why would he?’ Mary had remarked distantly when Aberdeen came home in an Uber at slightly past two, confused that her employer’s vehicle, which had left the club before her, was not in the driveway. ‘Normally, he would just have given Robert Townsend – if that is even his real name – as an alibi. Having lost that lie in front of an audience of everyone, why bother inventing another?’ Hearing this first hours later, Anna wished she had a fiction to offer. For Abe. And for John. But mostly for Mary, who needed reassurance in any form she could find it.
‘It is not my place to say,’ Edmund said after some measure of deliberation when they pulled to a red light, ‘But I might do better to prepare the both of you for what you are about to discover. I - ah, I suppose there is no delicate way to put this, so it may be better to just be out with it. Simcoe is legally deaf.’

‘What?’ both women demanded in unison.

‘He has been since he was ten years old. There is ah – something, something psychosomatic to it. Whilst he retains partial hearing, it abandons him in heightened stress – such as the sort he has recently found himself subjected to, among other … more common triggers. Long car rides. Meetings with new clients … Me. Sometimes me,’ he sighed. ‘It is ah … a most inconvenient defence mechanism developed in youth. I brought him yesterday to an otolaryngologist who believes that with hearing aids and therapy we might be able to salvage what remains but … um. Not to hold out too much hope.’

The explanation rendered them both soundless for the remained of the drive.

When they arrived at the field after an eternity that somehow seemed not long enough, they saw Simcoe’s enormous frame bent over a guardrail, it’s white paint chipping to reveal rust the colour of his hair, unbrushed and unbound, cascading down to broad shoulders hunched in a sulk. Already in full uniform - a scarlet red that clashed cruelly with his pale features - Simcoe watched as a few of his teammates practiced shooting.

Edmund was the first out of the car.

He and John exchanged a nod of acknowledgement as he passed by on his way inside the clubhouse to meet the refereeing staff along with Middle County FC’s coach to see out the arbitrary business football’s governing body insisted proceed each match even at this lowest of levels. Mary, after shaking the cramps from her legs, rushed to meet the captain where he stood, half turned and gazing in their direction. No. Not gazing. Staring. Staring as he always did. As Anna could no longer fault him for. She wondered why Edmund had not spoken sooner. How long he had known and why she had not when there were so many signs that now seemed obvious. She wondered why Simcoe never said anything to the subject, if he feared mercy or mockery. She wondered which he had known more of.

His expression was at once surprised and sorrowful when Mary embraced him. He softened as he returned her gesture, gently combing the long strawberry-blond hair of the petit woman in platform-heels with her tear-stained face buried in his chest. For a moment, Anna wished to join her in her sobs but she felt her mother’s hand on her shoulder. ‘Not now,’ she said, handing over an orange and a bottle of water and with it a return to what was sound.

Anna must have greeted her mother at that point, she reasoned. They must have spoken over some topic of little relevance or of great, but two hours later, all she could recall was that shortly after finishing her standard soccer-match breakfast, fate pulled into the car park in a Jeep Liberty driven by Robert Rogers. It parked directly next to her Accord.

Of all the people she suddenly wished not to see, Abe Woodhull sat in the passenger’s seat. He said something nonsensical about Pakistan, Senator Arnold, and the German chancellor who, insofar as Anna gathered from what seemed to be the preamble to a political rant reminiscent of Rush Limbaugh, was apparently to blame for America losing out in trade negotiations with the European Union. She glanced behind her to see Mary and John still locked in each other’s arms and eyes. ‘Mom,’ she whispered with a slight nod in their direction, begging her to intrude on their euphoria before Abe noticed their nearness and equated it with infidelity. Whether Nancy Smith had seen her signal or not, it was too late. In the same breath in which he had shot down the ECB,
Abe leapt from his wife’s vehicle shouting for Simcoe’s blood.

Robert Rogers laughed as he followed his lackey at a leisurely pace. He called to John Byrd who was engaged in a warm up exercise to run and tell Hewlett that John Robeson could not make it for reasons on which he did not elaborate, but which Anna could reasonably venture had to do with the liver he was in the slow process of rendering useless with cheap lager. Rogers shouted that had pulled Woodhull from a worksite to substitute, but assessing the situation as he saw now it, his boy might not make it to the locker room.

‘Ah’ve twenty on tae ging!’ he cried out to the man now running to the clubhouse, his arm rising in an offensive gesture to all as others began shouting their own bets.

‘S’okay,’ Rogers explained, turning to the district attorney. ‘He’s part Native. We can gamble as long as we’re using ol’Johnny as a bookie.’

‘Do you not realise that that is offensive?’ Anna sneered at the same time her mother wondered aloud, ‘Is everyone on this team named John?’

‘Nae, Pet. Mah nams Robert,’ Rogers said, removing his dusty old cap with a slight bow and offering his arm.

‘I’m … not interested,’ Nancy returned in lieu of her name, which, Anna imagined, Rogers likely already knew from the amount of time he collectively spent at the police station, both bailing ‘his boys’ out and answering for his own petty crimes.

‘Swine,’ Anna spat at him as she hurried to the crowded of players from both teams that had since swelled around Simcoe and the Woodhulls. In the twenty seconds it took her to sprint from the far side of the car park to the rusted rail separating the pavement from the grass, Abe had taken a swing and missed. Odds had been set at 10:3 in favour of Simcoe, and money was quickly changing hands (even though John Byrd was not present to ‘legitimise’ the exchange by value of the box he checked on a census form.) A Middle County man she would later learn was named Baker positioned himself between the combatants. Addressing them both by their respective surnames –something that would have immediately struck Anna as odd had she been calm enough to consider it - he proposed they shake hands, calling a truce until after the match.

To widespread disapproval, Simcoe offered his open palm. To cheers and jeers alike, Abe spat into it. Anna’s panic rose.

‘Satisfied?’ Simcoe asked, wiping Abe’s saliva onto his shorts with a hinted smile.

‘No,’ Abe answered, bending his knees slightly and pulling his clenched fists before his face. He bounced a bit, balancing his nerves in a way that reminded Anna of a common pigeon steadying its vision as it pecked about for food. He looked like a fool. Mary, frenzied, cursed his confidence and Anna, silently, found herself questioning the source of his conviction. Abraham Woodhull did not once look at the woman who wore his ring on her right-hand. It was as though for him this was not about his wife at all.

‘Have you ever been in a fight before, Mr. Woodhull?’ Simcoe questioned calmly, electing to pace rather than mirror a pose his challenger seemed to imitate from an arcade game. ‘Because I have. Oh, I have. And though I have beaten many a foe, I should take particular pleasure in this petty skirmish,’ he promised, the knuckles still raw from pummelling both Arnold and Edmund reddening further as he curled his long fingers into a fist.

‘JOHN NO!’ Anna shouted. He did not hear her as he continued to barb and belittle. Of course he
didn’t, she cursed herself. Needing to make her presence known, Anna joined Baker in occupying the dead zone.

‘John don’t do this,’ she begged.

‘Anna, stay out of this!’ Abe shouted. ‘This is about honour. This is about AMERICA! You’ve no right to-’

‘Honour?’ Anna gaped, ‘whose honour, pray tell? Certainly not Mary’s – whom you are both insulting by insisting with this – and not your own either! This is pride, Abraham! This is folly! It is juvenile and -’

‘Illegal,’ her mother interjected from the side-line, breaking another group of would-be-gamblers apart with a tone normally reserved for the court room.

‘Mr. Woodhull,’ Baker said again. Firmly, Anna noted, almost as a warning. In the moment, the two seemed to recognise each other. Abe relented. ‘Robert, find your own way home, yeah?’ he said, still looking at Baker. ‘Let’s go Mary.’

Mrs. Woodhull, however, shook her head. ‘It is not what you think, Abraham,’ she said softly as she stepped closer to Anna and Simcoe with a reserve that bordered on reluctance.

‘Isn’t it?’

She did not answer. When he left without further argument, she did not follow.

‘What have I done?’ Mary whispered as she watched her tyres kick up dust and gravel while her husband sped away. ‘What you needed to,’ Anna tried to assure her.

As Anna saw it, there was no other move her friend could have made. Mary’s alibi hinged on the idea that she had John had been together in a hotel room on the night in question. Denying it in front of the District Attorney, whether she was attached to the Arnold investigation or not, simply would not do. ‘I’ll talk to him,’ Anna said of Abe, but upon hearing her offer Mary looked to John behind her. He too seemed injured be the reality that he must have recognised. Mary had not chosen his love. She had chosen her lie.

An argument broke out in the chorus if Simcoe winning the girl meant that he had won the brawl that had not been. They collectively asked Byrd in varied voices when he came with both gaffers and the referee to see what all of the commotion was over.

Anna glanced at Edmund from the passenger’s seat. She had heard the same insults swirl into conversation every time he had been its topic, but until that very morning she had never seen the substance of their sentiment. He was rather prissy, rather petty, and it had rather seemed to Anna that her fiancé’s extraordinary ability to compartmentalize might just as well have rendered him a victim of Simcoe’s ire.

As players demanded that he help settle a monetary dispute with his maths degree after Byrd’s repeated refusals, Edmund, in his second official act as Bye-Week’s interim manager, reached out to his still-stunned captain, grabbing for his shoulder and attention as he scolded him that without Woodhull they did not have a full eleven. On hearing Edmund’s outburst, Anna wondered how well she actually understood the English dialect over which the Queen claimed dominion. He could not truly be concerning himself with the managerial details of a match he himself had wanted to skip, not when the lie he perpetuated to spare his sometimes-friend from consequence had nearly escalated into Simcoe’s public pronouncement of his own savagery. Anna wondered how she had
framed Edmund’s inconvenient authoritative tendencies before, and what other inadequacies of character proximity and phantasm had let her ignore. He knew what was going on between John, Mary and the man to whom she was married. Match or not, Anna had reasoned, he could have extended his friends the same sympathies he would have demanded for himself in advent of heartbreak. Instead, he redirected the discord against the man he needed to calm.

‘You have me,’ Mary interrupted. ‘I’m a Woodhull. I’ll play.’ Edmund Hewlett, the calculating and cold association league football manager, as opposed to Edmund Hewlett, the kind and charming man who had half-stumbled his way into her heart, looked at the small woman before him dressed in her Sunday’s best. ‘Ah, Mary, not disrespect meant but do you … do know how?’ he seemed to chide. Anna had elbowed him in his bruised rib, not concerning herself with digression.

‘No disrespect meant,’ Mary countered, ‘but it is soccer, Edmund. I’ll figure it out.’

She and John exchanged a long and longing glance as Nancy offered to see if she had packed Anna’s old cleats in with the rest of the shoes she had brought from Brooklyn. Neither seemed to hear her.

The game itself had started slow. Without Robeson, Hewlett could not employ his preferred formation, so rather than playing a back four, he spread his team three-five-three, using Mary as a centre forward and playing Anna to her left in a purely attacking role to which she was unaccustomed by practice.

Simcoe had gotten to keep his centre midfield position but spent the first quarter hour or so back passing whenever he took possession, likely, Anna assumed, his protective tendencies preventing him from playing the ball to Mary. Middle County, and particularly the same Baker who had helped break apart what would have otherwise been a brawl, were playing a hard, physical game. The referee seemed loath to book them for any fouls, of which by Anna’s later count of just her own bruises, were more than bountiful.

Twenty minutes in, frustrated by what he saw as his captain’s absence of commitment, Hewlett decided to take the game to ‘MCFC’ himself, charging up to midfield and countering for possession. Seeing that he was covered, he then passed the ball to her. Anna ran it up to the box and, finding herself cornered by three defenders, cried out to Mary as she kicked. Either she found the ball or it found her head, but the play resulted in the first goal of the game.

‘Hairspray,’ Mary painted, half-surprised when Anna raced along with the rest of the hoard to lift her in celebration. ‘Anything will ricochet off a pound of plastic,’ she laughed to one of the lads, winking, ‘that is why this is a girl’s sport.’

Anna smiled. Like her form, Mary’s curls had (still) looked perfect.

The last-minute substitute scored her second goal on an assist from Maglev close to the half time whistle, this time with clear purpose and intention.

Anna’s pulse quickened as memory returned her to the joviality of the locker room at half-time.

Edmund, elated by the atmosphere of promised conquest, the compliments he was receiving for his role as player-manager and the inevitable comparison by the team’s Liverpool supporters between himself and King Kenny, had abandoned the air of caution he initially attempted to instil. He had
begun his fifteen-minute window by telling his team in an accent heightened by emotion and absence of breath that he thought the referee had been purchased, but fell into the same spell of laughter they all had as Appleby interrupted, transforming the new gaffer’s speech into a parody of ‘Braveheart’.

The second half showed them that should have taken the weakened warning seriously.

MCFC returned to the pitch ready for war. Whether they had paid the referee or not, no calls or cards were pulled against them. Simcoe had seen yellow towards the end of the first half, arguing with the arbiter over a free kick awarded when a player for the opposition clearly exaggerated the extent of physical contact he had been shown. There was some luck in this. Angered, Simcoe played the back half with all of the speed and aggression he had supressed during the first.

There was some luck, too, in that Robeson had been left at home to nurse a hangover. Hewlett, in a surprising act of tactical ingenuity, had stacked the midfield. Knowing that his opponents would be keen to avoid an enraged John Graves, he barricaded both sides of the pitch with senior and seasoned members of the squad. Anna would have preferred to play the wing, but placing her beside Mary seemed to give the unanticipated striking talent a certain confidence.

Seventy-eight minutes in, Mary Woodhull scored a hat trick. The third goal, or rather, the kiss she blew a blushing Simcoe in celebration served to undermine her. It undid them all.

For no reason at all insofar as Anna or anyone else could tell at the time, a whistle was blown shortly after the game restarted. The referee conferred something to Baker and a man named Miller who wore the captain’s band. Miller looked uncertain, Baker seemed uneasy. Anna noticed that her mother was not screaming abuses from the bleachers as she had for the past twenty-three years. That she had been strangely silent throughout the match. With her earlier fear for Abe, choler for Edmund, and elation over the goals against what had thus far been a clean sheet; multiple peculiarities had escaped Anna’s attention. The quick conference brought them to the forefront of her mind and she began to tally.

Baker had shown familiarity with both the names Simcoe and Woodhull. The first did not come with much of a shock. John was the captain of the third-strongest side in the league. Abe, however, had never played soccer. While he was almost-famous in circles Baker did not look to be part of, Anna would have found it strange for an indie-punk fan to address the frontman of an unsigned outfit as ‘Mister’ in itself. And didn’t Abe call himself ‘Colpepper’ on stage?

Baker did not seem bound to a single position, fouled with the full force of his impressive frame, and apologised afterwards in what seemed to be earnest tones though he clearly acted with intent to injure. He was particularly hard on Hewlett and herself. He avoided Simcoe. His team seemed to avoid him when scanning for passing options.

Something, Anna now knew, was distinctly off.

She heard a scream. What followed was a deafening roar.

Mary Woodhull had scored an early header, seemingly on accident. She had since shot two beautiful goals, and though moments before she had seemed Akinbode’s natural successor as the side’s striker, the angle of her foot told Anna that her friend would never play soccer again. Baker had shattered her ankle when she briefly retook possession. Simcoe had seen enough. Within seconds he had the mysterious substitute on his back, challenging the by then unconscious Middle County substitute to fight someone his own size. Anna saw blood.

Simcoe was shown a different red altogether. The referee took a pair of handcuffs out of his back
pocket along with a badge and the card Bye-Week’s captain was most used to. Ignoring the props, John tore off his armband and threw it at Maglev, calling for Wakefield as he lifted a shocked and shaking Mary from the grass. Anna followed them to the bench. Her mother informed them that an ambulance had already been called.

Before being forced into the back of a police car, Anna heard John tell Edmund in the same language and too-calm tone of two-thousand-eight ‘It was an accident.’

Edmund said nothing in response. He himself had been carded for cursing at the undercover cop suddenly interested in the task of refereeing. What should have been a penalty shot for Bye-Week became one for MCFC, ending the game with a final score of 3:1.

Anna knew she had been lucky that her fiancé had not left the pitch with his hands bound behind his back as well; something - she gleaned from her mother’s post-match conduct - that had likely been Tallmadge’s intention.

“He didn’t try to kill Rostovtsev,” Edmund murmured, the vehicle vibrating with his voice as he drove over serrated cement. Anna was unsure if he was speaking to himself or to her, and if he meant for this to be reassuring. “He tried to stop Ellie from doing so, because that is what Ellie does. That is what she does and … and Ferguson knows it better than anyone. And now he is involved in the audit because of me. Because I tried to save John from my past sins. From my family. For my family. Instead I forced this whole -”

“Did you ever think that maybe, just maybe, you are not the problem? That John’s conduct has nothing to do with you whatsoever?” Anna snapped, unwilling to suffer an expression of ego while her mind circled a situation that demanded anything but. “You asked me a few days ago what I would have done were it my friends. And I thought … I thought – you know what, it is not important. What is is that I would have beaten the life out of Tallmadge’s man after what he did to Mary had John not gotten there first. And you would to. Deep down you know it. Not even your arrogance and evasive tendencies could cover -”

“You are right. I’m no leader,” he agreed. “I should have seen it sooner – with Simcoe. So much. I should have seen it sooner. I should …”

“You are a good leader, Edmund. A good leader and a great friend – I, I only,” she sighed. “He wasn’t in the wrong. He did what anyone would have done … he just. He acted without thinking.”

“I know. I mean to fix things.”

His sentiment would have been what she would have wanted to hear had it not sung of a stale refrain. “Haven’t you done enough?” Anna demanded. “Your organized everyone after the match. You kept things calmer than they otherwise would have been. Tallmadge can’t hold someone for a foul in a football game -”

“Baker has similar injuries to a soviet smuggle from a decade past. I might try to appeal to Lafayette -”

“Shut up, Edmund. Just shut up. This wasn’t your problem until you made it your problem and I am really worried you are going to make it worse.”
“This has been ‘my problem’ since I let my sanctimonious lord father convince me not to file a missing person’s report when I brought John into a safe house and left him for dead,” he snapped.

“Fine. Do whatever you think you have to do. But for the love of God stop acting like it is your sacred duty, like John is some waking nightmare born from your own incompetence because the way things look from where I stand his only real crime is constantly accepting the consequence for saving us all from our own worst selves. You didn’t make him what he is – or even what you seem to think he is. You couldn’t. Just … just stop.”

Edmund nodded, returning his full focus to the road. He was driving ten over the posted speed limit. They were going nowhere. Anna gazed out of her window and saw the same construction site she had seen what felt like fifty times in as many minutes. In her tinted pyro glass reflection, she saw clearly that all of her friends had known so much more of the world and its ragged edges than she so much as trusted herself to imagine before Wednesday morning. Mary Grant –now Mary Woodhull -was the product of severely underfunded foster care. Her husband Abe blamed himself for his brother’s death. Caleb Brewster had been kicked out of his home at fifteen for his ‘cursed affliction’ and had since taking up the task of caring for the elderly uncle who had taken him in, Lewis’ uncontrollable tremors serving the constant reminder that each day brought Caleb closer to paralysis. Abby Ingram had been tossed out at the same age, pregnant and forced to rely on her sudden political marketability to finance the survival of herself and her son. Peggy Shippen’s charmed life had shattered in an instant. She had been kicked out of her sorority for seductive messages the media said she had sent to a senator more than twice her age over a platform her father forbade her from using. Philomena Cheer escaped the destitution of college debt by signing her life away to the cruellest man Anna had ever known. Jordan Akinbode worked twice as hard as anyone she ever known for less than half of the credit his credentials alone should purchase. Aberdeen Declesias’ entire country had been destroyed in a storm. She had come to the land of promise only to find herself subjected to prejudice and systemic inequality.

And John Graves Simcoe?

John had watched both of his parents die. He had been locked in a van after a shoot-out. He had been locked in a cell when the same friend he had once again looked to for protection had gambled with his liberty in a crisis on conscious. He was still looking to Edmund Hewlett, hoping for some hero to emerge.

For this, her fiancé was at least half-accountable. Anna wondered what Edmund saw when he watched John repeating the cycle of violence they both faulted him for having begun. She wondered what he saw when he looked in the mirror. Young Edmund’s brilliance had rescued so many jobs and while destroying so many livelihoods. He had saved an empire he only later learned had been built on lies. Anna’s heart broke for them both. It broke for them all.

She tried to apologise for her undue outburst. Edmund did not respond.

Refreshing several apps and finding the same communicative void that had filled her soul with a similar frustration, she let the screen fade to black, showing her reflection, forcing her to further reflect. All four of her grandparents had retired as judges. Her parents were both prosperous in the same field and enjoyed a certain amount of celebrity and acclaim within their respective cities. She and her brother had both attended Ivy League universities, and her gamble to throw her privilege away on a pipe dream had found her engaged to literal prince, noble in both name and deed, and working for a prestigious law firm for a friend who’s prowess she admired and inspired to. What had she done to warrant such award when Senator Arnold’s simple presence in Setauket had destroyed the lives of so many people she loved?
“Maybe we should turn around,” she said. “Go to 1PP with everyone else from the team to give a character statement. Protest. Petition.”

“Have you heard anything?” Edmund asked.

Anna checked her phone to see if there had been news, but the thirty seconds since she closed WhatsApp telling herself not to worry had proven discouragingly silent. She checked her connection to be sure and was disappointed to find that her signal was still strong. Her mother had last written her twelve minutes ago advising that she had driven Mary Woodhull to an Urgent Care clinic, that neither of them had had any luck in reaching Mary’s husband, that she was needed down at the station and to please reach out if she had better luck. Anna returned a series of rather offensive emoji before telling her mother that she had better not leave her friend alone and uncared for. A lack of response told her that her efforts had been wasted. Abe had his phone off. As did Caleb. Aberdeen had no means of transportation. And Abigail was at the Manhattan station with Peggy Shippen, who apparently was still in town to give a press conference. Not that given her current status with her sorority sisters she had anywhere else to go.

Anna relayed all this to her fiancé. He nodded lightly, deliberating. “Tallmadge already has his hands full, I imagine,” he said after what seemed a long while, two miles as counted in streetlights. “Umm.”

“Here, take my phone,” Edmund offered. Anna reached. “I have a contact saved under Elizabeth Gwillim – with a ‘G’, send her a text saying that the NYPD used excessive force against women and immigrants. A young mother who grew up in Section 8 housing is in an Urgent Care facility with a broken ankle, a man from Islamabad was arrested for trying to protect her from police brutality. She’ll – ah, Effie’ll know I’m talking about Simcoe and alert her colleagues en masse. If Peggy Shippen to issue a statement as you say, likely half of the city’s reporters are at 1PP already. They will be able to do more collectively than you or I could hope to for the moment. I … I plan on heading there myself as soon as we’ve unpacked. Maybe we can arrive at a truce, Tallmadge and I.”

“Isn’t that the woman who made you a suspect in the first place?” Anna asked in hesitation.

“I did that to myself, though it had not been my intention. I just wanted to force a chain restaurant into pulling their offer on the property. It worked.”

“Was it worth it?”

“For you it always would be.”

“Edmund I am so sorry about what I said earlier, I -”

“It is fine. I am concerned as well.”

Anna sent the text she had been asked to write. They rode the rest of the way to the hotel in silence. Gwillim did not respond, nor did anyone on this side of the Atlantic whom she had texted from her own devise.

“What are you going to tell them?” Anna inquired when they pulled into the Hilton Garden’s car park a little more than an hour later.

“I’m torn. We will never repeat that result. If I protest, the game will need to be replayed and even if by the grace of god the league decides to drop all of the bookings we acquired – it is doubtful …”
“That is what you are worried about?”

“That’s I ‘already done too much’?”

“Edmund -”

“Your mother begged me before we left not to speak to the police about Simcoe,” he quipped.

“Of course she did,” Anna muttered.

Edmund rubbed his temples. “I … I have something that they want, or rather, something that I can easily get released to them, and I will offer that in exchange for John’s pardon.” He sounded solemn yet assured. “Tallmadge is looking for a deal. We know from his files that he wants to concentrate on André and his research, my medical records will bring that back into the focus of him and his unit. Press core or not, he wants to erase the morning as much as we do. His constable acted completely out of line and should he move to charge Simcoe with assaulting a police officer I am certain that there is no doubt in his mind that we will counter sue the force on Mary Woodhull’s behalf. Tallmadge’s career can’t take it. Even the stain of a public perception of police brutality by itself would end him. In light of his history with Ms. Livingston, he will agree to the trade. He has no choice but to.”

“One of my friends is in hospital. One is in jail. Edmund, the fact that you are unwilling to stoop to their level, even now speaks to your credit. You are a good and decent man-”

“But?”

“Why are you always so quick to surrender yourself?”

“Quick?” he scoffed. “I would argue that this is rather long in coming.” He paused, continuing with regained patience, “Charles Cornwallis has only help his ambassadorship for the past six months or so. I am prepared to ring him requesting that he comply with the NYPD’s request for my complete medical transcripts, thereby alerting him that André, in cooperation with the Department of Defence, has subjected some fourteen crown subjects to unethical, and - perhaps you could advise me here – illegal research practices, putting at least my life at risk -”

“What if they are in on it?”

“The British Embassy?” he asked as though alone the notion were unthinkable.

“Edmund … think about it. Why else wouldn’t they have complied sooner on their own accord?”

“Because our sovereign has an interest in insuring that my illness remains a state secret. Her granddaughters, the princesses of York, could carry the same gene that nearly saw me undone, as I strongly suspect both of my sisters and my niece must. It would damage all of their marriage prospects. Not just theirs, the monarchy …” he trailed off.

“Edmund -”

“That is why my family isn’t speaking to us, you realise. Royal weddings are hard enough as it is to arrange. I – I know that my younger sister has been tied to Clan Campbell as of late, but with our coming nuptials that plan will likely suffer two years of delay. The press is not happy about it either. Ideally Gwillim and her colleagues would have us wed sometime in the summer, a way of showing Britain is strong after the Brexit referendum –regardless of how it should turn out- and what I imagine will be an embarrassing performance at the Euros have otherwise made us Europe’s joke. It is probably why she is not responding,” he muse quietly. “I would be very much surprised
if she doesn’t still harbour feelings for Simcoe.”

Anna wondered to what extent their engagement hindered their chances at surviving unscathed. Edmund, stronger, refused to relent.

“Ah … no. No, Darling, none of that is to say that I have any regrets, only … that I trust Cornwallis to act. He won’t want the stain of negligence on his record and I expect that he will be discreet,” he paused, taking her by the hand. “And that will be the end of it. I promise. After I’ve played my hand in getting the Foreign Office involved on our behalf, I will offer my official abdication which should set things right with my immediate family and their closest allies.”

“Even if André’s research isn’t what your Embassy is trying to hide, I am still not sure what make you think that Cornwallis is going to risk breaking down relations over -”

“Attempted murder by a foreign government? I will have given him an advantage in any future negotiation than he would otherwise enjoy.”

Anna was silent for a long while. She could not believe that her confessions of love and the life she hoped to lead had entered into the realm of international politics. “I think you would have made a brilliant politician, Edmund.”

“I don’t think I am meant to take that as a compliment,” he tried to smile.

“I don’t think you should surrender your claim.”

“I don’t think you fully understand its implications.”

Ambassador Cornwallis never took tea in the afternoon unless he was entertaining company, and truth be told, on this particular Sunday he felt he might benefit significantly from something far stronger than Assam. Like Absinth. Or Arsenic. He had no mind to decide. He watched the young man the Foreign Office had sent as a military attaché, wondering how difficult it would have been for them to find someone who better understood the role he was meant to play as the boy dropped a cube of sugar into his cup, stirring it with the scar-ridden remains of his right hand. It was not the worst service injury Cornwallis had ever seen, but it was singular in the way in commanded his attention – his gaze neglecting the etiquette of his office. Banastre Tarleton had left his thumb and two forefingers in a plastic explosive in Bagdad along with his command of a battalion he had led to glory time and again, his wounds rendering him unfit for active duty. They had met first on Thursday, and by Saturday the ambassador had heard almost everything that could be said of the scar-tissue. Everything, that was, that could be relayed effervescently, which in turn told him most everything he felt he needed to know about Ban.

He had learned to do with his left that which his right would never again mange – write, shoot, hold a teacup as daintily and dandily as the nobles whose names he dropped into conversation with ease. He alternated between laughing at the tasks he found difficult and applying all of his mental energy to accomplish them on his own. ‘It is not pride,’ he had told him the night before, again, feeling Cornwallis’s eyes resting uneasily where his digits once had been. It was a standard that had been set for him in his youth when one of his sisters had been born disabled. His parents, not wanting her to live a life of reliance had forced the same high standards on a daughter with Down’s syndrome as they had on her six siblings of able body and mind, allowing none of them to treat her
as ‘different’. Ban had thus become almost oddly egalitarian until he wasn’t, until he was given an excuse pertaining to personal limitations. He extended himself the same quarter that he did to others, pushing beyond physical deficits, ignoring the role privilege played in helping him to overcome them. Cornwallis could not help but to stare.

Shaking involuntarily, Tarleton lifted the saucer with a smile that rarely vanished from his face. “You wanted to see me, Sir?”

“I just got off the phone with Francis Marion,” Cornwallis informed him. “He was finally able to locate ex-Major Najma Abboud.”

“Oh? Brilliant. Where was she then? Still unpacking?” he suggested with a hint of mockery.

“At Kroger,” the ambassador replied flatly, unable to share in his subordinate’s amusement. “What is that?”

“A chain grocer.”

“Oh my. Well the feds certainly had their work cut out for them there,” he said brusquely, “What can you do though?”

“You can tell me what the hell that was about,” Cornwallis insisted.

He had been awoken that same morning by a police inspector in Scotland who had reason for concern. Evidently, before flying to the United States to attend a Homeland Security advisory summit which had not been cancelled when it became clear to the world that its chairman, Senator Arnold, was unlikely to be in attendance, Tarleton had confided in someone warranting merit that he planned to pin what the police were not yet treating as murder on a Muslim with a recent court martial. A reputation that had proceeded the arrogant young attaché into Cornwallis’ home gave enough weight to this claim that the ambassador found himself forced to place his guest under house arrest while the Pentagon moved to investigate. The former Major had been found after a six hour search when she used her credit card to buy two bottles of Gatorade, a rotisserie chicken and something called coleslaw for which Cornwallis had no point of reference. She was cornered in the car part by a Marion-led SWAT team, shocked to find that anyone other than her mum would come on such an apocalyptic explanation as to why she had not answered her cell phone, which - much unlike herself - had died on the drive from New York to Norfolk. She had never heard the name Tarleton, and after being debriefed, consented to saying that she had never spent an hour in the back of a SWAT van behind a Kroger while her rotisserie chicken grew cold in her lap. The FBI sponsored her a replacement, billing the British Embassy $7.89 for the transaction. Charles Cornwallis was not amused.

“A ploy,” Tarleton said, taking a sip. Seeing that his host was not satisfied, he explained with an air of nonchalance, “I needed something from a colleague whom I happen to hold in great esteem and experience has instructed me that the easiest way to secure peace is to threaten force.”

“Do you care to expand?”

“What on?”

Cornwallis narrowed his gaze.

“It is this damned Hewlett audit and what it might mean for my city,” he sighed, some of his humour escaping as he exhaled. “There is some irony to it at every level, but Ellie is one of the most deeply moral people I have ever met. She doesn’t see herself that way, and I suppose of
greater essence, doesn’t offer herself in any way at all, believing in vain and vanity that her role in society excuses her from being anything beyond an object of projection. She is her inheritance, her family’s money and lands and charitable pursuits and whatever it is that others are given to thinking of those things. In some sense, she may be right. Richard Ferguson, for one, hates her for all that she symbolises to him and I found it … rather imperative that his assumptions be corrected insofar as they ever possibly can. She has a hero complex. So does he and I would bet that teaming up to quote unquote ‘save’ an innocent woman from a perceived threat will bring them as close to friendship as they might ever dare come.”

“Are you hoping to profit from the inquiry into the Hewlett’s corporate finances?” Cornwallis inquired.

“Not nearly as much as I imagine that you are hoping not to be hurt by it,” he retorted. “But I wouldn’t worry. My hopes, such as they are, are unlikely to pan out, so the economic stability I’ve ensured will have to serve as a consolation. Hewlett, I imagine, offered Ferguson some sort of payout in exchange for his intervention on Major Abboud’s behalf – imagining that I would honestly,” he paused. “My reputation is not undeserved, I admit. I employed it to manipulate her. Still hurts,” he sighed, “knowing that she truly views me in that light after all that we’ve shared.” Tarleton shook his head, recovering his smirk and composure for what it was. “But again,” he chirped, “there is nothing to be done for it. When you ring Ferguson back, let him know that Abboud is safe and thank him for alerting you to the problem, appealing to his own ridiculous sense of self. It will purchase the Hewletts enough time and grace to properly cover the events of Monday morning and I should very much doubt there is anything else for Fergs to find. The matter will be dismissed before it can begin to effect share prices. You’re welcome.”

He had been caught. Tarleton spoke lightly, deceptively unthreatening.

“Cheers,” the ambassador said, unsettled that Monday’s events had somehow found their way into tea and biscuits, increasingly certain that he was not long for his seat.

Everything that had gone wrong that week had been facilitated, if not initiated, by a stroke of his pen. His hand had been forced by decisions made by one government over the fate of another on the other side of the globe.

On Monday morning, Charles Cornwallis had a secret five AM meeting with the French Ambassador who advised him as ‘a curtesy’ that General Bouchard had been given orders to end the nation’s involvement in a Malian civil war in the coming weeks. The ‘Ministre des Affaires étrangères et du Développement international’ could not, however, appropriate the funding required, according to Bouchard and the Legion he oversaw, to position the currently French-backed opposition force to hold their own without necessitating future involvement of the international community. NATO did not want to commit and African wars were a harder sell for individual member nations than Arab ones in the current political climate. Rochambeau pointed to an unmarked area in disputed territory on an otherwise detailed regional map, telling Cornwallis that he had a solution, but needed help.

Without having visited the continent, without having kept up with recent news concerning the conflict, without words to offer a distinction, Cornwallis knew precisely what he was looking at. The property in question was a sizable plantation owned and operated by a cartel his own government had long been in business with. ‘France can’t seize it with British soldiers garrisoned
there for protection, but we could orchestrate a sale,’ Rochambeau offered. ‘The opposition army could feed itself from the crop.’

‘There is far less poppy there than you think,’ Cornwallis told him honestly.

‘Or so you say.’

He had already said too much.

‘What exactly are you asking of me, Jean-Baptiste?’

‘Hewlett refuses to play politics. Thinks of her land as a safe zone and funds a refugee camp in the same area.’ Raising his eyebrows, he inquired slowly in soft tones, ‘What can the Foreign Office offer as incentive for her to change her mind?’

Cornwallis bit his lip. ‘It depends, I suppose, on how much you can realistically pay. Essential social services are run from those profits,’ he said, making first sure that they were off the record.

‘Three-five.’

‘That is laughable.’

‘How much do you think wars cost, Charles?’

‘Are you threatening one?’

He would not have needed to. Rochambeau pulled a manila folder from his briefcase. Cornwallis flipped through the first few pages of its contents, realizing that French intelligence had enough evidence against the British government to bring corruption and criminal charges in The Hague. He slid it back, repeating the figure he was given.

‘I am attempting to organise a sale and I recognise that you have a certain sway within your department. An ambassadorship in America is … well from what I understand of UK politics, your appointment was not exclusively merit-based.’

Cornwallis felt and fell into the insult. ‘I can offer citizenship and passports for her women and war orphans, propose tax breaks that would help her charities absorb the cost of relocation. Three-five for the property. How much is it going to take to make the intelligence disappear?’

Rochambeau gave a rare smile. The men in the quiet and cover of darkness conspired to fund an exit strategy outside of the public sphere. A strategy, which by the time he left, Cornwallis felt assured would work to everyone’s benefit.

He felt sure of the hand he had managed to win for himself until seemingly unrelated events conspired to compromise the whole of their situation.

The following evening, Senator Benedict Arnold went missing. The morning after Edmund Hewlett was arrested in connection to his disappearance and by that night, the suspect had confessed to having committed corporate fraud in his youth.

Thinking they were doing the Hewletts a favour, DI Richard Ferguson was put in charge of the audit following young Edmund’s claims by the logic that given the inspector’s history with the clan, any evidence he was able to uncover would be dismissed in court out of hand. What that Chamber of Commerce had no way knowing, however, was that Ferguson was coming at his investigation with the knowledge that nearly a decade prior, the continuity of the Foreign Legion
had been put under threat in the case that effectively ended his career. Edmund Hewlett and John Graves Simcoe had both been suspects. Rochambeau had rung him in the middle of the night, offering a solution before Cornwallis had even been made aware that there was a problem.

‘My government, as well as your own, has long been aware of Edmund Hewlett’s, how do you say? Personal shortcomings. I have a man on the inside playing into them. From what I understand of the reports I have seen, he is best friends with Britain’s best banker, no?’

“And do you consider him to be particularly violent in character?” Cornwallis inquired of Simcoe.

“I fear I would not be the best judge of that,” Tarleton said dismissively. The ambassador again found his eyes rudely fixed on the wound that seemed to contradict his statement. Ban Tarleton would never throw another punch. He may have learned to handle a handgun, but determination and denial aside; he would never again serve his country in the capacity he had spent his youth preparing for. It was not his service record that translated to his talent for coercion, but rather his circle of friends. He should not have known about Monday or Mali. He should not have known about the chamber’s choice of commissioner, a decade old case, or the details of a confession given under emotional duress. Cornwallis had to uncover what his subordinate knew of the two British nationals whose alleged proximity to the missing senator was causing the world to unravel. “Between the two then.”

“Between Hewlett and Simcoe – you are asking who is the more aggressive?” the attaché clarified. “Oh, tough call, that. Edmund and I didn’t overlap at school. From what I have come to understand of him, he sees himself as a child of the Renaissance. The heir apparent to the great minds who awakened Europe from centuries of slumber with their contributions to philosophy and natural science -”

“You say that mockingly. His post-graduate research has been instrumental in various high-profile projects overseen by NASA and our own ESA,” Cornwallis defended as though offering a challenge or correction.

“If I sound mocking as you accuse it is because I have met the man on various occasions. More ‘Machiavelli’ than ‘Galileo’ if we are to judge him by his own constraints. As to John,” he frowned, his lightness of language and tone not deepening to match his expression, “well … he considers himself something of a poet. Haughty. High-minded. Horrible interpersonal skills. But it is always the quiet ones, ‘innit?’

“It would appear so.”

DI Tallmadge had arrested John Graves Simcoe earlier that morning, Cornwallis told him. This caused Tarleton to drop the saucer he held in his crippled hand. The ambassador smiled in spite of himself. Whatever information the would-be war criminal was getting, it clearly was not coming from New York. Tarleton’s posture seemed to stiffen as Cornwallis went on to relay that Edmund Hewlett had called earlier that afternoon to request that his medical transcripts be released to the NYPD’s Special Crimes Unit.

“You can’t,” the attaché gaped.

He had to. According to Hewlett, fourteen crown subjects had been part of a psychological study
which had led to an attempted suicide. If Tallmadge wanted to help see that matter prosecuted, he was not about to become an obstacle in the inspector’s quest.

“You think you are in any position to say?” Cornwallis could not help but taunt. “Based on the events of this morning alone—”

“Sir,” Tarleton interrupted. “I am here primarily to advise the Senate Defence Committee which has evidently overseen the research of which you speak on how to package a bill that would set an international precedent Britain hopes to follow. Questions of ethics aside, my understanding is the Dandridge / André research will save lives … but then I have not seen it given that the man I was meant to meet with met an old mate of mine in a pub a few days prior to my arrival. According to Tallmadge, at any rate.

Washington is already working the conservative sector for support. A wounded veteran back to battle the evil forces of Planned Parenthood? Truly an American hero,” he rolled his eyes before continuing in an earnest Cornwallis had not considered him capable. “Arnold’s disappearance is an easy sell as is to legislators looking over their shoulder for the next Nine-Eleven. Liberals are harder. But here,” he said, taking out his phone. “I received this text earlier from Effie Gwillim who forwarded it to me from none other than your dearly misguided Edmund Hewlett. I had no idea what to make of it until now.”

Cornwallis read aloud:

>>>The NYPD used excessive force against women and immigrants. A young Sec. 8 woman is in an Urgent Care facility with a broken ankle, a man from Islamabad has been arrested for trying to protect her from police brutality. <<

Followed shortly by:

>>>Run tell that ???<<

“She makes a call,” Tarleton continued, “the story will circle the world in an hour. Being that this operation was apparently related to the Arnold investigation, what better way to sell the use of spy drones than a demand to have checks on police? It is the current mood.”

Cornwallis nodded slowly. “When does your commission end, Ban?”

“June, Sir. What do you ask?”

“You might make a run for public office. I believe you to have a talent for this sort of thing.”

“I have many talents, Sir. None of which are possible to campaign from.”

“Make the call,” he said, hoping God and history would judge him under the constructs of his time.

“Sir, as long as I am on the phone, with regard to Edmund Hewlett’s request – I think we should look into this matter. Gather evidence regarding the Dandridge / André research. And wait. Threaten to expose it when it would be most politically disastrous for the Americans or most advantageous to us. You’ll never know when you’ll need the upper,” he paused where Cornwallis’ eyes invariably fell. “hand. In the meantime, I want to forward what evidence you do have – whatever of relevance his file contains - to some friends back home. Help sort a hostage situation before it is allowed to escalate. My mate, you see … he is expecting his first son—”

So that was what the boy was after. “Washington has ordered Hamilton to keep Eugene Hewlett in custody. Everything both Rochambeau and I have put forth on his behalf -”
“How has diplomacy alone served either of you thus far?” Tarleton demanded.

Poorly, Cornwallis thought. There had not been ample time to prepare. Both ambassadors assumed that Ellie Hewlett would launder the sum she received ‘as a donation to her charity’, breaking it up into smaller figures before using it to finance whatever public works project she hoped would help absolve her of continuing the sins of her forefathers. The amount entered into her available balance an hour before Edmund’s confession warranted an audit.

She called her twin, a junior CFO working in the power company’s Paris office, asking him to make funds disappear quickly, understanding that if discovered her own nation would face as much risk as the one Bouchard hoped to liberate by cultivating the crop his government had secured the purchase of. Eugene saw a quick fix in the property his brother had brought into the press’s focus. John Graves Simcoe had arranged the sale of a flat in his building between the youngest Hewlett and a Russian oligarch.

The prince had just enough sense to see that his time was up.

Eugene Hewlett sent an email to a columnist called Marat at French BuzzFeed with whom he had a colourful history explaining that his wife was about to give birth to another man’s son before getting on a plane. Having explained what he likely anticipated as being a lengthy public absence to the press, he found FBI agents waiting to arrest him in Copenhagen as he surely knew they would be. Cornwallis did not know if it was to his benefit or detriment that Eugene had no idea what his father-in-law was engaged in in Africa. That he did not know the man he had just intrusted his unborn son’s handsome trust fund to was working with his brother to help stabilize the common currency and strengthen the pound. That not even Simcoe and Hewlett were aware of their current role in world diplomacy and trade. Hamilton, however, suspected something was amiss with the man Rochambeau had assigned to carry out the mission, born form the opportunity he saw hours before Tallmadge named both Hewlett and Simcoe as suspects in the disappearance that turned the world upside down. He relayed all of this to Tarleton, asking, “Can you fix it without making a mess of things?”

“Not alone,” he answered.

“Then make the call.”

At eight o’clock that evening, Cornwallis proposed a toast. Having refused to release the records, Edmund Hewlett was still at the police station providing a statement on behalf of the man public pressure had forced the release of hours before. Tarleton’s plan to ask the press to intervene had worked a wonder. Various support marches of Senator Arnold’s controversial bill were already taking place in various cities. More were planned for the coming days from both ends of the polarized political factions.

“How Washington plans on going up to New York early in the week to put this all to rest,” the ambassador repeated what he had been told over the phone. “He will have a word with Hamilton regarding his unit’s treatment of Eugene whilst he was in their custody.”

“Glad it all worked out,” Ban smiled as he took a sip.

Cornwallis was quick to refill his glass, eager to learn what exactly ‘it all’ entailed. (‘Lose lips sink
ships,’ Tarleton had told him earlier. ‘In vino veritas, then,’ Cornwallis had thought to himself.)

“To well laid plans!” Their glasses clinked. “To you!” “To you!” “To Étienne Hewlett!” “May his proud parents soon be reunited!” “To Gwillim!” “To Rochambeau!” “To Washington!”

“George Washington,” Tarleton repeated, without taking a sip. “Since I have been here, I swear, it seems as though I am stuck in another age altogether.”

“The nomenclature?” the ambassador mused, “I think that Americans are typically named for Founding Fathers, Biblical figures, or …” he paused, reflecting on the types of magazines his wife and daughter stocked in the water closet as one tends to with a proper drink in hand and several weighing on the mind, “the odd curious noun now again. ‘North’. ‘Apple.’”

“I’ll never understand it,” Tarleton said lightly. “But who am I to judge? My brothers and I were all named after footballers from the Dixie Dean era – Clayton for the whole winning squad.”

Charles Cornwallis’ understanding of the national game only went as far as his diplomatic status demanded. Every four years he ‘supported’ England’s attempt at glory by watching them flounder through the group stage of the World Cup. When they were handed their inevitable early exit he spent the next three weeks or so hoping that some country Great Britain had never been at war with would win the tournament, which never seemed to be the case. He did not concern himself with the Euros. They had beaten all of the neighbours centuries before on true fields of contention.

Having only the vaguest of notions as to what Tarleton spoke of, he squinted, trying to remember if he had another point of reference for his subordinate’s odd and rather old-fashioned Christian name. Inebriated and arriving at nothing, he simply nodded as Ban continued, “That is what I mean though, about being stuck in another time. The way the Yanks talk about footy, you would think we were in the eighties and hooliganism was a legitimate public concern. Do you know, DI Tallmadge actually asked me about that when I spoke to him this morning,” his smirk expanded into a sardonic smile. “I got to recycle my favourite joke from God knows how long ago.”

“Let’s hear it then,” Cornwallis said, hoping against every construct of logic his military attaché was in the practice of forcing him to constantly reevaluate that this example of what the cripple considered humour would not escalate into another international incident.

“I told Tallmadge that last night I was woken up by a noise I could not quite identify. From my window I saw two thugs sporting Man United kits and to my horror I discovered they were playing football with a cat. I yelled at them to stop but naturally I was ignored. I had half a mind to ring the police,” he paused as he came to the punch line, “until I realised that the cat was actually up two-nil.”

Cornwallis returned his laughter out of relief. “It gets better!” Tarleton assured him, “Tallmadge had no idea what to make of it. He asked me, and I promise I am not making this up, if that was something akin to dog fighting. I said maybe in Turkey, forgetting, or course, how piss poor Americans are at geography. So now I suppose poor John Graves was subjected to some interrogation about animal cruelty because the good inspector has never seen a map of the near east, much less an Istanbul derby,” he smiled darkly.

“I assumed you were friends with Simcoe.”

“I hazard to imagine ol’ Johnny suffers under the same delusions. Worry not, Your Excellency, his newfound importance to the empire has not escaped me. If I may though … I would advise that in the future you and your esteemed colleagues take more caution in determining where to place your trust.”
“Would you care to expand?”

“It is not entirely my story to tell.”

“A girl?” Cornwallis tried.

“Isn’t it always?” Tarleton mused. His shoulders fell, speaking of some defeat. “It isn’t what you think though,” he stared cheerlessly. “Around nine years ago, a friend of mine … my best friend, chose to confide something to him that has now become a matter of public concern. I only found out about it a few months ago, and I’ve –truly I have worked to excuse it as age, or trauma, or any idea that came to my mind which might explain why he did what he did in that moment and his actions in all of these years since. But I can’t,” he said, placing his tumbler on the table and pouring himself another shot. “If he couldn’t handle it – and how could he have? - he could have gone to an adult for help. He could have expressed his condolences – anything, anything besides using the details of a family tragedy to explain all the reasons why he personally hates Edmund Hewlett.”

Of all of the things Cornwallis wished he had been prepared for before the week began, this was chief among them. He sat down. Tarleton followed him out of etiquette.

“We as an international community are trusting him to work with someone he hates enough that he would put other lives at risk to further this fight?” he asked, closing his eyes.

“Seems so,” came his answer.

Chapter End Notes

… at least Najma and Eugene made it out of their respective crucibles, right? I am DYING for your comments, but first, here are mine:

**The German Chancellor**: Angela Merkel, in March 2016. Her party (CDU) won the recent election but has yet for form a government.

**Rush Limbaugh**: A conservative American radio talk-show host. He also sells colourful ties.

**ECB**: The European Central Bank, located in Frankfurt, Germany. It is the central bank for the Euro and issues monetary policy to the 19 member states. Mostly, it exists as a buzzword and in this role stars as one of the primary villains in the popular apocalyptic-comedy known in Europe as ‘the nightly news.’

**The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act**: a controversial 1988 law protecting and promoting gaming as a source of revenue for Native American tribes.

**King Kenny**: Scottish forward Kenny Dalglish served a role as player-manager for Liverpool FC from 1985-1991. This just means that he simultaneously held both playing and coaching duties.

**Hat trick**: when a played scores three goals in a single match. A **perfect hat trick** (everywhere but Germany) is when a player scores with their left foot, right foot and head. In Germany (which isn’t remotely relevant to this chapter or fic, just its writer
and half the audience) it means that a player score three times consecutively in a single half, without anyone else scoring in between these goals.

**Clean Sheet**: in which one team prevents the other team from scoring any points. This term isn’t exclusive to football and is interchangeable with the American **shutout**.

**Cornwallis**: Best remembered for surrendering to combined American and French forces after the **Battle of Yorktown**, he was an officer and colonial administrator. Related, on at least one occasion he mitigated between **Tarleton** and **Simcoe** in their historical roles as green-wearing redcoats who found cooperation ... difficult.

**Francis Marion**: nicknamed “The Swamp Fox” (by Ban Tarleton), he was an American officer known for guerrilla tactics and intelligence gathering.

**The Hague**: Here, used synonymously with the **International Court of Justice**, the primary judicial branch of the UN which settles disputes between states, among other things.

**Planned Parenthood**: a nonprofit organization that provides reproductive health care in the United States. Mostly, it exists as a buzzword and in this role stars as one of the primary villains in the popular apocalyptic-comedy known in the US as ‘the nightly news.’

**Marat**: A radical journalist in revolutionary France.

**Dixie Dean**: played for Everton ninety years ago, or when they were last ‘good’.

The old joke Tarleton tells about Manchester United dates back to the **David Moyes** era. Why? Because as someone pointed out when I once had a tumblr, I habitually make references to players (and trainers) who transfer to the club (often from Everton, as is the case here.) That said, I have an amendment or, rather update for you regarding a note in a previous chapter. The last time **Wayne Rooney** came up he was still at Man U. He has been back in Toffee Blue since that start of the 2017/18 season. Looking ahead, I think his penalty that resulted in the equalizer at the Merseyside Derby like a week ago would be a good place to begin **Hide and Sequel** (mostly so I can get a few jokes about Everton’s 2017/18 season out of the way right up front. That or I have developed a certain fondness for Tarleton, who will (sadly?) never be reunited with his 2002/3 away jersey.)

And now that I have made us all a little dumber by filling my notes with the sort of history you would have to be two pints in to appreciate, I will take my leave, wishing you all a Happy Christmas and a good slide into the next year provide that we don’t see each other between now and then. Cheers!

Up Next: Fluff and pain killers (… and Peggy!)
The Partisans

Chapter Summary

Mary, injured, comes to accept the unlikely structure in which her ideals substantiate. Simcoe entertains a criminal charge. Peggy and Aberdeen struggle to keep things civil under their newly shared roof.

Chapter Notes

What’s good, lovely faces? Did you all have a happy holiday season? I really do hope so. Mine (if you were wondering) was about as merry as that of a highly secular Muslim forced to stare down Bockwurst and potato salad while a Helene Fischer TV special played happily in the background possibly could be - optimistic, but taking umbrage with the ambiance. Ladies and gentlemen, let me lay some truth on you about the culinary delicacy that is a cheap canned sausage sold soaking in its own juices: they are delicious, or can be, when you are at the pub, three pints in before half time and it hits you that you’ve not eaten all day. Order one. Go for it. But really, only then. I just have the idea from imported film that a cooked bird should be involved somehow in other sorts of festivities.

With that mind-set (… of missing the Bundesliga) I ended up writing a lot of Hide and Seek over the holiday break. I kept this update at a reasonable length (I hope!) but there will be more coming all too soon, oooh. Look out. I have nothing but transfer rumours to otherwise amuse me in the dead of winter. :) That said, this week’s warnings include: young love, psychological manipulating, real-world politics, steadfast Trump supporters, occupy types and Arsène Wenger.

As always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

There was a difference between ‘want’ and ‘need’ and though she spent a goodly amount of time trying to instil her kindergartener with this understanding, Mary Woodhull, who had so long gone without satisfying the semblance of either, found their meanings flip Sunday evening at her kitchen table. She did not just want John to say, she positively needed him to. Just a coffee longer. Just a coffee and another package of the Oreos her tragic hero had sent in replace of words the day before. She could not stand the idea of being left alone with the rest of their company. However, John Easton looked all too eager to retreat into Harlem where he hung his keys at night. Mary, with a slight pout, reached again for the canister between them. Easton looked upon her with pity and without objection let her refill his cup a seventh time.

He had picked her up hours ago at an Urgent Care facility and had driven her to IPP to give a statement with regard to how she came upon her broken ankle. By that time, a lawyer had already been called, a countersuit filed and five of the thirty or so witness testimonies had been given. All there was for Mary to do was wait and be waited upon. She found it surprising that her erstwhile
teammates and apologetic opponents offered her without exception every comfort that could be created in the lobby of a police station. Someone in a red tracksuit surrendered their chair to her, another to the only cast she had ever worn. They made a pillow for her foot from a pile of hoodies and sweatshirts. They lent her a power bank for her phone and offered to hunt and hurt her husband if he did not soon answer his. They brought her the finest refreshments the vending machine could offer: a bottle of Coke, a bag of salt and vinegar crisps, a bag of unsalted pretzels (“in case you are on a diet”) and a packaged cake (“in case you aren’t.”) They rubbed her shoulders and decorated her hot pink bandage with their numbers, signatures and well wishes. Though in short order ‘John’ was written everywhere on her lower right leg, the one who had left his mark on his heart was nowhere to be seen. The minutes ticked into hours and with every turn of the clock Mary’s anger faded further towards apprehension.

When called into interrogation, she countered every question the officer asked with one of her own: “Why has John Graves Simcoe been arrested?” “What grounds do you have to hold him?” “Has bail been set?”

“Are you a lawyer, Mrs. Woodhull?” the uninformed, overworked constable asked as Mary struggled with her crutches back out into the lobby. “No,” she responded. But I should be, she reasoned.

She carried this thought or let it carry her back to Setauket - again, in the back of Easton’s cab. He refused payment for what amounted to half a day’s work, telling her as he helped her up the stairs to the front porch to just worry about getting well so she could come back and save their season. With that, they said goodbye. An hour later, Easton had returned with her purse, phone, and a young woman named Peggy Shippen.

“I can’t thank you enough for taking me in.” Peggy had said, smiling and squeezing her hands in a sisterly fashion rather than shaking them. In this act of instant warmth, Mary immediately shared her au pair’s stated mistrust. She knew who she was from the news; she knew she did not belong in New York from her greeting. Misanthropy was a geographic phenomenon. It was established in everyone upon arrival, regardless of from where they came. Peggy Shippen was either trying to deceive the other residents of Whitehall or she was trying to deceive herself – regardless, Mary saw disunion.

“It is a pleasure to have you!” she spoke the same lie to the girl she was still half-surprised to find herself quartering. “Easton, won’t you come in? I’ll put a fresh pot of coffee on.”

There had been a message on her answering machine when she walked in an hour ere; a friend of Richard Woodhull’s had a daughter who needed a place to stay in the area – did he still have rooms for lease? A call from her father-in-law followed on the land line: Peggy Shippen was to be given his master chamber for the duration of her stay. Mary, barely able to stand, had order Aberdeen to go upstairs and change the sheets. The au pair protested, saying that she could not believe that it took hours of careful planning to cajole the chief judge into letting Abigail and Cicero rooms at short notice, but a white girl could just call and get him to give up his own bed. It was injustice! It was another example of institutionalized racism! It was a number of French words Mary supposed could be summarized as belonging to the ‘pardon my’ persuasion, but battle-worn and broken, she had no mind for translations or transgressions. She asked Aberdeen again to get the room ready, and to bring her one of Anna’s LSAT study guides and a legal pad from Richard’s office.

They sat together in the kitchen for the remainder of their wait, Aberdeen playing with her phone, Mary glazing over the material she would be tested on should she sit the exam that would let her apply for law school, as had recently been encouraged in a roundabout way by both her partner in crime, the DA’s daughter and a police constable. She found she could not read, however, her head
rattled with estimations and calculations of the unreal sort that exist between desperation and dreams that have been lost to time. She was nearly thirty. She had a career, a mortgage, and a marriage, and yet, something inside her whispered that she had a reason to leave. What she heard, she could not see. Reason had never been good to her, and now it was gone.

They had lost the corpse, and John had lost control.

Mary flipped a page in her book and her mind turned over the morning. Simcoe had come to her defence far too quickly. He had come down on her assailant far too hard and now he was in jail for it. And why should this surprise her? They had met by her driving Anna’s car into a man he had knocked out with a single punch. Two days later, he had beaten his best friend past the point of recognition to give his bloodied hands an alibi an hour in a motel did not provide. He had strangled her during sex hours after. Mary could still feel him fucking her over her mahogany desk while her son and husband watched from the wall, a hundred African orphans who never existed looked on from her monitor, and a cartel boss peaked through the open page of an internal UNICEF magazine that painted her as a philanthropist. She felt all of their eyes still. Mary felt John Graves Simcoe when she squeezed her thighs together, this despite the pain in her ankle and the drugs that we meant to sort it. She felt his strength when he lifted her against the tree where they shared their first kiss, when he lifted her off the field where they had shared their last. It was all too much.

She was helplessly and hopelessly in love with a killer.

A ‘killer’, she thought, whose only real crime was believing that she was worth more than the sum of what fate in the form of stale beer at a frat party had bestowed. She had a career, a mortgage and a marriage. She had the stability years of foster care had caused her to crave. She felt beneath it, even still. Woodhull was not her name; it was her husband’s. It was his father’s. It was the reason that even if she refinanced or took out a loan she could never take her leave. From sophomore year until Thursday night, Mary Woodhull had had no friends. She had not known love and hope had been made a distant memory. What Mary did have, however, was her son Thomas. She had Abe’s threat that the courts would take him from her should she ever file for separation.

What Mary had was a fear that she was already gone.

Abe had not answered him phone since his close encounter with John in the car park of the soccer field. This was not to say anything; Abe had stopped answering her calls somewhere in the second year of their marriage. This time it felt different. It felt final. It felt as though she had been the one to hang up. She wanted to call him, not because she cared where he was or for what lies he might tell her, but because she wanted to begin peace negotiations. She could no longer fight for him. She had surrendered that by standing mutely behind Simcoe when the two had nearly slogged it out.

Eventually, Mary told herself, things would be fine between herself and her husband. They had to be because they had never been and yet they had lasted this long despite it. He would come home late tonight or early tomorrow, smelling of cigarettes and sulphur and whatever medal job he had been working recently that allowed him the illusion of having participated in the economy. He would accuse her again in the same manner she had so often accused him, and Mary, in turn, would pretend to herself that she was not in love with the man her alibi forced her to pretend to be having an affair with.

Eventually, Tallmadge would find Arnold with whomever had kidnapped him after she and John had fled the scene. Eventually, her lies could end and the truth would fade with them. Eventually, the Hewletts would move out of Whitehall. She would see Anna now and again and they would partake in the kinds of pleasures which men were quick to avoid. Assuming Edmund had no particular interest in the sort of chic-lit transformed by the passing centuries into classics, any
connection to John would eventually be lost. She would not ask for news of him when Edmund would come over to pick up his eventual offspring, whom Mary would offer to babysit without motive. She would not mention John’s name to Anna when they were five pages and half a bottle of German Riesling into discussing ‘Persuasion’. She would, instead, clandestinely search for news of John online over a secured work connection until, eventually, she wouldn’t.

Eventually, she would see him in passing at DeJong’s or at a party, standing or sulking in a darkened corner. He would lift his glass in a wordless greeting, she would smile, nod, and slide back into the crowd of other guests, hoping that there was a Mrs Simcoe among them, hoping that they would never meet face to face, hoping that John had gone on to live the life she wanted but could not bear to wish for.

Because in the end, Woodhull was not her last name.

It was a chain she had once worn with dignity and would learn to again. For all of Anna’s slightly dated LSAT material, Mary had no other options. With this thought, she closed her book. No, she corrected herself. The book. It was not ‘hers’ and she would have no further use for it.

“Are you feeling unwell?” Aberdeen asked. “Should I get you another aspirin?”

“I’m fine … I should call Abraham. Again,” Mary answered, if only to assure her friend by keeping up appearances. “Do you know where I left my purse?”

After fifteen minutes of failed reconnaissance, Mary rung Easton at the number he had written on her cast, leaving a message to ask him to hold it for her until she could pick it up tomorrow at his garage. She then called, Abe, or rather tried to. Again there was no answer, but for once Mary found she was relieved. His anger afforded her more time more with hypotheticals, beloved in the risk that things might not work out as foreseen. Eventually would come, but eventually could wait. Mary closed her eyes and felt her pulse quicken while she moistened at the memory of the man she worried for, the man she worried she would come to miss.

“Should I put a coffee on?” Aberdeen offered. “It could be a while.”

“That would be lovely, thank you,” Mary answered, awakened from a daydream far too soon.

The device gargled and spat as the scent of the bitter beverage it was brewing filled the room. Aberdeen remained fixed on her phone, giving occasional updates, opinions and commentary. A protest had broken out at the Peggy Shippen press conference to the au pair’s unconcealed delight. Liberal media was enraged that a Muslim immigrant had been arrested for trying to protect a young mother from an out-of-line police constable. That had become the story though the lead was a lie. Aberdeen showed Mary a few pictures taken at the station that could have belonged to any demonstration save for the few faces she recognised from the locker room.

“Who is Wenger?” she asked of the only sign she could clearly read.

“Copper, probably. They are all corrupt. And everyone – even Robert Townsend!- is a corrupt cop,” Aberdeen pouted. “You should ring Senator Adams and tell ‘im to vote yes on Arnold’s defence bill. It would use drones to monitor the police. Can you believe it that they attacked and put in ‘ospital two innocent mums in the same day?” the enlightened au pair asked almost rhetorically, adding, “I don’t even know why I am surprised! You should make a statement, too! I think more people would listen to someone from your position of privilege. Wenger Out!” Aberdeen echoed John Appleton’s written sentiment.

Mary frowned. What meaning did ‘privilege’ hold for a prisoner, she asked herself. “I think
Arnold’s bill takes far too much liberty with the Patriot Act,” she said. Nothing would come from confessing that she would flee her gilded cage if she thought a joint-custody agreement could ever be reached.

“Euh …” Aberdeen squinted.

“After Nine-Eleven we – the American people – surrendered a number of our freedoms in favour of security and surveillance,” Mary tried to explain.

“Clearly not enough!” Aberdeen countered. “Look at the Black Community; we are constantly made to suffer such random acts of violence as you were victim to this morning. I am afraid to go out now with all of these cop cars around Setauket. I think, without such protest as is made down at the station, they would arrest me. Maybe they do so still. Nearly everyone ‘ere is an old white man, and all of these cops will one day be old white men and they do not like to apply the law to people they can see themselves in. Look what they did to your leg! And why? Because you are a woman! Inequality affects you too! We need more surveillance as a security measure against those meant to keep us safe.”

It was not a random act, Mary thought to herself. John Graves Simcoe had been the target; she had just taken the hit, as it were. But he was in jail and as unjust as it was, the people of New York were instead up in arms about a place called Pakistan where it happened that Osama bin Laden had been captured and killed. By the time the nightly news aired, this connection, which had yet to be made by the people evoking the First Amendment, would help those elements of the conservative agenda people like Aberdeen and her like-minded allies had not claimed as their rallying cause. It was theatre. They were all fighting each other in the streets for the right to claim victory for a piece of legislation everyone on Capitol Hill had wanted to distance themselves from mere days ago. John Graves had been made both cornerstone and casualty.

Simcoe, Mary thought, and perhaps this girl Shippen – whom Aberdeen, distracted by the protests that had taken the attention away from the statement the former governor’s daughter had been forced to give, had forgotten about until the senator’s supposed lover until showed up on their doorstep, asking for her bags to be brought up to her bed chamber.

“I’m sorry, I thought you were the help,” Peggy tried to apologise.

“‘The ‘elp?’” Aberdeen spat. “Excusez-moi? I know you are from the south but we ‘ave ‘ere the twenty-first century. Try again?”

“She is my au pair, and my friend,” Mary explained, “And she is about to make us another pot of coffee. John, won’t you join us?” she asked after the man who with a scowl had taken Peggy’s luggage up the flight of stairs. The bags landed on the floor with a thud that echoed throughout the house.

Two hours later, Mary decided that Easton was best described as dour. He looked older than he was. His humour was dry when detectable, his conversation wanting, and yet he stayed with Mary, her coffee, her packaged snack biscuits and the partisans fighting over DACA with more fervour than Mary knew from her husband’s pension for C-SPAN ever found its way to the senate floor.

Easton did not attend his watch with the sort of insincere openness in which Peggy seemed to deal.
Though English by birth and blood, was a New Yorker of the highest order. He did not smile. He stayed. This in itself was more than Mary could say for most people who had circled in and around her life, and for this simple act of integrity she had come to adore him. Her father had been a name on a birth-certificate left unsigned, her mother had left her for the sorts of pleasures that could only be found in a syringe and the State that then took her had left her at a different address ever six months or so for the next twelve years. Nancy Smith had left her in Urgent Care, telling her she really needn’t give a statement to police in her condition. Her husband had not left her a voice message or sent a text. But Simcoe and all those that he captained stayed with and to her. Mary did not know what she had done to deserve such support.

“It is getting late. I should be going,” Easton said, “thank you for your hospitality, Mrs. Woodhull.”

“Please, Mary is fine,” she tried to laugh. “Are you sure I can’t convince you to stay for another cup? It is such a long drive back into the city.”

Hearing her desperation, no doubt, he again relented.

“It is normal, isn’t it?” Easton asked when she thanked him for hanging out with her while longer. Normal, Mary thought. Maybe it was.

“Any sod would stick around to enjoy a wide selection of biscuits with an injured teammate and two poli-sci students,” the driver teased.

“Are you poli-sci?” Peggy perked up as she continued to address Aberdeen, “I was under the impression that you were literature given the amount of fiction that so freely flows from your lips.”

“Undeclared,” Aberdeen answered honestly. “But -”

“Oh they don’t have majors at community college, do they?” the blonde seemed to mock.

“Does it matter significantly what one reads and where?” Easton interjected. “I attended Saïd and I am no better off for it. My business has taken such a hit from an app of all places that I’m forced to drive a godforsaken cab myself.”

“You were at Oxford?” Peggy blinked. “That is rather impressive.”

“Rather?” Mary snorted, instantly cursing herself for engaging in a cold conflict.

“I’m sure it is nothing compared with Penn State,” Aberdeen said, empowered by the support she had just been shown. “Oh la la, the admissions process must ‘ave been tedious for you. Say Peggy, on that same note, what is it like to get kicked out of an institution with a library bearing your father’s name?”

“Aberdeen! That is quite enough!”

“Oh it is quite alright, Mrs. Woodhull. I’m fine with correcting misconceptions,” Peggy smiled. It was chilling, but for the first time it seemed genuine. “I may have been born ‘Shippen’, but ‘summa cum laude’ comes from the kind of hard work you are evidently want to classify as ‘privilege’ because it is easier to assume that ‘the system’ is a bigger obstacle to people like you than you are to yourselves. But go on railing about how unjust the world is, Miss Declesias. I am sure you think the fight for ‘justice’ you came on by way of social media is a far better use of your time than pursuing an educational background that would allow you to enact the changes you scream for in any meaningful way possibly could be … And maybe you are right there,” she added
with a slight lift of her small shoulders.

Aberdeen shook her head. “I can’t get a student loan -”

“You could get someone to co-sign,” Peggy suggested lightly.

“You offering?”

“Are you so easily bought?” she laughed. “You are clearly passionate. If you are interested, I’ll help you find scholarships and loan sponsors -”

“So you can add to your white saviour narrative?” Aberdeen interrupted.

Peggy threw her arms up in a frustration that Mary felt herself. Burying her face for a brief second in the palms of her hands, she exhaled. Her sigh sounded like a banished scream.

“Do you see –even just a little – what I mean about how you stand in your own way? Tell me, what about the way I look or the way I vote makes you so quick to write me off as heinous? How is it that you think liberals have a monopoly on human compassion?” Peggy catechized, continuing, “By the way, The Daily Mail, rather than some two-bit left-wing outlet, was the first to make police brutality a headline.”

Mary wanted to answer for Aberdeen, ‘it is because she has lived under the same roof as Judge Woodhull for the past two years,’ but she felt such sentiment was left better unspoken. It did not serve her interests to add to either arsenal.

Out of the corner of her eye, she watched her au pair pull another iPhone out of her Channel clutch, half wondering how someone who made fourteen dollars an hour could afford such luxury, half hoping to never catch her in the act.

“The Daily Mail?” Aberdeen challenged. “Oh,” she elongated, looking at her mobile device. “At-real-Mary-Robs – My, my, you ‘ave me there. I suppose it was way when I was a teen, when your fans were – and she puts a picture from some children in school uniforms, ‘instead of’ – and then she linked an ISIS propaganda video from YouTube. And that is in response to ‘at-Daily-Mail, do you ‘ave nothing better to do? When is the last time you got some? You are far too dry to be riding me like this,’” she paused, “Quality reporting, that.”

“Honestly is Twitter the only place you get your news?” the former governor’s daughter narrowed her gaze. “Go to the main site. There is a link in the description.”

“Jealous that ‘hashtag–je-suis-effie’ took you out of the public eye?”

Peggy started tapping at her own phone, which did little in support of her protest of this assessment.

“I’m scrolling this thread to save you the trouble,” Aberdeen countered. “About an ‘our ago The Daily Mail retweeted a picture some singer posted of herself in a scarf –and only a scarf – and then posted a bunch of images of the same lady in various other scarves next to someone very ugly who makes the same, asking ‘At-real-Mary-Robs, been a while. Are you campaigning for the Turkish presidency now?’ which escalated quickly. Also from Daily Mail a few minutes later, ‘Apparently there is a Fatwa against me now. This says more that I could in 140 characters about Erdogan’s
policies and proposals [1] ‘and Mary Robinson’s fan base. Is this really how you wanted to rebrand, at-Real-Mary-Robs?[2]’ And then ‘If all of my followers aren’t all out on the streets with ‘Je Suis Effie’ posters come tomorrow, I’ll ‘ave lost ‘ope in Britain.’ – which Marine Le Pen immediately retweeted, ‘ilariously … though … predictably. I don’t see anything about police brutality, but I’ve never ‘it ‘follow’ on a posh bitch so fast. Thanks for the tip, Miss Shippen.”

“Here!” Peggy held up her phone, displaying the mobile news site. “Get your news from a genuine source before you -”

“Are we accepting The Daily Mail as a genuine source now?” Easton scoffed. Mary suddenly wished she had not forced another cup of coffee upon him. Seeing the story on Peggy’s device, he smiled for the first time, asking, “Is that on the main page?”

“Yes,” Peggy answered, exasperated.

“Brilliant. I have to text the lads; tell Appleton his Wenger protest finally made it into the British national conscious and conversation.”

“Who is this Wenger?” Peggy asked as she scrolled through the comment thread that had expanded tenfold since she first read the main article.

“An aging, incompetent despot who refuses to step down from power,” Easton answer dryly.

“Ee must be done away with,” Aberdeen said, self-assured in her assessment, challenging Peggy to take the opposite stance.

“He is the manager at Arsenal,” Easton shrugged. “I have my doubts that my Sunderland will even be in the Prem come next season. Wouldn’t care either way about the Gunner’s gaffer, but it is nice for John Appleton to get a moral victory out of all of this nonsense.”

“You aren’t taking it seriously then? With Simcoe?” Mary inquired.

“We did all we could, joined in the protest against police brutality until we learned no one on either side cared about the facts. Then we just had a bit of fun with it while we waited. Oh – what do you know … speak of the devil,” he said as he started texting again. Seconds later, Mary’s phone buzzed.

She shared something with everyone at Whitehall. Unaware of their own doings, they in turn shared everything with her. This, Peggy thought, would hardly prove challenging.

John Easton, the taxi driver who had brought her from her press statement to her temporary quarters must have had succumb to a similarly bad experience with an elite university. Suspended in her final semester and privately shaken by feelings of abandonment and fears for a future that seemed so assured a week before when she had greeted her New York based friends at Penn Station with a bottle of champagne, the ways in which Peggy related to Easton were hardly a bond on which to build a lasting friendship. As much as she hoped that the brave face she put on would never resemble his brusque, anger at or over an institution was enough to engage anyone in extended conversation. This, she consoled herself, might well prove beneficial.

The Hattian au pair was of her age, and not unlike herself, kindled her inner fire rather than supress
her embers under the pretence of politeness. While it was evident to Peggy that they lived with vastly different truths, shooting down each of one another’s arguments with the single word ‘source’, the former governor’s daughter found their ongoing debate intriguing if not enlightening. She took some comfort, too, in the ire of her opposite. Aberdeen’s hatred was systemic. She was either too angry about Mitch McConnell’s proposition to defund a government subsidy from which she did not herself benefit, or too honest to placate Peggy with friendly overtones of the kind the girls at school long had.

Her sorority sisters had all sent her texts over the past three days, ‘I’m so sorry this is happening to you.’ or ‘It is so unfair!’ or, her personal favourite, ‘I'm so sad! The house just won’t be the same without you.’ The vote to kick her out had been unanimous. Peggy had not replied to a single whisper of regret. Aberdeen was at least sincere, which proved a surprisingly welcome change.

And then there was Mary, a liar like her. A porcelain doll with a political surname and an English lover who was something of an open secret. They both knew each other exclusively through media coverage. To the left, Peggy was a seductress who was sleeping with Senator Arnold to further her ambitions, whereas Mary was a young mother who had grown up in Section 8 housing and had become though a sports injury this year’s Sarah Livingston. To the right, Peggy was Governor Shippen’s youngest daughter, a bright, upstanding young conservative made victim to liberal bloodlust; Mary, the daughter-in-law of the state’s chief justice, a charity worker with a warm heart.

The truth, Peggy thought, likely lied somewhere in between where no one thought to look.

How either of them wound up Tallmadge’s suspects seemed a socialist conspiracy, but it did not excite her imagination half as much as the smile Mary wore whenever she glanced her mobile. She was in love, and aside from coffee and cookies, that was all she seemed to offer freely. Peggy longed for the same privilege.

“They ‘ad ice cream together,” the au pair said of the man texting her boss in an at once alluring and insufferable accent.

“Aberdeen, that is not a universal euphemism,” Mary whispered. “Nor is it proper conversation for the dinner table.”

“But we are eating Oreo’s,” Aberdeen countered, expecting that substance defined setting or altered etiquette.

“Mr. Simcoe is bring us something more substantial.” She turned to Peggy and explained that her financial advisor was the captain of the soccer team she, Mr. Easton, Mr. Hewlett, and Miss Strong all played for. Pointing to her cast, she added, “He just doesn’t want me on my foot after today’s match.”

“Is that a code for something as well?” Peggy smiled. Easton suppressed another laugh. “Text Simcoe he doesn’t need to bring me anything, I’ll be on my way out soon.”

“Tell me all about this Sin-coe,” Peggy pleaded. “What was the ice cream like? A Sundae?” Mary blushed, which said enough. “A Thursday afternoon, in the office,” she confessed after a moment’s deliberation, “Hard and hot.”

“I’m melting,” Peggy fanned herself with her hand, giggling the way she would have with one of her former Alpha Delta Pi sisters. Aberdeen gave her a queer look and then they shared a grin. This, Peggy thought, was going to be easier than she had initially anticipated.
She had spent the better part of the past four days cuddled up in her suite in Trump Tower with the disgraced former boss of her childhood best friend. John André was gorgeous and intellectually stimulating, a scientist by profession and an artist by nature. He had teased her with his flute until she opened herself to the whole of his orchestra, singing his name as a chorus in octanes both deeper and higher than she had ever reached in glee. They had made plans to travel the world together in its entirety; plans, which he assured her, would prove possible once his research was put into public policy and practice.

But André’s pretty promises were to be preceded by a piteous immuration.

He would be gone from here by Monday morning.

He was gone to her already.

Peggy still counted the minutes until his departure, until his return. He was gone, but he would come back. For her, surely, he would come back. She had a plan to ensure this eventuality happened with appropriate haste.

“Do you eat shellfish?” Mary Woodhull asked, unaware that her fingers were moving in alignment with Peggy’s private ambition.

“Um, sure,” she babbled, imagining herself again entwined in André’s soft embrace.

“You are not allergic or anything?”

“No, no,” Peggy assured her.

“He just never misses an opportunity,” Easton muttered.

“For what?” Aberdeen and Peggy asked in simulation.

“John, um, that is, Mr. Simcoe … he and Mr. Hewlett have this long-running inside joke,” Mary started.

“They have a proud tradition of aggravated assault,” Easton simplified. Mary went pale. She forced a sound pretending at a giggle. “I’ll take it if it means he is bringing us lobster. I was going to have Aberdeen make Hamburger Helper tonight so … lucky us,” she smiled.

“I’ve never had Hamburger Helper,” Peggy said, surprised the dish so much as existed in the vocabulary of an elegant individual with ambitions made apparent in the law-school study-guide with a Columbia bookmark open beside her.

“And you call yourself American,” Aberdeen scoffed.

“I have a US Passport, yes,” she returned with the sort of smile worn as a taunt. “Tell me more about this … rivalry,” she asked of Easton.

“It is not nearly as interesting as the two make it out to be. Simcoe calls Hewlett ‘Oyster’ because he is rather posh and pedantic, and the one time it might have served him to take his best friend’s paranoia seriously, Simcoe wound up with food poisoning and wanted to wrestle a victory out of a clear and decisive defeat.”

“So he is bring us food he can’t eat?” she tried.

“No … he can, he just ate them –the literal oysters - off season. It is not worth it to ask him about
“Gotcha,” Peggy winked as she searched her mind for credible context.

She had gone to a concert with André the night before. They had not stayed to see the first act. The venue was of the kind of where no one would think to look for either of them, as all of the spots André sought seemed to be. Their affair was a secret. It was necessity. He was married and she was being linked by the mainstream media to a man she had met once at fourteen. But all this would end, and not just for the promises of a primary candidate made via Twitter at five in the morning.

This would end, because Philomena Cheer was every bit as mad as her husband had diagnosed. He would leave her as he had promised when first her name had been spoken between them on Thursday afternoon. He would leave her; surely, he would leave her. The story about Peggy’s own text-based affair would be outed as a hoax, and she and John André would be together. Openly. Happily. For ever after and forevermore.

She would have written their love story in blood if need be, but in asking her not to leave town, DI Benjamin Tallmadge had provided Peggy with a perfect solution in the form of what he named ‘standard precaution.’

Between their shared moans, André had shared with her that for the past several years, he had been working alongside Dr Martha Dandridge on a project that would help the psychological community understand how to control the only human emotion that doubled as instinct. Arnold and the advisory committee he headed were backers of the study, and, when his bill passed, would be the primary beneficiaries of its yield. “This will save countless lives,” André promised her in an earnest and excitement which Peggy would come to share after reading his thesis, “but I need to rewrite a few of the my calculations for a different variable before it is fit to present to my peers for review.”

‘Why?’ she had asked.

“You can call it love, or you can call it hate - and I am certain from our various sessions over the past two years my subjects have thought of it as both and neither - but I based the majority of my hypothesis on the fact that ‘Patient B’ fears hurting ‘Patient A’ more than anything else in this world. It is a behavioural pattern, however, which he is unwilling to break and now it seems I have had a hand in arranging a scenario in which he has no choice but to continue this dangerous cycle. I had originally assumed that ‘A’ was the more volatile of the two, but with Arnold now missing … If only there were a way to monitor them during my stint at Belleview,’ he cursed. ‘Don’t worry, Love; I’m certain I can convince someone on either my research or my former association football team to keep me updated on their movements.’

Peggy, not one to trust fate to blindly do her bidding, had since come on a more direct means than the one her lover had half proposed. She left the André residence on Saturday night in tears she had not expected to cry and taken a taxi to Abigail’s, excusing her sobs to her oldest and truest friend that she was sorry she had not been there for her when things ended with Jordan. Abigail replied that she had not wanted to call her, had not wanted to distract her from the finals she would have otherwise been revising for.
This made Peggy cry harder. Impossible as it was to tell her about John André amidst the other personal and political catastrophes to which they had been damned by providence, Peggy found she could not so much as speak the name of her Panhellenic chapter without choking.

“I can’t go back to school,” Peggy told her when the tears finally stopped, lying with the truth, “DI Tallmadge wants me to stay in the area. I have to give a press statement tomorrow at two and Abby, oh Abby, you have to come with me.”

“Of course,” Abigail yawned. It was two o’clock in the morning, and while the hour may have defined the dreariness they shared, Peggy Shippen could not use timing as an excuse for her overall demeanour, nor would she think to. The daughter of a proud political dynasty, she had no concept of what differentiated manipulative behaviour from ordinary interaction.

“You don’t understand,” she continued with now-erroneous sorrow. “The police want to talk to you too, about something you have written … I am not sure what I said, I could have said anything … when I found out from the police that you and Jordan had called things off … I was so shocked, but I didn’t mean -”

“It wasn’t you,” Abigail dismissed. “They want to talk to me because no one can find John André and based on a few samples of my novel, they think that I may have had access to certain files I should never have seen.”

“And did you?” Peggy blinked.

Abigail brought her upstairs into her bedroom and pulled something out of one of the few dresser drawers that had yet to be boxed up. The ever-accumulating cartons had doubled in number since Peggy was at the same address a few nights prior. “Where are you going, now that you aren’t moving to Brooklyn?” she asked with an innocence neither forged nor forced. Abigail handed her a piece of paper she told her she had stolen from the office a few weeks prior, after Hewlett’s attempted suicide, before André’s public lynching. “I am moving to Whitehall next week. It is temporary. It is all I could find on such short notice,” adding beneath her breath, “of all the stabs of irony.”

“Hm?” Peggy inquired as she read.

“Patient B is better known to you as Edmund Hewlett. This is why I asked you to go out with Dr André last Tuesday. Why I have misgivings about Hewlett’s intentions towards one of my best friends. I want to trust that he isn’t as treacherous as his chart suggests, but … No. No but. Anna is a smart girl. I trust her intuition. And yours.”

If Hewlett was ‘B’, the identity of ‘A’ was not especially hard to deduce. Peggy inhaled deeply, slowly, and for the few seconds her lungs grasped the stale, dry air that tasted of the cardboard from which it stank, her mind grappled with doubt. “Oh, Abby. Are you sure? I’m worried about you being at Whitehall, with, well with -”

“Girl, I wouldn’t put Cicero in harm’s way, you know that. And André told you that Hewlett was harmless.”

Sure, Peggy thought, because we had yet to sleep together and he had want to change to conversation. “Abby,” she adapted her apprehension into an action she hoped would prove beneficial to all parties, “since I have to stay in town for the foreseeable future anyway, do you know if Judge Woodhull has additional rooms for rent?”

This raised Abigail’s eyebrows, “Donald Trump not offer to keep putting you up? Isn’t your father
“No, I mean he is and … he is, but I would rather stay with you.” As with most of her dealings, this was indeed deception, but it was not a lie unto itself. Peggy did love Abby and Cicero. She loved Anna, too, and she liked Edmund from what little she knew of him, which was not to say that she did not feel she could sort him if need arose. But André? He was her destiny. And he would see it too, surely, he would see it too, when she brought him weekly dossiers, when she gave him every detail of enemy movement as taken from within. If she could get to ‘B’, she could get to ‘A’, and she could get Dr André out of the intensive psych ward. He would convince Dandridge of his validity and Congress of his value. The war would end. He had promised her, and even knowing and weighing the possible influence of his (currently missing) donor against his words, Peggy believed him.

She had no concept of what differentiated manipulation from adoration.

She had never had her heart broken.

At twenty-two, she had no reason to believe she ever would.

Everything was already working out better than she had hopped. Whitehall’s acting proprietor was a porcelain doll with a political surname and an English lover who was otherwise known as ‘Patient A’ in André’s thesis. And he was coming over. And he was bringing dinner. And Peggy had a hunger that was hard to satisfied.

Easton, having said goodbye to Mary in the kitchen, was escorted to the door by Aberdeen and herself. Peggy told the au pair in whispers as they slowly made their way back, that she, too, had begun an affair, feeling the atmosphere before hazarding to open herself to Mary, hoping to learn what lay secret in her heart.

“With Arnold?” Aberdeen asked, adding as seemed to be her favourite device, “I know. Everyone in the whole damn world knows. The Daily Mail said so, too. Even on its Twitter.”

“No,” Peggy forced a giggle, making a mental note to look into scholarship programmes regardless of the girl’s lack of gratitude. Aberdeen would benefit so much, she decided, from classes in rhetoric at an institution with a debate society. In turn, so would their conversation. “With someone else,” Peggy teased. “It has only been four days -four tumorous days at that - but I have never been happier. Say … how long has this been going on, between Simcoe and Mary?” she inquired hopefully.

“I ‘ave only known about it for around as long,” Aberdeen admitted, after supposing aloud that she could forgive Peggy her misplaced joviality – something she cautioned might tone down if she wanted to make it in New York or “even this shit ‘ol of a suburb.”

“Funny how these things happen so fast,” Peggy mused, immune to critique. “Mary and her John, me and mine.”

“You need to listen to me,” Aberdeen said, pulling her around a corner. “Parlez-vous français?”

“Oui, un petit peu,” Peggy lied. She was fluent. Aberdeen seemed to sense as much as she told her breathlessly, “Don’t trust any man from New York. Mr Woodhull? Both Mr Woodhulls – scum.
Liars! The son is queer and thinks no one knows it. The father leers at me and thinks I don’t see it. But I do – I see most of what happens here. But New York? It can trick you! And for love, we let it. We all let it! I was enamoured with a boy for two years before learning he was just another plain clothes copper – only humouring me from time to time to become information about the Judge, or this, or that, or the other. Don’t fall for it! For any of it. Especially out here in the suburbs. In Setauket. This town is wicked.”

“Why don’t you say anything to Mrs. Woodhull about her husband if that is true?” Peggy puzzled.

“It wouldn’t matter if I did. Everyone talks here but no one listens. I know this from every moment I’ve spent in America. I know this also from you. I think not that I am the first one to have warned you about New York men. I see it in your face. But it is not your fault. It is just this place. Don’t smile so much. If you do, the city will do you in.”

Before she could question the true source of this sudden empathy, the doorbell rang. Mary called to them to see if they would not mind opening it. Both rushed to her service, opening the house to an atypically tall man with bags of take away who greeted them politely with a voice as cold and chiming as a gush of winter air. “May I come in? Mrs. Woodhull is expecting me.”

John Graves Simcoe was thoroughly enjoying himself as he gauged the girls’ identical, open-mouthed expressions. This might well be, he considered -thanks to Hewlett’s interference - the last time in his life anyone would ever gaze upon him with awe and reverence. By Wednesday, he would be wearing a hearing aid, and though the device might allow him to again enjoy the simple pleasures of phoning people whose physical presence he could hardly tolerate, he would miss moments like these. He would miss this last lasting semblance of normalcy very much, indeed. They spoke, and Simcoe realised how very afraid he was of another visible attribute that would further separate him from an already alienating society. The only honest hope he had of the device was that any display of his disability would bar him from promotion. That he would have to stay in New York. That some of what now was would last. He was whole here, and this epiphany frightened him more than any external threat.

The girls introduced themselves as Aberdeen and Peggy, respectively. He knew the former from Hewlett’s paranoid accusations, the latter from the round the clock media coverage concerning the crime the afternoon had made him confident Tallmadge was having a difficult time tracing back to him.

“Do you know what this is?” the inspector had asked as he passed him a manila folder containing a print out of an email. Simcoe had been awaiting as much since being forced into the back of a police car, his cuffed hands still shaking with choler.

“Hm,” the Brit buzzed as he half-studied it, “It appears to be, oh, help me out here, Inspector – since I had rather anticipated we would be talking about footy, what is that expression from your American interpretation of the game? A Hail Mary, is it?”

Tallmadge muttered something while staring at the same dossier, Simcoe asked him to kindly repeat himself, to enunciate clearly.

“You injured my constable in a similar fashion,” the inspector said again of a decade old medical report.
“And for that I’ve been harshly reprimanded,” Simcoe informed him. “Not only have I been locked in here for the past six hours waiting on … I suppose, either yourself or your printer, but the league has given me a five match ban and a $200 fine – both of which I am prepared to protest given the injuries your constable inflicted upon my forward. In fact … in fact, given DC Baker’s conduct, I think every minute you keep me in here is only going to make your situation out there all the worse. You have a history violent misconduct, do you not, Tallmadge?” He had done this dance before in Britain with brighter and better; where he had let the interaction play out in his mind since Hewlett had given the inspector reason to make him a prime suspect (in an act of what he likely saw as testimony to his self-accessed brilliance), the actualization of the dreaded exchange proved dull.

Simcoe found himself better entertained by a stain on the wall that looked as though someone had once thrown out the contents of their tea cup, which, he gathered from political advertisements, was something Americans took rather a lot of pride in doing, especially in fancy-dress. He wondered why in all of the hours he laid wasting, waiting for Tallmadge to make his move, he was not offered a cup to drink or dispose of as he saw fit. It was extremely rude.

“That is quite enough,” Tallmadge said, maybe for a second time, likely not for the last. Still, Simcoe took some hope in this assessment.

“There we find ourselves in agreeance. Am I being released?” he asked cheekily.

“No,” he was told, as he much knew he would be.

Simcoe smirked in response. “You can’t hold me on evidence from a crime I was acquitted of and pressing any additional assault charges would ill serve you cause. Tell me, Tallmadge, what exactly makes you think that there is anything connecting me to your investigation?” he challenged. “Until this morning, I’d say I’ve proven myself a vital resource. Mary and I rang the police when we found blood on the roadside. It could well be that it was not Arnold’s, but knowing that you were searching the area, I did my civic duty by reporting suspicious activity, something you have repeatedly asked of the public. I have come in to provide a statement each and every time you have sent summons; frankly, Inspector, I am unsure why I am a person of interest at all. I would appreciate, however, if you could get me in touch with my solicitor if you plan to continue this waste of an interrogation.”

“You were given a phone call when you arrived at the station. Why didn’t you take it?”

“I’m legally deaf, Inspector. A phone call won’t do me much good in my present state. I suppose, this being America, I might have a case to sue you for damages. I was at an otolaryngologist just yesterday, do you have any idea how expensive -”

“Wait, you waited until yesterday?” Tallmadge gaped, thrown into a panic Simcoe had failed to anticipate. “Mr Simcoe,” he spoke quickly, “I warned you when we first met the human bite is incredibly infectious. Why didn’t you heed my warning sooner? I’m truly sorry it came to this but -”

Simcoe laughed. For a moment, the memory of Mary’s warm mouth drawing blood replaced many less pleasant, but this was of no particular interest to the police. “It isn’t that. My hearing was severely damaged in a roadside bombing when I was a boy, the rest is psychosomatic, the sense abandons me entirely under sudden stress. In can last anywhere between a few hours and a few months.”

This admission, too, seemed to cause the good inspector an undue measure of dismay.
“And yet you’re a hedge fund manager?” Tallmadge squinted.

“It has happened during sex before, too,” Simcoe said; if only to make his integrator wince and writhe a bit more than he already was. “It can be awkward, I admit, but this is truly the worst I’ve ever had it. But then that can only be expected, you see I’ve never been a suspect in a missing person’s case before.”

“You’ve been a suspect in an attempted murder,” Tallmadge accused. In this, he was alone.

“No Inspector,” Simcoe corrected. “I was merely a witness. I assume these files came from Ferguson?”

“They did,” Tallmadge affirmed, not to the effect he no doubt desired.

“Then you didn’t read his analysis clearly. The good inspector found his culprit, and then the state found theirs. I was neither, and I signed a statement swearing I would say no more on the matter. Now I would rather appreciate you putting me in touch with an attorney, Mr Tallmadge, much as I suspect that folder of yours would disappear as soon as any other representative of the court entered the door. Say … we needn’t call my man back from Albany at all, let’s just get your boss in here. Save everyone time and trouble.”

With that, he knew he had broken him.

“I have a better idea,” Tallmadge said, defeated. “Why don’t you write a statement of your version of this morning’s events and I will let you go.”

“Just like that?” Simcoe grinned.

“I am required by New York and Federal Law to advise you that a sworn statement has the weight of legal testimony, any intentional misrepresentation of the truth could be treated as perjury,” the inspector told him, no doubt as though reading from a script. “I would additionally advise you to be as complete as possible in your recollection.”

Having no interest in a follow up interview, Simcoe filled five pages with neat script to Tallmadge’s specifications. Half an hour later, he was released to the jubilation of his teammates, the press, and several assorted groups that had gathered to protest, presumably, against Arsène Wenger, which Simcoe considered odd but understandable after the Gunners’ performance against Swansea midweek. He hoped that a loss against Tottenham would cause a riot and said as much to someone who approached him with a microphone.

“You shouldn’t have said that,” Maglev told him, pulling him to the side. “Appleton was the first one with a sign before, when the protest had been about Pakistan. They drug him back into interrogation thinking that there is a connection between him and Osama bin Laden as he evidently supported the same club. Hewlett is in there too, arrived back from Albany about half an hour ago. The rest of us are holding vigil for the three, well, now two of you. The others, the occupy types there in the street, only adapted the Wenger thing in solidarity with Appleton after his arrest. I have no idea what the Yanks are making of it but The Daily Mail and The Sun can barely keep their shit together.”

Simcoe stared at him, wondering which piece of information he had just been given came as more of a shock, wondering if he could be bothered to give a damn about any of it at all.

“And Mary?” he asked.

“Robinson?”

“Easton brought her home a few hours ago. She wanted to stay but we were all a tad afraid she was going to get herself put into holding. We started a collection to buy her flowers and a get-well soon card . . .” he continued, but after learning the Mary had come to the police station with a broken ankle to appeal for his release, everything else seemed irrelevant.

John Graves Simcoe looked at the news trucks in the car park, the protestors and the swarm of microphones and recording devices of various mediums. “Give Hewlett and Appleton my best,” he said to his lads before leaving the circus. He texted with Mary, ordered dinner online, climbed into an Uber which brought him to the four-star restaurant where he had purchased a meal for five before returning him to the Range Rover he had left at the filed earlier. From there, he drove to Whitehall where two girls stared at him in the doorway with something that verged dangerously close to desire, something he enjoyed if only in brevity as he came to grips with how petrified he was that he would never see respect again in any form. “May I come in?” he suggested, “Mrs. Woodhull is expecting me.”

“It’s you,” the one who identified herself as Aberdeen said. “From the photo.”

“What photo?” Simcoe asked.

“From the Daily Mail twitter account, wait,” she hurried back into the kitchen. Wednesday seemed suddenly a pipe dream. Simcoe worried he might not anymore have a reputation to defend.

“You are British,” Peggy said as though it were an accusation. “Settle a debate for us? Daily Mail – legitimate news source?”

“I’m not quite comfortable answering that,” he admitted.

“Peggy,” Mary tried, “you know from recent experience how the press can twist things to its own service. If we were just going on the news cycle you and Senator Arnold were in a relationship . . . of sorts,” she paused as they entered. Her inner sunshine flooded features otherwise made pale from pain and florescent lighting. “John,” she beamed as she struggled to rise. He rushed to her side. “I’m so happy. I’m just so happy to see you. Here.”

“They had no grounds on which to hold me,” he assure her. “Mary, please, sit down.”

“You don’t know where they plates are,” she said as though this validated her excursion. Simcoe could not help but smile.

As the two stood side by side at the counter whilst Thomas asked Peggy if she was Queen Elsa (“from a Disney film,” Mary told him, “his favourite.”); while Aberdeen put the boy in his high-chair and taught him the word for what they were about to eat (‘Homard’); while Mary wondered to him why she had not brought Thomas from his play room sooner (“The two have been fighting over politics and media all afternoon.”) Simcoe felt the warmth of her small body beside his. He felt normal next to her.

Next to her, he felt as though he was in more danger than he had ever known.

Chapter End Notes
I have a lot of contextual notes for you, and not gonna lie, very little chill. (I’m not to be blamed, I was just stood up for a study date, can you believe that mess?) Anyway, let’s have at it, shall we?

**Persuasion**: a novel by Jane Austen.

**DACA**: The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals was an Obama era immigration policy that allowed illegals who entered the United States as minors a two year period of deferred action on deportation and the right to apply for a work permit. It was rescinded by the Trump administration in September of 2017.

**#jesuiseffie**: a parody on **#jesuischarlie** the hashtag you, I, everyone you ever met and everyone you ever (and never) will used in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo shootings in January 2015.

**Marine Le Pen**: the leader of the French right-wing party Front National (FN.) Regardless of your views, she is worth following on Twitter, for of European politicians she is (singular?) in expressing condolences in the wake of the sort of event that had they happened on your side of the Atlantic would prompt twelve seconds of conversation about gun control (before that got shot down by the NRA sending out gift baskets.)

**Mary Robinson**: a pop culture icon in the 18. century. But c’mon, you knew after the last chapter she would at least get a shout out, right? ;)

… You may have been asking yourself, oh observant, long time reader, if this entire exchange was a self-indulgent protest of **Erdoğan’s constitutional referendum**. Tja. In my defence, we haven’t done that a while. It was time. In case you don’t keep up with the Turkish President’s propaganda tactics, he wears a different football scarf in every town he visits. That is what the underlining joke was about. I know. It isn’t funny if I have to explain it. It isn’t funny at all when a nation votes away its rights. Keep vigilant, everyone.

**Arsène Wenger**: recently surpassed Sir Alex’s record in Premiership matches, coaching **Arsenal** in 811 (812 at time of press) league games. In the first week of March 2016, the **Gunners** lost to **Swansea** and drew with archrivals **Tottenham**. The protest that bore his name in this chapter was written in a sort of homage to one that happened recently in Harare, Zimbabwe where cries for **Mugabe** to step down from power became demands for Wenger to leave the Emirates. Aren’t you a little surprised at how much football culture intersects with current events? All I do is politics and football and it still blows my mind.

**AFC Sunderland**: did indeed stay up, and what a treat it has been! Ladies and gentlemen, in case you missed it, allow me to direct you to the best thing that happened to football coverage and (pun)ditry in the latter half of 2017: The Stadium of Shite.

**Mitch McConnell**: The Senate Majority Leader. I wish I had a weird titbit of useless but amusing information about him, but I stopped watching Game of Thrones somewhere in the third season. I heard he wins it, if that helps. XP
“I’ve never had Hamburger Helper.”: I loathe making sweeping generalizations, but this is one that in my experience has been true of all American women of a certain privilege whom I have spoken to on the topic of pre-packaged pasta dishes – they love telling you that they have never had this particular convenience food. Bloody love it. I can only cite a single statement I was given as grounds, “It is the food of the poor.” I don’t know if this is true. I do know it is an exact quote, and in my reach for authenticity I could not help but to include what seems to me from afar to be a low-key expression of classism (that is probably completely socially acceptable over yonder.) I don’t know. Hamburger Helper is a little salty. Maybe I am, too?

Have any notes for me in return? How was your Christmas? What did you get, what did you give, or, alternatively, what are you most excited about not having to do again until next December? For me, it is Bockwurst, clearly. I guess I will see you all again soon, because …

I have a habit of writing complex scenes that become chapters of their own. You already know this.

Till then! XOXO - Tav
Abe re-evaluates his enemies and his options after learning about Mary’s injury and Simcoe’s innermost doubts form an unexpected source.

Chapter Notes

So the problem I have picked up on in the comments of otherwise remarkably discerning readers, is that Abe’s perspective is so often overshadowed by more dynamic characters that crucial parts of the narrative have been lost. Parts like … Senator Arnold! While I am rather honoured that I have unintentionally managed to capture that aspect of watching TURN in this modern setting, I am thinking that it might serve us all better by getting an isolated take.

Oh! That doubles as your warning. This is an Abe chapter, as the summary also suggests. But it is the second update you have gotten over the span of five days, and you are getting it now because the plots and perspectives to come make for more provocative reading that that of the protagonist of the series on which this work is based. Forgive me my trespasses?

Enjoy ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Abe Woodhull drove for a long while without direction. Even if speed barriers in the form of road works had not been present in his routine circles, accelerating to a point where his inner demons could not keep pace would have proven impossible in his wife’s Liberty. These little instigators of doubt materialized as shadows in the corners of his eyes - just out of focus but barely unseen. Their shapes seemed clearer in their dark whispers, amplified by every sound with which he sought to smother them. They told him to drive into a guardrail, into a tree, into abyss. But who then would provide for his son? Abe protested. Who but he had designs to protect the poor senator? Simcoe? He could not allow it.

The radio was no good. Songs of every genre became tragic ballads filled with the usual pestilence of failing expectations. Abe had turned off his phone. The specific unpleasantries of a life so shrouded in secret that shadows cast more comfort than their physical counterparts were left better unheard. He had nowhere to go and nothing to say. Abe Woodhull had lost his life to his brother’s memory. He had lost his love in a lie and his lucidity to a threat made under a two-post truck lift.

He pulled an album from the above-head storage compartment and pulled into a roadside public toilet facility which austerity had since chained shut. He knew the place well. Abe came to this familiar highway hide away intent on using a bush behind the abandoned building to relieve himself before climbing back into the vehicle parked in an otherwise empty lot to listen to some dead poet’s attempt to make sense of life’s disappointments or at least put them to song. A song
which Abe knew all too well. One of many he could hear in silence, one that could silence thoughts when spun. Occasionally, he took from these moments and the shadows that spawned them a sense that somewhere, someday, someone would stop on the side of the road and seek refuge in a Culper Ring CD that spoke to a struggle they alone could not sort. They would find an answer in his lyrics, and the idea of giving counsel to a stranger made his problems seem solvable in themselves. He would return to the road, and, for a time, he would know exactly where he was going. And when he again lost direction he would return to Woodstock by way of this same abandoned rest area, by way of his shadows and of the ones belonging to the evening alone to whom he was indifferent.

As Abe pulled up his trousers after relieving himself of Rogers’ orange-juice and whatever remained of the drugs he had let the Scotsman prescribe to undo the effects of the night before, he noticed another automobile on the far side of car park. Though naturally paranoiac, it would not have struck him in particular save for the fact that he could identify it at ease. Abe glanced around; momentarily certain he had be followed. He approached Anna’s old four-door sedan with a caution that quickly turned to consternation when he spotted the driver bent over the wheel. Abe banged frantically on the window, his heart pounding quicker than his fist; half-certain the driver’s had given out. Seconds that felt like centuries past before the greying man whose face was blackened with bruises nearly as dark and lurid as his blinking eyes looked up. He was not dead.

Edmund Hewlett was his enemy in every sense, but he was not dead. Without yet a valid reason for the physiological response, Abe found himself in tears.

“Abraham, what on earth are you doing here?” Hewlett asked -annoyed as seemed his standard - whilst he cranked down his window by hand.

“I thought you were dead,” Abe replied breathlessly. “That you had had a heart attack or … whatever you are on all of those pills for.” He knew vaguely from Anna and Mary that his father’s boarder cum favoured son was plagued by some rare genetic condition. Given a hospital stay a few months prior, Abe had reason to suspect that, unlike with his friend Caleb’s approaching fate, whatever Hewlett was stricken with was far from stable. But he hadn’t died. Not alone. Not out here. Abe did not know why this came as some comfort.

Wondering darkly if Mary had first met Simcoe over Hewlett’s sick bed, he rather found himself wishing that the foreigner’s heart had failed him before necessitating that his wife bring a toiletry kit, before Anna had agreed to be his bride, before any of them had reason to fret over the whereabouts of Senator Benedict Arnold. Edmund Hewlett was the enemy and he wished every measure of ill to befall him, but even so, as the man whom he hated without ration or reason spoke, Abe found himself giving thanks to the Lord God that he had not found him dead in the middle of a paradise known to none.

“Do you also take liberty with my medicine cabinet?” Hewlett squinted, burying his brow in his hand. He reasserted his original inquiry before Abe had ample time to consider an answer to the accusation. “You thought I was dead … that still doesn’t answer my question. Why aren’t you in hospital?”

Abe took a step back from the vehicle.

For a moment, the last text he had received from Caleb’s number resurfaced from its burial ground, from the moment Abe had switched off his mobile, fearful that it was being tracked. “With DI Tallmadge? Or,” he paused, thinking back to the fight he was almost in with the pale Pakistani whom he was but certain had assaulted Senator Arnold (and possibly on Hewlett’s orders), “Or was it your plan to have your mate put me there?” He felt his lip curl. The man in the car twisted his
bruised face in such a way that reminded Abe of a Rorschach inkblot test. Abe, befuddled, began to second-guess every explanation he had offered thus far. “What hospital?” he tried anew.

“Bloody hell, man! With yer gud’wife!” Hewlett returned with a hint of an accent that he often supressed. In it, Abe heard every threat Robert Rogers had made against his family. They felt suddenly realised. He pictured Caleb and the inspector trying to track him down and in the process finding Arnold in the Scot’s underground cellar. He pictured Rogers, livid that his retirement plan had been taken out from under him, exacting revenge in some horrible manner upon the very person to whom it had been promised should Abe speak. That he had not was of little interest now. He had been damned from the start. Had Hewlett come to inform him? How did he know where he would stop? How long had he been waiting? How long had he been watching and how had it taken him this long to work out that the two Caledonians were in cahoots? “And Thomas?” Abe asked, his voice shaking.

“With Aberdeen,” Hewlett frowned, confused by either the question or the tone in which it was phrased. “At home. She has no way of driving to meet Mary, having wrecked my transmission and – do you have your phone off?” he knotted his brow in frustration. “Abraham, you need to ring your wife.”

“It died,” Abe lied.

“Take mine,” Hewlett offered.

Abe held the device, fingers frozen as his housemate recounted events at the old soccer field after he had left. Alone. Angry. Angry, not that Mary had stayed behind, but rather that his plan to get her lover arrested had been shattered by the presence of a man he had recognised from the raid as a police constable -a man who had given Mary the beating Abe had been prepared to take to achieve the same end of Simcoe’s imprisonment.

It was worse than the whispers of shadows.

He could not go to the police. If it had ever been an option, it was no longer.

It had been foolhardy to seek an ally in Tallmadge or any member of his team. It was just him and Arnold alone in this fight against a group of British ex pats and a corrupt system that allowed their continued presence to stain this beautiful country.

Abe swallowed. He recognised that in part Simcoe and his possible co-conspirators might have been all that kept Setauket safe from those charged with its protection. There was no way out.

“What are you doing here?” Abe echoed Hewlett’s question almost mutely, biding time where he could. He could not call Mary. Not when his own cowardice had caused her casualty. Not when the man he had hoped to protect her from by publically provoking into an act of aggression had been all that stood between outpatient and intensive care.

According to Hewlett’s account, Simcoe had fought to save Mary where Abe himself had fled. As little as he trusted his housemate, having never know Edmund to extend a kind word to his sometimes or supposed friend, Abe believed him when he said that John Graves had done right. The phone buzzed and he handed it back, relieved that none of this had need of voice. His phone died. Hewlett’s rang. He gave it back before he could call. The best excuses, Abe told himself, were simple. Black truths exchanged for white lies.

Hewlett bit his lip as he examined what must have been bad news. “I spoke with my ambassador not an hour ago,” he told him. Abe was unsure why. “The NYPD is requesting the release of my
complete medical transcript, and thus far has been met only with red tape. Ah, it is fairly straightforward, I suffer from a condition that could affect other members of my immediate and extended family and – oh, never you mind. I had hoped to barter something to Tallmadge in exchange for my friend’s release. Something Cornwallis had no trouble accessing for me an hour ago but is now unwilling,” he paused, pivoted, putrefied. “You know … Anna quite nearly predicted this. Said that my government was likely in on this conspiracy, too. I hadn’t wanted to believe her but the evidence speaks for itself I am afraid.”

Abe could taste the bitterness of Hewlett’s words in the air that carried them. He could feel their chill creep into his bones. It felt all too familiar. “And so you’ve made yourself an enemy … of the country you love, all because you were trying to do the right thing in helping Tallmadge - the man who wants to see you and the people you most care about locked up,” he summarized, surprised at the subject of his sympathy. He shifted his weight between his feet. “You had nothing to do with Senator Arnold’s disappearance, did you?”

“Of course not,” Hewlett spat. “I am only a person of interest due to general incompetence, both on my part and on theirs … and I dare say that is, why, it is a rather apocalyptic take on my overall situation. An enemy of Great Britain? No Abraham, just a man forced to see it for all of its complexities,” his speech slowed to a standard pace. “You don’t smoke, do you?” Hewlett asked with a twinge of tempered hope.

“I don’t but … I know where Anna keeps her emergency stash, wait,” Abe answered as he reached across his housemate to the overhead sunglass compartment, finding an unopened package of Marlboros. “She used to keep a lighter here too … um -”

“It is fine. I have one. You too?” he offered, extending the pack and a nearly empty lighter from his jacket pocket.

“Why not?” Abe scoffed, coughing his way through his first inhale. Hewlett climbed out of a car that already smelled cancerous before lighting his own.

“Simcoe and I … we were subjects in a psychological case study it appears Arnold came to New York to get a report on before a security summit. It is a terrible act of serendipity, but here we are I suppose. I want to help the police, but my embassy has taken away the one thing I can offer without,” he winced rather than say ‘what’ in words. “I know what you think of John,” Hewlett continued briskly, “I do and I don’t hold it against you; hell, I imagine we are of the same mind with regard to his person more often than not, but he couldn’t possibly have killed … It is mathematically implausible when not impossible.”

“No … you are right,” Abe agreed. He did not know much about maths outside of music but he knew where Arnold was. He knew he was alive. He knew that without Rogers’ black market morphine that he would be on the mend. Abe could retrace most of the steps that had brought the senator to the hideout. For a moment, he thought to confess to Hewlett, to implore him for his help, but in the interest of Mary and Thomas’ safety immediately reconsidered. “Do you think Simcoe could take Rogers in a fight?” Abe asked instead.

“I think Simcoe could take most people in a fight,” Hewlett scoffed. “It still doesn’t make him – Christ, he had no motive. He is the most wilfully apolitical person I have ever known. I don’t know. I don’t know what to do anymore. Every notion I’ve had on how to appeal on his behalf has backfired. My best friend is in jail. Mary’s ankle is broken. My fiancée is bloody furious at me – something I know smoking will do nothing to improve and … and on top of it all, she was right about my embassy. I don’t have a Plan B” Hewlett murmured, “For once I - I don’t know. I’m at a loss. Truly. That is what I am doing. Sitting in a car park, hoping the British ambassador will
reconsider my request as though bureaucratic incompetence is something worth believing in.” He kicked at the gravel. “I can’t let this happen. John is a long way from innocent but I can’t stand here and let him face punishment for a crime I know he didn’t commit.”

Pitying him, Abe forced a smile. “It probably doesn’t help,” he said, “but … I wish I had a friend like you. Sometimes.”

“We don’t have to be enemies.”

They could not be anything but.

“Is Simcoe sleeping with my wife?” Abe returned. He could accept that Hewlett likely had nothing to do with Arnold, that he was victim to his own arrogance as they all so often were. By value of association, however, he was a greater threat to Abe and the Woodhull name than Rogers, the police, or the treasonous motives they served. It was a pity. Hewlett was a decent man. Abe could see himself otherwise liking him. Almost.

Hewlett took a long inhale, causing his fag to blister, burn and break. He closed his eyes as though doing so would help him search of sort his heart and mind. “Between you and I? I quite honestly doubt it,” he answered, flat but far from hard.

“So you don’t believe his alibi? Or Mary’s?” Abe challenged.

“I believe were together … in Connecticut when the police are stating the crime took place. Here,” he handed Abe what remained of his cigarette, opened the car door and reached under the driver’s seat. “I found this unloading the car this afternoon. Unopened.” Abe examined the receipt and the box of condoms it spoke of, imagining a very different scene than the one that had haunted him for days. “Also I,” Hewlett continued with notable hesitation, “that is I’ve known Simcoe for a long time, he may well be very attracted to your wife but I … I doubt it to be substantial. Rather, I don’t think it will substantiate. He has this … ah, how should I put it? Are you much familiar with the ideals of Courtly Love?”

“From Hole?” Abe squinted, “Kurt Cobain’s window?”

“Christ,” Hewlett sighed. “You Americans and your drought of historical and literary reference points.”

“What – what are you on about, then?”

Edmund Hewlett did not seem so sure himself. “Ah, that is, what I am trying to impart is that Simcoe prefers the whole ceremony of affection to actual manifestation. He is driven by the idea of a perfect love with an unobtainable woman. It is not something that is meant to be realised, it is an aspiration, an artistic ideal more than a romantic one,” he tried.

“And Simcoe is an artist?” Abe scoffed.

“Poet. You um … you may actually be familiar with some of his work,” Hewlett seemed to defend.

“From my wife’s nightstand?”

“I … I wouldn’t know about that. I meant -”

“I wouldn’t either,” Abe interrupted. “If there was anything, Tallmadge must have grabbed it in the sweep,” he paused. “I’ve never written my wife a poem.”
“My fiancée found a whole book full of sketches I did of her … thought it was ah … that I fancied myself a mangaka, that all on my attempts at capturing her essence were magical girls of various shōjo series from the early nineties.”

“I don’t … know what that is,” Abe admitted, hoping that in doing so he had not invited Hewlett to make a snide comment about something absent for American culture.

“For the best,” his housemate said to his relief. “Um. Artistic gifts of any kind may be overrated. It has never worked for Simcoe either, to my knowledge. You’ve see it with Anna, Sally. With any and every woman who has found herself the subject of his verse, that is – I’ve never known him to so much as voice that he considers the possibility of admiration to be mutual. He just writes. Notebooks of the stuff. It is all fantasy. It is all he is emotionally equipped to handle. You see …”

“What?”

“Just give it a few weeks. It will burn itself out and nothing will come of it. Provided things are sorted here - that Senator Arnold’s whereabouts are uncovered - Simcoe will return to the black hole of Calcutta. He is due for promotion, and,” he smiled sadly. “Let’s be honest, London doesn’t want him, there is no spot for a man of his talents in New York, and as he is fluent in multiple regional languages, I expect Barclay’s -”

Hewlett seemed to be bidding time. Abe had heard enough. “I’m a professional songwriter and musician; I’ve been in relationships like that. Like Cortney Love. I can’t say that any of them lacked a physical element.” he interrupted with admission and accusation.

Hewlett lit another cigarette from the embers of the one held awkwardly between his long, thin lips. “It is truly not my place to say -”

“But?” Abe demanded.

“He was nearly married, once. John. They broke things off, he and this girl and he moved to America. Went back for holiday, began to rekindle an old romance and, much like your Mary, she wound up pregnant. So he returned to London with intent on making the move permanent, only … um. Listen, Abraham. I ought not to be telling you this. It would be for the best if you -”

“Please.”

“Al-alright. Effie, um, the girl he was once due to wed, had an abortion late in her second trimester for emergency medical reasons, something was said to John in hospital - I am not sure exactly what – having heard various recollections, none of which I have any reason to doubt,” he paused. “A bit fuuny, innit? How the same truth can look so different from various vantage points?”

“What is your point?”

“Mine? Well, regardless of what actually happened, the affair left Simcoe with the impression that he was unworthy and unwanted. I think now … in Mary, he sees a beautiful woman who did what he considers the right thing in having your child, in building a life and a marriage with you in the hopes of giving the boy the sort of youth at least everyone I know wishes theirs had been. It’s beautiful, in a way - especially taken from John’s perspective. He cannot touch it without breaking it and so he won’t. Just let him pretend for a short time to belong to that happiness – he won’t do anything to disrupt it, not permanently. He is only in love with decisions she once made that have nothing to do with him. And he will realise that in short order. He always does. Anyway. He will be gone by the month’s end.” Hewlett rubbed his temples as he seemed to recite, “Go home, Abraham. Tell your wife you love her; tell her you are sorry -”
“And Simcoe?”

The question gave him pause. “Forgive him, too. I doubt highly that he means you, or your marriage, any real harm. Nothing against Setauket, quite the contrary, really, but it is too small of a place to hold a grudge. Lord knows we have had our differences, you and I, but it was never my intent … well. Simcoe. Simcoe will be gone. Provided I can get him released from police custody.”

It sounded almost like an offer. Abe had no idea what he was being asked to do.

“Tell me, Hewlett, what do you think … about my marriage?” he asked after a while spent in silence, wondering what it must be to want the life he was nearly willing to end a few mile markers to the north. Abe hated himself without knowing who he was. He questioned whether he had anything worthy of covet, if he was worthy of what he had, if he could ever hope to be. He felt bad for Simcoe. He felt bad for Mary. They were both substituting one another for something that had failed or had fallen away. He envied that either had that option.

“I hope this doesn’t come off as disrespectful, but to be honest, Abraham,” Hewlett answered, “I didn’t give your marriage all that much thought until I recognised that it would be the source of my oldest friend’s newest heartbreak a few days ago when all of this came out.”

Abe laughed. “You are alright, you know that?”

“I have my doubts,” Hewlett smiled with more than a hint of irony. Abe returned it in earnest. The man was at his wits end, waiting in an abandoned rest stop for an answer that may never come. He, and presumably everyone he cared for on this side of the Atlantic was a suspect in a possible murder inquiry, pawns in a game with dangerous players. Yet he attempted to offer comfort to a man who had never given him a single kindness, even in the form of a thought. Abe hated himself for reasons more tangible than the tangle of secrets and lies that would surely become the noose by which they were all hung. Hewlett for all of his faults did not deserve his suspicion or animosity; Abe reasoned that he probably did not deserve the delicacy with which the foreigner met his ugliness.

“I hated the idea of you and Anna. Hated it.”

“I am well aware,” Hewlett replied dryly, “You’ve told me as much on multiple occasions.”

“But you are okay, aren’t you? You know Hewlett – er, Edmund -”

“Hmm?”

“Anna is lucky. I really wish I had a friend like you. Hell, I wish I was a friend like you. Caleb is a person of interest now. Because of me. And Mary. God damn I … I was so sure, I was just so sure you had something to do with Senator Arnold that I -”

“Oh I do,” Hewlett confessed almost casually. Abe choked. “I mean to find him, if only so we can set this whole nonsense … you see I, I have some trouble trusting the police after everything I’ve been put through these past few days. Arnold could not have left Setauket. Maybe they are keeping him here?” he began to babble. “I worked out the numbers with Simcoe and there simply was not time between Arnold being reported missing and patrols being stationed at every motorway out of town for him to have gotten far. He is hiding … or someone is hiding him, to what end I can’t imagine … and I -or Anna rather – well, she has come on this plan to find out where which I mean to enact in her stead.”

“What plan?” Abe asked.
“Something I’ll likely jeopardised in confiding in you.”

The best deceptions, Abe reasoned, were simple. White lies for black truths. “I know how easily you might see me as the bad guy in your narrative. In your whole tragic … But I,” he closed his eyes. “I want my wife to be happy. I want my family to be safe. I thought … maybe it was xenophobia, maybe it was something as simple and complex as envy … I thought that you, that Simcoe – that you had something to do … that,” he stopped. It was senseless to voice the parts of his suspicions that had lost their bearing. “We are on the same side. At least when it comes to wanting to help Arnold without involving the police or raising their suspicions, we share more than you imagine.”

“So be it.”

Hewlett explained that it being an election year, people would be accustomed to strangers knocking at their door for any variety of reasons. They would collect donations for charity. They would organize a fundraiser for new uniforms for the soccer team Simcoe coached. They would collect signatures in support for Arnold’s defence bill. They would help Aberdeen champion her cause for racial equality. And then, in the evenings, they would compare notes on each address. Anything that seemed suspect they would examine again the next day, with different spies, until they came on something concrete.

‘They’ Abe quickly came to discover, included Mary.

Unrelated to Simcoe or any other third party, his marriage was over. He would lose his wife and the cover she gave him. He would lose his father and the love and respect he more hoped for than knew. Maybe, Abe thought, he should have written her a song.

“Spying by way of social justice?” he summarized. “You are … a lot better at this that I am.”

“You mustn’t chide yourself on such grounds. Espionage … well it is all a rather messy business. I’d not engage if I thought it avoidable, but so long as my name, and those of my friends need to be cleared, I’m prepared to do that which must be done.”

“I can get my friends and my fans involved,” Abe offered. “Bernie or Bust? Something.”

“Sounds promising. Give me a day or two to work out all of the logistics. And Abraham … thank you. It is much unexpected, frankly, frankly I am relieved. I thought you … for a moment I - It doesn’t matter. Thank you.” He seemed genuine in his gratitude. He seemed to seek no personal gain. Abe trusted him, enough. He trusted that he was a fool.

“You’re alright,” Abe assessed again. “And hey, if you need a band for your wedding, Culper Ring offers discounts to fellow conspiracy theorists,” he smiled.

“I’ll run that by Anna.”

Abe left the car park half an hour later with an idea of where to bring Arnold where Anna’s logistical brilliance could not reach him. It was a pity. Hewlett would have made a good friend and a better ally.

He could not go to the police. They had gone too far in their exercise of power in injuring his wife to gain grounds to arrest a man, whom, Abe reasoned, they would have no reason to believe was guilty had it not been for his own mistrust and marital doubt. He took the bag with a receipt in Simcoe’s name and a date and time that verified a shared alibi. Abe ripped the package open, shoveled two of the eight condoms in his wallet and had a mind the bring the rest of the bag’s
contents to Tallmadge as evidence, apologising to Caleb that he had ruined his date with paranoid accusations he had since proved himself right on. If things with Tallmadge had gone as well as Caleb initially indicated, he was already forgiven. Mary would forgive him, too, eventually.

He would save Arnold. He had a plan.

It was a pity. He liked Hewlett. Almost.

Chapter End Notes

.. I’m actually quite fond of Abe Woodhull. Which is a ‘pity’ given what is immediately in store for him.

Notes? It was a short chapter. I have but one:

**Mangaka**: A professional comic book artist. In googling this word (which I didn’t know), I discovered that there is a legit German Ausbildung where you spend three years (I guess) learning how to draw Japanese comics in accordance with the highly rigorous, controlled system of apprenticeship. Globalization. Who knew. Substitute ‘-chen’ for ‘-chan’ and come on over, live your teenage dream. Order a Bockwurst, but only at a pub, and only when you are watching footy and realise you haven’t eaten all day. I should work for the tourism and/or immigration board, which are also jobs you get after a three-year state tested apprenticeship.

I had not expected to upload this as a one off, so where I often take the time to come up with clever nouns with meanings that can be applied to varied elements in different ways, **The Patriot** was straight lifted last minute form a Mel Gibson film I have never seen. But I should! Apparently, I share a name with the primary villain, which is exactly what I look for in period drama, as we all do, I’m sure. Well, that and gorgeous, ginger warriors covered in the blood of their enemies. Ah! I miss Simcoe, so much that I .. I’ll be back soon. Cheers.
The Princess and the Dragoon

Chapter Summary

Conversing with his subconscious in a cellar somewhere between Oyster Bay and Baghdad, Benedict Arnold addresses his doubts, demons and desires only to find they share the same face.

Chapter Notes

Hey, lovely faces! What’s good? Strange way to introduce a chapter, even I’ll admit, but I just learned of another bizarre overlap between Arsène Wenger and African politics that I simply must share. Former Monaco star George Weah is now the president elect of Liberia set to assume office on 22.01.2018. Good on him. His stance? Pro Wenger. Said in a recent interview the man is like a father figure to him. Right on then!

Another crossover from the brilliant world of football that absolutely floor me this week of which you might not yet be aware: apparently, Burn Gorman was at Anfield making a complete tit of himself recently. It is as canon as it will be, people – Hewlett is a Liverpool fan! (How…?) The thing that makes this all the better is that Sam Roukin supports Everton, which adds LAYERS to their on-screen animosity (okay, not really.) Seriously though, how am I (to date) the only one writing a football fic? Defies logic.

If you are keeping track though (and I doubt you are; I have not mentioned this in a while) H+S Simcoe is a QPR fan (as with Rogers’ support of “The Gers”) simply for the nomenclature. Last note on this, since I picked on Sunderland fans a few weeks back in the end notes, I feel it is only fair to mention - had I made Simcoe a Newcastle fan instead, he would defiantly have been the bloke to punch a police horse. Missed opportunity? Perhaps.

Right. I have an actual update to bring in, and it is a bit different from what you are used to. (And not only because I am giving you two new! canon! POVs.) I hope you’ll bear with me. Your possible trigger warning include: The wars on Terror (Bush) and Drugs (Nixon), carnage, cauterization, cartels, poverty, sexuality, sharia, collusion, prison, populism, light Freudian themes, references to antiquity and … the January transfer window. Scary stuff, kids.

As always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Is it still a love story if the ending’s a sad one?”

Arnold was not certain of the answer was universal. In the dusk of the desert, eyes watering from exhaustion and the dust kicked up in their retreat, he felt sure that love was elusive, that it was the
first feeling man forgot when he felt the weight of a rifle in his hand.

His second-in-command would never hold a weapon again. Arnold knew what it looked like when a warrior was facing his final battle. The enemy was internal; it was remembrance and remorse. For a lad far too young to have been given charge of the vanguard, it was the death of his father, it was a fight he had had with a friend back at Oxford, a debt he couldn’t settle and a crush he had convinced himself was unrequited in a moment of cowardice. That would have to serve as his legacy. The lieutenant general was hardly listening. By all probability, the boy would be dead by morning, long before they had made it back to base.

Benedict Arnold remembered very little about the colonel beyond the mnemonics of a dying mind preserved by a double shot of morphine. He fully forgot every detail of who the boy had been before the explosion which surely had since ended him. Were it not for the last words he exchanged with the ferryman rank had forced Arnold to play, nothing about that January morning would warrant reflection.

“Yours hasn’t been written yet,” he had tried to assure him. The boy looked at him with glazed eyes, blood and bile coughed up over the last hour caked into his three-day stubble; his shivering body rejecting the pollutants and poisons the lieutenant general had given him to numb the pain of cauterization. Arnold felt his forehead with the back of his hand. It was too late. His fever was too high. Infection had set in. He would die in the back of a Humvee, denied Valhalla by the same arrogance that had seen him slain.

“Do you know the story of Scaevola?” Arnold tried, reacting to a reflex that no longer served any function.

"I am Gaius Mucius,” the boy smirked, speaking in a falsetto that felt copied. “A citizen of Rome. I came here as an enemy to kill my enemy, and I am as ready to die as I am to kill. We Romans act bravely and, when adversity strikes, we suffer bravely."

“Then suffer bravely,” Arnold told the lad in reference to what reaching shards remained of the right hand that had tried to bat his own away. The laughter that followed turned into another coughing spell. Two bullets were still buried in his torso. Crippling though it may have otherwise proven, the cosmetic damage to the boy’s forelimb was the least of Arnold’s concerns. The boy would be dead soon and he would have to explain the casualty to his commanding officer. He had done everything he could to stop him. To save him. In a few weeks, Arnold would sign a document faxed to him by some British coroner. He would watch other men die in his command and he would order each of them to face their last front as he had previously, as he did now, as he hoped the men who followed him had faced all others: As soldiers. As officers. As men whose sacrifices served a greater purpose. As Arnold hope that he, too, would have the strength to meet his end when it should seek him.

“Are you married?” he asked.

The lad smiled sadly. “When you ring my next of kin … tell them -”

“I’m not going to need to call anyone,” he interrupted. It was not a comfort, nor was it a lie. The young colonel attached to the joint operation did not belong to the United States Armed Forces. That duty would fall to garrison commander. Arnold would simply need to give an account. It was a form. A signature. His name would appear on the final page of the boy’s service record, something that could be cited when children the English officer would either never meet or never know saw his picture behind a panel of glass in the living room of some relative or another. ‘Under General Arnold,’ would be repeated with pride until questions ceased, until photographs faded or memory did.
“I’m not married,” the boy answered. “I asked a girl once but … no one will mourn or miss me, I fear.”

Benedict Arnold related to the sentiment he sensed. He, too, felt more at home in lands he hardly knew. “I don’t imagine any of your men will ever forget you. I don’t imagine any of your enemies will either,” he tried to smile.

“Enemies? We make war as the Romans did,” the colonel returned with a slightly sardonic chuckle. “I’d be ashamed before you if I hadn’t lain them all to waste.”

This, too, spoke to Arnold’s sense of self. “Keen on history, are we?”

“Not really.”

“Latin?”

“Latin?” the lad coughed. “Pfft! The way you complain about my accent, you’d think I barely have a command of English. No. I boarded with a lad who sustained himself by indulging in all of this shite. Quoted Livy enough that I guess I gathered the gist of it after years spent in the same godforsaken cell. You can write the tit for me, tell him my last conversation was with the American Ares over Roman propaganda. He would like it, I’m sure. The one thing I’ll ever have done in life that the cunt can get behind without having it create an ethical conflict. Or maybe it will. Maybe he will spend the next week or two bemoaning every ill he thinks himself to have suffered at the hands of his cherished rival Ed-,” he paused. Though his head remained on Arnold’s lap, the commander could tell he was hardly with him. “You know what the sick thing is? Bastard is probably sipping sherry in Dover right now with his gorgeous fiancée, quoting Caesar to her uncle without considering for an instant how very much he sounds like a certain Hewlett when he tries to show everyone how wonderfully clever he finds himself … and I am going to die for his continued freedom to do so. Bullocks, ‘innit?”

“You from Scotland?” Arnold asked in relation to the stated surname.

“Are you having a go at me?” the boy squinted.

“Dover?”

Benedict Arnold would have likely forgotten the exchange in its entirety if the Greek epithet the boy bestowed had not later found its way into a campaign poster. He would not remember him now if not for his final order to him: “I’ve made my share of mistakes today; don’t leave me to tally my initial assumption of your bravery and ambition among them. Life isn’t fair, Colonel, but by no means allow that statement to suggest to you that it is not worth the fight. Fight because you are more deserving than those who would chose comfort over country. Fight for your share of the same spoils. Fight if only because you are a soldier being ordered to do so. Regardless of reason, you will not signal death with a white flag. Not under my command.”

He had been telling himself the same thing for days, but found now that there was no mercy to be found in merely surviving. If memory served, the boy in fact had stuck it out for a few hours longer. He had gotten back to base but had not made it to the infirmary. He lost, just as Arnold had suspected. In the end, they all would share the in same fate.

Arnold wondered if death might take up his current challenge of combat. He wondered if repeating the word ‘fight’ in his mind to a point in which its meaning was lost served any purpose beyond reminding him what a warrior looked like when he could no longer lift his sword and shield.
He knew he had a fever. He knew that his condition was worsening with the opioids his captor used to control the pain. He knew the unceasing prattle against the cellar door belonged to precipitation; that spring existed in Setauket in ways that failed the desert.

He knew himself to take some comfort in the drug-induced daze that allowed him imagine that he was under enemy fire.

It was preferable.

On the field, he stood a fighting chance. Here he was helpless and that reality caused him far more pain than the leg he was certain to lose. Arnold fell asleep, thinking once more of his erstwhile Scaevola, envying the fire he had forced upon him to stop the blood flow, envying the boy’s composure in the face of field medicine and the ferocity of his scream when he at last cried out. He envied that his last shared memories had been filled with siblings, schoolmates, lovers and laughter; with former friends who spoke in Latin amongst themselves in seaside estates. He envied the military issued morphine that had delivered him from the sanguine stench of battle as opposed to the prescription opioids that did nothing against the scent of boiled eggs. He envied the soldier’s death the boy had suffered under a setting desert sun hours after his time had come.

But what Arnold most envied was that the British colonel had died wondering if love stories could have tragic endings. He himself had to live with the answers he arrived at in a dive bar days before.

‘No one will mourn or miss me, I fear,’ he told himself in an English accent that evidently belonged to neither Caledonia nor Kent. ‘No one will call my next of kin,’ he bemoaned, his inner voice still barely one of recognition. Perhaps death had heard him, and this was his answer.

He had not been home for much of his marriage. Hindsight told him that the affair might well have proved far shorter had profession allowed for the warmth of the hearth. He had served for twenty years. For twenty-one a woman had shared his name.

She had told him once over the phone that the best part of the Super Bowl had been the commercials. His then-wife lacking any appreciation for sport, Arnold had been quick to dismiss this opinion as folly - finding a hidden wisdom in her words days later.

Soccer was, he decided one evening over dinner, by the base measurement Margaret had offered, an affront to American values. The game was an insult to all of those who had served and fallen for the promise of freedom. Arnold had had half a mind to court martial half the men in the mess for treason as he watched them share in the excitement of their English allies over something the garrison commander informed him was an FA Cup Quarter Final. He frowned. A cup, his commanding officer said, was something liken to an American ‘Bowl’. In this, General Clinton had elongated each letter as though it comprised its own separate syllable. Arnold despised the accent and the distain implied in it. Were the two judged on their first definitions, he thought bitterly, the ‘baoehl’ was superlative in every regard: bigger, deeper, and with a greater capacity for volume. He found every difference between his nation and theirs - linguistic or otherwise - demonstrative of the strength inherent in America’s size. This was no exception.

The British, from what he could tell, saw him in the same respect. At 6’5, he towered over most of the men on the base, easily outweighing each of them in pure muscle. Sometimes he heard servicemen snickering things like ‘GI Joe’ or ‘Captain America’ with regard to his physique,
prompting Arnold to order them into drilling exercises until they had breathlessly passed what they defined as their breaking points. It was not the comparison to the cartoons of his childhood which he found offensive, but rather, that most of the rank and file he met had nothing of Saturday morning worth aspiring to. He would turn them into soldiers. Clearly, their own commanders were not up to task. They only measured in cups.

‘Not a sporting man, Benedict?’ a man called Burgoyne teased.

‘This isn’t sport,’ Arnold answered in resolve.

Soccer, as he understood it, was a ninety-minute game that took a mere two hours to broadcast. In such, it stank of socialism, of limits placed upon the free market. In America, he told those at his table, proper sport took an hour to play but close to four to watch when one factored in the numerous add breaks. It was fierce, it was physical, it was another testament to the might and glory of God, to His will being served by the forces of capitalism which had defeated the Soviets without a shot being fired.

‘I’ve forty quid on Pompey,’ Clinton told him with a smile. Arnold frowned, wondering why a Roman general and statesman was being evoked in this sorry context. He looked back at the television, hoping that someone had changed the program to a documentary, hoping a pop star would interrupt the goalless game to sell him a Pepsi. He thought of a home that he knew to be more imagination than address. He tried to envision of himself as another – as the everyman to whom he ascribed the morals to which he aspired. How grand, Arnold thought, to get up from an old couch or recliner to have a piss when match coverage faded into calls to commerce. How grand to grab a beer, down the half, and still have time left after to sit and reflect in the gentle glow of household products on offer which brand of toilet tissue one would stimulate the economy by purchasing in bulk. He thought of trips to Walmart with the intent of picking up a few things - thing that wound up filling a cart by the time they were tallied. He hoped the men wearing his flag on their sleeve were want for the same. The free market was an integral part of the viewing experience. It was a value that they were here to promote and defend.

Nine years later to the date, however, Arnold discovered the terrors of defeat and subjugation in the isolation of his cell. Namely, he had come to learn that soccer now existed in his beautiful country in a way that extended a few minutes of the grade-school physical education curriculum. It was appalling. The senator wondered if he could have done anything to aid the Feds in their takedown of the game’s governing body, if the investigation had come too late to be of any service to his own compatriots. Hearing the man who spoke in a Long-Island accent talk on his mobile about an association match he wished he had gotten to participate in was nearly as bad as arguing with the Jihadist he had met a few days before (cleverly disguised, though he may have been, by skin paler than his own and a shot glass filled with something their holy book forbade) over immigration policy and America’s lack of action in the so-said refugee crisis. It was all intellectual contagion. Arnold longed for the warfront. For the time when he could still imagine the forgotten man coming home from the coalmines to watch Monday Night Football with a cold American beer in hand. He looked at his leg - broken, bleeding, swelled with yellow bile that spoke of infection - longing to have another go at this immigrant ruining the American way of life.

As they all were.

What glories, Arnold tried to imagine, would his children later be able to sing about when they had a wall along the southern border, an isolationist approach to foreign politics and a tariff to shield them from pretty boys who sat on the side-lines for weeks on end due to hamstring injuries? Americans could play through concussions. Americans were great and if he had his way, their country would again match and meet its promise. He felt populism his patriotic obligation. He
would see the American Dream restored. He had to.

That was, if he managed to survive.

“He probably considers soccer a sport. Whole fucking town seems too,” he tried to say to the apparition beside him. No words came out. Death failed to answer his unspoken complaint, which caused Arnold’s umbrage and irritation to fester.

The man guarding his cell was clearly an American, opinions on sport and evident sexuality notwithstanding. Beyond that, Arnold could not identify the voice he heard. From what he gathered from the bits of a telephone conversation that made it through wooden cellar doors changed shut, the poor soul did not even know what he was meant to guard and garrison. It was Sunday, the Lord’s day, and the sentinel would have preferred to spend his morning with his mates on a soccer field than standing guard for his landlord cum employer. This whole town seemed deprived of the Gospel and the equally sacred American Constitution. Arnold looked for death and began to again tally his sins. Was their time to atone? If this was his purgatory, fire and brimstone seemed the least of the horrors that might well await.

He could not see, he could not scream. There was rather Dantian to the whole of it, but void of Virgil and Beatrice he had only this bastardization of the silent majority to serve a guiding role. The man seemed to think that he was there to protect a cement mixer (which he suspected Rogers of lifting off a local competitor.) Arnold grunted at this idea and heard in his own desperate sounds the reason for the lie his unknowing prison guard promulgated. The senator’s ex-wife had remarked to him on the occasions they shared a bed that he sounded like a piece of ill functioning machinery when he snored. He remembered in the insult how wonderful it was to sleep beside a woman of flesh and blood. He suddenly felt lonely. He felt that he long had been. He tried to refuse the recognition.

Sunday, he focused. It was Sunday. He had been taken a prisoner of war on his own soil six days before. The now-sobbing sentinel, he gathered as the conversation progressed, had been held captive for far longer. Judging only on the stranger’s presence, Arnold reasoned that Rogers was not on the property. If he could call out, if he could alert the man to his existence, they could help each other escape this place they both named hell.

He opened his mouth again, if only to curse irony.

The same drugs that scraped together broken shards of his past, the same that lent him the illusion that he could win the battle, were those that prevented him from fighting.

He wanted to scream, if only for sake of the sensation.

Instead, Arnold turned back to the figure whom logic told him was not present.

Sometimes the shadow took the form of the forth horseman, sometime that of the burqa-clad cartelist he had known in better days.

He knew it to be a product of medication and memory, to be as tangible and threatening as the enemy fire he heard in the rain. Yet it was real because he needed it to be. It was real in the same sense as Peggy Shippen had been before her absence on Tuesday evening revealed her as a similar illusion.

Benedict Arnold studied the shadow that manifested in a blackened room. He felt lonely. He felt that he long had been. The concept that he found he could not ignore was bleaker than the reality of his imprisonment, the reality that he would either lose his right leg or it would take his life. Was
that all Peggy had ever been, he wondered, a shadow of the sorrows he tried to shield himself from by standing in the spotlight?

No, Arnold tried to assure himself. He was not alone. He was not lonely. This particular vision of death and destruction was no governor’s daughter, but she was a friend to him when she felt like being one.

His throat was too dry to speak, yet they had been conversing nearly all morning.

Or maybe they had not. Maybe he had just imagined it.

He asked anyway.

“My voice?” she responded. “They say that is the first thing you forget about a person, and when we last met I still called you Lieutenant General.”

“I remember what yours sounds like,” he told her. This, he realised, was a lie. What he remembered was that her accent was a better match for her fingernails than it was for her costume. Suspicious as her hands had made him; their initial private exchange had still taken him by surprise.

It was common practice in Iraq to get intelligence reports from locals. Arnold had met hundreds of unfortunates hoping to exchange something they had heard in passing for the dream of having their asylum paperwork expedited and approved. This one had been different. Her clothing suggested Wahhabi ties, beliefs or sympathies; the information she brought was always related to the ways in which terror self-funded. He assumed she came from means, that she was the fourth or so wife of someone whose face he knew from a pack of playing cards printed with the faces of America’s foremost enemies in a war without end. If so, she lacked motive. Arnold was mistrustful of women as a rule, more so when they fell on either extreme end of exposed skin. Sluts and strippers, Holy sisters and Salafist spies surely all shared the same want to wrong and rob. He was an honest man; he made no exceptions.

The two had met several times prior in secret strategy meetings with men that outranked him and, curiously, under officers who served no secretarial role. In these she never spoke, relying on a translator whom she would sometimes correct. She was never spoken of by name useful as the intelligence had proven itself time and again. Arnold learned how to ask in Arabic if she sought sanctuary stateside. This, she met with a mirthless laugh he could almost still hear.

“Could it be that you have come to fear the Scottish people?” she now challenged in a voice Arnold could identify only as belonging to the relative south of same island to which she alluded.

“Fear? You mean because of Rogers?” Arnold snorted before pausing to reflect, “I’m afraid … I’m afraid that I’m six days in and already I’m starting to side with the enemy.”

“Stockholm Syndrome?” she perked up.

“Worse,” Arnold admitted. “Breaking the block and voting with the damned liberals.”

“That bad, hmm?”

“You have no idea. You hear that boy out there?”

“Is that Private Woodhull?” she asked.

Arnold shook his head. “No. I’ve never met him. Rogers has him standing out in the rain, guarding
this godforsaken shack, or rather cellar or basement or … did you know the difference is legal rather than linguistic in the State of New York? Woodhull told me that. He studied law at one point. And of course, his father – sorry, I know this means nothing to you.”

“It is a cellar. It doesn’t meet the basic requirements for safe occupancy.”

“He told you, too?”

“You know I’m not here, Senator Arnold.”

No. She was a product of isolation. He knew this as she claimed he did. He asked anyway. “If you were purely a figment of my imagination, wouldn’t you speak to me in my own voice?”

“I didn’t know you had a particular interest in psychology,” she replied in an accent he had heard described as posh, seeming pleased with what he supposed she saw as progress. “Tell me … what about me frightens you so much?”

“You don’t,” Arnold told her honestly. “You remind me or war, or war reminds me of you. It comes as a comfort, more than anything else. Thinking I might be able to stand up, fight my way out of here. Come, Hewlett,” he teased with a twinge of hope. “Be the Enyo to my Ares once more. Let’s take this town.”

“Do you find that much differentiates dread and desire?” she inquired.

It was a strange question given its source. Arnold looked for her hands in the drapes of dark linen that covered her tall frame as though he hoped she might be holding the answer she sought from him.

He recalled telling her years ago that religious women did not paint their nails in this part of the world, seeing any altercation to one’s physicality as an attempt to dispute the Creator by making an adjustment on what was a masterpiece by definition of God as the Sculptor. ‘Find me a woman between Istanbul and Islamabad who doesn’t wax weekly,’ she challenged, almost laughing. ‘Don’t believe anyone who would claim that women don’t all partake in and enjoy the same vanities.’

‘Partake’ he would accept in her case upon seeing her unveiled. But ‘enjoy’?

The woman attributed her assets for what they were to plastic and padding, to mental illness masquerading as model beauty. It was blunt without being brutal; she seemed neither interested in Arnold’s assessment of her looks nor in her own. With equal unfeeling, she explained at some later point that she was involved in all sorts of trafficking and that she employed her highly specific expertise in assisting her government and its allies when dragooned into doing so. And why wouldn’t she? It was beneficial to the cartel of which she was a part to limit supply.

‘I’m not quite certain why the Royal Army thinks it has any grounds to underestimate me,’ she confessed in a rare moment of falter that revealed her annoyance. ‘I have, after all, eliminated on my own initiative any profits from being made in importing drugs to Great Britain. I’ve begun to champion a substance abuse charity. Use is, as such, in decline on the island where it continues to rise in countries such as your own. Yet the Crown stations my closest friends to the front as though it supposes I am want for drive. As though it would bother me or tamper with the information I am able to provide.’

‘It doesn’t?’

‘Why would it? We share the same talents – my mates and I. They are – by and large – being rewarded by swift promotion for feats of bravery they are forced into due to my presence. Anyway,
was there not a certain honour in ancient warrior societies in being the first man over a wall?’

She herself was not brave, Arnold decided upon hearing this. She could not face those who faced death. She bothered with local dress. ‘It is not for your benefit,’ she told him distantly, ‘or mine.’

Though reasonably assured that the insultingly young aristocrat bought into her own given explanations, Arnold trusted her less after being shown a mask she identified as her face. He was not certain he wanted to see it now, much as he felt he had to. Something was not right. She was far too engaged in their conversation, far too interested in his answers. He felt he knew her, which he knew was something she would never permit. Arnold looked for her hands. He looked for something identifying. There was no light in the room. He could not see her and she was not there. He knew this. He spoke.

“You are an arch-pragmatist, Enyo. I never knew you to be so … philosophic in any of your dealings.”

“I never knew you to be so self-aware,” she offered in exchange.

“So why force the posh accent?”

“You like hearing it,” she told him. “Why do you think that is?”

Arnold could not say even if he could identify its true source. It was warm and deep, rich without being thick. It spoke tomes in only its tone, all the wonders the world contained of which he was merely aware. Arnold did not know if he would describe the waltz these words danced as ‘like’ or ‘longing’ – if they might be better called ‘lonely.’ Lonely? He suddenly recognised it as being the pitch in which he read Peggy’s texts to himself. He had taken it from somewhere, but did not know to which battle he owed this glorious spoil.

It certainly was not Hewlett’s voice.

It was not Hewlett at all. If anything, the soft baritone belonged to death. How then, Arnold asked himself, dare it to sound so sweet?

“Doesn’t hurt the brand?” he asked, determined to make his enemy meet his eyes in a room he knew to be too dark to discern defining features of any sort.

“Why do you think that is?” Hewlett repeated, slightly harder than as the question had originally been asked.

“I don’t,” he lied. “Like the accent. Hate all of them. Moreover, I think I liked you as a person better before I heard you speak.”

She considered this for a time. “Before you had a reflection of yourself when you imagined my face, my portrait can’t possibly do it justice. This holds true for everyone – think of how online dating always results in disappointment.”

“Why can’t I see you? I know what you look like.”

“I’m not sure you do.”

“You don’t disappoint me … Peggy,” he tried. Hoped. Begged.

“Peggy? Are you sure?”
He was not. The only thing he felt with any certainty was that he was too old to be playing these kinds of games.

“I’m not ‘sure’ of anything,” Arnold shifted, thinking on another way to draw her out. Debate should do. “I’m considering betraying my cause. Do you hear that man up there? Lost his job and his insurance with it when he found out he had cancer. Within months, all of his savings were lost to COBRA and co-payments. Worked all his life, he did. Ended up ‘robbing’ a bank with a spray-painted squirt gun, pleaded guilty after being arrested on site and did hard time, forcing the state to pay for his chemo. What I mean to say is, Affordable Care Act or not, we are all stuck fronting premiums one way or another – except now, this man’s life is ruined. He lives here in this halfway house, works for the proprietor, can’t find another job due to his history as a violent offender, and can’t move out because your man Rogers would fire him if he did. Told him this morning that if he stays put he can move in with his boyfriend and still keep his construction job. That is who he is on the phone with. Man called Charles. Trying to convince him to stay stateside, though why anyone would is a mystery to my mind. America,” he sighed, “where small town criminals who can’t even write up a ransom demand hold public servants hostage in private cellars. They have fucking soccer here now, too. Whole world has gone to hell.”

“My man, you say?” she asked, gently stroking his cheek. Arnold took her hands to find they were not painted this time. She was shrouded in blackness but it was no longer dark.

Arnold knew the desert sun under which they stood to be his fever. Still, it felt real, and he felt his pulse slow. For the moment, he knew where he was. He felt at home. That was enough.

“Do you see that lieutenant-colonel?” she asked airily, pointing to a distant boy with his back turned. “He can’t see me. That is the reason for the theatre, poorly staged though it may be. Has to be … God, going on two years ago now that three servicemen were lost when I made a slight miscalculation. Now they have my old schoolmates taking command of the vanguard on all of these little missions to liberate our shared enemies from the poppy that feeds them.”

“These people aren’t eating bagels,” Arnold scoffed. If she could not bother herself to feign concern, neither would he.

“Most of the farmers aren’t eating at all,” she told him, again, it seemed, not quite as Lady Eleanor. This was not an uncaring assessment, not, at least, as Arnold heard it spoken. She sounded like Peggy, or rather, as he imagined Peggy might sound. He remembered shaking hands with the daughter of the then-governor of his state once at a fundraiser when she was but a girl. It had not made much of an impression. It was only these past few months in which he had begun to find her positively stunning – stimulated more by the questions she asked than the selfies she always found an excuse not to send. She was not real, Arnold told himself, and yet she had to be.

“That why you can’t look your friends in the eye when you send them to death?” he asked after a moment had passed in response to setting. He longed to again hear a beautiful voice he considered might not even be female at all but instead a compilation of art and natural elegance, of manners he did not have and a kind of intelligence to which he could never hope to aspire. It was an idea of all that he wished he could be. It was Peggy. Even if it was not. Even if the aspiration whatever it be named was as real as the sun that slowly bleached the camo he knew himself not to be wearing.

“Should I tell you the truth about men, Senator Arnold?” she teased. “They are - every single one
of them - far too simple and vain to approach with even the suggestion of truth. Imagine I were to inform my former classmate over there of the sum of my experiences since last we parted. It is ‘poor thing!’ It is ‘what could I have done to prevent this?’ It is ‘my duty to protect her!’ And how! If I were to excuse my actions to him or any other as fate, or, alternatively, as free will – my own, mind – men, all men, are still apt to inventing a narrative in which they might yet play saviour. It is shambolic. It is the same with you.”

“You could get out of this game. You are rich enough.”

“And you could help me, couldn’t you?” she purred.

Arnold did not answer. He did not like the one instinct whispered.

“Why can’t I see you?” he demanded. “Your friend has been dead for six years or more. We aren’t even here. We are not in Iraq.”

“You clearly still are,” she insisted, not taking note of the rest. “To answer your question though, is a fundamental of Freudian Psychoanalysis that you’ve adapted subconsciously. The psychiatrist is meant to sit behind the patient, as not to influence their responses to given impulses through unintended assessments offered through expression. You know what I look like, Arnold. You know because we have had this conversation before. Because you rung me up when you could not sleep and I told you…”

“It isn’t PTSD,” the senator insisted against what he had been told once by a researcher he knew in a professional capacity. “At home - Harrisburg or DC, I’ve never had anything like this,” he paused, pleaded. “Enyo … Am I going to die here?”

“Not in the desert,” she answered in a voice too beautiful for any siren.

Suddenly Arnold felt he could not stand.

“You are here because you would rather die fighting,” she told him. “Why don’t you?”

“Why are you here? Why you – specifically?” Arnold cringed as he a shot of pain shot through his injured leg. He looked at the hands he pressed up against it and saw blood. He looked at her hands and found no hint of red - blood, polish or otherwise.

“Because I am a manifestation of everything you are too afraid to admit to wanting.”

“Opioids?” he guessed.

“No.”

“Money?”

“Maybe,” she said slowly. Do you consider yourself jealous of a girl you would name the goddess of war and cruelty? Of her lord father, perhaps? Do you wish that you’d driven all of your sons mad in the same vain? That you had been present to do so? That they were off securing your investments through criminal activity rather than attending Ivies on your dime? That,” she teased, “oh, that must hurt -”

“I’d never want a daughter like you,” Arnold spat.

“You would date a girl younger than you think I am … If you’ll allow it, you know what I think you most covet? Why you associate me so strongly with a girl you met on a handful of occasions?
It is this and this alone: You think ‘I’ could be happy living in a small flat on the bad side of some shit industrial town with him,” she pointed, pausing until the dream faded as all did in time. “I won’t. Of course. I’ll marry, or rather be married to some landed noble for geopolitical reasons … Or if I’m lucky, or if you are, I’ll be shot out here under the hot and splendid sun. But I could have been happy with someone who squandered away his small wealth, who could never have approached my dowry even if he hadn’t. And that is crucial to you. By your account, you’ve since witnessed me sobbing, helpless as I watched him die. And ah, how you hate ‘me’ for it. You hate me more for a moment of weakness than all of the many you begrudge me too much to admit you see as strength. And do you know why that is, Senator Arnold? You think that no one would love you if they knew how much personal debt you were in. You want to believe it possible but you would rather die here than risk certainty. That is why you can’t scream, rather, why you won’t.”

She was right.

Accepting that, he found he could not accept the source.

Benedict Arnold considered for a moment that while he knew this to be true of the woman he imagined, she likely did not know or so much as suspect it of herself. She never spoke of love. She never spoke of anything in the sense of emotional capacity. She knew nothing of financial hardship. No one knew of his.

This was not real.

This was not memory.

They had been here before, had had a conversation much like this, but as Arnold recalled it, she had told him that had a coup d'état in the early part of the past century not kept her forefathers from a throne that had been theirs by blood right, Britain could have kept her colonies in check; that the conditions creating and feeding the war would never have been. She spoke of her friends and their gambling debts in the same detached and distant manner with which she evoked the dead. She spoke, Arnold knew, in a distinctively different British accent. They talked together of Tacitus and tactics, of the politics in places they had never been and would never go.

In the single meeting they had after her friends had been murdered and maimed by his mistakes, nothing had changed. She did not challenge him. She did not pose questions that did.

‘It is war. It is what happens,’ she said to his condolences, and then, only vaguely. ‘I’m fine.’

Suffer bravely, Arnold had summarized for himself.

This was not real, yet he needed it to be.

“Peggy,” he pleaded, moving to lift her veil.

“You would rather die her than face certainty,” she insisted. Her voice felt like fire. Arnold found himself again in the cellar, her un-manicured nails digging into his open flesh, tearing the wound apart and his world along with it with it.

“Do you truly think it is brave to suffer? Do you not understand? You are going to die in here, Arnold!”

“Peggy,” he said aloud. Again. Louder and louder still. He screamed until she revealed herself at long last.

He screamed another name altogether, one, he only later realised, had always lingered on the tip on
There were days John Robeson missed the way things were on the inside.

Sexuality, for instance, was not politicised in prison, one was guaranteed three warm meals a day, and, above all, if a brawl broke out it likely did so within view. The rematch, at least, was bound to. There was always a rematch. A score to settle. A punch to throw.

Here, things were governed by norms that went against nature.

Robeson did not much rate Hewlett as a coach or Simcoe as a captain, but evidently between them they had had the sense to understand that Bye Week was unlikely to ever walk away with another win against Middle County. Neither was pressing the league to reschedule. Though he saw the reason behind this action he could not help but to feel twice cheated. Along with fellow Johns Maglev and Byrd, Robeson had been on his way out that morning when Rogers called to him from the garage, offering an ultimatum. If he played sentinel as opposed to sweeper today, he could leave the house and keep his job. Robeson agreed instantly with a single thought – if his boss held to his word, which he suspected he would, he could keep Charles Joyce in America and at his side.

Eight hours later, he was beginning to suspect that he had made the wrong decision in babysitting a stolen cement mixer. He had missed the game of the season and the fight of the century. He had long since missed his chance at true love. The day having made that clear, he missed the fallacy that such happiness existed, at least for the likes of him.

He missed the inside.

People who had never done hard time imagined prison as being void of its passage. They imagined that days, hours, minutes were without relevance, each akin to the one that preceded it. But time, Robeson would argue, had far more meaning in relative isolation. Every moment that passed brought one closer to a court date, a prole hearing, an attempt at civil rehabilitation. It gave one hope; it gave one something to do that seemed worthwhile by comparison. He had spent his time upstate obtaining his GED; he had spent the better part of the last few hours switching between the same three apps, wondering if the occasional grumbling he heard was result of construction equipment or his empty stomach, wondering when Rogers would return.

Evidently, no one had heard anything from the Scot since the match ended. No one had any interest in his whereabouts when it seemed likely that Simcoe would stay the night in jail and Appleton had booked himself a ticket to Cuba in the form of a ‘Wenger Out’ banner he had brought to the protest that broke out at Peggy Shippen’s press conference. Charles, his Charles, had asked the team’s absent Americans in the group chat how this ill-fated act of mockery warranted such concern. It didn’t, Anna Strong replied, followed by a queue of question marks. ‘Ben Tallmadge has been spending too much time on Wikipedia trying to connect soccer to organized terror’, Jordan Akinbode wrote. ‘Wait, I’ll phone him.’

They had yet to hear back from the striker who had effectively told them all to ‘suck it’ a few days prior.

Robeson could not have cared either way.

He himself had not written anything in response to this inquiry. He had gotten in an argument with
his boyfriend that morning, something they were both keen to ignore for the time being. It was too stupid an issue to expose the cracks in their foundation for all to see.

Despite the outcome, Hewlett’s tactic against the league’s top scoring team had been to park the bus - to run a hard defence with the hopes of winning with limited possession or forcing Middle County into a draw. It was dull football that Joyce was of the mind he, as a defender, needed to be there to see through.

>>How can you miss a game against our biggest rival?<<

Joyce had demanded.

>>Middle County has no rivals.<<

Robeson insisted. He received no immediate reply.

>>To be fair I did not think we were playing them. How can you not be happy about this? Just give me today – we can finally move in together. ♥ ♥ ♥<<

It took Joyce eight minutes to answer. When he did, it was not what Robeson expected, nor it was not what he had begun to fear. Not in as many words, at least.

>>Simcoe and Woodhull just got into a fist fight!!!<<

>>Seriously?<<

>>Well, no. Almost though. It was madness.<<

>>Charles, what about my moving in?<<

>>You should really get down here. Team needs you. We can talk after the match. In person.<<

They had not spoken since.

John Robeson felt cold out in the rain, felt he would catch one if he was made to stand outside much longer. He would then be out until after Easter, but at least, he consoled himself, he would not have Simcoe’s anger to contend with should he miss match day or training due to illness.

He missed prison. He missed time having a meaning. The minutes that passed out here meant only that Rogers had not returned. Robeson hated not knowing how much longer he was sentenced for. He guessed that Charles Joyce had taken an offer in India, that, or he was no longer open to the one Robeson had finally realised after years of trying. After playing out every way of broaching the dreaded conversation; after looking at his bank statement and calculating how long he could support them both while his boyfriend looked for another job; after writing Anna privately, asking if she knew if extra paperwork needed to be filed if one wanted to marry a foreign resident; after deciding it was all for naught, John Robeson called the only man he believed had ever truly loved him, crying before the words came out.
Joyce spoke sweetly. He told him he would be there within the hour. He would bring take away from the good Chinese place where everything on the menu was cheaper because a few months back a dentist who had somehow contracted Ebola had eaten Chow Mein in a dining area the restaurant had since closed. He would bring an umbrella and they could picnic together in the dark and sing in the rain. When Rogers came back, they could pack up his room. They could spend the night together. They would figure things out.

But three hours had since passed without Charles Joyce or General Tao.

He gave no apology or explanation, instead texting over the group chat that Appleton had been arrested, that Appleton was all over The Daily Mail’s website and that it’s editor had again taken to opening fire on some singer over Twitter.

>>Think about how good the next album is

going to be though!<<

Someone on the team wrote back.

He did not care if it was. Rogers did not let anyone touch the radio in his work truck and Robeson didn’t go to clubs. He hadn’t even when he was young and handsome enough for the outing to perhaps prove itself a draw – drinks and anxious, heightened self-doubt traded for sex and goodbyes said before breakfast. He had no use for pop stars. Robeson had, however, half a mind to go to DeJong’s but that, too, was not an option, business having closed for some dumb reason or another. Probably, he reasoned with a sudden resentment, because Anna had a rich new boyfriend and needed a job that fit the new social status she enjoyed on his arm. To Robeson’s mind, she was no better than the rest of trailer trash this town seemed to litter, but she had opportunities as well the educational means to exploit them. She had a boyfriend who loved her for reasons Robeson personally could not fathom. Anna Strong was not pretty, nor funny, nor very interesting on her own merits. Thanks to this latest turn in her tumultuous love life, however, he did not even have a place to grab a beer to take away his sting of rejection.

It was not resentment. Resentment was simple. It was an appropriate end to a series of small catastrophes. His therapist had checked himself into rehab; Anna, admittedly, would have made a decent enough substitute, whatever she had on tap would have made up the difference. It was a bad week, Robeson bemoaned, for his entire social network to be making moves towards self-improvement. He needed the people they were as opposed to who they were striving to be. He needed the familiarity he feared losing.

He desperately needed someone to talk to, a friend to listen to if not lift him from his sorrows. John was drenched, starved, and Charles was avoiding him.

They had been having problems for some time.

Charles would soon be made redundant thanks to the same forces of globalization that had brought him into John’s life in the first place. He had stopped attending AA meetings around the time that his lover had stopped putting on the pretence that he was looking for another job within the city. Fights had followed - the natural progression of cherished things ending too abruptly.

Joyce could not stay and Robeson could not leave, fine though he felt with the idea of beginning anew. He had a criminal conviction. No country would grant him a visa. He was stuck in ways it seemed applied to no one else.

He missed prison where hopes were too distant to ever become disappointments.
A vehicle pulled up onto the yard. It was not Joyce. It was not Rogers. Robeson was not surprised.

“Woodhull!” he greeted, forcing cheer. “No chance you brought any of those eggs -”

“Not today,” Abe dismissed him. “Hey, Rogers still isn’t back, is he?”

“Sorry,” he shrugged.

Robert Rogers was something of a surrogate for Richard Woodhull and, perhaps, for Abe’s wife Mary as well. It was not any of Robeson’s business, and normally he would not be tempted to ask, but having that morning missed the only interesting thing to happen in the backwater of Setauket since Hewlett had stuck a dull blade into Simcoe’s breast an autumn past, he said, “Heard you got into a fight this morning. That why you are here? Hoping Rogers’ll teach you how to throw a punch?”

“What?” Abe frowned. “N-no. Not exactly. Listen I need to get something from the cellar. You should … you should really go inside. I’ll handle -”

Robeson put his hands up. “Can’t. I promised Rogers I would not leave this post until he returned.”

“What did he say, exactly,” Abe questioned in a tone reminiscent of his failed attempt of legal studies. Robeson did not answer. In truth, he was not sure and would not have been even if he had not been drowning his impending loss the night before in a bottle of wine Dr André probably would not be stopping by to enjoy with his beloved enemy anytime soon.

Robeson was not entirely sure of anything the Scot said to him or anyone else. Robert Rogers was more mime than man, his impossible accent failing to dilute to comprehensible even after twenty odd years spent stateside. Every conversation was a game of charades with only three possible conclusions – that he thought John André owed him money, that he wanted to know if anyone had thought to record Ice Road Truckers for him, or that he was threatening to dismantle everything you ever held dear if you dared deviate from his latest half-baked plan.

For John Robeson, it was the third option more often than not.

Robeson could not wait to get away from him, away from the halfway house he had spent the better part of the past six years, regardless of Joyce was around to reward his sacrifices. Like Abe though he did, he was not about to step aside. He had been waiting outside for eight hours as a breeze turned into a drizzle that turned into a rain. He watched the younger Woodhull twitch and reasoned that could wait out this latest paranoid collapse and whatever patriotic palaver it contained.

“Please, just, turn a blind eye. Five minutes. I would not ask if it were not important.”

“Abe, look it is nothing personal – but this is my life. This is all it will ever be if I back down -”

“John!” he heard. He blinked. Abe had not spoken.

“What the hell are you two doing?” he demanded as he glanced at the cellar doors behind him, hearing the cry repeated.

“You have to let me in there,” Abe insisted. “Just go. Give me the key and go.”

Robeson gave him a hard look before turning to unlock the door in an awkward diagonal off the side of the house for himself.
“Let me see you,” he begged. He had forgotten what Peggy looked like. She never sent photographs when he asked. He could not trust what he could not see, and yet this was all he had. This, or a loneliness that threatened to claim him if his death was so reluctant to show her face.

“I’m not real, Benedict,” she repeated. “I never have been. But this is.”

None of it was. None of it could be. Lies were evil yet her voice was so inviting he might well name it allure.

He heard voices from outside calling him back from abyss.

“Benedict you need to call for help. It may be our only chance at reuniting,” she told him softly as she turned away. He closed his eyes. He understood. This was not his final front. There were other wars to fight. There were always other wars.

“I have to save Private Woodhull,” he said, finally recognising someone he was certain of, accepting the responsibility of his new command.

“Private? Benedict, look at where you are.”

The room was nearly as dark as the mantel she wore. Back turned as she listen against the door, he glimpsed her blonde hair gathered in a messy braid that fell only just past her shoulders. She was as beautiful as he had always imagined. She remained a figment of his imagination. A lie he told himself willingly.

“Your hair, you cut it?” he inquired, knowing from his limited experience with courtship that women liked it when one commented on such things.

“I’ve been growing it out for a few years.”

“It suits you,” he answered without hearing. She did not respond. He tried anew.

“I have to save Woodhull,” he said.

“Tell me, do you fear being defenceless, or do you fear letting another man be the hero in this part of your narrative?”

Recognition consumed him. Arnold felt at once euphoric, elated and fully let down.

“John?” he gasped. “It has been you all along, hasn’t it?”

“It doesn’t make a difference, does it?” the figure asked with a self-pleased half smile. “No. And that scares you as well, but aren’t we all afraid of the familiarity we crave?”

Arnold wondered if love stories could have sad endings.

He wondered if he had lost the plot to his own.

He remembered meeting John André – pretty, prissy, posh, the life of the sorts of parties he had never personally attended. He did not like him but he found himself intrigue by the things he said and the words he used. His handshake, if he recalled things as they were rather than as he wanted
them to be, was firmer than he would have expected from one who presumably spent his days asking troubled teens of a certain privilege how they felt.

He thought of the long-dead lieutenant colonel trying with what little remained of his right hand to wipe the tears away from a woman whom Arnold presumed he may have wanted on some level. He had used his last breath delivering an ill-timed joke; had they told her about El Nino? Was that why she was so terribly upset? The girl had forced a smile. Neither of them spoke of anything substantial in the final moments they would share. Maybe there was something in the idea of death being preferable to certainty.

He thought of the man he had sat next to at the bar a few nights back, when he had become certain that Peggy was not going to show up, when he paradoxically feared leaving, letting her arrive to the disappointment he felt. He explained this to the lonely heart he sought comradery in, listening to him, in turn, lament that he should have lent his old friend money, that he should have married him himself rather than looking on while this friend wed the woman with whom the man had long been completely infatuated. It would be different, he had said, if he thought they loved each other. He would be happy for them. Arnold was not convinced. He was not sure the man fully trusted in his own stated assessment either.

He thought of Private Woodhull, the only man in Setauket he had come to trust had his interests in mind, fiddling with his wedding ring when his hands were not otherwise engaged. He loved his wife and he didn’t, he told him. He was worried that in trying to protect her he had put her at risk. She was cheating. He wished he had had the courage to end things before they got worse. Staying felt at times as impossible as leaving. There were days he wished she would walk out. Arnold only nodded. His own wife had faxed over a divorce agreement before his final tour had ended. He signed it. Just as he had so many death notes prior.

No. There was no difference between death and certainty. Neither had anything to do with love. Love, Arnold thought, was the quick inhale one took when upon receiving a text message from someone who challenged and engaged their heart, it was holding on to the same air as they read. It was relief. It was the terrible understanding of one’s own human limits and the euphoria inherent in the concept of acceptance. That one could be loved for what they were and what they lacked. It was ambivalence. At least, that was what John André would call it.

Could it be? It could not, yet it was the only plausible explanation. André loved him but feared acceptance. ‘Peggy’ as he wrote her was far too elegant, intelligent and an intriguing for a typical undergraduate. No. She sounded like André. She reminded him of the grounds the doctor had given when he had awoken him in the middle of the night because he could not close his eyes. She reminded him of the feeling he had when he shook André’s hand, a rush he could identify but was hesitant to name.

There was a different sort of delirium, he knew, when drugs had run their course. There were no apparitions or delusions; there was only the duality of physical anguish and desperate attention, a single thought repeated in a thousand tones as a means of distraction. Arnold called out for the ghost he thought he knew. He screamed, of only for sake of the sensation.

“What have you done?” Robeson accused, pointing the flashlight Rogers kept on the top step at the supposed cement mixer. Even seated, the man seemed as large and heavy as any piece of machinery found on a construction site. He writhed as he called to him, screaming in an agony, the
source of which was easily identified.

“It is okay, I’m here,” he said, confused at how this stranger knew his given name. There was no
time to ask. He turned back to Abe and handed him his keys. “I’m guessing there is a reason you
haven’t called an ambulance?”

“Do you know who that is?” Abe gaped.

“No, though he seems to know me,” Robeson bit his lip. He had not had many relationships of any
sort in prison, having spent half his sentence in hospital. He could not imagine anyone from the
inside would seek him out, though the man certainly had the physique to suggest an extended stay
in a state-given suite. He thought back to his days on a deep-sea fishing vessel, certain he would
remember the man if they knew one another from an alternate nowhere.

“John, please, please don’t go. I need you, I’ve always needed you,” he sobbed. Robeson would
have surely remembered someone if such a context had ever existed for him. He had been with
Charles Joyce for four years. He never heard words like ‘need’, ‘please’, or ‘stay’.

“Listen, Abe, in the bathroom upstairs we have a first aid kit. I need you to bring it to me. Grab a
towel, something he can bite into while I work – I can’t give him anything for the pain. Aspirin
and alcohol both thin the blood and he has clearly already lost too much. If you can’t call an
ambulance, can you at least call Dr Wakefield? Maybe go pick something up from Uncle Lewis?”

“Do you know who that is?” Abe asked with wide eyes.

It occurred to Robeson that he did not much care. “Someone who is going to die unless his wounds
are treated,” he hissed as he moved to lay the injured on his back, responding to the man’s
resistance with soothing sounds and assurances the he was there. That he was not leaving. “What
the actual fuck, Woodhull?”

Abe wavered but he did not move. “Do you know what you are doing?”

“I spent twenty years on the open sea. I’ve seen worse. I’ve the first aid training to handle- why are
you standing here, go!” he demanded.

Abe shook his head. “Help me. Help me move him before Rogers get back. John that … that is
Benedict Arnold.”

“Who?”

“Don’t you watch the news?”

“Not since we entered election fever as a nation … what does that have to do – GO!”

“Okay,” Abe relented.

He turned back to the handsome man whose name he had just learned, who spoke his own with
pleas of passion such that Robeson had never otherwise enjoyed.

“Is it still a love story if the ending’s a sad one?” Arnold asked him.

“Believe me, whomever you mistake me for would be a fool to lose you and I won’t let that
happen,” Robeson swore, squeezing his hand. Abe’s hurried steps ceased. The flashlight he carried
crashed to the basement’s cement floor from the top of the stairwell, its glow extinguished in the
freefall.
“Whaur dae ye hink ye ur gonnae?” a gruff voice asked.

John Robeson was not sure of what was being said between Rogers and Woodhull; he understood in the tone, however, that his landlord would never let him leave.

There were days when he missed prison. There, he had not had a life sentence.

Chapter End Notes

I’ve gotten a bit loquacious, so let's just get to it:

**Scaevola**: a possibly mythical Roman youth renowned for his bravery. With the approval of the senate, he snuck into an Etruscan camp with the intent on assassinating Clusian King Porsena who in 508 BC laid siege to Rome. Unfortunately he mistook the king’s scribe for Porsena himself and targeted the wrong man, leading to his capture before he could achieve his objective. In defeat, he told the Etruscans that his body and life meant nothing to him (as a brave Roman) and demonstrated this by way of sticking his right hand into fire, earning him a cognomen meaning ‘left handed’. The king was so impressed by this action that he let him return to Rome. The speech offered by the unnamed soldier in the beginning of this chapter was lifted from *Livy*. Scaevola also appears in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* which this chapter also loosely referenced.

Ban Tarleton did lose half of his right hand in the American Revolution, something that became its own kind of sexy in the realm of 18th century populist politics but unfortunately did not make its way into any of his portraits (oil paintings and political cartoons alike) so I don’t have a good reference image to offer. If you want equally gross to look at, check out the portrait of him made later in life. He aged in a way that makes him look like everyone’s stern uncle, the one you wish you were not obligated to invite to dinner. Fuck, I’m not even white and I’ve an uncle who looks that way. XP

**Ares**: in Greek mythology, the God of war, usually depicting its savage elements. In the fourth series of *TURN*, Benedict Arnold refers to himself in this context, asking Clinton to provide him with Phobos and Deimos, his sons that accompanied him into battle (by which he meant funds to raise an army.) I changed it here to *Enyo*, Ares’ sister/lover/whatever, a chariot driving war goddess associated with the destruction of cities.

**Pompey**: Sorry, Arnold, we are not talking about *Gnaeus Pompeius Magnus* here, but rather Portsmouth Football Club who went on to win the FA Cup in 2008. In the semi-final against Manchester United at Old Trafford, Harry Redknapp knocked Sir Alex out of the cup race for the third time, so even though it was an upset, I’m struggle to even estimate what a bet of forty quid would return, but I am guessing Clinton went “home” happy that night.

**Burgoyne**: oh boy, an 18th century English dramatist whose most famous work was surrendering his entire army of 6,200 men at Saratoga, a turning point in the
American Revolution. You probably knew that. You also probably know that nothing gets me hot for history like economic intrigue so here is this: the most interesting thing about this bloke, to my mind anyway, was his financial dealings. Mainly, he supported himself by buying and selling commissions as though they were stocks for his entire career and actually got away with the scheme. Tja … unfortunately initiative was all he really had to speak for him, but I will always applaud shady as fuck. ;)

Haha, just kidding! We can all hold our applause. Which actually brings me to FIFA, football’s governing body. It is a corrupt organization that was stupid enough to trade in USD - prompting a 2015 FBI investigation and process that lead to Sepp Blatter’s resignation. God bless America!

**El Nino**: Spanish striker **Fernando Torres** transferred from **LFC** to **Chelsea** in January 2011 for a British record transfer fee of £50 million. Liverpool fans took the betrayal particularly hard (in terms you’ll be familiar with, kind of like Washington after Arnold declared for England in the series we all know and love) except … you know, on Twitter and inherently hilarious. Torres did not enjoy the same success at **Stamford Bridge**, scoring only 20 goals in 110 appearances and now plays for **Atlético** which um … if you only know one club out of Madrid … it (probably) is not that one. Can’t update you much further because I haven’t heard a single report on **La Liga** in months that isn’t intertwined with Spanish politics, none of it to do with ‘Wenger Out’ protests … yet.

But that is not the part I want to talk about. Oh no! And I am guess you feel the same way about this chapter. Drop me a comment. Hit that Kudos button. Goddamn, hit it twice because as much as I have bored you with football news in these opening chapter notes, I want it pointed out that H+S is edging up on its second anniversary and I have *strongly resisted* every temptation to mention or even elude to one José Mourinho to date. Do you know how hard that has been? How punable it is? Think of all you’ve been spared. Hit the Kudos button. And *please* come talk to me about Arnold/André. I have wanted this so bad for so long I just …
Abe Woodhull wished he had Samuel Tallmadge with whom to stack his side. He wished that whatever alcohol that periodically induced Robert Rogers to imagine the presence of the boy he had slain on an old country road a decade prior was on hand to give him some natural advantage in negotiating with his employer’s weaknesses both hidden and apparent. Rogers, however, was no more interested in drinking an ale that evening as the two sat at his old, un-level dining room table than he was in discussing the necessity of moving Benedict Arnold to better quarters.

“Ah hae tae drife tae Philomena’s tha’ moorns nicht – early. Park mah truck as lang as th’ polis ur around,” The Scot said to Abe’s offer to grab something from the cupboard or cabinet. Rogers had
not reacted to finding Robeson frantically tending to Arnold’s injuries by inflicting more as Abe had feared. He had barely shouted, barking only that Abe ought to retrieve the first aid kit as he had been instructed, repeating what the former fisher said as though he meant to commit it to memory while the poor tenant administered emergency care. Robeson had left the house half an hour before, taking one of the cars in Rogers’ garage to the far side of town with the twenty dollars their boss had given him to negotiate a purchase. Abe hoped that Rogers planned to partake in the weed his recovering alcoholic was meant to return with, that it would create a place in his mind where reason might prevail. Abe Woodhull had thus far failed in that respect.

“As long as the police are around we ought to at least consider moving Arnold,” he argued, much as he had for the past hour. “Jordan is going to be in Albany for six weeks. He sent the lads and me a text last night saying we were free to use his new home if we needed a place to crash after the gig. I know where the spare key is hidden – he will be none the wiser to Arnold being there and it is not as though he is going to visit at the weekend … uh, he is going through an ugly break up. You know how he isolates himself when he is in a bad way.”

Rogers shook his head. “Ye bin roon tae his new place yit?” he challenged. “Abit tois blocks frae th’ Brooklyn station an’ thee frae th’ District Attorney’s haem. It is th’ warst place tae keep heem. Whit if he shoids gie it? Ye said yerself ye don’t troost th’ polis.”

“Caleb does,” Abe swallowed.

“Caleb Brewster trusts th’ polis?” Rogers laughed.

“He trusts Tallmadge.”

“’At won’t lest. Hoo mony fowk yoo’ve seen naked dae ye troost ance th’ charm has worn aff? We baith ken yer mucker Brewster ends things afair gettin’ tae th’ grottie introduction bits.”

It was true, though in this instance Abe did not know if it was relevant to his personal concerns. His best friend had a genetic illness which his uncle was in the later stages of; his relationships as such they were never lasted for more than a few months, ending abruptly and without stated reason before any major holiday. He may have once had a conversation with a partner who, weeks after meeting Lewis, decided that he did not want to wind up in a situation where he would have to care for Caleb, effectively ending things between them in such cold terms. Caleb might well have only heard these words in his head, terrified that he may one day not be able to care for himself.

Easter, Abe remembered, fell early this year. In two weeks, he would be hiding eggs for Thomas while Mary made altogether too much food for four people. Caleb would have a beer with Uncle Lewis, Anna, DA Smith, Hank if he flew in from Stanford, and likely Hewlett now as well; he would entertain those present with a dramatic narrative of bureaucratic incompetence of the sort that defined his nine-to-five. Ben, as all the boys who had come before him, would not warrant a mention for Caleb could not bring himself or others to laugh over such matters.

But two weeks, Abe thought, could prove an eternity in a town where nothing ordinarily transpired. In the time that separated Setauket from springtime and rebirth, he could trust Caleb’s intuition would be unclouded by an inevitable he would never give Tallmadge an opportunity to refute. He told this to Rogers who in turn only shook his head.

“Half ay onie relationship yer ever gonnae be in exists only in yer wee heed, troost is th’ first hin’ tae gang. Swatch at ye an’ yer guidwife. Gie yer answer thers morn? Didn’t need Brewster muckin’ abit efter aw, did ye?”

“Leave Mary out of this,” Abe warned. The words stung. He did not love his wife as he should, he
loved the illusions his marital status created. He hated himself for it, and he hated hearing her name or distinction pass through the lips of a man who had threatened to harm her.

In all the ways he had imagined his marriage ending, Mary had never been at fault. He did not know if it was fair to blame her here. Abe did not like Simcoe, but he did not know him – those who did, Mary, Hewlett, the other lads he captained on his Sunday-league side, the people he knew back in London, all adored him enough to stage a protest demonstration following his arrest. And why wouldn’t they? Simcoe had been there to protect Mary when Abe had abandoned her in the car park knowing Baker was police, afraid of getting booked for something minor that might lead the force back to Arnold. Mary was not entirely at fault for what had transpired in place of commitment, but regardless of with whom blame lied, Rogers should neither evoke nor involve her. Abe wondered aloud if she and Thomas would still be used as bargaining chips if he were to file for separation.

“Go haem tae yer guidwife Abraham, afair someain else dae,” the Scot repeated with a smirk.

“The charm will wear off,” Abe said of his rival, not entirely trusting his borrowed assessment. At this, he rose from the table and pulled two beers out of Rogers’ refrigerator, one for his nerves and one with the hope his host was hospitable enough to join him for a drink. His employer frowned when the beverage was placed before him but clinked glasses all the same. He spoke for a while without value over some documentation he had seen at four in the morning over eighteenth century farming. Abe wondered if the few programmes The History Channel put out having to do with the past were of any particular interest to anyone else, or if Rogers himself had simply had it on in reaction to the hour.

“You know Hewlett is planning some door-to-door action,” Abe eventually interrupted his boss in a long-winded assessment of agricultural techniques from antiquity, more of which, he reasoned, no mere mortal could take. “He hopes that someone will see something that will point the police to Arnold. He says he and Simcoe worked it out mathematically; Arnold could not have left Setauket. If they know that, I would at least imagine Tallmadge does as well. We have to move him. I told Hewlett I would help but I can only lead him astray for so long.”

Rogers nodded slowly.

“I’ll hae a hink oan it. Nae Akinbode’s hoose.”

“No one is looking there.”

“Hewlett is pure tryin’ tae fin’ th’ senatur? ’at is jist barry, isn’t it?” Rogers repeated, making calculations of a different sort. Abe considered all he knew of Edmund Hewlett. Perhaps it was the fault of Whitehall – as was the case with his wife, father, and the au pair who lived with them, Abe felt he understood very little about boarder who shared his walls. He knew, however, that Hewlett had very strong opinions, one of which he had been on about of recent involving statistics. Factoring for human variables designated the equations as belonging to social science rather than mathematics, so he had told him. Abe, formally disinterested, suddenly found himself sympathetic to this view, wondering how much of the assessment was born from Hewlett’s sitting at a bar with Robert Rogers, whom logic seemed to defy.

“He is a suspect. He wants to clear his name,” he offered on the foreign tennant’s behalf. There was some irony in the fact that the man to whom he held so many feelings on contention was the closest thing to an ally Abe could find. Hewlett had even gone so far as to extend him an offer of friendship, remaining civil and cordial when Abe had responded with an attack. He was likely sitting in jail now, trying to do the right thing, certain in his assessment of what defined that abstract. Abe pitied him. He envied him. He felt he should not have been so quick to condemn him
Rogers continued to laugh jovially. “He’ll jist dig himself deeper intae whatever hole he’s got himself in an’ ol’ Robbie Rogers haur will profit aff th’ dirt.”

“I hate when you do that,” Abe commented, crossing his arms.

“Mix metaphors?”

“Refer to yourself in the third person. Anyway, why Hewlett?” he squinted, trying to understand Rogers insofar as could be managed.

“Yoo’d hae jist bin a wee lil at th’ time, but afair Ah cam tae thes coontry thaur was a lot ay gab abit his most noble ay hooses.”

“See that is the thing I don’t get,” Abe frowned. “If Hewlett is as important as everyone implies, why hasn’t he any protection? Body guards, lawyers, the like?”

“Who says he doont?”

“Evidence to the contrary. The man nearly died, he has been arrested, beaten beyond recognition sometime in the last few days – what more do you want?”

“Ah want tae bide time. Ah am sure someain is meant tae be providin’ security. Th’ Hewletts ne’er dae anythin’ overtly. We will bide, fin’ it fa, an’ en make contact. Figure it fa tae blackmail.”

“Blackmail,” Abe swallowed.

“Weel th’ us government isn’t in th’ wey o pay up ur they? Noo ’at they got it intae their heids ‘at we ur terrorists wi’ whom they don’t negotiate.”

Abe had other theories on why no reward had been offered. He knew from the moments he spent with Arnold when the senator was not absorbed with unseen shadows that Washington wanted to pass a new defence package he had been responsible for drafting. Though the details remained vague to him, he gathered that it would overshadow the Patriot Act in terms of asking Americans to trade their civil liberties for abstract securities in a reaction to the global political climate. The bill had stood no chance of becoming law, but thanks to a media interest in Arnold’s disappearance demonstrations were being planned and taking place all over the country in support of his proposal. In addition, Abe knew from Hewlett that Europe saw the economic disruption the senator’s absence created as an opportunity to further a trade deal that could serve to reduce tensions between member states in the banking union.

Arnold was missing because no one wanted to find him.

Everyone was profiting politically and economically from his evanescence, everyone – as Abe saw it, except for the American people.

“As Ah waur sayin’,” Rogers continued, “th’ Hewletts hae a reported history ay payin’ up. Ah don’t ken if yoo’d graced th’ earth at th’ time, but rumoor was ‘at th’ owner ay a majur newspaper back in Britain uncovered somethin’ abit th’ Hewletts ‘at coods undo th’ whole ay whatever designs they hud. Booght heem aff, they did. Gae heem twintie percent ay th’ company. Fur heem, it weren’t enaw. Got restless, threatened tae gab, suffered a stroke affair he coods.”

“So your brilliant plan is to blackmail a bunch of oligarchs who you think guilty of murder once you figure out what gang is meant to be providing Edmund’s security?” Abe gaped. His own
brother had been gunned down accidentally in a gang related shooting. He was reluctant to extend an open invitation to such calamity and doubted Rogers fully knew what he was suggesting. “Do you even care what happens to Arnold? You could die yourself!”

“Aye. But Eddie is a discredit tae his nam an’ a fowk knows it. I’m nae lookin’ fur a lot. Jist enaw tae gie me ben mah retirement, up tae Alaska. Ah can brin’ th’ senatur if he wants tae come. We can gang ice fishin’. He seems apt at stayin’ still fur extended periods. I’d invite ye alang, but I’d fash yerse yoo’d gie jittery up thaur.”

Abe considered that the Belgian beer had been offered in error. He often struggled to understand what Rogers was saying, now, he was fairly confident that the man had lost sight himself. “I don’t think Edmund Hewlett had anything to do with the disappearance,” he stated flatly, as calmly as he could manage.

Rogers smiled. “But Hewlett thinks Simcoe did an’ accordin’ tae André fa studies these things ’at is his Achilles tendon.”

“What?” Abe asked certain no answer could satisfy this latest queue of senseless words.

“Ah, don’t quiz me oan it, bairn. Psychiatrist, heed mince. It is aw borrowed Greek.”

“It is a really bad plan.”

“Ain whit is yoors, Abe?” Rogers barked. “Keep movin’ heem indefinitely? Hiner ye aye hae at leest a body mukker it ay toon?”

Arrogance and ambition were separate abstracts. Aberdeen Declesias felt this reality was sorely lost on her rivals, on her critics and on her present company. Peggy Shippen had called her self-absorbed. John Graves Simcoe was in the process of challenging their combined presumptions and prejudice. Although she knew it to be annoying to her boss judging by the manner in which the small woman pressed her pale lips together simultaneously managing both pout and sneer, the au pair was happy to play into these sorry misconceptions for the moment. After all, she was already winning the debate. The larger game, she came to realise, depended on how long she could keep the others distracted.

She had seen her new housemate at The Newsroom two nights prior, cuddled up between John André and a beverage Abigail had told her he had gone to rehab to combat. She could have sworn she had glimpsed them both at the Culper Ring concert the night before during a sound check, but the two had vanished into the crowd before she could investigate matters by way of relieving Dr André of the martini he held. Normally, Aberdeen would not have given the love life of a friend of a friend much of her mind, but as it happened, she had found herself a host of other club goers whom she had convinced to part with their hard-earned cash for the price of a smile and a name and number not her own. She thus awoke that morning with a pounding headache and queasy stomach. The au pair had accordingly tiptoed down the hall to a water closet belonging to another tenant. She was in the process of relieving the odd Englishman of some of the aspirin that he always had in excess when she had again overheard the name of the city’s most infamous alcoholic through the door connecting the adjacent room, this time in the most sobering of contexts. Anna, livid, had told her fiancé that he should have let Simcoe kill John André. That he had a certain talent for such tasks.
Peggy seemed ignorant of the animosity.

Aberdeen decided that the ex-sorority girl was probably every bit as smart as she sold herself as being but only half as clever as she seemed to think. Prior to meeting her, the Hattian had wondered why nineteenth-century novels had indexes in the back, as though anyone struggled to remember which once-named Russian was a general and which an envoy. She herself had never had problems of the sort. Aberdeen followed five-hundred-twenty-six separate Twitter accounts and could likely list them alphabetically and according to political alignment if asked to do so. She could remember which class she had back in school with the people on Facebook whom time and distance would have otherwise made into compete strangers. She knew the name and party of everyone on the town councils of Setauket and the surrounding electoral districts. The au pair never considered that she had a talent for this, or that one was required. But Peggy, she worried, associated John Graves Simcoe with Mary Woodhull alone and not with the man he evidently had reason to kill.

She thus tasked herself by making sure the wilfully ignorant did not enlighten each other to aspects of their private lives that posed a real threat to the peace. Aberdeen had heard whispers around Simcoe. She guessed, based on the way he spoke and studied others when they did, that he did not hear much of anything at all. Although nothing about the soft spoken but highly attentive man seated next to her seemed reflective of Anna’s anger or the ire his lesser seemed to accredit him with, she did not want to put Peggy’s safety at any unnecessary risk. She could not take the chance. Wrong as the former governor’s daughter was on everything on which she had an opinion, Aberdeen had never herself met anyone who knew as much as she did about Senate discretionary spending legislation. It was just a pity that for all of the Beckys and Britneys back at Penn State, Peggy Shippen seemed to have no talent for names.

Surely, Aberdeen reasoned, John Graves Simcoe’s could not have been entirely foreign to her. As Peggy claimed herself, she read The Daily Mail. Aberdeen teased this quickly in a few colloquial words from a language common to only two at the table. Mary sounded out the first few syllables as though it were a question.

“Why would the editor tweet out a photograph of you?” Peggy phrased more eloquently as the au pair hoped she would.

“I’m simply an extra in that scene,” Simcoe explained quickly, glancing nervously at the hostess who did not seem to notice the emotion behind his attention. Aberdeen, however, was concerned about the photo for reasons extending beyond a bad high school haircut. She doubted that Mr Simcoe would offer anything met anyone who knew as much as she did about Senate discretionary spending legislation. It was just a pity that for all of the Beckys and Britneys back at Penn State, Peggy Shippen seemed to have no talent for names.

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“Oh, Mr Simcoe, you never offered anything met anyone who knew as much as I did about Senate discretionary spending legislation. It was just a pity that for all of the Beckys and Britneys back at Penn State, Peggy Shippen seemed to have no talent for names.

What she imagined no one knew was that Mr Hewlett had indeed committed a crime that morning, and greed had made her a co-conspirator, something, Aberdeen felt certain, that could get her deported. She loved the city far too much to say goodbye.

Simcoe said something about John Terry without inflection. Aberdeen frowned when she realised he would give her nothing with which to judge his intentions or involvement. The police, she reasoned, would not be interested in the footballer in the centre of the photograph. They would search for a connection between the editor and the suspect-by-proxy. Unless she found one first, Aberdeen feared they would find her.

“Is it true you wrote a song for Mary Robinson?” she interjected. Simcoe looked ready to capitulate. She smiled.
“It is true that I wrote a poem … which she took a number of liberties with … but yes, I have had my words put to music. I asked not to be given the credit.”

“Plural,” Aberdeen said. “You wrote four songs. Did the cops ask about it?”

“Somehow it did not come up,” he said aridly.

“Seriously?” Peggy’s eyes widened.

“Where did you -”

“Google,” Aberdeen answered as she handed her phone to Mary. Simcoe’s pupils expanded slightly as though she had produced the most damning piece of evidence that could be cited against him. Aberdeen questioned briefly if something had been lost in translation.

“You are quite the poet,” Mary smiled.

“I assure you, Madam, that is hardly the case,” Simcoe replied, his finely tuned falsetto an octane higher than that to which Aberdeen had struggled to adjust.

“Isn’t art subjective?” Peggy inserted encouragingly. She smiled down at her own mobile, telling him the eighth track on an old album got her through high school. Simcoe did not seem to know how to respond.

“Once at a café on high street,” Peggy read aloud,

“In York on a cold afternoon,

When the excitement of youth,

Began waning,

When we both knew our end,

Would be soon,

I found in our shared unvoiced sorrow,

Reminiscing for the moment we shared,

That while I’d never quite trusted I knew you,

We were far more alike than our peers.

But sometimes I still think I’m jealous,

I think that you won from the start,

If not for your last name and riches,

For the coup that you staged on my heart,

The thing is I thought that I’d tricked you,

But now lost in your absence I see,
We didn’t escape for your comfort,
These outings were only for me.”

“Chorus” Peggy clarified before continuing. Aberdeen squinted, wondering if she was in fact familiar with the track, unaccustomed to oral recitation or simply did not want to scroll back up to read it again. Slightly annoyed, she began to sing along, encouraged by the colour that filled Mr Simcoe’s cheeks as Peggy joined in the melody.

“And while you never quite liked the spotlight,
You knew that it bleached out your scars,
You knew that with everyone looking,
We wouldn’t face that which we are,
Without this distraction I’m lonely,
And I know you’re the talk of the town,
But if you’ve time at the weekend,
You know I still want you around.”

“That is enough,” Simcoe said. “The rest is … not appropriate for supper.”

Both girls laughed at his reaction to their slightly out of tune rendition. “Compared to the rest of Robinson’s work -” Mary snorted back a giggle, smiling girlishly. This Simcoe returned.

“I suppose ignoring author’s intent …” he tried.

“So what is it about? It is kind of ironic, I mean … Mary Robinson writes so many songs about her alleged lover.” Aberdeen wanted to scream. She tried to kick the girl across from her but not finding Peggy’s legs she lost her balance, causing Thomas to laugh. “In Touch says she is married to some guy she won’t leave for financial reasons,” Peggy continued, plainly not talking about an English starlet of the past decade. “To think she found her soul mate in someone else…”

“I’m sure that isn’t true,” Simcoe scoffed.

“Check it,” Aberdeen said to her new housemate, holding up her manicure for display.

“Lovely,” Peggy replied, looking down at the own hands in confusion.

“Right? ‘Ad my toes done last weekend too, caught up on my tabloids. They broke up.”

“Her and her husband?” the blonde smiled.

“‘Er lover. Some time ago,” Aberdeen informed her, hoping against hope that Peggy would understand ‘stop trying’ from her tone.

“Good on her,” Simcoe said.

“I don’t mean to judge, of course,” Peggy prattled, “I’ve never met her, but I’ve recently met
“His name is Ban Tarleton and trust me, he is a monster. She is better off,” Simcoe insisted. He seemed unaware of all the ways in which he had just saved everyone at the table.

“Tarleton?” Aberdeen demanded, trying to disguise her glee. “As in ‘life begins at conception?’”

“As in his son.”

“Better off,” she echoed.

“But -” Peggy started.

“Don’t tell me you don’t believe in a woman’s right to choose because I have been -”

“Aberdeen,” Mary warned.

“There are other options,” Peggy stared.

Simcoe took a deep breath. “Don’t tell me either of you believe your politicians at their word,” he said to them, though his eyes remained fixed on Mary, whom Aberdeen imagined he meant to console.

“When someone says at every opportunity that abortion ought to be illegal -” she started anew.

“To my knowledge,” Simcoe interrupted, “John Tarleton never said anything of the sort. He spoke against medical tourism - young women taking the ferry from Dublin to seek legal and safe reproductive care in Liverpool. Either of you want to guess why this remained such a talking point for so long that politicians in other countries have since adopted lines of his rhetoric?”

“Christian values,” Peggy offered.

“Do not pretend that God -”

“I don’t have to ‘pretend’. Look at Abigail. When a mother, no matter how unfit she finds her situation, holds her newborn baby for the first time, it is God given that she loves it and wants to care for it. My mother is an OB –GYN, and she -”

“Sells your fathers policies for him.”

“So on one side we have Christianity and on the other Feminism, concepts this debate has determined to be mutually exclusive,” Mary rolled her eyes.


Simcoe stifled a laugh. “Looking at the politics behind the argument you’ll find we are discussing the will of neither God nor that of the individual. Tarleton might well have believed in his message, but the only reason he delivered it was to plant in the minds of young women he allegedly wanted to keep away from Liverpool’s ports that his city offered health care options they would not otherwise have had available.”

“You’re kidding,” Mary’s eyes budged.

“I’m not, he was calculating. He had no legal recourse against this industry so he bolstered it while at the same time appealing to his base. I don’t much care for politics. Even the seemingly honest ones have ulterior motives.”
“There go my people, I must find out where they are going so I can lead them,” Mary smiled ironically.

“Nothing has ever remained of any revolution but what was ripe in the conscience of the masses,” Simcoe agreed.

Aberdeen wished they would not flirt so publically. Peggy might see affection in their eyes and take it as an invitation to mention John André. She thought to warn her outright but not knowing if Simcoe spoke French or simply quoted long dead civic leaders over half-eaten lobster or, alternatively, if Thomas was paying enough attention to translate for his mum and her illicit lover, Aberdeen simply disagreed in the method most common to those of her generation and interests. Peggy echoed her in wanting to know the source of Simcoe’s claims, saying it sounded like conspiracy. This had the Brit in a bind. He could not provide an answer that would satisfy them both. Aberdeen hoped he would just quit, whisk Mary away upstairs, recite poetry or talk about disillusionment with the political classes, as it pleased her employer.

She could not say anything to Peggy. Not here. Not yet. Not until she understood where the lines were drawn.

Benedict Arnold, whom she must have some love for, at least in a political understanding, had gone missing sometimes Tuesday night. Peggy said she was not planning on meeting him as Twitter insinuated, which, judging from her comparative inexperience with the social media platform might well have been the case. Peggy had spent at least two evenings in the past week in the company of André, who had tried to kill Hewlett, incurring the wrath of Anna and, allegedly, Simcoe. André was meant to be in rehab, but was not. Abigail was mean to be moving in with Jordan, but she was not, and now both women closest to this modern Dr Mengele would be living in Whitehall, along with Hewlett, the Woodhull family, and herself.

Jordan had been friends with the detective inspector in charge of the missing person case, but he had removed himself from the game, literally, forcing Mary to take his place both on the pitch and perhaps as Simcoe’s second. Aberdeen did not want to see anyone hurt and did not want Thomas exposed to such an environment. Abe seemed to be in agreeance, but he was never around.

Arnold had yet to be found. Aberdeen had to gauge what she was up against without letting the others know she was on to them, without letting them give themselves up to one another.

It was a pity. She almost liked both of her present adversaries.

“Alright, here is an example – in the early nineties, England was addicted to ecstasy as a nation. As politician, how would you exploit the drug problem?” Simcoe asked.

“Impose policy changes to the criminal justice system,” Peggy answered.

“Pretend you want to turn a profit,” Simcoe said with a slight smirk, turning to Aberdeen.

“Softer sentencing,” the au pair shrugged. “Think on it – with less money going into keeping non-violent offenders behind bars, funds could be freed up to sponsor rehabilitation programmes, families would not be broken up, people would not lose their jobs … or would not struggle as ‘ard to re-enter the work force after years of being removed from society.”

“No,” Peggy countered, “stricter fines would add direct revenue to the courts and serve as a dissuasion to further or even first offence.”

“Forget partisanism for a moment and tell me how to make it taxable without suffering a backlash
“Legalisation?” Aberdeen squinted.

“A methamphetamine?” Peggy gaped. “There is no way anyone holding public office would so much as propose -”

“No, not legalisation. Commercialisation.”

“How would that even work?”

“In the decade prior to the one we are discussing, hooliganism was a public concern. Thatcher even proposed England withdraw from international competition to blur the focal point of widespread violence. Then, thanks large in part to a drug that had the country too preoccupied with vivid hallucinations to put up much of a proper fight the problem ceased. My friend, the politician – a conservative, mind, running a city with a fairly recent history of death-by-stadium-attendance invested money the treasury did not have in infrastructure, and worked out deals with the town’s two major clubs and the satellite company that had broadcasting rights. He had previously been in business with a drug lord in what I suppose is the most literal application of that description, re-established ties and saw an influx of sedatives on the streets. Publically, he put a lot of time and energy into promoting a sport rivalry, modelled after one that existed organically in neighbouring Manchester, and in such, helped to change to public perception around an existing industry that profited the city little until the era defined by his politics. All this, because he saw that Liverpool had a drug problem like everywhere else at the time.”

“That doesn’t actually address said problem though,” Peggy said.

“It doesn’t need to. It fixed the deficit. It is why I don’t trust politicians and why I am telling you both not to waste your time with ideology. In practice, what is done has nothing to do with what is said. The mayor, as I’ve already told you, was a conservative and imposed strict sentencing in accordance with party lines, while behind the scenes worked to make the problem worse because of the benefit it gave to other industry. I can’t imagine a liberal would have done anything different.”

“That is speculation,” Aberdeen objected.

“It’s not. He told me all of this freely when I mentioned that I planned to read economics at university. I had known the man for a great many years, having boarded with a number of his children and roomed with one – this Ban who, you know my opinion of.”

“Wait – you went to boarding school,” Peggy smiled. Simcoe shrugged. Aberdeen glanced at her new housemate, feeling for the first time that they were one in thought. “What house?” Peggy asked giddily.

“What do you mean?” Simcoe peeped.

“What ‘ouse,” Aberdeen repeated for her.

“Slytherin, clearly,” Mary sighed, no doubt exhausted form the six-hundredth round of debate. Aberdeen felt another twinge of guilt. Neither Mr Woodhull was present, and Mary, who had spent so many evenings suffering in silence while father and son examined the divide that defined them, was forced to again listen to like discussion. Still, the au pair reassured herself, she had to continue to be tactical. Peggy was entrenched enough in her worldview that if she could keep the conversation steered in a direction that forced her to defend it; Aberdeen was reasonably assured
that she could keep the girl from mentioning her liaison with Dr André. She had too.

Simcoe was smart, almost sweet and almost funny. The man looked, however, every bit as capable of the deeds Anna wanted to watch unfold in her lover’s name. Poor Peggy, who knew little of New York and nothing of this, had nearly let slip that she was in love with an Englishman prior to his arrival. Aberdeen could not let that happen again. She could not. It was easier for all present to imagine bright, bubbly Miss Shippen as Benedict Arnold’s secret lover as opposed to John André’s spring fling when she spoke as though she were her father.

Tired and miserable as Mary seemed Aberdeen simply had to keep the others in their publically perceived positions by removing romance from the conversation insofar as she was capable. Maybe her employer would indeed soon want to go to bed and Mr Simcoe would carry her upstairs. Maybe they would fall in love and Mary would leave Abe and take Thomas to go live with her in the city. Mary would be happy and Abe would be free and she herself would never again have to see or think of this backwater, filled with oysters but void of pearls. Aberdeen had to continue provoking the company. She had to. It was for the greater good, as an author she once obsessed over might well put it.

As things stood, no magic would be needed, for nothing to the au pair’s mind could prove more political and polarizing than a debate centred on a children’s book series. “You say Slytherin like it is a bad thing,” she protested to her employer.

“I consider myself one as well,” Peggy’s eyes widened.

“Right?” Aberdeen grinned as she reached across the table to meet Peggy’s open palm with her own.

“It … was not like that. There were only thirty or so boarders at that school. Our houses as they were separated by gender, nothing else,” Simcoe told them. Aberdeen guess that he had been asked about this before. It was no excuse not to answer. She repeated the question a second time.

“Ravenclaw then,” he sighed.

“Really?” Mary squinted.

“Hewlett would be a Slytherin. I don’t say that as an insult,” Simcoe claimed, though, Aberdeen noted to her own satisfaction he practically spat the distinction. “It is just his nature. He comes on something and pursues it relentlessly. His degree, Anna, his newly acquired position as our club’s gaffer … though I am certain he will never admit to it.”

“I always thought ‘ee was smart and -”

“I’m ‘evil’ - whatever that should mean? No, he is intelligent, annoying though it may be there is no denying it – but it is a quest for prestige rather than one for knowledge that drives him. He had a good job back in London and was involved in important research. In theory, he could have obtained a doctorate from a local university, but no. He wanted an Ivy seal on his diploma. That is it. You see it in the way he dresses, how he grooms himself – everything is appearance, everything is designed at setting a standard he hopes others will accept as theirs or at least believe as his. Myself, I’m smart but not cunning. I make connections without resorting to calculations. I read quite a bit … As to this morning,” he said after a pause, more to Mary it seemed, “While I take some enjoyment from fighting when necessary, I don’t seek it out on my own. I would not even go so far as to imagine that I, or most for that matter, are in any way themselves whilst throwing a punch. It is something you lose yourself in briefly.” It sounded to Aberdeen like an apology, a desperate plea.
“The id taking over?” Peggy asked.

“I hate to disappoint, I see no value in such topic, academic or otherwise,” Simcoe reputed.

“Psychology or modern literature?” she pressed prettily.

Aberdeen kicked at her again, this time finding her target. “Ouch,” Peggy mouthed, waving her finger as though she meant to scold a naughty child or small breed of dog girls like her sometimes carried in their purses.

“Harry Potter isn’t literature,” Simcoe told them, deaf to the commotion. “It is a book we all read as children and now use as a catch all for orientations of all sorts. I have my doubts as to how effective it is. I think it fair to call the politician I alluded to earlier a Slytherin of the highest order as Mrs Woodhull suggested. I’d say his son however was a clear Gryffindor from personal conduct alone, which might suggest in the context of a slanted narrative that he is a ‘good’ person. Brave, brash and adventurous I’ll allow, but politically? He is more conservative than his father, dangerously so—”

“Why would that automatically denote an absence of morality?” Peggy demanded.

“It wouldn’t if Europe didn’t have a terrible habit of letting history repetition and a number of political parties who’s programmes echo themes of twentieth century nationalism,” Simcoe answered calmly. “It is hearsay, but I rather trust the source on this – sometime last fall the lad tortured and killed a number of children who had been smuggled into the UK illegally, paying their passage by swallowing a number of balloons. He narrowly escaped court martial and carries on as though the escaped never existed for him. Even sent me a Christmas gift as though,” he shook his head. “I’m really not one for politics of any sort. I suppose if more men were honest, however, the world would cease spinning.”

“Nor am I, one for politics, that is,” Mary smiled. Aberdeen saw in its warmth the penthouse she had heard Hewlett speak of on occasion and imagined meeting Misters Townsend, Mulligan and Cato at some point in the future when she had an Upper East Side zip code and no reason for them to question her on Judge Woodhull’s supposed collusion, Arnold’s disappearance or anything else they imagined happening in a town where nothing did. The city, she thought, the city had real scandals. It had sensations so numerous that those which claimed her friends here would be forgotten as quickly as her love for a waiter cum plain clothes policeman. Time moved faster in New York. Life went on. Peggy Shippen, she decided, had so much to learn.

“Maybe it was just hearsay then,” Peggy challenged.

“To put it into your chosen constraints,” he smirked, “Hufflepuffs are tediously hard workers but loyal to a fault. The woman who told me had every possibility to profit from this knowledge and every means of verifying its validity, but she is godmother to the man’s natural child and sided with her heart … black though it may otherwise be.”

“Wait,” Mary frowned. “This monster of whom you speak has a family and could still bring himself to kill a kid?”

Simcoe held his hands up in surrender. “I’m only saying that ‘what house are you?’ is an awful determinant for any question of character.” Turning his attention back to Aberdeen and Peggy, he added, “As is ‘Democrat’ or ‘Republican.’” Maybe he had a point.

“I see why you left London,” Mary scoffed, seeming to agree.
Simcoe’s face fell unexpectedly. “In all likelihood,” he said softly as though he spoke to no one, “I’ll be returning prior to the start of the second fiscal quarter. I’m past due a promotion, you see.”

‘Slytherin,’ Peggy mouthed.

Aberdeen pressed her lips together and took a quick evaluation of her company and the clock. If they left now, Mary might have a few minutes in which to convince Mr Simcoe to stay. “It’s getting late,” she said. “Peggy, why don’t I help you unpack and we can house-sort all the world’s leaders.” She looked back to Mary who looked elated. Aberdeen hoped that this owed more to her suggestion than Simcoe’s statement. She hoped her exit would be an invitation for John to help her boss into her bedchamber. She hoped that Mr Hewlett was so entertained with himself and the games he stupidly played with acronymed organisations that his continued absence would serve as not to rob his sometimes-friend’s attention away from the woman he had come to see.

“Will you write me a poem sometime?” Mary asked. Simcoe wished she had been so kind as to wait until he reached the top of the stairwell. Her hundred pounds suddenly felt far heavier, that, or he could not support her weight alongside that of his heart. Trying not to show the sudden strain, he glanced down at her otherwise kindly face and found an expectation he felt hesitant to name.

“Sure,” he swallowed. ‘I should tell you … that song ‘At the Weekend’ – I wrote it first for a girl around seven years after she first challenged me that I couldn’t. I suppose it took me that long to miss her.” What he did not say was that he missed Mary whenever she was not at his side, a feeling that manifested tenfold with her touch. He wanted to have her. He wanted to help her. He had tried to do both and failed miserably in both respects. Mary wanted to placate him with short smiles and other hints at filtration, imagining him not to be a proper gentleman, imagining that he would not have protected her without. Perhaps he was not that which he strived to define himself being, perhaps he was every bit the demon those who ought to have loved him most seemed to consider him.

Perhaps it was their fault. More probably, it was his.

“Why are you so embarrassed?” Mary asked.

“I’m not,” Simcoe answered. He wondered what she saw in his that she mistook for a blush.

“John,” she seemed to tease, “you are more nervous holding me now than … well -” she stopped, her light expression growing serious.

Simcoe supposed it was true that he had not been half so nervous the night he led into the basement of DeJong’s expecting to find Arnold’s corpse.

“I had an expectation,” he said. “That night. Even though it was not as we feared, even though what we feared was worse than … I had an expectation around which to acclimate myself. That song I wrote, it reminds me that there are some things you can never adjust to or prepare yourself for. It is not my best work and I never intended it to become public. I wrote it in an hour, an odd moment of clarity in which I realised that I resented the subject for all the wrong reasons. I feel that may be a common theme, and I am not sure what to do with it.”

As horrified as he had been when Miss Shippen admitted in a recitation that she found something within the subject to which she could relate, he took some mild measure of comfort in the
recognition that his feelings had once been familiar. Everything he now wanted was a contradiction unto itself. What pained him most was the manner in which his clandestine and conflicting hopes seemed to materialise simultaneously. He found in his heart the malevolence he had so fiercely denied.

The worst of it was it was not just with Edmund. He remember the short tirade he had directed towards Ban Tarleton over supper, the realization that for all the man did to further his downward spiral he would happily trade any of his characteristics for those he freely condemned. Ban had gotten to fight for Queen and Country; he had seen and survived the worst of human nature, had committed atrocities of his own and yet he could still meet the world with a mirth of which he was unashamed. He remained close with ex-lovers and recovered friendships anyone else would have lost in a fight. He was brutal, often broke and yet somehow beloved by all. All, Simcoe noted, except him. Everything Tarleton was and everything he had provoked his hatred, above all, because Simcoe could not remember what he had said that afternoon in hospital clearly, what had reduced ten years of comradery, however strained, to short, slightly threatening texts, themselves seldom sent.

Simcoe could barely bring himself to reply. He wished this came from confidence rather than doubt. He wished there was dignity to the distance at which he held the world, that he, like Ellie, simply felt he had nothing to prove. He wished he had Gene’s tragic and tireless drive for acceptance and approval if these ideals could not be obtained.

He wished he remembered what he said that afternoon, or why he found it so difficult to speak.

He could not fathom how Effie had found it in herself to raise an army of her own rivals in his defence after he had seemingly dealt her such a fatal blow. Asking would prove only another point of contention. He was begrudgingly grateful for the unexpected intervention. He was bitter for having received it.

He expected no different from Mary.

He expected nothing at all.

He remained amicable with Sally when he saw her around, things having ended without effort when she ceased searching for some point of redemption within him. He would go as far as to say that he was friends with Anna, purely for the reason that they had never been as close as he once would have liked. Jordan had abandoned him in his hour of need, something Simcoe found as dishonourable as the idea that the others had not.

At nine o’clock on a Sunday evening, Edmund Hewlett was in a police station, presumably answering for his crimes. Simcoe had never loathed himself more.

He had spent more than half his life hoping that Hewlett would face a punishment he felt was long overdue. He hated him for abandoning him in the safe house, to the shoot out that still woke him from slumber and played tricks on his active mind, stimulated by triggers that could not be touched but were pulled all the same. Simcoe wanted his oldest enemy imprisoned. He wanted him to suffer the hope and stress of appealing his sentence, for desperation to be met with consistent denial. He wanted to himself tie the noose, load the pistol or, more probably, issue the injection for what he considered to have been a capital crime. He wanted Hewlett to meet his eyes in his final moments. He wanted him to beg. He wanted to take back the ability to blink which the prodigal price had stolen from him so long ago.

As long as he had amused his demons with the dream of Hewlett’s demise, however, there had always been part of him that hoped he would come back. He had hoped that the lad who had once
led him into battle was indeed as brave as Simcoe had initially assumed when the world and its brutality had been less real for him than the heroes in the books of his boyhood. He remembered every bump in the road in the back of a van blackened by cardboard-blanketed windows as being his promised salvation. Hewlett, he assured himself, had surely come back for him.

He carried this sentiment through every fight he had been in at school. When he finally met his missing saviour again - though a pathetic sliver of his former self, or at least of the attributes which Simcoe had ascribed of his own accord - it felt as though some prophesy had been fulfilled. Hewlett protected him from being punished for an evil not of his own hands.

True to form, something had then changed Hewlett’s mind on the matter. Again, Simcoe had found himself in a room with no windows, no answers, no hope.

Under similar circumstance, DI Tallmadge had offered him that which Ferguson had denied a decade prior - an opportunity to understand Edmund’s sudden decision for what it was. Simcoe had deprived himself the humiliation. Hewlett has since only spoken of how sorry he was, with words or without. He felt sorry for him, which was worse than any other atrocity of war. John Graves Simcoe’s closest friend was his most bitter enemy.

With every turn of the clock’s short hand, it became more and more clear that for reasons he felt he should never fully comprehend even if he should learn them; fate had finally bestowed all of that which he had so long wished. Hewlett was being punished through an attempt at protection. Contradictions, Simcoe cursed himself, ought to cancel one another. He longed for the animosity he had so long felt, a lighter burden by far than the feelings of affection and anguish he now carried in a confused bundle.

He laid Mary Woodhull on her bed, made a few gestures at her comfort and hoped for another confrontation with her husband. Something, anything, to get him out of her room and out of his head. He felt he could go for a round with anyone, he longed for a lapse of control. Looking at his raw knuckles redder from the room’s slight chill, he again wondered if he was indeed every bit the monster he had been named in anger and jest.

“Are you alright?” Mary asked.

He was not.

He wanted to have her. He wanted to help her. She wanted no such thing.

“I’m fine,” he answered in a voice he was vaguely sure was not his own.

“Will you stay until I fall asleep?”

“I don’t think that would be appropriate. Sleep well, Mary,” he said as he lightly kissed her forehead.

“I love you, John,” she fluttered.

He pretended not to have heard her. It would make it easier for them both to pretend the lie had gone unspoken come morning. Love, he decided, was always deceitful in the end. It was the grief that had taken his father’s place. It was his mother’s rejection. It was the envy and confusion in which he considered all of his former friends. It was Hewlett, whom he hated, giving a false confession – perhaps in a final act of vengeance in a cycle that had continued far too long.

There was no worse punishment and no worse crime.
“Sleep well,” he said as he shut the door, matching its squeak. He wanted to have her. He wanted to help her. He wanted a fight to make him forget.

At seven o’clock on Sunday evening, DS Hatice Yilmaz was informed by her direct superior that there had been a death in the family. She felt her small, slight frame crippled by the phrasing, her eyes increasingly heavy with tears to dry to truly form and fall. Not today, her mind pleaded with itself. Please, not today.

She could tell by the package in DI Tallmadge’s hands that there was no use in praying. Everything she had done to mentally prepare herself for this eventuality seemed in vain. She had been awake too long. She felt she might break.

“I’ve arranged a substitute,” Ben said, almost stoic.

“It doesn’t feel right,” Yilmaz replied. “Why today, Ben?”

Hatice Yilmaz still lived at home in a small flat with her parents and two sisters at thirty-one. She had never known another but sometimes felt as though she was a stranger to the same walls that had been marked with her height at the start of every school year from five to fifteen. She was never home and yet she could not leave, most of her salary eaten by her siblings’ college tuition.

Sometimes, it felt like a waste of money.

After spending Saturday in the office pouring over evidence between bouts of struggling to understand the accent of a Scottish colleague who seemed to speak with a pen in his mouth, she had come in after midnight, only to be woken two hours later when Emine, drunk, stumbled in from a concert. Hatice had been horrified to learn she had been in attendance. She heard the scratching sound of a key that could not find its slot, hoping that her parents were undisturbed by the same commotion she tiptoed to the door, opening it as slowly and silently as possible.

‘I saw your boss in his squad car with Caleb Brewster,’ Emine slurred upon entry, half-laughing. ‘I guess you were right about him after all.’

‘Shut-up!’ Hatice hissed in return. Their father worked in the intensive care unit in rotating shifts. If he was due back in three hours, he would not shut his eyes again, and would likely order the exhausted detective sergeant to make coffee for her sister and for him, leading a lecture on life choices down a road to a country he had left a lifetime before. If he, however, had just gone to bed, he would likely stay there, twisting in his sheets until he woke his wife that she might share in his worries. ‘Hatice works too much; Emine stays out too late; Atatürk did not die of liver failure after years of alcohol abuse so that Madison could wear a headscarf.’ She could hear it now, and would likely hear it whispered all week until tea could turn their doubts into a heated debate with all three of their daughters.

Hatice saw enough in fighting on the Arnold case to invite that energy home with her. She wished she could leave the office behind altogether, but Ben Tallmadge had been cast by the nightly news cycle as the villain in their nightmare of a narrative.

Naturally, Emine and Madison had asked her the same series of questions that they had heard on Nancy Grace whilst her mother offered her the switchblade she had purchased the first time she heard the name Sarah Livingston. Annoyed by the inquiry, she had told her them all while she did
not consider the inspector as having a goodly amount of respect for the fairer sex, it would do her larger complaints no credit if she criticised him over crimes of which he had been acquitted.

‘Anyway,’ she added when they respectively seemed dissatisfied, ever livid, and ready to make a gigantic meal as an excuse to visit the office. ‘I think he is gay. Whole thing with Sarah, I think he didn’t deny the accusation of sex outright because his dad is a reverend or something. One of those fire and brimstone types.’ They nodded in unison. Most of experience the sisters Yilmaz had with faith based fears had occurred early enough in their youth that such shames had been all but forgotten. Their post Nine-Eleven expression of religion involved telling angry Americans of northern European heritage that regardless of the day’s buzzword, it had nothing to do with Islam. Since the systematic, brutal killings of homosexuals by authoritarian regimes in the middle east had nothing to do with Islam according to the agreed upon narrative existent between American Muslims, no one in the Yilmaz household had any moral problem with what Tallmadge did or denied himself of. The topic was dropped, Hatice had hoped, for good.

Would that she should enjoy such fortunes, she thought as she dragged the girl smelling of cigarettes and stale beer into their shared bedroom.

‘Hatice – phone,’ Madison mumbled, curling herself into a tighter ball as Emine prattled on. She hoped it was work. She could not ethically listen to any more, nor could not tell her sister that Caleb Brewster was a witness and potential suspect in the Arnold case.

‘Shh,’ she hissed again. The more she knew, the more likely it would be that some detail would force her to report the conflict of interest to the commissioner. What little support the Special Crimes team had in conducting their inquiry would vanish.

Looking at her email as her sister continued to ignore her request to cease speaking about her boss and his witness, Hatice found that her unit was receiving considerably less aid from their foreign allies than she had gone to bed two hours earlier anticipating.

Ferguson claimed that he did not forward his files. His explanation for how they found their way into her inbox was suspect, but Hatice had to satisfy herself that these in fact were the DI’s private detailing of the investigation that had halted his career. As she read the email over, she found an unexpected parallel between the personal problems of a colleague in Edinburg and the professional setbacks Arnold’s disappearance had inflicted on Tallmadge.

>>Sir,<< she texted, forwarding Ferguson’s retraction. >>I have my doubts to the validity of this claim, but it might be possible that there is more to your removal from the pharma investigation than ‘prioritisation.’<<

He did not reply. But then it was four o’clock in the morning, and according to Emine, he was in the lustful embrace of a witness with a few priors in the front seat of his unmarked squad car.

The way Ben looked when their paths finally crossed fifteen hours later in the observation room seemed to confirm the rumours. He had spent most of the day at the hospital with Baker and looked as though he had not slept the night before. He should have, by all accounts, looked awful, but Ben Tallmadge was smiling, and not simply in the way one mirrored the mouths of others in a marked effort towards manners.

“We knew this was coming,” he sighed as he handed her an oversized cup from a bodega with Greek lettering along with a handful of condensed milk single shots and countless packets of sugar, Splenda, and other assorted sweeteners that designated themselves in a wide spectrum of colours.
“I didn’t know what you liked,” Tallmadge added. As much as she appreciated the gesture, the sailor in dire need of caffeine could not help but wonder in that moment, as she had done on many prior, how her boss could ever have been promoted before her. She knew the coffee preferences of everyone on her team and remembered those of most suspects whom she had interrogated on multiple occasions. Jefferson drank flavoured lattés. Carlos preferred tea. Rogers wanted to know why ‘Irish’ was not an option, which, frankly, Yilmaz also questioned at times.

“I like my coffee like I like my men, Ben,” she told him, trying to feign a sense of humour the day had all but robbed from her.

“Um … creamy?”

“From the fucking office,” she sniffed. Emptying two packets of sugar or sweetener without regard to which heath craze she was or was not participating in into the now-lukewarm liquid, she added with some measure of remorse, “It just don’t feel right. Not today. Disrespectful, this.” She looked down at her beverage, hating outside influence more than she had when she had read the early morning’s troubling retraction.

“Drink,” Tallmadge ordered. “You need it and it is what she would have wanted. We knew it was coming for months.”

“She put up a good fight,” Yilmaz agreed. “You should talk to your dad about officiating the memorial.”

“It has already been scheduled for Tuesday morning. That is when sanitation is coming for the removal. Laurence up in HR has already sent an email. She is to be awarded full honours.”

“Are we just going to like, throw a flag over her as they wheel her out – thank you for your service to this beautiful office of ours?” Yilmaz tried to smile.

“A city flag, maybe,” Tallmadge answered. With the protests going on I don’t think that it would be appropriate to decorate a coffee machine with the Stars and Stripes.”

“We can still fire blanks, right?”

“It is in the email, as long as we don’t fire in the general direction of anyone with a sign, we have the ordnance to mourn the loss of our automated coffee machine as we would any other fallen officer. Did you know she has been in the line of service since the seventies?”

“God, nearly fifty years on the force.”

Tallmadge sighed, walked over to the corner water cooler and poured a goodly amount into his own cup, mimicking the quality that the beloved machine had produced for the past five years. “We will never be able to replace or properly replicate her. But I need you to drink up, regardless. You look terrible.”

“Always what a lady longs to hear,” Yilmaz replied.

“I didn’t mean that in any way,” Tallmadge apologised. “Having approached Simcoe all wrong, I just need you at your best. I have a theory about getting Hewlett that I admit I’d find difficult to execute.”

There it was. “If this is about the files, Ben I am so sorry -”

“Hey, hey no,” he interrupted, lightly touching her shoulder in a way he intended as a comfort.
“You did your job. None of us are responsible for what happens on the other side of the Atlantic. But something about it bothers me … If you confessed to extortion and attempted murder, what would compel you to repeat this after an acquittal was granted?”

“Are you suggesting you think Ferguson sent the original email, had second thoughts hours later and reported the matter to IT? I have had that thought, too.”

“But why would he put what remains of his career in jeopardy?” Tallmadge squinted.

“Revenge?”

Ben walked to the window, looking in on Edmund Hewlett who had been waiting for twenty minutes to give a statement. His teammates seemed to have more patience and understanding over the course of the afternoon. As Yilmaz wondered aloud if the man expected special or prefer entry treatment, Tallmadge, suddenly not seeming to be watching the suspect at all asked, “Did you by chance read the transcript of the character statement Ferguson took from Tarleton?”

She had read the files in their entirety six or seven times. Tarleton’s testimony stood out in both the effect it had on the interrogation at large, and for the difficulty Yilmaz assumed someone unfamiliar with the institutions the then-nineteen-year-old cited in his assessment would have in reading it.

“Are you asking for a translation or have you been poking around the Interpol database as well?”

“Not only,” Ben grinned. “Here, this was taken from the quote unquote evidence Hewlett planted in Judge Woodhull’s study,” he said, handing her a photograph in a plastic evidence bag.

“Germany 2006,” Yilmaz read aloud from the back.

“I saw a similar photo posted to the Daily Mail’s Twitter feed earlier,” he told her, “I asked Sanchez to follow up on that end. You know how kids are with social media.”

“Sir, she might not need to. According to Paris, Tarleton roomed with Simcoe for seven years, served under Arnold in Iraq in an operation that ended up crippling him in a way that cost him his command, was recently court martialed for cruel and unusual conduct, gave a character statement that lead Ferguson to obtain a full confession form Eleanor Hewlett … Plus, do you happen to know where he is now?”

Tallmadge nodded. “As of this morning under house arrest at the British Embassy in Washington. Apparently, he told this same Eleanor to relay to DI Ferguson that he planned to frame Major Najma Abboud for Arnold’s disappearance. I got a follow up on it late this afternoon; evidently, no such action ever took place. The feds found Abboud in a Kroger parking lot completely unaware. I don’t know what his game was here … but I think your Edmund in there might. Abboud is engaged to Selah Strong. I imagine the two have met at least once.”

“I can find out, Sir. Speaking of games … are you telling me to play Hewlett the way Tarleton alluded that Ferguson ought a decade ago?”

“No … I have no idea what he was on about,” Tallmadge confessed. “But I think it is possible Hewlett has been trying to point us in his direction. I think it is also possible that Tarleton is the reason we can’t get our hands on André’s research or Hewlett’s medical files. He has at least restricted access to both. The embassy was willing to cooperate this morning. Both Hewlett and I put in requests independently of one another. Then Abboud happened –or didn’t - and everything changed. Cornwallis won’t give me a reason at the moment and I am confident that by the time he
does it will be a well-constructed lie.”

Yilmaz shook her head. “It doesn’t make sense. We know from Hewlett himself what his government hopes we won’t see, or rather, what won’t become public knowledge.”

“What if that is not it?” he boss challenged. “I have every reason to think there is something more to this story. Cornwallis knew that I knew this morning about Hewlett’s genetic illness as well as his recent suicide attempt. I’ve the clearance to view sensitive documentation and nothing in my service record to suggest that I’ve even in the past shared information with subordinates that they do not have the qualifications to view. He was willing to help, said it would take about an hour … which I know means nothing in Washington. Five passed and I ring him back, suddenly he is evasive in excess. Honestly, it was Burr all over.”

“So we can assume he has spent the whole day with Tarleton -”

“Yeah. But what could this bastard say after blatantly obstructing a criminal investigation that would change Cornwallis’ mind so completely?” Ben grimaced.

“Has he been charged?” Yilmaz inquired. “Coordinate with the feds -”

“You know we will get no support.”

“Then we will know we are on to something,” she paused. “It could work you know, what Tarleton said about how Liverpool fans deal with perceived betrayals. I’ve got something in mind. Let me at this?” she said, nodding toward Hewlett.

“Wait,” Tallmadge instructed. “I need you to carry this out more like a conversation than an interrogation. Hewlett is prepared for confrontation. Judging alone from the extent of the sketches he made of Anna Strong over the past few years, I’d guess that normal human interaction feels foreign to him. I’m no expert, but these don’t seem to have been drawn by the hand of someone who knew her. We took a similar approach with the Nancy Smith tapes – when you talk to him, just talk to him. You are good at that kind of thing. I’m not in the right state.”

“More coffee?” Yilmaz asked, offering what remained of her own.

“Were that only an option … No, finish. I just had a rough night.”

“Bad date?” she asked before she could stop herself.

“How do you do that?” her boss blinked.

“Emine told me.”

“Unbelievable. How did she get in there – how old is she?” he demanded with a concern Yilmaz had not expected.

“Twenty-four? She should not have been there and I told her not to go but you know how ‘kids’ are. I think you have my sisters confused. Madison – whom may parents hoped to give a better life by an American white-girl name is the Hajibi, Emine the closet punk. They are both old enough to drink now though.”

“In that case I am never going out again,” Ben sighed.

“That bad?”
He hesitated, likely answering only to afford her confidence in the coming interview. “I took Caleb Brewster back to mine and he gave me an off the record run down about the Setauket social structure. He was trying to find out if Simcoe and Mrs Woodhull are having an affair.”

“Are you going to call things off?”

“For the duration of this case,” he insisted. The sex, Yilmaz guessed from the forced surety in his tone, had probably been worth it. Despite all circumstance, he looked happy speaking Brewster’s name.

“Ben … I am not going to do anything with this information. Insofar as I can tell, everyone involved in this investigation is in bed with everyone else. Why not get in on it? No judgement from me. Personally if I had my pick I’d go for the bassist but -”

“You know Robert Townsend is an undercover FBI agent, right?” he laughed.

“Are you saying I have a type?” she winked. “Your secret is safe … just don’t you know, handle things the way you typically handle things. Just have a conversation,” she mimicked, adding, “You are better at that kind of thing than you think.”

“Really?”

“Fuck,” Yilmaz said, “this has been one of the worst days of my professional life. I fucked up the Peggy Shippen press conference to the extent that my Imam had to issue a statement saying that FC Arsenal has nothing to do with Islam. I got two sentences out of Abigail Ingram before she told me I had to charge her if I wanted to continue the conversation. Baker under-estimated either his or Simcoe’s strength and would up in hospital and I haven’t had a chance to organize flowers. I don’t know what to make of the evidence from an older case or the retraction Ferguson followed it up with. And on top of all that, our loyal office coffee machine gave up the ghost. But I feel better, after talking to you I really do. You going to be in here?”

“Yeah I’ve got you.” He replied, looking back to the awkward Brit pulling his from side to side beneath him. It was not nerves, Yilmaz noted. Not yet.

“Tell me, Mr. Hewlett, are you a religious man?” she asked upon entry. Bright, bubbly, affording the suspect and the hour underserved cheer.

“Excuse me?” Hewlett barked, completely thrown.

“Your foot … you keep rubbing it back and forth so,” Yilmaz answered, still smiling. “Sorry I – in the mosque shoes aren’t worn and there is this idea that suffering from athlete’s foot is a sign of piety, that normal creams do nothing to alleviate the itch because one is so often attending to prayer. But no … that’s not you, is it? Your problem is that you think yourself entitled to choose your own penance.”

“Um.”

“Did it occur to you that you are subjecting Anna to your fungus?” she suggested. “I have a bit of experience with this. You want to rent one of those deep carpet cleaners for your bedroom. Use a bleach-based disinfectant for your tub, throw out your old shower flip-flops and use a standard
cream until the infection goes away. But I don’t need to be telling you this, do I?”

“I’m … not a Muslim. I just … apparently I need to visit a drug store.” Yilmaz wondered how long he had had this problem and why he left it unaddressed.

“Apparently,” she agreed. “In terms of tidying up a place though, you might be giving me a tip or two. Tell me, how long did it take you to disinfect DeJong’s Tavern?”

“I didn’t,” he answered flatly. Frowning.

“I’m having a bit of trouble believing that. You see, your leased room was spotless aside from some surface litter I suppose you left to be a distraction.”

“Ah – no, no I assure you, Sergeant Yildiz,” he began to stammer.

“Yilmaz,” she corrected, surprised he had come as close as he did.

“Forgive me I -”

“It’s fine, you are an astronomer and it is a more common name,” she said briskly, explaining ‘yildiz’ meant ‘star’ when he again looked confused. “It is me who should be saying sorry,” she insisted. “Honestly, you know, there is not a lot that I get to look forward to in this job, but today I almost had the chance to talk to an author my mates and I are all currently obsessed with, and I think I am half having the conversation lack of manpower resources robbed me of earlier. You familiar with ‘Turn’ by any chance?”

Edmund Hewlett’s odd face twisted in repulsion. “The … ah, colonial melodrama Abigail is in the process of penning? I was not aware the work had any avid readers.”

“Oh, I am sure that isn’t true,” Yilmaz piped. “They were talking about it on a few podcasts this past week.”

“I don’t really … listen to podcasts?” he squinted. “Is that even a thing?”

“It is. So is ‘Turn.’ I somehow assumed you would be more of a fan.”

Hewlett shook his head, stating lightly, “Ah … it is a bit awkward. One of my mates was getting ready to move in with the author but things ended … partially over the way she chose to portray a figure ostentatiously based on him.”

“So she is basing it on real people,” Yilmaz tried to confirm, her eyes widening in artificial excitement.

Hewlett grew silent.

“You know who she reminds me of?” she suggested breezily, “Orhan Pamuk. My friends and I refer to the work as ‘My Name is Redcoat’,” she laughed at her own joke. “‘Snow-tauket’ kind of works too, but not as well. Sorry, I imagine that means nothing to you.”

“Orhan Pamuk is a Nobel laureate. Why do you assume me to be unfamiliar with his work?” Hewlett scoffed.

“Ever read anything of his aside from ‘Istanbul’?”

“No,” he admitted.
“The way he writes his protagonists in prose follows this formula that I, and evidently Ms Ingram as well I should think, see reflected in your character. There is always this guy who falls helplessly in love with a woman outside – and often below – his social standing, often in a relationship with a much more dynamic suitor, a Simcoe, if you will.” Hewlett rubbed at his temples. Yilmaz could not tell if he was troubled or terribly annoyed by the comparison.

“Anyway, in short order, he makes her the subject of his artistic expression,” she said as she pulled forward a few sketchbooks, flipping through various impressions of Anna when Hewlett crossed his arms, refusing to touch them. “It never ends well,” Yilmaz said as she slammed the volume closed. “Pamuk, I mean. But tell me, how long have you been in love with Anna Strong?”

“Love? True love? Since I’ve had the pleasure of knowing her … a few weeks. Before that was just … that was private. Detective, sorry, I don’t understand how this pertains to your case. I intended to give an account of the match -”

“Fine. Let’s talk about football. I understand you are a Liverpool fan, is that right? Maybe Everton?”

“Ah -”

“If I had to pick an English side I’d probably go for Spurs, to be honest,” she chirped.

“Well thank God you don’t.”

“I know right? Let’s stick in Merseyside. You’re Liverpool then, yeah? Sorry, that again brings me back to this damn novel I can’t get off my mind. You’ll indulge me? See it isn’t Ingram and Pamuk who do this exclusively in terms of structure – I mean, let’s face it, the same could be said of George R. R. and countless others. Maybe it is just modern fiction in general that kind of reminds me of Klopp’s side – stacking everyone up front and giving the absolute worst player all the free kicks?”

“I ah, I never made that connection,” Hewlett replied, nodding slightly in agreeance with the comparison.

“You know what else I read recently that really reminds me of a lot of the themes your friend’s ex likes to incorporate?” Yilmaz asked. Hewlett leaned forward, seemingly engaged.

She put a manila folder in front of him and directed his attention to a decade-old injury report. His wide mouth came unhinged. “Yeah … Mr Hewlett, why don’t you tell me about that game this morning?”

“How on Earth did you obtain this?” he demanded.

“You know I’m not sure,” Yilmaz answered, mimicking his expression and matching his energy. “See, I went to bed last night thinking I had gotten DI Ferguson to capitulate. Come to find this morning that he is under the impression your sister Eleanor somehow had it sent from his office account. It seems farfetched, I know. Ignoring all of the reasons he would have to lie about this, can you think of any reason why the girl he once named his primary suspect would want this specifically in my hands?”

“Um -” Hewlett stared. His eyes shifted to the right, an indication, according to one of the books written by Dr Martha Dandridge, that he was in the process of inventing some fabrication.

“Let me try that another way,” Yilmaz broke into his creative mind’s jumbled process. “Do you know if Eleanor is still in contact with this Banastre Tarleton?”
Hewlett straightened. “I have not heard that name in years, but she – Eleanor - is the godmother of one of his little girls,” he answered after a moment’s reflection. “In a – in a loose sense. Ah, I mean, Ban isn’t the biological father or even legal guardian. He was, and maybe still is, involved with a slightly older woman who had a young daughter when the two met. She, ah – this Mary Robinson – the same one you are thinking of,” he clarified, “she had a husband, who I suppose is the father as far as the law is concerned, but to the extent of my knowledge–most of this being from yellow papers - the two were estranged for years at this point. I’ve heard conflicting rumours as to the girl’s actual parentage, Prince Harry seeming less likely than John Terry given the timeline … it is um. Complicated, to put it lightly. Frankly, to everyone’s surprise Ban has proven himself – at least in that singular respect. Both of his ‘daughters’ have exceedingly wealthy benefactors. I don’t – I don’t know if the two, that is, if he and Eleanor have any personal contact outside of this relationship. She is friends with the mum at any rate and coaches at the girl’s fencing club, at least when she is in London. It would be, odd, shall we say, to imagine her and Ban not speaking but … well I know better than anyone how Eleanor holds on to grudges. I really don’t know if the two remain friends. But I have not had much contact with either for years.”

“Because of what Mr Tarleton said about Liverpool?” Yilmaz asked.

Hewlett frowned, perplexed. “The club or the city? Either way – what hasn’t he said? I am sorry but how is this relevant?” he again implored.

“Oh,” Yilmaz perked up, “he gave DI Ferguson a suggestion regarding how he might better conduct his investigation into you and Mr Simcoe and Miss Hewlett and this blood-thirsty horse of yours. Got her to confess and you to, well … to confirm most of what she said.”

“No I … no. Ferguson tricked the both of us in an effort to – no,” he argued, distressed by information Yilmaz took to be foreign to his ears. “Ban and Ellie were the best of friends all throughout their childhoods, I can’t imagine -”

“Yeah. He tricked her,” Yilmaz said as she slid the corresponding confession to Hewlett. He read it quickly and then again with a great deal of concentration. “Here is Tarleton’s testimony for comparison,” Yilmaz offered.

“I don’t understand.”

“Was there a fall out?”

“Maybe,” Hewlett searched, “but years later and it is of no relevance.”

“Why don’t you tell me what you know and I’ll decide if it is relevant or isn’t.”

“Why don’t you tell me why?”

“You see the thing is Mr Hewlett, my boss suspects that you are actively trying to make us look in Tarleton’s direction – a revenge scheme of your own, perhaps?”

“I have no idea what you mean,” he insisted. “I honestly had no idea of any of this until -”

“Again, I have a difficult time believing that on its face,” Yilmaz raised her finger, interrupting him. “My unit found, among various other scraps you hid in your landlord’s legal study, this picture. That is him, isn’t it, and John Simcoe?”

“I – ah, it is coincidence.” Hewlett explained while offering none.

“There are no coincidences, Mr Hewlett, not in crime. So either you are telling me you hid this
photograph along with what seems to have been the rest of the contents of your rubbish bin in Judge Woodhull’s office, in clear view of his son Abraham to distract uniform while you … what could you have done in the two hours you had us waste, Mr Hewlett?” she mused. “It seems rather strange to me as long as I am on it, that someone as … methodically private as yourself would be absent while we rummaged through your possessions. In your attempt to trash the room, we found that underneath the cups most surface areas were as impeccably tidy as we found the bar, curious – for someone who claims not to have cleaned it. Or did you think we would find the jersey you obviously wanted us to find and focus our attention on that – which again returns me to my original question. Why point us to Banastre Tarleton?”

“I don’t – I didn’t -”

“We have him under house arrest at the British Embassy. He flew to DC midweek to some national security council or another. Benedict Arnold was the chair until he became the subject of the investigation you seem to be derailing – judging from your expression, without reason or cause. I could imagine Tarleton having motive – he served under Arnold on an assignment that cost him his hand and made him ineligible for active duty. Far as I can tell from what we have of his service record, he left school without a degree or any other professional qualification. His commission is set to expire in a few months and while I am no military expert, I imagine he will have difficulties obtaining another given his recent disciplinary record. It looks to me that he was friends with Simcoe, at least in two-thousand six. The day before he boards a plane to America, the man essentially responsible for the upcoming reality that he will no longer be able to provide for himself, not to mention his two illegitimate children, disappears under mysterious circumstances. Hours later, the two blokes he has a pre-established history of trying to help the law take down become the primary suspects in our investigation. So motive. Possible opportunity. But what did you do to piss him off so much?” she asked, adding, “It could be that he has been trying to set you up as well.”

“I don’t know,” Hewlett insisted, still completely perplexed. “I did not even know he was on this side of the globe.”

“Haven’t you lied to me enough?”

“I ah, that is … ages ago, he asked my younger sister to marry him. It upset her enough that she came by my flat unannounced. Told me, um – told me what happened with a thousand and one reasons why she couldn’t say yes, which, to my rather romantic mind, seemed to suggest that she could not bear to say no. I told her to accept. She didn’t. I hardly had contact to either party before and haven’t since. I misread the situation,” he answered darkly, shifting, “With Simcoe it is … slightly more recent, but you’ll have to interrogate him for details. I wish you all the luck in doing so, truly. But it doesn’t have anything directly to do with Tarleton; he is just one of the many friends John lost in a heated exchange. I don’t know how to help you. I haven’t thought of the lad in years and this all comes rather as a shock. I’m glad Ellie didn’t take my advice after all.”

He offered nothing conclusive, but he needn’t. Tallmadge’s goal with this interview was simply to throw him off balance before providing pen and paper in the chance that his delayed arrival was due to hours spent practicing the statement he was planning to write. Ben wanted to show Hewlett as incapable of delivering a written sentence void of small linguistic errors, countering the text messages he believed Simcoe to be sending to himself via Hewlett’s mobile device. The two seemed involved in some sort of corporate fraud, a crime that Hewlett confessed to having committed as a minor. Provided the team could catch him in a lie, he could be easily persuaded into telling the truth, or enough of it, thinking that in so he was protecting Simcoe and whomever else in the process.
Tallmadge planned to gauge federal interest, either Hamilton would be grateful for the cooperation or he would reveal his collusion. Her boss, seeming reasonably confident that the FBI’s supposed aid was intentionally interfering with his search into Arnold’s disappearance, was devising a means of using his key witnesses against the forces who seemed to hope Arnold would remain unfound. Yilmaz could understand the political motivation – with the senator unable to make a mockery of his own platform via Twitter, his defence bill stood a far better shot at becoming policy. But Hatice Yilmaz’s branch of public service dealt with enforcing existing laws rather than gambling on proposed chances with the lives of innocent men.

And Ben was right. Hewlett struggled to hold his own in a basic exchange. He would bend or he would break, either way, his capitulation would provide enough of what Special Crimes needed to continue unhindered.

“Then let’s return to your room,” Yilmaz smiled. “Friday. You trashed it before we came, or tried to.”

“It was not intentional,” Hewlett sighed. “Abigail your … favourite new writer, as I said she broke up with Jordan Akinbode on Thursday – something my fiancée and her friends tried to sort with junk food and a teen oriented drama series. I went to the shooting range … that is -”

At this, she raised her eyebrows. “Which shooting range, Mr Hewlett?”

“A Walmart in New Jersey,” he admitted. “I came back, I -”

“After you were told not to cross state lines?”

“Jordan and Abigail had been together for ten years, needs must!” he insisted.

“So why the Everton jersey?”

“I wasn’t thinking of Tarleton, truly – I had all but forgotten he so much as existed. I don’t imagine John was either, you see, I, that is we had been in a bit of a row as you are well aware … having come with DI Tallmadge to his to take a claim -”

“Which you refused to give.”

“Ah … yes.”

“My clothes were in the laundry and John had that from his school days which he lent me because he is given to light sadism?” he suggested, continuing, “I don’t know. It had nothing to do with a fight he was once in with someone else.” Hewlett spoke with acidity. Yilmaz wondered if this was due to the row whose details were in doubt, or, borrowing from the man’s own sworn statement, a ‘perceived betrayal’ on the part of Tarleton, whose name he now seemed hesitant to speak.

“No, you and Simcoe have something special, you do,” she tried.

“I should like to think,” Hewlett defended.

Envy? Yilmaz wonder, phrasing her assumption as, “And the photo, why not give that to Simcoe?”

“Because I knew what he would do with it – hide it in some crack or crease or crevasse for all of time, the way he does with any pleasant memory he makes. You’ve see his flat. Most model homes have more intimate detail.”

“So you are saying Simcoe hides from happiness?”
“I am not entirely sure he knows what happiness is,” Hewlett shifted. He glanced down at the picture. Yilmaz could not read his expression.

“Do any of us?” she mused. “Right – don’t tempt me into a philosophical discussion. We could be here all night. Why don’t you write me an account of what you saw transpire on the pitch this morning whilst I go and inform my boss that I am about the charge the District Attorney’s future-son-in-law with evasion and obstruction of justice and see if I can’t find an extra ankle monitor lying around.”

“I start a new job tomorrow!” he protested with a furious veracity that nearly made DS Yilmaz edge back in her chair.

“Good,” she smiled. “As it happens I have one now and this is part of it.”

“Wait,” he said softly.

She did, for what felt entirely too long. “Am I ‘waiting’ on anything specific?”

Hewlett swallowed. “I don’t know if this is relevant, or useful – but I, that is if you are looking for evidence of collusion or something that might help you with the FBI or with DI Ferguson or … or my embassy, with getting them to cooperate with your search … I remember some things about a business dealing my father had with the former Mayor of Liverpool which might serve some interest or another. Ah, Tarleton’s late father, you see. He passed a few weeks before this statement was drafted.”

“A family on the rise, huh?” Yilmaz smirked at the idea of the ill placed attaché’s interrogation tactics being used to his detriment years after he had offered a slight against his rivals.

“Don’t confuse fiction for reality,” Hewlett said flatly. “There is no such thing as social mobility in Britain. It doesn’t stop those not born to it from trying, however.”

“Enlighten me, then.”

“Good work, Sergeant,” Tallmadge grinned. “You have him nervous now, he is writing hurriedly. We will catch him in the lie he best likes telling and call him back in tomorrow before work.”

“Oh, I still have every intention on booking him today,” Yilmaz confirmed as they both watched the suspect through a one-way window.

“I already have Sackett setting up a monitoring device. I imagine Hewlett will go straight to Simcoe. Heidi, I think the most useful thing he provided us was that good ol’ John Graves likes to hide things in his books. With any luck I’ll be able to get a warrant -”

“Luck? Ben, were you listening? Do you realize what this means? Leverage. If nothing else, we can now be certain of the real reason you were taken off your pharma case-cum-crusade.”

“What do you mean?”

“I think … it is possible, or we could possibly make the case that their entire energy concern is a massive store front. Even if Burr won’t budge, from what you have told me about Cornwallis …
that might just be enough to demand cooperation.”

Ben nodded. “I’ll let him think he is safe for the night and strike at dawn.”

“Your tactics have proven successful thus far,” she shrugged.

“If nothing else.”

Hewlett rose from the desk and began to pace. Nervously, he looked down at the paper and made a few adjustments.

“I had better get back in there,” Yilmaz said.

“Take him down to processing. And then call it a night.”

“And you?”

“With any luck I’ll be indulging my inner grammar Nazi until the wee hours,” he smiled.

“Call your new boy-toy first,” she winked.

He smiled, blushed slightly but shook his head. “No. First, I am going to email this Francis Marion about your suspicions around Tarleton to see if he wants to go another round with the bastard. I’ll CC Lafayette and Hamilton, and then it is just a matter on monitoring Hewlett’s movements to see if either bites. Like you said … everyone seems to be in bed with one another. Let's rouse them a bit. Find out what happens.”

Yilmaz returned her boss’s grin, for the first time feeling that she might have something to learn from him after all.

There were a number of factors keeping Ban Tarleton from closing his eyes as Sunday night stretched into Monday morning. Some practical, some personal, most professional, but all leading back to the single truth that the colonel had reason to anticipate would define the rest of his life: prior to leaving for America, he had planned and executed a perfect murder in cold blood.

Time, he mused restlessly, had no real meaning in the new world.

Tense, however, was operative and his thoughts formed themselves around the third conditional as they transitioned from absent to obsessive.

When he had gotten on the plane, he had no reason to suspect that his former commanding officer’s act of getting lost on streets so planned out as to form a grid would quite likely lead those searching for the now-senator to find a valve of poison which had planted in Edinburg months prior. In hindsight of having read Edmund Hewlett’s complete medical file against John André’s original research proposal, he reasoned that he might have been less clever and far less cavalier in his planning. He might also have given this evidence more consideration before forwarding the files to a third party whom he knew to be far more cunning than himself. He might have confided his specific designs on vengeance in someone whose sympathies he held. But he had not done any of these things. Society, he knew, was fickle and love was ever fleeting.

Though time had no meaning in itself, it was far too late for wistful hypotheticals.
It was far too late for doubt.

Banastre Tarleton had been damned from the moment it had first been suggested to him that Edmund Hewlett’s illness was unnatural. He had been fourteen. Half a hundred lifetimes had since passed in an equal number of years.

Soon, he well suspected, his private postulations would become matters of public knowledge. He would be arrested before his victim drew his final breath. There might, he feared, even exist a means of saving the man.

Tarleton had planned a perfect murder in the past tense. Those calculations now belonged to the boyish fantasies that defined every bad gamble he had ever taken. A sad reality clung to him despite his hesitations towards understanding. The designs of providence followed a simple pattern. Brave, brazen Ban, known to many by less endearing epithets, had once again managed to cheat his dreams out of fruition. As he always had. Perhaps he had been all too hasty; perhaps he had taken too much time to act. Perhaps time was and had always been a fallacy and he was as much a victim of fortune and fear as this Dr John André’s unfortunate test subjects.

In hindsight, he might have simply shot the man he meant to kill to the same desired effect. He did not shy before bloodshed. The Duke of Richmond, Argyle and half a dozen other places would have already been dead and he himself would have achieved immortality through the act. Picturing a point blank shot taken on a crowded street, he smiled. Then frowned. The rest of the Hewletts would likely have then been pressured to move a decent enough portion of their holdings out of his hometown. Everything his own family had fought for would have fallen to riot and ruin. The very consequence he had hoped to avoid would have been rendered an inevitability.

It might yet still.

Ban closed his eyes. In the darkness he created for himself, his fears felt stronger than in the blackness given to him by the night. He understood emotionally as opposed to merely intellectually why his oldest friend found it impossible to act for what seemed such a terribly long while. It was curious – somehow cuts felt deeper when one tried to factor for economic effect. Although this was a reality common to everyone engaged with the business end of politics, it spoke to a concept that seemed uniquely Hewlettonian. If the Queen’s cousins had not invented the game itself, they certainly set its stakes.

Perhaps in light of the Tuesday prior, all bets had instead been placed by John Graves Simcoe, who seemed positioned to profit most from the upset at its current stage. The thought threatened to make Tarleton ill. He had half a mind to turn on his laptop back on and send Tallmadge every file he had succeeded in convincing the ambassador to deny the NYPD’s search. Regardless of whether he cooperated or not, his luck, for what it was, was certain to run out. For a moment, he let himself flirt with the idea of dragging an old schoolmate and rival with him down into the pits of hell.

Except Cornwallis felt he needed Simcoe in some functioning capacity, which by ambassador’s exaggerated sense of importance seemed to translate into the bloody nation needing Simcoe punching numbers or whatever it was he did that served their designs.

Truly, there was no justice.

Tarleton could have never anticipated that months after he had made his move - of all the people he never expected to again suffer in this lifetime – Simcoe would become a suspect in the ill-timed disappearance of the man he had come to advise on defence policy.

The attaché envisioned every possible scenario of his former friend’s involvement in this
speculative crime only to arrive at the same conclusion: it was inconceivable, impossible.

Even if Simcoe had motive, even if this cursed psychologist André had removed the need for one, Tarleton knew from bitter experience that the man simply could not be trusted act meritoriously when called upon to do so, when moral would demanded the same of any other individual so confronted. Simcoe was given to short bouts of violence, certainly, but he was no murderer. The feeling and finesse required failed him, there was not enough goodness in Simcoe’s heart to allow blood near his hands. Tarleton could accept within reason that intensive therapy could transform anxiety and adrenaline into impulse, but not to such an extent that a man the past year had taught him had always been a coward could be driven to kill for either just cause or unrelated concern. Care could not be born from void. No matter how many times someone as inwardly cold and cruel as John Graves Simcoe might be asked how he ‘felt’, no given answer could possibly be anything more than an ill-constructed lie. Ban Tarleton simply could not believe the boy he had once known as a suspect under any set of circumstance.

But then they had all believed Simcoe, once.

They had believed John when he said that he loved Effie Gwillim. They had believed him when he said that he was engaged to this Anna Strong. They had believed him when he said that Edmund Hewlett was doing well. They had believed him all time times he called them his friends. Maybe, in the almost mythical ‘once’, it had even been true to some measure.

But this was not a question of time, it was one of tense and Simcoe’s was past.

He had abandoned his childhood sweetheart in hospital after their baby had died inside of her, saying things of such monstrous nature they ought not to have been thought, much less uttered aloud. Anna Strong - if existent - was not his and likely never had been. Edmund Hewlett had attempted to kill himself during his dissertation and Simcoe had not managed to say anything on the matter to his siblings, all of whom he was in semi-regular contact with. It was depraved.

As to the reality of the friendship they had known as children, Ban had recently learned that John had been told while they were still at school of half the horrors the Hewlett siblings were forced to endure in service of their house words. Rather than offer comfort, his then dorm-mate had taken the opportunity to lament his own misfortunes - to cry over situations that at that point had no longer existed for him in any definitive sense when any other response would have made such a positive difference in the lives of people he claimed to have cared about when not society as a whole.

Simcoe simply did not concern himself with others.

He never had.

It was this deficit of character had been what kept him from service, rather than the partial deafness on which Tarleton was sure the demon sought to blame the dismissal.

If the world was a just place, Simcoe would have sought to kill the duke years ago upon being told that the man was a serial child molester who targeted his own kin. If he lacked such strong convictions, he could well have arrived at a more appropriate response than abandoning a victim in a in the gent’s toilets and refusing to speak to her for the rest of term, angered that the only reason they had ever had sex was that she suspected – rightfully so – he had never much fancied her. Ties were fragile and affections fleeting, but empathy should have been easier than meeting injustice with avoidance.

Looking back, Tarleton reasoned that he might have pressed the issue. He might have asked what
the two had argued over rather than revising for A Levels which he knew he stood no realistic shot at obtaining. He might have smothered Simcoe to death in his sleep as he had often fantasised about for reasons that had yet to be given particular names. It would have achieved nothing in the immediate, but a decent man would still be around in Arnold if Tallmadge’s theories warranted any merit, and this accursed André would have never found someone mental enough to create lab conditions that could possibly lead to such potentially disastrous implications for men who served.

But Simcoe could never understand this, no matter how much ‘therapy’ he had undergone.

Tarleton had his doubts that André had much more than a working concept of that which he was in the process of making and staking his name on. The doctor had never served and Tarleton felt a certain sickness in the idea that Senator Arnold, who most certainly had, subscribed to André’s proposed prescription.

The attaché stared at the remains of his right hand, picturing scar tissue where the room emitted only enough light to show him a silhouette. There were two types of fear, André had written. The first was instinctive; it was what told you not to put your hand into an open flame. The second was reactionary; it was what told you to cauterise a wound when you would otherwise die from blood loss. The psychologist proposed a therapeutic means of eliminating the first form, overcoming inborn apprehension by increasing the elements more appealing to the overactive mind.

It seemed to Tarleton that André meant to create an entire army of men who did not consider consequence against fears born of their own tempered misgivings. The former colonel knew he had a touch of this himself from nature- it allowed him to kill indiscriminately for Queen and Country, it allowed him to exact vengeance on incarnates of evil without forcing him to question perspectives much beyond his own.

However, he was consciously aware that the world would be a far worse place if there were more men like him in it.

Ban Tarleton was vain, charming and charismatic; he had been born with a sense of how to get people to give him most of what he wanted and had few qualms in claiming whatever was not on offer by alternate means. Although self-admittedly a sociopath with tendencies towards brutality, he did his upmost to service this overwhelming trait to the benefit of the people and values he held dear. But he had known far too many politicians and diplomats to expect others to share in his standard of conduct. The world did not need a greater excess of cruel men than that with which was already cursed.

John André, he suspected, suffered a worse stand of the same infliction as that which claimed him and somehow thought it wise to spread this illness to the wilfully innocent.

Examining his own life against the original proposal - as all were tempted to do when reading up on the workings of the human mind - Tarleton could identify with ease a number of incidences in which he had been overcome with terror born from neurosis-invented scenarios of the sort André suggested the psyche could be trained not to cower to. Curiously, he found that none of the moments of his life in which fear had most overwhelmed him corresponded to anything he had been trained to deal with in the field. How, Tarleton questioned, would anyone be helped had he blacked out in a fit of rage in hospital while his biological daughter was being born, or while giving a speech at his favourite sister’s wedding, or while making empty chitchat with the Windsors during a charity golf match he physically could not partake in?

André did not seem to consider the effects his theories might have on civilian life. This told Tarleton that the doctor did not expect anyone to return to it. The bloody French, or so he had been told, forced science majors to take ethics courses throughout their intellectual development; he
wondered why the British did not hold their own to the same lofty standards.

The attaché tried and failed to address his misgivings. He was meant to give a speech the next day in front of some congressional committee or another. He was meant to sell a defence bill in Arnold’s absence. His own government had want to implement the use of spy drones within its own boarders and were reliant on the Americans to initiate the Metternichian practice, to answer all questions of human rights violations with a heavy hand as Britain integrated its own military technology into the public sector. In principle, Tarleton agreed with this part of the proposal. Where his trust varied was the clause on testing André’s methods in the field. Tarleton thought of waking Cornwallis to ask if this part of the package was imperative, if he might use part of his twelve-minute window to redress the research that had already wrought such malignity on Edmund Hewlett and, perhaps, Benedict Arnold - people he knew and had once loved.

Tarleton found his own choice verb curious but ultimately agreed with it. Love rather than fear forced men into action. He loved his daughters, his siblings, his city and his circle of friends. He would fight kill and die for that which he held dear without question. The same held true for the men with whom he had served. It was not something that came up in conversation, but he could not conceive of the idea that anyone in his battalion had not felt the same way about the cause they served. But then no one had asked them how they ‘felt’. It seemed only sick people were given that benefit and the sane would be made to suffer.

The irony that his own meticulously planned crime could be undone by a boy he had only known through an accident of the alphabet verged on comedic. The reality present in the fact that inaction he paired with a surname that in a list of thirty fell beside his own would have prevented the past decade its pain was a tragedy all unto itself. Still, Tarleton told himself as he again tried to shut his eyes, he would have still poisoned the realm’s most powerful landholder had he had an inkling to what he was but certain would prove his own unlikely undoing.

Perhaps he had without paying it any conscious mind. He knew that upon abandoning the rights and duties inherent in his name, Edmund Hewlett had gone to New York to pursue a title of a different sort, one that his two sister who had then stood to inherit nothing had no trouble obtaining for themselves within Europe. He knew the story of how Hewlett had first met to Simcoe – sad or serendipitous, depending on whatever factors dictated the mood in which it was being told. The two had evidently found one another again across the ocean through some accident of fate or association football. Tarleton remembered being rather amused over the continued ordeal that was their ‘friendship’ until he was not, until Simcoe evidently began inflicting pain in ways no longer passive.

According to his phone, it was one-thirty in the morning. A single question kept Banastre Tarleton’s eyes from closing. If DI Tallmadge was right, if Simcoe was in some way responsible for Arnold’s disappearance, was André ultimately to blame?

He thought about the ambassador, the plans he had made when concerns surrounding the French exit from a civil war in Mali, separate nationalist movements in individual European Union member states and the proposed referendum could be used to bolster a trade agreement that had spent decades in deliberation and debate. He thought about the frantic calls Hewlett had made to the embassy, how he had convinced Cornwallis to deny his request.

It seemed to him that Hewlett suspected Simcoe’s hand.

It seemed that he alone saw in the sought after record its damning contradiction. It would not be long, he thought. If Tallmadge was half as good as his record suggested; the world would soon know the facts surrounding the stroke the man suffered at twenty. It was not a genetic condition
carried though the Gordon line. The twelve blood princesses in scattered houses throughout Britain would not curse their male offspring to the same fate as Edmund was whispered to have suffered. They could marry without physically weakening the monarchy.

Long ago, someone had wanted the heir presumptive to the Hewlett holdings dead, presumably fearing that he was readying to go to the police with the same confession he had offered the NYPD because some bird had lost interest in him. It was comic. It was tragic. Maybe, it had always been fate.

Tarleton had been confident enough in his explanation of who had most wanted to end young Edmund’s life that he had murdered a man with the same method to force a confession and cover up. He had thought he would never be caught.

In light of Arnold’s disappearance and all the other crimes it seemed set to expose, he now felt certain of a life sentence. The police, or the feds, or the French or some other force would get their hands on all of the files on his laptop and make the same connections that he himself had made. He had no idea of his next move, not having anticipated the need for one.

The attaché grabbed for his phone, an old Blackberry with an actual keyboard, the only model he could manage. As he waited for his email to connect to the server, hoping to find the advice he had sought earlier in the evening by forwarding André’s research proposal to a newswoman far smarter than he, he sent a text to his thirteen-year-old telling her he loved her and was thinking of her. Teenagers, he knew from recent experience, did not like answering their phones. He would call his little one in Scotland one he was certain her mum had finished readying her for preschool, not wanting to add to the stress with an interruption. Marie did not respond, not that he much expected her to. Effie Gwillim’s address was not present in his email either, which came as something of a surprise.

The only message he received had been sent by the Foreign Office. Ban Tarleton read over the attachment, longing for the moments passed in which he anticipated prison for all his better efforts.

Though probably deserved, some punishments, he decided, were far worse than those which the mind was given to inventing on its own.

Chapter End Notes

I either don’t have a ton of things to note this round or don’t feel much like writing a long list after rereading that chapter before hitting post (likely a combination of the two), but let’s have at it:

**John Terry** is and English centre back who previously captained Chelsea and the national side. He is at least as famous for being a disgusting human being as he is a distinguished footballer, and currently plys his trade for Aston Villa (something I was surprised to learn was the result of a transfer, as nearly every Championship player who immediately comes to mind can otherwise be described as being ‘on loan from Chelsea.’ It is a thing.)

**John Tarleton** was a businessman who served as Mayor of Liverpool in the mid-eighteenth century. A few of you may know that I personally find this particular public office ripe for discovering comically misappropriate uses of time and tenue.
The current holder, for example, recently used official stationary to inform the FA that he filed a claim with the police to investigate bad business practices he believes evident in the transfer of a footballer from the club he supports (… Everton. Seriously.) to Chelsea. One of his predecessors demanded a public apology for The Patriot’s Col. Tavington, whom he felt was a slight on a similarly named local hero. Inspiring stuff.

Orhan Pamuk is a Turkish novelist. It is probably unfair to summarize his works as DS Yilmaz did … but um, if protagonists who agonize over a woman below their social standing to the point of gross obsession with unhappy endings is what gets you hot, I can recommend at least five works of fiction that might be of interest. (If you want to seem academic, citing ‘East-West dichotomy’ as his theme probably sounds more appropriate than ‘do you remember what TURN did to Annlett?’) My Name is Red and Snow are two of his novels. I remember not being crazy about the English translation of the first, but beyond that (and all joking aside) they are both worth the read.

Anything I missed? Anything I mentioned that you want to know more about? ;)
As always, thanks so much for reading!

Up Next: Here comes the general (and his right-hand man!)
The Own Goal

Chapter Summary

Tarleton receives devastating news from London. Ferguson discovers a spy on public transit, leading him to uncover a devious plot he may be too late to hinder. Simcoe opens fire on his own forces. Mary gains crucial intelligence from an unexpected source.

Chapter Notes

When I write Hide and Seek, I tend to this of it as a league table, with each interaction between characters comprising a single match. Right now, we are in January with all of the problems that entails ... and to be honest, you guys – I’m not holding out hopes for this week/end despite all the noise. We have something like a mid-week FA cup match between two sides that have no business being in the third round, which is only mildly exciting in itself because I am getting the feeling that these clubs (Tarleton and Ferguson) will meet again in a relegation play off at the end of the season. ( ... And because I am kind of hoping one or both of the gaffers (Cornwallis and Ellie, respectively) will soon get the sack, if only for that the mid-season managerial merry-go-round is always a joy to behold.) We’ve got a derby (!!!) between two clubs vying for a CL qualification spot (Simcoe and Hewlett), a host of new starters (Aberdeen) for clubs that could really use them (Mary) as a result of the transfer window. Deadline day is approaching, injuries are beginning to pile up ... anything could happen ... but, I don’t know. I’m not feeling it. This seems like the kind of weekend where I’ll be real with you – I’d just catch the highlights on MotD and uh, go see what’s up in Serie A or Ligue Un. It feels like I ought to recommend other, better fics with that disclaimer, but counting comments, I have a total of four readers (who also happen to be the best writers.) You all know what you have penned and are already well vested in one another’s libraries. ♥

Love you all dearly, and apologises in advance for what I am sure will prove a series of disappointments and upsets.

Want to do the thing anyway? Let’s go for it: Brussels, veganism, hyperbole, parenting, petty theft, rejection, organized crime, collusion, bribery and some interspersed meta on H+S itself.

The return key looks tempting, I know. Cheers.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He was certain the hours would find him again when he returned, most likely in a customs control queue comparable to purgatory.

Though far from a linguist, he reasoned that there were particular words which centuries of
Anglicization had sought to render unrecognizable against their derivatives. ‘Angst’ was fear for Germans. Liberty, or as the French put it ‘liberté’ was more concerned with the collective than it was with the individual when spoken of on the continent. However, the most striking example of this disconnect which Banastre Tarleton had ever personally encountered was with what the English referred to as ‘gross bureaucratic incompetence’ - a phrase that had surely been adapted from the old Flemish ‘Luchthaven Brussel-Nationaal.’ This idiom, to his great confusion and dismay, appeared on the e-ticket the Foreign Office had sent. He had no great hope that the flight had been booked in error. It was too late for that, or too early. In the colonies, it was always difficult to tell.

But the hours would find him again. They now knew where to look.

In Britain, wait times were inconvenient; in contrast and comparison, the Belgian system was altogether stagnant. Although lying in bed a world away, Tarleton felt his legs buckle under his own weight at the mere suggestion of that which awaited him as he attempted to return to the estuary via the river Styx. Hours would turn into days before he would make it through the initial checkpoint; shoes, jacket, belt, watch and wallet removed, laptop and phone unpacked and place into a grey plastic bin, whilst stuck behind a horde of holiday travellers, all of whom were confused by this basic airport etiquette.

Singular among crowded travel hubs, there was no option at the first gate for frequent flyers who understood security precautions to bypass the chaos on which the entire operation seemed to thrive. This in itself would prove an annoyance, but witnessing the flaws inherent in humanity (so perfectly on display at this airport) was an agony akin to no other. The few other passengers, who, like himself, had blessed at birth with the strength and stamina required to queue for twelve hours or more, brought nothing of what they ought to have learned from the first circus to the second. The charade of the powers-that-be trying to determine who among the angry masses had come to their country with an intent to kill and who had simply developed a certain bloodlust whilst waiting well past the time their connection was due to depart would start anew. Slower, it seemed, at the second checkpoint than it had been at the first.

Time had nothing better to do than to remind one of its existence in the centre of the Union and the Belgian authorities were always keen to waste what little was left of it. As though they intended their airport to function as a living metaphor for Europe as a whole, they often placed Flemish and French speakers at the same workstations, ensuring no understanding could be reached even among employees of the dysfunctional deep state.

Tarleton, who had spent ten years in counter-terrorism, could see no such benefit to any of these measures. In the off chance one made it through the series of crucibles, he or she would likely succumb to starvation or dehydration long before finding their gate. Time showed no preference towards any particular religious or political affiliation. There was only one fate in Brussels, and no amount of prayer or petitioning exempted one form eternity. Flights often went unmarked, water was taxed higher than oil, alcohol or tobacco, and every kiosk selling food seemed to specialize in over-priced, organic, locally sourced vegetables sliced thin and served raw on gluten-free vegan bread, itself so hard that it could be used as a weapon. Nourishment, it most certainly was not. If the bloody Belgians for reasons unknown allowed these baguettes to bypass security when a bottle of hand sanitizer could land one a life sentence, what other mistakes had been made for all of their wasted efforts? The attaché could not fathom, even with respect to NATO alliances, how the ever-righteous Americans had not made these terminals the topic of hawkish rhetoric, for surely such sandwiches posed a greater threat to their safety and way of life than whatever they had once claimed Saddam had hidden in the desert.

This, he knew, would prove his final mission. Reading his return ticket, he realised to his own
surprise that he was not ready to die, not, at least, for a cause as unworthy as a connection that would never come.

Then again, it was perhaps better this way. Ban Tarleton did not want to go back to what little he had left. Not now. Not ever. Even if he exempted the practical need to remain abroad for the time being from his considerations, there was nowhere in Britain that felt like home. Tarleton had moved into the smallest of studio flats nine months prior when he and his long-term domestic partner had finally admitted to the differences it now seemed they would never be able to reconcile. Half of his things were still at her place, half of them were stacked in boxes in the atrium of Effie Gwillim’s penthouse, all, as both women claimed, were slated for charity. He, however, had no way of addressing this concern, unable as he was to figure out a means of defying physics, of unpacking the whole his possessions into an IKEA bookshelf and wardrobe that stood mere inches from a twin-sized bed he shared with a small dog which barked day and night - easily frightened as it was by the noises on the rougher side of the city. A city, Ban noted, that had once been his. He questioned if the area could even be considered part of Britain anymore in this stage of its decline.

He had expected more from his life, hoped more form himself, instead finding that the flaws that had become apparent upon receiving his inheritance had not disappeared with the sum left to him when his father had passed a decade before. Although his salary was decent, it did nothing to cover the costs of his personal deficits and strengths. The colonel was a gambler, he had two little girls he loved to death living with their mothers on opposite ends of the island, and travel, necessary as his situation made it, was expensive when one had limited time to book and no means of operating a motor vehicle. He did not earn enough from his wages to spend each weekend in a hotel in either capital, and yet he had no choice. Sometimes, he would be able to guess at sporting fixtures well enough to make up the difference. Sometimes, he had enough of the balance paid on his credit cards to max them out once more. He had to. He knew how lucky he was, given the circumstances that had lead to his court martial, to maintain limited visitation rights at all.

There was an irony that every field decision he made was done so with the interest of his illegitimate children in the forefront of his mind. It became bitter with the understanding that he seemed in the minority in this motivation, that he stood no chance of convincing the people running the country he loved not to invite the problems of Europe into their embrace at the expense of their own people. It was too late for that. Or too early. This would and could only be decided decades after his death.

Time did not seem to exist now, not here in a country where everything was open for twenty-four hours. Tense took its place as much as grammar could substitute an abstract, and, at ‘present’, none of these problems would have proved any concern save for the fact that Tarleton’s personal life consisted of little beyond that which caused him to be shunned in a professional capacity. The return ticket was a slight on his honour as a gentleman. He did not want to go back. He could not and in this respect, Belgian incompetence was truly a blessing.

Though his flight was booked for Wednesday morning, Tarleton reasoned there was no chance that he could make it up to Edinburgh to spend Easter with his toddler.

If he were back in Britain in two weeks’ time, he would have no excuse to avoid the vicinity of his so-called crime. Absence would look more suspicious than presence, but this thought perished as quickly as he surely would in Brussels; alone and lonely awaiting a plane that would never come, wondering if he had enough of a charge left in his mobile to ring Mary and ask if this was what ‘Waiting for Godot’ was meant to be about. He found he was already reminiscing for the days when his former girlfriend had drug him out to the West End for a bit of culture, something he had not anticipated he would miss until he had gone through a series of several someones-new. He had
been with no one since and was beginning to doubt he ever would. But then perhaps it was for the best. He had little time and less to offer.

Tarleton switched screens and saw in his banking app that he had no withdrawable funds, the bets he had placed on horses and half time scores at the weekend earning him a grand total of less than twenty quid. He questioned if this, too, was for the best, given the predicament his government had placed him in. Tarleton returned to his traumatic recollections of the terminal, wondering if the placebo effect of having eaten was not in fact worth the €9 charged for green and glorified cardboard. He remembered once buying something comparable in the German capital as a student, taking a bite and offering the rest to a kit of pigeons who turned up their beaks. Tarleton had seen the same sort of animal indulge in such delicacies as cigarette filters and chewing gum that had since become part of the pavement. He had wondered ever since at every heath craze; what poisons that even pigeons would not touch were present in that what was said to be beneficial to people who cared about animals or the environment or some other lost cause? Maybe, he smiled, these had only passed the rigorous food and safety regulations on the ground that the government wanted to eliminate this element of the population en masse, a holocaust masquerading as a liberal movement. He liked to imagine his taxes were amounting to some great good.

It was better that he was broke. If forced to fly to Brussels, he would prefer to perish from natural causes than to commit suicide with an expensive sandwich ostentatiously made with all-natural ingredients. He would most likely depart this life in Terminal B, his body added to the mass grave that must exist in the vicinity with those of all of the other poor souls who had been damned by their employers to serve on this particular front; the same as he would have had he been born a century prior giving that he remained a member of the armed force. Tarleton found this thought poetic rather than hyperbolic, and considered including it in the complaint he debated filing with the Foreign Office.

Perhaps it was the hour or the lack there of, but he found he could not force his thumb to compose more than >><In accordance with my rank I deserve to be shot rather than sent through Belgium regardless of what I’ve done to offend<< a poorly worded sentence he would ultimately never send. An alarm he had set the evening prior caused the device to vibrate in his hand, itself paralysed with tiny prangs of pain from the extent and angle of its positioning. ♥Ring Banina before school ♥, it read. Tarleton closed his eyes and felt the pillow beneath him. He felt certain that for all the ills of European partnerships apparent at the airport his return flight was booked though, at least he would be able to find rest within its walls.

Time would find him there. It had nothing else to do beyond defining delays by the indefinite. He wondered how long it had been since he had slept; if this interval could even be measured in units he considered did not exist. Not here in America, at any rate.

Over the phone held by a hand that had fallen asleep independently of the rest of his body, Ban’s youngest daughter cheerfully contradicted the basis of his assumptions.

She told him with confidence it was three in the morning where he was, because it was eight in Edinburgh and Washington was five hours behind. >>Didn’t they teach you that in school, Daddy?<< she laughed. He complimented her on her numbers and imagined her smile - so like his own. Encouraged by his enthusiasm, his toddler went on to inform him between giggles every variation of what-and-what made ten. When it was ten o’clock, it would be five in America, or so she said. She was just learning how to tell time. He could not tell her that there were some places where it did not exist in ways the clock could track. She would not understand that yet. He barely did.

>>Georgie, this is out stop – time to say goodbye!<< he heard the young woman he had lain with
for one night while working undercover chirp, presumably between clenched teeth.

>>If we have art today I’ll make a picture for you, << his daughter continued, unperturbed by the approach. >>Mummy can send it from her phone or computer – wait, she wants to talk to you. What is your favourite dinosaur? Huh? Okay, I have to go. Love you! Bye! <<

“Love you too, Pumpkin,” he said after she had already handed the phone off.

>>Banastre Tarleton, whit in God's guid nam <<< Kolina began.

He closed his eyes as the petit Scotswoman continued to scream, though, to his to his genuine shock, not at him.

“It is alright, Madam,” Richard Ferguson tried to assure her as displayed the badge in his otherwise empty, battered, brown leather wallet. “I’m a police inspector.”

“And I’m a workin’ mum who has to get her daughter off to kindergarten, yea?” the young woman returned, unimpressed by his credentials. “Give me back my fuckin’ phone, ye wanker!”

He looked at the device he held after again asking patience of the man who - to his complete horror upon hearing him called by a name he well knew - had served as a figure of envy for the past twelve minutes.

It had been thirty hours since he had rung his ex-wife telling her to put his boys on a plane; boys, he had been told, who had ceased being ‘his’ when the prioritization of his altogether stagnant professional life had torn his personal one apart. If her tired threats to deny him visitation were made and meant in earnest, Ferguson knew he had no legal recourse. He was behind on child support payments, and even with the deposit due to hit his account when Barclays opened for business that he expected would console his creditors, a court date would entail a drug screening which the inspector sorely doubted he would pass.

He had long since ceased questioning how hope could so quickly metamorphose into hate in the course of its materialization. Ellie Hewlett, under investigation for corporate fraud, had confessed both to her guilt and blessed virtue in paying him a heavy sum to intervene with the FBI on the behalf of Najma Abboud, a woman she had never met.

The bus ride to work reminded Ferguson that his reinstated wealth could not afford him that which he most wanted - the illusion of familiarity modern technology seemed to provide everyone else. Everyone, including the demon who had been ready to condemn an innocent woman due to the colour of her skin or the direction in which she face to pray. The treachery was that it had all been a rouse. It would have been comparatively simple for Ferguson to live with the reality that he had compromised his soul in an effort towards human compassion, but the major had never faced any threat from within. He had been paid by a Hewlett to behave like a Hewlett, to justify his own corruption with the suggestion of a good deed.

He hated Banastre Tarleton almost as much as he hated the truths the man framed as deception. Ferguson had to face that he was no better than the people he wished to see condemned. He hated that such was not even the main objective of the colonel’s manoeuvre. He had somehow managed from a self-assumed position of weakness to convince the Americans to release a political prisoner, securing for himself a moral victory over all those who played by the book and lost to its rule.
But one way or another, the little trickster would answer for his actions. The world was not a just place and whatever his game was, Tarleton did not seem to have properly addressed its steaks. At least, Ferguson granted himself, he still had that over the bastard. Lady Eleanor seemed ignorant to the fraud that Tarleton had committed with and against her private graces. As everyone born north of Hadrian’s Wall knew, nothing could prove quite as damning as a Hewlett whose power had been checked, a reality to which the trajectory of Ferguson’s own life could witness.

She had paid him off to do what any sinner would presume to be the right thing. Paid him to use his position to stop a cover-up from which she would have stood to profit. Insofar as she was aware, John Graves Simcoe and Edmund Hewlett could have escaped suspicion had she been willing to compromise upon the morals she claimed. Ferguson had initially assumed Tarleton’s play an attempt to save two of his school-friends from Tallmadge’s search. Instead, he had fooled Lady Eleanor into saving herself from condemnation, sacrificing what remained of their friendship to this end.

Richard Ferguson had bought into the bribe.

It would not have been right to extend himself the same doubt he had so long denied his enemies. He had acted for profit under the assumption that some ethnic minority on the other end of the world would benefit as well. The illusion of charity had been removed by an email from DI Tallmadge yet he still took a base comfort in what his account balance would soon be. Ferguson felt that for this he was worse than any of the Hewletts had ever been. They made sacrifices, not compromises. They suffered for their sins. As rich as they had made themselves, they still accomplished great acts of good.

Weighing intent was more than he could bear.

A war criminal had proven to Ferguson that a cartel boss had a kinder soul than he might ever aspire to. He proved himself a coward in his hope that the two would fulfil their destinies in being one another’s undoing before his badge would force him to condemn them both to a far cruller fate.

He hated Banastre Tarleton almost as much as he hated the truths the man framed as deception. He hated that a man he knew to hold fascist sympathies was a better friend and father than he himself would ever prove.

The woman whose phone he had confiscated made another reach of its return. Replaying the triumph of the day prior in his mind, the DI wondered if having a young woman deeply cross with him was worth any benefit that could come from speaking to a person of interest as she continued to berate in the same language he had grown accustom to hearing from the Liverpudlian he had on the line.

“Mummy!” the little girl with her scowled upon hearing her mother swear. She put her hands on her waist, mimicking the woman’s posture and adding weight to that which she whispered in horror, “that’s a very bad word. No.”

Caught slightly off guard by this assessment, Ferguson found himself searching the girls face for Banastre Tarleton as an innocent question returned that all-to-identifiable artillery of crude argot.

>>Oi, who do fack ay vous, mate? Mad cunt – you place much value on your ability to procreate you best hand back the mobile, or’right? Have your boss give me a ring at a Christian hour if you need a bloody statement. <<

“I’m in charge of this investigation -” Ferguson began. How he hated southern accents. He tried to step back, avoiding another attempt of assault, but was met with the resistance of a mass of fellow commuters who had joined in shouting the abuses the young mother would likely have a difficult
time defending to her daughter at supper.

>>And I’m frankly struggling to see how you see that as relevant. Would you let your kids curse? Poor form for little ladies, ‘innit? You might learn something from Georgie’s better manners, your cunt.<<

“I, ah – sure. No, no I wouldn’t. Let my children talk … as you yourself do, Colonel,” he stammered as commuters pushed and shoved their way past him, jostling for position as the carriage pulled to a stop, still surprised that this was a rule Tarleton chose to enforce.

>>Right, apologies, shall we begin anew?>> the colonel asked, his accent altered in conformity with the airs he clearly did not feel himself obliged to. >>Won’t you kindly return the mobile device you pilfered, my good sir? It would be much appreciated.<<

The city bus opened its doors and the woman rephrased the demand, her tone turning from angry to desperate though the language did not alter with her child’s disapproval. Ferguson questioned who he had become and if he had anyone left to blame but himself. “Wait,” he said, uncertain as to whom he spoke specifically.

The two had boarded at the stop after his. In the madness of the morning commute on crowded public transit, the inspector would not have paid either much mind save for the fact that they had shared the seat in front of his. The woman, whom he imagined he would have thought of as a girl herself were it not for the child she toted along, might have been attractive once; she might have been attractive still if not for what seemed an organized effort to eradicate her natural features. Her long hair had been bleached into straw, coloured like candyfloss and packed under a cap Ferguson guessed she wore to conceal her roots – brown, he assumed, like that of her daughter’s. They shared the same piercing blue eyes, though layers of black liner which the hour did not warrant blanketed those of the young mother. Ferguson had wondered if she was a prostitute, if the single practical element of her wardrobe would be disregarded after dropping the smaller girl off at school. He noted the shield of his alma mater on the oversized black sweatshirt she wore over leggings of the same shade. It was barely long enough to cover her rear. In it, she barely looked old enough to begin university applications. Although he had no desire towards her, he felt filthy for staring and saddened by the assumptions he had made and the culture that had standardized them. He had overheard her quizzing her daughter on the spelling of words she was meant to learn and remembered doing the same with Patrick and Sean in what felt another lifetime. The inspector averted his attention to the roadside shops they sped past, trying to recreate in his mind all that he had lost, trying to ignore the price his poor fellow passenger might be paying on the street that her child could smile and laugh as she did. She had probably been quite pretty once, and happy too, or so he imagined.

Before the bus had come to its next stop, the woman’s phone rang. Ferguson watched her face twist with annoyance, reflected in the inside of the buss window, black and pale paintings obscuring the greys of the buildings, street and sky. ‘It’s Daddy,’ she told the child. ‘Tell him I want to talk to him when you are done.’ Ferguson knew the tone. He knew little else from his own ex. The recollection prompted him to continue creating a narrative for the pair of strangers, one which allowed him a few minutes of again supposing moral superiority. The ex-boyfriend, he told himself, had likely just gotten out of jail, lived on his grandmother’s couch and spent his welfare on weed and take-away. He had gotten the girl pregnant at school, forcing her to exchange her dream of the University of Edinburgh for a small mouth she suddenly found herself expected to fill.

Unlike himself however, it seemed the young woman managed to provide for her child. Ferguson saw his own reflection in the double-pained glass and felt as dark as the clouds that covered the city with their imminent threat.
Whatever the absent man’s sins, the exchange the inspector overheard him having with his daughter broke his heart by reminding him of the one he had not been permitted with his own sons prior to them getting on a plane with his ex-wife and the man she lived with. For a moment, he lost track of the two kids in the seat in front of him as his mind waltzed with and around the words which he feared he would never be able to voice to his own children. He wondered what his boys were learning in school, if they would share it with him as merrily as the little girl did with her father. How long, he wondered, would it be before such smiles no longer existed in earnest between him and his boys, before their weekly telephone conversations became monosyllabic and disinterested, before they casually began calling the man they lived with ‘Dad’ - even when they spoke to him. It would sound apologetic until they learned to weaponize it, or so he imagined.

But that, of course, was all dependant on if his ex-wife ever again let their sons near the phone when he rang.

The pink-clad toddler with bows in her braided hair handed the mobile to her mother when she asked a second time through a clenched tooth smile, no doubt directed at the man, who from the sounds of it, was working on the other side of the Atlantic rather than sitting on some sofa in Scotland. The moment she spoke the name of the Colonel, Ferguson found himself returned to the office though ten stops still physically separated him from this destination. He took the phone from the woman’s hand and found in the action chaos comparable to what his colleagues over in Glasgow dealt with daily.

>>Tic, tic Inspector …<< another yawn came from the line he held to his ear.

“Ferguson,” he informed him sharply. “We’ve met before on several occasions. Um. Coronel, can I ask that you hold for just a minute?”

Without waiting for a response, he shoved the phone into his trouser pocket and proceeded out the sliding door directly into one of the city’s busiest intersections. The little girl, he panicked, had joined the crowd of people making their way out into Haymarket. Her mother, undoubtedly petrified, raced after her. Ferguson followed, quickened by the continued slurs and abuses shouted from fellow passengers.

“Georgie!” the young woman cried as the girl walked out into the street in true Edinburgh fashion, without paying oncoming traffic any mind. For a second the inspector feared she would stop at the sound of her mother’s scream. He reasoned that it was safer for her to keep moving, at least until reaching the island where tourists who he presumed to be German by their odd adherence to traffic singles waited on a small green figure to shine on the opposite side of the road way instructing them to walk. Georgie did not wait with them. To Ferguson’s relief, she did not even stop as she shouted back that she had to get to school. He knew it was safer for the wee small girl to kept marching now that she had committed to the cross. There were enough people on the street that motorists were forced to travel at the posted speed. Ferguson did not trust them to locate their breaks if the child were to break her pace.

He caught up to Georgie’s mum before they reached her daughter on the street’s far corner. Georgie had since assumed the same disapproving posture which he had first seen on the bus. She stood with her hands on her hips in front of a small kiosk selling crisps, pre-paid phone cards, and the sorts of papers more interested in Edmund Hewlett’s surprising engagement to an American bartender than the senator who had gone missing in the same small town. “I plan to give this back truly, I only – I couldn’t find a working number … for, for the colonel,” Ferguson tried when the woman pointed to a window advertisement, commenting that he could ring the colonies himself, from his own phone for a rate of 12 pence pro minute. He followed her as she entered the store with her daughter now in toe, buying two cucumber sandwiches, a bottle of milk that was meant to
taste like strawberries, a litre of IRN BRU, and almost as a second thought, one of the multiple newspapers with the same photo of the happy couple pulled from Facebook - a testament to the standards of modern journalism. “I just love her,” the young woman gushed. The shopkeeper looked at the publication with the same distain Ferguson himself felt for the whole charade. From the wall behind the till, a framed photograph of Queen Elizabeth looked down upon the day’s news with shared disgust. “If she saves us from the reign of Duchess Edna,” the owner muttered before returning his attention to a game on his mobile.

“Have you by chance spoken to either Edmund Hewlett or -” Ferguson spoke into the device he had stolen; worried the line had gone dead.

“Well come on then!” the woman interrupted, pulling him by his necktie across a side street before he could get his question out. “I’ll not have your business interfering with mine, Sir!”

“And what is your business, ma’am?” he asked.

>>She is a student,<< Tarleton offered from across the world. Ferguson was surprised and relieved to hear his voice again. He himself would likely have hung up during the fiasco.

“I meant your wife,” he stammered as he tried to keep pace with the young woman with candyfloss hair balancing two rucksacks on her shoulder and a plastic bag on her arm as her daughter skipped along and spoke excitedly about her schoolmates.

>>No,<< came his colleague’s correction.

“Ex?”

>>Not exactly. Kolina is a friend … we have a kid together. It’s not as complicated as you are want to make it. Now,<< he seemed to swallow >> is this in regard to Major Abboud?<<

“Oh,” Unsure where his feet were taking him, Ferguson had forgotten where he wanted to begin.

>>Ah? Christ, you are well placed to be in a room full of Hewletts.<< Tarleton snickered at the sudden stutter. The detective considered for a moment that both reactions might be audible manifestations of fear in reaction to Scotland’s most famous surname. Perhaps in Tarleton’s case there was something more substantial that he hid behind his ever-present suggestion of cruelty; his smirk a constant display of schadenfreude, more conspicuous and off-putting in itself than the crippled hand he made no attempt at concealing. Perhaps, Ferguson reasoned, the grin was a disguise he assumed to some end, rather than a threat in and of itself.

“I’ve made some inquires, Coronel Tarleton, regarding your alleged plot -”

>>Splendid!<< the younger man chirped, still mimicking the posh manner of speech - sounding no more convincing in his effort than American teenagers did in their attempts to copy a dialect that they understood to be standard ‘English’ (but which likely only existed for the purposes of the cursed Harry Potter franchise.) Ferguson imagined for a moment that the attaché who made no secret of his antipathy for the people across the pond (and those across the Channel, and those across multiple other divides without a physical barrier) was making some attempt at integrating with and endearing himself to the people of Washington. He nearly laughed until remembering those whom the loud little populist shared a name with, privately reliving a nightmare of the nineties when a possibility had existed of the Tarletons taking up residence on Downing Street whilst the least of them continued in startling political fashion, >>Then you know the matter has already been sorted. You may also be aware that I’m being duly punished for my role in that plot, something I imagine I have you to thank for. Bit of a sadist after all, aren’t we Fregs?<<
“Bloody hell are you on about?” Ferguson demanded, incensed at having his moral character again called into question by such a demon, noting the language borrowed from an insult he had afforded the man on the last occasion they had spoken. He wondered to what extent this cold war was personal on either of their accounts.

>>Brussels.<< Tarleton replied flatly.

“You mistake me, Sir,” Ferguson said, stopping in his tracks.

The airport, as he well knew, was likely the best argument in support of Brittan’s proposed withdrawal from the European Union. Navigating one security point only to arrive at the next was something logic ordinarily instructed would cause one to miss a connecting flight, but the continentals in their ingenuity made up for lost time by routinely delaying take-offs by several hours. Sometimes, the Germans would dictate affairs and policies in the same sense they did in the parliamentary council, grounding their aircraft for days so that socialists could cry over their already generous retirement packages. Richard Ferguson was frankly surprised that this was not a talking point for the politicians who had steaked their fortunes on the Brexit campaign, ignoring in the moment that, excepting Tarleton, most potential ‘leave’ voters had never themselves left the UK.

Perhaps it was the accusation alone. Perhaps it was the conversation he had had with Ellie’s racketeers day before. Perhaps it was the one he overheard on the buss a half hour ago and the pressing concern that someone like Banastre Tarleton had heathier relationships than those he had managed, but Richard Ferguson felt a surge of empathy for an enemy who, in his own way, served the same Crown. Tarleton was a criminal but everyone was deserving of some mercy. Ferguson perhaps needed to demonstrate to himself he was still capable of that feat.

“When I was a teenager,” he told him, “I flew to South Africa for a Lion’s tournament. The return was through Brussels and after two days of waiting in a terminal, my mates and I decided to take a holiday bus to Amsterdam and flew from there to London, and booked a night rail back up to Edinburgh. Don’t wait,” he cautioned. “Nothing ever takes off in Belgium. Nothing. It is futile to hold out hope. Ship your baggage by post if it cannot fit into overhead storage and once you make it through passport control, get out of the airport itself as quickly as possible and book the rest of your passage by another means. It makes no sense to do so ahead of time because there is no telling when your flight will actually land and how long it will take to make it though.

“I had the same thing about a decade later when I’d won tickets to the World Cup in Germany. You’d think the radio station would have sent me through Frankfurt but in an effort to save some thirty quid I would up in Brussels once more. After fifteen hours, I hired a taxi to take me to the broader – not trusting the Belgian trains to be any more functional than their aircraft – and ultimately found myself in Munchkin-glad-beer about an hour before kick-off. It was a group-stage match. The connecting flight I was meant to take, as I later discovered, did not take off until well after the tournament ended. I ended up having to secure my own way home.” Swallowing, he added, “We have our differences you and I, but I would never wish that upon you – upon any human being.”

>> Really? I can think of a handful I’d happily send into an inferno so bleak Dante did not dare to dream, << Tarleton scoffed. This admission did not surprise Ferguson in the least and caused him to feel a bit ill about offering his condolences. >> Thanks, truly, for your advice, but the weekend was not as kind as I had hoped and as such, at present, I simply don’t have those kinds of means. As I am flying for business, I have no choice but to follow the plan the Foreign Office has designated -<<
He sounded weary, worn down with worldly concerns. Ferguson found this hint at honesty as unsettling as the cold smile Tarleton wore where other men would scream. “Colonel, with all due respect, I think you and I both know such has never been much of a determining factor in your choices,” he paused. “This – your return ticket – I assure you, it wasn’t booked at my request. I need you alive if I’m to conduct an interview, and while I realise there is little I can do to convince you of the contrary, I wouldn’t wish continental Europe on my worst … enemy. I – I hazard to imagine the sort of man who truly would.”

Ferguson spotted a car parked illegally in front of the corner kindergarten ahead, surrounded by small children in play clothes and a few boys and girls wearing the same uniform as his sons would have been dressed in were they not currently at a holiday resort in some former Yugoslavian country with their mother and the man he was convinced they already called ‘Dad.’ The commotion around the vehicle lead him to instantly recognise the driver as one of the men who had recently broken into his flat, though the Adidas sweats had been replaced by a suit of the Italian wool variety. “Can I call you back?” he asked Tarleton, “Will you answer?”

>>If I am not in a meeting. Yea. Sure, fuck it, why not?<< he laughed. >>You saved me from Kolina’s tirade de jour and anyway, ‘tis always divine to be reminded that I am not the single biggest prick in the Queen’s service. Cheers, then.<<

Ferguson sighed, keeping his eyes on the hitman, having to agree with Tarleton’s breezy assessment.

The slender man before him and a more portly colleague had kicked in his door at shortly before four the pervious afternoon, bringing with them the beverage of the hour. Richard had been ordered at gunpoint to sit at the small table littered with the remnants of microwavable dinners that often doubled as his work desk. The man who spoke must have been close to himself in age, perhaps a bit younger. He was of Asian descent with a London accent, the elegant sort unbecoming of the red tracksuit he then wore. Ripping the landline from the wall before taking the stool opposite Richard’s, he made a slight nod at the man who had taken up most of the open kitchenette with his girth. After filling the electric water cooker with tap, the other hoodlum donning the same uniform disappeared into his mother’s bedroom. Richard begged that she be spared from whatever this was. ‘You’re a fucking disgrace,’ the southerner replied. ‘Look at this place – squalor unfit for habitation. Percy! Did we bring anything for the rubbish?’

‘The order was just for tea and biscuits, and milk - assuming the detective had let his expire. I see why that was among the boss’s concerns.’

It took a moment for it register with Richard that the two were not speaking in code. Whilst the posh-sounding Pakistani spent the next five hours explaining the negative effects of drug use - making thinly veiled threats at Richard’s person all the while - his colleague treated his mother to tea and began cleaning the house by way of robbing it in the most civil of fashions – asking the former Lady Melgrave’s permission to remove certain items from the premises. Percy left her correspondence and records alone at her request, placed the player in her bedroom at his on initiative and, from what Richard could tell from where he sat, replaced the curtains on her window and the sheets on her bed. His mother’s books were moved to where she could easily reach them from her wheelchair.

By the time everything had been vacuumed, swept, scrubbed, mopped and bleached; by the time the rubbish (including the diagrams the covered the living room walls and windows) had been taken out, the space almost looked like a proper home. Almost. Richard’s bed wound up back out on the street side where he had found it. ‘Does this surprise you?’ the man asked when his colleague had finished. ‘We are used to creating and disposing corpses. We know how to clean up
a crime scene. This though – this was considerably more work for Percy, I imagine. Here,’ he passed Ferguson a deposit receipt stating that two million pounds had been paid to his account for ‘antiques’. ‘My employer requests that you never ring her up for the purposes of recreational drug use. I personally would prefer to never have to come back to this part of town, so lets you and I understand one another. Should my esteemed colleague and I have need to return, we are going to start off by breaking everything you have left.’ He offered his hand. Petrified, Richard returned the gesture. The hitman griped his fingers he offered a little too tightly, causing the fallen inspector’s knuckles to crack. He would not have needed this display of comparative strength to understand that Ellie Hewlett’s associates had no interest in destroying his mother’s old opera records.

Seeing him again, his fingers still stung as he began to text himself Tarleton’s new number, surprised to find his number within the woman’s contacts. “Madam,” he called out as she and her daughter joined the group of other curious children and their parents and teachers who had gathered around the beautiful woman emerging from the limousine. Ferguson approached with hesitation. Hewlett greeted him with a slight tilt of her head before returning to her public with considerably more warmth. Georgie Tarleton, or so Ferguson learned when another little girl offered Lady Eleanor a homemade cake, had been anxious to get to class that morning for her school-friend’s fourth birthday.

“This looks so delicious,” Ellie smiled as she lifted the child whose birthday it was, returning the cake to a woman Ferguson assumed was either her teacher or grandmother. “But it would make me very sad to think of your friends not getting to enjoy your hard work. You know,” she winked. “We princesses must always be generous and kind – and you are a princess too, Nora. Every girl is on her birthday – no matter how old she gets. It’s a rule. And as a princess, you need to treat everyone with kindness. Ah, I do so wish I could stay for your party – but I think I am leaving cake and kingdom in good hands,” she smiled as she placed the girl down. “Patel?” she beaconed softly to her associate, “Can you help me with this, please?”

The man who had given the most impressive drug prevention speech Ferguson had ever heard struggled for a moment with the clasp of Ellie’s chain, which she then gifted to the wee Princess Nora. “I wish I had a tiara for you, my dear, but you’ll accept this instead, right? Happy Birthday, Darling! May you enjoy many more.”

The girl threw her arms around Ellie’s now-bare neck, thanking her for the spontaneous gift. Before rising again, Ellie greeted Georgie, who kissed her cheeks quickly before returned her attention to the cake for which she came. Kolina pulled her back, gave her a sandwich and the strawberry flavoured milk from her thin plastic tote and insisted on a kiss goodbye and a promise that she would be good, both of which her daughter gave freely. The smaller children swarmed to the jungle gym when the school gates were opened.

“Every girl is a princess on her birthday?” Kolina repeated to Ellie with a smirk.

“Quite,” the noblewoman laughed under her breath. “My family has been shooting our Christmas portraits every October for as long as memory serves – I’ve gotten to play princess every Halloween for the whole of my life. Ah! Just once I’d like to do something comparatively more creative … a sexed up version of some medial profession.”

“I was a slutty cop last year,” Kolina winked, adding, “Sometimes I forget you share a birthday with the devil.”

“And here I imagined that the one biographical detail everyone knows about me is that I am a twin. Apropos,” she shifted, “when you next speak to Ban, Darling, do give him my thanks for his intervening on Eugene’s behalf. You’ll understand, I have a few pressing matters that make it
impossible to ring him up myself at present and I know he phones Georgie daily.”

“Well, I would do,” Kolina said loudly, shooting Ferguson a glare through what remained of the crowd. The inspector approached, timidly handed her the mobile he had commandeered, apologising once more as she snatched it back. “You have no idea who I am, do you?” she demanded of him. Before Ferguson could inquire as to why he should, she returned her attention to the device. “Oh. He’s already hung up. We will have words later, mark me,” Kolina swore to the man no longer holding the line.

“Ah – Fergie,” Ellie greeted sharply with a painted smile. Return her attentions to the young mother she asked, “What is this about, then?”

“This fuck once turned his best friends into the police,” Kolina answered of her child’s father. “And this wanker”, she expanded, again using the epithet by which she would henceforth always refer to Ferguson by, “overheard Georgie talking to her dad on the bus and stole the damn thing from me that he could – I don’t actually know? Help Ban plan some sort of escape from an airport? To think this is where my taxes are going -”

Ellie did not seem to be listening. “Lina,” she interrupted, her voice deceptively light and musical. “I recall specifically asking you not to read through the documentation I had you gather and distribute. It is of a highly sensitive nature and it serves no one to discuss it on the street. Ban did not know what his words had done - he still does not to the extent of my knowledge - and I would quite appreciate it if you kept it that way. Am I understood?”

Kolina nodded. Her expression spoke to a reality that at least part of the relationship between herself and the effortlessly elegant Eleanor was of a professional nature. For all of the deceptions that she covered herself in, Richard Ferguson’s most formidable enemy had not secured her seat on the board without bloodying her own hands - she had confessed that much to him when she was but a girl.

“Now, do you need a lift?” Ellie asked.

“I’m fine,” Kolina seemed to evade.

“Are you certain?”

“The university is in the opposite direction of where you are headed,” the young mother claimed as she removed a parcel from the rucksack which she had not handed off to her daughter, shoving what remained of her breakfast selections in the space its absence created. “Anyway, I’ve been trying to read the new chapter of Turn for the better part of the weekend, but -”

“I understand,” Ellie nodded. “Is there a new one out?”

“From Friday,” Kolina shrugged, “I’ve only gotten -”

“Don’t tell me, I have not looked at it at all yet. We’ll have a proper chat when we’ve both made time for reading,” she prattled gaily.

“What is Turn?” Ferguson interjected, wanting to hear Ellie’s interpretation.

“What the fuck kind of detective are you?” Kolina demanded, hands on her hips, “Seriously, how the hell did they give you that badge and -”

“It is this brilliant work of friend-fiction,” Ellie clarified, “I mean that in the best and worst way possible. Right now, Setauket it is absolutely ridiculous in itself: the senator who saved my best
friend’s life went missing without a trace, my older brother - heir presumptive to the largest conglomeration of duchies in Britain - is marrying himself to a bartender for some residence extension, and this woman – this Abigail Ingram, is writing a period drama about spies and petticoats. It is like … how dose one possibly translate that into this?” she paused. “She did make Simcoe a murderous, lustful psychopath though – which I rather appreciate.”

“And why is that?”

“Ah, it took everyone in my little clique more than a decade to know him for what he is, I just think the image Turn provides is rather accurate – and I do, so, so very much hope that Edmund’s Anna is half the self-serving, manipulative,” she hummed rather than swear, her eyes dancing from side to side “the novel paints her as if my dear brother is serious about making her his bride. You need a bit of that to survive in our world. Fabienne Bouchard doesn’t have it within her. Edna’s Douglass-Chaplin and my Campbell don’t possess enough of it either to get far with our family. It would simply make these awkward little get-togethers a wee bit more interesting, if I am to be frank,” Ellie smarted. “Now, Inspector, on that note, do you fancy a lift? I imagine we are ultimately going to the same address.”

“Uh I – I guess.”

“Cheers, Ells. You should choose your friends better and you own me a new ink cartridge,” Kolina hugged her.

“And you should do better to remember that the worst thing about a person is not necessarily the truest thing about them,” Ellie returned the embrace with something of a caution that the inspector supposed was meant for him as well.

“Whatever,” Kolina replied, looking at Ferguson. “Right, I guess we will be in touch. Take better cares towards yer mum, Wanker.”

Unsure how to respond, he simply waved until she turned the corner, eyes fixed on a smartphone, presumably reading an account of who Edmund and Anna might be if they wore petticoats and perukes.

The two women had met eight years prior in the back of a similar vehicle. Ellie had been up from Oxford to celebrate Christmas, by which Ferguson knew it was meant she had spent her October birthday in the same way she spent all others, smiling with people she did not see if she could otherwise help it, pretending to be a family in front of press core in a pre-arranged photo-op, scenes that looked to be set around the castle but were in fact staged within feet of one another. She had spotted Kolina at a bus stop through a tinted window en route from the airport to the circus. The girl had been crying, pinned up against the Plexiglas wind-guard, an older man’s hand up the skirt of her school uniform.

“I did what anyone would do,” Ellie claimed with a practiced nonchalance. “I asked Patel to stop, got out of the car and ensured that this predator would never touch another girl.”

“You killed him,” Ferguson interjected.

“Perhaps. Perhaps I simply inquired as to his address and sent a few of my associates over to clean the place up a bit. Apropos, did your mother like the tea I sent?” Her lips hazarded into a smile as
her eyebrows rose in recognition.

When he did not answer, she continued that upon learning the assailant was living with the victim and her mother, she took the lass to a battered women’s shelter and helped her file a claim with the police (something Ferguson was later able to verify.) In the time that had since elapsed, the two had kept in touch, Ellie providing part of her university tuition in exchange for an odd project here and again.

“Espionage?”

“Not in the sense that you are imagining it or that Ms Ingram does. Did you know, Inspector, that in this day and age there is far more money to be made with the sale of data than there is with drugs? Grey area too … legally speaking. I’m a bit proud if I dare to admit it to have been part of that.”

“Breaking into my home and email server is pretty black and white.”

“So is accepting bribes, but here we find ourselves,” she smiled. “Kolina didn’t break in to your flat. She made a mistake and is paying for it through community service which includes bringing warm meals to your mum.”

That was why she was annoyed he did not recognise her, he realized. The world’s worst never seemed to let pass a chance to remind him that he was of their numbers.

“May I offer you something to drink, Inspector? Coffee, tea, champagne -”

“I thought you didn’t drink.”

“I don’t among people I can’t trust.”

“I don’t think I have anything to celebrate.”

“Perhaps not.”

“Do you … trust me, Ellie?” Ferguson inquired after a moment.

“I trust that you want to see me in jail. You know I’ve always rather liked that about you Fergs, that naivety that allows you to imagine people can be held accountable for their actions. It’s charming. Oh, do promise me you’ll never change.”

He nodded slowly. “Is that why you don’t trust Coronel Tarleton or Ms Gwillim?”

“It is not that I don’t trust Effie … but I have my doubts about her judgement. She is careful when it comes to business concerns and societal ones as they pertain to me personally, but frequently fails to respect possible future outcomes of the public interest pieces she pens or prints. Mary knows it is all rubbish and we can laugh about it together, but her daughter, my godchild, is at that age where everything feels like an alienation. I don’t want Marie to be under the impression that I had anything to do with her mum and sort-of-step-dad separating when she has so few adults in her life she trusts right now. It is things … things like what Effie sometimes prints about Ban and I which prevent me from telling her anything, you know … personal. If lies are destructive think of what truths would do.”

He had been all morning. He asked anyway.

“What would they do?”
“Hopefully we will never find out,” she laughed without smiling.

“I think deep down you want nothing more.”

“Than normal relationships with my dearest friends? Don’t we all.”

“Than to make it all stop.”

“I think you are projecting,” she challenged.

“I could lose my job for that, you know … for the files you sent to DS Yilmaz. And I think your little hacker was right, you need to choose your friends more carefully.”

Ellie leaned forward, “I’ll confess to anything you wish if you agree to leave her out of it.”

“Why would you do that? Ellie, I swear – I don’t understand you at all. Did you bother reading my report before -”

“Of course I did, and yes – I think you do. Understand me that is. What would my goal be in sending an email to a copper who otherwise has no outlet to gather information regarding the one case in which both my brother and John Graves Simcoe appear? Simple. You were right – neither were guilty of anything half so severe as that which they are now being accused. The record you kept shows that John only intervened as much as he did out of a misguided notion that I needed protection and that my brother attempted to mislead the search out of a sense of guilt, thinking himself somehow responsible for behaviour that John at no point exhibited. I hazard to guess the same is happening now in New York. John found himself in the wrong place at the wrong time thanks to some skirt and Edmund assumed the worst of him. Tallmadge and his team will compare your evidence to their own; separate the two for questioning, make Edmund think that John betrayed him in hopes of optioning a confession -”

“How can you continue to be mates with a man who all but told me -” he began.

“How to extort me? He knows me better than anyone else does – well, anyone but you,” she smiled. “Ban didn’t know what was going on, by the way. I should doubt he does even now. And if he did … well, maybe he was betting on you making enough of a mess of it as to allow me to exploit my predicament.”

“It bothers me. I know you and Tarleton both and I cannot imagine you being in a room together under any regular circumstance. Socially, politically, ethically, you are about as opposite as any two people can be before differences become similarities. So what is it?”

“I have considerably more control over my own press than he does, Inspector. Don’t believe everything you read,” she paused. “You ever been given Effie Gwillim’s antithesis on truth?”

“With half the questions I ask,” Ferguson muttered.

“…Her specifically or in a more general sense?”

“Hard to say, harder to tell. Where are we going?” New Town was in the opposite direction of the destination he thought he had been promised.

“Post Office,” Ellie chirped. “Breakfast … if you want some.”

“Are you hungry?” he asked. The small sounds his own stomach made reminded him that he had neglected dinner the night before.
“Most menus don’t cater to my taste, but I could go for a coffee.”

“I always forget that about you. Most vegans I know -”

“I’ve never understood that. I never found any topic as impossibly and imposingly dull as listing foods one won’t eat, or pretending that there is anything moral to it. It is a trend like any other. I only partake because I find it a convenient means of avoidance. I’ve always seemed to struggle with eating in general. It is always ‘it is not attractive to be so thin’ or ‘you know she is anorexic, right?’ or some other assessment everyone feels qualified to give. When people know that I don’t partake of any animal products, however, I’m suddenly granted with this artificial beauty of both body and soul. If I don’t have time to eat or simply forget, it is like ‘well who can blame her, tofu is disgusting,’” she rolled her eyes.

“I wish that was not your experience,” Ferguson said solemnly. If Eleanor Hewlett could be bothered to feign belief in higher morals he did not share, it might be easier to ignore the ethics that he had been shown evaded him entirely. He had to break her. He had a badge. There world was not a just place.

“I wish we did not live in a world where women rate themselves and each other by how their waistlines compare. One way or another this is every girl’s experience and we all find individual ways to cope. Veganism is wide spread enough that I am never asked to explain it and people are typically gleeful that I don’t, present company excluded.”

“I wasn’t making a moral judgement. That is more your terrain.”

“You judge me constantly.”

“Because the law requires it.”

“Not enough, clearly.”

Perhaps there was a measure of truth to this, too.

“Here,” she said, handing him the package Kolina had given her. “You can open it. It is a list of every patient in the New York metropolitan area who has been prescribed oxycodone since December of last year. A pharmaceutical lobbyist who is currently the subject of an ongoing investigation sold it to a man with whom I’ll no longer be doing business. I’m just forwarding this information along as a way of thanking Inspector Tallmadge for what I hope will be his continued cooperation.”

“Tallmadge isn’t on that case anymore,” Ferguson said, flipping through a list of hundreds of names and addresses.

“I never said I planned to send it to Tallmadge,” Ellie smiled. “You’ll see. Tomorrow afternoon, I should think. You might take the day off.”

“I can’t just hand this back to you.”

“You think too highly of yourself to avert the forces of justice because you imagine that you don’t like me very much,” she smarted.

“I imagine this has more to do with your wanting to protect Edmund, John and Ban form further suspicion than it does with any effort towards law, order and authority.”

“Ban?” she blinked, effectively removing her mask. “No, he has nothing to do -”
“Thanks to you he is one of DS Yilmaz’s prime suspects,” the inspector informed her lightly. He had been paid by a Hewlett to behave like a Hewlett. He was beginning to take compliment in the comparison when he saw how easy it was to introduce Lady Eleanor to her demons as she had often hosted balls for his. Perhaps he was becoming a bit of a sadist after all. Perhaps his badge demanded he be one.

“But he didn’t … have anything to do with … Arnold went missing days before he -” she stammered.

“In the spirit of honesty, I really do not think he had a role to play, either. Not initially, at least. Your immediate reaction tells me you think Edmund and/or John certainly did, however.”

Ellie’s dark eyes widened in recognition.

“I assume that goes a ways further into why you sent Yilmaz my files. So tell me, Princess,” Ferguson grinned. “What exactly did I miss all of those years ago?”

The Towne Car rolled to a stop.

They bantered to keep from screaming, to delay questions and accusations in favour of an illusion of the normal they had long known and never cherished.

John Graves Simcoe stood over a table holding a tape measurer while the host whose hospitality he had all but exhausted flipped through a codex. “I understand the game,” he told Hewlett. “I simply fail to comprehend how you and Wakefield have the patience or rather desire to spend your free time engaged in it.”

Since laying Mary in her bed and leaving her to the lies they had once shared, Simcoe had taken to strategy, allowing his mind to be consumed by battle plans, forcing Hewlett’s legions to line up against each other. He squinted as he measured the distance and impact of his latest roll.

The game itself was long and needlessly complex; a needed distraction from the real war they were losing, from the terms of their defeat. Hewlett had returned to Whitehall wearing an ankle monitor after Sunday had turned into Monday, offering nothing verbal of his police interrogation or the hours that separated its end from his return. “I told you that you would hate it,” he said of Warhammer.

“It makes no difference; I’m not letting you play.”

“It might make for more of a competition.”

“I appreciate the modal auxiliary,” Simcoe smirked. “You are aware that I pose a far superior adversary to myself than you could ever hope to prove. I’ve been at this for hours and I simply wish to see which of my strategies -”

“Oh there is no denying that you do more towards your own destruction that anyone else would ever think to,” Hewlett spat before shifting, “are you using metric or imperial units – ah, never mind.” He took a deep breath before adding, “It is not something I would brag about.”

“No. Because you would have no need to. You walk out of an interrogation you could have
predicted with an ankle monitor and I -”

“They have the files from the incident we were cautioned to never speak of,” Hewlett rubbed his temples. For all the energy that the prince had expanded in assuming that his brother’s strategic marriage to a general’s daughter would serve to exonerate them all, Simcoe imagined that the case in question must have at least crossed his mind. He could have prepared a defence. The fact that it seemed he had not so much as thought to do so was distressing and demoralizing. It gave Simcoe cause to question his sometimes-friend’s commitment. With Hewlett having declared for him, he worried that the war would prove longer and bloodier without any benefit. It had to end. He had to win, and win quickly. Mary Woodhull had already been made causality. He could not, and would not see her hurt again. He wanted to have her, to help her, and he could not do either were he to remain engaged against Tallmadge for much longer. The detective inspector, after all, held the higher ground and commanded better men.

“I know” Simcoe belittled, angered that his closest ally was not up to task. “I was questioned about it as well. Disappointed – I honestly thought the ordeal would prove more of a challenge.”

“Ferguson claims that Ellie sent the files,” Hewlett replied flatly.

“What possible reason would she have for doing that?”

“Revenge, perhaps,” Hewlett muttered, not meeting his eyes. “Did you ever talk to Tarleton about what we did?”

“I never talked to anyone about it, unlike yourself,” Simcoe spat.

“I didn’t say much to the police, they – they just caught me off guard. DS Yilmaz, you see … she thinks that I’ve been trying to point the search to Ban Tarleton.”

“What, because of the Everton jersey?” he squinted.

“It is more complicated than that, “Hewlett relayed. “Turns out, he has been in Washington for a few days. Served under Arnold in the operation that cost him his command. His commission is due to expire in a few months and … the police think he might have something to do with Arnold’s disappearance. That maybe he is trying to pin it on us, or that we are trying to pin it on him.”

It was impossible and untrue, but upon reflection, Simcoe would not put it past his childhood friend to do something of the sort and could see how Tallmadge had come on this theory. It was the kind of manoeuvre he might have himself made before he had been forced to consider consequence as more than an abstract concept. It was not difficult to imagine Hewlett attempting the same, which came as a comfort as cutting as it felt. Contradictions, Simcoe maintained, ought to cancel one another out. When it came to Edmund Hewlett, they never seemed to do so.

“That is a turn I didn’t see coming,” he admitted. “Are you trying to exploit it?” They both stood at the desk, staring at the tin soldiers Simcoe imagined as firing shells. He returned to the fantasy he had unwillingly extended to Hewlett, speaking to him as though brass pins covered their shoulder sashes and the breast of their dress coats. It was too easy. He had the feeling that he could dispose of a man for reasons that did not extend beyond resentment. Studying Hewlett, he gathered they both felt the rush.

“I was trying to lead Tallmadge to André, but that is impossible giving that we don’t know where he is,” Hewlett frowned. “We should have called Rogers on Friday. He is so mad about the penalty we handed to Middle County that he did not even come up to the station to give a statement. If he knows where André is, little chance he will tell us now.”
He was right. Simcoe did not want to acknowledge his own error or be reminded that he had made one. “I ask again – are you intending to put this on Tarleton?”

Hewlett was silent for a long while before meeting the question with another. “What would you do?” he asked so softly it felt like the surrender of a command. Simcoe, who had long wished for the man to resign in shame, needed the company of the warrior he contradictorily suspected the weakling of being. He needed an example reaffirmed. Kind men did not win wars.

“I spent the better part of my life wishing that you would be brought to justice whilst simultaneously wishing that you would return to protect me from a danger I long since have not faced. Tonight both came to fruition and I … never hated myself more,” he confessed. “I can’t defend Tarleton, but he has experienced the world in ways I have not and I don’t believe it is mine to judge him either. We were friends, once. I’ll talk to him.”

“John, I’m so sorry,” Hewlett sighed, pained by his words or the actions that made him feel they were warranted.

“If you mean it - that you are sorry - for the love of Christ will you stop reminding me of it?” Simcoe spat. “It makes me miss you … it makes me miss who I imagine you were before we met. I fear I may have killed you, too.” He felt his fingers tap against his upper thigh. He felt Hewlett’s eyes on them.

“Maybe you did. But maybe it is just the cycle of nature, death, rebirth – unconcerned with and unconnected to the individual.”

“Is that how you wash your hands of sin?” he smarted after a moment.

“No,” Hewlett hazarded to smile. “I do that by falling in love with the girl I meant to marry for a Green Card, by gambling with my freedom to force Appleby’s to drop their interest in the property she asked me to buy for her. I do that by spying on the French, getting two of my best friends in on an insider trading scheme, confessing to embezzlement to ensure that if this blows up, I’ll be the only one to face punishment, all while trying to hide the fact that you and Mrs. Woodhull played a part in Arnold’s disappearance. I could go on, but I take you point. No amount of wrongs could ever make a right. The ankle monitor though, that only has to do with my admitting that I crossed state lines to help Akinbode work through a break up. You have – I’m certain – countless reasons not to trust me. Tallmadge only has this one. Maybe two … I admitted to having no contact with Tarleton since he -”

“Killed those kids?” Simcoe asked in a way that assumed the answer.

“Proposed to my sister,” Hewlett finished before allowing the question to twist his kaleidoscope of expressions, made more manifest by the bruises that stained his pale skin. “What kids?” he gaped.

“What proposal?”

“One that by all indications she was smart to reject.”

“I’m not sure. I knew they were in love before I really knew either of them. Nice to think Ban at least had it figured out at one point.” It was nice to think that Hewlett, too, was still governed by a certain coldness which Simcoe had always suspected him. Hewlett was either his greatest creation, or he was Hewlett’s. The man admitted in not so many words that he would make a pawn out of a non-combatant without any cause beyond seeing him as a means to their survival. Simcoe hoped it was meant in earnest. He needed to believe in his alliances. He needed to believe he could still be loved in ways not given by imagined necessity.
“I’m not sure,” Hewlett continued to frown. “She paid off a gambling debt of his which probably just means she had cash that she needed to make disappear. They are both opportunists -”

“No. Tarleton wouldn’t lie about that,” Simcoe considered, “neither of them would.”

The Ellie Hewlett he had known was, or presumably would be, the product of a self-fulfilling prophecy. She never entertain the idea of love, knowing one day she would be married off to a fellow noble, a pawn in a geopolitical game of chess that would never be won. She would give her lord husband a son and, having exhausted her political utility would promptly meet her end before she had the chance to become a liability. The Windsors, she told him, had learned from Diana. The Hewletts had as well. The most she could do was eradicate some of the evil of the past several centuries while she maintained the last name connecting her to them. Soon she would be a Campbell and Simcoe considered that he might well weep on her wedding day with the knowledge that he wished he shared in yet another characteristic of the most terrible, twisted man he had ever known.

For all his faults, Tarleton had at least tried his luck where he must have known he could only be negated.

Simcoe, by comparison, had not confessed his love for fear of consequences less severe. He wanted to help Mary Woodhull. Nothing, he realised, could be salvaged or saved when one feared confrontation with his own heart.

“Everything alright?” Hewlett asked.

“What does it feel like, when you fall in love with the one person you know you to be forbidden?” Simcoe posed. Hewlett, or so he distressed, was a stronger man as well. He had held every incentive to not fall in love with Anna Strong and the life he had struggled to create for himself had fallen apart the moment he had spoken three words – words, which Simcoe doubted, he would take back if given the chance.

“Can I ask why?”

“Mary told me she loved me. I don’t know her well enough to know if this was fear or pragmatism or simply a slight at the strength of my moral character – it was unnecessary and frankly inappropriate, however, it begs the question -”

“Are you stupid?” Hewlett demanded. “How did you respond?”

It occurred to Simcoe that he had never seen his comrade in arms truly riled before today though they had certainly been in fights too numerous for numbers. Perhaps it was the hour, perhaps it was the atmosphere, perhaps the words he had just spoke or the profuseness of problems that faced them outside of this new theatre, but Simcoe felt aware of the blow. He felt it like the knife that had found itself into his chest, aimed with far less force and precision than Hewlett’s present dissension. Simcoe wondered if he had had this conversation before with Mary, or with another resident of Whitehall whose surname she shared. Certainly, it seemed he had prepared for this eventuality the way that Simcoe had prepared to be confronted with Ferguson’s case files at some point.

So this was what it was to be found of guard.

“I didn’t,” he admitted sheepishly.

“I ask again,” Hewlett bit. "Are you actually an idiot?"
Mary Woodhull had enough experience combating rejection that a phrase left unanswered ought not to have stung. For a long while she lay awake, inventing explanations, filling an absence of words with excess until she became aware of their lack of weight. Doubt had no benefit of which to speak. Mary found that she could not afford to John the same acceptance with which she had long met her husband’s evasion. Perhaps it was that their lies had become truths – an inversion of that which she had known in her marriage. Perhaps having invented an alibi together, Mary found herself unable to fabricate one independently for a loss of interest or affection. He courted conflict on her behalf yet shied from her every advance.

Mary loved a man who she paradoxically could not claim to know.

Ashamedly, she found herself reaching for her mobile as though it were reflex. She had spent six years searching Abe’s text messages for clues as to where he had really been when he came home late from Rob’s, Caleb’s or a gig at some supposed dive bar that even Google could not find. In a similar fashion, she typed John’s name into the search bar on her home screen, hoping for some indication as to who he had been before he had had her to ignore.

Nothing on the first page of results lead Mary to any particular revelation. John Graves Simcoe was extremely successful in his field; he was at one point engaged to a media heiress and entrepreneur who bore a slight resemblance to Anna, one that would perhaps be more striking if her college-and-current housemate had the benefit of a private platiés instructor and a corporate Photoshop licence.

“If she wasn’t good enough for him,” Mary muttered to herself, not bothering to bring the conditional to its logical conclusion as she continued to scroll. She glazed through a number of news articles either about him in a professional capacity or in which he was quoted in the same regard. All Mary learned for her efforts was that John thought that someone called Nate Silver whose name she vaguely knew from the news was doing statistics a disservice in refusing to submit his analytical model to peer review. She imagined herself pretending to understand the criticism at the sort of dinner part where such things were discussed until wine turned the conversation back to sport. Laughing with people to whom she did not relate, lost and alone in her lover’s company. At the bottom of the screen, she tried one of the other search results prompted by the term ‘John Graves Simcoe’. ‘JG Simcoe’ brought her to a lyrics site, which brought her to view videos on loop. Two hours passed before her iPhone died. Two hours in which she heard John’s voice within Mary Robinson’s smooth, sultry contralto, the alembic of that which he chose to say so opposite to his sound.

Mary Woodhull did not know the man she had offered her heart to, but she understood him in ways she had no comparable talent in which to express. She felt his ever-failing search for place and purpose, his hidden wanting for the traits that he condemned in others. She felt lost in the paintings and postcards that had been torn from her walls, leaving only their shadows in purer shades of white that had yet to pale in the sun. She felt empty, open, lonely and lost. She did not know the man she loved, but on some level, she knew what it was to be him.

She fell asleep filling the silence left by the three words he had not said with the hundreds he claimed he never planned to offer.

“Mrs Woodhull,” someone whispered as they shook her shoulder hard enough to wake her.

“Why are we whispering?” Mary asked as she looked up to see Aberdeen. Crocking her neck
slightly, she found the opposite end of the bed empty and began to weep – not for the fact that Abraham had once again abandoned her to an empty bedchamber, but because she found such relief in his absence.

“Oh, non, non!” the au pair exclaimed, before hugging her, softly singing a folk song in Hattian Creole she used to calm Thomas, stoking her hair until Mary began to hum along. “Balancé yaya Yaya o - Yaya Madan Mango balancé Yaya -Talon kikit sa se pou Yaya, that is good, Mrs Woodhull, yes, very good. Is it your leg? ’Ave you so much pain?”

“No I … I think I am happy. I think that must be it,” Mary answered. “Have you heard anything form Abe?”

“No … but Mr ‘Ewlett says that ee saw your Jeep parked at Robert Rogers’ on his way back. I imagine ee – Mr Woodhull – is working late. Only that.”

“Work would typically denote a wage,” Mary sighed. Aberdeen looked at her with something between sorrow and expectation. “I’m glad he isn’t here. I shouldn’t be happy that things have gotten so bad between us, but I am … and that’s why I am crying. Maybe I am just tired. What time is it?”

“It is a little after midnight,” Aberdeen answered. Mary realised she could not have been sleeping very long.

“And why did you wake me up?”

“It is Peggy -”

“This sounds like something that could have waited until morning.” Mary muttered. The best argument against liberalism was hearing liberals speak. The same could be said of the opposite faction. She closed her eyes and prayed for patience if deliverance could not be granted to a sinner such as herself as Aberdeen continued frantically.

“No, it cannot! Mrs Woodhull, there is something I think I need to tell you. I should not know this, but I ’ad the most ’orrible of ’eadaches when I awake and I overheard Mr ‘Ewlett and Ms Strong talking … when I …” the au pair began to sniff.

“It is okay, Aberdeen, what did they say and what, pray tell, does it have to do with Peggy Shippen?”

“Anna, euh, Ms Strong said that this Dr André, Abigail’s boss, the one I saw on Friday after he was meant to have gone to rehabilitation against alcohol abuse – I … I told you this. I told you and ‘Ewlett and all of Whitehall that I told Robert Townsend I saw him – André - with Peggy.”

“I’d … forgotten,” Mary confessed. It had been a long weekend. She found herself wishing for the left-wing rhetoric she imagined would confront her.

“What if ‘Ewlett ’asn’t?” Aberdeen exclaimed. “What if ee is telling this to Mr Simcoe right now, or if ee has already told ‘im?”

“Is Mr Simcoe still here?”

“Yes … with Mr ‘Ewlett, it is the problem, part of the problem. Anna ‘as told Edmund in the morning that ee should ‘ave let Simcoe kill André when ee was angry enough to do it. She said that André tried to kill ’Ewlett to make Mr Simcoe so upset as this – and I don’t want, I don’t want that anything should ‘appen!” she began weeping, uncontrolled. Mary moved to hug her, but Aberdeen
declined the affection.

“Nothing is going to happen,” she tried to assure her. Aberdeen forced a folded piece of paper into her hand.

“But I found this in Peggy’s possessions when I was helping her to unpack, it is from André. You know ‘ow Mr ‘Ewlett ‘as a ‘eart condition? It is a lie! André was trying to control ‘is medication to mimic the symptoms, ee made him think all kinds of ‘orrible things that ‘is depression would worsen, that ee could monitor the effect this ’as on Mr Simcoe – ee meant to make ‘im, Mr ‘Ewlett, commit suicide! And Peggy, she stole this too – from Abigail. She tried to explain it to me but she doesn’t know what I know so I just played dumb and let ‘er talk. She thinks she is in love with André but if ee can make this football team of his do all sorts of self-‘arming things so he can study the effects of fear on the psyche – I think so that ee manipulates Peggy as well. They sent ‘im to a mental institution – to Belleview. Maybe it is good, if he were actually a patient, but he is only there to finish ‘is research where the police can’t get ‘im! And Peggy, she is to report to ‘im everything about ‘Ewlett and Simcoe and the others, which is why she is living ’ere and not in Trump Tower. I don’t know what to do.”

Mary reasoned that she did however, justifying that they all did mad things for what they thought was love.

“You were right to come to me, Aberdeen.”

Chapter End Notes

To round out the football analogy from the introductory notes, (the legendary) Sam Allardyce recently made a controversy-inviting comment in a post-match interview (this sort of activity, in accordance with his position as a Premiership manager in 2018, is far more of a show than Big Sam’s actual football and may perhaps be his primary role at the club.) I thought his words were worth a share in light of the chapter you just suffered:

"I've got no problem with the fans booing us because we deserved booing, that's what happens. We didn't play very well and the fans show their disapproval, and rightly so, because they pay money to come and watch us."

Well said, Sam. That sentiment pretty much encompasses the way I feel about taking up ninety or so minutes of the time for which you pay a rate to your internet provider each month. If memory serves, the Everton gaffer advised his players to take it in, let it hurt and learn from it. I’m doing my best, guys. Hopefully I will be able to end this transitional arc in the next update and get us back to something I imagine you as wanting to read.

So then, on to the notes!

Geography:
Nothing about Brussels stated in this chapter was in any way exaggeratory. In fact, I may have toned it down for younger audiences.
With a population of 4mil. Berlin is the largest city in Germany. One could graph the entire population in a Venn-Diagram with one circle for Vegans and the other for Politicians. The overlap is probably huge.

Munchkin-glad-beer is an English approximation of Mönchengladbach, another city in Germany. There is a long running joke about how difficult the Scots find this word to spell and pronounce because Celtic has faced the Fohlen Elf in the CL seemingly often in recent years.

The streets, kindergarten and kiosk in Edinburgh are all very much real places. That guy who sells newspapers and phone cards across from Haymarket? Never looks up from his phone. Ever. I aspire to that level of self-indulgence.

Melgrave is a small town in the middle of Scotland that boasts a cleaning service and laundry mat in its single block of shops, and was chosen for that reason alone.

If you are reading The Liverpool Echo, Toxteth is the single worst district in all of Great Britain, which is indicative of nothing save for local bias. Manchester newspapers, as a point of comparison, all claim that the worst of the nation is within their city limits.

Notable Persons:
Banina Georgina Tarleton was Ban’s natural daughter, born, brought up and buried in Scotland. Her mother is listed only as Kolina in baptismal records. There is evidence that by-then-General Tarleton took care to visit and provide for her, which is really the least he could do, having feminised his first name in such a manner as to allow his kid go about sounding like an exotic fruit. Marie Robinson (sometimes Maria) is Mary Robinson’s daughter, whose early life Tarleton was also involved in. Sadly, both girls died within months of each other, decades before their sort-of-sometimes-father-figure, who had no children with his wife.

In 2018, none of the criticism Simcoe was stated as offering up on Nate Silver is revolutionary, I know, but for the sake of historically accuracy, in March 2016 the FiveThirtyEight model had yet to come under serious scrutiny. Simcoe always seems to know what’s up with everyone’s b---s---, or? ;)

Sport:
The British & Irish Lions did a tour to South Africa in 1997. This is an event that takes place in the world of union rugby every four years. Fairly recently, I got the see them in New Zealand and would one-hundred percent recommend flying out for such a tournament (as long as you don’t have a connection through Brussels, that is.)

The 2006 FIFA World Cup took place in Germany. No matches took place in Mönchengladbach, I just really wanted to use that joke.

In football, an own goal is where a player scores on their own side of the playing area rather than the one defended by the opponent. It is also a widely employed metaphor for any action that backfires...

Up Next: The subsequent Nuremberg trials
Simcoe voices his doubts over Abe’s innocence in Arnold’s disappearance; Mary begins to suspect that neither man is guilty of ever having loved her. Aberdeen offers insight and assistance, not wanting to see Peggy hurt by John André in a similar fashion as that to many of her other friends and acquaintances. The following morning, Tarleton pleads his case to Simcoe before confronting Washington with a troubling confession.

Chapter Notes

Hello again lovely faces! Judging from a few of the comments I received on the last chapter, I believe an apology may be in order. I presented you with the penultimate chapter of this already too-long transitional arc, alongside the assumption that all of my readers were well vested in one another’s libraries. While my belief that readers tend to comment remains unshaken (after all, don’t we as English speakers already have ‘Ulysses’ to lie to one another about having read? ;) I ought to have provided some links of better interest to my tired audience. So! Ladies and gentlemen, I have scoured the internet looking for fics that may prove more worth your while should this chapter’s summary not be to your liking. In no particular order:

For my fellow fans of twenty-first century politics, I found the definitive work: The Impossibility, Which Makes This Possible - guys I remember reading this as a teenager and I cannot believe, but am oh so pleased to discover that the David Cameron / Ed Miliband fic is still going strong! I need to catch up …

Staying in Britain, if you haven’t seen the award-winning limerick UK foreign minister (and poet laureate) Boris Johnson wrote about the sexual relations between the Turkish president and a goat, I got you: I wish I was making this up but at the same time I am so glad I’m not.

Perhaps however, you have developed a taste for footy, crime drama and Germany? I confess, I haven’t read this one yet, but it sounds promising: Kissed by the Devil & Saved by an Angel. Check it out!

These all may sound a bit tongue-in-cheek, I’ll admit, but I promise you I stand behind my list of better reading. None more so than with: Haywired - really, how have you not read Haywired? It is the best Simcoe / Hewlett fic out there and offers one of the most compelling character studies as seen from a modern setting in this fandom. Plus, it is hilarious. Wandering Ghost has a way with Simcoe’s voice that is simply unparalleled. She also has an amazing blog with gorgeous TURN fan art and a work of original fiction that I cannot recommend highly enough.

In case you are here for Tallster (I can’t wait either!) Meet Me Under The Bleachers is my personal all-time favourite work for this pair (and not just because I am a simple girl who simply loves sport AUs.) You haven’t read it? You need to read it! Seriously,
it is the freakin’ best I’ve found.

You know what the funny thing is? I found most of these searching the tags for an Arsène Wanger / Retirement fic. To my great shock and horror, none exist. (Guess which epic I’ll be writting next?)
But what have I written for you as of now? What, oh what, did you click on?
Good news is, this is the very end of the bridge, bad news is, it is still upwards of ten thousand words and … want to just do the thing?

Warnings include: right wing rhetoric, casual racism, colloquial misuse of literary terms, bitter heart break, gun control, endless monologues …and another act of the Athenian tragedy that is House Hewlett. Is it a Tarleton-heavy chapter? (And generally heavy chapter?) Ugh. Yes, but he isn’t given a POV and it is the last we will see or hear from the wayward colonel for a long, long while. I personally couldn’t be happier.

We start with Mary though, so shall we? ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“What precisely are you suggesting we tell him, Mrs Woodhull?” Edmund Hewlett asked.

“Anything you want,” Mary replied with a slight grin which her tenant then met. The bruise stains and shadows on Hewlett’s face bleed badly into the room’s near-blackness. His studio flat above Whitehall’s garage was dark save for the glow of a bedside reading lamp - shutters closed and thick drapes pulled over the small windows that not even the light of the stars be granted entry into their private covenant. The group spoke in whispers – that was – its members that could be bothered to speak. Mary had brought Aberdeen to Hewlett’s quarters a half an hour earlier and asked her to repeat everything she had gathered from Peggy Shippen’s desultory musings on her first brush with what the poor girl considered love. Mary’s original partner in crime had barely offered a word since their arrival.

Hearing Peggy’s situation again explained in John Graves Simcoe’s presence, Mary wondered if she did not have more reasons to empathise with the young woman who had unknowingly marked herself as an enemy. John had scarcely afforded her a greeting, sitting on the side of Hewlett’s bed as though wounded - unable or unwilling to meet the gaze of the warrior who had dealt him such a crippling blow. Was it something so terrible, Mary found herself wondering, to be loved by her? To be told as much?

Abraham had yet to come home. When Hewlett asked what she would do should he discover her here, Mary had remarked out of hand that any excuse would suffice; when they returned to their sometimes-shared bed she would pretend as though she desired her husband physically, thereby ensuring that he would not touch her or pay her any mind for the next month. Her own comments now stung like salt on open skin. Perhaps it was the same with all men. Mary had told John that she loved him and had allowed herself the comfort of letting his disability to serve as an excuse for his lack of response. Now, she was certain he had heard her, or at least read those three weighted words as they parted her lips. How, Mary cursed herself, could she possibly have been such a fool? They had scarcely known one another for a week and John had warned her as he carried her up the stairs that he left affection long unanswered – the poem he had written that had made its way into the UK Top 40 was a response (perhaps to a similar challenge) delayed by nearly a decade.
Mary glanced a framed photograph shaved to the side of Hewlett’s desk to make room for a Roman legion. Perhaps, she thought, were she as charming, pretty, witty and well-bred as the younger of the two sisters smiling in their riding gear, she would have dreary love songs written about her as well.

In six years of being married to a musician, Mary have never recognised herself in a single line of Abe’s lyrics. She closed her eyes. She would never be John’s muse, either. She was a fool to think the affection she felt for him would ever be reciprocated. He had long been in love with Anna Strong and as experience indicated her own charms could not compare. Mary suddenly wanted Simcoe as far from her as their situation allowed. Luckily, she tried to assure herself, her nature alone was enough to push men away. Mary Woodhull was not worthy of want, but she knew how to clean up a mess.

“It makes sense that Tallmadge is focusing on Whitehall as a place of interest despite, nay, due to the lack of evidence. I cleaned DeJong’s myself and taught Aberdeen to disinfect in the same fashion. She tidies up in here when you ask her to do so,” she explained to her lodger who expressed confusion in his recollection of the sergeant’s line of questioning. She sighed as she again glanced his ankle monitor. “We need to analyse all the information we have in the manner which the inspector might in order to guess his next move. Edmund, may we use your whiteboard?”

Aberdeen was already in the process of erasing long hand equations against Hewlett’s protests. Simcoe remained silent, almost disinterested. Mary had half a mind to invite him to leave.

“Why did you clean the tavern, Mrs Woodhull? Does Inspector Tallmadge know that you ‘ave done this thing?” the au pair asked with a hint of worry that had been present in her voice since Peggy’s arrival at Whitehall. Mary frowned.

“I was there on the night in question,” she answered. “Arnold, I assure you, was not. I can’t stand filth and at the time had no reason to think Anna’s bar would turn into the site of a criminal inquiry.” Only the last bit of information she provided was a lie. Aberdeen seemed not to notice. “Tallmadge doesn’t know that I ever went inside and I intend to keep it that way.”

“Oh … t-that, that might not be true,” Hewlett injected. “As it happens … I met Abraham by happenstance this afternoon at a rest stop on my way back from Albany. He sent his man Brewster to Tallmadge to uncover the truth about the affair you both claim to be having. I know that Caleb works the Tuesday evening shift, if he saw you -”

“He didn’t,” Simcoe stated plainly. “If he had, there would have been no reason for him to pay Tallmadge a visit.”

“Tallmadge? Are we going to solve the Arnold case?” Aberdeen’s eyes widened in an excitement none of the rest of the party had the energy to share.

“We are going to try,” Mary told her. “Write down everything I say.”

The au pair, to Mary’s surprise, could write as quickly as one could speak. An hour later, both sides of the whiteboard, several sheets of paper and half a hundred post it notes of the four’s combined intelligence told them that Dr John André had been researching the phenomenon of fear on the human psyche for some considerable time. His project had attracted the interest of Dr Martha Dandridge, an esteemed colleague at Columbia University and a well-known and well-respected contributor to the science. She had convinced Washington (or perhaps the Secretary of Defence who shared the city’s name) to fund the project on the ground of its possible military implications. To this end, André had attempted to convince Edmund Hewlett to take his life with his own hand,
speeding up the process of whatever he hoped to generate in John Graves Simcoe in time for
Senator Arnold’s visit to New York.

Arnold had gone missing the day before he was scheduled to meet with André, Dandridge and their
research team. The senator intended to use the study’s findings to inform his recommendations to
the Defence Committee. The press reported that Arnold – who had been meant to speak at a Trump
rally Tuesday evening in an attempted cover for his more controversial activity in New York - had
instead arranged to meet Peggy Shippen in DeJong Tavern. The two had been engaged in an online
romance for several months.

Peggy claimed to have first learned of this along with the rest of the world. She herself skipped the
rally in favour of a better offer – Abigail had asked her to question André with regard to Hewlett’s
intentions towards Anna. Peggy Shippen had fallen in love with the alcoholic psychologist over a
plate of pierogis at an Eastern European restaurant. Having covered the cheque, her credit card
statement could validate her alibi, were she only able to give one. Tallmadge was after André.
Peggy had explained to Aberdeen that she could not let the police know she was in his vicinity.

“I don’t know why she was so keen to tell us though,” Aberdeen slighted. “I think it is to do with
‘er sorority sisters voting to revoke ‘er membership. She needed, maybe, girlfriends for talking too.
She cannot talk to Abby because she ‘as ‘ad a most terrible breakup, and Anna, she is not ‘ere.”

“I’m not entirely convinced she isn’t playing all of us,” Mary remarked. “I don’t know André, but
this feels suspiciously like his work insofar as I’ve heard of it.” It may well have been that
Simcoe’s counter argument to their differing partisan politics was enough to form the basis of
friendship – a display of ‘the enemy of my enemy’ logic to which Aberdeen seemed to ascribe.
Mary could not help but worry, however, that her child’s caregiver had been manipulated by Peggy
in the same sense they all assumed Whitehall’s newest resident to have been manipulated by
André.

“I still can’t believe it was all a lie … my heart condition, this whole bloody time. But how would he -” Hewlett murmured as he examined the piece of evidence twice stolen from his own file.

“His father was a pharmacist. I think he took a look at your medical records and the list of
medications that you take and came to an … unfortunately familiar conclusion,” Simcoe informed,
his voice shrill, fingertips tapping an unfamiliar beat against his thigh.

“Which is?” Hewlett prodded.

“That you hadn’t suffered a stroke at all. That an attempt to poison you when you were twenty
failed and this illness you were lead to believe you suffered was given as an alibi – one, that given
your relations, halted any further investigation, for if it got out that half of Britain’s princesses
might carry such a destructive gene -”

Hewlett scoffed and shook his head. “That sounds like the sort of rubbish the The Daily Mail -”

Simcoe’s eyes narrowed; though he continued to stare at and speak to Hewlett Mary felt their
sudden arctic chill. “It is what I know Tarleton to believe. Tarleton, and the twins, and Mary Anne
Burges, and Fabienne Bouchard, Danny and Charlotte Wessex, David Murphy, and … and Effie,”
his voice broke. “That is why you have never read it in The Mail.”

Mary felt her jaw clench. Effie Gwillim seemed Britain’s answer to Anna Strong: a doe-eyed
brunette with an Oxbridge background working far under her earning potential if only for the
hubris that came from always being the best among selected company. Anna was the daughter of
the district attorney, Effie’s aunt was the editor of the UK edition of Vogue – both influential and
emotionally distant women had raised daughters who could easily break hearts without a care when those of girls like herself, Aberdeen, Abigail and perhaps Peggy went unheard. Mary hated her. She hated the way John softly spoke her name. She hated that he could not even hear himself for the fool that he was.

“And you are only mentioning this now?” Hewlett demanded. He positioned himself between her and Simcoe so that Mary could not see her almost-lover’s face. For a moment it seemed she was the centre of this most recent of arguments, that Hewlett, for reasons she could not fathom, was coming to her defence. Had John told his friend what she had said? Had Edmund simply guessed at it? Either way, he seemed to want to protect her from the man and his bittersweet memories of a girl he evidently considered ‘better’.

Mary Woodhull hated Effie Gwillim. Had her paper not published some bullocks relating to her injury during the morning’s soccer match, Appleton would not be in jail for the supposed crime of supporting some London club currently underperforming expectations. Had Effie’s name not been mentioned at supper, John would not be thinking of her; he would, perhaps, let Mary pretend he was hers once again. Her alibi hinged on John being able to find her desirable. Women like Effie, women like Anna, destroyed the illusion Mary needed to market and the confidence required to make the sale.

“I didn’t think there was anything to it,” Simcoe seemed to taunt. “Meeting you as an adult, seeing you for the weakling you’d become, I’d assumed -”

“Stop fighting,” Mary hissed. “Let’s stick to the facts. Tallmadge is intrigued by this angle, not because of this information,” she said as she grabbed the sheet of paper from Hewlett’s hand, “which Abigail stole from a file that the police cannot access – but because Pfizer is a joint sponsor of André’s study. The inspector’s team had a break on a case they have been building for years against the corporation the morning Arnold became the main act of the media circus. Tallmadge was removed from that investigation in response to public demand to see the senator return to safety and, by every indication, isn’t taking it particularly well. We can use that against him if we can find a way of working together.”

“What indications?” Aberdeen asked, pen and Post-It at the ready.

“His investigation should be focused in Setauket,” Mary answered. “There should be a stronger uniform presence on our streets. Arnold is here somewhere - that much Mr Hewlett and Mr Simcoe worked out mathematically – independently of one another and using, from my humble understanding, different types of equations that criminology implements. Tallmadge has likely worked this out too, but has focused his available manpower on Columbia, perhaps looking for a tie to Thomas Jefferson that would allow him to keep the man for questioning. We were able to glean as much from the files Mr Hewlett lifted from DA Smith’s computer. Rivington’s also printed an article a few days ago about the arrest and release of the lobbyist. It is the fifth search result that comes up when you google ‘DI Benjamin Tallmadge.’” Mary Woodhull spent a great deal of time skimming through search results, looking for unlisted gigs, determining where her husband was and – more decidedly – where (else) he was not. After six years of broken marriage, she considered herself something on an expert in internet sleuthing.

“So, can we be sure that Tallmadge will leave us alone?” Aberdeen squinted.

“I should doubt it, not with Bye Week serving as the test group in André’s closed study,” Hewlett answered. “It is what I am banking on if I am to be frank.” Aberdeen suddenly winced. Hewlett stopped, looked for a moment as though he meant to retract on something he had said. After short deliberation, he continued, “I have a plan to find Arnold that relies heavily on enemy cooperation
which is why I’ve already told Abraham. He suspects me. He admitted as much. I told him we are
going to start a door to door campaigning – a series of them. It was ah, it was Anna’s idea. Being
an election year people are used to having people with clipboards knock on their doors. Espionage
through social justice, you see? The plan was and is to have Mary use her UNICEF resources to
figure out which streets will be most receptive to which social cause or charitable venture .”

“The problem with that is most of the residents of Setauket don’t have funds to spare,” Mary
interrupted, wishing that she had been consulted sooner.

“You don’t need to open your chequebook to sign a petition of to talk to a volunteer about racial
inequality or abortion rights or…” he cleared his throat. “The plan is to hit them up from every
angle, compare notes on each address amongst ourselves, get the coppers to follow us – in essence,
to trick them into doing the job they were assigned to do.”

“What happens if they find Arnold?” Simcoe asked.

“Then whomever is holding him hostage shall be arrested,” Hewlett stressed.

Simcoe considered this for some time before pipping, “How do you know Woodhull isn’t himself
guilty?”

“Because he suspected my hand,” Hewlett sighed.

“He could have just said that, you fool! Where is he now? Why does he buy so many goddamned
eggs?”

“It is nearly Easter,” Hewlett smarted, “you are still on the eggs? Why are you so obsessed with
this?”

“And he often avoids my bed,” Mary spat. “There is nothing strange about my husband ignoring
this particular role or responsibility,” Turning back to Hewlett, she continued. “So Abe will follow
us and report what we find to Tallmadge through Caleb to ensure we are essentially working with
the same set of information?”

“Precisely, my dear.”

“Good,” Mary nodded. “What else do we have?”

“Tallmadge confronted me this evening with evidence from an old crime of which I was acquitted,”
Simcoe offered, though, it seemed, not to her. “Unfortunately, I cannot go into details on the matter
as that was half of the agreement, but the man was so off his mark that I imagine Jefferson, or
perhaps Brewster, has him distracted enough that any picture we paint for André though Peggy, as
Mrs Woodhull suggests we do, will more than suffice them both. If Tallmadge is truly attempting
to link his former investigation to this research, that is,” he paused. Seeming to speak alone to the
ankle monitor, Simcoe added meanly, “Hewlett has been … most helpful in this venture.”

“The Paki copper -”

“She is Turkish, or Kurdish or something between the two. Can you attempt to speak without
resorting to racial slurs – inaccurate though they may be?” Simcoe quipped.

“You know that is hardly what I meant,” Hewlett rubbed his temples. Mary braced herself for
impact.

“You should know – ‘ow old are you? Forty? Fifty? – that your white privilege -”
“Aberdeen – you are right, but frankly this isn’t helpful,” Mary said sharply whilst her au pair scribbled a Hitler moustache on the stick figure she had labelled as ‘Hewlett’. Simcoe laughed.

“I’m … thirty-five,” Hewlett murmured, brushing back a few stands of hair that had skipped grey on their way to white in the last few weeks. “The Detective Sergeant – um, Yildiz isn’t her name but I forget what she corrected it to. At any rate, the woman who by whom I was interrogated said that Simcoe’s costuming me in an old Everton jersey during Akinbode’s breakup bash lead her to believe - amongst a series of other purely circumstantial evidence she located – that I, well. That I was trying to pin this crime, that is, the disappearance, on a man named Banastre Tarleton who served under Arnold and is currently working at the British Embassy in Washington. Tarleton has placed a block on my medical records which I tried to secure for Tallmadge from our new ambassador in exchange for John’s release -”

“I’ll text him at a more Christian hour,” Simcoe shrugged. “Tarleton will talk. He can’t help it.”

“Are you sure?” Mary challenged. “I mean - are you sure that is wise? Your embassy? This investigation is already destroying our town, the last thing we need is for it to become an international incident.”

“Arnold is a senator whose controversial bill is about to pass simply on the grounds that he is not around to defend it. I’m a prince of the blood who is about to marry an American divorcée without the permission of my Queen. I’m also the chief suspect in this case. This is already and international incident,” Hewlett muttered.

“Mr Simcoe is right about Tarleton,” Aberdeen cleared her throat. “Ee thinks ‘imself clever and thinks ‘is talents fully underappreciated. If ee knows anything about ‘ow the case looks from the perspective of The Pentagon or its foreign allies, ee will tell Mr Simcoe to convince ‘im of what a darling ee is.”

“How, pray tell, are the two of you acquainted?” Hewlett squinted, shaking his head slightly.

“We aren’t. But Mary Robinson wrote two whole albums about ‘im and when I was learning English I wrote down the lyrics to songs as I listened. It is why I am so quick at transcribing,” Aberdeen smiled. “I think Tay Tay wrote -”

“She is right,” Simcoe stated. “He’ll talk. If he has access to Hewlett’s records – records he knows Tallmadge to want – he will be keen to let me know why he has put a hold on them.”

“He hates you,” Hewlett contravened.

“You want to try your luck, then?” Simcoe spat. “Why not ring up your sister and let her know that not only did you confess to a crime Ferguson is now looking to the rest of your siblings to answer for as they now have a hand in daily business operations, but that you singlehandedly deflected some of Tallmadge’s suspicion onto a man I well suspect she fancies?”

“I don’t even have a working number for Eleanor.”

“As it happens … I do,” Mary inserted. “At work. We are in the same field. Depending on what Tarleton tells John, I’ll examine that angle.”

“So it is decided then? We are going to pin this whole thing on a kid we both grew up with? Because we don’t agree with his politics or simply because it is convenient? I always knew you were cruel, Edmund, but -”

“No one is pinning any crimes,” Hewlett insisted. “No one is ringing any member of my family.
We are just … using Ban for insight and as a possible means of exploiting some to Tallmadge’s time and resources whilst we work out the kinks in our plan to locate Arnold. We know from the evidence that you and Mary found on your ‘date’ that he left the basement storage room of DeJong’s by foot, perhaps with a broken leg, and was picked up on the side of the road by a white vehicle that swerved into a tree to avoid him. It is probably dented but not too heavily damaged, and could not have gotten out of this town without being searched. That is what we need to be on the lookout for. What Tallmadge should be looking for … but if he plans to bring André to justice in the meantime or instead, well …”

“Robert Rogers ‘as a white work truck,” Aberdeen said excitedly. “And ee is a good mate of Dr André.”

“And he didn’t drive to the match yesterday,” Simcoe smiled, “instead relying on … Woodhull for transportation. Oh, fancy that.”

“My husband had nothing to do with this! This – this is just what my marriage is like,” Mary pleaded. How very dare John ruin her only make threats at what little she had left. “If you mean to ‘help me’ as you’ve said -”

“I’m surprised ee went as far as to send Caleb to spy on Tallmadge,” Aberdeen muttered her agreeance. Mary stopped, as did the world.

“So … so am I,” she said quietly after some consideration.

“I’ll drive by, see what I can find out,” Simcoe announced as he moved to exit. “Hewlett … come round to mine after work tomorrow … or today, rather,” he corrected, looking at the time on his phone. “Miss Declesias, Mrs Woodhull, I’ll see you both on Tuesday. I’ll be in Setauket to coach the kid’s team -”

Aberdeen began dictating and writing herself another note. “Which includes ADA Aaron Burr’s daughter and ADIC Alexander ‘Amilton’s son. Both are assigned to the Arnold case, neither would let their children play for Mr Simcoe if ee was truly a person of interest,” she smiled. Mary gave her a curious look. How long had this interrogation with Townsend and his associates lasted? “I’m just repeating what Anna said this morning to Mr Hewlett,” Aberdeen shrugged. Hewlett nodded.

“That is why she asked me to be caretaker manger?” Simcoe asked, disheartened and slightly offended.

“Well I should doubt Anna asked you in so that you might teach her team how to properly foul the opposition,” Hewlett quipped. Unable to instantly formulate some sarcastic reply or another, Simcoe then left without a word.

“Aberdeen,” Mary said, swallowing a sob at seeing the back of another lover turned without paying her any further regard. “Find out in the next few days everything you can about André’s research. Visit him at Belleview with Peggy if need be –”

“No, I’m sorry I cannot allow -” Hewlett began.

“She will be safe. There is nothing that André can do to her in a heavily guarded facility. Find out – if you can - what André expects his research to show and report to Mr Hewlett and Mr Simcoe that they might behave in such a way around Peggy that we cause André to question his calculations. We will force him to ruin himself. No one need die for vengeance to be ensured.”

“I agree,” Hewlett said quietly after a moment. “Still I don’t want to risk Aberdeen’s safety, she is
just a kid herself -”

“What of what I want, Mr ‘Ewlett?” the au pair demanded. “I don’t want Peggy to be ‘urt by this man. I don’t want that anyone else should be and ee ‘as tried to ‘urt you and Mr Simcoe – and the nice men of your football team. I don’t like Setauket, but I don’t think the people ‘ere are undeserving of justice. Ee cannot get away with this. Ee won’t! You and I could easily be deported, and ee, who ‘as made such a worse crime as simply wanting to live ‘ere, who plans to attack the US Armed Forces with the same mind-poison ee did you, should be lauded as a genius? As a romantic ‘ero? I’ll not ‘ave it! Someone needs to stand up for you and I am good at taking stands! We are fellow immigrants, but we are also friends, are we not, Mr ‘Ewlett?”

Hewlett let himself smile for a moment. “I … I suppose we are friends, Aberdeen, which is why I worry.”

“If you can trust me to spy on Agent Lafayette, Dr André and Peggy should prove -”

Mary shot her lodger a sharp glare before addressing her au pair. “Aberdeen, excuse me – you did what at Mr Hewlett’s request?”

At two in the morning, a light was on in Robert Rogers’ halfway house. Simcoe had parked a block away before sneaking to the window to hazard a look. Bye Week’s keeper was still up, holding a conference with his tenant Robeson, Robeson’s boyfriend Joyce, and (of all people Simcoe had not expected to find seated at the kitchen table talking over Chinese takeaway) local weed farmer Lewis Brewster. He watched for a while, waiting for Woodhull to grace the late-night meeting of MSG and THC, but to no avail. It looked after some time as though Rogers was doing his best to offer couples’ counselling, that Brewster was better suited to the task. Simcoe wondered what had transpired between the lovers, remembering that in all of the morning’s chaos Robeson had not been present on the pitch.

Perhaps he had it wrong.

No, there was something more going on here.

Mary Woodhull’s Jeep was parked in front of the locked garage though there was no trace of her husband. Simcoe spent an hour searching the vicinity - ultimately finding nothing save for his own defeat. Sullenly, he returned to Manhattan, suspicions unsatisfied and simultaneously unwavering. There was something wrong with the sort of man who would not rush home to be at his wife’s side.

He knew as much from the example he himself set.

He did not deserve Mary Woodhull, the taste of her cherry flavoured lip-gloss of the marks left by her teeth on his malfunctioning ear. He did not deserve her love. The only reason she was in this situation - the only reason she had become a casualty of it - was his sudden presence in her life. She had been happy before him. She would be happy without him. She would see as much when the morphine fully wore off.

John Graves Simcoe spent the whole of the night in the company of these thoughts. They found him in his sleep, in the shadows on his walls, in his sheets still covered with the scent of Hewlett’s blood, sweat and sex. They found him in the distractions he sought on his phone – on the stock
ticker, in old photographs, in any news item he tried to skim with eyes barely open. He could not
save the woman he loved. He tasted her lip-gloss and felt her hands around his throat. Mary
Woodhull could and would save herself. She might yet save them all. He did not deserve her grace.

When the clock struck six, he absentmindedly hit send on a simple message he had first composed
in before leaving Whitehall. >>When you wake up, please text me. There is an urgent matter we
need to discuss.<<

Simcoe had not expected his mobile to ring moments later. Hitting ignore on the call, he typed out
a request to reduce communication to written form. He was having trouble with his ears. It took
twelve minutes before he received a reply that read >>We are well suited to never speak, you and I.
Can you still read lips? Can we Skype?<<

Ban Tarleton, he remembered, had lost most of his right hand in combat. Simcoe found himself
smiling at the realisation. Perhaps, he considered for the first time, the reason his oldest friend
hardly wrote owed itself to inability. The idea was more comforting than it ought to have been. The
idea was comforting until Simcoe considered the implication; he sometimes missed the company
and conversation of a man who had committed greater atrocities than would even enter into his
own contemplation, yet it was he who was positioning to condemn Tarleton for the sake of
convenience. When exactly, he wondered, had both their lives taken such dark turns?

Not wanting to strain his eyes with the mobile version of the video call service, Simcoe switched
on his computer, making himself a cup of tea while he waited for the machine to start up. Tarleton,
he saw a five minutes later, had taken no time to relax. He looked horrible – dark rings framing
bloodshot eyes as though he had been in an all-night brawl with sleep and taken more than his
share of punches in a battle he would doubtlessly claim to have won if asked. Simcoe recalled
having long ago convinced the then-captain of their school’s football team to give the imp a spot
on the squad after Tarleton had first been introduced to coffee, thinking –correctly – that running
every evening would wear him out enough that the impulse to plague the night with his mindless
musings would prove less tempting. He had agreed to join the team himself to this end - that had
been the deal with Danny Wessex who wanted to sign him and him alone. Two years later,
Tarleton was promoted to the captaincy after a close race, something that, even twelve years after
the fact Simcoe maintained was unfair. He was a better leader. He had slight seniority in the team.
He had told Tarleton as much, informing that the only reason he was even on the roster was due to
a sacrifice Simcoe had made in service of his want for sleep, which seemed to injure his dorm
mate’s ego enough.

Were only their problems and the solutions they sought as simple as they had seemed at sixteen, he
sighed to himself.

Banastre Tarleton did not look beaten, Simcoe then decided. He looked like he was engaged in a
fighting retreat, smiling as though his caller would soon find himself under heavy fire.

“Yea, sorry mate, I can’t keep up with you in that respect,” the colonel greeted with deceptive
merriment, shaking his left hand free of the words he did not wish to type. “My hand is ready to
give up on me entirely from explaining to Marie – oi, do you remember, that German writer – poet,
dramatist - whatever? The bloody genius you told me about back at school?”

Simcoe considered for a moment the all of the occasions he had attempted to tutor Tarleton against
what he assessed the man’s appreciation for literature to be. >>Bertolt Brecht?<< he guessed. No
written narrative that he could remember from their curriculum had ever much spoken to the man’s
soul. >>Did you by chance relay the story of how he got his teachers to alter his grades by marking
spelling and grammar mistakes that were not present and then questioning where he was
wrong? he asked, laughing a little internally over how very much Tarleton might come to resent his hero could he be bothered to emerge himself in the scathing social critique of a clever Marxist. There was no point in trying to explain irony. His former dorm-mate’s interest in the written word had never extend much beyond the notes Simcoe had let him copy in hopes of being left to read in peace in their long shared room.

“Yea,” Tarleton admitted, “only it took me about half an hour to type as much. Hope it worked out in time. She is in a fight with her mum, you see, and it is my fault in a roundabout way. I imagine things will only get worse at home if Mary has to sign an exam.”

>>What did you do? Simcoe asked for his better manners demanded it.

“Left Mou to their care. Marie did not want to walk him exactly when her mum wanted her to and she is at an age now where everything explodes at even the hint of a spark.”

>>I take it things are otherwise going well then?<<

“Nope, no,” Tarleton smiled, perhaps to keep from screaming. Though he could not hear him at present, he imagined his former friend’s tone to remain as breezy and buoyant as it had always been. “Mary and I … we got into yet another row about how the kids are being raised last August. Then September happened and then October, and now I’m single, living in a studio in East Toxteth, listening to Taylor on loop – which is its own kind of irony, given that literally everyone I ever knew sided with Mary in the break up.”

Simcoe took a deep breath, fighting every urge to once again inform Tarleton that ‘irony’ was a literary deice used to indicate intention opposite to that which is ostentatiously stated, as opposed to ‘a mild inconvenience’ as he still seemed to believe. Realising that it would be a waste of time, that it did not serve his interests to argue with an idiot, he tried to appeal to him instead. >>Yea. I know what that is like. Check Twitter though? You still have Effie.<< he wrote, adding when he saw his former friend’s face fall into a rare frown, >>You can count me, too, if you feel that might balance things.<<

“You know that is all fake, right? Twitter … Edmund texted Effie to do something about your having gotten arrested, she wrote me to ask if it was … advisable, given, I suppose, what happened last Wednesday.” Simcoe suddenly felt himself fully awake, barely having touched his tea. Tarleton and Hewlett had both played roles in trying to ensure his release. Given circumstance, it seemed rather ironic. There would be no strategic gain in pointing this out and it might well serve against him. Tarleton’s subtleties, he well knew, were far more difficult to read than those found in any piece of fiction.

“I gave permission to proceed and then when a protest broke out, Effie started a ‘war’ with my ex on social media to distract from the fact that The Daily Mail was the first to print the story that saw you freed, not wanting to herself become a suspect. She did pen and print the first article on the crime scene, after all,” the colonel continued. “The two aren’t really fighting. They were probably sitting on the couch together when it happened; catching up on ‘The Only Way is Essex’, ‘Made in Chelsea’ or whatever other scripted reality drama is airing. Effie, I’m well sure, brought Middle Eastern regimes into the discussion because she felt bad about her guilty pleasures being as pedestrian as they are. Nothing’s really changed since you left, you see.”

>>Everything has.<<

“Yea … I, I know.”

>>You look terrible<< Simcoe told him. This, however, was only half-true. The once proud,
pretentious pretty-boy looked completely human, which was at once both tragic and terrifying. Somehow, he had expected the elegant devil to don a dress uniform, to be freshly shaven with his dark hair slicked back, to be speaking of war gains rather than of personal losses. He expected a version of Edmund Hewlett, of any Hewlett, albeit one who would ironically name himself as their natural opposition.

He well looked the part now. Dressed in a tee shirt (and presumably boxers), morning stubble and messy curls, Tarleton seemed no better off than he himself. It struck Simcoe how much this appealed to his sympathises, even with the hard won knowledge that the man’s single strength was his ability to make himself seem personable to any company. This, too, was likely a clever ploy of calculation. Tarleton seemed like an average person. A reasonable one. One that might be reasoned with. He looked like a person because he was likely aware that Simcoe knew how to fight and slay monsters.

“I’ve been awake for … time, loads of it. I’m not sure how or if hours actually work here. But you!” he broke out into laughter, “Fuck, mate – when you said you were having problems with your ears I’d imagined you meant that your hearing problems had returned. What is going on,” the colonel gestured to the side of his own head with his good hand. “What is this?”

>>A long story.<< Simcoe replied of the bandage he still wore. He could feel the warm of Mary’s lips, the warm of the world between her legs, the chill that traversed his spine when she spoke to him of love.

“Ah, come now – I’m a fast talker, you’re quick at typing, fill me in - it has been bloody ages, hasn’t it?”

Perhaps it was the familiarity with which he was addressed, or the idea that at least part of the reason they had not spoken in recent years was that they could not rather than there being some unspeakable sin between them. Tarleton did not seem like a heartless killer, he seemed like the boy who had broken him out of his shell through sheer persistence; that was until Simcoe realised that in many ways he seemed like he had simply given up, that his attitude and appearance was more surrender than strategy.

>>You are unusually quite.<< Simcoe commented when he had finished relaying his romantic troubles without having been interrupted. It was eerie. Disquieting.

“I’m just in shock. Sounds like you are trying to steal my life mate. Let me understand this right, you’ve this completely infatuating married woman with a small child who, somehow, by God’s grace, thinks your interesting enough to have around – that, or, the everywhere-but-the-bedroom sex is worth her while. She is incredibly successful in her given field whereby her husband is a looser in his, but she is never going to leave him because of his parents, or hers, or something. She gets on better than you do with most of your friends and you have a sinking feeling that she doesn’t mean it when she says that she loves you. And her name is Mary. Parallel fucking lives.”

He was more accurate than he realised. Simcoe still had not told him the reason for his call.

>>Bit more complicated than that. She is my alibi for the night Benedict Arnold went missing.<<

“Well, then you're fucked one way or another,” Tarleton smiled. He shifted. “You and me both … John, we really need to talk. I don’t think there is an easy way for me to say this … but I’ve – I came here in service to the Sovereign to advise Senator Arnold in marketing his defence bill, which … seems to be an easier sell without the man himself around. Without meetings to otherwise occupy me, I’ve taken to reading the damned thing.”
Simcoe wondered if incompetence was a stated government objective. He nodded for Tarleton to continue.

“There were some documents that I am aware Edmund requested for his defence, or for yours, which … for selfish reasons I convinced Cornwallis to deny Inspector Tallmadge and his search. I’ve since sent them in full to Effie Gwillim, but she has yet to respond on how we ought best proceed. How … how acquainted are you, exactly, with a Dr John André?” he squinted.

>>He was my therapist for years after I was ordered by a court to seek out anger management.<<

“And Hewlett?”

>>Went on his own accord.<<

“How is that?”

Simcoe swallowed. He typed. >>I found Hewlett with Anna in my bed. I’d beaten him up for unrelated reasons and as his bloodied cloths were in my machine. I lent him your old Rooney jersey when another mate of ours came by - for no other reason than I knew he would hate wearing it. We went to a Walmart shooting range and the next morning the police did a raid on Hewlett’s flat, taking the item presumably form his rubbish or laundry bin. Being that you gave evidence at another investigation against us, or rather, against Ellie, you became a person of interest. The police then found that you served under Arnold in the operation that crippled you and think this might all be part of some elaborate revenge scheme.<< Closing his eyes, he wrote, >>The records you are keeping from Tallmadge likely don’t help you case.<<

Tarleton shook his head. “Its just mad isn’t it? You can’t smoke anywhere in the states but you can fire a gun in a designated area in a fucking supermarket and it is not considered a danger to public health and safety.”

>>That is your take away?>> Simcoe dismayed, wondering if Tarleton had skimmed his texts without any effort to internalise them in the way he had always been given to consuming prose, plays and poetry.

“Can I get the jersey back, do you think?” he puzzled for a moment. Simcoe did not bother to respond. “O’rite. I guess that is sorted then. I’ll be honest with you, John, I’ve long resented you – hated you even since that day we had in hospital last year.”

>>What happened?>> Simcoe typed quickly as he could.

“Why don’t you tell me?” Tarleton smarted in retort.

>>I don’t remember.<< Simcoe confessed.

“I figured,” Tarleton said before pausing for another long while, pressing his lips together and looking away from the camera. “Do you still use the same email?”

>>Yes.<<

“I’m going to send you something. Let you redeem yourself, if you wish. It is John André’s
original research proposal, methods he has been testing on you and your mates for years and intends to employ within the ranks. I know you don’t think much of my ethics but I cannot allow that to happen. I simply cannot. I was up half the night, thinking about what would happen had I – with my extensive training - blacked out in rage in the moments of my own life where I had been nearly paralysed with the kind of fear André suggests can be eliminated from the field. But I’ve seen it, haven’t I? I have seen it in you. And you have, too.”

>>I don’t remember anything about that day!<< Simcoe insisted.

Tarleton shook his head lightly. “Edmund stabbed you? Edmund? Oh bloody hell…”

He was right. Edmund Hewlett was naturally inclined to avoid conflict when the situation demanded it than to react violently in a bout of anger over nothing. A few days ago, he had been ready to kill. Simcoe cursed himself, wondering if he had recognised this earlier if everything that had since transpired could have been avoided.

His phone lit up with an alert. He could not believe sabres were being surrendered rather than rattled.

“Right so, there you have it. Do whatever you will with it, give it to Tallmadge, ring your local representative, your solicitor, delete it ... if you want, but first I need something in exchange.”

>>First tell me what happened in hospital.<<

“You’ll see I also attached Edmund Hewlett’s medical records,” Tarleton continued, ignoring his request. “And those of Thomas Gwillim. Gene was right. Back when we were kids, he was right and … a few months ago I did something about it, intending that if the crime was investigated instead of merely covered up, Lady Edith would go down for mine if she cannot be brought to justice all of her many. It won’t happen now,” he sighed. “Not with my being a suspect in this case, thanks, I guess, to you. Not with the files every intelligence agency on the planet knows that I’ve seen. I’m not sorry. Not in the least. I wish I’d known and acted sooner. Done more. You could have,” he seemed to stress, “But it makes no difference now. I need you to give my closing argument in the event that I, well, end up answering for what I well imagine to be your crimes in the interim.”

>>You don’t mean to say that you think I had something to do with Senator Arnold?<<

Banastre Tarleton did not answer if he even read the question.

John Graves Simcoe could taste his own sick.

He returned to the day Eugene Hewlett had come back to boarding school after a weekend trip home to visit his bed-ridden brother, convinced that Edmund had been poisoned. No one took him seriously, save for his sister, who, after silencing the spectacle, confided to Tarleton that she had evidence that what her twin had said could well be true. Effie Gwillim’s father, she had told him, had suffered the same fate years earlier, dying of stroke at a young age. The then owner and editor of Britain’s most popular newspaper had evidently discovered something horrible about the Hewletts. They had paid him off, he had pressed for more, and Lady Edith, who had left higher education a semester shy of a degree in biochemistry, had demonstrated how willing she was to negotiate further. Or so Eleanor Hewlett had laid it out, Eugene adding only that they extended the same hospitality to members of their own house when threatened - an argument, Simcoe had noted at the time, that medieval and early modern history supported.

Banastre Tarleton had never needed much convincing.
John Graves Simcoe, even after seeing evidence earlier in the evening that his beloved enemy’s symptoms were indeed manufactured, was still unsure.

His former friend need not continue. He knew what Tarleton was capable of; he did not want fantasies of the righteousness of it all forced upon him. In the past week, Simcoe had endured too much to believe in the fallacies of good and evil. The only truth was survival. He listened, if only to avoid another obstacle to that end.

“I’m something of a public figure because of the force my father was in politics,” Tarleton continued, perhaps to address Simcoe’s scepticism, perhaps to brag or beg mercy. “I’ve been told by that I turn his legacy into shame every time I speak in public. I hate that. I hate the insinuation that my politics have anything to do with those of my father. I came from a good home, a proper one in every sense. But I grew up with too many children who didn’t have parents, and that just doesn’t sit right with me.”

To Simcoe, it sounded like stale, sordid rhetoric.

“You’ll fault me for being simplistic in my justifications, for imposing the effects of the specific example I am using on an entire population, and to that charge I offer that if this behaviour were singular, we as a society would not allow it. Allow? No. We blatantly encourage it nowadays. The duke, his erstwhile lady and the man she eventually married imprisoned, raped, murdered and mangled their own children with the stated objective of helping minorities – and on top of it, on top of it - they waste no opportunity to give their charges cause to feel guilty and ashamed about their so-said privilege. It’s allegorical to what our culture has become. Where I live, in Liverpool, in the city in which I was born and raised, my own daughters can’t visit me. Poverty and crime are both rampant, public services won’t respond to destress calls – and why? Because that would be ‘racist’,” Tarleton began to rant. “Because some liberal bastard in Westminster is lining his pockets with the sort of human trafficking that creates this influx of foreigners who we are meant to pity and cater to. Politicians don’t even bother to express horror anymore when these people fail to respect the laws we are unwilling to enforce because of some misguided notion of ‘understanding’, or ‘cultural relativity’, or whatever politically correct language we’ve agreed upon to halt any honest conversation from happening.”

With these words, Simcoe returned to the night he invited Arnold to take their disagreement out into the car park. He had only just met the man. The only thing they had been able to agree on was that though rejection hurt, love was far more painful. He did not know who Arnold was, who he may once have been. He did not know how his opinions had come to form or how he had managed to convince anyone to share his views with rhetoric that border on outright hate speech. Simcoe had known Tarleton, however, since they both had been boys. Thinking about what Ban had become as an adult forced him consider Arnold as a person beyond his protectionist politics. There were likely sides to the senator which the world would never know, deep-rooted morals and sensitivities born out in the worst ways. Neither Ban nor Benedict had returned from war; neither had been given a chance to truly do so. He saw Tarleton but imagined Arnold’s deeper, far more authoritative voice. There was no good. There was no evil. There was only survival and he had robbed Arnold of all semblance of that abstract he had assembled. He had assaulted him without reason. He had not paid him much personal consideration after the fact.

Reason, Simcoe thought, had long been his substitute for all that which he personally lacked. He felt ill at the ease at which he had surrendered it to André’s random whims.

“I’m on the wrong side of history for supporting immigration reform, or so I’m told, as though people alive today have to ability to judge what cultural norms will be in seventy years. The way you look at me now tells me that I should count you among my critics. And I’ve tried, truly, I’ve
been trying for years to understand how you can adapt such an attitude. You act as though policy
couldn’t interest you less, as though politics was a game played by those with too much time and
not enough talent to pursue more worthy interests, you act like what happens in the motherland
doesn’t effect you in your shiny new world, but fuck mate! You’re in banking, you should know
better than most where your taxes are going and where they are decidedly not. You remember
Kolina? She was sentenced to one hundred hours community service for petty theft, the process
around a pair of £3 sunglasses with the plaintiff offering a guilty plea cost the city over a thousand
quid – the half of which she has to pay back. Added to this incompetence, on the same day, a few
blocks from the Edinburgh Primark, in a flat paid for by the government, a Syrian refugee killed
his wife – stabbed her to death in their kitchen. That didn’t go to court. According to the public
prosecutor, he had not lived in Britain long enough to understand our laws in a way to be held
accountable to them. I found out about it on the online editions of a few newspapers, but with
censors worried that race riots would start if such was put to ink …” he swallowed. “My daughter’s
mother has a criminal record, a sentence and an astronomical fine when judged against actual
damages, while a murdered becomes a victim, and we actually have laws in place about pointing
this out to the wider public.”

Reason had never played much of a role in any of Tarleton’s dealings. He acted before looking for
justification. Simcoe would be damned if he continued to mirror the same behaviour which he was
beginning to identify in himself of late.

>>Ban, is your expectation that I should compose your hate speech into elegant rhetoric? I
understand the outrage though I fail to sympathise with it, but I don’t understand what –if indeed
anything- this has to do with André’s study or Hewlett’s medical record.<<

“Read it then. And read Eddie’s record in comparison to Effie’s father’s autopsy. Shit, you don’t
even have to do any research, you were there. You remember the shootout at the safe house that
you let define you. How Edmund was so enraged that his father had forbade him from reporting
the incident – from reporting you missing – that he later tried to file charges against the man on
your behalf. That is why your godfather came back from deployment, to help him get the legal
backing. But then Eddie had a stroke, at what, twenty? Look at everything else that was happening
at that time, the influx of asylum seekers, the crackdown on low-budget narcoleptics to the north of
Hadrian’s Wall that lead to the widespread use of heroin – suddenly, suspiciously easy to access.
Of course, thanks to the duke’s pseudo-liberal political influence, sentencing for drug offenders
was softened, made practically non-existent for those holding or awaiting asylum. The Hewletts
got bloody rich off trafficking and sold it to the public as ‘tolerance’. The worst of it is that they
forced all of their still-innocent children to believe the propaganda. I can’t bloody think of a more
exacting example for the argument that Gutmenschen are indeed the worst people. Edmund, who
was enlightened to all of this around the same time as you were, threatened his father’s bottom line
and his mother attempted to kill him for it, same as she did Effie’s dad decades before. She sat at
his fucking bedside like a woman grieving for a sick child, whispering to him when he could not
respond, when no one knew how much brain function he still had, that he was a terrible person for
wanting to hurt the people that his position in society demanded that he help. And while in
hindsight we can see what a bloody waste it was on Edmund’s part to offer anything in your
defence, I feel like … like it didn’t even occur to Lady Edith that that was her son lying there - that
he had only been trying to help an innocent orphan by retracting a formal complaint he had been
forced to make before you had any legal rights of your own to exercise.”

>>I never knew any of this. Edmund never told me.<<

Tarleton looked away for a moment. Simcoe’s inbox lit up again.

“How many of us speak freely of our defeats? Oh – are you disappointed John, sad that Eddie isn’t

>>
the villain you need him to be so you can live with yourself? Apropos, that is why I imagine you said nothing of the hell to which he has been subject to here in the colonies. His depression. His stabbing you, according to a statement you gave on Wednesday. Really, John? Edmund Hewlett, Saint Edmund handle a weapon? Did you really need to personally be at the centre of this fiasco to recognise that something was seriously wrong with a man you claim is your friend? You were enjoying it … I bet. Vindication. This idea that only you carry that he is just as much of a bastard as you are. I can’t forgive you for what you did to Effie … I can understand it within the context of your being a subject in André’s study and could likely excuse it as a symptom of this were it not for what you said to Ellie a decade earlier. What the fuck kind of a man gets told by a friend that she hasn’t spoken to her father since well before starting school because when she told him her uncle had sexually mishandled her, he responded that he knew already, that it was the trade he made for permission to build some windfarm off the coast, that it was the price she had to pay for her pretty dresses? Seriously, who the fuck hears that and answers: ‘Oh, your brother is a terrible person too. He took me to negotiate the terms of a trafficking agreement when I was eleven, and by the way, the only reason your house is quite so rich and powerful is because you bring loads of opioids into Britain.’

“You have no soul, none! And I hope to God that every time you take a woman to bed it is in the back of your mind that the only reason she is there is that she knows you have no interest in spending the night. That she wants something empty with someone who thinks she is nothing because otherwise she can’t bear human touch and she worries that is somehow worse than whatever it is that you offer. Yea, that is it, isn’t it? So tell me more about this Mary of yours.”

“You have no right,” Simcoe spoke. “Ban, I am warning you -”

“What? What can you possibly do to me now? Pin me with the murder of the man who saved my life? In a few hours, I am going to argue before Congress that they cannot pass this bill of his as it is currently written, that André’s methods are extremely dangerous to a civilian population and - immediately afterwards, I imagine, I’ll be dishonourably discharged and sent home through Brussels.”

He could be so hyperbolic, Simcoe tried to tell himself. That is all this was.

“Maybe I’ll be lucky,” Tarleton shrugged with one shoulder. “Maybe Tallmadge truly does consider me to be guilty and I’ll somehow get stuck here, to answer for your crime rather than risk being in the vicinity of mine. I’m going down either way. I have nothing to go back to, and I hate to admit it, but you’re smarter than me, John. You always have been. In exchange for the information I sent, for the fact that when Tallmadge asks me about you I’ll only tell stories about how you were quiet and kind, spent more time in the company of books, wrote poetry - whatever it is you use to market yourself on dating websites - there is something I want in return. I’ll do my best to convince whoever needs convincing of your innocence, and you’ll make sure, in some discreet way, that Lady Edith suffers as much as her once-lover in the likely event of his passing. Hopefully, you can figure out how to do so in a way that doesn’t turn all of Liverpool into Toxteth. I sure as all fuck can’t.”

Banastre Tarleton continued to speak. All Simcoe heard was that he had killed the kingdom’s largest landowner.

“You know Edith had Edna when she was only fourteen right? Fourteen,” he shook his head. “That is a child. That would be like if Marie were pregnant now. Of course Edward wouldn’t look at her after that. No. Being old enough to bare children immediately removed her from the sphere of his sexual interests. They sent her away, for two years until Edith was granted permission from the Sovereign to marry a younger brother instead. This little baby Edna, locked in some tower in the far
north, her existence, and eventually her inheritance denied. Little wonder she grew up to be so cold. And Ellie! Who looked so much like her mother when she was little; suffering from her uncle's advances in an exchange her father agreed to that some law be passed with his profit portfolio in mind. You know how pretty I always thought her, now that the world agrees it is like you can’t even see her face anymore. When she smiles it is always …” he paused, perhaps to mimic. “But Gene, to my mind had the worst of it - ruined completely, can only eat a few bites a day without coughing up blood, still on supplements because he is terrified of what his parents would do if he was ever unpresentable in their eyes. They have him in hospital now; being arrested and abused by the FBI was the best thing that could have ever happened to him. Edmund escaped, albeit only a decade after his mother literally tried to murder him just to save face. But now he is a suspect in this Arnold thing, because of you …”

There were so many times life had afforded Simcoe the opportunity to intervene on behalf of the Hewlett siblings; so many chances to rise to a challenge which he had answered by closing his eyes in favour of rest, acting as though the battle horn did not sound for him, as though he could not hear its cry. Things ought never to have gotten to the point where Tarleton was in the business of killing influential figureheads in the hopes that his crime might expose others. Things should never have been allowed to get where they were between himself and his former dorm mate personally. Simcoe thought all the times that he could have been there for the people he had once been able to call friends yet was not, justifying his inaction with some moral superiority complex. He thought about Ellie sobbing in the toilets, how he was so hurt that she used him in the same way he used her that he did not really even consider the basis of her reasons for telling him that she had only fucked him because she knew he did not fancy her. That she could not stand being the object of anyone’s affection. She told him explicitly. He had not heard her. He had not listened. He thought about Mary screaming her husband’s name during sex. Ban was right. Most of the sex he had been subject to as an adult had left him cold.

He agreed to helping Tarleton save his city from the stain of his crime and turned off his computer when Mary’s remembered screams –present in every word that was spoken - became too much a burden for him to bear.

At seven in the morning, an hour before he was due at the office, John Grave Simcoe returned to his sheets, returned to the bed he had nearly buried Edmund Hewlett in and screamed into a pillow that carried his stench. He screamed. He screamed for Hewlett. For Arnold. For André. For Anna. For Aberdeen. For every bloke on his Sunday league side. For Ban and whatever ill-advised thing he was about to do.

Mostly, he screamed for Mary. He screamed until he could almost hear himself over the deafening memories of her crying for her husband when he had her bent over her desk, over her crying in pain when her anklet had been shattered, over the cries of the sirens that carried him from her for the crime of coming to her defence.

He had invited this pain, courted it even with honey words and flowing whiskey. It did not fail Charles Cornwallis’ expectations to find himself with a pounding headache on Monday morning, but he had been deceived by it all the same. This was not the sort of hangover that announced itself with the alarm. The ambassador had showered, breakfasted and climbed into the back of a vehicle before discomfort began to disconcert. He had not thought on aspirin or fatty meats until it was too late for either to bring him any comfort. He was five miles outside of the capitol before he truly felt
his own sick.

The silence should have come as more of a relief than it did. Gazing out of the car’s window with small eyes and a look of dejection, Tarleton seemed as volatile as when he laughingly exhibited cruelty. At least when he smiled, Cornwallis knew what to expect. Perhaps his attaché was singing the same internal chorus of deep regret. Cornwallis thought back to university, downing bottles with his dorm mates and the company they kept, finding the desire to drink again the following evening. It felt now another life altogether.

“I’m still on UK time,” Tarleton replied nonchalantly when asked.

“Do well to get over that,” Cornwallis nodded.

“They already booked my return. Wednesday. Through Brussels.”

“Ouch,” Cornwallis winced. “Who did you manage to piss off so severely?”

Tarleton gave him a hard look, not blaming but searching. In truth, the ambassador knew what this was and hoped his expression did not betray him. The FBI and NYPD had coordinated with the Foreign Office to get Tarleton to talk through the promise of a torture not explicitly forbidden by the Geneva Convention. Cornwallis himself had had nothing to do with the arrangement and rather pitied the boy whom, he suspected, had nothing to do with Arnold’s disappearance whatsoever, aside from staging a mock-cover up form which many benefitted financially and which saw Tarleton’s old school-mate realised from confinement. No one had been hurt by the manoeuvre, but the ambassador had his doubts as to how well Tarleton would be able to convince his critics. The boy seemed to have no care for the whims of the crowd.

Marion would interrogate him at Tallmadge’s request when they reached Arlington. Tarleton was not familiar enough with the local motorways to understand that they were not on their way to Capitol Hill.

“I’m really not sure,” Tarleton said of his ticket. “Ferguson was my first guess, but I spoke to him this morning and I believe him when he says he had no hand in it. How would he though … now that I’ve a think on it. No matter. I’ll survive,” he lied. “There are a million ways one might waste time with an excess of it at hand. I’ve been trying to read Ulysses, for example, since I was in the sixth form. Did you ever notice that airport newsstands have exactly five books on offer, no matter what country you are in and none of them make any solid sense? It is always something like Joyce that you avoided reading at school, something that a teenager might actually indulge in, a trivial bestseller form a year before, a revisionist biography of the last twentieth-century politician to have died and - my personal favourite - a travel guide of the place you are leaving.”

“How far did you make it with Ulysses?” Cornwallis laughed at the assessment’s accuracy.

“Record? Around five pages.”

“I got through a full chapter in Frankfurt waiting for a picket line to break.”

“I hate Europe.”

“Where would the classics be without continental incompetence?” the ambassador mused.

“Fair,” Tarleton smiled. Cornwallis felt his face fall. He had developed against his better judgement a certain fondness for the boy, and hoped it would not come to this. Continental Europe was awful enough without self-important, self-imposing novels to contend with. He wondered if he might have anything in his own library he might lend.
“It is a pity,” he commented when they passed a sign letting them know they were in Virginia. “If you were staying around for a few more days I’d have taken you to a few tourist attractions – Jamestown, Yorktown, Williamsburg – it would be fun. You could fire a colonial era musket. Took the kids last summer.”

“Excuse me?” Tarleton blinked, brought back from Brussels or the Dublin of dawn of the twentieth century.

“Figured that would be right up your alley.”

“No … it is, to be sure. It is only … doesn’t it astound you that you can take your children to a series of educational theme parks where they can learn to fire a gun, but where you can’t smoke anywhere?”

“Cigarettes are more hazardous to the overall health of a population.”

Tarleton’s face twisted in confused objection.

“It is something you get used to,” Cornwallis shrugged of their American cousins, uncertain when he had accepted the norms of what the colonists considered civilian life.

“I suppose it is part of their history,” Tarleton dismissed. “What is closest to Washington? Yorktown? How late are they open? Maybe we’ll have time for reconquest,” he laughed. Cornwallis recognised something in it.

“Something about you reminds me of the American War, somehow … it has been troubling me since last night when we were discussing how the colonists all seemed to be named after fruits or founding fathers -”

“Oh, because of my daughter’s given name? I get that from my ex, too – says it reminds her of an old Gwen Stefani song. It wasn’t my intent, but there is no standard feminisation of ‘Banastre’ and I had to improvise … needless to say we call her Georgie, her middle name – Georgina … less fruit-like.”

“No, no,” Cornwallis shook his head, “I meant, forgive me, I know you were named for some footballer or another, but I was somehow associating your name with someone else and I’ve only just come on context. Tell me,” he said with some scepticism, his eyes shrinking to match the hour, “by any chance was your father the same mayor who tried to make Mel Gibson issue a public apology to the City of Liverpool for ‘The Patriot’?”

“Oh, yea, yea – right. No, that was him, the mad cunt,” Tarleton could not help but smile at the recognition. “The best thing about that episode was that my old man made it plain that that he was playing into the US’s understanding of itself. Other than an executive use of pyrotechnics, it is about the most blatantly American film trope conceivable, ‘innit? High drama at city hall that demands an immediate police response and public reckoning. Bless.”

“Did it work?” the ambassador wondered.

“If I remember correctly, the studio reimbursed his ticket, but by that point we had the film on VHS and my little brother and sister had watched it half a hundred times. Brilliant, that. I don’t think anyone in Hollywood ever said sorry to the local hero on whom the film’s villain was based, but there were probably a few hundred articles written around that time about my city’s proud history which had likely been my dad’s principle ambition with the whole venture. I’m not being entirely ironic in telling you: ‘Come to Liverpool. Not only have we the nation’s best mash without
“Pity, that,” Cornwallis said dryly, the sentiment giving him pause. “No Banastre, you shoot children down at the pier.”

“That was in Portsmouth,” he replied with acid after a few minutes slipped into a silence that pounded like the drums of war. “And I didn’t shoot anyone. Not then.”

Charles Cornwallis desperately needed an aspirin. His attaché could do well with a strong sedative.

“You don’t know what it is, to spend so long in national defence,” Tarleton spat. “You stop seeing things with respect to the widely accepted construct of reason. I can’t apologise for my actions last autumn, Sir. I did in the moment what I thought necessary to keep Britain safe.”

“It isn’t mine to pass judgement, but you should know that the American’s think such their God given right. You are sure to answer a few question on the incident, I feel it only right to prepare you.”

Tarleton sighed. Burring his face in his full hand and letting the half that remained of the other continue to rest on his knee, he asked without inflection, “We are going to The Pentagon, aren’t we?”

“We are.”

“Good. That’s brilliant. Let them bring it, I’m always keen for battle of any sort.”

“You might try to be less cavalier,” Cornwallis warned.

“Sir, I can’t return to Britain. I should have died in the desert six years ago. I’m not cut out for civilian life,” Tarleton admitted without meeting his eyes.

“Too much?”

“It’s not,” the colonel remarked, strangely solemn. “In all honesty I spent the whole of the night considering it. I’m having second thoughts about our level of cooperation with the NYPD. We ought to have sent them Edmund Hewlett’s medical transcripts.”

“Why the sudden change of heart?”

“It is not in the United Kingdom’s national interests to allow Arnold’s defence bill to pass as it is written. Have you read André’s original proposal?”

“An nescis, mi fili, quantilla prudentia mundus regatur?” Cornwallis mused to himself.

“I didn’t take Latin at school,” Tarleton responded. “Arabic and Spanish – but I switched the latter to German my final year because the class was making a trip to das Bundesrepublik for the World Cup.”

“Die.”

“What?” the boy sneered.

“Die Bundesrepublik,” Cornwallis corrected.

“Oh. I never was one for foreign languages. I heard it said that they are only studied by people with nothing interesting to say in English – meaning, of course, no disrespect -”
“The quote is from the Peace of Westphalia - ‘Do you not know, my son, with how little wisdom the world is governed?’”

“Fair critique.”

The ambassador nodded. He had long had misgivings of his own about the assignment and his NATO allies who would resort to such measures. “I have orders to insure that the Americans issue precedent that Britain may follow suit. We have half an hour before arriving for our meeting with Washington. Convince me, Colonel - why I should refrain from following Her Majesty’s request?”

“I accidently killed a twelve year old by applying a high voltage charge to the parts of him that determine his gender,” Ban Tarleton told him in a voice that betrayed little emotion. Cornwallis knew this, he had known this prior to the colonel’s visit to the embassy, but the cold disconnect between the younger man and his actions caused the ambassador to straighten his posture as he listened. “It is not the worst of what I’ve done for my country if we are assigning morals arbitrarily, but the evidence shows that Her Majesty’s government has its issues with my implication of the training I have already received. John André would create such episodes en masse. I asked myself in the small hours what it might look like should someone with my training and no concept of what separates military and civilian life – something which the implementation especially the widespread implementation of this study would surely rob them of would look like, thinking back to the times in my own life defined by fear in which I had no orders to serve as guidance. I realised I already have a clear understanding. If I may?” he asked, indicating to the top button of his dress coat. Cornwallis nodded his approval and watch in agony and embarrassment as the colonel struggled to remove his brass covered blazer with limited use of what was once his right hand. It was not that he had not learned to shoot with his left hand, Tarleton forced himself to laugh, but rather that he could not put on his gas mask on quickly or correctly in the event of an NBC situation. “Nuclear biological chemical,” he clarified. It took him fifteen minutes each morning just to dress himself. “I’m sorry,” Cornwallis said, lost for a more appropriate response.

“I ought to be the one to apologise. It doesn’t fail me that my scars cause others discomfort, there is little I can do for it though. It is another war wound of sorts I mean to show you, here,” Tarleton said once he had the blazer of his formal uniform removed. He bent his left arm in the wrong direction which caused Cornwallis to wince, having instead prepared for blood and broken flesh. “I can’t fully lift this shoulder either,” he shrugged for empathises. “A few months ago, nearly a year now, a dear friend of mine was in hospital. She had miscarried and developed acute blood poisoning as a result. I visited her … made a donation, so I suppose in a sense now she is my little sister, but that is neither here nor there. I wasn’t my strongest but … I suppose that is of little relevance.”

“What happened?”

“John Graves Simcoe happened. Rather John André happened to Simcoe. It was his child – Simcoe’s - or would have been, you see. He flew in from America when he learned that Effie was in hospital, found out that she had an abortion on an emergency basis – I’m unsure if it registered. His mum – when he was a toddler – also lost a son in her seventh month and it destroyed his parent’s marriage from what I understand. Perhaps it was learned behaviour he was demonstrating – but I doubt it. I severely doubt it. What you must understand Sir is that John and I went to school together. We shared the same room for seven years. We were on multiple teams together, an assortment of extracurriculars – I know this man, at least, I knew him. I couldn’t recognise the John I saw screaming incoherently at a poor woman lying in a hospital bed. He looked as though he was ready to attack her, which prompted me and several others to intervene. Granted I was weakened from having given blood, I’m not quite so tall or strong as John and never have been, but he … as he continued to insult Effie, - Effie Gwillim, whom he once filled books of poetry about, sullen
afterwards that his words could not begin to properly praise her – he fought me off. Separated the joints in my arm with a single tug and twist. After a combined effort removed him from the room, it took three men to tear him from me. We all knew him growing up. We all did sport together. Granted, when he played he played to win but it wasn’t as though … if he was shown a card he wouldn’t argue the decision. It was not as though he would mercilessly beat an opponent for a perceived foul. Fuck this kid … he read and wrote poetry. He was shy and socially awkward, but smart … really smart. And kind besides. I think he hated me half the time … thought I talked too much, at any rate. Still he helped me revise when I needed it – even if I thought I didn’t. He is probably the reason I got into Oxford rather than a more willing and worthy applicant. He is not the sort for – do you know what it’s like, when they fix your joints? It hurts just as much if not more than the initial separation. It never comes back fully right,” he said, demonstrating the extension of his elbow once more.

“I was a really shit kid by comparison … probably why I’m as strict as I am with my own daughters now … but John was, well he was something else. Haughty, for sure, a little arrogant – you always had the feeling he was mocking you – but he wasn’t violent in a base manner. André killed the John Graves Simcoe I knew. He tried to murder Edmund Hewlett in a more literal sense to that end – to make John react in whatever way would meet Arnold’s satisfaction. And can you imagine – you know the Hewletts, don’t you? What it must have done to Edmund to see John so completely broken … I have to think he blames himself. That is all they do. Those kids. All they ever have. That is André’s goal though – the way John was that day in hospital – he wants to create an army of men who meet emotional turmoil with blind aggression. This is not something we want running rampant, Your Excellency. Can you imagine for a moment what society would look like if Britain’s best -a not insignificant portion of the population - had my ills grafted upon them? I feel – no. I know. I know that I was being selfish, too eager to please my superiors in an effort to secure an extended commission that I know to be out of my reach,” he gestured with his mangled hand. “I should have advised you to send the files to Inspector Tallmadge. With them, he might succeed where I am sure to fail.”

“Colonel Tarleton,” Cornwallis replied, “I’ll give you all of the support I am at liberty to offer.”

“Sir?”

“I still think you ought to consider a career in politics.”

“Why is that?”

“You care about your country and its people; you’re willing to risk sacrifice that they not come to harm … you’re viscous, vicious and manipulative, but above all …”

“What?”

“You are absolute shite at diplomacy.”

They shared a genuine laugh.

“I’ll do all that I can to aide you in your cause, but when we get to Arlington, this is what you need to do -”

When Charles Cornwallis accepted his appointment to the Embassy, a friend had gifted him with a
thin Langenscheidt as a joke – the dictionary was meant as a guide for translating English into American and vice-versa. He had flipped through it a few times for a laugh but it now sat somewhere in his library. As with aspirin and fatty meats, what he felt needed most was not on hand.

“Many mickles make a muckle,” George Washington responded when Colonel Tarleton presented his credentials. The boy looked at him for help he could not provide. Washington was an intimidating presence as it was. He never sat during meetings, regardless of their duration. He never smiled. He never said more than what he meant. The problem was it was so difficult to decipher his codes.

“He knows who you are, Colonel,” Billy Lee, the Pentagon’s Press Secretary began to translate, “he demands to know what it is you think you are doing here.”

Cornwallis took a deep breath. Tarleton smiled.

“Your Excellency, I’m here because I believe Senator Arnold was the victim of his own project. I know, at least, who caused him to come to harm.”

Chapter End Notes

This is why we can’t have nice things, dar-ling …

Want to do some notes so we can get out of here (and out of the southern theatre)? Let’s have at it-

Every child in Germany learns about Bertolt Brecht’s school-age stroke of genius some time in their educational career. As a teacher and formally shit kid, here is how you too can make it work: don’t use it right away. Let a few weeks pass after you have first been introduced to Herrn K. before making your move. You need to first ask about a legitimate mistake you’ve made. Probably do that twice before marking spelling and syntax errors that don’t exist and asking your teacher what you have done wrong. He or she (having by now forgotten the story they relayed) will be like “Oh no, what was I thinking?” and adjust your grade accordingly. You’re welcome. ;)

I don’t like to logroll (really) but if for some reason you are curious in an expanded version of ‘Eugene Hewlett thinks his brother is being poisoned’, Joust is set in the
week this first became a matter of consideration. It is told by Effie Gwillim and is (mostly) about her first crush.

Was Tarleton’s internet breakdown disturbing? I based it loosely on the transcripts of the U.S. military tribunals in Nuremberg after WWII and the current programme of the AfD. The news items he cites in his tirade were also based on German sources, namely the online editions of ‘Rhein Zeitung’ (a local paper) and ‘Die Welt’ (a national one). Neither have a particularly right-wing focus.

If you’ve a mind to do so, you can call me out on Tarleton’s use of ‘Gutmenschen’ when he later demonstrates that he does not know the gender article for ‘Republik’. Both are political terms that I was all-but-certain had since passed into English the way ‘Realpolitik’ and ‘Spitzenkandidat’ have. IN CASE I AM WRONG, here is an English language explanation for the term: Gutmensch (German cultural term similar to "do-gooder"; literally good human) is an ironic, sarcastic disparaging term for a person or a group. Those who use the term believe that Gutmenschen have an overwhelming wish to be good and overeagerly seek approval. This comes along with moralising and proselytising behaviour and a dogmatic, absolute perspective, which does not allow deviant views. In political rhetoric, Gutmensch is used as a polemic term.

Though Ban’s father did historically serve the office in the 18 Century, the Mayor of Liverpool who demanded an apology from Mel Gibson over ‘The Patriot’ in 2000 was Edwin Clein. No apology was forthcoming but the studio did in fact reimburse £5 of the ticket price for people who mailed their stubs in – it took over a year to process all of the complaints. (No one tell me that people who write modern AUs do so to avoid research.) XP I’m fronting, I’ve got nothing but love for the city of Liverpool and the calamity that is its local government and would probably look into such things for a laugh anyway.

“An nescis, mi fili, quantilla prudentia mundus regatur?” said by Axel Oxenstierna to his son, when the latter expressed doubt about how his negotiation abilities would match against those of more experienced statesmen and diplomats. The Peace of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years War in 1648.

Side note to some other dialogue in this scene, did I initially decide to include Tarleton just because of the criticism TURN received for making Simcoe’s character closer resemble the nightmare narrative of Bloody Ban than um … the historical John Graves? ¯\_(ツ)_/¯

As always, thanks so much for reading!

Up Next: Ben Tallmadge has a (really) bad day.
The Hang-up

Chapter Summary

Tallmadge gets a break in a case he has been pursuing for years; Gwillim gets a break on a story. Hewlett finds that he may lack an inner best to allow him to match Simcoe's edge in interrogation. Ferguson watches on as his oldest enemy waltzes with the Five Families. But first, a diva discovers that her having complained to a psychologist about a playboy and his friends a decade earlier may have contributed to the disaster now unfolding across the Atlantic.

Chapter Notes

As you may gather from the summary, this is an incredibly long chapter (even by my standards) so I will be brief up front. Talking to a friend recently, I heard a rumour that Sam Roukin “knows fanfiction is a thing” and while I have absolutely no reason to suspect *Hide and Seek* would hold any interest for the actor or those who run in his circles, I feel I ought to take this opportunity to say (just in case) that I am sorry for all the cheap shots I take at Everton fans. You guys don’t deserve half of the calamity you have suffered this season and should absolutely be contending for Europe.

I make no apologies however for anything I’ve insinuated about Liverpool (FC, or the local government – to tangent here right quick, I had to do some analysis this week for something unrelated that required me to read a whole bunch of statistical data from the 2011 census and can you guess at what strange bit of information will always stick out in my mind going forward? The slogan that the city council decided to go with was “it’s liverpool” [sic] Is that honest advertising or an attempt to lower expectations? The world will never know, but either way I think it is brilliant.)

More to my fourth favourite city and the football in it, I find that I also can’t quite bring myself to say sorry for hopping on the LFC bandwagon this week. Seriously, I don’t have a side in the Premiership but seeing Pep’s City get kicked out of the CL has given me a joy that has long evaded my sport-watching experience. YNWA! (Um …)

Enough of that though. Let’s do some warnings: day drinking, casual (and blatant) classism, collusion (this is really a constant as of late …), police brutality, shattered Omertà, bad business, attempted extortion, arranged marriages, break-ups and heartbreak, oh, and minor character death. To quote a cast member you can quickly forget: „I promised you blood, and my dear – I always deliver.“ ;)

And my dears, as always – I hope you enjoy!

Edit: 17.06 I am working on the next chapter, but due to the EU and all of its wisdom, this may be the last chapter I get to post. My email is in my profile and if in the meantime you want to know how things turn out for a few of the characters, Indefinite Articles is practically a sequel. Cheers.
“Bit early for that, isn’t it?”

“What,” Mary scoffed as she pushed passed, proceeding into the kitchen with a bottle of prosecco, a girlish smirk and skip in her step. “You’re awake.”

“ Barely,” Effie Gwillim scowled, wishing she had not sent the maid out on errands, wishing she was better at dismissing unwanted visitors herself.

At an address like One Hyde Park, neighbours, like price per metre square, were meant to be a mere symbol of prestige. It was one thing to wonder at the names of fellow tenants, at where yours fell in comparison to theirs when the building featured on a clickbait list of the ten most expensive residential properties in Great Britain; it was another altogether to be forced to associate. There seemed to the owner and editor of The Daily Mail - fifth* listed in a tally of socialites with six-million-pound flats in the heart of London (*first, were her publication running the piece) - something entirely too proletarian about conversing with the woman who lived in a penthouse two stories beneath her own.

At ten o’clock on a Tuesday morning, Effie hated that she knew the school schedule of Mary Robinson’s like-named thirteen-year-old daughter. She hated that she knew the address of the butcher the seemingly ageless icon went to twice a week to purchase small cuts of specialty meats for the papered Yorkie she continued to carry in her Birkin long after the Americans who started the disgusting trend had all sent their own small dogs to ‘live on a farm’ (as was the politically correct term for euthanasia in two-thousand-eight when such animals ceased being fashionable.) She hated that Mary, who had cancer, a child, a string of celebrity lovers, a role in some West End production or another, a forthcoming sixth album and sometimes–custody of the rodent she called a dog, still, evidently, found the time and energy to go to the spinning class in which they both were enrolled. Effie, shamefully, had herself gone all of twice in as many months – but then, as she tried and failed to comfort herself, her own short legs did not warrant or enjoy nearly as much attention as those of a pop princess.

Mrs Robinson, nearly forty and, at this hour, make-up free, still looked like the cover of a woman’s glossy – what little girls aspired to be when they grew up and what young women who had since disappointed impossible societal ideals called ‘Photoshop’ with forced distain. Effie, who had to live with the hard truth that her nosey neighbour was indeed every bit as beautiful as she was on Seventeen (and at seventeen), was a mess by contrast and comparison. At ten on a Tuesday, she wore a bathrobe over the camisole comparative laziness designated as pyjama, her unkempt hair in a bun that itself confessed to the reality that she had yet to brush her teeth either. She was exhausted both emotionally and physically (although the last few days were more numerous than the sum of her movements in them.) Her uninvited guest in trendy sportswear seemed to dance despite sore muscles through the otherwise unused kitchen, occasionally lifted by the fairy wings Effie was sure she would see were her eyes not so strained from having stared at a computer screen for what felt the longer part of her existence.

“Mimosa?” Mary asked, pulling a container of orange juice out of the refrigerator and a bottle of sparkling wine that Effie suspected was not properly chilled out from the canvas tote she had carried in.

“Um – I’ll just take it straight if it is all the same,” Effie surrendered as Mary produced two glasses from the cupboard. “Ellie has been gone for a week and the juice has been open for at least as long.”
“For someone with a master’s in agricultural science she really objects to chemistry,” Mary frowned, pouring the remnants of the fair trade™, organic™, preservative-free™ and slightly patronizing™ beverage into the sink after sniffing it. She shook her head at the emptied container. “What, pray tell, is the point of progress if you’re not going to flavour your foodstuffs with formaldehyde? No matter, we have something to toast too.”

This, they most assuredly did not.

Effie Gwillim and Mary Robinson would not have been friends with one another had they not chanced into the same circles. Mary had fallen victim to the charms of an old classmate who had seduced her on a bet whilst still a student, she had then fallen in love with the sonnets she found scribbled on hotel paper in the room the two had first shared, and, upon learning that the words belonged to another man altogether, had been desperate to meet this John Graves and his muse. Effie had ceased serving that function sometime after her then-fiancé had taken a job overseas upon graduation. Mary -who had been married all the while and was wedded still - had ended her extended affair the pervious summer when she and her inamorato realised that they could not reconcile their disagreements surrounding his too-protective tendencies towards her daughter (not his.) Effie found herself wishing time and again that for the egos that boarder on immaturity which she sensed and sometimes saw in the parties that could not seem to co-parent, that she had been asked to declare a side after the split. Her choice would have been plain. Frankly, she was not entirely sure why Mary still felt it appropriate to associate; the two women had previously only ever enjoyed familiarity as a foursome.

On this morning in particular, Effie felt that the few things they had in common might only exist in the past tense.

“You haven’t heard from Ban lately, have you?” she asked as casually as she could make her cracking voice sound.

“Why?” Mary blinked.

“No reason,” the editor replied with a shrug. Were Mary Robinson a regular Mail reader, she would have gladly regaled her with the apocalyptic undertones she found herself in the throes of ascribing to a series of email she had woken up to the previous morning from a school friend who now worked for the Foreign Office - begging for help, advice, or any alternative she might offer. Effie had no idea how to respond to the request, but then, as she had long assessed, people were given to only asking for input when they had already reached a decision. No one ever wanted to hear outside opinions; they wanted to hear the own echoed.

Effie Gwillim had no idea what to say that might help the unfortunate sender feel sound.

Colonel Banastre Tarleton had in all likelihood already acted on whatever impulse compelled him without affording consequence much of a second thought, without waiting for her echoes of approval to underline any justification he found fit. By the time Effie had finished reading the three attachments her eyes had no legal right to see, it seemed too late to save Ban from himself. She could not reach him by any means of communication and considered saying something to this end, but where she was merely worried for a former classmate, Mary would be absolutely devastated at the loss of her true love, keen though she otherwise seemed to pretend the boy had been to more to her than another passing fancy.

Learning that the mother of Ban’s (*adoptive) child had not been able to reach him for the past two days either, Effie’s distress turned to dread. She silently considered that she would never again have the pleasure of being told to ‘sod off’ by the favoured son of one of Britain’s foremost families who –inexplicably- had spoken like a proper ‘lad’ even before feigning idiocy had become
something a cultural aspiration. His ex, seemingly unaware of the plight that possibly faced the colonel, prattled on all the while over some footballer with whom she had been successful in ending ‘things’ amicably, as she poured prosecco for them to toast another ending. ‘Things’ Mary clarified with a wink at the pooch in her handbag, meant strictly that she had twice tricked the boy in question into walking the dog she had gotten stuck with sitting, leading to his naïve assumption that they two were in a committed relationship.

“It used to be so much harder – and rightly so,” the diva bemoaned. “I bore and birthed John Terry’s child and barely achieved WAG status when that was something worth having. Now with everything on Instagram, I’ve dated half of London since Ban and I split – and I swear, it used to be people like you I blamed for putting such ‘packs of nonsense’ into the world,” she complained in Effie’s own language, “but it is them, isn’t it? No – you know what it is? The help! I asked Anderson if he wouldn’t mind taking Mou out when Marie refused to do so and he told me – he actually told me - that whilst it was in his contract to watch me and/or my daughter take the wee thing for a walk, he was under no contractual obligation to hold the leash. Being that staff is so hard to replace, I couldn’t well put up a fight. I threw my trainers on, met a kid in the lift with a few puppies, batted my eyelids and asked if he wouldn’t mind one more. Next I know, I’m ‘dating’ Dele Alli per his own social media output,” she shook her head.

Effie mirrored the action for reasons all her own.

“I was at the office until two,” she said flatly, as much to the bubbly before her as the woman who had brought it. Mary squinted, tilting her head sceptically as though to say she knew that this had not strictly been the case (as a series of parking tickets Effie would later discover had already testified to without her being aware.) The editor had indeed been working from home, but absent her flat mate, the penthouse she had not left for days hardly held that distinction. She stared at the emptied juice container, fearing and feeling the loss of yet another friend, resenting Mary a bit more for having removed this artefact of her now-former presence. Effie had not been able to reach Ellie since the day after breaking the news on the Arnold disappearance in the British press. The distance was not in itself uncommon, but given recent calamity across the Atlantic, she was beginning to suspect that this particular bout of silence would become a permanent feature.

It stung. The two had lived together for most of their lives for most of their lives – first as schoolgirls thanks to a lucky accident of the alphabet, then at university (although they had attended separate colleges) having both bided on the same house in Oxfordshire only to come to the conclusion that there was room enough for both of them (and five more of their girlfriends besides.) Most recently, they lived together at One Hyde Park, Ellie having relocated to London after Effie’s engagement had fallen apart.

Actions of solidarity spoke louder than words; it hurt all the same that Ellie would disappear without offering one. Effie suspected her flat mate to be somewhere in the developing world (or Scotland, which frankly, the newswoman counted as a colony despite some three hundred years of ‘unification’ for she maintained that a few farmers to the north of Hadrian’s Wall did nothing to make Britain ‘Great’.) She missed Ellie all the same, nearly as much as she missed how things had been before her name appeared below her own on their mailbox and above hers on a list of the building’s prominent residents, when the room the princess inhabited had been a nursery for the little girl Effie intended to name after the Sovereign (or, alternately, after herself – as Mary had done with Marie.) She missed the idea that John Graves Simcoe would come back to London to share her bed and in her complaints about the neighbours who had not entirely grasped the concept of good fences. Looking at Mary, she missed too whom the diva had been when she had been with Ban Tarleton, even if the two had been upstairs in her home far too often back when John’s name was on the lease and the flat was thus truly deserving of the title.
Actions of solidarity spoke louder than words.

Effie knew that her newly-single neighbour had not come up this morning to celebrate the fact that Dele’s dog Hugo (whom the Spurs player swore was not named after Lloris) had ceased posting to Instagram how much he missed going for walks with Mou (who had most decidedly been named for José); Mary was there, primarily, because she had reason to suspect that Effie was depressed. This fact hurt more than it ought when she felt it sink in. Effie Gwillim would not have extended anyone such concern and curtesy had it fallen upon her to do so, which she strongly suspected was why she was surprised to the point of resentment that anyone still took such cares towards her.

“What for?” Mary gaped in reaction to her ‘office’ comment with more theatrics that the editor felt deserving of at this hour, though she was in the process of putting on a show of her own which someone with as much stage experience as the famous ‘Perdita’ likely saw straight through.

“What in heavens are you working on? You’re the only one not running a cover story on how Edmund Hewlett’s -”

“Wedding is adversely affecting the British economy?” Effie finished, having evaluated the completion and found it wanting, adding, “I’m not The Guardian,” as though the very insinuation was a slight.

The Daily Mail had been started by Effie’s great-great grandfather in response to sudden, widespread literacy (possibly, she joked in better moods, in an attempt to combat it.) Nearly one-hundred fifty years after the proletariat had learned to read, Britain as a whole remained unable to understand numbers they found in print as Mary Robinson, herself ordinarily far cleverer than the combined whole of The Mail’s audience, stood proof. People bought Effie’s paper because it posed no challenge to their comprehension. This reality, she reasoned, might have proven too much for the mid-morning cognitive skills of someone who only read the ‘Culture’ and ‘Lifestyle’ sections of lesser tabloids given prestige status based solely on the supposed political leanings of the board. If her own readership did not care about wedding kitsch around the prince the press as a whole had otherwise long forgotten, Effie Gwillim could not be bothered to.

For the moment, she had far too much on her mind for either Mary or her topics of conversation.

“Five-hundred-million pounds lost in estimated revenue from tourism and tea-towels,” the blonde continued to rant, “Five-hundred … how do you think they even came on that figure?”

Effie sighed. She was not entirely sure herself. “I think John would say that whoever did the maths calculated current prices and rates against expected inflation should Brexit pass and sensationalized it. Edmund would say that all statistics are made up on the spot, which is also somewhat exaggeratory -”

“Oh, honey,” Mary pouted -dramatically- at hearing John’s name, pouring ever more prosecco into a glass that Effie assumed was meant for her until it was filled to the brim. The amount of alcohol now at play made Effie suspect that her neighbour was after something beyond her comfort based on past behaviour, but raised a toast all the same, hoping it would deflect from her sudden embarrassment.

Rather than wonder if there was enough bubbly on earth to make them both forget the point of reference around which her initial reaction had formed, Effie, after taking a sip, succumbed to a slightly different frustration. “It doesn’t matter anyway, does it? Until last week, no one assumed Edmund would find a woman to marry him. Ever. Full stop. The only thing the unfortunate timing of his American nuptials could possibly affect in the realm of UK tourism is the fact that Ellie’s wedding will have to be moved back a full season, and it is not as though anyone is expecting
hordes to show up at the city gates to toast the new duchess-consort. No one wants another loveless marriage. The Royals don’t want it because one – commoners bring more bank, and two – such would give the Hewletts too large a share in the crownlands for anyone’s comfort. The people don’t want it, they want the whole fairy tale. Knights slaying dragons and winning thereby the heart and hand of a princess.”

“Yeah,” Mary smiled, smarting, “I liked those stories even when you had me playing evil-witch-by-proxy.”

Effie rolled her eyes. “Bitch, you played yourself there.”

“I’m serious. It is better than imagining of all the money the economy will never see or the cute-as-it-is-kitsch Edmund + Anna teacup I will apparently never own. I take it you two are still in a fight though?” she pried. “That why you’ve hidden yourself away?”

“I’ve just been busy with work,” Effie dismissed her. “Ellie and I are fine insofar as I know. She is probably working, too.”

“Ellie is at her ancestral home to my daughter’s great chagrin. Marie doesn’t get on with the other sabre instructor and makes careless mistakes as a result which only,” Mary took a deep breath and readjusted. “I was having drinks with Ells shortly before she left – guess who with,” she rolled her eyes before beginning a short rant. “Bastard showed up at mine, handed Mou over without affording me any prior warning – said that he would be out of the country for a few weeks and that he had something from America that Ells just had to come along to hear. Guessing from the frantic tone it was not a new hit single the PPL will surely drag its feet on licencing in the UK … but you! I haven’t seen you in two weeks and I am beginning to worry. Everything alright, love?” she asked with concern she did not bother to disguise.

“I was on Twitter Sunday night,” Effie protested. “We had that ‘fight’ about world leaders with no sense of club loyalty.”

“You … do realize that doesn’t count?”

“Mary look, the world is about to implode. Work is just -”

“Well, you are taking the night off,” the diva interrupted with a sudden, wide grin. “I’ve the whole thing planned. I rang Olivia last night - she is hosting Angie in Hamburg and I think that you, me and Mou here could hop a flight -” she chimed whist puckering towards the Yorkshire Terrier that had yet to hop out of her purse. The animal was well over ten years in age; Effie wondered if it still could free itself from its crushed-leather cage without assistance.

“I am not flying off with you to some … strip club. And you know you can’t bring that on a plane,” she indicated to the family pet which she still could not fathom zoology classified as a canine.

“Ignoring how desperately you need some dick in your face, you really don’t want to see if Frau Chancellor can get her freak on? Mary-Anne and Ri-Ri are already in – I hate to say it but you know who you are turning into?” Mary wrinkled her nose.

“Wait … ‘Angie’ as in Angela Merkel?” Effie blinked, pulled out of the mental list she was making of other breeds she did not count as being dogs. “What on earth has she to do in such an establishment?”

“Oh - Olivia Jones is one of the people who gets to choose the next President,” Mary winked. “I
suspect the two are bosom buddies.”

Oliva Jones was a drag queen who owned a number of sex clubs in the depraved city that doubled as the centre of the German-language newspaper industry. As the international edition of her paper was printed on location, Effie Gwillim had previously experienced enough of the Hamburg’s nightlife to satisfy all of her sexual curiosities in a single business trip. As it happened, she did not have many and was embarrassed to learn that the chancellor had any at all.

“Very democratic,” Effie scoffed at the krauts’ limited electoral process.

“Don’t pretend that is the weirdest thing you have heard all week.”

“Were that only the case.”

“Anyway … leased a plane … leaves at seven,” Mary sang.

“I can’t,” Effie persisted.

“You barely have a choice. You need to come, if for nothing else than to apologise to Rihanna, she’s mad as all get out over that Arsenal piece you ran recently.”

“Why is this a thing now?” Effie scoffed. “Why do foreign celebrities all seem to have a side in the Prem – I’m English and I don’t even – you know what, I don’t care. I really do not care at all. I’m sorry I just have … I have to figure something out. I can’t come with on your impromptu girls-night. Thank you, truly -but my answer is no.”

Unable to shake her shoulders of the weight they carried, Effie simply shrugged and turned away, returning to the laptop in her living room she had not closed for two days and the chaos that cluttered around it – used tea mugs, some emptied, some not, takeaway containers that had gone mostly untouched, Post-Its, pictures and postcards she had dug out of her nightstand. She hoped that Mary, whom she could hear following in toe, would not ask her to explain.

Effie turned back to the pile of letters she had reluctantly left when the doorbell first rang. Edmund Hewlett corresponded sometimes, John Graves Simcoe hardly at all. She had spent the better part of the morning searching the missives she occasionally received from the two New Yorkers for small changes in style in hopes of finding evidence that the study the US Armed Forces had helped sponsor had indeed made monsters out of the men she had known as boys.

Everything about her life would be easier to contend with if she could find an enemy deserving of the anger, hatred and blame her soul had too long contained.

Effie had not seen her beloved in nearly a year and now had reason to doubt that she ever again would recognise her John in the demon who had come to share his handsome face.

They had been engaged once.

She had nearly born him a daughter.

Painful as it was, Effie was consciously searching for reasons to cease hating herself for loving him still. All she had found thus far was the suggestion that the man she had planned to spend her life with no longer existed in any way she wanted to know.

“I’ll help,” Mary offered, quickly glancing over the paperwork with a tiny pout as she began to gather cups to bring back into the kitchen. There was no judgement in her voice, which Effie found as kind as the gesture itself. Kinder still would be for her neighbour to simply leave her to her tears.
They were not themselves close, and Effie suspected that shared address aside, she would not know the starlet as anything beyond a celebrity feature story were the blonde not quite as near as she was to the very people Effie could not bear to think about at the moment.

She saw little Marie in all of her mother’s pretty features and recalled watching the wanton hate and fear that had followed Ban back from the warfront vanishing - if only for a short while - whenever he cuddled his daughters in the evening, reading to them with genuine joy and joviality until they eventually fell asleep despite their best efforts to prove how ‘big’ they were by staying awake. Effie hoped that John had some similar outlet, but strongly doubted that was the case. He had no one to love in New York, and no one, it seemed, would hazard to love him at this point in his life. Anna Strong, whom he had long written that he planned to propose to the moment her divorce was finalised, was instead marrying Edmund, who had long served a double role in John’s life as loathsome rival and oldest friend. John was lonely, for he must be now, and Effie felt the sting of no longer being enough to fill the void that threatened to swallow him. But then, how could she possibly hope to be? She had not seen the changes that had slowly stolen him away from her until it had been too late for any love to be salvaged.

She wanted Mary Robinson to leave her to her regrets, the happy memories she would rather forget, to Jennifer Lopez’ entire romance-film repertoire that had been playing softly in the background on her big screen, providing her own broken story some sense of impossible narrative.

“You can’t help,” Effie sighed as she fell into a familiar chorus she hoped would create a semblance of normalcy, “I was thinking of calling my aunt … who I know I am beginning to resemble -”

“No,” Mary replied while studying an old photograph, “I can now assure you, you’re not. Your first reaction when I mentioned the economic sting of a royal elopement was to state what you assume John Graves Simcoe would have to say about how the figure might have been arrived at. And look at all this … this …” the word failing her, she simply exclaimed “Why, your auntie would never!”

Effie laughed in spite of the certain sadness she found in the inaccuracies of the comparison, so perfectly punctuated by the woman who jokingly offered a contradiction. If the all the world was a stage, Mary Robinson, certainly, would both star and direct, outshining any man cast as her opposite. For years, every time The Financial Times speculated that the Hewletts intended to move their offices out of Liverpool, she came around with a bottle of bubbly and a few altered photographs of her illicit lover and the woman she thought it wise to insinuate he was seeing on the side. This always accomplished desired effect of convincing the prospectors that the business - which both she and Effie held considerable stock in - was better than ever (though the market likely knew full well that these particular bearers of the Tarleton and Hewlett names had nothing to do with the deal that kept the factory doors open.) More often than not, Mary found a way to profit personally as well, having ended several incarnations of the same extended affair in ‘reaction’ to a rumour she herself had started, leaving Ban apologetically dismayed but ultimately none to wiser to his domestic partner’s constant scheming.

Mary Robinson was simply good at break-ups. She had plenty of rehearsal to assist her in the Dele Alli incident she was most assuredly not suffering now.

Effie’s Aunt Margaret was better still, for she could have improvised any act from her second-wave-feminist oeuvre to convince even the hardest of critics that a man -or men in a more general sense - were not worth a press statement or second thought. Words in public put aside, Margaret Spinkels-Graves had been in a perfect, loving marriage for the past fifteen years. Maybe, Effie mused, happy relationships were based on high drama. She feared, however, that her own curtain
had closed long ago.

Since reading the final attachment in the email she had been sent, Effie feared equally that she was owed a second act.

If John had indeed been brainwashed to meet fear with bouts of bellicosity, could she truly hold him to account for what he had said and done after she had lost the baby? Or had they grown so far apart at some prior point that she could not have recognised then and there that the man who came to see her in the hospital was not the same who had stolen her heart?

She swallowed a sob as she restarted ‘Maid in Manhattan’, cursing the title and the setting. At least, she consoled herself, it was Edmund Hewlett riding off into the sunset with a member of the middle-class rather than the man who had sung this presumably awful Anna Strong’s praises for the past few months. Effie considered the ways in which John had written over the barmaid, absent of the poetry that marked his earlier affairs. Was this to spare her, or had André taken his sonnets alongside his sanity? She stared blankly at one of too-numerous love stories she watched whenever she was upset and felt herself grow sick at the sight of the ugly New York skyline.

“I ran into her recently; did I tell you?” Mary offered, thankfully, without retuning to the topic of John. “We were at a gallery opening where I’d expected you would be - to give me context if nothing else. So, I am standing there looking at this piece when Margaret Spinkels-Graves comes up. I said ‘hello’, she responded ‘there are a lot of people in Versailles today’ and rolled her eyes -”

“Are you paraphrasing?” Effie tried not to smirk at the mental image of her aunt putting someone she secretly considered a quintessential Essex-girl into place.

“I’m not. The bitch literally Marie Antoinette’d me in front of all of London’s finest,” Mary giggled. “So, of course I burst out laughing - I mean what else can you do? But then I remember that every artist featured was a holocaust survivor or something and it felt inappropriate … and, and was, mind. But the world is such a mess right now that even had that faux pas made its way to the press no one would have cared, what with Senator Arnold, the Trump candidacy, Brexit, one of the Hewletts marrying an American and all of the money the world apparently will never get to waste on souvenirs with their strange faces on them,” she paused. Squinted. “Is it me or does that whole branch of the Royal Family look like they owe some of their genetic make-up to shit-Asia?” Mary gestured to her comparatively less-impressive and imposing cheekbones, continuing for context, “One of those former-Soviet ‘–stan’ countries where the Hewletts themselves grow poppy. I wonder if Fabienne Bouchard is really having another man’s baby or if they just had to say that because … you know,” she wrinkled her nose, “it could come out dark-skinned due to some latent gene. Ells gets grossly tan in the summer or whenever she is in South America – they probably all would if you let them out in the sun. I’d put money on that being why she is hiding up north now, having to make an official appearance at Easter as they do.”

“I will keep that in mind next time I need a neo-fascist fluff piece,” Effie tried to excuse herself, slightly uncomfortable in any conversation that threatened to make her liberal-by-comparison.

“The Hewletts having odd features – for Brits, that is – doesn’t make me a racist! Honestly! I did that video with Beyoncé, remember? And if I were to resent Ellie or the others after all this time it would have more to do with bio-food products than what I strongly suspect to be foreign blood somewhere up the line.”

“Good,” Effie shrugged.

“Yes,” Mary grinned, echoing, “It is really a good time for a mini get-away. Don’t worry,” she winked, “I’ll have you back before the next bomb drops.”
“I need to hang out here and see if it already has,” Effie replied, still staring blankly at a bad film. “I’m calling your aunt. See if she wants to accompany me in your place,” her neighbour quipped.

“I feel safe in saying that I think she’ll pass.”

“…Up a chance to see men willing objectify themselves?” Mary challenged, raising her eyebrows without much creasing her brow.

“You have a point,” Effie smirked, albeit over her sudden suspicion that the physically flawless Mrs Robinson owed some of her perfection to Botox.

Mary sighed with an air of theatrics, replaced the teacups on the coffee table where she found them and relaxed herself into the sofa beside Effie, prying, as she was want to, “Or we could just … you know, sit here … talk about it, whatever it is …”

In another life, her neighbour would have made an excellent gossip columnist and, as such, Effie reasoned, she would have want of her.

“We can’t,” she insisted sharply, inviting her guest to leave with every visual cue she had at her disposal – glaring, pulling her feet closer to her torso and crossing her arms after turning up the volume on a film she had watched a thousand times or more.

Before she knew it, however, she was speaking of things she would have preferred not to voice.

“I think the man I loved may well … I think he may have done something simply dreadful and if I don’t figure out what to do with the information I’ve been shown, countless others lives could be destroyed in one fashion or another. But if I do speak … I know the consequences could be severe for at least one person I care quite deeply for, and I … Oh, Mary! I think … I think there is a decent chance already that …” she began to sob. There were too many things that simply could not be said to present company, yet she had no one else to tell.

John Graves Simcoe and Edmund Hewlett, Effie relayed, had been part of a study that the US Armed Forces had plans to replicate and implement on a much larger scale should Senator Arnold’s controversial defence bill pass. No one knew this detail of his proposed package, and in his absence, no one cared. It seemed Congress would ratify the motion without much oppositional debate as a fearful public had taken to the street in support.

The press had been quick to pin the disappearance on organised terror. The police, as she knew from what little contact she had to the colonies, had instead decided to focus their attention on the original victims. Effie considered that Ban -whom she knew to be incapable of keeping his pretty mouth shut - had carbon copied one or both of the New Yorkers who shared their alma mater in the same email he had sent her, or that John and Edmund had come to learn about the study through some other means.

The media had no particular interest in this angle, but from all Effie could tell from and ocean away, Dr John André had gone missing the same night Senator Arnold had.

To her mind, John had taken vengeance on the doctor who had ruined his life and nearly ended his dearest enemy Edmund’s altogether. He had likely found him in the company of his government
patron and decided it in his interest to leave no survivors.

It pained Effie to imagine that John had become such a man. It was possible that she was given by occupation to colour everything with blood, but from what she had researched into DI Ben Tallmadge, the leading detective seemed a man of reason and judgement. If after a week he suspected that her friends were guilty, Effie had to accept the reality he sought to prove as her own.

Upon hearing this, Mary gave a counter argument that the whole affair a matter of politicking. The senator was not missing at all. He had returned to Washington a few days early and was watching comfortably from his mansion on the Chesapeake Bay as the world burned in his name, playing the fiddle to bide time until his ultimate triumph. Effie, unexpectedly, began weeping once more at her neighbour’s choice wording, reminded of John’s love for history and Latin, reminded of his strong, calloused hands running through her curls as they lied together in bed after making love, him softly reciting poetry in dead languages in his peculiar high-pitch. It hurt nearly as much to know that no other women would ever get to know John in this particular context as it had recognising that she herself would never inspire another verse of love.

“Arnold, from what I gather, is given to speaking the same way, well, not in terms of intonation but,” Mary tried to comfort her. “I think it is just the educational background we all share. The way your aunt mockingly refers to me as ‘the English Sappho’,,” she tried to laugh. “I know that when Ban was injured and the two were riding back to basecamp, Arnold called him ‘Scaevola’ – which, of course, Ban found hilarious, countering his then-CO with the ‘American Ares’ epilate that later found its way into a campaign. I didn’t mean to make you sad. I was probably just remembering that story and let it influence my visual.”

“My God … Arnold was the one who saved Ban’s life?” Effie gaped, finding a new dimension to her fears.

“That is why we have a picture of him on our mantel,” Mary squinted as though to question how she had never noticed it. “Well, had rather, with all of the other shit Ban thought warranted display: his awful siblings and their combined hundred children, a couple of tweets from Kanye’s epic meltdown he printed and framed for ‘inspiration’, an Everton pre-season team photo, that picture that I saved in the breakup for future blackmail of him and a few lads from his boarding school days dressed up as the Spice Girls -”

“John was Geri,” Effie sniffed.

“… do you want me to go down and get it for you?” Mary smiled. “It might help you stop mourning your loss.”

“It isn’t that. No, I … they used to be so close. I thought – I hoped – that with Ban in the colonies, he could help turn the tide as it were, but if Arnold holds his loyalty – and why wouldn’t he? I think he might … I think Ban might instead end up doing everything in his power to get John, and possibly Edmund, convicted of a crime I for one don’t want to believe they committed. I mean, you probably know better than anyone what the colonel is like when he is angry, irrational -”

“I probably do. You’re right,” Mary responded, surprisingly sharp. “And from that position of authority I’m telling you not to worry. From what I understand he is in the US in a purely advisory capacity, likely telling Congress how to capitalize on Arnold’s disappearance. Having no other future job prospects, he won’t do anything to screw this up for himself. He isn’t stupid,” she defended.

“He told Cornwallis not to comply with Tallmadge’s request for the embassy to release Edmund Hewlett’s complete medical. He then emailed me saying that he was having second thoughts about
it, that he should rather strive to work with the NYPD.”

“Ignore it?” Mary shrugged.

“I can’t. Too many people I love would be hurt if this thing that I know it to contain were to come out, too many people in general will be hurt if Tallmadge doesn’t get enough evidence to subpoena André directly before Arnold’s bill comes for a vote.”

“It wasn’t fair of Ban to put that choice on you,” Mary said after a moment’s deliberation. “I wish he and I were on better terms, I could maybe -”

“No. What was ‘not fair’ was for Ellie to put this on him.”

Although her best friend had always been evasive on the subject, Effie knew that Ellie faulted own her family for the way it faced threats from outside and in. She blamed her mother for the strokes suffered by Thomas Gwillim and Edmund Hewlett, the first of which had proven fatal.

Studying her father’s autopsy against Edmund’s medical records as Ban had requested in the accompanying email, it seemed to Effie that Ellie had always been right to suspect something in Edmund’s illness was amiss. She had no right, however, to have first disclosed any of her suspicions to a mutual friend for whom stability had always been a struggle, regardless of however much she may otherwise hate him now.

Based on contextual evidence, Effie knew in her gut that Ellie had gotten Ban to act where she would not. She suspected this to be the way a girl she had never known to openly express ire meant to avenge the underaged smuggler she had been given no choice but to watch die. Ban Tarleton would be his own undoing. He would find a way to justify his coming death as he had every stage of his demise. Ellie Hewlett would combine her interests and expedite intent as she always had. Effie could not help but feel that the victory of either party would somehow ring hallow.

“I don’t want this,” Effie told Mary. “She will say it is about my late father, I know she will. I don’t want Ellie to do anything on my behalf. If there is anything to this -to the idea that Lady Edith murdered my dad - it is neither her battle to fight nor her sin to atone for and I have never been able to convince her of such. And on top of all the other bullshit this week has brought, I am worried that Ban -” she stopped.

Mary betrayed nothing of pain as she continued the thought in Effie’s stead, “would do anything for her. He would do anything for either of you – but forgetting him for a minute, did you ever consider, and please, I am not saying this to be cruel in any way – that whatever Ban and/or Ellie’s intentions,” she paused a long while, “that they are less altruistic than you seem to imagine?”

“That is exactly what I fear,” Effie began to speak quickly. “I’m afraid that this goes deeper than what little Ban let on. He just wrote ‘compare’. He may well have gotten others involved, John -”

Mary shook her head. “Effie … I’ve seen the article your father was handsomely paid not to publish. From what I remember of John, if he can’t deal with an emotion, he simply doesn’t. He may act out in destructive ways, but he only does himself harm. I wouldn’t … he is too far removed from the situation to cause an impact. Ban blames the Hewletts for every ill this world has ever suffered -if only because assigning his father any guilt would be akin to losing him again … Certainly, if there is a fight to be had, he’ll want a piece of it, but he isn’t armed to defend something he would find that he does not truly believe if confronted with the truth behind his convictions. As to Ellie, knowing her as long as I have … I’m nearly certain she suffered the same advances as her mother once did. The fact that she has not acted upon those feelings yet suggests to me that she won’t. I don’t understand what it is you are worried about. Ellie probably told Ban
what happened to her when she was a girl, and yes, he is probably livid over it and rightly so, but haven’t you … at least mentally, prepared yourself for this eventuality? For whatever reason, he is the only person she has ever trusted her smile to, so why not her anger and tears as well?”

“No. NO!” Effie insisted, not wanting to consider what Mary implied about her best friend, especially when the accusation was taken from a story she herself had both helped bury and briefly exhume.

Mary turned away, pretending to watch the film’s protagonist fall victim to a lie she had never meant to tell. Effie tried to watch as well, having been rudely confronted with enough scenes of torture which she ought to have been empathetic to feel out on her own ages ago.

Ellie Hewlett had never dated. Effie had always assumed this owed itself to a superiority complex, not wanting to risk mixing with those below her station. This theory, however, was undone by countless evidence to the contrary. Her best friend was, and had always been, as republican as a princess could possibly prove herself. She was generous with her staff, through herself whole heartedly into every charity venture - handling society’s derelicts without a hint of elitist distain. However, the princess did not take to touch with the same sense of elegant decorum, often freezing or pitching a fit when uninvited fingers felt out for her.

Effie had personally never thought much on it. Ellie’s problem, she had long considered, was and had always been that she was giving of her energy and wealth to the point of it sometimes being off-putting. Paired with a resolve to offer no defence of her character, this left most to assume that she in truth was more ice princess than philanthropist, that she was a poster-child for everything wrong with the class system she ‘pretended’ to hate.

Effie wondered if she would rather have read the narrative her rivals had written than the one her closest friends seemed to hide in plain sight. As a friend, she hated to think that she and Ellie did not share the same closeness that the princess let herself enjoy with Ban, apparently Mary, and probably Ferguson, as well as a host of others far less worthy of her affections than Effie personally considered herself as comparatively being.

As a newswoman, she hated to be the last to know, especially, when she could well have been first on the scene.

Her late father Thomas Gwillim had, shortly before his death, written and had meant to publish an expose on the Duke of Richmond, who as a young man had been betrothed to Edith of the Gordons, one of the prettiest daughters of a rival to the country’s far north, fully a decade younger than he himself. He had evidently impregnated her on a stately visit when she was but thirteen, ending their engagement thereafter and looking to other, younger girls as a replacement, rumoured to have had affairs with a number of children living on his estate. In all the years since, he had never married.

Edna Hewlett, his daughter and thus true heir, had this been born on one of the northern islands, hidden away until the duke’s younger brother stepped up to do the ‘right thing’ by wedding his by-then-sixteen-year-old cousin in his brother’s place, with the Mail inventing a story of forbidden love coming to fruition and the public coming to adore ‘Edith and Edmund’ the way they never would have ‘Edith and Edward’ – though the bothers were all but identical in ways the eyes could see. Edna was briefly replaced by the newborn baby of a man who shared the Hewletts’ business interests, continuing the façade until the decoy was himself a toddler, at which point a five-year-old who had spent her life in isolation was brought to Edinburgh and told she was three.

Effie, who read the article the northern nobles had bought before it had been sent to print upon inheriting her position at the paper, had long considered the whole thing to be bullocks. It was,
after all, just the sort of thing The Daily Mail would print in the weeks of late summer when parliament was not in session, America had released all of its blockbusters, and deadline-day was too far in the future for anyone to give a damn about sports that were not in season. No one would have killed her father for a lie that he had not explicitly told - not when the Mirror, Star and Sun all routinely crafted stories of the like they opened to public consumption. Effie did not see the article as a compilation of every narrative she watched govern her friends, she saw it as a coincidence that could prove dangerous in the wrong hands.

Knowing what Ellie and Eugene could be like when confronted with fictions surrounding their family, Effie decided it best if she kept the matter to herself, something her Aunt Margaret who, for twenty-two years had run the publication in her stead, advised was the wise thing to do.

The fact of its existence slipped out at a dinner party downstairs around a year later when Marie and a few of her little cousins emerged from her playroom in fancy dress, trying to trick her visiting aunt and uncle that they were, in fact, princesses of the Disney variety. Clayton Tarleton had laughingly made a comment that when he was a toddler he was dressed up as a princess too. ‘No, really, I was Lady Edna until I was about Marie’s age,’ he had confided to close company. ‘It is clearly me being baptised on the cover of The Daily Mail,’ he winked at Effie and her then-fiancée John, informing his supermodel wife and the teen idol his younger brother was in a committed relationship with that he had once heard something he had never bothered to verify about the real princess being sickly when she was little, that, or he claimed dramatically, teasing at the children, the whole charade he had been made party to owed itself to the fact that the Hewletts were a later offshoot of the Plantagenets, who as everyone learned in year six, were descended from the demon Melusine and therefore could not themselves be sprinkled with holy water.

Ignoring his brother, Ban told his ward that if her uncle could get over his ego so, too, could she – that she needed to go change into something appropriate whilst Effie repeated what she had just muttered. There was a certain darkness to Banastre Tarleton that he rarely laid so bare in his private life. Frightened by it, Effie obeyed, producing the unpublished article for her former classmate when she returned to the office the following morning. ‘Don’t say anything to Ellie or Gene,’ she had made him swear. ‘To my mind this is all such a pack of nonsense, nothing to get them upset about.’

Unfortunately, the colonel understood nothing of the creative fiction tabloids produced on the daily.

Unfortunately, Effie Gwillim had neither taken that into account nor considered who else he might tell and how far the tale might travel.

“I’d been with Ban for two, three years before taking a job on Broadway,” Mary began anew. “He rang me one night, sobbing, begging for forgiveness –”

“Why?” Effie blinked, surprised at the turn.

“Oh,” she shook her head, speaking as though she relayed a few lines in a script from a play in which she had not been cast, “Ellie took care of some Headhunter he owned money to and then, in the heat of that moment, he asked her to marry him.”

“WHAT?” Effie demanded.

“She never told you?” Mary shrugged. “Frankly, I’m not surprised. I’m not surprised she refused him either. Ellie … can’t bear the idea of being with someone who fancies her which is why, or so I was told, I never particularly felt myself threatened by their friendship. I was just annoyed at Ban
always after exactly that which he will never find on offer: getting physically close to someone who cares for her works to trigger memories Ellie has no doubt fought to suppress, and regardless if either was conscious of this or not,” Mary still seemed to recite.

“No. No Ellie wasn’t – no.”

“Why do you imagine she is so willing to marry Campbell?”

“Geopolitical manoeuvring,” Effie sneered.

“Ellie though?” Mary asked sceptically. “I am fairly sure she sees a loveless marriage as a fitting end. She will be free of her surname and of the unwanted advances of men she may want but can never hope to please.”

“Stop! You don’t know that she was raped. You don’t know that her mother was. Stop saying all of this as though it is fact. It is just a stupid thing my father wrote that I refuse to let become his legacy just because I mentioned it once in relation to some shit Clayton was on about one night.”

“Stop saying all of this as though it is fact?” Mary echoed. “This is rich given the source.”

“I never!”

Mary shook her head. “Look Effs – this isn’t just coming from me. As it works out, my ‘Wicked’ co-star was married to a psychologist, I – admit I was a bit annoyed over the whole matter at the time and this husband and I, we spoke a few times about Ban and all of his many … friends. Ellie, you, John, Gene, Mary-Anne, the Tarleton family that absolutely despised me and the Hewletts they may have hated just a wee bit more. I was furious with all of you at the time. Anyway, this doctor evaluated all of you from my tellings and gave me a means to test my theories – or his theories rather – about the realities of relationships insofar as I might ever hope to. Remember when I first rang and told you that the two were having a torrid affair? That wasn’t entirely on economic grounds – I really didn’t even expect Liverpool to benefit from the rumour in any way … Ellie though, oh Christ did she suffer in silence. She did nothing wrong, of course – nothing to encourage advances that, as you know, never existed outside of the isolated incident - but I enjoyed it all the same. For a time, anyway. When I realised I had come to value her friendship more than the romance I had been forcing for far too long, I let him go -”

Effie had stopped listening at psychologist. “Philomena Cheer was opposite you in ‘Wicked’,” she wisped. “Did you … her husband, um -”

“Oh, I don’t recall his name if I ever knew it. Why?”

“What do you remember about him?” Effie asked as she reopened her laptop.

“British, handsome in a vaguely effeminate way, I recall his voice strange as I know that sounds – his accent was so … staged, as it were. He put on airs and sounded posh,” she smiled. “Sometimes, to amuse myself when I tried of whimsy, I would say something to throw him and he would enunciate his vowels a bit harder than intended – I think he was Mancunian? Northwest, for sure. Being a fake-member of the upper echelons myself, I can always find out my fellow counterfeits.” Effie raised her eyebrows at this, vaguely surprised that Mary was self-aware, or, at least aware of how she came off in present company. “I ceased all communication a few weeks after meeting him when he made a pass at me,” the diva continued, “not wanting it to ignite any more backstage drama than already existed on set.”

“Is this him?” Effie asked, turning her screen to show a recent photo of John André she had pulled
from the internet to her guest.

“‘Yes.’

“That is André.”

“Shit,” Mary said under her breath. “Yea … when you said Andrei I just had this mental image of more a Rasputin figure. That is Philomena’s husband, but it is not … I mean, it can’t be -”

“André wanted to study the effects of fear on the human psyche, believing that it could be altered into producing behaviour suitable for the warfront, that militant Islam had already figured this out and was employing it against the west. His proposed test group was a football club largely made up of immigrants with similar backgrounds in high-stress professions – as close as he would get to an ‘army’ before knowing if his methods worked. John and Edmund were among them. Mary, do you mean to tell me that André knew parts of their horrible backstory before even meeting them? Christ … no wonder they became the focus.”

Effie thought back to all of the things John might have said in Mary’s presence when she and Ban had first started seeing one another. Six months into a siege that had gone on to last over a decade, the then-second lieutenant had lost his father to prostate cancer and, on his death bed, gained a fortune which he quickly gambled into squander and a series of hard truths about the political situation of his city around the turn of the century which he (still) could not bring himself to grapple with. Needing a villain for his narrative who did not share his surname, he gravitated towards casting the younger brother of the Duke of Richmond with whom his father had been in business as his bête noire; a man, who, unfortunately for the flow of conversations to follow, happened to share a name with his eldest son.

Any mention of ‘Edmund Hewlett’ had been enough to turn John into what Effie had then known to be his worst self: huffy, sulking, bitter in ways that won him no sympathy. Effie’s own experience with the younger Edmund had been much different – he was conceited, yes, but at least in his case the vanity was deserved. Furthermore, Effie considered, it all but decimated on the occasions one was able to keep him in conversation for more than five minutes. Sadly, these were rare – the heir presumptive was painfully shy and had not the same interest in power politics as his siblings and the society in which they lived. She had urged John to make peace with the prince that he might make peace with his past.

Now, she lived to regret it.

By all accounts she had heard, John and Edmund had indeed become friends an ocean away from their original conflict, but this was under the influence of André, who may have been introduced to them through a series of rants over which Effie did not need to inquire. Mary Robinson knew Edmund the younger only as the heartless opportunist who shot horses and abandoned small children under heavy fire. John André, in turn, likely only knew John Graves as a single-minded, vengeance driven demon.

Now, it seemed, that was all they were or would ever be.

Mary’s shock faded into distress. “Effie, I couldn’t have foreseen -”

“I’m positive that explains John’s behaviour in hospital,” Effie expanded, her cold heart cracking, breaking against the heat of her blood. Mary, by comparison, looked rather pale.

“After this happened, after my run on Broadway … I returned to London and found that war had ruined everything that had once been good about Ban and that peace was only making him worse. I
am so, so sorry if anything I said in anger that eventually lead to John and Edmund suffering the same on some psychologist’s couch.”

“Nothing is your fault – that was years before!” Effie said when she realised her neighbour was on the verge of tears. “And honestly? What were the chances John would take a job overseas and Edmund would decide that no doctoral programme on offer in Britain was quite elite enough for him?”

“Um …”

“Disregarding that last statement,” Effie shook her head to readjust, “you know what I thought, afterwards, after John had left and you all were with me in my hospital room? Despite what I lost, I have the family I had always wanted. I always had people to love and care for me. And to think now that this man André exploited the pain of its members for personal gain! I could, why - I could well kill him!”

“And you are worried that Ban, John, Edmund, Ellie, or anyone else emotionally involved just might,” Mary tried.

“Ban sent me John André’s research proposal asking what he should do. I have thought about printing it, but if I run this your ex would most certainly be fired and would most probably go to prison for the leak. If I stay silent, is that blood on my hands if the US Military goes on to employ it and more personal lives are destroyed?”

“Again, he should never have put this on you. He was probably just excited with his finding – desperate, maybe, to find his way back into Ellie’s good graces. I know the two haven’t much spoken since … well since we all were given reason enough to distance ourselves.”

“There is something else. Benedict Arnold was the senate contact for the funding that enabled the project. Edmund was arrested last Wednesday in connection to his disappearance -”

“NO! I knew you suspected John, but Edmund?”

“John was taken in on Sunday. Both have been released - in part due to our social media efforts - but I worry they are still under suspicion. I haven’t been able to reach Ban since Sunday evening and -”

“Marie spoke to him yesterday morning,” Mary dismissed. “You can worry about him when he goes a full day without trying to spare his children from the consequences of their actions. He told her something about Bertolt Brecht, so from that I imagine he has been in friendly and constructive contact with John -”

“I think he has been trying to protect them, in his way … but I am worried about what you said earlier, about it not being entirely altruistic.”

“I meant that only in relation to -”

“Listen. First, Ban told Ellie about Edmund’s arrest, saying that he planned to pin Arnold’s murder on a Muslim who had once served under him. She asked DI Ferguson to intervene, creating a short-lived international incident that lead to Ban being placed under house arrest at the British embassy, giving him time to charm the ambassador. At the same time as some FBI SWAT team was on the hunt for this former American officer, John was arrested. Edmund tried to negotiate with Cornwallis to get his medical records released to DI Tallmadge who is leading the Arnold investigation – thinking it would lead Tallmadge to seek out André instead, but Ban placed a hold on them and is now questioning if it was the right thing to do. He too has reason the believe that
Tallmadge is ultimately after the doctor, and that Edmund’s records would lead to at least a search warrant — but, given what he thinks he sees about the reality of Edmund’s heart condition after examining my father’s autopsy report.

“It would be disastrous for business and given that the Hewletts’ contracts in Liverpool are due to expire his city would certainly feel the hit.”

“I don’t think it is that. Not exclusively, anyway. I don’t think that Ban would bring my father up unless he had plans to make good on an oath – which I certainly never asked for! – promising to avenge his death.”

“Yeah, well Ban says a lot of shit when he is upset,” Mary shrugged. “I wouldn’t think too terribly much on it. Have you talked to Ellie about any of this? She’ll back me up. As would … literally anyone who has ever met the lad.”

“No, and I don’t want to.”

“Why?”

“Mary this … you can’t say this to anyone, anyone at all.”

“I promise.”

“I can’t talk to Ellie right now, because this can’t all be coincidence. Ban was the first of us to read André’s proposal and he keeps finding ways of creating a distraction right when John and Edmund need one most. His intelligence … it is all intuitive, you know? It’s … I think he suspects them to have together murdered Benedict Arnold. Because I do, too,” she confessed. “I think this Dr André turned the man I love and my best friend’s older brother into cold murdering bastards and I am bloody terrified.”

She felt Mary Robinson’s arms fall around her and bring her into a tight embrace, one that she returned out of desperation. “I can’t stand the thought of what has happened to John,” Effie sobbed. “I’ve never been able to accept that we were over, but how can we ever be after what has been done to him – after what he has done to other people? I didn’t recognise him – I didn’t recognise him and I should have after all that we shared.”

They sat like this for what felt a long while, until both of their faces were soaked and their tear ducts were dammed up from exhaustion. Effie sought comfort in her company, sought to return what felt a strange favour until a ringing mobile pulled Mary away. “Do you want me to get that?”

“No. I have been avoiding my problems for far too long as it is,” Effie said before answering the device on speaker with “Where the hell are you?” in lieu of a greeting.

>>Darling, you would not believe me if I told you, but that isn’t the story I’ve called to relay.<<

Elanor Hewlett seemed to tease.

Effie swallowed. “Listen, Ellie, we really need to talk. So much has happened since you left and … I miss you. I need you to come home. Please. We have to talk. But we have to talk in person.”

>>I’m under investigation for corporate fraud based on a statement my brother gave the fuzz. I’m in Scotland because I can’t leave Scotland. I would invite you up, but first I need you at a computer because I just got off the phone with The Committee Chairman and Ben Tallmadge is about to have the most eventful day of his career.<<
Edmund Hewlett detested tardiness. Had one of his students given him the same excuse he had provided Hayden’s HR department for his absence, he quite likely would have advised them to drop the course. Higher maths, he would have told them, required a great deal of concentration and commitment.

The same could be said of friendship, as the past week had shown.

DI Tallmadge rang him on Monday afternoon requesting that he return to the station to answer a few questions about his statement. As he was under inquiry rather than arrest, Hewlett had been able to bide time within reason, returning to work from his ungratifying low-cholesterol lunch with the explanation that he would need to take the following morning off. The police, he explained to new employer, hoped he might identify the man who had assaulted him out of a line up, having earlier lied about his bruising and ‘broken’ ankle. Seeing Mary that morning as she struggled with a cast through the kitchen, insisting on helping Aberdeen prepare a proper breakfast despite all of the room’s protests for her to sit down, Hewlett had had the forethought to cover the monitor with a leg brace left in his possession from an earlier sport injury of his own. The contusions and crutches purchased him just enough sympathy with HR to allow for an excused leave of absence so early in his employment. Beaten and broken by the surprising ease with which he had come to find himself able to lie, Hewlett limped into interrogation, not as an assault victim, but as a suspect.

“Clever,” the sergeant to whom he had spoken two nights prior commented on his props. Tallmadge was silent, smiling lightly in such a way that caused Hewlett to question his calculations. He had driven to the station in Anna’s sedan, the same borrowed vehicle that had half-slain the senator the Tuesday prior. This realization had forced him to park a block away, not that he risk the car being made evidence, as much for practical reasons as protectionary ones. Public transport from Setauket to New York City would take two and a half hours, meaning he would need to rise at five o’clock in the morning to make it to the planetarium on time – something that would have proven difficult under any circumstance, fully impossible after two months spent succumb to depression, seldom dragging himself out from under his sheets before ten.

Paranoia, which had plagued Hewlett for the whole of his life, had finally gotten the better of him if Tallmadge’s smirk and the sergeant’s statement were to serve as an indicator. He had considered stripping himself of the brace and abandoning his crutches to the back seat before entering the station, but - worried that someone from work would drive past and see his lie for what it was- he had decided to carry on his act of being crippled. Now, Ben Tallmadge knew him to be capable of constructing an alibi.

“If Nancy Grace and the entire female population of your city are to be believed, you were once in a similar position, Inspector,” Hewlett said curtly. “I just took a new job and certainly do not wish my colleagues to know that I am a murder suspect.”

“I didn’t have a choice in the matter,” Tallmadge replied, neither phased nor particularly interested. “Not,” he shifted sharply, “that it would have occurred to me to try to disguise a monitoring device
had I given the internal police any ground to insist upon my wearing one. Take a seat, Mr Hewlett. This might take a while.”

“I came of my own free will,” Hewlett protested. “I told your sergeant everything about the match -”

“If you mean to insinuate that you’ll leave unless I charge you, I might remind you, Mr Hewlett, that you just now referred to yourself as a ‘murder suspect’. My department has been treating Senator Arnold’s disappearance as a missing person case. Any reason why we might want to reclassify the parameters of our investigation?” Tallmadge asked. “Take a seat, Mr Hewlett – either there or in a holding cell. It makes little difference to me.”

Hewlett took a deep breath, hating his upbringing as he relaxed into the opposite chair insofar as he would ever be able. His posture was rigidly straight. At thirty-five, he could still feel every slap his shoulders had ever received for slouching. He pictured how Simcoe might have looked by way of comparison – casual, relaxed, feet likely crossed up on the table to demonstrate complete disregard for his captors. He would have likely looked as though he had nothing to hide. Realistically, all of Bye Week, Middle County FC and everyone else who had sat in this chamber to answer a simple series of questions had done so with a demeanour that evaded Hewlett completely. Even knowing it was in his best interest, he could not so much as bring his back to touch that of the chair. It was too common. Tallmadge, he saw, noted this deficit.

“You seem nervous, Mr Hewlett,” he remarked.

The suspect said nothing in reply. What good, he wondered, would it do for him to explain the environment in which he had been raised? Tallmadge took a few pages from the manila folder he had in front of him. It was thinner, Hewlett saw, than the one containing the files the NYPD either had or had not received from DI Ferguson, formally of Glasgow. “You shouldn’t be,” Tallmadge said. “I guarantee that you have been here before. Likely, quite often at that. Here,” he said returning to Hewlett the statement he had written on Sunday. “Let’s talk for a moment, if we may, about spelling and syntax.”

“What is this?” Hewlett demanded, seeing a copy his sworn statement covered in red ink.

“English is a bastard language” Tallmadge told him. “It began its existence as an Anglo-Friesian dialect brought to Britain by Germanic settlers in the fifth century with some Scandinavian influences entering by the eight. Many Norman and French words then entered the lexicon, if you will, with the Conquest – Greek, Latin, Dutch, German, French et cetera emerging in the vocabular of the Renaissance. I read history at Yale, you see. Many Middle English documents that survive to this day seem to have by most standards highly irregular spellings. Not by your own judgement, I’m guessing. No Mr Hewlett, your write … I don’t even want to say phonetically -”

“Then please, by all means, say what you mean to,” Hewlett spat. “I have a minor learning disability. Dyslexia has plagued me my entire life. I’m on a 504 at Columbia, this is why,” he gestured to the corrected paper. “If you mean to humiliate me -”

“I don’t,” the inspector tried to assure him, raising his hands as though to offer an olive branch if not the white flag of surrender. “I just have a few questions, that is all.”

“No,” Hewlett said as he flipped thought the paper he had not expected to find so rigorously noted. “It seems you understood me despite my mistakes. Your man Baker -”

A single loud knock served to stop him midsentence. Tallmadge turned around, standing when he greeted the gruff looking man as ‘chief’. The sergeant followed suit, relaxing when the man in the
doorway gestured for her to be seated.

“I’m sorry to interrupt,” the elderly, decorated officer said. “Paulo Genovese just walked in off the street on his own accord with what he states is evidence against The Commission and is refusing to speak to anyone but you, Inspector Tallmadge.”

“Understood,” the inspector nodded, straightening, Hewlett noticed, ever so slightly with what he imagined to be nerves. He knew the name of the unexpected witness as that belonging to an ambitious underboss in one of New York’s Five Families and felt the hand of his own.

The dossier had been delivered an hour earlier. It contained two large bound documents filled with the names and addresses of everyone whose prescription Oxycodone was due to run out in a dominion he considered his own. A pink Post-It Note on the first read: ‘To borrow from your own lexicon, I’ll make you an offer you can’t refuse – call me! 💖’

Neither name nor number accompanied the package, but it contained new iPhone with a single set of digits preprogrammed under pseudonym Paulo well knew, one he had already guessed at from the Edinburgh postage stamp.

“Enyo,” he greeted his Scottish counterpart when she answered on the first ring. “You realise we only say things like that in the movies.”

“The offer still stands,” she seemed to purr. “Though, truth be told, you’re late, Mr Genovese. I was expecting you to ring me last week.”

“Blame it on the post,” Paulo replied. “I only just got your package.”

“Indeed. It has been a bit hectic in New York, I’d imagine. Still, we had an understanding, you, I - and the commission I expect you hope to soon chair. You’ve not abided by your end of it,” she warned, “and yet … well, let’s for now leave things at: I’ll let you make it up to me. I sent you two files, the first of which you are going to hand deliver to Inspector Benjamin Tallmadge of the NYPD.”

“Haven’t they told you, love? Tallmadge isn’t on the case anymore. There is a big to-do with a certain missing senator … or is the British press of preoccupied with your brother’s coming nuptials -”

“And here I thought you all too keen to leave my brother out of it,” she taunted before tapering her tongue into a blade within the same breath. “We had a deal, Mr Genovese. You have not held up your end of the bargain which I see as an excuse to overstep myself. I sent you a print out of a transaction made between Thomas Jefferson of Pfizer and Frank Cali of the Gambino crime family. I need you to take the receipt, contained on the first page of the smaller file - along with the whole of the rest of its contents - to DI Tallmadge. It will give him grounds to arrest Jefferson and allow you to eliminate your internal competition -”

“I don’t make deals with coppers,” Paulo replied flatly.

“Which is why you still take orders at … how old are you now, Paulo – fifty?” Enyo said sharply. “You know, when I was a little girl I was told by a … business associate that we often have more in common with our enemies than we do with our friends. Of course, the man was referring to a sport
rivalry – but it always stayed with me and I find it to be … particularly fitting to your situation. Your enemies, my dear, are masking themselves as allies to take advantage of your family’s pathetic adherence to Omertà.

The second file is for you to use as you see fit. It contains information about individuals forced into chemical dependency by a broken pharmaceutical system for most of your territory. You needn’t tell Talmadge about its existence, but if you don’t take advantage, Franky Boy surely will if he hasn’t already,” she paused. “Your lack of central leadership tells me your family can’t afford a war, not against your arch-rivals whom you now know to have direct ties to Big Pharma … and surely, not with me, my friend.”

There were all of five women in the world who truly intimidated Paulo Genovese: his wife, his mistress, the district attorney, and the two involved in drug trafficking who simultaneously enjoyed strong ties to their respective militaries. The ‘liberator of the liberator’ was, thankfully, far away in South America; the ‘princess of the blood’, on the other hand, seemed ready to call in the cavalry. He tried to stall. Eleanor Hewlett, he knew, had not earned that particular distinction due to her place on some line of succession. Paulo looked around to make sure he was alone. He lowered his voice. “You are asking me to give Tallmadge –"

“All the evidence he needs to arrest a man not directly related to mafia activity,” she calmly cut him off. “I’m asking for a distraction. Tallmadge has been trying to get to Jefferson for years. I’m only asking that you provide the good inspector with all the excuse he needs to put this down for good.”

“I didn’t realise you were an expect in New York’s most tenacious cop.”

“I wasn’t until he arrested my brother last week,” Enyo said snidely. “Family is as important to me as it is to you, Paulo. You’ll go to Tallmadge, or I’ll come to you. Your choice. Your so-said code has already been compromised, and I am giving you a chance to make amends - under very generous terms, I might add. That said, the caution I’m about to give is admittedly profuse, but whereas you speak in terms of ‘associates’ I can call upon an army. Don’t give me more reason than I have to come to your city, for if made to, I shan’t come alone. Uphold your part of the agreement we share by delivering Jefferson to Talmadge as it were and do what you want with the rest. Ring me when it has been done. Same number, from the same phone. It is encrypted, the only way you can reach me.”

“Do none of the others work anymore?”

“Not for you, Paulo – ciao!” she laughed.

“Cheers,” he replied to a dead line.

Genovese dressed himself slowly in a suit he knew he wore well, unable to face the coward he feared he would find in the mirror.

An hour later, he walked into the precinct with information surrounding a drug deal of which he had not been part in hopes of loosening the noose negligence had hung around his neck.

“Go,” the sergeant urged her boss who glanced anxiously between she and the suspect. “I’ve got this,” she smiled at Hewlett. He hated her casual confidence, her too-focused stare that stung
nearly as much as Tallmadge’s manic adherence to proper formatting. Hewlett glanced down at the statement he had written, the words dancing when he looked too long, causing him to feel slightly dizzy with their waltz.

Tallmadge excused himself, shooting Hewlett another hard look of suspicion before exiting the interrogation room. The suspect glared back, embarrassed at the ease with which his ego was wounded.

“Sergeant Yil…” he attempted, still unable to recall her surname beyond the first syllable.

“Maz. Yılmaz. Not good with names either, are we?”

“I ah … you must realise, most of the people I have ever known have but a distinct few,” Hewlett tried to excuse his faux pas. He was still want to call her ‘yildiz’ – the single word of Turkish he felt confident in pronouncing.

“Are we speaking of Windsors and Bernadottes or Johns and Roberts?” Yilmaz chimed.

“Ah … both, I suppose, if we are also speaking geographically.”

“But you knew John Graves Simcoe back in England, is that correct?”

“Yes?” Hewlett squinted.

“You say that as though you are unsure.”

“I don’t understand why I am being asked to repeat it,” he answered honestly.

“I’ll come to that in a minute. Let’s talk about your spelling though – it is something of an interest of mine. An obsession, if you will. My mother is mute, well, that is, where my father, sisters and I understand her perfectly – you wouldn’t. The Turkish authorities removed her tongue when she was a young woman – probably unflinching as the cut it from her mouth to strike terror into the hearts of those knowing a word of the Kurdish language. In Diyarbakir, she spat as those this should mean something, “Or Amed, as I’ve also heard it referred.”

She gestured all the while, perhaps, Hewlett thought, behaviour she unconsciously mirrored from the woman whose voice had been taken. Yilmaz spoke casually, he noted, as though this was a story she had had to relay on many an occasion. He could not help but wonder in his heightened discomfort if this was an appropriate venue for it.

“Why are you telling me this? Only a demon could enact the scenario you’ve recounted.”

“A demon? No, Mr Hewlett. A government decree that followed the military coup of 1980. My parents first met in hospital. My father was a nurse – he still is. Married my mum then and there, knowing that she would get better treatment in America where he was set to move within the month. She was a teacher in Turkey, my mother. Cleans homes on the Upper East Side now what with,” Yilmaz indicated to her lips. “Perfect English though, at least in written form. It would have to be when I think on it, being her only means of communication;” she paused. “If I came home with a paper that looked like yours she would have made me copy my corrected individual mistakes five times each before rewriting the paper in full until my fingers bleed. To this day I’m a little fearful texting her, even with spell check, autocorrect and the like. I only bring this up because it gives me cause to wonder a bit about the texts you have been exchanging with Simcoe of late.”

“You are asking if I went through something similar at his insistence?” Hewlett shook his head. Leave it to Simcoe to voice every fault he found to anyone who would listen. “My dear, it would
not have made a difference if I had.”

“His spelling is perfect.” Yilmaz seemed to challenge.

“He is a poet of some renown back in Britain. You might expect as much.”

“But not from you.”

“No.”

“Except,” she elongated, opening a file she was not quick to share. “Oh – this is interesting. Hm. It begs almost the same question,” she frowned. “I took you for a Klopptimist.”

“I … am I suppose?”

“Still the you can win the league?”

“Mathematically.”

“And Europe?”

“Of course.”

“Just not away at Palace?”

“We beat the Eagles with ten men at the weekend,” Hewlett frowned.

“That come as a surprise?” Yilmaz inquired with an intent Hewlett struggled to place.

“Not to anyone who follows football,” he scoffed.

“You like shooting yourself in the own foot, don’t you?” she smiled.

“In terms of unnecessary fouls or -”

“No, you as a person, Mr Hewlett,” she clarified, “not you as a supporter of a franchise. See, for a moment I might have been able to let it slide but, you’ll see here – in a transcript of a recent WhatsApp exchange between you and John Simcoe – that you were absolutely adamant that your side would lose at the weekend. Since I know you have some trouble with it and the course of my family history has in contrast made me an expert, I’ll help you out,” she pointed to the print out she laid before him, “there are no spelling errors in the messages you sent Simcoe in rapid succession. Here, just as a point of comparison, this here is a transcript of a text exchange you had with your future mother in law the same morning. Slower, you’ll note, and with far more errors that elapsed autocorrect – some of which my boss even called you out on.”

Tallmadge had marked his mistakes on this copy as well. Hewlett swallowed, remembering Mrs Smith asking him if he was drunk Sunday morning in the midst of trying to negotiate space for even more of Anna’s shoes in the sedan.

“Mr Hewlett, I am going to make an assumption and you can correct me if you wish – but you aren’t texting Mr Simcoe at all, are you?”

“I, ah -”

“Rather, he is texting himself from your phone, that, or given the speed of the exchange and the fact that the time stamps on some of these show that you were conversing with Ms Smith at
precisely the same time – good ol’ John Graves has set up some kind of algorithm to do the texting for him. Being that you are still in the ‘this is our year’ phase of what your old friend Banastre Tarleton calls ‘the red mentality’, I’m given to think that none of this has anything to do with footy at all. So … are you curious as to which parts of the code I’ve been able to crack?” she winked. “This here, from last Thursday, is about purchasing property in Setauket – perhaps to make your unsuccessful bid on DeJong’s look less conspicuous.”

She knew nothing. Hewlett did not bother reading the text she had surely misinterpreted. “The tavern is the only property in Setauket I have any interest in holding,” he responded in all honesty.

“Well, you might have been a bit more forthright in telling Simcoe as much,” Yilmaz shrugged. “As things stand, you and a few dozen other shareholders own more than half the town, much of which was purchased from a London real estate mogul whom I believe you also went to school with – Danny Wessex?”

“Yea. I know Danny,” Hewlett blinked. He had not heard the name in years, had not seen the lad in longer. He had received an invitation to his wedding, more out of protocol than any friendship they had shared on York’s playing fields. He shook his head. “This is honestly the first I’ve heard anything about a landgrab in Setauket though.”

“He sold you land he had bought a few months prior for six times what he paid,” Yilmaz informed him. “I don’t entirely take you for a fool, Mr Hewlett, so I did some digging and discovered that the world might literally be as small as the town you now call home. Check the Daily Mail this morning?”

“No.”

“Surprised Anna hasn’t called you about it yet.”

“Not her cup of tea either.”

“No even when she is in a sport bra on page six?”

The sergeant pulled out her mobile to show him a picture of teenage Anna exchanging her national colours for the one’s Danny’s wife Charlotte wore under her maiden name. “Gwillim doesn’t seem to care to cite her sources, so I had to do my own digging on this one and found that your fiancée gave up the game in any professional capacity after ending Mrs Wessex’ to injury. Now, I thought Danny’s gouging might have been revenge for that particular incident, but the history is older, isn’t it?”

Hewlett blinked again. “Anna mentioned once that she played two matches for the Under-21 US Women’s National Team … but I, no. No, I didn’t – and I doubt, highly, Sergeant Yilmaz, that anyone – much less Danny Wessex of all people would think to hurt Anna through me.”

“Would Simcoe though?” she pried.

Hewlett felt his fists clench and his throat contract.

“I’ve been told there was a death on the force,” the Sicilian greeted in a slow, gruff voice. “My condolences.”
“You didn’t come here for our world-famous coffee, Mr Genovese,” DI Ben Tallmadge stated, still standing. The meeting was not being held in a standard interrogation room. Rather, the two were in Ben’s office, Genovese having made himself comfortable in a chair facing the desk. Ben took the one beside it after some deliberation he hoped was no apparent in his movement. He did not want to glance over a photograph of Nate to meet the eyes of one of the most notorious murderers in the city, a leader in the war that had stolen his first love away from him.

“No,” the mobster agreed. “I came to put this in your capable hands.” He reached for something under the wool coat he had folded on his lap. Occupational instinct placed Ben’s hand on his holster, aware though he was that the unofficial head of the largest of the Five Families was unlikely to open fire himself, especially within the station’s walls. Still, he sighed in relief when the man handed over a bound dossier.

“How did you come to obtain this?” Ben asked as he surveyed the document.

“A mutual friend. I am afraid that is all I can say.”

Knowing that the mafia had an honour code that Paulo Genovese felt particularly bound to, Ben stated his concern, “It still begs the question why you are surrendering it to me.”

“The enemy of my enemy,” the made-man began to allude. Ben did not appreciate the implication.

“We are not friends, Mr Genovese. And it is not my case anymore.”

“We are more alike than you may assume, Ben. I have no intention of surrendering my place on The Committee to this, as I am all but certain that you have no desire to abandon your own ambitions to the politics of convenience. Look at the last page,” he instructed.

“There seems to be quite a bit missing,” Ben commented as he flipped though, noting a mis-numeration.

“It is all I was given,” the Sicilian swore.

“All you were given or all you are giving me?”

“Does it make a difference? Jefferson and Cali are set to meet at the docks in an hour. I trust the source of this information as I trust that you -”

“What are you asking in exchange?” Ben interrupted. He did not have time to organize a proper invasion, he would have less after disobeying a direct order to negotiate terms for a turncoat. Genovese took his time considering, time which felt slower as Ben’s pulse grew to match pace with the seconds ticking away on the clock on his back wall. He knew this could well be a trap, but in the event that it was not, he would be fated to curse caution for the rest of his life. It seemed likely that he would never be handed another opportunity like this; aside from the reasons that owed themselves to logic, there were rumours that Jefferson planned to relocate to Paris permanently, and Cali appeared so rarely in public that it made little difference if he was in New York or not.

It would make an enormous difference to the city, however, if the NYPD could stop an illegal shipment of prescription Oxycodone from being peddled on its streets.

Ben owed that much to Nate.

He owed it to himself, as well.

“Your cooperation … and silence,” Genovese answered at long last.
“You let me handle this on my own,” the detective warned.

“What purpose would it serve me to send my associates anywhere I know you to be mounting your forces. Of course – the window is limited. If you don’t want to take it, I could always make a call.”

It would take too long, Ben knew, if he did this by the book. Excusing himself from the conversation, he gathered most of his team together. There was little time for tactics. He told his men to put their Kevlar on and prepare to follow his lead.

After sticking his head back into the room where Hewlett was being detained and telling Yilmaz she was in charge of the Arnold case until the time of his return, making no mention to his second as to where he was headed, DI Ben Tallmadge departed the station in an unmarked car that stank of sin. Putting on his siren as he sped through the streets, he was called back by the sound and the stale air to Saturday night when he was a passenger; when Caleb Brewster, who knew the backways far better than he himself could ever hope to, had whisked him back to his flat – his gorgeous eyes focused on the road whilst Ben fiddled awkwardly with his first attempt at fellatio in years. He remembered how it felt to be in Caleb’s arms, the euphoria and agony of being with a man who was not DS Hale. Ben felt as though he betrayed his first love - that he betrayed equally a near stranger whom he had no business bringing back to the apartment he once shared with his partner.

The problem, he now saw, was that he had never left the pew in his father’s church. Ben Tallmadge knew that he was in too many ways still at his boyfriend’s funeral. He had to bury Nate on his own. He had only today to do it. He had to focus.

When he pulled up to the river’s edge minutes after letting his longing and sorrow break into steadfast resolve, he quickly arranged his troops around the designated meeting place only to find the two criminals in question were already inside, each of them flanked by more men than the inspector had anticipated from the email exchange. He raised his service weapon. Thomas Jefferson had started the city’s drug problem. Frank Cali had given the order that had killed Nate in the line of service. He took aim, giving an order for his man to follow suit, firing off but a single a round before moving in to storm the premises.

One way or another, he swore, this would end here and now.

The previous Wednesday, Edmund Hewlett had made what now seemed the fatal error of informing the police about two-hundred jobs he had been unable to save, more because his father’s sudden, stern disapproval that bordered on absolute dismay remained for him - half a lifetime later - the most remarkable detail of the entirety of his short, sordid career in business than out of any strategic necessity.

He had begun relaying this narrative as a whole in hopes of distracting from Simcoe’s involvement in his current scheme, but it seemed that for all of his old friend’s initial anger, John Graves had been playing him from another angle all the while. At least, this was the police seemed to believe.

Despite his own growing mistrust, Hewlett found himself fighting the urge to laugh.

Ferguson was a quality detective, albeit one trapped by politics in a rank likely far lower than that which he was due, thanks to his brief entanglement with Simcoe, Hewlett and their murderous
horse. He was not surprised that his fellow Scotsman had followed up on this lead, though it came as a shock that there he had found a trail at all.

Perhaps he had been naïve in this respect, but having left himself with no possibility of retreat, Hewlett marched forward to a battle he had not anticipated necessary to fight. For now, this took the form of sitting vis-à-vis Sergeant Yilmaz as she relayed Inspector Ferguson’s findings. Hewlett was only half listening as he tried to anticipate what his next move might be were he to reach the clearing to indeed find Simcoe on the other side, having mounted his considerable forces in opposition.

Per the sergeant whose quick reading and rigorous adherence to proper spelling apparently owed themselves to the fact that her mother was missing her oral organ, as the result of Edmund’s finding no feasible solution that would allow for business to continue, an office in Liverpool had needed to be closed. Twenty-one years later, Hewlett found he could not any more feign the sorrow his father had once demanded of him. He had given up the entirety of his considerable inheritance to salvage as much as he could under the market conditions of the era. He had saved his family’s wealth, honour and reputation. He said nothing to this effect. It seemed, in light of what Ferguson had been able to uncover, an altogether moot point.

“The closing of this division caused then-mayor John Tarleton to make veiled threats, which your father then countered by stating that he had incriminating documents of his own that would cost the mayor his party’s nomination if exposed. I can’t open the attachment. Do you know anything about what your Lord father was referring to?”

“No,” Hewlett answered honestly. “I was fourteen. I don’t even know or remember what Tarleton was being nominated for.”

“Prime Minster.”

“Glad that didn’t work out then,” he muttered.

“Tarleton seems to have immediately resigned from the race on his own accord. In what appears to be – according to Ferguson’s findings - the final series of exchanges between the two men, he then made the bold move to request that Eleanor and Eugene be sent to live in his household, attaching what may have well been another threat of sorts.”

“Or perhaps he was simply seeking prestige,” Edmund guessed. Yilmaz said nothing, reading on to inform him that which he already knew - the mayor was denied this honourable expansion of his already enormous family. Hewlett Sr. suggested in his refusal that his former friend well knew the fate that awaited those who moved to threaten their most noble of names. Tarleton replied to this with only, as Yilmaz relayed, ‘someday your children will grow up, and good luck to you and your Lady wife when they do.’

“It seems the two never again spoke directly with one another,” she remarked.

“Sometimes partnerships fall apart.”

“I suppose that is something you know quite a bit about, Mr Hewlett.”

“I’m less of an expert than you credit me as being,” he smiled. He knew what she was trying to do. Even if her assumptions were correct, he was determined not to let himself be captured, at least not in a trap he had unknowingly laid for himself in misplaced trust.

Though Edmund Hewlett disagreed with his father on a great many things, he grew increasingly
determined as the detective spoke to deliver upon the promise to bring destruction upon all of those who threatened his name, especially as Anna would soon share it. He had told Simcoe about the market scheme Aberdeen had gathered from the gist of Lafayette’s loud telephone conversation with the Moussed in hopes of raising half a million with which to purchase the bar in which his fiancée worked, thereby fulfilling the fondest wish of the woman he loved. The funds had been too easily secured. Tallmadge and his team seemed to know nothing of the information Hewlett had happen upon, having only half cracked the code – and that, he grinded his teeth together - as a result of Simcoe’s lack of care; not taking into account the various spelling mistakes that he so often mocked while programming his algorithm, not so much as attempting to allow the information sent from Hewlett’s number to otherwise speak as he would in any sense.

Perhaps, this had been Simcoe’s intent all along.

On the same night Hewlett made his confession, Simcoe had been in communication with Banastre Tarleton who had advised him to purchase more property in Setauket, warning him that Anna Strong would be on the cover of the Daily Mail the following morning wearing a bewildered expression in front of the bar where Senator Arnold was reported to have last been seen. It could well be, as Yilmaz laid out, that Elizabeth Gwillim had tipped him off to this, that Tarleton had somehow over the distance of a decade recognised the face of a girl who had accidently ended his older sister’s footballing career by fouling her in a friendly and had decided, with the help of his former roommate, to take retribution in money if blood was not an available option.

It could, however, be mere coincidence that the man who the colonel now seemed to be claiming once saved his life disappeared in a town where the Wessex’ just happened to own property (as, Hewlett noted to himself, they did all over what once been the British Empire.) Danny, Charlotte -and the whole of her extended family, likely wanted to sell before value plummeted, and, perhaps, had given Simcoe the chance to create a scenario that might force Hewlett to confess to some greater guilt in the process of recouping their initial investment. Hewlett wondered how on earth Simcoe found the ways and means to organize all of this with everything else he had on his plate whilst questioning how strong his internal enemies’ shared motive truly was. If he was right, their alliance was weak at best and could thus be easily undone.

As he now saw it, Simcoe had denied Mary’s amorous advances thinking that Anna would soon be his. He himself would soon be in prison by what he supposed had been his sometimes-friend’s estimation, leaving Simcoe thus in complete control of Setauket proper. The situation that lead to his engagement to Anna likely had the banker convinced that the woman they both loved was nothing more than an opportunist who would follow her ‘heart’ to him when she saw she had no other options.

How very mistaken he was.

Simcoe had again made a miscalculation about him - and with Anna now a factor in the same equation - Hewlett was determined to make the error prove fatal.

Bitter was he was at the reality of his ankle monitor, it proved a blessing in disguise. Having fallen into the trap that Tallmadge laid in the evidence Ferguson had gather against them both as younger men, Hewlett had learned how the Scottish inspector had come on his then-winning tactic. Again, he fought the urge to smile at the absurdity of it all. Everton considered itself Liverpool’s rival and the fool Banastre had always placed his bets on the wrong side. The colonel very likely saw their current situation, as Hewlett imagined based on what he had been told on Sunday, in the same way he had seen the reality of their past arrest – something to be exploited for the purpose of indemnification.
Hewlett, by contrast, saw through them all. He needed only to deny it here for his own survival.

“I didn’t know anything about the land grab in Setauket!” he exclaimed. “Nothing! And John, to my knowledge, knows nothing about any business my father ever did with the former Mayor of Liverpool!”

“But you trust him?”

“To handle my finances?” he scoffed. “He is the best in the field.”

“When he tells you that he had nothing to do with the disappearance of Benedict Arnold?” Yilmaz posed. This threw him, but only slightly. Her strategy, he saw, remained the same as it had been on Sunday evening. Having forced doubt upon him, she hoped she could convince him to divide his forces from those Simcoe had pre-placed in order to weaken the strength of their shaky alliance, the same as Ferguson had done years before.

Her mistake had been in thinking he did not take note of all of her cards when she briefly shown her hand.

“Yes! Bloody hell! Yes!” Hewlett insisted. He would deal with John in his own time. The demon would surely be his own undoing, but if Hewlett admitted to what he knew now during the course of this interrogation, too many people he cared about would be dragged into the same hell: his beloved Anna, Mary Woodhull, Jordan Akinbode and Aberdeen Declesias, all of whom, like himself, were only in this situation because of the same misguided sense of loyalty.

Hewlett knew himself to process the unenviable fortune of being rather good at breaking such ties, something that would here again prove beneficial to him. He had achieved, after all, only the most limited contact to the blood relatives who had evidently been set on his demise. He had survived every assassination attempt to date. Let Simcoe do his absolute worst, he thought to himself. He would be able to defeat him in the end and save the others as well, allowing them all to profit from whatever misfortune should soon come to befall his most cherished enemy.

“I believe you,” Yilmaz said.

“You … you do?” Hewlett stuttered in response.

“For now. What was it Banastre said to DI Ferguson? ‘Liverpool fans are defensive to the point of denial about their side until someone truly gets the better of them?’ - that assessment nearly convicted you before. And these aren’t the only risky bets John Graves Simcoe has made with your money, are they? I haven’t entirely figured out the rest of the ‘league table,’ focused in on your team - so to speak, as I was, but I think this is a ploy.”

The door swung open without the curtsey of a knock.

“This interview is finished,” the Frenchman whom Hewlett had spied upon declared as he rushed in without awaiting invitation.

“This isn’t your case,” Yilmaz responded without bothering to rise in greeting.

“I’ll see that you are taken off it completely if you don’t immediately surrender this room,” a stern, steady voice came from around the corner. Within seconds, a man dressed in full military regalia appeared unsmiling before them. Yilmaz took to her feet immediately. Hewlett rose as well, recognising the man who now made their company from the evening news.

“I trust your judgement,” the American Defence Secretary said to his foreign liaison. Hewlett watched Yilmaz leave in Washington’s company with the feeling that he would have gotten better terms had he confessed to her when he had been given the chance to do so.

“Monsieur ‘Ewlett,” Lafayette greeted. “It seems we meet once more.”

Ben Tallmadge drove back to the station the long way around, taking in the day’s victory in the silence of his car. It had not been as he had so long anticipated despite living up to his expectations in every conceivable fashion.

Having played with a hundred like scenarios in his fantasy over the course of the past six years, it was as though he had been as distant from any of the actual action as he would have been had the morning’s events only transpired in his inactive mind. Ben had been deaf to the exchanged fire, moving through the dead zone as though he would in any routine operation.

His victory did not feel hallow, though it did not feel cathartic.

It felt, he realized, like another day at the office.

After six years of metaphorically sitting on a church pew whilst his father read the eulogy of the man he had loved, feeling the guilt and stain of sin in the shadow of the cross, Ben Tallmadge finally felt as though he had been able to go to work and do his job. He felt that things had returned to normal.

He pulled into a carpark by the Hudson, letting the wind cascade through his loosened hair as he stopped to watch the small waves on the water’s surface. For a time, he did not think anything but instead let himself feel. He felt hope fill the void dread had left in his heart. He felt the chill of the air on his cheeks, the occasional light sting of his long hair as it whipped against his face with each arctic gush. Buying himself a coffee from a foot truck, he countered the coming storm with a bit of bitter warmth. He was free. He had, in turn, liberated his city from mafia’s stronghold, having undone an alliance between the Five Families and the pharmaceutical industry.

By the time this fully hit him, it had begun to drizzle.

Ben, who suddenly felt glad enough to sing, simply stood, watching the water gather itself into ripples and small waves until it broke against its own weight. There was a beauty to it which he had too long denied himself. He could well have spent the entire day at the river, in the rain, in the comfort of the coffee he could no longer get back at the station and in the realization that every drop of precipitation forming puddles in the gravel would soon bring the world closer to its coming spring.

He resolved to visit his parents at Easter, to voice a silence that he had let shame him for years. He deserved better than what he had allotted himself as of late.

Ben reached into his pocket for his phone, intent on making a call he had been anxiously avoiding.

A text from DS Yilmaz told him, however, that he had to return to the station immediately. He had another case, which he reasoned, he had the same motivation to solve as he had in the one that had met him head on in the morning. When the Arnold affair was ended, he would be able to pursue Caleb Brewster with the same tenacity that had catapulted him to professional success. The man
had stolen his heart and seemed intent of holding it hostage, after all.

“I have to go, love,” Ellie Hewlett interrupted her best friend midsentence when she heard the inspector’s phone ring. “I have a call on the other line I have been long expecting.”

“Will you call me back?” Effie begged. “Els, there is something I really need to tell you.”

“I shan’t have the time, I fear – and I doubt you will either. We can catch up after Easter when I’m back in London. Until then, let me leave you with this: Paulo Genovese is about to die, likely within the vicinity of the central Manhattan police station.”

“Because of what we just wrote?”

“Because he failed to keep Edmund safe from trouble as I had trusted him to do,” she said with a learned nonchalance that in no way corresponded to her actual feelings, adding in the same slightly bored tone, “Oh, but do leave my brother’s name out of it, would you? Blame it on the Gambinos. The other families surely will. Cheers, darling!”

She caught the phone on the last ring before Ferguson, visibly annoyed that he had made himself privy to any of this, could move to answer himself.

“You are late again, Paulo!” Ellie greeted, shifting to make herself comfortable on the inspector’s dining room chair, for a moment sharing in his stated annoyance that her associates had taken the couch. “I am beginning to think you and I need to readjust on our professional understanding.”

“I wanted to make sure it went down as planned before reporting back,” the mafioso excused himself.

“And?”

“Jefferson and Cali were both arrested. Tallmadge is nowhere to be seen.”

“You think he went down in the line of fire?” Ellie inquired, giving her genuine sentiment, “That is really a shame.”

“Poetic, when you think on it. Lad hasn’t left the office in six years for fear of waking up in the bed Frankie Boy made empty for him. Now he and DS Hale can be together wherever cops go when they die.”

“Hmm.”

“So are we done?”

“Not quite. Did you happen to overhear anything about the Arnold case?”

“They are pretty closed lipped, which means they either know nothing or they know everything.”

Ellie Hewlett did not care either way, but she had to keep Genovese on the line whilst simultaneously leading him out of the station to reduce the risk of collateral damage. “I know him, Arnold,” she told. “Knew him anyway. He was the one who gave me my nickname.”
“I thought that was part of the ‘e’-thing your family has had for centuries for reasons of fraud,” he sheepishly remarked.

“No, no. It is a reference to Greek mythology. One of my favourite stories, in fact. Enyo was the goddess of destruction, conquest and bloodshed who was said to so delight in battle that she refused to pick sides when asked to settle a dispute between Zeus and Typhon, using her influence and impartiality to elongate the conflict. That said,” she paused, “did you truly think, dear Paulo, that there would not be repercussions for you as well? I negotiated with every representative member of your committee individually to provide for my brother’s protection as the Crown does not think such is within its interest – tell me, was it truly so hard?” she asked, her practiced composure breaking. “He is a physicist! He spends his nights looking at the stars! Bloody hell, he is the most boring man I have ever in my life known! His only social engagement is playing in a Sunday league side with a few British expats and between you, you could not keep someone like him from trouble?” she spat. “Don’t make deals you can’t deliver on, Paulo.”

“It was an oversight.”

“One that will cost you your head,” Ellie swore.

She heard Paulo Genovese hasten out of the police station, realising that he had been compromised.

“Oh? Leaving so soon?” she smarted.

“Where are you?”

“I’m war,” Ellie smiled. “I think you’ll now find I am everywhere. I promised you blood, and my dear – I always deliver. Arrivederci!” she rolled a code word to a line that went dead. With that, she handed Ferguson back his phone, taunting girlishly before showing him her tongue, “Don’t worry,” she winked, “we only kill each other.”

“It worked then?” the inspector asked.

“Did you honestly doubt that I of all people would be able to start a street war in a country I otherwise have no interest in? Tallmadge – or whomever – will search Genovese’s property and find the rest of the list before it can be of use to anyone else. With the power structure disrupted and alliances squandered, it is the perfect time for the NYPD to strike and bring the mafia down for good,” she explained. “Should they need any additional assistance on the trafficking side, I’ll be happy to provide all that I can in exchange for nolle prosequi – surely to be granted as I have nothing to do with that scene beyond once agreeing not to pursue their boundaries in exchange for their clandestinely providing Edmund with security should he ever need it, which, of course, they failed to do,” she shifted. “At least he still has Simcoe, I suppose.”

“And Tallmadge?” Ferguson asked.

“I don’t kill cops, Fergs,” she assured him again. “It is against my code – beyond which … what reason would I possibly have to do so? We are all ultimately on the same side. I want an end to the widespread use of narcotics more than, perhaps, anyone else on the face of this earth.”

The inspector took a seat beside her, his legs no doubt sore from an afternoon spent pacing the length of his small living room whilst she regaled Elizabeth Gwillim with breaking news of everything set up to transpire on the other end of the world. “What will you do … when all this is over?” he asked almost shyly. Ellie searched his expression hoping to find grounds for this hesitation. It was not as though he had never put this question to her before.
“It will never be over,” she answered as she always did. “I’ll keep celebrating small victories until my hour comes.”

Ferguson looked at his watch, perhaps inadvertently. Ellie laughed all the same. “I’m just wondering if Kolina is going to show up today to bring my mum lunch,” he explained.

They sat in silence for a while, both staring at the time displayed on his wrist. “Tell me, will you laugh or cry at my funeral?” Ellie mused, seeing her minutes tick by.

“Bit of both,” Ferguson admitted. “But I shan’t live to see you buried. Your much younger than I am, Eleanor. Much … heathier.” Ellie snorted. She had long kept her diet limited for fear of being poisoned. No one knew this and no one needed to.

“I’m a member of the aristocracy. I’ll be killed from within as soon as I’ve exhausted my eminence, an heir and a spare as it were,” she assured him. “You declined my invitation to Eugene’s wedding, but surely you’ll be in attendance when I wed Torquhil and ascend to Inveraray, won’t you?” Ellie fought the urge to pout outright, fearing that it was moments like these she would most miss in the impending future.

“I would sooner have you arrested,” Ferguson said sharply.

“I do ever so hope you try.”

“Why don’t you just run away?” he shifted. “Surely you’ve the means to finance it.”

“I’ve considered it many times,” she smiled to herself, “but I love my brothers and sister far too much to … conduct myself like Edmund, shall we say. Not that I don’t admire him for it. Ah! To think of how different my life may have been had I taken the one chance I’ll likely ever be shown … not that I’ve come to regret not …” she trailed off. Some stories were better left unspoken lest fate chance a listen. Even if she could bring herself to say the name of the man who had nearly shown her salvation, it would be unthinkable to do so in present company. Easter, after all, was still two weeks away and she still had no idea how her favourite foe planned to use the opportunity she had handed him.

“What?”

“No. No I’m sorry but I see no point in telling stories in the subjunctive tense. Let’s live in the present and speak not of sad futures or the moments to which our minds are want to return. Do you still have any of the tea and biscuits that I sent? It is high time we put a kettle on and raised a toast to Ben Tallmadge.”

It was odd, the pace of change.

Hours earlier the two had spoken face to face for the first time in years, for the first time as friends.

Arriving back at 1PP two hours behind the rest of his team, Ben Tallmadge spotted Paulo Genovese on the stairs of his station seconds before the famed mafioso blew his own brains out.

The inspector screamed for backup as he quickened to approach, feeling a hand on his shoulder as he bent down, searching for a murder weapon, knowing that he would not find a pulse in the blood
and carnage that had come to replace his Genovese’s heavy features.

“Tallmadge! Tallmadge!”

He turned to see ADIC Hamilton behind him. “Leave this to CSI,” the FBI director instructed. “You need to come inside immediately. The news of Genoese’s death has been on the MailOnline App for three minutes now, the latest in a series of articles surrounding your morning involvement. Lafayette has been with Hewlett all morning which tells me we were wrong, the press leak is coming from within. Muster your team, Inspector. You are all hours late for a briefing. Washington does not like to be kept waiting.”

Chapter End Notes

Let’s just do some notes.

Mafia:
Frank Cali is the current boss of the Gambino crime family. Paulo Genovese exists only for the purposes of this narrative, the largest crime syndicate in New York lacking a current leader. The Commission is the governing body of the American Mafia, formed in 1931 to replace capo dei capi (“boss of all bosses”) with a ruling committee consisting of the bosses of each of the Five Families of New York. Omertà is a code of honour that places importance on silence, non-cooperation with authorities, and non-interference in the illegal actions of others. (Wikipedia)

Football:
I have no reason to believe that Spurs midfielder Dele Alli would be so naïve as to convince himself that he was dating a diva twenty years his senior (and, in reality, 200+ years deceased) but he is adorable and has a very cute ‘dog of Instagram’ that just fit the narrative.
Hugo Lloris is the goalkeeper and captain of Tottenham Hotspur.

Back in 2004 when the world still loved him, football-legend and fragile narcissist José Mourinho bought a terrier in Portugal and punched a policeman when he was told that he could not bring the animal into the UK. The dog then ran away and the public became obsessed with the saga for a full season. I would be surprised if there were not a number of small dogs bought during this period named for The Special One. (If you throw this into google, you can find a number of inspirational posters with Mou’s final assessment of the affair: The dog is in Portugal and the city of London is safe. … I guess it is better than the ‘Just hang in there!’ cat that existed in the same period.)

In case you missed it: Rihanna is a gooner.

To Historical Persons:
Perdita and the English Sappho were both nicknames Mary Robinson wore within her lifetime.

“Very democratic” and “[what] a pack of nonsense” were catch-all insults Elizabeth Gwillim liked to use in her diaries.

Geography:
I may be biased here, but Hamburg is hands down the number one best city in Europe. A story? Okay! This is what happened the last time I visited. I am on the train. As I exit, what is there to greet me but a man in a trench coat and his exposed tra-la-la.

I smile and wish him luck with that. I move 2 metres further. A man on a fish bucket
tells me that I am going to hell for my heels. He is as specific in his fashion critique as he is in his Qur’anic recitation. I tell him I bought them at C+A for half price. He asks if the sale is still going on and tells me a bit about his wife, whom I am sure he made happy when he finished condemning the rest of the morning commuters. Then, I went to Starbucks, still at the Hbh. They spell my name correctly. It is 8 AM and I have one of those foreign names you have to simultaneously choke and swallow whilst speaking. Hamburg is a very educated city with a very polite and world-open population. (Then I went to a ton of meetings where no one wasted time because it is a place of pure magic.)

After the military coup in 1980, many Kurds were forcibly relocated to Diyarbakur (known as Amed in Kurdish). The story Yilmaz tells about her mother’s tongue corresponds to an actual government policy of the era. Much of the dialogue, however, was taken from the second season of TURN and adapted slightly to this narrative.

Misc.:

In European folklore Melusine was the daughter of a fairy princess and the king of what is now Scotland who was either a serpent or a fish from the waist down and left her noble husband when he broke his oath not to look at her while she was in the bath. I don’t recall the specifics, but I distinctly remember something from history about Richard I forming an alliance with one of the many, many Raymonds of the Third Crusade based on the understanding that they both were descendants of this same water-sprite. Wicked, or?

Nolle prosequi is a Latin phrase used in the context of the criminal justice system to describe a prosecutor’s decision to voluntarily discontinue charges.

So! There we have it. And what is to come?

Edit 17.06: I know I am way late with an update, but I am working on it. It is a Ben one.
Chapter Summary

Something is amiss within the Arnold investigation, but it is not, as Ben is told by his superiors, mutiny within his own ranks. Meeting Washington, he considers handing in his resignation.

Meanwhile, Caleb learns the senator’s supposed whereabouts from his Uncle Lewis shortly before the cop in whom he is romantically interested pays him a surprise visit. Wakefield discovers how little he fears his own demise. Abe lets his prisoner escape and experiences a small schizophrenic breakdown whilst in pursuit. Good times.

Chapter Notes

When I hit you guys with the last chapter, I never anticipated leaving this story alone for quite so long. Ramadan came with some of the weirder rules of fasting and by the time I’d finished pretending to be devout for thirty days, the World Cup had begun and I think it is little secret where my fandom loyalties truly lie. If you missed it, you didn’t miss much - nearly every fixture ended in a shootout after extra time. France won, Germany finished last in their group, the only thing noteworthy to come out of South America was the short-lived meme … and ah, don’t get me started on The England Band. It has been a few weeks now and my ears are still ringing.

I think we can all be grateful that club football has breaks during the week, time enough to forget how horribly disappointing the sport can prove.

Speaking of horrible disappointments however, I finally finished this update! I would do my regular run down of potentially upsetting material in my typical tongue-in-cheek fashion, but too many elements of my introductions have been lightly imitated and then apologised as of late and I’m just not feeling my routine anymore as a result. I should really work to keep it fresh up in here anyway. In that spirit, let’s all scream in agony a la Brazil’s best and once you have mastered that skill, do please ‘dive’ right in to this chapter… yeah, that link was just an excuse for a bad pun. Aren’t they all?

Cheers.

DI Benjamin Tallmadge understood procedure and the importance of following it. That, he presumed, was what was being discussed. He could barely hear what was being said. He had sat before Nancy Smith’s predecessor in the same corner office while the former district attorney gave the same off-book recitation of this standard script.

When Sarah Livingston had died in damning circumstance, however, Ben had trusted in the system.

Weeks after his name had been cleared of all wrongdoing, he had been promoted over more senior
and experienced officers to his current post. DS Yilmaz called it politics and met it with protest. Perhaps, Ben considered - not for the first time and certainly not for the last - she had been right to.

It took ten minutes for the inspector to realise his ears were ringing from the explosion. He sat in silence in the office of the district attorney, only vaguely aware of his present company and surroundings. Paulo Genovese - as he understood per the grounds given in The Daily Mail’s questionable online output - had been murdered the self-same moment in which the rival Gambino family named him as a snitch. Although Ben had no great love of the crime lord or the corpse he left on the steps of the central Manhattan station, he felt burdened to the man who had enabled him to make that which would prove the arrest of his career. As an officer, he had a duty to him regardless of which side of the law either of them had found themselves on over the course of their lifetimes, for, whatever else he had been, Genovese had been a citizen of New York City. He had been killed in cold blood on their own base and, as Ben saw it, the NYPD had the same responsibility to the mobster to catch his killer as they would have had it been anyone else’s blood staining the cement outside. Regardless of the words being exchanged around and about him, Ben found that he could not focus on anything else at present.

“We need to search Paulo Genovese’s property. Start with his residence and speak to his wife,” he muttered, meeting his chief’s gaze and transforming it into a hard glare when his assessment met the air.

“This isn’t your case, Tallmadge!” Clinton roared in retort. “It was not this morning and it certainly is not now! George Washington himself is here to inquire into the status of the Arnold case. He did not travel up from Virginia to speak to a mere sergeant. There is a protocol in place for a reason, Inspector, to prevent men like you from following whimsy and flights of fancy-”

“There was not time to follow procedure!” Ben interrupted, “I had a limited window and I took it. Sir,” he readjusted, “with every respect to DI Morgan and his team, no one knows this investigation better than I do, and if I am not permitted to follow up -”

“Arnold is your objective now, Inspector,” a stern, steady voice came from behind him.

Ben rose with everyone else in greeting as the most powerful man he was ever likely to make the professional acquaintance of entered the room, flanked by an entourage of federal agents and servicemen donning full dress uniforms. Before he could stop himself, he challenged the Secretary of Defence, “With respect, your excellency, is he yours?”

His ears were ringing. He barely heard himself speak. The small gasp that escaped him after his unfortunate comment, however, was strikingly audible.

“What do you mean?” Washington asked, his expression and tone betraying no hint of amusement at this act of insubordination. Ben swallowed, but resolved to stand his ground.

“I was called into this meeting on the premise that the FBI believes there is a leak somewhere in my team - that someone is feeding information to a British tabloid about my daily dealings, perhaps in detriment to the investigation. I know my unit, Sir. What I don’t know is why my sergeant, whom I had formally designated to lead the search this morning in my stead, was thrown out of her interrogation of one of our leading suspects or why I am being asked to sign off on an internal inquiry against her. This is not what I anticipated when I was told that the FBI would be lending its support.”

“I agree,” the District Attorney said of her subordinates. She placed her hands on her heavy hips in a psychological show of size. Washington, to whom she spoke, made no move to readjust his posture in response the way most men would. He did not shrink, nor did he adopt a defensive
The room’s air, however, seemed to cool. “Lafayette had no authority to release the suspect without offering a word of explanation to ADA Burr, DI Tallmadge, or – in his absence - DS Yilmaz,” Smith continued.

“I’ll remind you, Madame, proximity forced you to resign from this investigation. You have no jurisdiction here.”

“That well may be, but you are in my office, George, and I’ll not stand by idly whilst you reprimand my inspector for doing an exemplary job despite foreign interference,” she spat. “My office has no interest in pursuing charges against Tallmadge for what anyone can see was an excusable absence given the circumstance, but rest assured that should yours move to hold him to account, you’ll face mine in court – should it get that far – and we take no hostages. If there is a leak, it is not coming from out end.” Her eyes narrowed. Ben wondered if she saw herself in the same scene he did – arguing before a grand jury, effectively ending a long-standing criminal syndicate, sweeping through re-election, or, perhaps, pursuing a post of yet more prestige – a governorship or congressional seat. He knew what was coming, what role he would soon be told to take. The source, however, caused him question and pause.

“Charges …” Washington repeated with a slight shake of his head. “Madame, I have the mind to recommend Inspector Tallmadge for promotion.”

Hearing these words, Ben felt like handing in his resignation. His great victory was being used only to further ego and agenda, another piece of office politics as his every other major appointment had been. He wanted to get back to work, yes, but Washington, Hamilton and the team the latter brought to the NYPD were proving a hindrance in ways that exceeded prior expectation. A man had been murdered before his eyes but Ben was being commanded to look away – to look, specifically, for a missing person when all of the evidence and information he gathered was instantly reburied by external interference the moment it had been exhumed. His unit was blamed for a possible leak whereas he was placated with talk of promotion. It was as though he was being asked to fire on men he had lead into battle time and again by brass who understood very little of the operation they oversaw. Ben stood and met Washington’s direct gaze. “With respect, I have much to occupy me today without entertaining ideas of tomorrow. If you will be so kind as to excuse me.”

Caleb Brewster sat in his living room which was as big as it was small. Two fishing rods were raised high on the stern of his houseboat, their lines now slack. An hour had passed since he had cast them. The grill was hot, but fish, it seemed, would not be on the menu tonight. He cut thick pieces of SPAM from the block he had been using in his unsuccessful attempt to catch and kill something to give his diet a bit of variety, but the marine life out in Oyster Bay seemed uninterested in the canned staple. “Tonight,” he announced to his uncle, pulling out a half loaf of white bread and a can of jalapeno-cheddar-flavoured spray cheese from underneath their small, shared table, “we dine as kings.”

Lewis nodded his consent. Caleb did not much mind, either. He watched the slabs of square meat darken over the charcoal grill he had set up on the back of his houseboat, wondering what he would do to conceal it should the beautiful man whose bed he had shared on Saturday night ever took him up on an offer he had been foolish to make with a high-profile missing person hiding out in his hometown. The charcoal grill was in violation of several local ordinances and Caleb began to guess at the fine, flipping the SPAM to its still-pale side to warm it the whole way though. It
seemed a ridiculous focus for his worries. Ben Tallmadge was unlikely to text him back given the way their date had ended, and even if he should, a ticket for a cooking device the state had named unsafe would be the least of his concerns.

His uncle Lewis was in the process of rolling a blunt, making the thin plastic lawn table shake out of rhythm with the coming tide. As he did this, he continued to relay a story Caleb had reason the believe the man who had yet to return his calls would find most interesting. Senator Benedict Arnold was, according to his uncle, injured and being imprisoned in Robert Rogers’ halfway house where Lewis did a fair amount of business dealing to (and sometimes with) those who had been left with no better options than signing over their welfare cheques to the Scot each month. As Caleb saw it, there was no part of the system that was not broken. If the fates of his neighbours were not problem enough, he could not report what he was being told about an unaccounted-for resident of the same slightly dilapidated property without putting his only relation at risk of facing criminal charges for selling part of his crop. His best friend would likewise be cited in the prosecution. Caleb did not know what had happened, but he knew too well where things might go. He tried to focus his ears on the sizzling sound of fat dripping onto smouldering ash. This, he thought, was the real reason Abe had asked him to play at Ben’s affections. Affair or not, it was now apparent that it was rather his own guilt Abe was hoping to find had gone unnoticed by the authorities.

Caleb glanced back at his uncle.

Lewis shook constantly as a condition of his palsy and as such he always looked nervous. Caleb, however, had never seen him quite like this before. He struggled to make eye contact and, perhaps in an attempt to conceal his fear from his nephew, had focused almost the full of his attention on transforming what remained of his stash into the evening’s entertainment. Uncle Lewis had a licence to grow marijuana for medical purposes but mainly used this as a means of supplementing his retirement pension, selling his surplus to the un- and underemployed residents of Setauket, most of whom he would meet at the pub in the evenings after they had all spent their days trying to ignore the wholly apparent meaningless of life with the aid of one sedative or another. But there was no pub anymore and no Anna to give its patrons the advice she was loathe to implement in her own long-stagnant situation – fight.

Fight, as it happened, was exactly was Caleb felt like doing, more and more with every word his uncle spoke. Abe Woodhull had come by Lewis’ house late the night before in something of a state, asking to purchase weed in copious amounts. Uncle Lewis, who had known Abe since he was a teenager, invited him in out of sheer concern. Though far from the golden boy he had once been, Abe had never expressed any interest in recreational drug use. He had a son, he had a wife, and, upon hearing this much relayed to by an elderly man who himself had never had the chance to know such happiness, Abe had broken down into tears. Thomas and Mary, he said, were themselves the very reason he needed to return to Rogers with the requested substance. Lewis named him a price far higher than any he might have otherwise charged. Abe had forty dollars on him, Lewis offered to go to Rogers himself to collect the remained of the debt.

The elder Brewster did not like the Scotsman to begin with. He liked him all the less when he saw him exploit and abuse the other townsfolk. Lewis had lived in Setauket all of his life, as he told Abe as he struggled to get into Mary’s Jeep, and now repeated to Caleb. “I’ve lived in Setauket all my life and will surely die here as well. If it happened last night as opposed to in five years as the doctors predict it would have made little difference. Robert Rogers will not threaten my friends and neighbours so long as I remained breathing.”

“I believe that,” Caleb smiled weakly. “We will find a solution.”

“Some problems, or so I’ve learned, are beyond the wisdom my years have lent,” Lewis mumbled,
his hands continuing to shake.

He hated when his uncle spoke like this. In truth, Lewis Brewster and Robert Rogers were mere months apart in age, though the former moved as though he were old enough to be the man’s father. Lewis had been a little older than Caleb now was when he had been given the diagnosis. He would never be as old as he now pretended to be.

Neither would Caleb.

Sometimes, when he heard his uncle speak as though his years had given him anything of a life from which to draw relatable experiences, he contemplated ending his own, wondering how long he had left before he would be able to point a gun to his temple without his hands shaking to the point that he could not rely on the shot to take him. Lewis Brewster drank his lager through a straw and after an hour of trying to do little else could not manage to roll a small cigar.

Sometimes, Caleb wondered how long it would be before he met life with the same struggles.

Sometimes, he swore he would end it all long before he lost a convincing amount of control of his movements.

Sometimes, it felt as though he had died with the diagnosis.

He could not shave anymore so he had let his beard grow long, wild and unruly. To his co-workers at the US Post Office, he was a rebel or he had been given a religious exception of some kind. He thought this funny. He did not believe in God. Fate, however, felt very real, and as a piece of cooked SPAM fell from his sandwich as he tried to take a bite, he felt like throwing himself overboard. Caleb did not know if he could still swim. Sometimes, he had his doubts.

He glanced at a phone that neither rang nor buzzed with an instant message. He did not know why he expected it to, he had, after all, told a man he had just fucked in the small bathroom of a filthy flat that he had a degenerative disease. Caleb had had many partners but few relationships, and those he had known had been short lived. He had no idea why he told Ben. Perhaps the man was as good of a detective as they said.

He was better, at least, than Caleb was a spy.

He had believed Abe Woodhull when his friend had given him this narrative about his wife Mary and, - of all unlikely people - Simcoe having an affair. He did not know why he did not think of it at the time, but Abe had wanted information about the Arnold case that went further than his stated interest in his wife’s whereabouts, itself something of a curiosity upon a moment’s reflection. Caleb had given this to him and earned Ben’s scorn and refusal. Had an officer who worked under him not been maimed in an undercover operation Caleb would have gone to jail.

Ben had briefly broken down over the news, something, Caleb supposed, was rare for the man. He had driven him to hospital and after waiting while Ben as Inspector Tallmadge saw to that his constable was in stable condition, they said goodbye with a handshake that felt more like a hug. Ben then thanked him cordially, offered to give him a ride somewhere. Caleb refused out of shame, took the bus to the nearest subway station and rode to the lot where his car was parked from the night before. He texted Abe again while in route. He had yet to receive a response.

It now made as much sense as it didn’t.

Abe, Uncle Lewis continued, was trying to protect his family from threats Rogers had made. Rogers had Arnold decapacitated with extensive wounds to his leg in the cellar, John Robeson who
had heard him cry out moved him to a utility closet whose contents were unceremoniously tossed aside for a cot bed where the American hero laid after being operated on with limited antiseptic by the same man, a man, Caleb remembered who learned how to fix wounds in the field, who had spent most of his life since in federal prison after acquiring something far deadlier than his prior profession had prepared him for.

The weed, Rogers said, was for Robeson. He was a mess. He had just broken up with his boyfriend. They ate the Chinese food Joyce had brought too late in an act of pentane and Lewis tried to determine from three men suddenly unwilling to talk what had really happened. Finally, Robeson said they had to call the cops. Abe did not trust them, relaying something of what Edmund Hewlett had told him about trade negotiations of all ridiculous notions. Hearing this, Caleb was certain his uncle must have misunderstood.

The safest place for Arnold, according to Abe, was hidden away. Arnold at least knew the name Hewlett, which cemented this suspicion. Rogers, meanwhile, was bidding time on who to blackmail. “He meant who else,” Lewis assessed. “Abe Woodhull and John Robeson were absolutely wrecked by the pressure he put them under.”

Lewis had played up his frailty in response to the mayhem he had invited himself into. Rogers only laughed. He was no threat to his grand plans. He was not leaving; where, after all, was he going to go without the physical means of getting there? He would stick him in the cellar now that Arnold was no longer rested there. His boys would not ask questions about the noises they heard. Most of them, he said with a stab at Robeson and Woodhull, knew better.

Later, after trade negotiations had otherwise broken down, Lewis told Abe that he accepted the forty dollars he had originally been offered for his weed. Abe apologised profusely, he never meant to get him involved, he would get him out of here. Lewis told him to instead worry about keeping the senator safe. He returned to Rogers and asked if he would put him up for the night in a bed rather than a basement as he could pay the going rate. Rogers smiled at this new suggestion on how to turn a profit and had excepted all the cash Lewis now had on him for the night’s rent. Lewis made an exaggerated struggle of getting up the stairs and as such was given a small room on the ground floor. Then, he lied awake waiting. Rogers was right, he would not get far on his own. But he too was an entrepreneur of sorts, it was late at night and the Scot had to go to sleep at some point.

Early the next morning, he found John Byrd in the kitchen and asked him if he wanted to smoke a bowl and then, after giving a few grams to the Native whom Rogers called his ‘Indian’, asked if Byrd, who had not overheard any of the evening’s action or was simply school not to speak on such topics, would mind driving him to his nephew’s, which was not far out of his way. Byrd complied. Caleb kept a loaded shot gun on his boat and Lewis had sat outside all day waiting for the inevitable.

Caleb had thus come home to a barrel and an insane story.

He had no reason to question giving the source. He demanded to know why his uncle had not called. Then he remembered the difficulty the old man had with phones and their buttons and they both grew silent. As they were about the light their blunt, a car he did not immediately recognise pulled up. For all he knew, it was an unmarked police vehicle, or worse. He coked his rifle, wondering if he would be able to shoot Rogers should it come to that, wondering what he would do should Abe be in his company.
It seemed, somehow, a fitting end to the day, or, in a broader yet more exacting sense, to his life. Somehow, John Wakefield had never much doubted that an over-priced American mega-retailer would have played a supporting role in his ultimate demise and departure, a logical conclusion giving his wife’s spending habits against to college debt they both still carried decades into their careers.

The Wakefields had met at Harvard. His wife was a legacy, which meant that her parents endowment may have partially paid for the not-insignificant amount of his tuition covered by a crew scholarship, something which she had jokingly informed him of when they had been undergraduates and she most unexpectedly had put him in the unprecedented position of trying to piece together the rough semblance of a breakfast for an American princess who hadn’t the curtesy and consideration to leave his dorm room at first light, perhaps leaving behind a fake number scribbled above a faker name on a post-it stuck to the cover of whichever piece of popular fiction found itself on his nightstand the way many of the girls before her had.

Charlotte Alcott had said she did not like sugary breakfast cereal, but she did like his accent. She laughed in a way that reminded him of coins clinging against the aluminium basin of a slot machine on one of the countless Albanian-owned corner casinos in Merseyside where he had spent his youth, putting five pence pieces into a slot at regular intervals with his head cocked towards one of several televisions showing a football match that other patrons had put money on. Wakefield was a pragmatist rather than a gambler though the setting he most associate with England might suggest otherwise. He spent his weekends in the sort of establishment where no one could be bothered to ask for an ID if it even occurred to them to inquire into his age. The coffee was free and he could watch The Reds play without embarrassing his overworked mother, who, for her three steady jobs couldn’t afford a television for their studio flat with its metal covered windows that invited no light to share in their room. Pubs were too expensive, Anfield itself was out of the question. For less than a pound, however, he could watch the team he supported as well as any other on the island or in Europe. Sometimes, he even won back his coins and others besides, once walking away with a proud twenty quid that he reinvested in the establishment over the course of the rest of the half season.

With Charlotte, he had thought he had hit the jackpot. He laughter sounded like riches and he seemed to her worldly in his retort that Harvard had a questionable scouting process. He rowed for them because Oxford had had no interest. Nor, he later added when dry tones turned jovial, would they have had any reason to.

He had told his wife about his background within the first few weeks of their relationship. His mother had him at seventeen and - having no qualifications or legal status - had spent her life working long hours at various minimum wage jobs, cleaning homes at the weekend and charming her richer clients into letting her use their address when registering her son for school that he might have the benefit of a better primary education than that on offer in the L8. When it came time for him to enter secondary education, the two had moved from their two-room flat to a shared air mattress in a studio where light was afraid to enter that she might afford his public school tuition. Wakefield was enrolled in as many sports as possible to take up his afternoons. Afterward, he would go to his homework in the public library and when he was finished he would amuse himself with fiction until closing time when his mother would arrive to collect him. He did not have a key to the flat. Toxteth, as his mother never tired of telling him, was not a safe place for a boy to be alone. He suspected there to be more dubious reasons than his protection for her forbidding him from home and hearth until such time as there was nowhere outside of the sector left for him to stay, but to this day such was too sorrowful for him to consider.
When he had been small, she had taken him to work with her, giving him colouring books and crayons to amuse him in bar store rooms whilst she had worked double shifts. She had taken him to the nicer parts of the city, too, where he knew not to touch the toys of those children who were only home two weeks out of the year, leaving behind piles of pretty things in their places, seemingly to remind servants of what they could not afford to buy the children which society did not want them to have.

When he was old enough to be bored and had asked his mother if he could help her clean, she began to scream at him in her native Czech that such was simply not and would never be an option, not for him. His innocent inquiry as weighed against the sacrifices his mother then proceeded to speak of likely had to do with her later decision to send him to a public school that he might be around those he should better consider his peers. After that day, young Wakefield did not return to the residential streets of Childwall where his address was listed until he was in sixth form, when after sitting for over an hour in the same car his mother had been driving for twenty years wearing his Sunday best, he had emerged at her anxious bidding to exchange a handshake with one of the then-mayor’s esteemed guests who told him he would look out for him at the weekend crew meet.

Months later as a result, Wakefield found himself at the most prestigious university in the United States, sharing sheets with a bottle blonde who had a Beatles poster hung up over her headboard and likely pictured Penny Lane and its blue suburban skies whenever he told her of his home, regardless of what was said.

He ended up following Charlotte to medical school and then to the alter, where her father (whom she still called “Daddy” in her late forties) had spent well over a million dollars to give her a dream wedding and set a president for Wakefield with regard to his wife’s expectations. Charlotte could not be bothered with household chores and laughed when he cooked, unable to comprehend why anyone would do these things themselves. She had always been privileged enough to be apolitical and did not care much for the events that had come to shape their actual costs, the depreciation of the value of their home, the socialized medicine that meant that insurance payed late when they paid at all, the things that kept Wakefield up at night with worry while his wife dreamed of taking the girls back to Aspin in the winter. They both had their own private practices and shared a building in upper Manhattan – Charlotte was an OB-GYN, John a paediatrician. He suggested that they move their respective clinics to a less expensive street during the recession. When this did not meet her satisfaction, he offered to surrender his own business and go work in another practice where he would not be responsible for rent and payroll, again, to neither her understanding nor agreement.

Wakefield told his wife that every year on his birthday, his father would send him a card with a fiver in it. It had taken him half his adolescence to understand why his mother would cry when he would offer her the money in hopes of making her life a little easier. She could not afford to buy him presents and could not afford to buy herself anything. Most nights they ate cup noodles, and, when she knew he had an important exam of meet, she would go without in order to buy him something a bit better, that, or she would take from whichever kitchen she was working in when circumstance allowed. She felt that she failed him, that he suffered from the cowardice that had caused her to flee from her occupied country, and after saying this she would tell him that she was sorry for crying, that his father loved him, that it was his birthday and he should spend the money on something he might like.

When he was a teenager he realised that his father, should he have any want to find him, would not know his home address for it was listed for the purposes of school zoning in an entirely different district. His mum was not officially listed anywhere. She had not come to England legally and as such was ever in hiding, unable to receive any sort of government assistance, unwilling to return to Czechoslovakia until The Velvet Revolution saw the Soviets out and her visa, as it were, could be validated. Instead, she had hid in the hole she had dug for herself after the failed Prague Uprising
twenty years before when her father had been among the academics to commit suicide as the Russians arrived in their tanks, determined that her son should know the promises of capitalism in ways she never would. She wrote him in the name of a man who had left her when he had learned she was pregnant and stole food to substitute the diet she could afford to provide on a market she had been told was free.

He would explain this time and again to his wife who took an entirely different lesson from the narrative. “You have to spend money to make money,” she told him. He wondered if she knew the names of her nurses.

This was not to say that he faulted her for her lack of empathy, she had no basis for understanding and he was able to accept this. Charlotte, however, was not as equipped to contend with what she saw as a lack of appreciation for the sacrifices she herself had been forced to make, sacrifices such as shopping at Macy’s as opposed to Saks. He told her that spending a few hundred dollars in a lunch hour worked to the same effect no matter which name was on the receipt. She wondered why it mattered when they were a few hundred thousand in debt. She had a point.

It had occurred to her a few years prior that they might find help for the problem that was beginning to define their marriage within the wider medical profession, specifically, she had made an appointment for him to speak with a psychologist whom she took to be a specialist in childhood trauma giving that some of her friends sent their children to the practice that they might be diagnosed with ADHD – something that Wakefield felt was more of a trend than an ailment around the turn of the century. He liked André enough, however, that he kept attending his weekly appointments without feeling that he was getting much from them beyond a sense of familiarity. Like him, Dr John André was from the north west, his parents were immigrants with no understanding of how impossible upward social mobility was in an Anglican country and, as such, was living by his own admission completely outside his personal means without internalizing any pleasure or feeling a great sense of accomplishment from his new postal code. Wakefield was married to a trust-fund-child, André to a Broadway actress who had had her big break. When Wakefield had first heard all of this, he was not lounging on a couch but rather sitting on a barstool, watching Moyes’ Manchester take a beating by Liverpool at Old Trafford to the tune of 0-3. If André was emotionally invested in the fixture, he didn’t much show it. Instead, he mentioned that he was thinking of starting up a Sunday side, asking Wakefield if he was interested. Wakefield, who had never much played, offered the story of how he budgeted to watch matches in corner casinos and how much he missed having afternoons where he could be honest about how poor he was, if only with himself. André mentioned out of hand that Edmund Hewlett, heir presumptive to the largest conglomerate of crownlands in the British Isles had recently signed on to the squad. Wakefield went to a practice more from curiosity than anything else, not thinking much about the famously reclusive prince himself nor wondering what he might be doing in North America, but genuinely interested in seeing someone whose last name littered the town he had grown up in engage in physical activity, possibly to the embarrassment of all there to witness. Hewlett did far better than Wakefield was conditioned to expect by a childhood shame that had since transformed into scorn without his knowing. For reasons he never volunteered, Hewlett had somehow also found himself pursuing a post graduate degree from an elite American university which, in no surprise to Wakefield, seemed to have left him rather poor. Most of the men he played football with shared that background – expats with Ivy League or Oxbridge diplomas whose promise had been butchered by a global economic downturn no one had anticipated. The comradery he formed with these men made his home life easier in that he was better able to ignore his wife’s spending, having found an outlet for his anger and fear – one which, despite André’s better efforts and constant inquiry had nothing to do with anything that had been prescribed on his office couch.
Bye Week was based in a suburb called Setauket. They practiced on an open field at a local middle school and called a dive bar their club house. DeJong’s had once pretended to be Dutch to appeal to an upper middle class cliental obsessed with Heineken and when this demographic moved away from the area they had begun stocking Warsteiner on account of a few Turks who showed up on Saturdays to watch the Bundesliga for reasons that failed Wakefield’s personal grasp on globalization. Pretzels remained on the menu when the pub transitioned to an ‘Irish’ theme in the advent of Bye Week’s near-constant presence, Guinness becoming the over-priced house beer to everyone’s chagrin. What seemed the entirety of a weekend yard sale was suddenly hammered to the establishment’s walls. However, it was the local charm that made the alehouse feel like home, the bathroom sinks that never worked, the terrible house band, the un- and underemployed population who sat in the darkened room day in and day out, among whom was Lewis Brewster who happened to sell weed.

Anna Strong, the head bartender, turned a blind eye when the pair snuck into a backroom stall to light up. Sometimes, when business was slow, she would bring them salted pretzels and beer nuts in exchange for a hit or two. Sometimes she would put a six pack of a proper Pilsen into her weekly beer order and charge Wakefield house price for a product she said she struggled to move. ‘They like Bud Light,’ she said of the other Englishmen. ‘That is because the only other beer you have on tap is Guinness,’ Wakefield told her dryly before passing the joint he had rolled. Lewis drank the overrated stout gladly, albeit from a glass straw Anna had ordered when his palsy had reached the point the more beer found itself on his clothing than in his mouth when he tried to lift a pint glass. She was rather sweet to the clientele. It didn’t surprise him when Edmund Hewlett announced his intentions towards her earlier that year, he was surprised, however, when the slightly pudgy, big-eyed beer maiden had joined their Sunday side, that was, at least, until he learned that she had gone to Columbia Law and was presumably in as much inescapable debt as everyone else André had scouted. It still seemed strange criteria.

He had overheard in passing that Anna had played a few matches for the under-twenty woman’s national team and, decent of a wing as she had more recently proven, he had not thought much more of it until that morning when his wife showed him an article in the online edition of The Daily Mail picturing her embracing another Charlotte, the both of them stripped out of their colours, presumably to exchange jerseys. His wife wanted to know if this was the same suddenly famous bartender whose place of business he and his mates so often frequented in a tone that implied judgement on Anna’s moral character. Wakefield responded affirmatively, matching her mood. She took her own car to work that morning. At lunch, she had gone to Macy’s for what she had put to her administrative assistant as ‘retail therapy.’

Wakefield had his own head nurse distribute the three appointments to the other doctors who shared his practice and took off for Setauket before his wife returned with whatever dress made her feel better about her ridiculous notion that he was having an affair. It was not the first time she had hinted at the idea, but it was easier to let her think that Anna (whom he did not find attractive in the least or on any level) had stolen his heart than it would be to admit that he spent a fair amount of his time rolling grass with a palsy patient a few years his senior just to disengage from a life he imagined many would envy. His wife would put a stop to it if he afforded her any semblance of a construct that allowed her to think that she was not part of the problem. Anna was younger and had bigger breasts, and these things she seemed to blame on herself. That he drank and did drugs recreationally would excuse her from accepting any actual guilt. She would forbid him his small escape and he imagined that he would eventually come to seek it in the form he unexpectedly found himself faced with now.

In private phantasies which he doubted that he had even voiced to his psychologist, he had been the one holding the rifle to his head.
Wakefield took a deep breath held it to three and exhaled slowly the way André had once told him to, the way, he said, the did in the armed forces. It worked. He met the gun unafraid, smiling even as he thought of his life insurance policy and how the pay-out would solve all of his wife and daughters’ problems. His partners would offer to buy the third of the practice that still remained in his hands and Charlotte would hire an account – or Captain Simcoe would offer to intervene at the funeral. Yes, certainly. They would be safe, secure. The world would be better off without him. It was so simple.

He began to laugh, remembering how he considered it had been a mistake to come to Setauket when he saw DeJong’s Tavern still sectored off by police tape, when he wondered if the coppers would find any evidence of his more illicit activities within its walls, when he was all but certain that they had in finding that Lewis Brewster was not at home when he had then tried to call on him there. His collar had stuck to the back of his neck with nervous sweat for the entire duration of the drive that followed. He wondered now what it was he though he had to fear. He was going to die and the thought was so joyous that he had all but forgotten the pain of life as he prepared his last words.

“Tell my wife -”

“Jesus Cristfuck, Buddy,” Caleb Brewster, Lewis’ nephew and one of the three members of DeJong Tavern’s house band that was named after some local roadway or another, jeered as he lowered a weapon that looked as old as the nation itself.

“You are not going to shoot me?” Wakefield wondered.

“Thought you might be Rogers behind dem tinted windows,” Lewis shouted, gesturing for Wakefield to him over to what looked to be the patio of a houseboat that had seen better days.

“I thought you had been arrested or worse,” Wakefield said, forgetting his disappointment that he was not going to die when he saw his friend alive and well.

“What for?” Caleb seemed to demand. His uncle whistled and lifted a joint, beckoning again for them both to join him. “I don’t know if that is such a good idea, tonight, what with the heightened police presence,” Caleb said with a shaky voice.

“I have some rum,” Wakefield offered.

“Well that changes things slightly,” the lad gave his consent, clapping him on the back and leading the way.

Caleb chattered nervously for quite some time, until half the bottle had been shared and a new joint had been rolled. It was all over topics of little consequence, but the bearded boy spoke so quickly Wakefield questioned his ability to concentrate.

“Why were you going to shoot Robert Rogers?” he asked, interrupting. Caleb’s expression turned deadpan. “Yea … I get that,” Wakefield confessed after a moment’s consideration.

“Last night -” Lewis started.

“Did you hear that Joyce and Robeson broke up?” Caleb put forward before his uncle could voice any thing more than a temporal adverb for context.

“Oh, shit,” Wakefield squinted in disbelief, glancing at Lewis, wondering if this were true. “No. No I hadn’t heard. I remember on Sunday the two were in a spat – Robeson couldn’t make it to the match on account of some problem with a cement mixer – but then after Mrs Woodhull’s ankle
was broken by some undercover cop and we all had to go down to the station to give a statement in Simcoe’s defence, I’d all but forgotten – I should probably make a few calls,” he prattled, embarrassed that in his darkness and delight he had all but forgotten that his friends had problems more immediate than bills that would never be paid. He had to ring them both.

“Can you repeat that?” Caleb asked, moving the table as he stood bracing himself on two of its corners and he began to roar. “Mary’s ankle – aw, for fuck’s sake!”

His new prison provided nothing of comfort. In Setauket’s darkened cellars with nothing but the lingering scents of cabbage, hardboiled eggs and unfinished construction to keep the company of his absent mind, Benedict Arnold had understood his predicament. He struggled with and against his setting on a couch in what he had overheard was Brooklyn, in a room that bare if not clean. The floors had recently been finished – a dark wood that he knew from his own recent home improvement project was out of his price range. But then, he considered in an effort to make himself feel less at fault, his living room was considerably larger, meant for hosting balls and grand galas in hopes of convincing potential donors to open their chequebooks, for serving fancy finger-foods that failed to fill to the brothers Koch, selling his vote to their vision for fear that without the televised advertisements their money could buy his seat might go to a democrat.

He had heard himself on the radio during his transport and suspected that his commercials were now playing in a loop on the twenty-four-hour news stations who had very little to report or otherwise screen. If he survived this ordeal he was reasonably certain his seat would be secure. Arnold snorted back a laugh that followed his dark though that perhaps this was preferable to an actual re-election campaign. He shifted slightly on the bed Private Woodhull had made for him from the contents of a few of the scattered boxes and felt the sentiment self-retract.

“This sofa is less comfortable than the cold concrete floor of your basement,” he announced. Abe nearly jumped.

“I … can look for another pillow,” the boy offered.

“Nonsense. Sit,” Arnold commanded. Abe removed himself from the position he had taken at the front door, staring out of the small glass panel that lined it, shaking every time a car drove by, be it a marked police vehicle or not. The front of the brownstone faced a quiet and well-kept residential street a few blocks from a police station. The District Attorney apparently lived a few houses away as well. As a stronghold, the house was particularly ill-fortified. Arnold understood that his private had selected it for precisely that reason but it seemed he was losing his nerve. He had seen this before in the field.

Benedict Arnold had always had a talent for inspiring his men, but when it came to comforting them words tended to fail him. He did not lose often enough to allow for any such practice in these arts. “Sit,” he commanded again. “See for yourself.”

Private Woodhull looked lost. Arnold studied him, wondering how to make a solider out of this man. He was shorter and had a smaller build than the senator had originally anticipated, the shadows that whispered lies having made the man seem massive in the darkness Arnold had known for days. He had worn sunglasses for a few hours at the insistence of a man named John, or Rob, or something else so common it was quickly forgotten – the man who had treated the wounds
on his leg, whose existence had proved a fairly convincing argument for The Affordable Care Act. Arnold shook himself free of the nightmare that threatened to overtake him of some warm hearted liberal learning this stranger’s story with the police focusing their efforts in Setauket, affording him a podium from which his narrative could be relayed to middle class news watchers who were far too ‘worldly’ to understand the inherent detriment in having the government tell one how to spend their money. He forced his torso as far forward as he comfortably could, again glimpsing a small backyard with its unfinished landscaping that caused him to feel a little ill. Woodhull took the cue and sat where Arnold’s head had rested, letting out a small gasp of surprise when the senator again laid himself down, resting his head on his private’s lap. How, he wondered, was he so reliant on such a weakling?

“If you were under my command I’d force you to do push-ups until your knuckles bleed,” he commented.

“Sir?” Woodhull questioned.

“Don’t worry. I have something else in mind. Something more civilian. You see that mess outside? It is a disgrace.”

“Jordan hasn’t finished with it yet. He is um … he will be in Albany, arguing before my father and his colleagues for a few weeks.”

“Appeals?”

“Yeah. We have uh, in New York City this catch twenty-two with food trucks, they have to purchase a permit to operate, but having this permit forbids them from parking anywhere, so they are in essence being taxed twice which contradicts both state and federal law. It is a class action.”

“You think your friend will win?”

“I don’t know. I haven’t been paying much attention to opening arguments. Adams, that is – Abigail Adams is arguing on behalf of The City of New York, so it won’t be easy.”

“Best of luck then,” Arnold scoffed. “It is a man’s profession, law.”

“I heard on NPR recently that more women are going to law school now than men,” Abe said.

“If we are thinking of the same report, they credit ‘Legally Blonde’ with owing to some of the change in that statistic. Women don’t understand such things, not really. They only want to do what they are told is trendy.”

“Didn’t enlistment rise in the US Armed Forces after the premiere of ‘Top Gun’?”

“The military set up recruitment tables outside of movie theatres,” Arnold informed him. “It was by design.”

“Still it is … sort of the same, isn’t it?”

“Showing the public noble values and anticipating them wanting to embody them themselves is entirely different than shooting a film about lipstick and high-heels and thereby changing the admissions pool to America’s most esteemed universities.”

“Isn’t Peggy Shippen -” Private Woodhull started.

“An example that proves the argument? I am tempted to think.”
“I’m sorry your date turned out as it did,” Abe said almost mutely.

“I’m not. I heard her on the radio this morning. The girl was ignorant and insufferable in a forty-second sound clip. Regardless of everything that has happened since, I don’t imagine I would know what to do if forced to entertain her for two hours.”

“Fair,” Abe swallowed. “We live together now, well ... I haven’t seen or spoken to her. My father rents out rooms to boarders -students mostly - and she needed a place to stay. My au pair texted me to tell me something about Roe v. Wade and my wife mentioned that the debate between the two girls has been non-stop since Sunday night.”

“And you really think women should be encouraged to study law?” Arnold challenged.

“You make a fine point, Sir.”

“There is something I want you to do for me should time allow,” he said after a moment.

“Anything,” the lad offered.

“If I don’t recover soon, I want you to finish building the steps to the back porch out there, and, as further thanks to your friend for letting you crash at his place while he is not himself using it, I want you to stain the wood – but not with what I can see from the window he has purchased for the project. No. That would clash with what I can see of the interior scheme in an ugly way.”

“That is really … not what I expected,” Abe admitted.

“Physical labour would do you a world of good. We could go back to my original idea of turning this into boot camp.”

“I just meant, it is a bit surprising that you … care so much for aesthetics.”

“In what way?”

Woodhull did not answer.

“Son, I spent some twenty-odd years fighting for the ideal of the American Dream. It wounds me to come home to half-finished projects. I spent my every leave making my home look less like a warzone,” he laughed bitterly, “only to have my wife take the house and hounds in the divorce. Two Margarets! What luck!”

“What changed? Between you and Miss Shippen, I mean.”

“I would rather not get into it” Arnold replied blandly.

“You have given up,” Abe Woodhull observed. “Prior to hearing her press conference, whenever you were awake, you worried for her safety, and now that you know her to be safe it is as though you don’t care about your own well-being. If that isn’t love -”

“It isn’t,” Arnold interrupted. “I realised that the person I’ve been texting for months was not Miss Shippen at all. It was someone … someone who borrowed her likeness to play into an idea I wish I still had of myself. I don’t care to expand.”

Dr John André was in all likelihood the architect of all of this. Arnold imagined him laughing as he pretended to be the lovely Miss Shippen, teasing him with the promises of challenge and fulfilment both physical and intellectual as he charmed him into disclosing in some text over an unrelated
subject exactly what he wished to see from the research in which the senate advisory committee he chaired was invested. Arnold had spent months imagining that he had finally found his match. The worst of it was, he still believed he had. He closed his eyes and imagined André’s fingers — rather than Abe’s — absentmindedly brushing strands of hair from his forehead as he spoke to him in a beautiful, deep baritone that reached for riches he did not realise himself to already possess as they argued about the very nature of enlightenment.

Suddenly, he found that he was not in the unfinished, mostly empty house of an attorney who for him did not have a face, but rather in André’s thoroughly modern apartment with it’s almost extravagant push towards the exquisite, naked and entangled in his would-be lover’s arms as their tongues, tired of feigning interest in high-minded ideals at this late hour took solace in the other’s embrace, fighting for dominance and teasing one another with attempts to retreat. Staring at John with his always bright and inquisitive eyes, light smirk and hair made of gold, he wondered, if he were to be fully honest with himself, how long it had been since he had subconsciously stopped picturing Peggy in his place, wondering if he ever truly had been quite so blind. He hated André and he had to have him, imagining a lifetime unfold in the folds of this man’s sheets with sex he knew to be sinful working to further their debate: intellectual, domestic and otherwise. If that wasn’t love –

Arnold opened his eyes and found the room had grown dark. Private Woodhull was no longer providing himself as a pillow, but rather, was using an unemptied box as a stool. He wore an expression of extreme discomfort and Arnold forced himself up into a seated position – his injured leg still extended, the other half bent as he squinted to see if Woodhull had, in fact, made the improvement to the backyard as he had recommended. The boy looked to be sweating. He would make a soldier of him yet.

“We’re not safe here,” Abe said. Arnold, drowsy, nodded for him to expand. Abe bowed over his knees, his forehead buried in his palms. “I haven’t slept in days,” he confessed. “I had a conversation with a man named Edmund Hewlett, another of my father’s tenants, a couple of days ago. He is one of the main suspects in your disappearance and for a time I considered him to be responsible, which sounds ridiculous given, well … but he is Scottish, you see, like Rogers.”

“Racial profiling is expedient and usually yields the results we are looking for. You mustn’t blame yourself on the basis of liberal arguments.”

“Some animals are more equal than others?” Private Woodhull seemed to mock.

“Giving that in this analogy some animals strap bombs to themselves or fly planes into buildings, I daresay,” Senator Arnold glared.

“No … no I, I just made a mistake on this one. Or I didn’t. I don’t know anymore. Hewlett, that is, he is friends with … a few other people around whom the investigation is focusing its efforts, my wife among them. In an effort to clear his name and theirs, he and his fiancée Anna, who, consequently I used to date — uh, small town, came up with this plan to go door to door in Setauket, using volunteers and the sort of social advocacy that campaign seasons tend to make into a plague of biblical proportions as it is in a means to collect data from recorded responses to determine where you are, in essence, espionage. Hewlett is a mathematician, at least, he taught maths to undergrads at Columbia while pursuing a post graduate degree himself. His best friend or worst enemy or, well it has always been sort of hard to tell, he works on Wall Street and helped formulate the equations they are going on, I guess, which is why I suggested we move you here. You see, my friend Jordan is in Albany, as I’ve explained, and he offered to let me and my band crash here Saturday night, so I told Rogers all of this, thinking of your safety - mostly, worried that you would develop a lung infection in a cold basement – but the text, or so I’ve since realised,” he mumbled,
“it was sent not only to me, but to my bandmates as well, Caleb, whom … I’ve already involved far more than I admit I am comfortable with, and Rob, whom I discovered over the course of this past week is an undercover federal agent.”

“You haven’t slept -” Arnold began.

“It is not a case of paranoia,” Abe defended against an unvoiced accusation, thus in Arnold’s eyes invalidating his own argument. “My au pair somehow convinced this Hewlett, the maths guy, to part with his prissy European sportscar for an evening which she then drove to the restaurant when Rob worked, or rather, pretended to. She had a crush on him, you see. She wanted to impress him and it … well, Peggy Shippen, that is, your Peggy, was in a corner booth with a man named John André whom the cops had wanted to talk to. She mentioned this or something of the nature to Rob, who told her he would handle it. Uh – Peggy and Aberdeen, my au pair, they are both close friends of a woman named Abigail Ingram, who until last week was Jordan Akinbode’s girlfriend, she also used to work for John André. She still does work there, only he – André - was let go from the practice and had told everyone who knew him that he was voluntarily checking himself into rehab for alcohol abuse a few days prior to Aberdeen seeing him. That is why she spoke up. Anyway, she then offered to teach Rob to drive a stick, and after the restaurant closed, the two went to an empty parking lot of a community college, where, by her account, he immediately destroyed the transmission. Rob -if that is even his name - offered to order them an Uber, but instead called in two fellow agents who took Aberdeen to the FBI’s Manhattan field office. Thinking she was about to be martyred in the Black Lives Matter movement, she ended up recording the whole interview on her phone – they were going after my father and – needless to say, I haven’t spoken to Rob since. I meant to confront him but even during the sound check I couldn’t I … I don’t know.”

Benedict Arnold tried to piece together this constellation in his mind, but his focus kept forcing itself back to André and Peggy. Together. “I know what it is like to be deceived,” he offered. Abe nodded.

“I’m worried he is going to find you here. Rob, who is part of the system, who might be a far greater threat to you than Hewlett and Simcoe who just want to clear their names. There is something else, may I?” Abe asked, indicating that he wanted to sit beside him. Arnold consented gladly, telling his private to push the box closer to the couch to serve as a support for his leg. It felt good to sit up. He commented on this and Abe offered him a weak smile and showed him his phone. “The police were calling everyone a few days ago, directly following your disappearance, as one would suspect them to, I suppose. Caleb had mentioned to me his takeaway from the conversation and I made an assumption that panned out, somewhat to my regret. He is a bit of a flirt, Caleb and … it turns out the inspector was every bit as interested as I had hoped. They spent the night together at Tallmadge’s flat and,” he sighed.

“To back up a bit, in the hours after your disappearance, the police had DeJong’s Tavern, where you had gone to meet Peggy the night before, quartered off as a crime scene. Anna is the manager of the bar, or was, prior to it being effectively shut down. She went with the cops to unlock the door and to answer a few general questions. Hewlett took a picture of the outside of the property and sent it to the press, which is complicated in its own way – the owner and editor of The Daily Mail owns the majority shares in the publicly traded stock in a company owned by his father, and she used to be engaged to John Graves Simcoe – but I believe him when he says he was not thinking of any of this at the time, instead trying to use an appeal to her investigative reporting connections and general business savvy to see if she find out about another potential buyer for the property, perhaps convince them to pull the offer so that he and Anna might make one of their own.

“Within seconds of sending the photo he was arrested and brought to the station, which … makes
sense. Then Simcoe entered this narrative by coming to offer a character statement. As a matter of routine, they did a background check on the guy and discovered a possible history of violence –
possible, being that he was cited in a what looked to be an attempted murder investigation, details of which were restricted by Interpol. That having raised alarms, the police asked into his whereabouts for the night in question – that is, as it applies to you, Sir.”

“Um hm,” Arnold nodded.

“My wife is his alibi. The two were in a hotel in Connecticut together and the story seems to check out. I told Caleb that I wanted to know if the two were having an affair … my, my marriage is far from perfect but I never expected Mary to be the one to stray, you see. Which isn’t to say that I’ve ever had designs on cheating myself, only … how can I put this? I always assumed she loved me more than I love her,” he shook his head. “It isn’t important. What is is that under this premise I got Caleb into the chief inspector’s flat and he sent me these pictures from Tallmadge’s wall – one of those evidence boards, like you see on scripted TV shows. Only here is the thing: Rob, who was at DeJong’s the night of your disappearance, isn’t present here on Tallmadge’s wall. What if he is in on it? What if he is among the internal elements that are causing the investigation to faulter? I don’t think it an accident that this morning Tallmadge was finally able to arrest Frank Cali and Thomas Jefferson, or that Paulo Genovese was murdered on the steps of 1PP,” he began to speak quickly. “Rogers … Rogers thinks. Fuck.”

“What does he think?” Arnold pressed.

“You know how I mentioned that Hewlett is also Scottish? It turns out he, or at least his family is, very important to and on their native island.”

Arnold nodded. “The Hewletts are nobility who behave as royals and with good reason; they own or hold more landed titles than any other family, and, from a certain perspective, have a better claim to the English Crown than their southern cousins.”

“From what I’ve heard they built the majority of their wealth during the first Afghan war through the opium trade.”

“That I can vouch for. I knew one of them, once.”

“What?!” Abe exploded before falling into a string of expletives.

“The family has controlled the cartel for generations. As they happen to operate in areas now occupied by NATO forces, the younger of the two princesses helped to coordinate on intel and risk assessment during my time in Iraq. I have no reason to assume she would … unless, no,” Arnold stopped himself. The past half hour of conversation had already made enough enemies out of former allies.

“What?” Abe pressed. “Rogers has this idea of blackmailing the Hewletts into essentially paying for his retirement in exchange for your release. He was hurt in the housing bubble, you see, and has this stupid dream of moving to Alaska because of the reality shows that get played on the History Channel these days. Anyway, with Edmund an innocent suspect, Rogers thinks - let me start over. I brought up that it was strange that someone as presumably important as the heir presumptive to a collective of duchies and earldoms would not have his own security detail – but Edmund doesn’t. I’ve known him for years, that is simply – absent of what this investigation has revealed about his past, I would have no reason to imagine that he was anything but another pompous British asshole whose sense of self-satisfaction was born from extending his small finger while he delicately sips his tea, as opposed to, you know, dumping that shit in the harbour where history instructs us it belongs.”
Arnold nodded his agreeance with this assessment.

“Rogers said that he agreed, that someone must have been tasked with providing security and that they had done a rather shit job of it, that within a few days we would discover who dropped the ball … and then this thing happened with Cali and Genovese, and Jefferson, to a lesser extent, I guess. He thinks that the Hewletts had contracted with the Five Families to keep Edmund safe and now he wants to make contact, to threaten people who pose a sizeable threat to the mafia – the fucking mafia! Sir, I’m a college drop out. Rogers is an aging construction worker, we don’t have a chance. The only reason I did not go to the police immediately is that he threatened my family if I refused to help or if I got in the way of his grand plans, only now … well, it is a waste. Mary works for UNICEF, you see. He told me that I need to have her call Lady Eleanor, who does some public charity work around drug prevention and intervention and that Mary has to start making demands, threats -”

“Do that,” Arnold said.

“No!”

“See where she stands,” he again suggested lightly. Abe began to panic.

“And tell my wife, who already has a foot out the door, that I have been helping to hide you for a week? That the man I work for has made threats against her and Thomas and that I’ve done such a shit job of protecting them while trying to save you that I may have accidently helped to start a street war here in New York that as such she needs to call a cartel boss and - by way of making threats against her brother - demand whatever figure Rogers is after? When Mary has already become a casualty of this investigation? When you yourself think that the Hewletts may be involved after all and -”

Arnold raised his hand, bidding the boy’s silence. “On my last tour of Iraq,” he told him, “I lead a successful charge with what I had been told were too few men. I let a British colonel lead the vanguard and he later died from injuries sustained in battle. He and Eleanor Hewlett were either friends or lovers or somewhere in that strange stretch that exists between the two distinctions that ultimately amounts to being neither to the satisfaction of no one - suffice to say, she sobbed the way women do when he was returned to base heavily wounded. I saw her a few times since and offered my condolences, she offered me in return a statement absent of sentiment that such happened in war, which I appreciate. It isn’t often that civilians possess a critical distance the way soldiers should. I would have forgotten the affair in its entirety had the lad who looked too young for the rank he wore but certainly seemed worthy of it in the end not offered me the ‘American Ares’ epithet and had I not begun to identify myself as such.

“Of course, it is possible that Enyo, or, Lady Eleanor as you name her, discovered years after the fact that I ignore part of her recommendation, with my thinking, - correctly I might add - that I could take the stronghold with the men I had rather than waiting for others to be reassigned when enlistment was at a low, but it seems highly unlikely that she would seek vengance in a way that would lead to whispers that evoked her family name. I doubt she bares a grudge against me. When you’ve seen as much death as the lot of us have, it is harder to wish for it even in jest, the way people in New York threaten each other in traffic.”

Abe shook his head. “It could be that the Hewletts hold less sway in British politics and policy than they once did. Edmund tried to get his medical records released to Tallmadge’s team but his embassy refused. Here,” he said, zooming in on an image of John André taped to Tallmadge’s wall. “This guy, the elusive Dr André – according to Edmund Hewlett anyway,” he began to ramble again, almost incoherently, “this all comes from files he lifted from the DA on with regard to your
disappearance that can’t be used in any court, even from the NYPD’s side, because they were not obtained legally – basically, they were not given a search warrant for André’s office at Columbia and these are from the desk of Dr Martha Dandridge, who worked with André and has worked in the past with the Department of Defence -”

“I know who she is.”

“Yeah well, according to Hewlett, it seems as if, and I haven’t seen the evidence myself and would not know what I was looking at even if I had -”

“Get on with it, man!” Arnold shouted. Abe straightened.

“It seems like André tried to kill him, Hewlett, in order to record Simcoe’s reaction. It looks like they – André and Dandridge – have been using the soccer team Hewlett and Simcoe play on to run an experiment of some kind or another, maybe one with a possible military application. I’m not sure. I do know that Dandridge has infiltrated the investigation, that my friend Rob might be involved in some similar way, that he knows where you are or at least where this place is -”

“That would not explain why Tallmadge has focused his attention on André,” Arnold said to himself, staring at a face too beautiful to hang on a stranger’s wall against a backdrop of lies and secrets.

“It would if -”

“If what?”

“You said you were attacked by a Pakistani? Well I found out recently Simcoe was born in Pakistan. What if he was driven to attack you by whatever André did to him in the lab? What if that is the reason why they are trying to cover this up and why the British Embassy is refusing to help one of its foremost citizens? And everything else is just … a distraction, a campaign to get your defence bill passed? Sir, I don’t know any more how I am meant to differentiate between enemies and friends.”

That much was clear. “I have to get out of here,” Arnold told him.

“I know, I know and I am working on it, but without knowing what angle the police are working, with Rogers -”

“I’m not going to the police. Not yet. I have to find John André.”

“If anyone would know where he is, it is Robert Rogers,” Abe said. “They are best friends, believe it or not. They may be one another’s only real friend at that.”

“Rogers … and André,” Arnold repeated. “Then presumably we are all pawns in this plan. I think I know what happened and what we need to do.”

“What then?”

Arnold elected not to answer directly. “You can either be a solider or a spy,” he told Private Woodhull. “Which are you?” Before the boy could answer, he continued. “That box is marked kitchen. Open it, find a knife. We are getting out of here.”

“We can’t.”

“We will make it look as though there has been a struggle.”
“I was ordered to keep you drugged.”

“Do you trust me? I’ll come back for you. We have a saying in the army – leave no man behind,” he assured him. But Woodhull was a spy rather than a soldier, and talented though he may have proven himself in that expense, he was expandable.

André’s research had not proven as effective as its initial promise, that, or it had generated unforeseen side effects that could hinder its military potential. In order to save the project, before it came up for review the Defence Secretary who held close personal and professional ties to its other chief researcher must have arranged for his disappearance, ensuring that in the state of national confusion the bill Arnold himself had written would pass without open debate. This told him that there were parts of André’s project that were worth preserving and being that it had a greater value to the British than the lives of a few of the prominent test subjects, Arnold had made a good investment, one, however, that did not do much to serve him at present. The powers that be likely knew exactly where he was as Abe suggested. They had likely orchestrated the whole affair without his or André’s knowing, content to dispose of them both once the objective had been achieved. Rogers, Arnold doubted, knew much of their connection or the work they two had been involved in or he would be demanding more. But if Dandridge and her allies in Washington (which, was to say, the ‘honourable’ George Washington himself) knew of Rogers’ personal connection to André and subsequently were already keen to exploit it, Arnold knew could not remain in the Scotsman’s custody a moment longer.

Abe Woodhull found a knife in the box and pressed it to his forehead. “Good,” the senator told him. “You would have made a fine Private, indeed. Sit,” he instructed him again.

When he had, the two shared a few more thoughts on the nature of the Republic, on Ayn Rand and what it truly meant to be objective. Feeling confident in his ability to console in defeat, Arnold placed his heavy hand on Woodhull’s shoulder, squeezing as the boy began to ask where he planned to go. Within a few seconds, he was out cold. Unceremoniously, Arnold tossed the limp body that slouched upon his to the floor, kicking him a few times with his unbandaged leg for good measure. “Suffer bravely,” he bid him as he had his erstwhile Scævola years before while watching on as that boy succumb to his service injuries in the back of a Humvee. Rogers, he reasoned, would not be as cruel as fate. He had seen humanity at its worst and as such determined that no man could match the Lord God in his absence of mercy.

Their expressions destroyed whatever fantasy he had found for himself in the absence between his office and the docks. He could and perhaps should have stayed at the station and restricted his sense of disillusionment to where it normally resided. He could have returned to his flat after taking Heidi for a walk, returned to staring at the case as outlined on his living room wall which served to distract him from the chaos his home had become in the past few years.

Ben Tallmadge glanced at his phone and debated texting his sergeant to inquire as to her mother’s cleaning rates as a twinge of embarrassment ran through him, considering the state of disarray of his own quarters as compared to those of Caleb Brewster. No, he decided, worried that such an inquiry could be perceived as a microaggression in light of the last conversation he had before leaving the office, worried that Yilmaz had made some headway with the British Embassy – unlikely though it was given their average hold time and the general reception his department received when it came to external authorities – that she would thus have something to say to draw him away from the docks.
Nearly every suspect in the Arnold investigation seemed more willing to cooperate with his team than their self-supposing allies. Accusations had been hurled at every member of his unit without caution or consideration. No one had been talking or texting while exchanging fire. It would have been impossible even if they had wanted to. The only member of his squad who had stayed behind at the station whilst Ben organised his raid was Yilmaz, and the only reason she would have been in a position to inform the press of the raid in real time owed itself to the reality that she had been thrown out of her own interrogation by a Frenchman who turned around and let the suspect go without informing the NYPD who had been readying to make an arrest. Still, she would have had no way of knowing where the rest of the team was, much less motive to endanger them as well in the endgame of an operation she too had been working on for years.

When fingers were pointed, Ben became indignant, rather he saw no further reason to suppress this emotion which defined his duties more and more each day. For his efforts or perhaps in spite of them, he had been offered a promotion. He considered handing in his resignation on the spot.

Upon slamming his office door after the conference had concluded and he was no longer being asked to be a politician, he got to be a detective again and found the task considerably more rewarding. Elizabeth Gwillim, the editor of The Daily Mail, had been surprisingly easy to both get on the phone and coax into cooperation.

'It was no one on your payroll, and no one who wishes you any harm,’ she assured him of the tip-off. ‘That said, the incident was by and large an inside job as I’m certain you have read by now – oh don’t pout, Darling’ she guessed, ‘it just works out that audiences only have the vaguest of interest in palace intrigue as it involves … Italian-American businessmen, shall we say, and only at 10:30 on a Thursday night, and then only when the largest story in the news deals with domestic politics and there has been no major sporting event in the past four days. Your name just sells better.’

‘You know this?’

‘Definitely. My publication tracks hits and length of time one invests in every article on our site as every major media outlet does. I can send you the data if you are interested.’

‘I’m interested in the name of your source,’ Ben told her. ‘There is an internal investigation I want to put to rest.’

‘There is an external investigation as well and that I might be better able to assist with,’ Gwillim chirped.

‘In what way?’

‘John André’s research.’

‘How?’

‘Does it surprise you that I am better at my job than you are at yours?’ she laughed.

‘How did you even know that I was after -‘

‘I didn’t but now that you’ve told me why don’t we make a deal? I’ll send you everything I have and you’ll catch this bastard and subject him to the might of American sentencing,’ Ben guessed by the sudden shift in tone that Gwillim was alluding to the death penalty, which he did not have the heart to tell her the State of New York disallowed.

‘That’s it?’ he squinted, disbelieving.
‘Isn’t that enough?’ Gwillim asked with a resumed air of innocence.

‘Why?’

‘Oh, I think you know – here is something I will give you the source on as it is now of little consequence – I have a quote from Paulo Genovese saying in essence that you haven’t left the office since your partner died some years back due to this whole messy pharma business. As it happens there are people I once loved who have fallen victim to André’s project, and much like yourself I would be horrified to think of anyone else suffering the same when I so easily could have worked to ensure another outcome. Do you follow the news, Inspector Tallmadge?’ she prattled.

‘That is, when you are not in it? Arnold’s defence bill has a line item that isn’t getting much attention with regard to mental heath care within the armed force – I’ll summarize it as his wanting to employ André’s research which promises to understand and this eliminate fear the way our collective enemies already do, or so I gather, by turning family-fathers into suicide bombers.’

‘Oh my God –’ Ben nearly began to pray.

‘I’ll send it to you on the condition that you never ask me how I came to obtain it. And, that you bring justice to the parties responsible, of course. Now, be a dear and give me an address that is off the NYPD server,’ she commanded.

He offered a Microsoft account he had had since high school before hanging up, hoping he could remember the password when he pulled out his private laptop and called Mr Sacket into his office.

‘I need to get into my email,’ he told the civilian head of the IT department. Sackett snorted at the idea of his time being wasted on something so easily delegated to a teenage intern. ‘And then I need you to trace a file I’ve been sent back to its original source.’ This was met with a grin. ‘Give me an hour,’ Sackett said. ‘I’ll time you,’ Ben returned.

Within fifty-five minutes, he knew that Elizabeth Gwillim had gotten André’s research from Col. Tarleton, currently assigned to a diplomatic mission in DC from where the email had been sent. Tarleton, in turn, had received it from Fredrick North MP, who himself had been informed by Gen. Petraeus, ‘and you’ll never guess the final two names in the chain,’ Sackett told him with a frown that betrayed a fair amount of self-satisfaction.

‘Dandridge to Washington?’ Ben guessed. Sackett bit his lip in a way that affirmed the suspicion.

‘What do we do?’ Ben asked.

‘My work here is done,’ Sackett told him. ‘Unless there is anything else.’

Knowing felt like treason. Without reading the file further, Ben walked out into the bullpen, pulled his lead sergeant from her desk brought her into his office and closed the door. ‘I need you to get Tarleton on the phone,’ he told her.

‘I’ve been trying -’ Yilmaz began.

‘I have a suspicion as to where the leak came from and I think he had something to do with it. At any rate, he is part of the reason we now have this,’ Ben explained, opening his computer. ‘It is a two-hundred-eighty-three-page pdf file outlining all of John André’s research and its possible military applications. You can read it while you are on hold.’

‘How did you -’

‘Trying to clear your name,’ he answered honestly. ‘I got lucky, or, I most assuredly didn’t. Let me
know what you are able to find and ... take that home with you tonight. I don’t want to leave it here. I’ll explain ... I’ll explain when I know how we might best proceed. If you get through, let me know what you find.’

‘Thank you, Sir.’

‘And Yilmaz? I know what you are doing with,’ he gestured with a circular motion around his face, mimicking the headscarf his sergeant had thrown on to suggest the lawsuit that would surely be threatened. ‘Don’t,’ he cautioned. ‘I’ve recommended you for a promotion. I know you are trying to make a point with regard to the way you were treated this afternoon and I get it, but you don’t want to do anything that is going to make you look ... un-American,’ he told her out of concern for a career he had knowingly put in further jeopardy, ironically, by trusting her to do her job.

‘And what does an American look like, Ben?’ she spat.

Ben went directly home after leaving the office, ignoring the members of the press who had followed him hoping for a statement with regard to the arrests his team had made, to Genovese, to Arnold, to Sarah Livingston. He considered ringing his father but thought it better to get out of the city altogether upon seeing his car a block away from his building on his way back from bringing his dog on her walk. ‘Do you want to go to Grandpa’s?’ he asked in a high voice that resulted in a wagging tail and would have regardless of what he had offered. He asked his dog further, ‘who’s a good girl?’ several times as he opened the door to the backseat for her and merged into traffic from what he considered prime parking, finding rush hour awaited him on the interstate.

Ben meant to go to his parents’ house, to explain to his father what he had carelessly implied to his sergeant about an open display of her faith (which he still suspected her to be politicising as he had known her to do in the past) wondering all the while if he was not guilt of the same. ‘How much do you think I hide behind the Cross, Heidi?’ The dachshund looked up at the sound of her name but being that this was spoken in a voice that did not promise a small snack for her in its pitch, she was quick to return he head to the seat and close her eyes. ‘Yeah, I feel you,’ he said, aware that he was mostly speaking to himself. ‘My dad will know how to handle in though. He does a lot of inter-faith stuff with the kids preparing for confirmation. It sounds stupid, doesn’t it? I doubt I got much out of it in light of my conduct earlier, but he’s friends with all the other local religious leaders and I’m sure can help me come up with a culturally sensitive solution that goes beyond an ‘I’m sorry.’’

Heidi did not care. By the time he reached his exit, neither did he.

Out of recent habit, Ben turned towards Setauket when he reached the fork in to road. Instead of turning around when he realised what he had done, he pulled over, plugged the address Caleb had given him into his GPS and found himself sitting in a plastic chair on a houseboat with what might be best described as having rustic charm within the next quarter hour. As dusk fell, Caleb turned on the fairy lights he had strung over the back railing and offered Ben another cup of coffee, or something stronger, if he so desired.

The party had ended with his arrival. An old man Caleb had introduced as his uncle eyed his suspiciously while another drank the hot beverage as quickly as he could manage, afraid to exactly look at him. ‘Are you hungry?’ Caleb asked. ‘I don’t wish to impose,’ Ben said, wondering if he should take his leave. ‘Eh, step inside with me, Benny boy.” Ben followed as he was bid.

“Look, I’m sorry about the cold reception, you have to understand, you are the first guy I’ve ever … my uncle isn’t homophobic or ‘nuthin, he is just afraid I’ll get hurt. Hell, I’m afraid I’ll get hurt, I’m afraid -”

“You don’t need to be,” Ben stopped him. “After seriously considering surrendering my badge I
told one of my subordinates that her religious expression as guaranteed by the constitution made her seem un-American, playing into the office politics I can’t stand – the politics that make my job impossible. I was threatened with demotion and promotion alike after arresting one of the biggest mobsters in the country along with the man who may be singlehandedly responsible for the opioid epidemic and I swear to God I’m … sometimes I think that Jordan is right, that I am on the wrong side of the law. Never mind, I don’t want to – I just mean, all this is to say, I don’t care if you and your friends were intoxicated in public or smoking marijuana or anything. I’m off the clock, and my jurisdiction here only extends to the Arnold case anyway.”

Caleb sat on the edge of his bed, not meeting Ben’s eyes. “I heard about it on the news. Say, you should be celebrating, yeah?”

“What do you suggest?” Ben asked, hoping to mask his timid nature when it came to cute boys with a teasing confidence. Caleb looked up and broke into a wide grin. “Anyone ever tell you how handsome you look in uniform Benny? How the hell are you single?”

Ben looked down and saw that he was still in the clothes he had worn on the raid, minus, of course, the Kevlar which had exhausted its function. “I’m single,” he swallowed, “because I am exactly the sort of idiot who invites himself into the home of someone he fancies, makes a speech about having reprimanded two men on felony drug charges and -wearing this, mind- who legitimately wonders why I’m receiving a nervous reception from two men I’ve never met, who I saw throw a blunt into the bay as I approached. Oh no, but I am a ‘cool’ cop. Jesus. This is … awkward and humiliating,” he admitted, afraid he had broken into a blush.

“It doesn’t have to be. Let’s get you out of those clothes, cute as you are in them. Hang a sock on the door handle and uh – you don’t have a pair of handcuffs, do you?” he winked.

Ben blushed deeply as he began to unbutton his shirt. “Here, let me help with that,” Caleb offered. When his hands fiddled with the fastener, Ben noticed the trembled slightly. Gripping them in his own, he pulled Caleb closer into a deep kiss that seemed as short as he knew it to be long. “I’ve been thinking about you all day,” he told him as he felt himself stiffen. “Me too,” Caleb told him with a hint of nervousness Ben was too quick to attribute to stemming from the same place as his own.

“I really like you,” he whispered.

“Are you really thinking of resigning?” Caleb asked as he reached to remove Ben’s holster and with it, his service weapon.

“Oh’ Robbie Rogers was reit,” the Scotsman said before bursting into a hardly laughter. “Ye shoods hae kept heem drugged.”

Abe frowned at the man’s aggravating use of the third person every time he wanted to punctuate a point. He was aware that he was not beside him, that the syntax was of his own invention, and that as such both it and the interwoven sentiment were warranted. He knew this, because when he turned to confront his illusion, he instead saw his father in the passenger’s seat beside him.

“Abraham,” Richard Woodhull said, deepening a voice that was always stern to make it seem all the more scolding. “What on earth were you thinking?”
"I was thinking that if I didn’t find a way to get Arnold out of there that little Quaker shite was going to move in and -" he knew he shouldn’t be driving. Abe pulled over to the side of the road as he always did when shadows that existed in darkness took on forms that he knew. He pulled a CD from his visor storage, turned up the stereo and with the Jeep Liberty in park, turned back to his father.

“I don’t know what happened,” he admitted. “I must have been out for around six hours. When I came to I was on the floor, sore in places I didn’t even know I could be. The front door was open, Arnold gone. I still had my keys, my phone – no calls or texts from Rogers, as I’d expected to find. Nothing from the police. Just Mary wondering where I was. Mary telling me dinner was in the refrigerator, that I could reheat it in the microwave. Mary telling me to sleep on the couch, that she had had a long day and didn’t want me to wake her when I came in. Oh, and Caleb, wanting to know if I knew that my wife got hurt playing soccer. Aside from that last one it could have been a normal fucking day.”

“You say you never compromise

With the mystery tramp, but now you realize

He's not selling any alibis

As you stare into the vacuum of his eyes

And say, "Do you want to make a deal?” his father offered.

“Maybe,” Abe admitted.

“How does it feel?” the judge asked. Abe remember the chorus and hummed along until his father began to sound like Dylan, until his features faded back into a shadow, until he faded altogether.

“If I had seen a psychologist about this ages ago,” he asked the darkness of an empty highway rest stop, “do you think I’d being the same position as Hewlett? Do you think I’d have been more successful, that I’d have swallowed enough pills that I couldn’t be saved? Maybe they are not all like André though. What do you think?”

“You used to be so amused

At Napoleon in rags and the language that he used

Go to him now, he calls you, you can't refuse

When you ain't got nothin', you got nothin' to lose

You're invisible now, you got no secrets to conceal,” the darkness answered in a kind of wail.

“Probably, yeah,” Abe agreed. He saw headlights flicker past through the trees that lined the road. A second set followed a few minutes later and Abe turned off his car. Slowly and as silently as he could manage, he stumbled out and made for the trees on the far side of the carpark, afraid that at two AM, the only people on the road in the outskirts of Setauket were involved in either the coverup or the investigation or some unholy combination of both realities as they related to the senator who, admittedly, he ought to have drugged. Robert Rogers was going to kill him. Robert Rogers, he realised, was going to kill Robeson, Lewis, Mary, Thomas, his father, he would make good on every threat he had made in the past week. Abe’s pace quickened. He had failed everyone. He had lost Arnold. He had lost his direction.
He found himself in a clearing where he knew his initials to be carved next to Anna’s in a large oak tree. Using the light on his phone to find a path, he laboured along to where the woods let out within sight of the docks, of Caleb’s houseboat with its hundred pretty lights. As he approached, he saw Lewis and Wakefield standing sentinel outside which was to say they were both sleeping on the table, a bottle of Captain Morgan between them. Abe nudged Lewis lightly, “You are not safe here,” he told him, thinking to wake Wakefield and ask if he could house the old man for a few nights. Before he could, the cabin door opened. Caleb, unkempt as ever stood before in his boxers and told him he looked like shit. “What happened?” he asked, gesturing to Abe’s cut forehead and bruised eye.

“Arnold,” Abe told him in a whisper.

“Buddy look, I know we need to talk, I know that, but you couldn’t have picked a worse time.”

“Mr Woodhull,” DI Benjamin Tallmadge said, appearing behind Caleb. “What are you doing here at this hour?”

Chapter End Notes

Looking back at that chapter, I don’t know that there is anyone I would willing trade places with. So much for escapism, hm? I get why people prefer fluff. Let’s have some notes:

**SPAM** is a canned pre-cooked pork product. Its origins are in America but it is also sold in the UK (and 39 other countries.) Anyone want to take a stab as to where the factory that produces the dish for the British market it? That’s right, my favourite punch-line of a city. You are not surprised and frankly, neither am I.

That said, if you are in my beloved Merseyside and are subsequently low on funds, while I can’t condone gambling I feel fine about recommending watching sport in a corner casino a la Wakefield’s reminiscing. If you need a moral justification for this sin, your small change is really just paying for the coffee. Don’t use the toilets in any of these places. Seriously. **L8** is the postal code for **Toxteth**, which (though I personally think is overdone here when it is spoken of from the perspective of a fallen trust-fund-child in 2016) truly was a dangerous place to be in the 70s and 80s. **Childwall** is another borough of the same city. **Penny Lane** is a song from **The Beatles** that lyrically paints a rather quaint picture of **Liverpool**.

Although the eight-month Russian siege that followed **Prague Uprising** resulted in very few casualties, a number of academics killed themselves in an effort to draw international attention to their cause.

I’m pretty sure I’ve made a note or two about **David Moyes’ single-season stint as the gaffer of Manchester United**, but in case I haven’t, or in case you only know about this calamity from the loose references I make – Moyes was Sir Alex’s hand-picked replacement for one of the most impossible jobs on football and, as time told, was not up to task. If I am remembering correctly, he was sacked after the 0-3 home defeat to Liverpool, which made it mathematically impossible for the team to qualify
for the Champions League. The Man U job, to relate it to something I am supposing you are more familiar with, is kind of like the DADA position at Hogwarts – after Ferguson, no one has held it for long and those who have stepped into the role have been cursed … to press and pundit scrutiny. José Mourinho is the current manager. He can be your Snape if you want giving that he is just. so. extra. (albeit in an opposite way.)

With regard to Yilmaz’s suddenly adapting a headscarf I could write an essay had I more than 5000 characters total, but to do this in a few hashtags, not all Muslim women wear hajib but all women are constantly subject to having their clothing politicised, which is probably the larger issue at play here. Let’s debate.

The lyrics that appear as dialogue in the final scene are from Bob Dylan’s Like a Rolling Stone from the 1965 album Highway 61 Revisited.

Up Next? To say it in song text:
Well, I'm not the world's most passionate guy
But when I looked in her eyes
Well, I almost fell for my Lola
Lo lo lo lo Lola, lo lo lo lo Lola

Till then! XOXO - Tav
The French Connection

Chapter Summary

Hewlett struggles against his familiar demons in the interests of foreign markets and international relations. Simcoe delves into conspiracy theory, takes on coaching duties and has sex with a certain call girl. Mary clandestinely saves the world from the misgivings of her extended company in exchange for eighty orphans and a school that never existed.

Chapter Notes

I came at you guys last time without my standard list of potentially upsetting material, thinking that the situations that comprise the plot of Hide and Seek are so outlandish that no one reading would internalize the subject matter in any harmful way. As though to test my own resolve, I then wrote this chapter which … actually does have a few things I would personally want to be made aware of up front. So let’s do it. First off, if you happen to also have a month-long holiday where thinking about sex will undo your fast, it is forced upon you here in more than one fashion. On the same note, I’m not what one would call a smut writer, so what your getting isn’t exactly anything to get excited over. Sorry about that. Following a long-established pattern of relating the realities of 18th century society to modern sport, slavery is mentioned, and since I’m kind of on a role here, there is a highly fictionalized portrayal of the Scottish Independence Movement, loads of economics –

… Oh, and Anthony Weiner makes a brief appearance.

We good? Let’s get on with it then. I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“D’accord, je la lui donne tout de suite,” Phillip Hamilton repeated slowly, careful to emphasise the wrong syllable in every word he spoke. This attempt at attention, however, had the most undesired effect of causing the beautiful Mademoiselle Declesias to crush her palm against her forehead, concealing her exquisite features momentarily as such muttered something about accusative and dative pronouns and his having at least that down properly. She said the sentence she had corrected again, slightly slower this time, with the kind of over-enunciation one usually only associated with costume drama of the sort which his mother would excitedly text her friends while watching until his father looked up from his laptop long enough to pinpoint and criticise the historical inaccuracies he found apparent. (This, in turn, usually resulted in the Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's New York field office being hit with an aptly named ‘throw pillow’ when his wife had heard enough critique.)

Having been born in the land of the free, Pip himself did not much care for European history.

A year prior, he had joined his father in complaining about palace intrigue in courts of power in
structures that had long ceased, finding the plot dull and dated. Something, however, had changed deep inside of him in the summer between seasons and he was now just as keen to watch the Sun King take his brother’s wife in the sheets as he was with any amount of sword fighting he once thought more interesting in films where men wore tights and heeled shoes than what he once mistook as adults groaning without reason as they wrestled in bed. He imagined Aberdeen in a corset his deft fingers would work to untie while he whispered sixteenth-century euphemisms, explaining his intention of exploring his animalistic instincts in the self-same terms – faire ‘la danse du loup’ ou ‘le bête à deux dos’ as one once said.

Aberdeen sighed deeply, slowly, almost suggesting that she too saw herself being had on an elaborate set. Pip realised, perhaps too late, that the sound was one of aggravation than of shared amorosity. Instead of relaying what was actually on his mind, he again told his tutor again that he would give ‘la lettre’ to the Félicien character who existed in his French textbook as the homework assignment required, this time careful to say all of the words exactly as he had just heard them from her full lips. This met with the approval of Mademoiselle Declesias and she praised Pip with a wide, toothy grin he was quick to return.

“Jesus,” Cicero muttered from across the kitchen table. Pip turned to his class- and teammate and shot him a hard glare which the other boy volleyed with an eye roll before returning his gaze to his own homework. Pip had been raised with French and as such spoke the language fluently, something that, ordinarily, he never let his schoolmates forget. He could have just as easily done this worksheet as he did most of his homework in the subject – five minutes before class while engaged in an argument with his friends over something altogether unrelated.

Fate had other plans, however.

That afternoon when he was riding the train, his father had called him from work, worried about his whereabouts, breathing a sigh of relief when Pip, embarrassed in front of most of his friends and thus deeply annoyed with his father, told him that he was headed to Setauket. ‘For soccer practice,’ he had reminded him with a harder pretence of aggravation than he might have used had he not had an audience. ‘Same as every Tuesday and Thursday.’ A few minutes after exchanging ‘okays’ and ‘goodbyes’ his phone rang again. Pip was told that he was to go home with Cicero and Mrs Ingram until his own mother could drive out to the suburbs and pick him up after work – this, instead of simply taking the railway back into the city the way he ordinarily would.

Something, his father said curtly, had happened at work. He would explain in the evening.

Pip’s friends had all looked at him with wide eyes. His father had immigrated from the small Caribbean island of Nevis to attend university. Almost immediately upon setting foot in his new country decades prior, Alexander Hamilton had learned of a pathway to citizenship programme that saw him enlist in the armed force. Having grown up on an island increasingly reliant on tourism and taking note of the destabilising effects global warming was having on weather patterns - predicting how this might translate into the economy as it concerned the hotels that might have otherwise employed him had he stayed at home, a young Alexander had worked his way up the ranks, deferring his acceptance to Columbia and part of his scholarship along with it, later making up that loss through funds he received as part of the GI Bill. He had remained in the reserves until being scouted by another defence division. As such, Pip’s dad still sometimes spoke as though he were leading an artillery unit into battle decades after dog tags had been turned into naturalisation papers. His friends heard the tone as though it meant that Pip was in trouble, but this was rarely the case. Mostly, his dad just worked too much and from nine to five and sometimes thereafter spoke to everyone he met as though a three-letter acronym followed their name.

‘Oooh,’ the chorus of his classmates had tauntingly sung. Pip rolled his eyes. He was twelve,
nearly thirteen and saw himself as a man grown. He did not need his father to explain his concern, he had an iPhone with a news app. A mafia don had been murdered on the steps of a police station which was sensational to be sure, but not to such an extent that he thought it possessed any direct threat to his personal safety.

‘It happened right outside of Thea’s dad’s work,’ Luke replied when Pip voiced his suspicion as to what his dad would say at the dinner table as carefully as he could while his mother cupped her hands over his little sister’s ears. Luke was less sensitive. He made wild gestures as he continued, ‘That is why he pulled her out before last block. Apparently, Genovese’s whole head just exploded.’

‘You think she will be at practice?’ Justin asked.

‘I doubt it,’ Pip injected. His parents were overprotective. If they did not want him riding home on the train without an accompanying adult, Mr Burr, by comparison, had likely locked his daughter in her room where she would remain under police protection until the city decided how to move forward with prosecution, at which point he would only be able to be reasonably convinced of his daughter’s safety were he taking no active role in the resulting case. This paranoia was not entirely unwarranted, children of civil servants were always at an increased risk – but Thea was not a child and neither was he. They had both learned the hard way, however, that protesting sudden rule changes with this assertion disproved that point in their parents’ eyes. He sent his oldest friend a text expressing his solidarity. She wrote back seconds later on a different topic, hoping to answer a few of the questions that had arisen in homeroom that morning, questions the other members of the team whom Pip was sharing a carriage with were still asking despite the day’s events.

‘What do you think the new coach is going to be like?’

Pip’s first impression was built on John Graves Simcoe’s high-pitched assessment that players who did not show up to practice were not committed to excellence and therefore would not start on Saturday. Although he had his phone in the pocket of his shorts, he did not bother texting Thea with this news.

Internal competition was every bit as much of a contest as whatever they met from the opponents the faced on the pitch and hearing such sentiment pleased him quite a lot, allowing him to forget any feelings of empathy that had arisen after their respective parents had taken time to react to an act of violence that had happened within their direct reach. As Simcoe spoke, Pip found himself wondering if Theodosia Burr would be returning at all. Her father had signed her up for soccer when his boss mentioned that her daughter coached a kids’ team during some work function. A year later, Cicero, a boy she knew from the team, transferred to their school and within a few weeks it felt like everyone Pip knew was suddenly playing soccer. Not wanting to be left out, he asked his parents to enrol him in the sport as well. He looked around. Now that Anna Strong (née Smith) was gone, he wondered how many of his friends would quit or would be transfer to other, closer teams as the opportunity their parents likely saw to advance their careers by making nice with the boss’ daughter was no longer a factor.

The more Simcoe spoke, the less Pip liked him.

The new coach asked them all what their preferred position was, growing more displeased with every repeated response of ‘striker’ he was given. Much of the training was taken up with exhausting defensive drills and a bombardment of insults until they were split into sides of Simcoe’s choosing and told to simply play. Occasionally, he would tell two players to switch positions in a voice that matched the ringing pitch of the whistle he blew to get their attention, suggesting strategy as the game recommenced. Simcoe demonstrated how to force the other team
offside and hinted at how one could commit a foul without collecting a card which created excited
but uncomfortable laughter amongst ‘the rank and file’ as the coach had taken to calling them with
a hint of distain.

After practice had ended and the boys and girls had all showered, each player was given the name
of a professional they were meant to watch on YouTube with a specific focus. On Thursday, they
were promised the drills would be personalised. Pip’s heart sank reading ‘Marta – dribbling’, both
because women’s soccer was duller by its very nature and because he strongly suspected that
Thursday would see him passing a ball between his own two feet for an hour in the cold rain while
Simcoe continued to chirp to all of the players complaining that they been told to go home and
observe someone other than their heroes from Madrid, Munich or Manchester that the women’s
game possessed more of the technique they should want to aspire to at this strange when they
possessed neither the size nor the strength to compensate what he maintained they clearly lacked in
skill. Pip’s heart broke altogether when Cicero put his bags in the back of Simcoe’s Range Rover
and said that he and his mum were in the process of moving to Whitehall, that ‘John’ was headed
to the same address.

‘John,’ Pip mimicked as he added his gym bag and rucksack to the cargo.

‘Yeah, I played with his team once a few Sundays back,’ Cicero shrugged. ‘He’s cool.’

It took a few blocks for Pip to appreciate the merits to this argument. At a traffic light, the new
coach commented that they had both surpassed his expectations. Cicero met this with enthusiasm,
Pip smiled as best he could, finding the expression less forced as Simcoe continued that he had
’some modest familiarity with the scouting process’ and thus knew through a number of his
connections what academies in Europe looked for in young players. Both boys leaned forward in
anticipation.

‘Were you given a try?’ Cicero asked.

‘I’m legally deaf, so no,’ Simcoe answered. ‘My experience is all second hand, I roomed with a
boy back at school who has two brothers in the business. One is an agent and the other was a
scout at Inter for about a decade before being promoted to Assistant Sporting Director.’

This, Pip decided, validated all of the mistreatment he had suspected himself of being subjected to.
Simcoe continued to elaborate at their urging that one of the brothers had married into the Agnelli,
and that as such he knew (if only just in passing) everything the people in back - and boardrooms
looked for in a signing and had several established theories in how to best coax potential out of
‘young players of promise.’ This excited both twelve-year olds and Pip felt his exhaustion fade. He
asked the coach if he had a ball they could practice with until his mother showed up but was told
that when they reached Whitehall, he expected them to finish their homework in an upbeat tone
that somehow seemed to leave no room for argument. Pip was keener to obey than he otherwise
might have been. Cicero still let out a groan as they pulled into the driveway.

His friend’s new house was fancy and Pip met it with wide eyes.

‘It is temporary,’ Cicero told him, embarrassed.

‘It has a pool,’ Pip said, hoping that evenings here post practice would become a routine.

When the two walked into the kitchen, he became determined to do everything within his power to
make that happen.

Cicero said his hellos and introduced everyone with a shrug. Pip already knew his mother, he said.
Miss Shippen was her friend from back in Philadelphia. Mrs. Woodhull was their landlady. Mr. Hewlett was Ms. Strong’s fiancé.

And Miss Declesias, Mrs. Woodhull’s au pair, was the most beautiful woman Pip had ever seen.

She spoke French with a Caribbean accent like that of his father and Pip was tempted to respond in kind when he remembered something Coach Simcoe had said during practice about strategic gameplay that suddenly made sense. He asked her if she could help him with his homework, homework, he lied, that he did not entirely understand. While Cicero worked on his maths, occasionally asking Mr Hewlett or Mr Simcoe for assistance when he realised he had made a mistake, Pip worked on some calculations of his own.

“Quel ans as-tu?”

“Quel âge as-tu,” Miss Declesias corrected before providing him with an answer, “J’ai vingt-deux ans, moi.”

“Et moi treize,” Pip exaggerated slightly.

“Douze,” Cicero coughed. Pip felt his fingers curl into a fist.

Aberdeen was ten years older than him, which mean that if he were going on the rule he had been told in school of half the age of the older party plus seven, they two could start dating when he was her age now, but what use had he for convention? He knew that in the State of New York sixteen was the legal age of consent, and he was mature for his age, as was proof by the fact that he was having a conversation with a cute girl whilst his classmate (whom Pip suddenly presumed had not yet begun stealing Victoria’s Secret catalogues from his mother’s mail) was improving his understanding of the binomial theorem with the older gentleman their former soccer coach was apparently going to marry.

Pip smiled to himself.

He was smarter than Cicero.

He understood strategy.

He understood game.

He could keep this charade up, he considered. In four years, after showing Aberdeen what a genius he was by learning the French language and all of its complexities astoundingly fast under her private tutorage, she would fall in love with him. By his sixteenth birthday she would be finished with college and they could get married with his parents’ consent. They would buy a house out in Harlem and-

No, Pip adjusted. His goals were too modest. In four years, Aberdeen Declesias – or Hamilton, as he hoped her to be called by such time – would be living with him in a new mansion in an old city, Milan or Turin or somewhere else he could vaguely picture as being situated on a peninsula. At twenty, Pip reasoned (for such seemed reasonable) he would lead the Stars and Stripes to lift the World Cup in Qatar and afterwards he would be rewarded with a transfer to Real Madrid. Maybe he would instead go to Paris is such was to Aberdeen’s liking and they could live in tights and corsets and speak of everything save for power in colourful euphemisms as kings once did. He asked her what her favourite city was and she answered New York.

“I mean, your favourite city in Europe,” Pip clarified.
“I’ve never been,” Aberdeen told him.

“I could take you,” Pip offered in earnest, albeit as the icon he imagined he would become under Simcoe’s attention rather than the boy he was - a boy of twelve years with parents who would not let him take the train back into the city by himself on a Tuesday night; a boy whose classmate could no longer contain his laughter. “I’m serious,” Pip spoke over the awful sound that made him seem childish by association. “Coach has connections to agents and sporting directors, in a few years kids will be wearing sport shoes with my name on them, just you wait.”

Aberdeen smiled and looked away, rather she looked over her shoulder and exchanged a sentiment entirely through facial mimic with Miss Shippen, who for her part seemed to be encouraging what Pip hoped to be the au pair’s interests.

“D’accord,” Aberdeen laughed. She seemed as though she had something more to say to this end, but Mr Hewlett was quick to cut her off. In fact, conversation ceased for some time altogether when he cleared his throat to ask, “John, exactly how involved are you in the Tarletons’ various capital ventures?”

Somehow, it sounded like a threat.

Edmund Hewlett considered himself careful and cautious. The world in all of its elements had cautioned him into feigning cooperation but in light of the little lad’s comment he found he could not continue this pretence.

John, certainly, had long since let such drop.

He met Hewlett’s hard gaze with one of dismay and confusion, tilting his chin slightly toward his neck in a show of surrender that had the effect of making his jaw look slightly larger, revealing him for the beast he was. “I haven’t the slightest idea what you are alluding to Edmund,” he replied, spitting as he spoke Hewlett’s given name. He had told him recently that familiar terms felt like insults when spoken between them and Hewlett could now consent that there was some accuracy in this. ‘Edmund’ and ‘John’ were, respectively, where the lies they told felt most apparent. They were not friends. They never had been and never would be, pretending otherwise, insofar as the prince could see, failed to serve whatever purpose it once had. Especially, he thought, his eyes slanting under the weight of his increasingly furrowed brow, if John was willing to bring innocent children into this conflict.

“I imagine by ‘agents’ and ‘sporting directors’, there are two, three people you could be referring to,” he told him with a calm he would not have been quite as much control over had he less experience with and exposure to backroom politics. “If tasked with such and given appropriate time, I might be able to come on a few reasons why one might afford Banastre the benefit of doubt, but William and Clayton are without question two of the most amoral individuals I’ve ever had the displeasure of encountering. I’m uncertain of exactly what role Chiara plays at Juventus but I would hazard to guess that her day to day involves exploitation, even enslavement -”

“Is this because Pip and I are children of colour?” Cicero started in a tone no doubt learned or lent from Aberdeen and the sensationalized stories of systemic inequality that made their supposedly shared situation sound more drastic and dire with every repetition.
“You’ll forgive my vocabulary,” Hewlett said offhand, not meeting the boy’s eyes, not removing his own from his immediate foe. “It was not my intention to reference race in this discussion, but sport management is a messy business, and I am horrified to learn that Coach Simcoe would so much as suggest -”

“All I said was that I know from second hand experience the sort of drills players their age run at academies,” Simcoe tried to deflect.

“But … if we win the league, you’ll still send a video to generate interest, right?” the boy Pip seemed to beg.

“If he does, you’ll want to make sure you have a damn good solicitor on hand to scrutinize every line of the contract,” Hewlett scoffed. “John, step outside with me?” If the request sounded like a threat, Edmund Hewlett felt inclined to make good on it.

John Graves Simcoe blinked for what must have been the first time in his life and rose in contention-ridden compliance. He followed in silence as Hewlett lead the way up to his room.

“It is alright,” he assured him when the door was shut. “Abigail has moved so many boxes in the garage there simply isn’t room for anyone to sneak in and have a listen.”

“Oyster you are overreacting as always,” Simcoe said lightly. “I had the feeling the boys were facing questions of commitment after training and I merely wished to impart with that comment that I know what I am doing.”

“Do you?” Hewlett demanded, raising his voice though he suspected such made no difference to Simcoe. “Honestly do you have any fucking idea whatsoever?”

Around the turn of the century, Clayton Tarleton had been under contract at a Championship side that had since dropped into the third division. He had been on loan at Inter Milan when after a half season Oxford had wanted to make a sale which his brother cum agent was only too glad to facilitate. Clayton, however, broke up negotiations, arguing that the Italians would be in error to make the transfer permanent, citing his various deficits both on and off the field and providing the man who would become his employer with dossiers on everyone he trained with, offering recommendations that saw the club move from a fourth-place finish to nearly taking the league the following season. As such, he got what he wanted - to stay at Inter in an administrative role which better suit his skill set. His elder brother, dumbfounded, left the table that afternoon several million pounds poorer than he expected to be.

Edmund Hewlett knew that both men looked for profit in the labour of others, often swindling players well out of their worth, leaving boys bankrupt and physically broken out after a few seasons of ‘almost’ without a care. But these were the lucky ones, the ones who were dropped - at least they still owned the names that the world would not know.

He would not have known most of how encompassing contracts were if not for a wedding that nearly did not happen. A few years after embarrassing his elder brother in a business meeting, Clayton had come to know a woman he wished to marry. When the pair applied for a licence, the second son of a prominent and powerful family discovered at twenty-six that he was unable to apply for a change in legal status, having signed his rights away a decade prior to his brother, making it impossible for him to enter into any contract, professional or private, on his own accord. Apparently, such was standard in the sporting world – agents often possessed every legal right that would otherwise be enjoyed by players based on passport or place of residence. What little freedom was left was taken by the clubs for whom they played, who, in turn, saw them in the same terms – potentials for profit rather than people.
For Hewlett, it was a step too far.

Clayton’s story had had a happy ending insofar as his brother did eventually consent to his marriage to a Brazilian underwear model, but only after the assistant in charge of overseeing the progress of academy players at Rede pulled a few stings with his employers to open the doors at one of the then-five China-based academies the club ran to a number of the boys William owned; the family’s de facto patriarch correctly saw The People’s Republic as the best place to recoup his partially imagined losses from years before. There did not seem to be any hard feelings about the affair within the Tarleton family, business was business, after all, and it was made clear to Hewlett that the problems he saw and sought to address the next time William and his wife were given an audience in Edinburgh were systemic and industry wide. ‘It was business,’ William had smiled in a way that left Edmund feeling cold, shaken and considerably less sympathetic to the ideas the man had about the other kinds of contracts he had come in an effort to renew. Luckily, Edna was making those sorts of decisions for the family by that point. She raised her glass in a toast to the young couple and bid the man to continue. Edmund watched on as his status demanded, occasionally glancing at the enormous tapestry that covered one of the walls in this particular drawing room and the scene it depicted, privately longing for the age when a Hewlett invitation involved the slaughter of entire clans – cornered and massacred in a valley so saturated with blood the snow that then fell was said to have been stained red for seven years.

He liked playing on Sunday and watching the club he supported whenever he could, lost in the spectacle and excitement of professional sport insofar as he could forget for ninety minutes the plight of the players, most of whom were millionaires at the level that held his interest, all of whom he pitied when made to think about it for more than a minute.

But as much as he felt concern for whatever promises Simcoe had implied to boys at an impressionable age where day dreams felt as real as the chill of the breeze or the colours and scents that grew stronger in and after the spring drizzle, this matter was not that which had him in such a state of alarm. Still, he reasoned given Simcoe’s apparent offence at the implication, it might be the best route to take if he meant to lead him into a confession.

“Regardless of your end game, I don’t think you should be talking to ADIC Hamilton’s son about the Tarletons. Any of them,” he continued.

“My end game,” Simcoe repeated as though this was an accusation he meant Hewlett to account for.

“My meeting with DI Tallmadge and DS Yilmaz did not go so well … for either of us. It was broken short and I was afforded the opportunity to speak to Lafayette. You might want to sit down, John,” he said softly, placing himself on a corner that the end of his bed. Simcoe pulled the chair from his desk a few inches too close, causing their knees to meet. Hewlett tried to readjust his position accordingly. Simcoe made no attempt to move and as such, Hewlett was given no escape.

That morning, he relayed, DI Tallmadge had been called out of interrogation for reasons relating to another case. DS Yilmaz, who took over for her boss, had called Hewlett out on his dyslexia, evident in the statement he had written with regard to Sunday’s match, evident in his personal correspondence via text, “Absent,” he said, “from your algorithm.”

Simcoe’s jaw dropped slightly, seemingly shocked at this oversight, at the error he made by making no errors.

“I would not have been able to tell,” Hewlett confessed, “even if I had been reading them in full.”

“I know, I -”
“That isn’t, however, what aroused suspicion. No John, apparently I am not the only one you have been texting with regards to personal finance,” he said as though such were an invitation.

Simcoe raised his eyebrows with an air of mockery. “I manage a number of hedge funds. I text nearly everyone in my contact list about -”

“You know who I am talking about,” Hewlett said flatly.

“Tarleton?” Simcoe scoffed. “You’re not serious. If there is anyone I wouldn’t,” he paused, sighed and buried his face in the palm of his hands. “Shit,” he said, repeating the expletive in a whisper several times in the same breath.

“Do you care to expand?” Hewlett inquired, kicking at Simcoe’s feet as an invitation for his eyes to recommit to the conversation. Simcoe pulled a phone from his trouser pocket. As he opened a messaging app and began to search for the interaction, he tried to provide context. “A phone I believe to have belonged to Benedict Arnold rang while I was driving back to the city last Wednesday morning after Mrs Woodhull and I had finished cleaning DeJong’s Tavern, clearing it of any and all evidence – which, in hindsight, raised more suspicion than it served to quiet. I panicked and tossed the thing out of the window. When I told Mrs Woodhull as much, we agreed to meet up, to search for it together. While I was waiting for her, Ban texted me and tipped me off that Anna would be making her debut on the cover of the US edition a British tabloid the following morning – asking if,” he stopped abruptly, continuing in a chime that rang of falsities. “I may have exaggerated, slightly, the extent of the relationship between Anna and myself over course of the past year or so.”

“Ah, but it was real to you, wasn’t it?” Hewlett challenged, providing his own assumption and answer. “It still is.”

“No … no,” Simcoe defended. “I just wanted him to think -”

“Why?” Hewlett demanded, again in a raised voice. Simcoe took a moment to respond.

“Because he is … because he has always had so much ease with the fairer sex, I wanted him to think that fortune favoured me in the very way he had been shunned time and again. You know Mary Robinson is married, right? That she has been throughout the entire course of their relationship. She has no contact with her husband but no interest in getting a divorce, everyone says - including Ban himself when he is in one of his blacker moods – because she doesn’t want to be free to marry him.”

“I think that is part of the attraction,” Hewlett mused.

“Speaking from a first-hand experience it could well be,” Simcoe confessed. “Putting the idea in his head that a married woman was seeking a divorce to be with me, I know it is petty and terribly childish, but I liked watching him lip curl slightly when we met up for drinks last time business brought me back to London – his ‘O’rite, yea? Gut ed vous.’ so heavy with the surfacing of his hidden self-doubts that the sentiment was barely audible through the awful scouse he is often want to revert to when emotionally addressed. I … assumed Anna and I would come together someday. That there would be no harm in -”

“I believed that, too,” Hewlett admitted. “I had something one might be tempted to call a crush for the better part of a year on Ms Strong, one I didn’t act on, seeing as you … respecting your territory. Don’t you think we might both have respected hers a wee bit more?”

“I certainly do now. But what does it matter? Here,” he squinted slightly before passing the phone
to Hewlett for his own inspection. “I think you’ve been had, dare I say.”

The text message in question simply read >> Property :)<< using emoji in such a way as to force the reader to hear the word as spoken with an effervescent but altogether empty smile. This particular Tarleton, Hewlett decided, was either a genius or a fool – or, more dangerously, a fair bit of both.

“I panicked and snapped up all of the land on the market in hopes of disguising your interest in DeJong’s tavern,” Simcoe said. “I just checked, I hadn’t at the time, but the holding company was a subsidiary of Danny Wessex’ real estate concern. But I don’t think Ban … he isn’t smart, savvy or sophisticated enough to know or guess that – anyway, why would his family, giving his history with money, trust him to take part in any such scheme, if there was one? I think it is all coincidence, one, maybe, we are lucky the police picked up on.” Simcoe began to gesture in a way the suggested cooperation and comradery. Hewlett did not believe him for a second. “Hear me out – if the cops are focused on an imagined conspiracy around land you -we – own in Setauket -”

“Sorry, I have to stop you there,” Hewlett coughed. “if you are saying you hold Ban Tarleton in ill esteem when it comes to financial planning, why take his advice without further question?”

“I … I don’t know,” Simcoe answered. It sounded as though he was second guessing himself.

“But it isn’t about him, is it? It is about Anna, it is specifically about getting me out of the way that you can, what exactly John?” he shook his head in disgust and dismay. “Prove to her, to me, to everyone you have ever held the slightest bit of envy or resentment towards once and for all that you are the better man? When judged by … what exactly is the context you are trying to establish? Because from what I saw downstairs you are behaving like a dog -”

“Where do you come off -” Simcoe leaned forward, raising his own shrilling voice slightly. Hewlett did not move to retreat. He sat completely still, feeling Simcoe’s hot, heavy breath, certain too that the sensation was shared unequally, that his resolve was enough to send a shiver through the spine of his opponent.

“Every time Mary made an effort to talk to you downstairs you interrupted me,” he continued with his practiced, cutting calm, “answering Cicero’s latest inquiry rather than respond to her question, to her presence in any way. You were the same way on Sunday night, on,” he stopped, shifted. “Let me offer an assumption and you can tell me if I am right. Now that she has served her purpose, or hasn’t rather, you have lost interest in leading her on at all. Was it your goal to make Anna jealous, that she could see what she stood to lose? Arnold aside, it has been about her from the beginning, hasn’t it?”

Simcoe leaned back in his chair, sliding himself away slightly that he could cross his legs. Hewlett smiled. The posture his former-friend assumed to look powerful was its own sort of surrender. His grin broadened as he grew increasingly certain that Simcoe felt the blow he had self-dealt.

“Maybe,” the demon admitted, almost mutely, “Not in the manner you suggest, but maybe.”

Hewlett waited for the silence between them to extend a discomfort before he responded. Studying Simcoe, he wondered if he felt the quiet in the same way, if a true absence of sound was worse than the small noises that made one increasing aware that they were decidedly making none, or if, on the contrary, he was so used to this sort of darkness that he had long ceased meeting it with emotion save for occasional bouts of embarrassment. Simcoe seemed further away than the metre he himself had placed between them. Hewlett wondered where he was, where he went, and if any apparitions or aspirations kept the company of his quiet.
“The Sovereign gave her consent to my union,” Hewlett told him, feeling more alone in absence of speech than he was convinced his rival could. “It’s over.”

“You don’t seem happy,” Simcoe commented with a frown. Hewlett met his expression. When he had gotten out of the police station he had a voice mail on his mobile requesting that he visit his local consulate. That an important document awaited him. His hopes had been too high.

“Its politics, it exists regardless of how or if I contribute,” he sighed. “There are steps Buckingham Palace was willing to conveniently overlook – normally Anna would need to meet the Queen, she would need to convert … with that in mind this veil of legitimacy is a design to keep my family from holding any real power or influence. By indicating her approval, the Queen sends a signal that the Crown would prefer I inherited Richmond over my sister, which would rob Edna over the Scottish titles she all but embodies as well, making her no more than her lord husband’s consort and destroying the majority the two married expecting to share. It is a poor move; the referendum nearly succeeded and should there be another – and there will be another, mark me - it is all but sure to pass. If we keep a clear majority, Edna will be elected Queen, if she keeps Richmond – which she will, it is by far our most valuable holding - Scotland will remain a client kingdom and England will seem stronger for it. Being that we are mutually dependent on one another and fully reliant on foreign trade, I – no. I’m not happy,” he agreed with the assessment, slightly bitter that he had no one to tell beyond the man who undoubtably wished him harm.

Hewlett reasoned that Simcoe had been exposed to the plight and predicament of the world he had once inhabited to understand it without being emotionally attached. Or maybe he was. Maybe he would run off and relay this all to Banastre or one of the more capable bares of the butcher’s family name, hoping to facilitate the fall of a powerful house because two decades before he, Edmund Hewlett, fourth of his name, could not find a means of honouring a trade agreement or whatever exactly it was that caused his father’s oldest co-conspirator to bequeath such bitterness to so many in his last will and testament. Maybe, Hewlett though, he had inherited some of the same scorn that drove the others to into manipulating each other to effects he could not fully imagine. Part of him hoped to watch the various factions fight themselves into a stalemate, a Stalingrad. It was nothing to him. He had taken Setauket without lifting a finger. Perhaps as such he was more than ready to retire the old world in its entirety. He considered bring the Instrument of Consent, was it not another contract that served to rob one of the right to exercise their own free will? He had originally wanted to marry Anna for a Green Card when the world he had left had been happy to let him go, refusing to hear his modest requests for money, unable, or perhaps too able, to see that it would have purchased only his continued absence from court. Now, he wanted to wed for love for there was no other reason.

None, at least, that he felt comfortable naming.

“Have you spoken to Anna about it?” Simcoe asked with a hint of disapproval Hewlett was sure his fiancée would share based on her final comments to him on the way to Albany. He shook his head.

“When?” Hewlett snorted. “I was in an interrogation room for most of the morning. The ambassador called me during such time to inform me that a document awaited me at the consulate. Voice mail. I haven’t been able to reach him since – for all of the things I need from the embassy all that they provide is the piece of news I least want to hear. Anyway Anna … she ah, she doesn’t think I should be so quick to abdicate by means of self-omission. I don’t know how I feel about that,” he confessed. “I did not even know I was still in contention for a crown until I was arrested for a crime I didn’t commit and ah -”

“What?”
Not wanting to betray his darker misgivings to a man he considered his most immediate internal enemy, Hewlett deflected. “Don’t worry about it. I take you have had more luck, at least in terms of communication with the embassy itself than I’ve been shown in the past day,” he paused, adding meanly, “get any new investment advice from the United Kingdom’s most notorious spendthrift you might tell me about before the fuzz finds me again off guard?”

Simcoe’s face was at once absent of expression. When at last he answered, his tone was just as void of anything telling. “I wouldn’t call it that,” he answered. “‘Luck’. I talked to Colonel Tarleton, yes, but it is nothing of what you suggest. When I said it was … this whole thing, when I agreed that it was about Anna … I’ve been thinking on my first time for the past day or so … within the flat that showed you yours and -”

“Sorry,” Hewlett blinked, stopping Simcoe’s tangent by extending his index finger. “We had this midnight meeting whereupon it was decided that you would contact someone you know in the embassy to find out where we stand and you talked about sex? No,” he shook his head. “You didn’t talk about sex – you talked about how to ruin a perfectly good investment scheme that I brought you on because you can’t stand that I might benefit -”

“He told me that you were in the process of filing a suit against your father on my behalf when you … when you had a stroke,” he said flatly. “When you were twenty. I don’t know what to do with that. With any of it. He said in all of his grand, self-certain vitriol that I found vindication in your more recent behaviour for all of the mixed emotions I’ve always held around you, that I was enjoying this until, well, he suggested that I still am,” Simcoe forced a laugh of the kind and clang that transferred its bitter taste to the tip of Hewlett’s tongue.

“I’m not, for the record,” he continued almost solemnly. “I think I’ve long since forgotten how to be happy. But … Ban somehow got his hands on the character statement I gave to Dandridge in which I spoke of that little incident we had in October and he pointed out that I ought to have seen and said something sooner, that you are not the sort to handle a weapon … especially not in response to a verbal exchange. Suffice to say, it got me thinking on,” he stopped, adjusting his gaze to better meet his one-man audience. “A few days ago, you said you would kill André and that is just not you. But maybe I want it to be because one, he deserves it and two, this coming from you makes me feel more justified in that which Ban makes a decent argument that I’ve always been -”

Hewlett shook his head. “And to expand this further, does it occur to you that Ban needs you to be a villain to justify his own actions?” he challenged. “Of all the things you could let get to you!”

“About Anna,” Simcoe continued, “I did agree to helping you in your scheme with designs of shattering what I saw as a fragile union – you know that. You know that I merely hoped she wouldn’t get hurt. But what does it matter now? I’m happy for you, in a bitter-sweet sense I’ll freely admit, but it’s – you had sex in my flat,” he seemed to complain.

“And you told Tarleton about this?” Hewlett wondered.

“No, he told me about my first time and it got me seriously thinking about yours.”

There was nothing particularly strategic about the silence that followed that statement. Hewlett did not wish to hear more about nights spent in Sodom, calculating quickly that he would at some stage continue this conversation with his wife to be, and that Anna would impose her liberalism onto the situation in such a way that the idea of the act would cease to disgust him, or that he would feel alone enough in his opinions that he would be forced to suppress them in extended company. For now, however, he could not let it go.

“That explains – I mean, truly I can understand why you wouldn’t announce such things but it
might have been helpful for me to know about your past relationship before I -”

“You’re not serious,” Simcoe said blandly, adopting the same expression of disgust Hewlett knew himself to wear as he retraced the way his mis-relayed whatever it was that he had meant. “No, I … you are probably right,” he admitted, sounding slightly sick. “My first time had everything to do with him and nothing to do with my actual partner. The way it had more to do with you than with her. It was just … hate. Even at the time, all I was thinking was ‘how many people can I punish simply by sleeping with Eleanor Hewlett?’ And when I examine my justifications today is all seems so petty, so banal -”

Hewlett felt determined not to fall into this trap in the way he had the autumn prior. Perhaps Tarleton was right in his observation that Simcoe felt vindicated seeing him over taken with an anger that any man of reason would have felt but that Simcoe, at least, could not seem to control within himself. He softened his tone, extending an invitation to Simcoe’s second-favourite sense of self, the sullen victim – sensitive, sad and woefully misunderstood. He placed his palm atop his beloved enemy’s fingers, tapping something tuneless on his kneecap in a show of stress. “Well,” he started, “you were nearly expelled on count of preserving my reputation. I can certainly understand why you hated me in particular.”

“No, it was … about five years after the fact,” Simcoe countered. “It was everything that was going on at school. We were doing Shakespeare that year and the class elected to stage a play rather than sit the final, I was given one of the lead roles and Ells was in the commons helping me run lines during the holidays. When I get stressed I can’t hear and it was worse back then when I was hyperactive in trying to hide it. I was reading Juliette because everyone was having a laugh at my voice, which made rehearsals damn near impossible. Effie and I actually broke up for a few months because of it, well that and cursed football team. I’d lost out on the captaincy in September in favour of Tarleton and Effie was happy - openly – over this social development, thinking that without the responsibility of leadership I’d have more time to woo her, but it only made me train harder and things just fell apart between us. And I hated Ban, I hated him in that teenage way that supersedes reason, though if asked I could have cited many at the time, all of which ultimately would have amounted to envy. I though he was better than me, and so did he, and so did seemingly everyone else and it stung me to my core. He was mediocre in every respect in which one would or rather should be judged in such an institution – academics, athletics … but everyone loved him where I was shunned or shut out and the most infuriating thing about it was that he didn’t ever seem to notice. It was so natural to him to bend the four acres that comprised our world at that age to his every fancy … at the time it seemed as though he didn’t try because he didn’t have to whereas I worked constantly and had to contend myself with scraps.

“Of course, looking back that is absolute bullocks,” Simcoe continued, speaking swiftly as tough he feared he might otherwise catch the words determined to escape him if he paused long enough to level his tongue. “He was as broken as the rest of us, as I suppose most kids are. But then, to me, he just had everything – a huge, tight knit family where he was at least his father’s clear favourite among his many siblings, the captaincy I coveted, he eventually became class speaker – was impeached due to some disciplinary measure only to be re-elected by a near-to unanimous vote, myself of course being the only stand out. He had a girlfriend, always, often multiple at once - even with the stain of that same reputation and the dating pool being as small as it was - hell, even when he would bring a girl back to ours and she inevitably saw that he spent at least twice as long preening each morning as she might, they all just adored him. The worst of it was that, though I would stand to argue that he was never kind, he was always nice, nice enough, anyway, that no one else could be bothered to resent him as I had come to, quietly indicating that the loathing that sustained me at times wasn’t warranted.

“But then there was Ellie, who was simply off limits to him and whom I strongly suspected he was
sensitive about. We shared a stage kiss in the common room. I stopped and asked what we were doing – no one was there, everyone was at home with their families or – not at home, on some ski slope or property they owned on another island with a warmer climate then the one we all shared. For reasons I still don’t understand, she told me about how you shot a horse and how everyone in your household … how you all behaved as though such was normal. I had … such little trouble believing that, for you, it was. Normal. I’ve no intentions towards animal cruelty, but I wanted to be you all the same in the moment you had taken that shot. I wanted to have everyone simultaneously fear and pity me nearly as much as I wanted to be loved. So I fucked my ex’s best friend, a girl who shared your name, on the bed of a boy I had no real reason to hate as much I did, hoping he would smell her perfume and my sweat in his sheets when he got back from the Swiss Alps, as though to say to him ‘look, I’ve had the one thing you never will’ or, to you ‘I can get away with the unthinkable just as easily’ or to Effie, ‘you never meant anything to me anyway, and yes, for the record, I do think Ells has always been hotter. Frankly, it is hardly a secret that most of your friends are.’

“Ellie herself had nothing to do with it. That was my first time. It wasn’t hers. I could tell but … I didn’t think too much into it. Effie and I made up when she returned to school and Ellie and I agreed that we should never talk about what happened over break to anyone. I kind of hoped Ban would find out somehow all the same.”

Hewlett was lost for words. Simcoe, by contrast, was far from finished with his confession.

“She told him, recently, to punish him I suppose. It seems to be the only motivator she has in life. I think that is my fault, too. Ban told me something, his assessment of the whole twelve-minute affair … he said that I only sleep with women who see me as an escape, who wish me to be gone in the morning, who don’t fancy me and hope that I’ve the basic curtesy not to fancy them either. It is sick and sad and yet I believe it to be true. It was with Sally, at least. It would have been with Anna had things gotten that far. I imagine it is with Mary as well. That, if you must know, is why I am not pursuing things any further with her. She deserves more that I can give.”

“John,” Hewlett began, inadvertently squeezing at his sometimes-friend’s hand in earnest. He, his sister, Banastre Tarleton and Elizabeth Gwillim all possessed a certain, sometimes clandestine disposition towards irrational cruelty, as did Sally Townsend, as, he strongly suspected, did Anna Strong. No one Simcoe named in his considered recollection, however, had half the capacity for torture as the man seemed to suffer without pause within his own masochistic mind. “I think you are affording this more credence than the claim itself warrants, consider -”

“But you?” Simcoe laughed loudly, cutting him off. “Your first time was passionate love-making to the woman you are going to marry. Your world is literally falling apart and yet for you nothing existed in that moment except for the girl you will spend the rest of your life with. I’m not surprised … nor am I surprised that I am jealous of you for it -”

At this Hewlett laughed as well. “I lost my virginity at thirty-five. You lost yours at sixteen. Of course there were differences, of course we face different problems and let them define us in different ways at various stages of life. You are mad because you’ve grown up enough to see that the envy and anger you held tightly as a boy no longer means as much to you – and why would it? You are more than your past mistakes, or errors of judgement or however you would have it defined.”

“Do you think so?” Simcoe asked.

“Do you still think of me in those terms, of the boy who shot his stallion?”

A long silence followed. “I don’t know,” Simcoe admitted. Sometimes I worry you are not,
Hewlett knew what he meant. “Sometimes I worry that you are right,” he sighed. Nodded. Continued with more trust than he had begun. “After – almost immediately after DS Yilmaz brought your and Tarleton’s little property scheme to the forefront of my attention – a French secret service agent, the one, mind, whom I obtained the list of companies from, came to question me on the same matter. On why you took Tarleton’s tip, which was the easiest for the NYPD to crack in your code. John … I’m not quite sure how to say this, but you need to meet with him, with this Lafayette. We need to meet with him. Not at … not under any formal construct. You see I’ve, that is, I miscalculated exactly what it means to be related by marriage to the man holding the allegiance of the most powerful army in the world. The French have been keeping tabs on my family for years. They have been … working with, sometimes exploiting the … rather regrettable sources of our wealth to their ends, same as the English. It is not important in itself.”

“It certainly sounds important -”

“What is important is that Lafayette was tasked with having a conversation within my earshot that betrayed information his superiors guessed based on prior evidence I would not be able to resist putting into your hands. Since the incident in Glasgow they have had an eye on you as well, at least, they have had an eye on the trajectory of your career, trusting that you had the sense to use this information in a way that would lead to conditions to facilitate a trade deal which the rise of right wing nationalism in the western world is closing the window on enacting. If certain companies generate growth in the second quarter the agreement is certain to get past the final round of legislation, passing regardless of which way the referendum goes in Britain, or the election in the US, or the one they will have next year in France, in a sense saving the free market from politics and, perhaps, politics from the people who vote.

“I don’t think they much care if you, or I, or Akinbode profit personally from our involvement, the problem lies in your having transferred funds in Tarleton’s -or the Tarletons’ – interest, whatever those may be .”

“I honestly did not consider for a moment -” Simcoe started. His trembling fingers formed themselves into a tight fist.

“Consider this: the purchase alerted the police to our illicit financial activity. You need to be careful.”

“Maybe that was his goal,” Simcoe mused. “Originally, anyway.”

“But?” Hewlett inquired anxiously.

“I think it is possible that Ban suspects you or I had a hand to play in Arnold’s disappearance. Because of some other shit he is in he hinted that he might be willing to take the fall in so long as I might find a means to recommit your family’s business interest in Merseyside. I don’t know why it is so important -”

“We are the largest employer,” Hewlett said offhand. “From what I understand from The Echo, city council has implemented measures in recent years that have caused multiple other large businesses to relocate for tax reasons. The shipping contracts we’ve had for twenty years are due to expire in the fall and the board wants to transfer trade to Copenhagen. The concern is legitimate, although … I don’t know what Ban personally gets from it.”

“I think he was proud to be his father’s son,” Simcoe offered. The excuse seemed so laughably middle-class.
“So he means to suffer for his sins?” Hewlett spat. “It isn’t important. I could … I have several cards I might yet play in terms of … the influence I carry within my own house. Let me think on it.”

“Let me handle it,” Simcoe said.

“That is the thing … we can’t afford to make any more mistakes. We can’t afford any more suspicious transfers or purchases or … John, the people with a bigger stake in this, the powers that be, they could make this disappear. This whole thing with Arnold. If we cooperate, that is. If we don’t -”

“We’ll be hung as spies rather than shot as officers?” Simcoe bit his lip. “We’ll see about that.”

The was the response Hewlett ought to have expected. He realised that his hopes, again, had been set too high.

He saw her first in the lobby where it was strange to see anyone save for the sentinel charged with protecting the buildings few residents from the realities of the wider world that did not warrant entrance into a property where flats were priced in the millions. She was an element of this outside, a call girl clinging to the arm of a former congressman whom Simcoe would not have recognised without a prior sex scandal that played all too well into the puns that naturally generated from the man’s surname. He snapped a picture which he was quick to text to Effie Gwillim, a ‘thank you’ without having to say as much for the role The Daily Mail had played in securing in his Sunday release without charge. The three shared an uncomfortable ride in the lift whilst he read a quick series of responses he initially assumed to be in reference to the scandal he had brought to press attention, but his erstwhile bride again disappointed his expectations. Nothing of what she thought she had to say was in any way related to Anthony Weiner or the adult actress entangled in his embrace.

Simcoe put his phone back into his pocket, suddenly set on ruining the night of yet another political figure. When the door opened for the couple’s exit, he took the girl by the hand and opened her to bidding. Charmed by his chequebook, she bid her former suitor adieu and followed Simcoe two floors up to his penthouse suite with the unmade bed that still stank of Hewlett’s sex on which she took a seat.

Slowly, Lola began to remove the straps of her dress from her shoulders, alluring in itself but far too coquettish from what substantial experience had thought him was his taste. He recognised her from a number of websites hosting those videos he watched when otherwise idol, hoping for vicarious satisfaction as his hand stimulated the flow of blood to his hardening cock.

Addressing her by her screen name felt too direct despite all that which her striptease was suggesting. He walked to his kitchen, saddened to see that most of the beverages stolen form the bar had been drunken or poured down the drain. “Can I get you anything?” he offered anyway, his mind already set on placing an order with the concierge.

Lola wore a seductive smile and little else as she moved to join him where he stood, searching a drawer that served the purpose of storing things that did not otherwise have a place for the menu he had been given when he first moved in. For the first time he felt impolite staring, wondering if her exquisite physique had been surgically enhanced, worried that touching her would undo what few
illusions she left him.

John Graves Simcoe had never paid for sex before, nor had he ever brought a woman back to his flat for that sole purpose. Perhaps, he considered as she began to say sweet things in inviting tones, all he was looking for was what he had just bought. Perhaps it always had been and he had merely afforded other encounters a false construct for part of him had been too cowardly to face the truth and all of its implications.

“What is her name?” Lola asked when he seemed unresponsive. “I can be her.”

“Hurt me,” Simcoe whispered, seeing Mary Woodhull when he closed his eyes, drawing Lola into a kiss. He felt his hands encircling the small red-head’s throat as she cried out for her husband in a fit of pleasure, stiffening in the moment as he remembered her meeting his sudden attack, digging her nails into his neck as she squeezed her legs together, so tight, moist and hot that she robbed him of his seed in the self-same moment. Lola teased him with suggestion but made no actual move to do that which he asked. When Simcoe grew weary of her lack of immediate aggression and pulled back from their kiss, from the teeth that cut against his lower lip without the curtesy of drawing blood, he told her she might put her pretty mouth to better uses and felt her open palm meet his face in a hard slap. He smiled. She turned away, moving to open the cupboard over the stove he left largely un-stocked.

“Take it,” she said of her lacy thong when he moved to trace its length along her hips, “No, no,” she said. “On your knees. Don’t use your hands.” Lola proceeded to pour the contents of an expired box of dry, sugary breakfast cereal on the floor between them, telling him to remove his trousers. He let them fall to his ankles as he watched her stilettos work what had once been food into a fine powder, finding that it cut into his skin as his kneecaps met the floor. “Don’t use your hands,” she warned him again, pulling at his hair and crushing his fingers beneath her heel when he again attempted to disobey.

The pain lessened when his tongue found her pleasure point before he had half-completed his task. In her taste, he, too, forgot the scene he was in and those that it stood for in his mind, all of the girls who were gone when they decided they had enough of what he was able to give, or that it had not been enough, that he ought to have known better than to try. Lola let out a long moan as his hand moved to replace his tongue within her, that his oral organ might better focus on vibrating itself against her clit whilst her sweat and sex burned his bloodied fingers with their salt. Lola shifted and he could feel her bracing herself against the stove as he brought her into a scream.

When he looked up, he saw she had taken a knife from his counter. “My turn,” she smiled, slightly out of breath.

He had, of course, in his time, prior experiences of being tied to a bedpost, but such was never seamless nor were the knots quite so secure. He remembered visiting a sex shop with Effie when she turned eighteen, her eyes wide with wonder and worry, seeming to ask what he wanted rather than contend with what she was willing to try. At home she laughed as she fumbled with the instructions, dampening his drive and fuelling him to frustration, a fight that might have turned itself into anger filled sex with the goal of pure self-satisfaction on the part of both parties had her awkward giggles not left him limp. He remembered in contrast the various encounters he had with Ellie after she had first taken him as though he were an entitlement, fucking her hard and fast in the school’s stables, his fingers half stuck with sweat to the parts of her breeches designed to grip a saddle whilst she made good use of her riding whip – good use until she had the nerve to enquire if it hurt terribly, pulling her lips into a small, perhaps practiced pout as though to indicate she cared about the answer, though he suspected it made little difference if he had given a ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Sally had been as silent in bed as he heard Quakers were in Meeting, she buried her face and with it any
cries of pleasure or pain into a pillow when a pull of her hair or a particularly hard thrust and having had hers hardly extended him the same curtesy which had been half of the appeal. When he watched Lola previously on Pornhub he pictured Anna mimicking her cuts with his body as her canvas. The closest he had ever come to the sensation, however, was Edmund extending a dull and dirty blade in a fit of uncharacteristic anger before fleeing naked into the night, only to show up at his some days later to watch an international friendly which Simcoe personally preferred to remember for the goal Dele Alli scored against France than for the deviant pleasure he had in his sometimes-friend’s attempts to cauterize the wound he had left, a Hewlettonian expression of remorse if ever he had seen one.

With his hands bound, he could do nothing to stop Lola from slowly tracing the scar on his chest, worse, he well suspected, than it might have been had he not been burned by a knife he knew to be from the same set as the one she teased him with, asking if he trusted her. When she covered the eyes he could not bring himself to close with one of his silk neckties, she cut him off from anything that felt fully real – the pain and pleasure he experienced as she began to ride him falling together as though they had always been one, making him question exactly how long he had existed in this state where everything that fell short of extremity failed to make an impression. Blind, deaf, and most assuredly dumb he again found himself returning to the room in which the sensations Lola sold had truly been one in the same. He found himself in Mrs Woodhull’s office, his beloved bent back over her desk, screaming the name of the man whose picture filled nearly every frame on her wall. It made no difference when, struggling for air and under duress he had gotten her to say his. What he heard was ‘I’m married.’

What he heard was that - as it was with the scar on his chest - one sin could not be atoned with another. Perhaps, this crime made the one they might yet be prosecuted for all the more clear.

He saw and felt Mary within Lola. He must have cried her name at some point during the night for long after things between them had ended, his makeshift chains loosened enough through intercourse that with some struggle he had freed himself to find her gone, he found she had left a missive on his bathroom mirror – written in a lipstick not quite the shade she had worn. A colour that reminded him very much of Mary Woodhull’s cherry flavoured lip gloss, something Lola must have guessed at by the way he must certainly have mourned and moaned her name.

Maybe I should be paying you for being so sweet to me. XOXO – “Mary” he read, leaving his eyes to linger on her four letters that said so much. Lola had lived up to her promise. She could be her, and perhaps she would again should he require such companionship without the strings he had been told he feared. He looked over the card she left with a number, her real name and another lipstick stain and left it in the shelf where it stood against his aftershave.

Upon treating his various wounds with peroxide that bubbled and blistered in his countless abrasions, washing himself free of sting and scent, he retired to his sofa, positioning the pillow to better watch for the sun, soon sure to rise over the city as it had not seemed to since the day he had sat at Hewlett’s bedside in hospital back in January when the world was at its darkest.

John Graves Simcoe was a warrior, not a monster, but as neon and florescent lights from the skyline faded with the break of dawn the blur between his ideal and the assessment the world seemed to ascribe broke down. He was a coward when it came to commitment of any kind. The people he had come to resent the most were the ones who had demonstrated their care and dedication time and again. There was something serene in this thought that surpassed the doubts he carried and concealed like a weapon he meant to wield against himself at any given moment, that surpassed any call to anger or envy born out in an urge for violent acts. For a time, he closed his eyes until the words that had weighed heavy upon him for days again found themselves in focus, taking a different tone than the one instinct and opinion had forced upon his broken ears and
shattered heart.

He took his phone off its charger to check the stock ticker, guessing at what was wanted, guessing at what was right, certain that cauterization closed wounds and worsened scars.

He would call Lola again. But he could not call her Mary, for she was holy ground on which he dare not tread.

Leo Messi as she knew him had the same basic characteristics and mannerisms of most of her interns. He stood to the left of her monitor and nodded his agreeance to her every suggestion, providing an air rather than an action of support. Mary Woodhull hated him as she hated everyone and everything else that entered her office of late. Like the teens and twenty-somethings who came to UNICEF ‘for every child’ (whatever they took that to mean), Mary would not have known his name were it not printed beneath the bobble-head souvenir she had been given along with a pair of tickets to a soccer match years back when the Spanish side came to North America for something called a friendly, her bosses imagining that she had any particular interest in watching grown men run around wearing the name of her employer on their shirts.

She again flicked her index finger against his wobbling head in frustration. He nodded. It was not quite sympathy. It was a sentiment she understood all too well.

“Are you a Barcelona fan, Mrs Woodhull?” her guest asked from the other side of her sizeable desk.

“What?” she snapped.

“The player … never mind,” Simcoe answered before falling again into the sort of silence Mary had begun to believe herself the muse of at least when it came to men.

“What colours would I need to wear for you to understand that we are on the same team?” she slighted. “And its Mary. You’ve seen me naked. We can call one another by our given names.”

“It was a mistake,” he said distantly. Mary followed his eyes from Messi to messy, to the pictures of her small family she had hanging on her office wall to offset various awards and certificates and the coldness they seemed to create, not that it admittedly helped much under normal circumstances. Sometimes, Mary saw the photos of her and Abraham in the way one looked upon the people existing for the purpose of selling the frame itself, an image one was meant to trade for one that held more personal meaning.

Her whole marriage seemed itself a frame.

Without glancing back, she tried to imagine what it was that John saw within the image that caused him such pause. He had come to her house the evening prior, made cordial conversation with her housemates, helped Cicero and his friend from soccer with their homework, and for what seemed a terribly long while, kept Hewlett’s company in the apartment over the garage, now too filled with the artefacts of the life Abigail had been brave enough to leave behind for her to hazard a listen.

In this construct, Mary, despite her broken ankle, had found it natural to fall back into the role she knew too well. She cooked dinner for everyone. When it became apparent in the course of the meal that followed that John had no more interest in speaking with her than he had when he had arrived,
she fell silent until such time as he took his leave, shortly after Mrs Hamilton had arrived to pick Pip up, exchanging a few words with the petit Asian woman over traffic on his way out, more, Mary noted, than the night had shown he deemed she herself deserving of. Hewlett retired too after his friend had gone and the boys had gone out back to play in the evening’s fading light. Mrs Hamilton accepted Mary’s offer of coffee and conversation and the five women had spent the next hour or so in the company on one another’s laughter until the clock drew such to a close. All the while, Abe was absent. John had come without having been there. The mistake, Mary thought to herself, was not having extra material sex or saying her husband’s name out of force of habit. It was expecting that comradery had a place in any sort of romantic union, illicit or otherwise.

In this room, on this desk, Mary had gone too far in the demands and expectations she had placed upon raw desire. Perhaps having seen her lose skin and stretch marks, John could not longer see her as being worthy of want. Perhaps he struggled to see her as his partner in crime as well. Perhaps, he stared upon the photographs hanging behind her and saw only the frames, replacing their contents with pictures more familiar, more too his liking. Hewlett, or an ex who worked for a newspaper, or a friend at the embassy, or a family over which he never spoke.

“For me, Mr Simcoe, for wanting to remain in the loop -”

“My business with Hewlett last night doesn’t concern … the various things you and I have done in the dark,” John said, still too distant for this to sound much like a warning he meant Mary to heed. “You’ll understand, I’ve made enough mistakes as you are concerned, I’ve upset your entire life by subjecting it to my presence, I can’t involve you -”

“I have nothing else going on. Try me,” she said, smiling in the way wild beasts did when they were readying to attack. It was not in fact the case that on this or any other afternoon, Mary Woodhull, Deputy Head of Public Relations, had any time to waste at work. She had to create a school for orphans in West Africa to coincide with a project that had been well-funded but had never come to fruition in the way her employer claimed, which, was to say, the sum had likely paid for the bonuses of an number of executives or had paid to put the organization’s logo of the shirts of star athletes and on the bobble-heads to which they lent their likeness. She had been here before. Perhaps her expression said as much. John Graves Simcoe, by contrast, said nothing. As he had since entering her office with takeaway they both had yet to touch, he stared at the screen of his phone with a blank expression.

“You have yet to answer my question,” she said of the text that had summoned him.

“I have a conflict of interest,” he answered blandly. “I have to convince the board of a large company to renew a contract that itself creates a conflict for their balance sheet due to an increase in local property tax when they have already voted to begin moving jobs next year. The firm’s junior CFO who was set to take a meeting that would finalize the relocation was arrested last week prior to that happening in conjunction with a confession our Hewlett was foolish to give; Edmund telling the DA by way of demonstrating his honesty and, perhaps, intentions that he once committed cooperate fraud at his father’s urging whist still a minor, prompting an audit of the family’s various for- and non-profit undertakings, including the company and contract in question.

“Part of the issue, insofar as I see it, is that the French expect this change which would strengthen stock value to be implemented … and I know this because Hewlett Industries is one of the businesses – forgive me, Mrs Woodhull, I can’t involve you in this.”

“It’s Mary.”

“Even still.”
“If it has anything to do with Hewlett’s confession and the case -” she began.

“I met someone,” Simcoe interrupted, his pale features suddenly ridden with apology.

“Even still,” Mary returned.

“I should -”

“I appreciate your openness and honesty and ask that we continue our conversation in that same
spirt,” Mary said with a light smile that seemed to crush his soul. He nodded but was slow to comply. She, in turn, was slow to listen.

In a conversation he had initiated on Monday morning with Colonel Tarleton, Simcoe had been
given that which Tallmadge could not get a subpoena to obtain, namely, John André’s research
proposal and corresponding findings. In exchange, Simcoe had been asked to act in the interest of a
business arrangement set to expire, having heard a confession that itself seemed a desperate plea.

“I haven’t mentioned this to Hewlett yet in so many words. I don’t know that such would be wise.
He called me into a private meeting with regard to … his personal finances, which my contract
forbids me from expanding upon, excepting perhaps to say that given the scope of the case that is
being built against him are an element of interest to Tallmadge and his team.”

“And are they very interesting?”

“No, but I think you should,” Mary hissed, drawn momentarily away from mental images of the
women who might have replaced her in the role she had briefly occupied in Simcoe’s heart by
memories of Aberdeen’s uncontrolled sobs on Saturday morning. Perhaps, her co-conspirator was
correct in his assessment that his presence had upset her entire life. Perhaps here was where the
line was drawn and they, unknowingly, had long since crossed it.

According to Simcoe, her au pair had acquired Hewlett’s car on Friday night after she had agreed
to help him ease drop on a member of the French secret service who had attached himself to the
Arnold case, accompanying ADIC Hamilton of the FBI and DI Tallmadge of the NYPD in the
initial round of questioning. This man, Monsieur Lafayette, had spoken to Hewlett directly the day
before, interrupting an interrogation with the NYPD on the same topic, telling him that he had been
tasked with putting said information into his hands, hoping, that Hewlett in turn, would put it in
Simcoe’s.

“What I do is followed and mimicked by a number of market speculators. That I have invested
Hewlett money has generated subtle growth in certain sectors, creating conditions to allow the
passage of a trade deal, itself helped by the affect Arnold’s extended disappearance has had on the
dollar.”

“How is that affecting exchange rate?” Mary asked.

“Public alarm and international uncertainty. It is the same with any news item that calls security
into doubt. This … what Hewlett and I are engaged in, would not have attracted the attention of the
NYPD were it not for a purchase that I made outside of that which I was given to work from.
Here,” he said, handing over his phone.

“This says ‘property’,” Mary read with a certain degree of scepticism.

“In an effort to disguise our interests in DeJong Tavern – a bid, by the way, which I lost on to
Eugene Hewlett, Edmund’s brother, the CFO who was arrested upon landing in Copenhagen – I bought up a number of Setauket properties from a shell company that turns out to be run by a member of Tarleton’s family.”

Mary skimmed the chat as Simcoe continued, swearing her to secrecy. “You can’t say anything of what I am prepared to tell you. Even to Edmund … perhaps especially to Edmund given the reactions André’s therapy was designed to elicit.”

“And what is that precisely?”

“In his thesis, he states that the enemies of freedom -”

“Is that Bush-era for ‘Muslims’?” Mary wondered, certain she had heard that wording before.

“I think it American for anyone who can give them reason to invade or oppose sanctions or tariffs. But here – specifically, this deals with the more violent inclination of man. André’s understanding was that fear in an instinct that we culturally except as an emotion, therefore allowing us, or rather soldiers, to overcome it, replacing flight with fight, with violence in the extreme. I’ve seen examples of how this has thus worked on a civilian population not responding to a given set of orders. I don’t want to see what that which I am about to share would do to Edmund if confronted with it at this point. I … I lived this second hand. Last night, unable to cope with the horrors I might have prevented or at least reduced,” Simcoe stopped. He loosened his tie and began to unbutton his shirt. Mary felt her eyes grow wide as the glimpsed scabbing gashes he told her were more extensive than he cared to let on. “I paid someone to do this. I wanted to feel pain. It is all I want and I have fewer qualms than I might otherwise like to imagine about causing it, as Arnold, I’m sure, stands evidence. Hewlett,” he said after a small pause, “did this with a butter knife in October when I told him I’d had sex with his sister.”

“With a butter knife?” Mary blinked.

“So to speak.”

“My lips are sealed,” Mary swore, returning her gaze to a photograph Simcoe had sent someone who might have once been a friend.

What followed was a shock if not exactly a surprise in the hindsight of her having long known a central figure to the saga Simcoe sought to relay. The current Duke of Richmond who held a conglomerate of other titles, mostly in Scotland, had once been in a consanguinely betrothed to a girl more than a decade his junior, had acted upon his rights as husband before he quite held them and had gotten her with child. This act ended the affair insofar as it might rightly be called one and saw a fourteen-year-old noblewoman hidden away with her daughter until the duke’s brother wed her in his place when she reached the age of consent, a scandal of sorts designed to conceal a greater injustice. The union that followed was successful in that it secured an heir and a spare, as English law to that age forbid women from inheriting such titles. This changed in 2012, shortly before Edmund Hewlett, heir presumptive to an expansive thrown, arrived in America as Prince George’s parents had not wished to know the gender of their first child and the Crown did not wish to leave such matters to later speculation.

Though Simcoe suspected his sometimes friend of lusting for power, he was not surprised that the man yearned to be free of the surname that came with it. The Hewletts were historically notorious when it came to capital gains and the aggressive means they had of defending this passive income. Edmund’s father had business pursuits partially in the private sector, giving the green energy projects he had been at the forefront of before since before this had become a profitable market curious bedfellows. One of these was the late, long-serving Tory mayor of one of Britain’s largest
cites whose children’s every dead seemed to confess a darker shade of the deals he had made with a landless lord to reduce Liverpool’s deficit, the other, was a tabloid owner who had somehow gained a twenty-percent stake in company shares. As Mary had heard on Sunday night, it was speculated that he had been poisoned when he sought to extend his reach, leaving his unborn daughter heir to what time would turn into one of the most profitable companies in Europe.

Time, however, was stagnant for quite a while and at the turn of the century it was speculated that the Hewletts risked bankruptcy. Edmund, however, had seen a way out of this, a way that seemed not to take the first of the Hewlett’s house words into account. John had met him shortly after when Edmund asked him to act as a translator when he sought to investigate another such rumour about his family’s wealth that had popped up at regular intervals over the past several centuries, namely that it was first made in the opium trade, something, Simcoe repeated, he had learned all too well had been true. After a shoot out in a safe house, Simcoe had been abducted and Hewlett influence had swept the matter aside in reaches that invited more rumours, two of which Simcoe had recently been able to verify. Edmund’s mother, Lady Edith, had in fact poisoned the father of John’s former fiancée prior to Miss Gwillim’s birth. She had tried to end her own son’s life by the same methods a little over a decade later, mimicking the symptoms of stroke.

At school, John had seen the effect this had on Edmund’s two younger siblings, twins Eleanor and Eugene, both suddenly under enormous pressure to serve the family name. Eugene was for a time heir to a title he had spent his formative years with no expectation of inheriting and was forced to grow into this role, which, among other things, involved shrinking his waist in quick fashion, undergoing gastric bypass surgery to rid him of the baby fat puberty might otherwise have taken care of. He had been sick for the rest of his life due to complications and was currently in hospital - still, as far as Simcoe could tell, a person of interest for all of the warning factions looking to profit from Arnold’s disappearance. Eleanor had likewise been asked to replace her mother in the role unexpected pregnancy had stopped Edith from playing – sent to live with her uncle the duke in exchange for his allowing her father to build windfarms on his land, she had spent years victim to his sexuality until one day, she snapped.

At her half-sister’s wedding, Eleanor had made a number of threats to a large enough audience that it would be impossible for her to carry them out without facing conviction. She repeated parts of this conversation to Simcoe when she had returned to school. He told her in turn about the time he had been shot at in Sighthill.

In ways made possible by various leniency laws enacted at the same time Scotland was first hit with large scale migration, the following year a man was released from prison and Eleanor asked for John's help in settling a debt this human trafficker though he had with the Father of the French Legion, who happened to have a biological daughter as well, one who later went on to wed Eugene at that. Eleanor had arranged a meeting at an event that celebrated the opening of a sanctuary for small birds whose migratory patterns had been disrupted by her father’s windmills, sucking them into the spin that illuminated Britain and crating carnage with these blades. Meeting the man in a stable, instead of handing over a sum of money, Eleanor, who insofar as Simcoe could tell had since learned the ropes of the side business that supplemented the coin in the family’s coffers, pulled out a riot stick and with the precision of someone who had held a sabre since she could speak the word began to strike him down. Edmund, who had hobbled out for a smoke, had overhead the commotion that ensued when John had tried to reinstate order and come upon a scene he was quick to mis-assess. Perhaps in an admission of the guilt he felt over the last time he and Simcoe had seen or spoken to one another, he released one of the spooked stallions from its stable, lead it to trample upon the man he hoped to pass as a would-be horse thief, released the beast into the night and rang the police.

The story Edmund offered became the official explanation for the incident when the French secret...
service got involved, only, as memory served, after Eleanor had given a then-young homicide
detective an honest account of what had happened. The Direction générale de la sécurité extérieure
had kept tabs on all parties since.

“How closely?” Mary asked.

“Close enough,” Simcoe considered, “that they were able to put this trade scheme of theirs into
action hours after Arnold disappeared. Edmund gave me few details of his conversation with
Lafayette beyond to say that we could not afford to be so carless, that the French could shift any
number of fingers away from us in so long as we acted in their interests without calling undo
attention to it.”

Mary felt her heart stop. “So they might know that we, that you and I -”

“They might. But I cannot say with any degree of certainty. I have yet to arrange a meeting being
that I have a conflict of interest in the matter as I’ve already described.”

“I don’t see -” she began to protest.

“Tarleton all but told me that he murdered Edmund’s uncle and could not risk being in the vicinity
of his crime scene come Easter. To that end he indicated he … he was meant to give a speech
before Congress yesterday but I’ve yet to see anything about it in the news. I think the feds might
have gotten to him first, either way, he has gotten to me. I am afraid to call and I am afraid not to.”

“It is best you don’t. I’ll ask Abe if he knows anything about it,” Mary commented out of hand,
“he is constantly watching CSPAN.”

“Your husband,” Simcoe lingered. “No, no it is best we don’t let the Tarleton name get around.
Not here, not when Ban suspects -”

“What did you tell him?”

“Nothing about Arnold. Everything about you,” he indicated to his ear.

“Oh.”

“The thing is, he suspects me of murder primarily based on my actions a little under a year ago,
things I don’t remember, having read André’s research which Arnold’s committee helped fund. As
one can tell from the news ticker, Washington DC has used Arnold’s disappearance to create a
public outcry of support for a controversial bill that would see my therapy replace the current
practices employed in the three branches of military service. Britain wants the bill to pass for
precedent, that they might be given permission as it were to follow suit. I don’t know if this is part
of the French design, but I imagine a number of NATO countries are after these provisions. And if
Tarleton can’t stop this from happening - and, how could he? - … he thinks I might share this with
Talmadge, which might be a design on getting me to give evidence, essentially, against myself.
That said, I don’t know his end game. He wants me to used my business skills to save his city from
the economic downfall that would be created should the Hewletts move their lucrative assets and
trade to Copenhagen, which would suggest … I don’t know. As the text message proves he has
been playing me for some time.”

Mary considered everything she had been told as she spoke. “You and Effie Gwillim are still on
good terms, at least, she was able to use her media presence to create a protest that saw to your
release after you came to my rescue by assaulting the constable who broke my ankle.”

“I don’t know that I would call those ‘good terms’,” Simcoe slighted himself.
“She owns twenty percent of the company -”

“More now -”

“What would it take for her to gain a clear majority on the board?”

“Edmund’s father to retire and his four children to sell their stock.”

“Well that can’t be too hard.”

“It is a lost cause.”

“Why now?” Mary demanded of him.

“The market creates opportunities which -”

“No, you mentioned Tarleton is trying to kill the Duke of Richmond, why now? Why so many years after Eleanor made whatever threats she gave against his person?”

“I think he just found out about it. I … look,” he shifted, “Tarleton did something unspeakable that lead to him being court martialed. He was not charged but he won’t get another commission, and as long as he has the connections -”

This was not what Mary was after. “How old is Edmund’s niece?” she rephrased.

“Christ, I didn’t even think -”

“I know how to clean up a mess, John. I need you to trust me, and … I need you to leave.”

“What are you -”

“I’m about to secure myself a promotion. You are about to take that meeting Hewlett wants to arrange with Lafayette. Do everything he says. I can settle your other scores.”

“Mary, I can’t expect you -” She raised a finger for him to stop and pointed at the UNICEF mission statement. “I know what I am doing, but it is best if you don’t.”

“I -” Simcoe started.

Again, Mary cut him off. “Out of curiosity, what is her name, this someone you’ve met?” she asked, resting her chin on folded hands.

Mary Woodhull felt the air was too thick to breathe. She felt that which she had inhaled clog her throat, chocking her slightly. When she tried to swallow, she found her mouth was dry. The phone rang as the call connected. She closed her eyes and focused on the sound, trying to hear cheer in its empty reverberations.

If she pulled this off, she would be assured a promotion, the kind that came with the sorts of bonuses paid for in funds meant to establish schools for children underprivileged in ways she
recognised that as an American she would never appropriately understand, regardless of the basis her personal background provided. Mary would never know poverty again, even in the western sense where she had almost always had running water with which to wash. She would pay off the house in Setauket and sell it as part of the divorce settlement. She would be able to afford the kind of solicitor who could win her shared custody. She would move out of the suburbs and into the city and she swore she would never look back.

She did not need Simcoe’s help, eager as he had been to offer it before something better had come along. That said, he still clearly needed hers. Mary did not much care for foreign markets, French armies, or the policies and politics born from her crimes. She cared about her freedom, her family, and her friends, but life had shown her in the past week that love by its very nature was cautioned by loss.

Simcoe was gone to her as were the sweet things he had said, but Mary had come to agree wit the assessment he had offered all the same. She would leave her husband. He had, after all, left her long ago. As the phone continued to ring, Mary found that she would not miss the reality of Abe or the fantasy of John nearly as much as she would miss the girls who had more or less become her co-conspirators and constant company. She would miss giggling with Peggy and Aberdeen over guys when wine had rendered any argument between the two moot. She would miss Abigail’s silent strength. She would miss Anna and the years that vanished in her presence.

But these women could not follow her where she was prepared to go.

Anna, in particular, would never talk to her again. Perhaps it was for the best.

Mary opened her eyes. Leo Messi was still nodding. It was not quite supportive. It was not quite sympathetic. It was reflex, something Mary understood all too well.

>>Hello?<<

Mary swallowed her own nervous misgivings and spoke into the receiver of her secure work-line. “We’ve never spoken before, but I imagine you know who I am.”

>>UNICEF,<< came Ellie Hewlett’s answer.

“Mary Woodhull, Deputy Head of Public Relations,” she introduced herself, nearly forgetting the modifier. “Listen, I know it is late over there in the UK, but I need to sort something before leaving work and I believe you may be in a position to help. By chance, I came across a photograph earlier today of you volunteering at a refugee camp with Ban Tarleton,” she tried slowly, wondering if that was a real name, “and I was wondering if you might be able to do me a favour.”

>>You are Edmund’s landlady, are you not? Have you been watching the news? I dare imagine I’ve done enough for one day.<<

Mary knew, or rather had her suspicions, as to what the pretty little future-figurehead was referring. She did not wish to dwell on it. Though she called with the intent to instigate another heinous act, she cared less for organised crime than she did for secret meetings with agents who introduced themselves by way of acronym. She could not wait to put all of this behind her if only to prove to herself that she would not in fact miss this aspect of her new life as well.

“I need eighty West African orphans to attend a school that doesn’t exist … yet.”

>>Or so I’ve heard.<<

Mary clenched her jaw. This was not the first time something like this had happened within her
organization but it was the biggest disaster she had been asked to deal with to date. Ironically, she reasoned, if Arnold had not disappeared, were he not dominating the news, the public would be speaking of little else. She smiled. She knew how to clean up a mess.

“I’ve heard a number of interesting titbits too as of late, and I, at least, am willing to offer my assistance,” she said as though this were a threat. Eleanor could not, after all, see that she was shaking.

>>My brother <<

“Did nothing,” Mary interjected before Edmund Hewlett could again dominate a conversation he was not directly a part of. “No, of course not, and I am not ringing to suggest he did. What I am suggesting is that you and your friends are targeting the wrong man. I don’t mean to pass judgement, and, even were I positioned to, I should doubt I would disagree. I’m merely offering my assistance, seeing as that you could well kill two birds with one stone, or, " she paused, "however many I suppose you want with an entire windfarm. That said, I need something, or rather, a number of someones in exchange. Give me my eighty … and I’ll help you end them all.”

Chapter End Notes

Well that is one way to sort things …

Anyway, here are the day’s headlines, local news to follow the weather:

The show alluded to in Pip’s POV is, of course, Versailles, of which I got through about two episodes (... which has more to do with my inability to sit still than the show itself.) My French is nowhere near good enough to tell you if the language used was dated, but I can tell you that the euphuisms which coloured the young mister Hamilton’s sexual awakening were translations from Shakespeare. ;)

Marta is a Brazilian football player, generally regarded to be the best woman in the game.

Messi is an Argentinian footballer, widely considered to be the best of all time – but unlike Marta, he’ll never win the World Cup …

Inter[nazionale] Milan gets its name from the academies it has placed all over the world. Juventus is owned by the multi-industry Agnelli business dynasty, who, until this past summer, have generally had a reputation of responsible club spending. In case you missed it, let me link you to the best sport financing story I have read in recent years: Executed by Fiat (that is not the title, it has been a month and I am still pissed that the English media did not see this clear punning opportunity.)

I have probably mentioned this in the notes to some prior chapter, but the Tarleton family proper made its fortune in the slave trade in addition to other capital pursuits. Historically, they seem to have had no sense of the relationship politics played in corporate gains - to use an example that proves the argument, as an MP, Ban Tarleton
was hard on about commerce (in the most immoral ways imaginable), so much so that by the time he retired 40% of all of the world’s trade went through Liverpool, which seems insane but more to the point almost certainly enriched his extended family … who were consistently loath to lend him money (and where they did, there was always a catch like ‘please leave the country’ or ‘break up with your girlfriend’ (and preferably both.)) I hate that this is now part of my general knowledge. To be fair though, I would not know nearly so much about Tarleton were he from Manchester or some other (lesser) city.

The Liverpool Echo is my favourite local newspaper. Instead of having a normal Sport section, they put all of their Liverpool FC and Everton FC news on separate broadsheets, because, you know, who cares about whatever is going on at the other club. I’m into it.

Anthony Weiner is a former congressman who is currently serving a federal sentence as a sex offender. I did not know this about him from following the many, many scandals in which he’s appeared over the past decade or so, but in my research for this chapter I discovered that he had a supporting role in ‘Sharknado 3: Oh Hell No!’ which, to be honest, is half the reason he made the final cut, so I would have reason to put this in the notes.

Does your local representative embarrass their constituency in ways that extend past their normal parliamentary duties? Let me know in the comments!

As always, thank you so much for reading. XOXO – Tav

Up Next: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead
The Wake

Chapter Summary

Anna and Edmund plan a life together, Edmund plans to keep certain details of his secret from his bride to be. Rogers expects Abe to break under pressure, Robeson is altogether shattered. Simcoe meets with Lafayette, Ben unexpectedly finds himself delivering bad news to his prime suspects. Arnold’s whereabouts are revealed. Evidence is exchanged over cocktails with offensive names as the lads try to cope with the concept of loss.

Chapter Notes

I am still agnostic around the idea of writing for one’s self. I, of course, would like to credit myself with that level of confidence, but let’s be honest – a chapter of Hide and Seek is about fifty to eighty hours of work for two to four comments from you all and the euphoria they bring (something, I’m sure, my fellow writers can well relate to.) That said, there are a number of small things here and within the larger universe that are particular to me or rather to realities I want to see portrayed in fiction of any kind (because representation matters or however one would choose to frame it.) Things such as characters with disabilities they don’t let define them, mixed race couples where neither party is white, secular Muslims, women of all shapes and sizes kicking ass, hell, basic things like kids with acne and adults who still carry this distinct scar of adolescence …

But you guys. YOU GUYS, for all of the words in which my self-righteousness shines, I have to admit, I have said nothing that remotely lives up to the ways in which this German / Polish detergent commercial challenges social norms. Watch it. It shows a man doing laundry, which doesn’t sound like it should be remarkable until you consider the inherent sexism of how everything that has to do with soap is sold, women wistfully dancing with the clothes they have just cleaned, mothers holding their little girls up to show them how clean one product was able to get a table cloth or dishes in comparison to a competitor, looking at her as though to say ‘and one day, my dear, you too will spend a goodly portion of your life cleaning up after other people, just as Mummy does.’ I hate that so much. We need to change this in a way that extends past one spot.

Stepping off my soap-box (ayyyy!) for a moment to actually introduce this update: this chapter contains major injury and minor character death. There it is, you’ve been warned. Now have fun and travel safe.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Quiet nights were the worst for these invited rumination in to one’s active mind as though it were an old friend rather than an obstacle to the task at hand. He had fifteen minutes in which to find temporary solace from an enemy who would always win in the end, yet all he could do it seemed
was to stare at the havoc death reeked on those who stood in his periphery, the friends and relatives of those patients who might not last the night. The nurse found himself looking at the only man in the lobby whom he knew by name, a man who seemed to know more than he himself did about a surgery he had assisted in a few hours prior, or, at least, about its outcome. The patient would not wake up for a few hours and would not be able to speak when he did, but if practice set precedent he would wake up, which from the hospital’s perspective would make the operation a success.

The nurse frowned. The man’s stance seemed to indicate otherwise.

The breakroom by the nurses’ station was just big enough for the coffee machine it contained and the small sink used for the sole purpose of refilling the cannister when it came time to put another pot on. Ayaz Yilmaz turned to judge the current contents, ultimately electing to forgo the cup he came for lest he be tasked with brewing the next batch. He stood in the too-small doorway, turning his attention back to a scene so common in the ICU that the content of this conversation was clear from the posture of the men having it. The speaker’s spine was rigidly straight, his hands slighted downward, an unconscious caution for the two to whom he spoke to keep their fragile calm.

They should have stayed seated, but they never did.

No one ever did.

Death demanded all to rise in salute. Such could rarely be sustained.

Yilmaz watch as one of the men being spoken to slumped back into his seat, likely too crippled by shock to hear the condolences that followed. The other began to pace, forgetting the pain in the leg half-covered in a brace, or, perhaps, needing to feel it acutely to convince himself that he had not just died as well.

Ayaz Yilmaz had spent forty years in intensive care. He knew this conversation word for word and would not have given it much (if any) consideration were it one of his colleagues having it with the family members of a patient who had not pulled through rather than one of his eldest daughter’s. Tallmadge was a detective playing doctor, perhaps in response to his surroundings. Another nurse slid past Yilmaz, asked if he wanted what little was left of the pot which he had no want to refill as basic etiquette would then demand, pouring it for herself when he shook his head no. Yilmaz did not remove his eyes from the interaction that had captured his attention. The inspector took a seat beside the tall ginger when the third member of their part indicated that he had no intention of letting whatever had been said between them sink in in this particular setting and made his way towards the lift, leaving his crutches behind in the corner where they stood.

“Sheila?” Yilmaz said to the woman in slightly nicer scrubs with the unenviable task of manning the garrison – telling doctors and nurses where to attend and grieving relatives where to wait.

“What is the status of 1216?”

“Stable,” she answered blandly. He asked this every time he walked by, at least, he had since Sunday when the constable had been transferred to his unit for observation.

“And 1245?” he inquired of the patient who had filled half of the chairs in the lobby on this otherwise silent night. His name was Charles Joyce, but Yilmaz knew him only by the number of his bed and by the injury he had attended - a slit throat, a blood transfusion, a dozen or so grieving friends struggling to make sense of the attack. He glanced over his shoulder at the ten men whom Tallmadge had declined to share his update, instead seeing himself as a much younger man in their place, spending his break at the bedside of his beloved, a girl he then called ’714’ and a few of his co-workers referred to as ‘PKK’. A girl who wrote him little notes – English phrases in phonetic signs, unaware that he was already planning to take her with him when he left the country at the
month’s end.

The attack that had taken 1245’s voice had been just as brutal.

He wondered who among these men would be able to leave it in the past when their friend eventually recovered to the extent that he might, if it was personality or proximity that determined such fates. He saw far more blood each day than most men would ever witness in a lifetime but left this at work when he retired from a shift. Still, part of him was stuck in Diyarbakır, worried that in some misguided act of patriotism more would be taken from the woman he had since married than her tongue and the language it was believed to have known.

Hospitals tended to linger.

Loved ones never left, even when everything had gone as right as it possibly could.

“I’ve got nothing new for you,” Sheila sighed. He was sure she would be singing this refrain until her relief came in the morning. Yilmaz reached his hand behind the counter, feeling for the pack of Camel’s he stored where anyone could steal.

“Those will kill you, you know,” she slighted, not glancing up from her computer screen.

“I’m going on lunch,” Yilmaz announced. His co-worker clocked him out on the time sheet and handed him a lighter from her purse without a hint of humour.

Ayaz Yilmaz turned and took a deep breath.

He nodded at Tallmadge from the elevator but received no response in kind. He wondered what had been said to the man whose company he kept when it seemed both the constable whom the detective and his entire staff had come to visit several times in the past few days and patient who had filled the floor’s lobby with other foreigners, were, for the moment, in stable condition.

Perhaps, Yilmaz thought, he had misread the interaction he observed in its entirety.

He remembered the men his daughter’s boss addressed form a few months prior.

Perhaps, Yilmaz thought, he was simply trying to keep the red-head from making another scene.

He appreciated the gesture, unwarranted as he saw it. Yilmaz himself bent the rules at times, and had in the winter when the man refused the leave the side of a suicide victim when visitation hours had ended. He would not have remembered him otherwise and wondered what business Tallmadge had with him at all.

Outside he found the man in a leg brace still pacing as though he experienced no pain, carefully walking along the yellow line that designated the smoking area, concentrating on its boundaries. He assumed him to be the suicide victim from a winter past, for the small, pale man with far too many grey and white hairs for what he guessed his age to be looked as though he might contemplate jumping if only luck had found him on a ledge.

“Allright?” Yilmaz asked as he lit a cigarette. The man nearly jumped out of his skin.

“Allright,” the young man repeated in an accent the head nurse was slow to place, almost as though the word were a mantra unto itself or had some meaning to him which Yilmaz couldn’t begin to guess at. “O’rite,” he seemed to mourn. Yilmaz frowned.

“I work in the ICU,” he told him gruffly. “I have for forty years. Whatever Tallmadge told you,
your friend is more than likely to pull through. I checked before coming out here. There is no guarantee – when is there in medicine? – but,” he stopped, reaching out for the young man’s shoulder as though to pull him back from whatever metaphoric ledge he seemed to look down at with a determination the nurse assessed as frightening. “Look, you are not doing yourself or your friend any favours by ‘walking it off’ as they say in sport. C’mon, let’s – let’s sit down, son. No one is going to care if you - in your condition - want to have a cigarette on that bench over there.”

The two sat in silence until Yilmaz had finished his fag, crushing his filter under the sole of his shoe, fulling planning to leave it where it lie. The young man bent as though he meant to pick it up. Instead, he began to remove his leg brace. “I’m not injured,” he told him.

“Son -”

“I’m … I’m the prime suspect in a high-profile missing person’s inquiry.”

Yilmaz was no longer curious about whatever information Tallmadge had relayed. “I don’t think you and I ought to be having this conversation,” he tried to excuse himself. His eldest Hadice never spoke about her cases in detail, but he knew it to be a conflict of interest all the same to sit on the same bench of a man she might personally be investigating. Perhaps there were legal complications of his presence here. He rose. He would have walked away had the man not continued, or had his hard words closer matched the heartbreak Yilmaz could hear in his tone.

“I knew he would be questioned, I knew and I didn’t care. I didn’t care and – how can bloody Ban Tarleton of all people be dead? It is my fault … John and I, we killed him. We killed him in cold blood all because my mate thought it would be funny to make me wear an Everton jersey and then they called Ban into questioning and he just … how could he just? How?” the boy seemed to beg for absolution.

“What did they say happened?” Yilmaz asked in spite of himself.

“He was shot in Afghanistan, or Iraq – one of the two, and I should know which but I don’t. It was years ago and I never thought to ask, or maybe I did and I don’t remember. We weren’t friends … we might have been given our relative proximity but we weren’t. I was only in his company on a handful of occasions. I never asked about his war wounds or if I did I didn’t care about the answer enough to hear it or enough to know it now, rather,” he rambled, almost incoherently. “Ah – he was shot, that is really all I know, one of the bullets grazed his heart and they flew him to Ramstein for an operation, a bypass or something. It was years ago. Apparently, a clot since developed and he just … dropped. Dead. There, in interrogation, where he would not have been were I not so callous -”

“It isn’t your fault,” Yilmaz told him, trying to create a calm. “It could have been any number of factors over which one would have had half as much control as they would have liked. As a heart patient he was likely taking blood pressure medication, going in for control every three months or so,” he offered. The boy’s face was completely blank. “It wasn’t the questioning itself. That I can almost assure you. Anything could have affected … is he English? New to this country? A change of diet or climate -”

“I know I, that is I used to be on heart medicine myself. Ah - I called one of his sister’s a bitch earlier this afternoon,” the boy gave. “Not to her face, naturally, not … just in passing and I said it because she is immune to suffering when I swear that is all I feel. I wanted her to cry, just once, about anything – and now I feel I would do anything to take back that thought,” he paused. “I don’t know how long I’ve been like this. I don’t know if it is even fair to blame André for it when there is so much we might … Joyce. Robeson. I don’t know what to do. Maybe Simcoe was right. Maybe Tallmadge will.”
Yilmaz, lost for words, found his pack of cigarettes in his pocket and offered another to the young man with white hair on the verge of tears.

“T’m getting married in eight days,” he told him. “A week,” he corrected, looking at his watch. “My fiancée,” he began, a bit lighter in tone as he lit both of their cigarettes, “she hates when I -”

Ayaz Yilmaz smiled. “I’ve been married for thirty-five years, son. Trust me, what your wife doesn’t know won’t kill her.”

“That is what I am banking on,” the young man exhaled. The nurse supposed he was no longer talking about smoking and that his daughter or her boss would inquire further if there were questions to be asked. He congratulated him on his coming nuptials and, before returning to work again offered his condolences for the man he supposed to have died from a clot. The young man seemed too shocked to have really heard any of it. Perhaps, Yilmaz thought, he had been as well when the man he mourned in the midnight air had first fallen in Afghanistan, or Iraq, or some other place the boy likely only knew from political rhetoric.

Quiet nights were the worst as far as shifts went, for they served to remind that so many who came to visit would never fully leave.

Outside, smoking on a bench near the entrance, the boy was nowhere and, for a moment, Ayaz was back in the city where he had been born. Upstairs, he found that there was enough coffee left in the machine that he could have a cup without obliging himself to brew the next batch. He returned to his shift knowing that the next seven hours would cause him to forget the interaction in its entirety. He would go home to his wife and his adult daughters and eat the breakfast they had made for him while the four women turned their attention back to the news and began to bicker with the headlines and then with each other and he would be happy for the commotion, for the voices of the people he loved and the sounds that had to supplement what could not fully be articulated with a stunted tongue.

Silence, he reasoned, was as formidable of a foe as death itself.

Edmund Hewlett felt his astound slowly turn to aggravation the longer the conversation continued. Anna wore a smile all the while, directing it occasionally towards him when he, or rather, their upcoming wedding again became its topic. Court was in session but oral argument was not scheduled until early next week. As such, he had worked through the proposal he had been asked to submit at his own place of employment the night prior, unable to sleep on account of his manifold of personal worries. He had turned his work in early that morning -a week early at that - and headed up to Albany to speak with his solicitor, leaving the office before noon with the blessing of his bosses, impressed with what they saw as dedication, with what Hewlett was more apt to view as desperation.

It was not to say that the job was beneath him, only that he had not expected to find himself in his mid-thirties thinking up ways to make mathematics intriguing to an audience of teenagers whose excitement over a trip to the planetarium existed only so far as it could be weighed against sitting in a stuffy classroom and doing problems out of a workbook whose previous owner had already transformed all of the illustrated rockets and other shafts into phalluses with which they were more familiar. These children, he had decided on his first day in educational outreach, were far preferable to the adults who supposedly strolled in on weekend mornings, the ones who used the
love they claimed to have for science at best as a means of social signalling, at worst as a way of attempting to conceal their ignorance though passion. He thought back to the night before, to Cicero and his rather intelligent questions when compared against the debate Aberdeen and Peggy had over supper on global warming, (the later eventually conceding that it was not a hoax, but that the American workforce was fuelled on that which lead to 52% of the world’s pollunants, shifting the argument to imagined scenarios of how the workforce could further expand without pesky environmental regulations getting in its way.) Hewlett had remained mostly silent, seeing it as a lost cause, instead impressing the preteens afterwards by imparting some of his knowledge in ways that caused them to ask more questions about the actual, thus building the basis for his proposal whilst blocking their passes out back as the women he lived with laughed on the patio about whatever topics they found amusing - fashion and right-wing fascism and other such things of the sort.

Hewlett returned to the moment and returned his bride’s smile, again noting that she never shared this much excitement with him personally when it came to wedding plans and family politics.

He wondered if she talked about flowers arrangements the same way with Abigail or Mary, Sally or any of the others she had asked to be bridesmaids, or if this was an act for the benefit of the woman on whose behalf she had effectively ended her own sporting career; if the people she was now closest to saw the same cold strategy he had come to expect whenever they found themselves filling out paperwork for the county clerk or the immigration office.

He pulled out his own phone, wondering if Charlotte would end the call at half time or continue ‘catching up’, whatever that meant. Though loath to leave Anna alone with her insofar as he was present, he wondered if it might be better worth his while to seek Akinbode out in the hotel bar, to order a Rubin and catch the rest of the thrashing Liverpool was evidently giving Manchester United in the Europa League whilst the ladies laughed over their lessers, over men and the behaviour they brought out in them by way of their womanly charms.

Hewlett rubbed at his stomach and mouthed a few words about walking down to the bar. Anna rolled her eyes, nodded and returned to prattling with a lawyer on the other side of the Atlantic about their respective presents and times long past.

He had a history with the woman as well. One he was sure would show up in conversation as soon as he shut the door. Not, he hoped, in terms prevalent to their present predicament.

On his way down to the bar - a small room that spilled into one of the corners of the lobby entrance, Hewlett found himself questioning the nature of coincidence. At nineteen, Anna Smith had ended Charlotte Tarleton’s footballing career in an international friendly when the two met mid-air, Anna’s cleat grazing her opponent’s in a way that made England’s vice-captain lose her equilibrium entirely, causing her to fall in such a way that seriously injured her lower spine. Edmund remembered the match, which was to say he remembered the English students at Saint Andrews celebrating the score they saw printed in the papers the next day, a 2:8 victory against one of the best teams in the world, perhaps ushering in a new era of English football. He remembered agreeing among his Scottish friends and colleagues that these southerners already resembled the colonists far more than they might like to admit in that the women wearing the national colours could have happily beaten the men readying to embarrass the country on an international stage. (Naturally, without calling any attention to the fact that Scotland had failed to qualify for the tournament.) He had learned first a few days later that a girl he vaguely knew growing up had even been playing when the palace’s secretaries called to inform him of the gift that had been sent in his name out of protocol. He had not given it much thought then, either.

As Anna relayed her version of events days before when first she saw a picture of her younger self
in The Daily Mail, she had thought of little other than Charlotte for months to follow. She was not
carded after the collision but was subbed off in the second half, never to be called up again.

The first thing she had done upon arriving back at her dorm was ask her roommate for a cigarette.
Then, the two had gone about filling the small room they shared with smoke.

‘It was horrible!’ Anna had said of the apology she intended years before. She thought she owed
Charlotte another now, unused to her new celebrity and fully unfamiliar with the world from he
came to a point where the contrast was becoming disquieting. Charlotte had been far more exposed
on that back pages of British tabloids long before being concealed in long robes and a court wig on
the covers of more respectable publications. If Anna owed anyone an apology, it was his own
extended family who had enough decency to find a sport bar scandalous. Still, she had been
playing phone tag with the other woman in the picture since it had first gone to print, more
concerned with this near-stranger’s image than with her own. No counter argument Hewlett could
offer would work in anyone’s favour, so he ignored his fears and frustrations when Anna grabbed
her phone in response to every peep, hoping that she would prove as successful at keeping Mrs
Wessex on the topic of tabloids as she had been in getting him to join her repeatedly in this vicious
cycle of circular conversation.

He hoped, mostly, that Charlotte would say nothing of the land her husband sold him via a text
between his banker and her little brother. He had to protect Anna from the crimes he had actually
committed much as she tried to involve herself in proving his innocence when it came to Senator
Arnold.

‘It was early summer, already too hot and humid to attempt baking in that degree of earnest, but
Mary had been collecting Martha Stewart Living magazines for what must have been years and in
one of them we had found a recipe for meat pies that I decided in the sort of logic that only has
sense in confusion we had to make because hospital food is horrible and Charlotte was likely to
spend a few weeks at Beth Israel,’ Anna continued the same narrative.

‘You know we Brits only eat those at Christmas,’ Edmund had then laughed though he suspected it
to be inappropriate.

‘Well … yeah, and now I know why. Mary and I went out and bought a second toaster oven for the
event. What we ought to have invested in was a new air conditioning unit as ours was broken, or at
least a fan to facilitate a quicker removal of the fish smell from out quarters, but alas, our dorm
stank like a dock in the summer heat for the rest of the semester … it probably does to this day. We
ended up having to store our clothes in our friend’s rooms after washing literally everything we
owned in the days that followed.’ Anna animated the tale with the hands as she talked, letting her
mimic speak in such a way that he nearly choked on the stench she described.

‘Why did you make meat pies with fish?’ Hewlett puzzled.

‘I knew her before this happened, Charlotte, I mean. We both played for our schools as well. I
bought a few textbooks from her once and she tried to sell me on Newhaven, which was the farthest
I’d ever been from New York and as I recall my bones were already aching to return.’

‘Isn’t Connecticut right across the sound?’

‘Your point? Anyway, she told me about the place she was from and, like most transplants, wound
up complaining about the food by way of comparison,’ Anna smiled, ‘so I told her to come to New
York. I couldn’t let my city not live up to the promises I believed to be true so after making beef and
chicken versions of the only dish I’d ever heard of as being British, Mary and I got creative and
decided to give fish the same treatment.’
‘Ah, not with the same spices, I hope.’

His bride-to-be stuck out her tongue. ‘We paid the price. Charlotte loved it though, which tells me everything I want to know about the UK’s culinary traditions.’

‘I’m going to get you to eat haggis one of these days.’

‘Oh no sir, you’re not.’

‘There is a vegan version.’

‘How would that make it better?’

‘Fair,’ Hewlett conceded. Anna went on (as he was coming to sense that women simply tended to do) about how much weight she had gained that summer after giving up sport. ‘How many pies did you eat?’ he teased, pinching at her sides, unsure if he should apologise when her sudden shift told him the gesture was hurtful to her in some way he had not anticipated.

‘I was a fat kid,’ she explained, unconsciously pulling at the hem of her shirt as though she hoped to create more fabric to conceal a figure which Hewlett never meant to imply that he thought of as being any less than flawless. He opened his mouth to offer an apology but Anna continued. ‘I got into sport in the first place in reaction to that specific embarrassment. Here, I’ll show you. Don’t judge me, okay?’ she said as she began searching through old Facebook albums on her mobile device. ‘Here. That’s me at my heaviest, I think. It was not right after leaving soccer but -’

‘That was you?’ Hewlett asked, aghast until he could not control his laughter.

‘Arse!’

‘Who was your favourite sailor scout?’ he prodded teasingly.

‘That is your assessment?’

‘I don’t … know what it is you expect me to say,’ he admitted. ‘I like your hair better now, is that what you wish to hear?’

‘I was a size twelve,’ she told him flatly.

‘I have no idea what that means, though, I strongly suspect, in retrospect, it has very little if any meaning at all. However, if ever I need some company at Comic Con …’

‘You are such a dick -’

‘Are you going to punish me in the name of the moon?’ he smiled.

‘Okay real talk: My guy, is that why you became an astronomer? Sailor Moon?’

‘I wish I could say ‘yes’ but as it works out my field attracts far fewer girls in short skirts than say … geology. Those are the real rock stars of the science world.’

Anna looked like she was ready to make a witty come back to his pathetic pun when her ringing phone cause panic to cross her face. ‘Hello,’ she said with a smile that she had to force, ‘Yes, this is she. Oh, hi! I take it you got my message, listen I just wanted to apologise -’
Charlotte Wessex had been partially crippled by the collision and had used crutches for years. All three of her children had been born via Caesarean section and that same caution had banned her from horseback for eight years until a minor traffic accident had aggravated this old wound and she found that she was unable to move her car to the side of the road or her legs at all. From what he had gathered in passing, Hewlett understood that she was happier having had the inevitable come and go without much ceremony. Her husband had driven the kids to school for a few weeks until a mini-van had been modified to accommodate the wheel-chair she had used on occasions prior - a device, she said, that she felt less bound to than she had her crutches. She could, for example, now sit on a horse (though the riding, admittedly, she left largely to her husband, unwilling as she was to let her two younger sisters who specialized in precisely this type of therapy to tell her how to handle an animal using only the reigns.) Heels, similarly, no longer carried the risk of injury or even discomfort and as such now occupied more than one closet in her Chelsea home. ‘That,’ she chimed in a voice that sounded of the city she was from, of pub music playing in moist and salty air, ‘and being that I can’t feel anything in the act itself, Danny’s finally acquainted himself with foreplay, after, you know, sharing my bed for the half of his life.’

‘Men,’ Anna snorted, hearing this.

Hewlett wondered as the conversation shifted to the photograph which Anna had wrongfully assumed Charlotte was equally embarrassed over if the latter’s disabilities excluded her from the character assessment he had carried in her regard for nearly the full of his life, namely that Mrs Wessex was a bitch of the highest order. Contrarily, he considered that ascribing attributes he did not see her as possessing purely because she now could not walk would be equally as insensitive. For a moment he found himself longing to return to the winter when he had been unable to see the world for the other people who occupied it, alone but unbothered by the implications of adjectives that simply did not occur to him when ‘the other’ seemed an abstract concept rather than an opponent.

Charlotte had always been lively and loquacious, she met the world with a sort of cheer that did not seem rehearsed. ‘Wouldn’t it have been lovely?’ she laughed as she spoke about his upcoming nuptials when Anna had briefly handed him her phone, ignoring his nonverbal protests. ‘I remember distinctly that I invited you both to my wedding and neither of you could attend – you might have been married for more than a decade by now.’

Somehow, Edmund was not sure that was true.

He wondered if ‘fate’ and ‘coincidence’ were synonymous or, rather, if they were both words one used to console themselves to the fact that time was linear, even when it was not.

Part of Anna would always be standing in a stadium, stunned by the screams of a girl who would never entirely get up. Charlotte was stuck in a chair but not in this memory, her might-have-beens all seeming to surround the happiness of others rather than a misery she herself refused to meet. And why would she have any want to? She was incredibly successful in her field and had married her childhood sweetheart (himself wealthy beyond measure) with whom she had since had three (doubtlessly beautiful) children. Anna, Charlotte said and to her credit truly seemed to believe, was the catalyst for most of this. Her father and boyfriend had boarded the same plane to New York directly after her initial accident and by some miracle the six hours they were forced to spend in one another’s company convinced the right honourable Mr Tarleton to give his favourite daughter away in marriage months later.

Was ‘miracle’ a more delicate way of saying ‘money’?

Edmund Hewlett left the room before he could be certain of how widely this opinion was shared.
Danny Wessex, as he saw it, simply had enough capitol to serve as a counterbalance to his skin colour, itself indicative of moral deficit in Charlotte’s father’s eyes. Hewlett wandered the hall, wondering if Charlotte was blind to this, wondering of his own situation if he ever truly could be. Anna had agreed to be his bride because of the sum he had set for the span of three years – was her ‘eternal love’ a reaction to another such promise, perhaps one he had been too ignorant to understand was inherent in his name?

He could not tell her about Lafayette, about the consent of the Queen and what this meant for his place at court. He wanted nothing but her happiness but feared being certain of its source far more than he feared the might of the laws he broke constantly to ensure her smile.

To hear Charlotte speak, the property he now owned in Setauket could be the product of coincidence, fate, or the fact that time was linear and Simcoe had reacted too fast. He wondered if Mrs Wessex even knew that the sale had taken place, or if her husband’s calculations closer mirrored his own.

He could not talk to Anna.

But he had to talk to her boss about the predicament in which they had both been placed.

“Hey,” Jordan Akinbode greeted with a nod. He had the bar to himself, which was not to say that it was altogether empty, only that he had so many flies spread out in front of him that none of the other patrons had any want to hazard pulling up a stool in what he had marked as his domain, occasionally looking up at the screen in warning when someone at a table asked if the bartender to switch the channel on the single television from Fox Sports to CNN. “I think y’all’ll go all the way this year,” Akinbode offered, the match resuming.

“Here is hoping,” Hewlett responded. He ordered himself a cider and, upon finding that the Hilton Garden Inn in Albany New York did not stock what he could hear Simcoe refer to as glorified apple juice, he settled on a whiskey sour instead and ordered Akinbode the same.

“Trouble in paradise?”

“Not in so many words. Anna has apparently been playing phone tag with a woman named Charlotte Wessex all week,” Hewlett answered. “They have been on the line since Sturridge scored the penalty.”

Akinbode nodded.

It was awkward to be talking like this as they both seemed to concede, but stranger still would be to handle one another exclusively in the purely professional tones in which Hewlett had come up to the capitol to speak. Akinbode had surely seen in his features that something in their shared scheme was amiss immediately upon his arrival. Hewlett, not wanting to call Anna’s attention toward a concern he could not share, he followed her to her hotel bed, tousling in her sheets until the phone had put an end to his few minutes of fun.

“She a United fan?”

“Everton.”
“Ah,” Akinbode nodded. “You know what gets me?” he said after a moment. “Every single person in this bar saw a black man score the only goal of the game and yet I had two conversations at half time with white people wondering if my interest in soccer was born out of European colonization of the African continent as though Ta-Nehisi Coates just came out with an article on the topic and I, as the token black friend, have to both applauded them for having read the piece and answer to any number of accusations they now feel comfortable asserting having done so.”

“I take it you’ll not be reading the new Black Panther when it comes out next month.”

“What in our history would suggest to you that I’ve any interest in comics whatsoever?” Akinbode snorted. “But I have to defend my interest in the Europa League in a way no one would ask me to were we here watching March Maddens.”

“You are right, that is ridiculous,” Hewlett gave when he arrived on nothing else. It seemed to be what Akinbode wanted out of the conversation and he indicated as much by ordering them another round.

“I was playing a little footy with Cicero last night. He misses you.”

“They living at Whitehall now, him and his mom?”

“Th-They are.”

“Tell him,” Akinbode stared. Turning his lips inward and biting them in consideration, he adjusted. “Don’t tell him anything. Abby thought I’d nothing to offer her boy even when we were together.”

“I have a friend who is still close to his never-quite step-daughter after he and his girl spilt. Actually … I’m not sure why I phrased it that way, we are not friends, we are anything but. Maybe it illustrates my point a bit better in that context.”

“What is your point?” Akinbode asked, not meeting his gaze.

“The sacrifice isn’t worth the surrender,” Hewlett tried.

“Cicero is twelve. I’m not going to use him to get to his mother.”

“I don’t think that is how he would understand things.”

“I don’t think that makes what you are suggesting any less wrong.”

Hewlett nodded and set about moving an ice cube around in his tumbler with a small stirring straw. Akinbode replaced a few papers in a manila folder and returned his gaze to the screen in the hanging in the middle of the liquor cabinet behind the bar, seeming to neither be watching the match nor reading the news and stock tickers that ran beneath it, all items, Hewlett noted, related to Senator Arnold’s disappearance in one fashion or another.

“About this friend,” he tried again, “ah – the one who isn’t really a friend, the one with a kid that isn’t really his -”

“What is it, Hewlett?”

“We … ah, I’m afraid we’ve hit a bit of a snag, th- that is you, me, Simcoe -”

“In what way exactly?” Akinbode’s voice deepened.

Hewlett went on to explain as plainly as he possibly everything that had befallen him at the police
station the day before, the property purchase, the code, Lafayette and Simcoe’s reaction to all of it. Akinbode sat quietly and listened, interrupting only to order another drink, not inviting Hewlett to join him in a round. If he was surprised, he did not show it.

“I think you need to talk to Tallmadge,” he said when Hewlett had finished after spending what seemed a long time considering every option. “Tell him what you know, get it on the record as soon as you can in exchange for ligancy should something come of it.”

Hewlett had hoped for a better plan of attack. “What will happen to our profit shares?”

“Depends on whose prosecuting,” Akinbode paused. “I can get you off,” he said in a tone that in and of itself told that his standard fee had just increased tenfold. A light smile fought its way onto Akinbode’s features and Hewlett could tell he was more excited at the prospect of a court battle than he was fearful of repercussions.

Hewlett was not sure that was enough.

“Speak of the devil,” Akinbode said as the screen of his phone illuminated, the ringer on silent. “Ben,” he answered, “I was just talking about – I’m sorry, can you repeat that?” he asked.

His expression, however, indicated a kind of contradiction. Akinbode had clearly heard what ever had been shared and simply could not comprehend the words. “Hew, I … here,” he said, handing the phone to him. “Are you fit to drive? I have to go back to New York. Now.”

Hewlett nodded, holding up a finger as he pressed the phone to his ear.

“Inspector Tallmadge,” he greeted. “Ah, yes, hello, this is Edmund Hewlett, I’m, I’m sorry, I was handed the receiver – Jordan seems a bit out of sorts. What, pray tell has -”

>>I just got a call from the 79th precinct, there was a report of domestic violence at Jordan’s Brooklyn address and I simply need him to come in and answer a few questions at his earliest convenience.<<

“That is impossible,” Hewlett said. “I mean – I mean we are coming, of course we will be on our way in a few minutes -”

>>I don’t know yet that it is urgent. I’m,<< he seemed to sigh. >>I’m headed to hospital myself to check on the victim’s status, a person of interest as it were. It could be a few hours. <<

“Who?” Hewlett demanded, thinking instantly of Simcoe.

>>Charles Joyce. I – my condolences, I know he plays on your soccer team. <<

“Joyce?” Hewlett gaped. “Who would, what was he -”

>>I’m afraid I can’t disclose any of what you ask at this point.<<

“Can you give me the name of the hospital? Jordan’s not in much of a state to drive. We’ll meet you there as soon as possible.”

There had been a fight the night before. He had not been there to bare it witness, but its remnants
left him on edge all the same. John Robeson felt the way he had in prison as he looked upon the mess the two men had left, boxes shoved in a struggle that continued to create an eerie energy which made the conflict feel present though it was more than a few hours past. As he cleaned the room to rid himself of the sights spurned on by his subconscious mind – moving the couch to the place he remembered it having been the day before, replacing its pillows, washing blood off the knife he had found underneath, and, with the same dampened cloth, mopping that spot on the newly refurbished floors – he continually looked over his shoulder, his hand unconsciously navigating to the switchblade he carried in his pocket, a habit he had picked up in prison out of necessity, something still too relevant to his routine.

John Robeson was not a violent man of his own nature but he was not a particularly calm one either. He lived in a halfway house run by a slum lord and frequented by a slew of unsavoury characters whose presence kept him on near-constant edge. Some time ago, he had taken to drink to make them disappear and when he was sober his hands began to shake, trembling as much with fear as with yearning for the poison he knew to be ruinous to what little of a life he had.

What he had now was a job to do, one (unfortunately for his nerves) which required that he do very little.

Sitting on the edge of the sofa he had pulled back into its corner, watching his hands shake with the rhythm of the room as though he himself had been present to pull a punch, Robeson decided to task himself with more than simply keeping watch.

At around eleven in the morning, he began to unpack the boxes Jordan Akinbode had managed to move into his new home sometime between breaking up with the love of his life and leaving town for reasons of business. Carefully and with much consideration, he organized the kitchen, hung curtains over the windows and pictures on the living room walls – leaving those of Abigail and Cicero in a box he remarked as ‘personal’ which he carried down to the basement, hoping Jordan would know what he meant, hoping this same friend would know by the time he found it if he dared to look upon images of the life he almost had.

Robeson personally did not want to think of the woman who had broken his friend’s heart any more than he wanted to think of the man who had shattered his, but as he set about installing the bathroom sink he found himself imaging the place he might have rented with Charles in more vivid detail than he had when there had been even a hint that this might have happened. He envisioned an altogether average and ordinary life and began to weep with the realisation that such would satisfy few, that such was entirely out of his grasp and would be forevermore.

He did not earn enough to move out on his own. New York had always been out of the question. Now, thanks to some investor buying up property in Setauket at above-value and thus altering the realities of the retail market for men like him, he was unlikely to find a place in the suburb either.

He would live and die in a halfway house. Upon his demise, his few possessions would be brought to a dumpster at a worksite and tossed unceremoniously in with old carpet and mould-eaten drywall to make space for the next unfortunate soul to share his sorry fate. There were days he missed prison where his sentence had not been indefinite. There were days he wondered if his crime was worth the care - if it would not have been better to take whatever time had been left to him had the cancer gone untreated and to have spent these days in a bar in some small fishing town far away, to have died with more dignity.

He hung a mirror, built up a boxed bathroom cabinet and hung towels for decoration and for drying hands. When he finished and again found himself with no task in which he could actively engage, his own hands began shaking with every sound from the road and every silence that followed.
In time, John Robeson decided that it was altogether too quiet.

Robert Rogers had woken him shortly before his alarm was set to ring, told him that Woodhull had failed the basic task he had been given of protecting the senator and that he was now to take over at the location to which they had moved Arnold the morning prior. Rogers had been worried that Lewis Brewster, who was neither at his house nor at his nephew’s, would inform someone of what he had overheard if he had not already. Now, he was worried about Woodhull’s loyalty, and, as was often the case, Robeson was given the punishment if not the blame for what had happened when someone else had been tasked with playing sentinel. Abe had apparently been injured in a struggle when he had failed to keep the senator drugged. Rogers said he had taken care of it already for that day. He assured him that Arnold was sleeping in a bed upstairs, that all he would need to do is guard the house, making sure no one entered and no one left.

It was too quiet.

It had been all day.

Robeson hesitated up the stairwell he had been cautioned not to climb (“He is a politician, guid at talkin', he will gie ye tae change yer min' if ye lit heem intae it.”), every creak his steps created causing him to feel more disquiet in his soul. Upstairs, he found all three rooms empty. There was a bed, but it was unmade – no pillows, blankets, covers or sheets to tell the tale of the man who had again escaped the watch. Robeson walked over to the window, wondering if Arnold had created a rope from the things meant to give him comfort and used it to escape whilst he himself had been busy with the housework he had not been asked to perform. He found, however, that the widow did not open at all. He checked the others to be sure. Alarmed, he ran downstairs and opened the front door, finding nothing but a quiet residential street.

Robeson hastened back into the living room, looking for any sign of Arnold that he had not washed away that morning. He heard the front door open. He heard his own heartbeat. Instinct found his hand on the switchblade in his pocket when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

He heard his heart pound.

Next, he heard a scream.

His own.

He did not hear his ex-boyfriend collapse. He remembered putting pressure on the wound he had created in a moment of panic that now seemed indefinably sustained. Blood redder than the roses Charles came in carrying covered his neck and escaped his lips as he gasped for air. Robeson continued to scream, crying for help in sounds too confused to constitute words. He lifted his former-lover’s head, cradling it on his lap as he struggled to contain as much blood as he could, feeling his sleeves grow heavy with the same substance, feeling it seep into his very soul.

By the time the paramedics arrived, Charles Joyce had lost consciousness.

By the time he was handcuffed, John Robeson had no recollection whatsoever of what he had done.

He not a violent man but he was not a particularly calm one either.

At the station he was given a sedative prior to being stripped and thrown into a cell. In the twelve minutes it took for the medication to render him unconscious he broke his fingers bone and flesh by banging on the metal door of solitary confinement, still screaming for the man he had been told that he may have killed. The man, he claimed over and over in what police mistook for confusion,
who was and would forever be the love of his life.

It was evening when his oldest friend arrived at hospital. Ben Tallmadge had been there since late in the afternoon. The seats waiting room had been filling up steadily since the work-day had ended, mostly with men he recognised from Sunday, from the soccer team, from the files he had read in connection with John André’s research.

They barely spoke. Not to each other and certainly not to him. Sometimes, someone would get up, walk to the nurses’ station and ask for an update the poor woman was unable to give. Sometimes, they would recognise him, however vaguely, on their way back to waiting and ask him how this could have happened as though they imagined any answer criminology could offer would give them closure.

In truth, they did not want to know – the simply wanted to ask why, which was for the better, as Ben could not anticipate what might happen were he to say. All of these men had been subjected that André’s methods, any of them might become as violent as the friend they swore would not harm a fly. He could not add to their stress or sorrow. When he spoke, he tried to emulate his father, recalling and reciting what he could of sermons written to rise the conjugation from a shared sense of suffering while he wondered if his own prayers could be heard.

CSI from another precinct had already swept the scene by the time his unit arrived. As with DeJong’s Tavern, it seemed that the perpetrator had spent the better share of their time tidying up the crime scene than committing anything in particular – here, unpacking and decorating rather than ridding every surface of stains old and new. Jordan Akinbode swore that he had left his home in a sorry state, same as Anna Strong had claimed of her bar (and years of public health records could stand to support.) In all his years on the force, he had never seen anything quite like it. It felt odd and eerie, disconcerting in the same way costumed drams often were with their battle camps of pristine white tents, pressed shirts and tight breeches that seemed borrowed from the portraits painted long after the fact rather than details of whatever crucial battle the actors were being paid to depict. He had watched a number of such films as an undergrad at Yale majoring in history; he had watched them several times before pin-pointing what exactly felt so off. Here, it was easy, but neither elapsed time nor physical evidence gave him context for the filth he sought but could not find.

He returned to Sunday morning, prior to fist setting foot in this wing, remembering Caleb Brewster tossing out half eaten cartons of Chinese food and wiping down his counters whilst Ben lied in bed, discovering with horror that his private home had been victim to espionage. He imagined Caleb having done the same at DeJong’s where had had been working the night Arnold disappeared, felling sick, sad and angry that he was beginning to suspect a suspect and that he had slept with the man a number of times since. He wondered if he was affording Jordan Akinbode the same undeserved doubt.

“I left for Albany on Friday,” Jordan told him. “I’m not sure what time I left but I remember getting to the hotel at one and being told that my room would not be ready until three. After that I went for a walk, had a coffee – I forget the name of the place but I am sure I have a receipt. My car remained in the hotel carpark all the while. I’m certain they must have CCTV you can check. Otherwise I’ve not been anywhere but the hotel and the court house. I could provide a list of witnesses -”
“That won’t be necessary,” Ben said, both as a detective inspector and a childhood friend. “Other than Abigail, would anyone have had easy access to your house?”

“Abigail didn’t,” Jordan corrected. “She gave me back her key the night we split, so last Thursday. I left it under the floor mat on the front porch and offered my place to some friends of mine who were playing a gig not far from there, offering them the place for the night if they needed it. Um. On Saturday. It was,” he reached in his pocked, “here, if you want I can forward you the text I sent.”

“Did you send it to John Robeson or Charles Joyce?”

“No. Abraham Woodhull, Caleb Brewster and Robert Townsend.”

Ben Tallmadge felt his heart sink. He has woken up before the sun in Caleb’s arms, with Woodhull banging on the door. It seemed he would have done better to have hidden himself in the shadows rather than confront the man directly. Woodhull said that he had been assaulted earlier that day by his employer but did not want to press charges when Ben had offered his professional assistance. Caleb, too, seemed at a loss. Ben had discovered over the course of conversation that Woodhull was working under the table, which he might have been want to investigate further were the man being paid for his efforts. As Woodhull told it, he was helping out on the house his wife had purchased, hoping to move his family out of his father’s residence, hoping that would save his marriage which he feared was falling apart.

For a while, Ben spoke to him over topics of the Book they had both grown up with, which seemed to sooth.

Caleb had less sympathy for his friend’s plight. ‘You married the wrong woman,’ he had said.

‘She is the mother of my child,’ Abe answered.

Ben felt entirely out of his element. He left the houseboat the following morning assuming that everything Caleb had told him about Abe wanting information about his wife’s alleged affair had been honest. When asked, the pair had both confirmed the story Caleb had told – Caleb, who looked at him with bedroom eyes and told him that he had nothing to do with the Arnold case but that he was glad it had brought him into Setauket and this into his life. It felt as honest and earnest as the embrace they were in, as Caleb’s soft kisses that tickled the back of his neck as he entered him deeper, telling him all the things Ben so desperately longed to hear but was afraid to even think – that he was handsome, witty, interesting and exciting.

Ben now felt that the only thing to be said of him was that he was a fool, or that he had allowed himself to be taken for one. He bit his lip and looked up from his notepad, nodding for Jordan to continue.

“They were the only people who knew. I don’t want to speculate, but Robeson and Woodhull work together, maybe he overheard somehow? I still can’t – I don’t want to hinder your investigation in any way but … it is impossible. John Robeson would never -”

It was the same sentiment that had been relayed to him all evening. John Robeson, Ben thought, likely would not have killed the man he loved in cold blood. John André, however, just might have done to meet his own ends.

“He has a criminal record,” Ben challenged, simply to see how his friend would react.

“We have a shit ass heath care system in this beautiful country of ours,” Jordan said, matching his
“Jordan -”

“He is right,” Simcoe chimed in. He had been waiting in the lobby by the time Ben had arrived, sitting in a corner, unblinking but without seeming to pay anything much mind. Throughout the evening, he had not once gotten up to ask about Joyce. He had not greeted his friends as they arrived. He had not approached Ben with the same confused questions that served to form a character defence of the attack’s clear perpetrator. “About Robeson. He is not at fault. I believe I can offer proof of that.”

John Graves Simcoe spoke in a voice that was at once solemn and shrill. Ben swallowed, straightened. Simcoe seemed so certain of loss that Ben wondered if the suspect knew that which he had learned that morning, if he ought to offer his condolences. He opened his mouth, unsure of the words he meant to say.

“What?” Hewlett substituted. The question sounded like an accusation. Simcoe ignored it.

“I was … admittedly I should have said something, forward this to you right away Inspector Tallmadge, but I wanted first to know what it said, if it was genuine, if -”

“André’s research?” Ben asked. “I have it.”

“From Tarleton?” Simcoe asked.

“No,” Ben told him honestly. Simcoe gave something of a nod. He did not inquire further.

“I have something else that might be worth offering for your investigative purposes,” Simcoe continued. He looked at the inspector without seeming to see him, as though consciously trying to ignore anything that would have assisted his understanding prior to his hearing aid. He was frightened, Ben sensed, frightened and desperate not to show it. Simcoe did not seem to understand that offering evidence that could well be used against him in court in hopes of, presumably, reducing the charges Robeson would surely face was incredibly brave, almost foolishly so. “I know you were looking to obtain Hewlett’s medical records. I don’t know how they will be of any assistance, but -”

“Tarleton sent you -” Hewlett began, more confused than accusing.

Ben wondered for a moment why he suspected either of them of Arnold’s disappearance. Simcoe and Hewlett had both been consistently forthcoming with information and evidence, they did seem to share anything with each other they were unwilling to offer to him. Ben imagined for a moment that everything he had been told by the pair had been honest, wondering what the situation might look like were he to hold these two in the same personal regard he was unable to entirely rid himself of when it came to Jordan and Caleb, who, in truth, he had more reason to suspect.

Hewlett, he envisioned, had likely been covering for the affair between Mr Simcoe and Mrs Woodhull. It had not been going on for very long – the two had perhaps met at his bedside when he had been taken home from this very hospital, Mrs Woodhull seeing concern her tenant’s friend that felt absent in her marriage. As to his own romantic entanglement with Anna Strong, had he not been honest about that as well?

That the two were engaged in some activity of questionably legality seemed clear, but Ben was not altogether sure it had anything to do with his case. Perhaps the two were so nervous about the stocks Simcoe was trading, partially with Hewlett’s money that it had given rise to coincidence.
Perhaps all they were guilty of insofar as it concerned the scope of his investigation was spending time in the town where Arnold had last been seen and trying to employ the connections that had in the country they called home to get information for him he could not obtain a warrant for. Ben bit his lip.

“You needn’t cover for your friend,” he told Hewlett. “Washington knows he was the leak. Um. Jordan, will you excuse us? I need to speak with Misters Hewlett and Simcoe alone, if you will.”

Jordan nodded and rose. Ben stood as well, turning to face the men to whom he spoke.

“I had asked one of my sergeants to contact your friend at the embassy a few days ago when he became a person of interest. We had not had much success getting through, and, this morning I learned why,” he paused, noting both men sought to meet this news at eye-level. “You might want to take a seat.”

“No,” Simcoe said, not as much in defiance as in anticipation. Ben remembered that he had lost both of his parents at an early age, he had likely been given news of this kind before, that, or he was trying not to expect it. Hewlett’s pupils shrank as he crossed his arms over his chest, no doubt hearing in the seven-word warning the rest of the conversation to follow. It was not the first time Ben had found himself tasked with delivering such news. It always felt wrong. He cleared his throat and continued as though he were speaking to the press core, as though he could anticipate a more through and throughout follow up to his statement, one which would not take the form of denial or disbelief.

“On Monday morning, Colonel Banastre Tarleton was brought to the Pentagon to answer a few questions with regard, or so I’m told, to an incident that occurred over the weekend involving himself and an American Major. About an hour into questioning he collapsed and is believed to have suffered a heart attack brought on by a blood clot, possibly resulting from prior injury. Right now, the British Embassy is making it impossible for The Pentagon to perform a full autopsy, wanting to have the body be examined first by their own coroner. I’m told this is common in international incidences. I’m … I’m sorry to have to give you this news.”

He first leaned himself that morning when he had come into his office to find Sergeant Yilmaz still behind his desk, Washington, Hamilton and Lafayette speaking more amongst themselves than to his second. “They found the leak,” Yilmaz said. Washington advised that his seat had been looking into the matter, again offering a gentlemanly apology for his conduct in initially addressing the Special Crimes Unit with suspicion. The Colonel, he told, had known the editor of The Daily Mail for the entirety of his life. They had gone to school together. They had, for a time, attended the same university if not the same college, and had since spent the better part of their adult lives living in the same London high-rise. Tarleton was responsible for initiating the riot at the station, for various protest that had sprung up around the country. They had evidence of this. They had taken his phone and asked the embassy to provide his laptop. If Washington knew that Gwillim had sent him the information that had been sent to her, he did not indicate it.

When the three men left, he asked his sergeant if she had said anything. ‘No,’ Yilmaz answered. ‘I’m starting to think this, all of this, has been an inside job from the beginning.’ Ben nodded. ‘God Bless America,’ he agreed ironically.

If he could figure out how it all connected, he could save his country from its own worse instincts.

Ben Tallmadge, however, was beginning to doubt his own.

He wondered if he had had any right in relaying to these two men that their friend had fallen, if Cornwallis had any right to keep it hushed up until, presumably, he had achieved whatever he
aimed for in this collective venture of which Ben assumed him to be part.

“He died in interrogation? Why wasn’t a medic called in?” Hewlett demanded. “Why -”

“Mr Hewlett, please.”

Simcoe was silent and slumped back into his chair. “When I last spoke to him,” he said in an empty tone, “he talked of surrendering André’s research to you, that I should if he for whatever reason failed to. I think he knew that something might happen to him. I think I did as well. He wanted to speak against its implication. He said I did things last summer, horrible things that went against my - against human nature. Things such as what we have seen Robeson repeat tonight. Tallmadge, I’ll give you everything that was sent, hell, I’ll give you a transcript of the conversation, whatever you need to trace the call, but I need … There is something else I need for you to know. I was in a café not far from here when I heard that Joyce had been brought to hospital. I learned this when the man whom I was meeting received a phone call, presumably from the FBI relaying as much. I turned up the volume on my new hearing aid – thank you, Oyster – and I … André’s study was referenced in the way the news was relayed. I didn’t stick around much after that. Being that you were the only copper to actually show up here and that I am the only suspect you seem to have any interest in -”

“Who were you meeting with?”

“Lafayette?” Hewlett guessed. He did not wait for his friend to answer, leaving the lobby, leaving his crutches behind.

Simcoe did not have to wait long for his solicitor to re-join them. Jordan Akinbode, Ben suspected, must have been glancing over his shoulder all the while. “Hewlett came to tell me earlier, I advised them to inform you -” Ben raised his hand in caution. “This isn’t a formal interrogation -”

“The hell it’s not,” his friend began. “I want an investigation to be opened.”

“Alright then,” Ben smiled.

Jordan explained that his clients had been pressured to interfere with the stock market by a French agent acting in interest of a trade deal between the US and the EU, that he had maneuverer in a way as to make Simcoe and Hewlett appear as criminals rather than hostages, threatening his associate Anna Strong while indicating to her fiancé Edmund Hewlett that all of her problems would go away if only he would cooperate. Hewlett had asked Simcoe for his assistance without telling him the full scope of his problems and falsified evidence against himself hoping no other party would be punished for what he had been pressured to do.

“I met with him today, with Lafayette, and I can confirm all of it,” Simcoe added. “Unfortunately, I can’t prove anything. Lafayette spoke in mimic, only moving his lips for me to read. Occasionally, he would say something out loud, an assessment of the weather or of his own talents in English, such as they be. Of course, I ended the meeting early, discovering that my friend had been taken to hospital, hoping, in truth, to find you here, Inspector.”

It sounded slightly condescending, but this perhaps was something Simcoe had no control over and did not in fact hear or intend.

“Tarleton knew … at least, he knew that I was handling a Hewlett account. Now he is dead,” Simcoe said, somewhat out of place, as though to question if Ben thought these things were connected.

“You have my deepest condolences,” Ben said, unable to offer anything more for the time being.
It did not seem enough.

In truth, he knew it was not. It could not be.

Simcoe rose. “You should come,” he said. “Meet him, and mourn him, and we will come back in
the morning to discover if formality demands us to find a Charles Joyce version of the same.”

“Where are you going?” Ben asked.

“A brothel?” Hewlett repeated in disbelief.

“It is what he would have wanted,” Simcoe said, self-assured as ever. “Well, he probably would
have wanted us to go to Atlantic City but being that we are not allowed to leave the state -”

“I think I have been lenient enough for one night,” DI Tallmadge said. It was the officer John
Wakefield had followed out to the curb, but he was hesitant to speak to him, finding that he was a
part of this funeral party that Simcoe seemed to be of the mind should be a party indeed.

“Mrs Tarleton, that is, Banastre’s mother, allowed mine to use their address to enrol me in school
as a boy. We never met.”

“You wouldn’t have,” Simcoe said. “He was away at school. With me.”

“Just if it … I don’t know. Comes up in the resulting inquiry.”

“They are going to want to keep me as far from it as possible,” Tallmadge said. Wakefield did not
know if this was the threat that it sounded, or, if so, at whom it was directed. He sighed as the cab
pulled up to take them out to Harlem. He had not been invited, but he climbed inside regardless. No
one seemed to mind.

When they reached the first stop light, Simcoe asked him if he wouldn’t mind going on at length
about how Liverpool was the first of all cities, the world’s eighth wonder, the Garden of Eden or
however he might like to hyperbolise. Wakefield gave him a weak smile. “I don’t feel that way
about my home town,” he said.

“Thank God,” Hewlett murmured to himself.

“Can you play up your scouse and curse incoherently about immigration, or the Irish, or more
specifically James Joyce?”

“I’ve never read Joyce,” Wakefield confessed.

“No one has read Joyce,” Akinbode said. Tallmadge nodded as he continued, “It is something we
all pretend to have read, that we get away with faking in high school because our teachers all did
the same.”

Hewlett snorted back as laugh.

“Well, Ban, you would have been in good company here,” Simcoe said to this ghost he had known.
The car fell silent, save for the news radio which Tallmadge was quick to tell the driver to turn off.
“Speaking of company,” Wakefield interjected, meeting the inspector’s gaze. “Most of our team was waiting in the lobby through much of the night. Many of them still are. Um. Rogers, that is, Robert Rogers, our keeper, never showed. I have a theory … as to why. One that I think worth sharing.”

“Please,” Tallmadge said. The others all leaned forward in their seats.

“Last night when you … when we saw one another on the boat, I had been speaking with Lewis Brewster for quite some time. Woodhull woke us up after midnight and … I’m not sure if you were still there or when he arrived. He said something about not being safe and – this doesn’t leave the cab, okay?”

All parties nodded their consent. “I had reason to believe him. Feeling myself sober, I loaded Lewis into my van and drove back to the city. He is staying in my guest bedroom now. No one can know that he is there. No one. You see … Lewis told me that Abe Woodhull had taken him to Rogers’ halfway house out on the edges of Setauket the night before, that Rogers’ was holding Arnold captive. Robeson, who has some basic medical training, had tended to a wound on his leg, Arnold, apparently, was delirious, screaming for a man named John – which is particularly unhelpful when it comes to our group, I realise – beyond to say that it seems he had a relationship with him. Which none of us do.”

“André,” Tallmadge said. “John André.”

“He is Robert Rogers’ best friend,” Hewlett said.

“Lewis was drunk, I don’t know if there is anything to this, but – I think I know where your victim is, Inspector. At least, I know who is involved in his disappearance.”

“And I think I know why,” Inspector Tallmadge said. He pulled out his phone and told whoever had answered his call that he needed a warrant on his desk for all of Robert Rogers’ properties and worksites the following morning.

“And mine,” Akinbode interjected before Tallmadge could hang up. “Given … what happened this afternoon, if there is truth to any of this, there might be clues there … I don’t know. I do know that Woodhull at least would have known where they key was hidden.”

“Lewis and Caleb Brewster –” Wakefield started again.

“They are not within my scope of interest. Trust me when I say I’ve no interest in prosecuting your friends,” the inspector assured him.

“And mine?” Akinbode asked, his eyes darting to Simcoe and Hewlett.

Tallmadge was silent for a long while. “Wakefield,” he said. “You are a paediatrician, are you not? Would it be possible to borrow your mind in a professional capacity? You see … Robeson, and really, most of the rest of the team for which you all play are … of interest but not exactly in a criminal capacity in light of some of the evidence Tarleton may have well died obtaining.” Hewlett buried his face in his palms. Simcoe looked out of the window in the same effort to shield his companions from a sadness he could not otherwise conceal.

“What do you need?” Wakefield asked.

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Robert Rogers was sore in ways he did not know his body could be. Slouched before the television with a beer in hand, he wondered if he was still capable of the adventures that awaited him in Alaska, adventures that took the form of felling trees, driving eighteen wheelers down ice covered paths, deep sea fishing, and, on Mondays, the odd Viking battle. Sometimes the channel lived up to its name and showed him something about Julius Caesar or Idi Amin, but this interested him little and he muted the volume and shut his eyes, hoping that when he opened them he would again be shown positive images of a possible future rather than reminders of humanity’s horrendous past.

That morning he had awoken far too early for his own liking. Unable to sleep, he began loading timber into the back of his work truck and proceeded to transport it to a worksite he had hoped would be his last - the Woodhull property on the far edge of town. On his way, he happened to glance its owner merging onto the road from a rest stop said to be scenic, though why Rogers could not explain, well as he otherwise knew these woods. He honked and Abe pulled over to the side of the road, his forehead bandaged, frantically telling him a story he was too tired to hear. Arnold, Abe said, had attacked him and escaped into the night. What then, Rogers challenged, was he doing in Setauket? The senator could not possibly have gotten so far. The two switched vehicles and Rogers drove back to Brooklyn, arriving just prior to the beginnings of the morning rush.

His search did not last long.

Arnold, clever fox that he was, had burrowed himself under the unfinished back porch, no doubt intending to emerge in the morning and head to the police station. A struggle followed, but though younger and far more volatile, Arnold had been weakened by his week of injury and delirium and had proven little challenge to him. Rogers had fought the man to the ground, startled him between his strong legs and forced a few pills he personally took for pain (and occasionally recreation) into Arnold’s mouth, covering his small, thin lips, knowing that the medicine would dissolve weather the senator elected to swallow or not. Within the next half hour, Benedict Arnold was again passed out in the back of Mary Woodhull’s Jeep Liberty, traveling safely back to Setauket at a little over the posted speed limit.

It was not yet six in the morning.

Rogers turned off the headlights well before pulling into Whitehall’s long driveway. He used the motion sensor on Mrs Woodhull’s sun visor to open the garage. As Abe had complained to him a few days prior, the space was packed with boxes leaving no place for his band to rehearse.

For Rogers’ purposes however, the space was perfect.

Whitehall had already been cleared of being a place of possible interest and with all of its residents out searching the suburb for traces of the senator as Abe had also warned, the last place any of them would think to look was within their own home. Rogers found a yoga mat for Arnold to lay on and made a fort out of heavy boxes he was certain the senator would not be able to move in his present state. Confining the man’s hands with a plastic tie and his mouth with duct tape, he stopped and listened.

“Abe?” Mrs Woodhull called, confused at seeing her car back in the driveway. “Hm. I didn’t hear him come in. I guess you don’t need to drive us after all, Abigail.” Three women and two children said goodbye to each other and loaded themselves into two cars, including the Jeep, driving off without the slightest inclination as to what had happened. Rogers heard Hewlett shuffling around upstairs, which told that he was not downstairs to see him, and so, letting himself into the building proper through the garage door, he ‘snuck’ out through the house’s front entrance.
Robert Rogers had then walked an hour across town, took his truck back from the work site where he had had Abe drive it and went back to his own to wake Robeson.

As much as he trusted his boys, he could not let them know Arnold’s current whereabouts. A single house would not pay for his retirement and regardless to how he might hold up in Alaska, he knew he would not last another season in construction, physically or financially.

Abe Woodhull, he knew, was in a state of panic. It would not take long before he broke down. Whether he asked his good wife to intervene or whether she did so of her own initiative, Rogers suspected that he could soon make contact with the Hewlett family, whom, he too was now beginning to suspect was every bit as criminal as had long been said of them. All the better for it, really. He would make threats, blackmailing them with stories which could be true, or, true enough that the family proper would offer him a pay out for his continued silence, the senator’s release and thus the name of their favourite son to be cleared of all suspicion. They would be grateful, and he would soon be far away from the worries of an economy for which he was no longer fit.

He began to dream of Alaska in the glow of the early evening television, this untamed landscape full of possibilities and promises too beautiful to simply speak. His phone rang. He was too entranced in the images of snow covered trees surrounding frozen lakes to take the call and let it go to voice mail.

It was the Brooklyn police station.

John Robeson was in custody.

Robert Rogers was unnerved, imagining now the warrants that would likely follow, the questions that would be asked, he felt it in his bones until he found himself laughing.

“Lit them come,” he murmured to himself. “Ah won’t be hidin’, an’ whit Ah’ve hidden they will ne’er fin’.”

The establishment itself was far more exclusive than the address may otherwise have suggested. He had parted with all of the cash in his wallet to buy their access to the room where they were served in a dimly lit room overpriced drinks by some of the most beautiful women he had ever seen, the walls lined with others who refused to approach the table on account of their collective fear of Tallmadge, one born out of a reputation perpetuated by media which the man himself did not seem to deserve.

“We don’t cater to your taste,” the proprietor told the cop upon entry.

“I’m not here for myself,” Tallmadge shifted.

“I’m getting married in a week,” Hewlett offered. It was honest. It was easier to explain their presence in an exclusive brothel as a stag night than the wake that it was.

Simcoe had asked that specific music be played and when the call girl he had recently come to know returned with their second round of bomb shots (which he had decided on specifically due to the offensive name the Americans had for them) she wore a blonde wig and a halter dress that exposed more that just a little of her cleavage. “When you said ‘Mary’, I would never have guessed you to mean The Mrs. Robinson,” she teased.
“I didn’t,” Simcoe told her blandly, trying to ignore the look he could feel Hewlett giving him. “The soundtrack … it is just a bit of ambiance.”

“You know … Irish Car Bombs, if the name has anything to do with any Mary Robinson, Perdita probably isn’t meant,” Wakefield said in place of complaining further about his curdled Guinness.

Everyone’s face mimicked the sensation of having swallowed the cocktail as they looked upon the stout they were meant to drink with Jameson and Bailey’s as quickly as they could manage.

“Well if for whatever reason this is in fact a theme night, might I make an alternate beverage suggestion?”

“By all means,” Wakefield replied.

“Ever had a Gertrude St. Lager? It is half a pint of tap beer topped off with spumante we pretend is champagne so we can charge $17.99 a glass.”

“Oh, I am here for the overpriced obscure eighteenth-century literary puns. We’ll take a round,” Simcoe announced, producing a credit card from his wallet. “Start a tab?”

“M’lord,” Lola winked.

“M’lady,” Simcoe replied, kissing the hand that had reached out for his Black American Express.

“My God,” Akinbode snorted.

“Eighteen dollars for half a pint? That is rather expensive,” Hewlett frowned, content to ignore the familiarity his friend showed this particular courtesan.

“No accounting for taste,” Simcoe rolled his eyes. “Didn’t we say we were going to live out the night in Tarleton’s sprit?”

“By ruining beer?”

“Among other things.”

They lifted their glasses, took the shot and shared a shudder.

“I never knew the lad,” Wakefield mused. “Something about him, even before these Irish Car Bombs never failed to annoy me though, and the worst of it is that it wasn’t really even his fault.”

“What then?” Simcoe squinted, part of him thinking it wrong to speak ill of the dead regardless of one’s relation or lack thereof.

Wakefield’s expression remained serious as he continued, “The Lord Mayor of Liverpool really didn’t think to name his four boys after The Beatles? Such a missed marketing opportunity, one, I’ll add giving the rest of his rhetoric seems altogether out of place.”

“I think if you have that many kids there is not that much planning involved,” Hewlett replied flatly. “Anyway, they were all named for former Everton players so it still fits the bill.”

“I understand and empathise,” Simcoe agreed. Turning back to Hewlett, he continued, “think on this yeah? Giving that the youngest is already named John, Ban would have wound up being Ringo and still have had the stupidest name of the lot.” He tried to smile. Ban had always resented his given name, at least, he had since securing a lifetime ‘ban’ from every English stadium upon breaking into Goodison Park at fourteen, effectively turning himself into a pun. He wondered if his
dorm mate would have laughed at Gertrude St. Lager, if he would have understood the reference, if
he, like the book’s main villain, would still argue that life was meant to be enjoyed, if he enjoyed
his own in the end.

They had not spoken much of him, and perhaps it was better so. Hewlett looked to be in the throes
of guilt over his own indifference to the man hours prior to his death. Simcoe was still not sure
where he stood. He did not know what to say. Curiously enough, Wakefield had dominated most of
the conversation since their arrival, informing Tallmadge that the medication Hewlett had been
prescribed to treat his depression acting in conjunction with the aspirin he took for his heart could
likely have mimicked symptoms of a rare childhood illness he did not believe him to suffer.
Hewlett said nothing to this end. Akinbode was quick with his threat of a class action, Tallmadge
with words spoken in earnest of doing everything in his power to help avenge everyone who had
been hurt by André and Arnold’s plot. Hewlett asked if a heart attack could be chemically
constructed as a stroke apparently could. Simcoe tried to remember the names of Ban’s illegitimate
dughters, wondering what would happen to them, if they would come to have the same
relationship with their father’s memory as he had with his.

He turned to Lola, watching her chat up another client as she waited by the bar for their next round,
still dressed the woman whose voice filled the room. Even at a low volume, Mary Robinson’s
sound was still big enough to make him feel quite small. He wondered when and how she would
hear the news, if she could still miss or mourn the man with whom she had spent most of her adult
life after everything that had transpired between them in that same span of time.

“What was his real name?” Akinbode asked.

“Banastre.”

“No, Ringo?”

“Oh, I have no idea.”

“Richard Starkey,” Tallmadge told them.

“Alright, we have to change the music,” Akinbode gave. “I, as someone heart broken in a whore
house, can’t listen to any more ballads of heart break.” Simcoe was ready to object to his lawyer’s
less-than-considerate language when the man continued, “Do you think he got to Abby too?
André, I mean … I know they slept together, but do you think he, you think he manipulated her in
some way, some dangerous way like he planned to do us? I’m just thinking, I – I don’t know.”

“I can talk to her if you want,” Hewlett offered.

“The problem is she won’t talk to me.”

“Okay … change of music,” Tallmadge said when the silence between them became
uncomfortable. “Are we sticking with a Liverpool theme?”

“Must we?”

“Is there a single good Beatles song to get a lap dance to?”

“The things that sound far smarter when said in an English accent,” Akinbode murmured to
Tallmadge. The inspector smiled.

An hour past in lighter sprits, none of which Simcoe could entirely share. At last call the decided to
raise a toast to the deceased.
“To shameless quote his kind-of-widow,” Simcoe started, still unsure of exactly what to say, “Colonel Tarleton was the epitome of everything admired and everything frivolous, while his good qualities, if he had any, were so eclipsed by vanity that he seemed to act as a perpetual shadow to his own imagined splendour. He was too polite to be religious; too witty to be learned; too youthful to be serious and too handsome to be discreet. Despite all evidence to the contrary, however, in the end he was a true friend after all. It pains me that the last words shared between us were those of contempt. Good night, Ban. Here is hoping that St Peter’s twelve gates of pearl won’t prove half the excruciating purgatory as those you were too oft’ made to suffer in Belgium.”

“To a fallen officer,” Tallmadge offered diplomatically.

“I’ll take your case to the highest court,” Akinbode swore, more to himself than to a man whose name he had first learnt a few hours earlier.

“Wasn’t our Ringo an Everton supporter?” Wakefield asked as though the answer to this would determine whether his glass would be raised with the others or not.

“Excepting Paul, all of The Beatles were,” Tallmadge said. Turning to Hewlett, he continued, “Thanks to that jersey we found in your apartment, I’ve gone deep into a lot of internet rabbit holes over things I never expected to find myself Googling.”

“If we ever go out again,” Wakefield told him, “we are finding a pub with a trivia night.”

“I could stay here forever.”

“I think I just might.”

Simcoe cleared his throat and looked at Hewlett. “I don’t have a toast as it were,” his sometimes-friend gave, “having not known the lad nearly as well as I’d ought to have done, but with respect to his taste in sport I offer my humility in the form of a dirge. Anyone who knows the lyrics, feel free to join in. It is what he would have wanted. Maybe,” he swallowed.

“Oh we hate Bill Shankly and we hate St John,

but most of all we hate Big Ron,

And we’ll hang the Kopites one by one on the banks of the Royal Blue Mersey,

To Hell with Liverpool and Rangers too,

throw them all in the Mersey,

And we’ll fight fight fight,

With all our might for the boys in the Royal Blue Jersey -”

“I thought it was pink?” Ben squinted.

“Kopites are Gobshite,” Hewlett said, seeming to mean himself specifically.

Kopites are Gobshite,” he continued the chorus until all four other voices joined him.

Simcoe felt like sobbing. He felt like screaming. He felt there was no appropriate way to say goodbye.

Looking at his teammates, he wondered who among them would be next.
… everyone who has read *Indefinite Articles*, shhhhh!

So, I realised a few things about myself recently as I begin to edit this work for possible publication. First, I have no qualms whatsoever about throwing shade at whomever you support in club football. None. (Unless you are a fellow Bayern fan, in which case to be honest I’ll just make fun of you personally.) My brothers used to joke that they were fine with me dating, knowing that no relationship would last a half-season, transfer window, cup competition or whatever. That my marriage has survived HSV’s regulation is itself a wonder. Honestly though, I never thought I would carry this trait into adulthood. I also never thought that (should I pull off this impossible feat of convincing a broader public to give me a shot) I may well become the first Muslim woman to write a book centred largely around beer and sport. The signs were always there, I’m sure. My parents would be *so proud.*

Still, regardless of what may come, I’ll never be anything when judged against the man who broke the stereotype of laundry being a woman’s domain. Go, my friends, shatter norms that fail to make sense in out modern society! Use your notes sections in place of the blog you don’t have and – ah, yea. … Notes. I actually only have one, so let’s have at it.

Parts of the eulogy Simcoe gives were respectively lifted from pages 46 and 42 of volume one of *Mary Robinson’s 1799 novel The False Friend*, which is available online for free, but, to save you the trouble of reading this particular tome, I’ll give you a condensed synopsis: The heroine, Gertrude St. Leger (whose name was also punned in the final scene) is basically Elizabeth Gwillim with a serious Elektra Complex. The novel in almost its entirety takes the form of letters she writes to her best friend about her life as an exceeding wealthy orphan and the people she encounters in polite society, among whom is Mr. Treville (a blatant parody on Tarleton with whom Robinson had by then split) who St. Leger has an affair with against her better sensibilities (which she otherwise so harps on they become their own sort of sin.) But anyway, yeah … at the end she learns that Lord Denmore, her legal guardian and the guy she has really been thirsting on all throughout is in fact her biological father, having been a ‘false friend’ to the man whose name and wealth she inherited by his sleeping with her mother, leading to Gertrude to die of a broken heart (as one does.) It is well over 1000 pages and the English ‘s’ used to be written like an ‘f’ and if you are like me and grew up with ‘ss’ instead of ‘ß’ and sometimes have to do a double take in slightly older books in German … my oh my will this **** with you.

As always, thank you so much for reading!

Up next: The kids are not ‘o’rite’ … (and neither is DI Tallmadge.)
The Unrelenting (Pt.1)

Chapter Summary

Six children both intentionally and inadvertently affect the day’s news. A week after their break-up, Abigail and Akinbode find themselves face to face. DI Tallmadge finds himself in a dilemma of duty and faith.

Chapter Notes

You guys will forgive me my indulgences, for I find I have to bang on for a bit about history by way of introduction.

This week I found myself reading a spreadsheet this week of Westminster’s Ways and Means budget from 1780-something (as one does) and that which ought to have been obvious for years at this point occurred to me out of the blue: 18th century English history? More of what the internet calls a ‘white space’ than I have ever personally encountered in chain coffee shops. I always felt somehow like an unwelcome intrusion and now that I get it has nothing to do with me (or anyone else for that matter), I feel less out of place in my own mind. Hear me out on this one – History is important in helping us understand the origins of our inner hang-ups thus allowing us to overcome them. Honestly, the day after discovering why I felt I never could quite fit in with ye olde TURN fandom, I went and put my name in for a promotion as underqualified as I imagined myself. The resulting interview is in two weeks. XD

Real talk, read up on whatever it is that speaks to your stranger interests and completely nerd out on it regardless of how much you may or may not match the intended audience. I have lived this before by often being the only girl in a pub intent on watching whatever game is on (as I am sure we all have in some fashion or another.)

Yo, I am going to stop being shy and start going to museums and re-enactments and such. In a few months I will let you guys know the redcoat-impressionist equivalent of “Messi or Ronaldo?” (not a good pick up line, lads!!!) and maybe in a year or two I will be able to tell you what generates the same blank expression as “Why am I am Bayern fan? Do you have two hours to talk about financing (i.e. listen to me gush about my idol Uli Hoeneß)?” when talking early-modern history.

Till then, let’s just leave it at knowledge is for everyone and talk about a few things in this update you might want to be prepared to read:

This chapter touches on weapons and religiosity, not in a contained or connected context but smoke does tend to follow fire. The first part focuses on my personal favourite fictionalized historical figure within the H+S universe (not even going to front …) and the final two scenes deal heavily with what may well be the worst reality of our modern era. Every scene is centred around a phone in some way (so if you are reading this on yours, hey, hey – you are in great company!) As the summary suggests, children play the primary roles in this chapter. It was not intended – I normally draft around six scenes for each chapter knowing that I will cut one or two, but this update featured ten in the outline - a figure that only increased as I got into it.
I’ll be back as soon as I can with more of Ben and Jordan on the worst day of their lives as soon as scheduling allows, for now though, as always, I hope you enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was too abrupt for anyone to have filmed it, but the laughter and jeers of their schoolmates would soon prove every bit as damning as the comments she might have otherwise read about her character on YouTube or Facebook. Her bloodied fist was still shaking with an anger, one which would turn to dread as soon as she turned away. In ten minutes, she too would be crying, but few would be around to witness her collapse. In the moment, however, Marie Robinson felt in complete control. Fixing her gaze on the upperclassman whose nose she suspected that she had just broken, she straightened her shoulders slightly, and, in a voice too small for anyone else to hear, dared him to say it again.

Rather than meet her challenge, the lad cursed and walked away. So too did she. The bell rang shortly after but Marie did not make her way to English Literature, which not so long ago had been among her favourite subjects. Instead, she turned into the girls’ lavatory. After washing her hands in water than ran cold regardless of how the sink’s handles were adjusted, the thirteen-year-old locked herself into a bathroom stall, pulled a pair legs (which were beginning to seem too long in comparison to those of the other girls in her year) close to her chest that no one could see them and took her phone from the inner breast pocket of her school-issued blazer to text her father over what had just happened.

>>I got into a fight<< she wrote.

>>Marie, I am so disappointed in you! You are a young lady now, you have to start thinking about you future.<< he replied a few seconds later.

Reading this, Marie broke down into tears.

Normally, the first thing he would have asked would have been ‘Are you alright?’. When she responded that she was, the man she remembered would have followed up with two questions: ‘Did you hit first?’ and ‘Did you hit hard?’. Only after affirming that she had met both requirements would he ask her ‘Was it deserved?’, always allowing her to defend the action before offering a counter argument, one which might include the words ‘young lady’ but most certainly would not speak of disappointment.

For a moment, Marie wondered if this was how her father really felt, if he always had and if that was part of the reason he and her mum had ended their extended affair to begin with or if this was simply part of the new normal that sought to fill the vacuum he had left in her life when he had zipped up a suitcase stuffed full with items of his fall wardrobe as her mother screamed, stopping only briefly to kiss the top of Marie’s head before shutting the door. There was a time when he would have promised her this would not be permanent. In September, no such words had been forthcoming.

Last year when he still lived in London, when they shared a roof if not a name, Marie never got into fights, she had an ‘A’ in every subject and most certainly never skipped class to cry in the
toilets.

Now, that was exactly what she was doing. It was not the first time she found herself in this same setting and emotional state. It was not even the first time that week. At least today, her reasons felt real.

She wiped her eyes dry on the sleeve of her blazer, staining the red garment with the black of her mascara which she had previously been discouraged from wearing by both of her parents, expected to be a ‘young lady’ but not to look like one, not yet. Not at thirteen. As Marie saw it, however, she did not have much of a choice. Not at school. Even with the benefit of cosmetics such as it was, she was not pretty in the slightest. Her long hair was pale and thin, worn in twin braids to hide its absence of texture. Her face was covered in spots and thus covered in concealer and packed powder which she applied every morning on the corner of her block in the sort of old phone booth tourists came to England just to take pictures of themselves in, hiding where her mother could not see her or the efforts she had to make towards her appearance before meeting her friends and enemies on the school’s steps before the first bell rang. The mascara, admittedly, was almost counter-productive. She wore it primarily that her pale lashes would not disappear entirely into her alabaster war-paint, while in truth, Marie wished herself to be altogether faceless.

As it was, she had to cope with comments schoolmates and strangers comparing her unfavourably to her famous mother. The mascara was a must and now it was misplaced, a testament to the girl she was rather than the woman she most assuredly was not. Her dad, she considered, probably would be disappointed if he could see her now in every way that a father-figure possibly could be and this thought made her break into a sob. Her phone blinked again and she nearly through it against the wall when she read:

>>Why aren’t you in class?<<

The short message had been sent a second after the last.

But that, Marie considered, was its own kind of impossible.

Her dad only sent her texts that might be better composed as email and these took an eternity to type for he only had one hand.

“Marie?” a voice called. She could do without the company. The girl pulled her legs closer to her chest and clenched her jaw, determined not to make a sound. When she inhaled, however, the air came in with a sniff and her hiding space was discovered. Someone tried to turn the stall’s handle and, upon finding it locked, began tapping lightly on the door. “Everything alright?”

Nothing was.

“Fine,” she responded.

“Are you crying?”

“Susan, can you just let it alone?” Marie begged.

“No!” her best friend scoffed. She knocked again on the door. When Marie did not move to answer it, Susan Bertie got down on her hands and knees with some measure of complaint and stuck her head under the door. “Fine, stay in there, whatever. Here, take my bag though? It is Chanel and … it’s my aunt’s. She doesn’t know I’m borrowing it and I don’t want to set it on the bathroom floor,” she explained, removing her head momentarily and replacing it with a black lambskin clutch. “I have baby wipes inside,” she said, “fix your face, yea? Or … don’t. Actually don’t. Just, we will go
to the headmaster’s office and say Christopher assaulted you and -”

“Assaulted me? I thought you were trying to be religious,” Marie frowned. Though herself in no position to throw the first stone, she felt the Bible’s teachings altogether wasted on her best friend who was more naturally inclined to economics than ecclesiastics. Susan had calculated that if she opened a savings account upon completing her confirmation at fourteen, she would accrue enough interest on the gifts she could expect by her sixteenth birthday to put down payment on a Jaguar, planning, as most at their school did, to do her work experience in the United States that she might get a driving licence a few months sooner than was otherwise allowed. Marie, in contrast, reasoned her dad would give her a Fiat when she turned seventeen, either working a family connection or winning enough over some weekend binge to blow a four-sum figure in a used car lot without her having to turn to a God he himself only professed to believing in rhetorically in response to the rise of radical Islam in Britain.

“Is it still lent?” Susan knotted her brow below as Marie began puzzling if her dad still cared for her enough to provide for her in this way. “I stopped going to catechism,” her friend said sheepishly.

“That didn’t last long,” Maire found herself smiling.

“How long is it meant to? Lent, I mean. Forty days, right? Like, when did it start even?”

“It ends at Easter, I know that much,” Marie paused, noticing a bandage on her best friend’s knee. “Wait, I’ll come out,” she said, hastening. “What happened to you there?”

“Football, last night, I went to training with Yasmin and Rachel,” Susan said with a little brag, leaning forward with her hands on her hips. She stood half a head under Marie but carried herself as though she was especially big, and in some realms, she was. Susan was the natural daughter of someone who sat in the House of Lords, likely the most interesting thing that could be said about the man whose name she had inherited but whose title she never would. She lived with her Lady grandmother whom she called ‘Nan’, and who, for her part, seemed altogether unaware of Susan’s existence, much less her presence in her stately home. Susan had an aunt as well who would sometimes visit. Sometimes, when left feeling lonely, she would look at old photographs in which her grandmother’s caretakers appeared in the background and try to guess from their features who her mother might have been. She did not know her father well enough to ask him herself when he rang on her birthday and Christmas, but this was increasingly becoming less of a hang up for the girl as Susan had learned to lie about her age and thus to compensate for a lack of familial affection with statistics – namely the likes, views, shares and subscriptions she got on social media. She had a YouTube channel that was popular enough to receive advertising revenue and corporate sponsorship. Marie wondered how long it would take for Nike or Adidas to find their way into one of her haul videos if they had not already made an approach as her friend’s smile seemed to attest.

Unlike herself, Susan was not still in braces. Whenever she grinned, Maire self-consciously closed her own mouth in order to cover what she could not help but to think of as yet another permanent flaw rather than a slow correction, common in accordance with her years. Her best friend had straight teeth, perfect skin, and glossy dark hair she had cropped in a short flapper style some months before, making her look older and more elegant than she was - as did her burgundy lipstick and the padded push-ups Marie would personally have never traded for a sport-bra of the kind she always wore were she lucky enough to own something that could imitate figure. She decided in her private envy that football and her friend did not quite fit with one another. Like confirmation classes, this was another phase Susan would quickly outgrow.

“I didn’t know Rachel played,” she shrugged. “She never mentioned it.”
“She just started, too. Like, literally just last night. You should sign up with us! *Lady Anna* used to be a footballer.”

In hearing ‘Lady Anna’ evoked, Marie lost any and all interest she had in her friends’ newfound past times. On Tuesday, *The Daily Mail* had published a picture of Edmund Hewlett’s American bride hugging her Aunt Charlotte when they were both but girls. Everyone at school was keen to slight the tabloid and claim they should not lower themselves enough to read it - that was, of course, until something contained within its pages could be used to taunt and torture a fellow classmate. That morning, she had first heard for herself what her cousin had said the other boys had been whispering to him all week - lewd comments about what they were want to do to his famously beautiful mother, with or without her consent.

Billy had walked past them, head down.

Marie had meant and moved to follow, knowing from experience the matter would blow over on its own and it was best to ignore it, but then one of the boys in sixth form laughed as he said *‘It isn’t as though she could run away now, is it?’* and something in Marie had snapped.

She turned to look at herself in the mirror and saw her face streaked and smudged with waterproof mascara that could not stand up to saline. “Can I have a baby wipe? I can’t go back out there like this. If I do, they will send me to speak to the school counsellor again when I could just as well be given a detention or suspension -”

“Your point proves mine,” Susan said, adjusting her weight slightly that her unchanged stance turned from a tease into a lecture. “You don’t have to say ‘assault’ even though that is technically what they were talking about doing – just make it seem like it was a fair fight and be the first to fess up to it and you should be fine,” she stopped. “Are you? Okay I mean?”

“I am. Honestly, I just … I just don’t need Miss Chatham to sit there and try to tell me why she suspects that I’m not. She is not even a real psychologist, you know, just some lady who made an Open University course in paedology that allows her to sit in a corner office two days a week and feign sympathy for a fat pay cheque.”

“I like her.”

“You wouldn’t if you -” had parents, Marie wanted to say, but did not. “Look, she just … she smiles and pretends she can relate, saying things like *‘I wasn’t much older than you when my parents filed for divorce’* and I am like yeah, I mean I get that used to be more of a social stigma and all, but her parents probably sorted things in court. My mum has two top-ten singles out right now and they are both about how much she hates my dad. We never talk about it -me and her - but the same, it is *all* I hear anywhere I go. I’m sorry but Miss Chatham has no idea what it is like.”

“Okay. Sit down,” Susan said almost mutely after Marie’s rant had settled into the light buzz of the economic overhead lighting. “Let me fix your face.”

After two minutes or so of struggling against the shadow she created in the glow of the florescent light as Marie sat on one of the toilets, Susan suggested that she re-do Maire’s eye liner in homeroom where they could both sit on the couch. Marie wondered that her friend did not want to rush back to class as quickly as her feet could carry her, but didn’t ask. Instead, she simply answered questions that might as well have come from and adult who was paid to force their concern onto the student body. “People don’t move from London to Liverpool,” Susan scolded in reply as they turned the corner. “People don’t move away from London at all. It is a place you come to, not a place you leave. Stop being ridiculous.”
Her mother said the same thing every time Marie brought the matter up, only she put it in terms of how much she could comparatively provide for her. ‘You’ve never wanted for anything,’ her mother would dismiss. ‘Want?’ Marie would counter. ‘I want to go and live with dad!’ To this, her mother would tell her that she would not last a week in sixteen square metres of estate housing and if Marie had the audacity to further challenge her mother to allow her to prove her wrong in this assessment, Mary Robinson would cross her arms as though to warm herself from her own inner chill as she said, ‘Ban isn’t even your real father.’ Marie would call her a whore in return and fifteen minutes later her phone would ring and she and her dad would have a conversation about appropriate language - which was itself senseless as she and her mum would find reasons to not speak again until Marie had another detention slip or test she needed her to sign. Eventually, she reasoned, her mother would give in and kick her out the same as she had done to Dad, allowing her to go live with the parent with whom she simply she got on with better, “And then everything would be better,” she said to Susan as her friend was trying to apply liquid liner to her eyelid, tongue stuck out slightly in the sort of concentration Marie hoped would not correlate to how heavy her wings would look when Susan’s work was finished.

“I thought your dad was John Terry,” a voice came from a far table. Susan snapped her head around, no doubt wondering exactly what Marie was, though, when she looked up herself to answer the question of who the hell actually did homework in homeroom (after being told not to move), she found she was not surprised in the least.

Marie Robinson never much talked Arthur Wellesley if she could help it; the same could be said of the relationship everyone else at school seemed to have with him. She let a sigh escape at the sight of the lad. Susan, in turn, immediately lost interest and returned to her task at hand.

Arthur, Marie reasoned as her face was made, had probably been told by a grade-school teacher or guidance councillor that he was ‘gifted’, translating the word into a licence to never make any discernible effort to live up to this potential lest the assessment be disputed. He would probably get into Oxford or Cambridge with three Bs because of his last name and would probably wind up in parliament at some point thereafter representing a constituency with a low voter turnout, at which point he would make a name for himself by getting Britain involved in whatever endless conflict the Americans would have by then started over petrol – which they called ‘gasoline’ colloquially and ‘freedom’ or ‘democracy’ interchangeably in the political rhetoric Westminster would again want to imitate. Marie felt this way about most of her male classmates, but there was something about Arthur that made him especially easy to dislike on these grounds.

Part of it was that he was Irish.

Part of it was that she was petty.

Though not in the same year, the two had orchestra and advanced French together and the previous autumn they had been sorted into a project group that involved sometimes getting together after school to write dialogues they were meant to preform before their class explaining whatever cultural or historical topic they had been assigned. Marie found it difficult to stand up before a group of her snickering peers as it was, Arthur made the task close to impossible for her, loath as he was in engage in any step of the process whatsoever. She had been to his house once to work on their shared homework and he had not even the curtesy to provide a bowl of crisps for her and their fellow classmates as was the culture and custom of such study sessions. ‘What’s this?’ Marie had teased when Arthur had said curtly that he was not hungry, (not going so far as to ask if any of his guests were.) ‘I thought the Irish were keen on potatoes.’

The two had not spoken since except to exchange a few words of text in a foreign language course which Marie still had an A in as she wrote the majority of their one-act plays herself – primarily on
the grounds that she would be damned if a classmate who did not contribute to the project got to say more than one or two lines and this were then to correspond to his general class participation grade.

It was probably for the best that they otherwise had nothing to do with one another, she reasoned. He seemed to her to be the very distinct type of awkward introvert who would read five pages of the Bible and then turn to tell whomever happened to be on hand to observe his arrogance that he could disprove the existence of God. They did not speak often, but she found herself imagining him dragging her into such a pseudo-intellectual argument whenever they two so happened to be in the same room the way that some girls always saw their own death in the form of a spider and began screaming to be saved.

She wondered how widespread her silenced paranoia around conversing with the upperclassman whose undeserved superiority complex was almost all that one could speak to truly was; in the process, questioning if she was in part just shallow and did not want the association to extend to and expand upon her own ugliness. Like she herself, Arthur was lanky and spot-ridden, but where Marie compensated with cosmetics and snide comments designed at making her classmates laugh, he never smiled and rarely gave any indication that he even could.

Part of this probably owed itself to the fact that Marie Robinson was hardly the only fellow pupil to ruthlessly make fun on him whenever opportunity allowed. Part of it seemed a conscious invitation on Arthur’s part for his peers to do just that.

He kept his hair in an unfortunate style which seemed to come from another time and place - specifically, the Ruhr valley from back when Schalke 04 had last gone deep enough into a cup competition as to remind the English what the term ‘Euro Mullet’ described. If he wore it a bit shorted on the sides, Marie considered as she studied her curious classmate half in spite of herself, he would look instead like an American gun enthusiast, the kind that made the nightly news after having shot everyone in their school to have ever offered offence, real or imagined.

Marie swallowed, imagining that if he did somehow, someday get his hands on a firearm she would be the first causality for her potato comment. Though she knew he meant to return the insult in a way that was readily available, she was surprised he spoke to her now all the same.

“Biologically … maybe. I don’t really know,” she answered in spite of her caution, slightly confused at having been asked to respond to a Daily Mail article other than the one about her aunt and Lady Anna having been acquainted, surprised that such was still in anyone’s conscious mind as it had been printed years before. Unlike Susan, Marie had never been especially curious about her actual parentage. She had a dad. Had, a past tense that was grammatically simple but practically anything but, she though with a sadness she was determined not to let show. “My legal father is a different person, too, but I hardly see how that is any of your business,” she quipped.

“What are you even doing here anyway?”

He declined to answer. Susan got up from the couch to check for herself, announcing seconds later, “Okay, I’ve seen lads playing with themselves in this room before but never quite like this. Do you need some competition, love? Oh, it is just tragic isn’t it? Why do you have every army lined up in two columns?” At this, Marie rose as well. She walked over to see pieces of a board game arranged without strategy. Arthur looked as lost as the men he had place in the middle of the Atlantic. He looked at his phone when it buzzed, and, frowning, scrawled three more names on a computer printout containing nothing but.

“Are you fucking kidding me?” Susan cursed as she read what was scribbled.
“Kitty?” Marie guessed.

“No,” Arthur answered her.

“Who?” Susan blinked. “Never mind – do we have to do the American War again in year ten? GOD! Screw that, I thought I was done.”


“In history? Or is this like a Hamilton thing?” Susan shifted, sharing a hint of excitement. “The show is coming to the West End, did you hear?”

“No, we are doing World War One right now and this is … part of my work experience,” he explained, sounding more embarrassed than condescending. “I’m flying over to DC on Saturday for two weeks and I’m meant to do the seating arrangement for the Hewlett wedding. I guess the embassy wants to involve itself or this is just an act of hazing.”

Susan, hearing this, found her excitements uncontainable to Arthur’s expressed annoyance. “Are you going to make your driving licence?”

Marie, guessing the answer Arthur seemed loath to offer, took a seat across from him.

“I hate this. Ordinarily, I would get to go home for the Easter holiday,” he told her. “I need to. Kitty hasn’t responded to a single text I’ve sent in the last fortnight.”

“My dad – not Thomas Robinson or John Terry – won’t stop texting me,” she gave. “Something isn’t right about it. But whatever. Let’s just blame our problems on the respective service providers and try not to thing about -”

“Hey,” Susan interrupted by snapping her fingers in their field of vision. “Arthur – that is your name, right? Is it still lent? Like is sexting just not a thing for you right now?”

“What?” he blinked.

“Oh, okay cool. Your girlfriend though, she Catholic? I know they can be like really hard core when it comes to fasting. I wouldn’t want to offend,” she said without marking that her words, such as they were, might well have been offensive to a certain audience.

“No?” Arthur puzzled.

“But you are both from Dublin? Weird, but whatever. I don’t care. Give me your phone,” Susan demanded, again seeming larger than she was or would ever comparatively be.

“No?” the lad responded, his confusion clear.

“I’m going to get her to text you back! Trust me,” Susan winked, “I am good at this kind of thing.”

“She is,” Marie confirmed. Susan grabbed the device. Arthur was allowed no time to be convinced.

“I’ve time for it. It is like, I’ve already missed enough class that I am going to have to spend four hours here on Saturday regardless if I go back now or not,” the girl prattled and she typed something Marie was sure was deeply inappropriate. She, in turn, looked at the pieces on the bored and the names on the list. “Is this for the reception? What is the space like dimension-wise?” Marie asked, having been to a number of such events in the past.

“I don’t know, I’ve never been and I’ve no map to tell me.”
Arthur shrugged. He looked up when he heard his phone buzz in Susan’s hands. “Did you -” he began.

Susan’s eyes grew wide before retracting when her entire face turned into a bright smile. “Honestly, I don’t know what you are on about, the girl has to fancy you like mad … that or she is incredibly dim-witted - perhaps both because I am just paraphrasing some of the grosser comments I get on Insta -” she stopped. Her face lost all of its expression but when she spoke no measure of enthusiasm or excitement had been lost to her tone. “Actually! You know what! Marie, bitch, we are both just as dumb. Your dad is probably busy and just delegated the task of texting you somewhere down whatever command chain. I mean … mine has.”

“But mine wouldn’t!”

“Maybe he is … with someone. It happens,” Susan shrugged.

Marie, feeling the slight, pulled out her phone and began searching for Americanisms in the way words were spelt, picturing her dad in a hotel room with a random woman whose name she would never know and he would forget by the time he had tossed his condom if not sooner, asking this one-night-stand to handle his correspondence after the act in a way that would doubtlessly come across as further flirtation, a way of saying to this stranger that other women shared his life but only she was sharing his bed. Immediately, Marie felt awful and ill over the suspicions she borrowed from her mother’s lyrics. “He wouldn’t … he might, I mean, to someone else - anyone else - but not to me. What if you are right though? What if something happened and he can’t write me himself?”

With this worry, Marie found her fears begin to closer resemble the man as she knew him, returning her to one of her earliest memories – hosting her father and a number of stuffed animals for afternoon tea when he was still struggling to use his left hand to do simple things. It would still take years before she would fully understand how lonely they had both been when she was a toddler and he had returned badly injured from his final tour of combat; that rather than pandering, he had been glad to let her to play princess for him, wearing a plastic tiara as she sipped her tea and smiled at the only member of her called court who was not made of plastic or plush; that he had needed her then as much as she had needed him since and needed him still. Though it had been years since they had last taken tea in a phantasy setting, she returned for a moment to the miniature table she had once had in her room, wondering how her dad would learn to make do if he had somehow lost another appendage. Suddenly, she felt very small again.

“All I see?” Arthur asked. Marie passed her phone to him.

“The thing is, my dad only has one hand he can type with,” she explained. “He can’t be texting as fast as he is, unless, like I was saying, there is some mix up with the service provider. It has been this way since Monday. He is supposed to be in Washington, working – you know? But whenever I write him he writes me back right away and … I don’t know.”

“What does he do?”

“He is a military attaché.”

“So, he is with the embassy? I mean … I doubt we will meet up being that I expect I’ll just be filing papers, making tea and admitting that I am not the best party planner if I need to in order to get a stamp and a signature, but if you want to put your number in my phone … I can text you if I see or hear anything next week.”
“Why would you do that?” she wondered.

Arthur didn’t seem to have an answer so he tried with another question he tried to disguise as an assertion. “I could trace the IP address if you want?”

“Can you?”

Cicero Ingram had never showered quit so quickly. In fact, he was the first to leave the locker room, and this after completing with soap and water what his equally hurried friends were in the process of attempting with Axe Body Spray. Outside, he let the fresh air fill his lungs, feeling for a moment as though he had just left a gas chamber and questioning if his teammates would have enough sense to escape the musk of hubris or if they would instead all succumb to a suffocation of their own making. Realizing he was still wearing the shower cap he had borrowed from his mother months before and never intended to return, he shoved it into his sport bag along with the clothes, cleats and shin guards, themselves thrown in in such haphazard fashion that he found he was unable to zip it shut. Cicero broke into a jog. Meeting John Graves Simcoe where the field met the forest, the excitement that had spurred him all day came to a sudden stop.

“Was it fake?” he asked, crestfallen as he observed his coach looking sadly at his touch-screen.

“Were it only,” Simcoe replied, awkwardly shoving the device back into the pocket of his sweatpants.

Cicero pulled out his own phone and reopened the app. Prior to training, he had endeavoured to discover if the story that filled social media and filtered into every conversation he had had that day at school was true – namely, that Nintendo had recently plugged a limited number of rare ghost-type Pokémon in and near the Setauket crime scene, but these had thus far proven as elusive as Benedict Arnold himself. He guessed that Coach had not found any either and asked him as much.

“I … was not aware,” Simcoe puzzled. Cicero frowned, the statement throwing his general understanding of the world into question. He had Facebook, but this only because like every other twelve-year-old he knew, he could count and had thus subtracted one from his birth year in order to build a profile the way that his more foolish friends would add whatever number to their given age that they thought might make a difference when chatting up girls. Cicero was of the personal opinion that old people spent too much time on social media - so much time, in fact, that they were ruining it for the target demographic. He had gotten a friend request from Miss Anna once which was almost as bad as it would have been had his own mother sent it. He had let it sit in his notifications for two weeks until he had to lie to her face that he had not seen it, and even after that it had only been with reluctance that he had hit ‘accept’.

His former coach shared ‘funny’ e-cards and ‘inspirational’ quotes about wine and housework. It was almost more than he could bear. After receiving a request from Miss Peggy (who was worse in that she was almost young but still shared memes about Mondays and wrote posts about palates) he had set his account to private and now only logged in when he had exhausted his every other app he had obtained by saying he had been born in 2002, which was how most of his mates interacted with the platform. Sometimes, however, it was worth their while as he again found himself hoping it would yet prove today.
“Do you not have Facebook?” Cicero asked hopefully, deciding before his new coach even had a chance to answer that he was ‘cool’ because he understood, at least in essence, that he fundamentally was not.

“I do, we just … follow different people,” Simcoe sighed, his chin tucked into his collarbone as though he meant to look down. Still, he did not quite meet Cicero’s gaze. “A friend of mine passed away last night – well, I found out about it last night. Another is in hospital. No one I know is posting or sharing anything else,” he shifted. “Forgive me, I’m just tired. It was a long night.”

“I’m sorry, about your friends, really,” Cicero said quietly. Coach nodded that this was the correct response and moved to change the topic. “Am I taking you back to Whitehall today?” he asked almost cheerfully. It was the same tone he used when they tiered during training and he was adjusting his expectations, introducing a particularly difficult drill in which to express his disappointment.

He was sad and deeply so. Seeing this, Cicero made an awkward movement to give Coach Simcoe a hug, but thinking better on it, quickly shoved the hands he extended into his pockets. Coach clearly did not want anyone to know all that much about whatever problems he was having in his personal life, which Cicero understood in a limited capacity. He had himself been embarrassed on Tuesday for Pip to come over only to find that he and his mom had moved into a suburban hostel rather than the house Jordan had bought for them. He still had not told any of his friends that the two had broken up and that his family was no more. For this, there were no words. Coach probably did not have any either for the problems he faced. Doing his best not to imagine how distraught he himself might be had something unspeakable happened to one of his friends, Cicero answered as casually as he could, “No, Mrs Hamilton is picking us up today. She said I could stay the night. My mom has a sudden work thing, I guess.”

Simcoe nodded. “Pokémon, hm?” he commented, noting a few of Cicero’s teammates now scavenging the field with their phones. “That was a thing when I was little.”

“Do you want to come with us?” Cicero asked hopefully.

Coach shook his head, slightly surprised. “Where? To the Hamiltons’? I don’t think you quite in a position to extend such an invitation.”

“No – Pokémon hunting,” Cicero smiled. “We are not far from the crime scene so -”

With this, the man’s posture and expression altered entirely. “No,” he said as though giving a command, “And no, you are not going anywhere near -”

“You didn’t!” he heard Pip yell as he approached, breaking from a jog into a sprint as he continued to scold. “You told him?”

Cicero took a deep breath and instantly regretted it. His friend stank of sweat covered under fifteen layers of various body sprays. Girls who found such an odour attractive and enticing were gross, he decided. They were gross and someday they would become the sort of women who ruined social media by sharing news items that had nothing to do with anything he cared about. He moved his hand before his face in an attempt to encourage uncorrupted air into their space. Pip crossed his arms.

“I invited him to come along,” Cicero coughed.

Coach, still sounding like a commander, tried to end the argument about to ensue by explaining the more mundane aspects of his duties to the Rec Centre Soccer Team ‘Blue’. “I have to wait until all
of the parents arrive and … look,” he softened slightly when he saw that Pip was scared. “I understand Pokémon Go is fun, but for the police this isn’t a game – you can’t sneak onto a crime scene. I imagine that is a finable offence no matter who your parents are, furthermore I don’t -”

“Want us seeing blood or finding a dead body?” Pip tried to argue. “My dad is in the FBI. I’ve seen -”

“No,” Simcoe told them flatly. “You haven’t. Don’t be so flippant about,” he stopped. “Look this app, it seems the sort of thing a mate of mine would be into. I don’t know where he is with his wedding preparations but … maybe we can all - or maybe you can go instead with your parents at the weekend, but you are not crossing any police tape. The two of you are free to look around the complex with your teammates, but stay where I can see you – don’t go into the woods,” he warned.

“But -” Pip started up again.

“Just how keen are you to see a corpse?” Simcoe asked lightly. Pip put his bag down beside Cicero’s and walked slowly, sulkily, away.

“I can’t believe you said something to Coach,” he complained as they walked along the line of trees, as close as they could come to their area of interest without getting in trouble.

“He was looking at his phone,” Cicero explained. “I thought he was playing too.”

“He works on Wall Street,” Pip sighed. “That is all they do is look at their phones.”

“I thought he seemed sad.”

“He works on Wall Street,” Pip said again.

Cicero bit his lip, “His friend died, I thought he might need a new one.”

“Oh,” Pip responded, looking down. “Oh!” he repeated a bit louder.

“I know, its -”

“Cicero, wait, come back,” he began waving in excitement, “I found -”

“Hey, are you dorks coming?” a familiar voice called out before the boy could finish his sentence. “Pip, your mom is here. Come on!”

“Stall her,” Pip answered. He did not look in her direction. He rarely did if he could otherwise help it.

Theodosia Burr and Phillip Hamilton were friends since birth who were acclimating themselves to the reality that they were slowly drifting apart with age. What they had in common owed itself alone to personal geography – they were neighbours, they went to the same school, they played on the same soccer team and there the similarities stopped. It had been a few weeks since Thea had last spent lunch at their table. It was not, as Cicero saw, that she and Pip were in an argument, it was that the things they could argue about and agree on were dwindling. Most of their conversations were restricted to pleasantries – meant in earnest, but sadder, he considered, than things said in anger all the same. Fights could be fixed, but base differences were too big to overcome.

Thea snorted, “You know that Pokémon story is about as real as the one about Jay Z and Beyoncé buying the rights to the Confederate flag that went viral last summer.”
“That was fake?” Cicero squinted, never having heard this fact called into question.

“Guys, look!” Pip reinserted himself, moving to fill the space between them – a space that Thea had filled with lies which her oldest friend was for the moment keen to ignore in service of his own immediate interests. Pip held up a new iPhone with a screen that was only slightly cracked for their inspection and approval. “I can’t turn it on,” he told them excitedly, “but maybe if we charge it -”

“You should bring it to Coach,” Cicero interrupted.

“Hell no!”

“Maybe someone is missing it,” Cicero continued to argue.

“Finders, keepers.”

“Come off it, Pip. It is probably locked -”

“Oh! I know how to break into an iPhone,” Thea smiled as she reached out for it for it. Pip made a gallant effort of keeping it from her but being that Thea was taller she had little trouble snatchng the device he tauntingly held above his head. “It is mine by right,” he said.

“It is useless to you if you can’t use it,” she argued. “Look, I saw Kim unlock an iPhone on Keeping Up with the Kardashians a season or two back so immediately I tried it on my dad’s and I promise it works and that I know what I am doing. Just like, ask your mom if I can come over, say we have homework since apparently you need help in French now.”

“Okay, okay,” Pip said with a slight blush. “I’ll sort it. Put the phone in your purse.”

Happy though he was to see the two getting up to their old mischief once more, Cicero had a bad feeling, one he found he could not quite voice.

By every measure, the week was going well. Still, Ben Tallmadge found himself alone in his office, unable to find satisfaction in his work. Sunday had proven his greatest tactical defeat in ways that seemed to multiply themselves against elapsed time. His constable had been injured - as had a young woman who so happened to share a surname with the State’s Chief Justice. Ben had treated victims as perpetrators and come down on them with a heavy hand, a move, perhaps, which had not only harmed him but strengthened is true enemy.

Still, the soccer team seemed to trust him - offering advice, assistance, and most valuably of all, information.

Once again, Ben feared, he was not worthy of this faith.

The night prior, after toasting to the life of a man he himself could not claim to have known, Simcoe went to pay the bill and Hewlett told the table that he wanted to step outside for a fag. Subtle tone told Ben that he was meant and he moved to follow.

‘When did you take up smoking?’ Jordan asked.

‘It is a hard case,’ Ben answered in a way he thought convincing patting his friend on the shoulder as Jordan returned to talking about the British Invasion with an expat who was not otherwise
interested on the mark the city he had been born to had left on music.

‘That word is offensive,’ Ben told Hewlett moments when he joined him outside.

‘I meant a ‘cigarette’,’ Hewlett corrected, coming as close as men like him dared to apology.

‘No, you didn’t.’

‘No,’ the Scot confirmed. ‘My fiancée wants me to quit.’

‘Picked a bad week for it.’

Hewlett nodded. His expression changed half a hundred times in the seconds he stood in contemplation, ultimately deciding it best to just be out with it. ‘I know where John André is. I didn’t want to announce it inside as he has hurt others in our party far more than he has me personally … Akinbode in particular, and I -’

Ben nodded his understanding. ‘Belview,’ Hewlett continued. ‘He is in … a relationship, one I would imagine is deeply manipulative in nature. Here, it involves two of my housemates. Ah – not, not Abigail. These girls, they are both in their early twenties, you see – ah, that is, Miss Shippen, whom André has positioned in Whitehall that she may spy for him, updating him on our happenings as he works to re-evaluate his findings, and Miss Declesias, who sees the man for what he is and worries that unless she inserts herself in some way, Peggy – all of us really - might be lost for it. They are my friends, Inspector – these girls, and they are only just girls, you’ll understand. I don’t want anything to happen to them and I need you to intercede before anyone else has the idea to,’ he gave a slight nod, not towards Ben but rather the figure emerging from the building several paces behind them.

‘You hadn’t the curtesy to wait for me?’ Simcoe accused when he met them on the pavement.

‘I did,’ Hewlett said. ‘I thought you would be faster. I’ve none of my own.’

‘Unbelievable, always underprepared,’ Simcoe shook his head as he offered his pack. Ben took one as a cover.

‘I bought you those last week,’ Hewlett objected.

‘Sorry … You think a pack has lasted me a week? This one in particular?’

Ben did not smoke himself but he felt the sentiment all the same. As he let his cigarette burn, he watched the two and found himself smiling over a conversation he could not follow for his lack of history with their topics. Following Ferguson’s recommendation, he had done everything to divide Simcoe and Hewlett. To a large extent, his efforts had seemed successful, but his plans had been based in error. For a moment, he found this a comfort as he watched the two interact as the friends that might have proven outside of André’s influence until it occurred to him that the doctor’s entire calculation examined false variables.

John André had not corrupted fear.

He had weaponised love.

To Ben, this seemed a far greater perversion.

The inspector feared increasingly that to win this fight, he felt that he would need to stoop to the same level. In the worst way one could, he related to the man the 79th Precinct had locked in
solitary confinement. He looked at Nate, still smiling on his desk six years after Ben had watched him die, feeling a familiar pang of guilt he’d thought gone with Tuesday’s arrests. Genovese was dead and Cali and Jefferson were being held without bail.

It was over.

It never would be.

He had lost his first love and had been so vain as to imagine the man could ever be avenged. He thought of John Robeson and began to imagine what it would have done to his mind to have pulled the trigger on his boyfriend, imagining what it might do to Robeson should he learn that in the fatal moment, he had no way of discerning right from wrong, no choice in or control over the destructive actions that occurred without thought. Unlike the others who had so far found themselves affected - proper English gentlemen from privileged backgrounds – Robeson was a poor man who had spent the larger part of his life in prison and surely carried parts of that culture, parts that showed in the damage he was capable of inflicting.

Ben reached for his headset and dialled his father at the church’s office, unsure if he sought permission or pause.

He had had no trouble convincing DA Burr to sign warrants for Robert Rogers’ property and worksite. Jordan’s house was in the process of being turned upside down as well at his own insistence. Evidence which seemed to correspond to the story Lewis Brewster had relayed to John Wakefield had been uncovered and was currently being processed by CSI. Ben had not been on site himself, having spent the majority of the day trying to gain access to a mental health facility which he and his boss had been told was not housing John André. Ben had argued that he was there under an assumed name and Burr suggested that they try to go after the visitor records, but after spending his lunch hour in the company of Alexander Hamilton, had had returned to inform him that the NYPD had no legal recourse which he could exercise. Burr stated that needed more evidence to justify a subpoena. Ben saw but one way of getting it.

It was in his power to have John Robeson committed. He could put a man on the inside, one whom he would have reason to visit. Tactically, he would be surrendering information to André that he did not want the man to have, information, he reasoned as the phone rang, that Peggy Shippen may relay regardless as he could do nothing to provide for her protection directly, being that the young woman had committed no crime and what she was suspected of engaging in afforded her no further status as either suspect or victim.

It was, however, in his power to put a man on the inside for an extended duration, a man whom he could easily make his own.

It was morally deplorable and he knew as much before his father answered.

>>Ben?<< the reverend greeted, indicating that the call had come as a surprise.

“Dad … I have a bit of a dilemma. Do you have a minute?”

>>Always, what has you down?<<

“A man whom I know to ultimately be innocent of the crime he is charged with is in custody. I can’t have him released, and in order to provide reasonable doubt I need to make another arrest. The problem I’m encountering is that the guilty party is being treated as a witness rather than a suspect and I cannot seem to convince my superiors otherwise. My dilemma is this, if I put this man, the one I have in custody, where I need him, I am risking that the other will come to real
physical harm, but this could be my only chance. What would doctrine instruct me to do?"

>>Luther once wrote,<< his father began. >>No. Forget Luther. Tell me what you think because I think you know the answer to this one, Benjamin.<< Ben sighed at the sound of his full given name.

“I think I have less than twenty-four hours left to make a decision,” he replied blandly.

>>If you feel you must wait that long, I’d say you already have. Does your badge entitle you to play God? Deuteronomy 32:35<< his father began to quote, >>It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them.<<

“I saw … you have probably seen this on the news, but Paulo Genovese was killed yesterday outside of my station. I watched him die. What they aren’t reporting is that he delivered information to me that allowed me to make a series of arrests. He was a mafia don … he had done unspeakable things, yet – Hebrews 10:30,” Ben tried for himself, as ever, hoping for his father’s approval, “‘The Lord will judge is own people.’”

>>You’ll find another route if you know this one to be wrong. I believe that. You needn’t seek absolution, we are all tried with temptation. And Ben? If you need to come and talk about what you were made to witness -<<

He could not. He was bound by police protocol as he was on so many matters great and small. The reverend likely knew as much but Ben appreciated the offer all the same.

“Dad um … thank you,” he said. “And I don’t mean to interrupt, but speaking of ‘wrongs’, there is something I really have to say. Something I’ve been – I’m seeing someone. Someone you would not approve of.”

His father was silent for what seemed a long while.

>>Son, so long as we are quoting scripture, let me pose to you Proverbs 10:12 - Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.<<

“I wish that were so,” Ben gave, looking at Nate thinking of the men he had broken bread with the night prior and the one who had wronged them.

>>Who are you, Benjamin, to insinuate it isn’t?<<

“A cop,” he answered simply.

>>And a busy one at that, I’d imagine. Tell me though, do you have time to visit at the weekend? Your mother is making her famous Sunday roast. I know I can’t get you to come to worship – how long has it been since that was too much to ask? – but I want to meet this man of yours regardless of whatever conclusions you seem so assured I’ll come to.<<

“You -” Ben choked, unable to find the words.

>>Know?<< his father suggested with a small chuckle. >>Since you were seven, eight maybe. You caught me … I was just working on a sermon to that affect. In many ways I never knew what to say and so I said nothing, hoping, you, instead would come to me with questions as you always had. Now that you are a bit old I can see that you are only interested in what I have to say on any matter when you are faced with a crisis of conscious or faith -<<

“Dad,” Ben said flatly though he found himself smiling at the shift in his father’s tone,
judgemental only when he spoke of how infrequently he made time to call or visit.

>>Sunday?<<

“Yeah … yeah I, I don’t really know what to say.”

>>What is his name?<< his father again coaxed.

“Tallmadge?” Mr Sackett entered without a knock. “We have something.”

“What?”

>>His name?<< the reverend asked again at the same time the civilian head of the IT department advised, “A trace on Arnold’s phone.”

“Dad, I have to go,” Ben said into the receiver, hanging up without a proper goodbye, dialling Russo’s extension as soon as the line went dead without taking his eyes from the man who had given him what he mistook to be good news. “Mike, get the boys together -”

Mr Sackett held up his hand. “That might not be the best idea. The signal is coming from the ADIC’s home address. Use caution.”

“Hamilton?” Ben snorted back a laugh, “I fucking knew it. Russo, did you hear that, grab your gear, we are going in.”

The soldiers, who had not so long ago seemed altogether faceless, now had names, families and personal narratives, all of which she knew. There was an irony in the imagery of these seven scattered units that comprised the battle plan, another in thinking of these players in terms specific to war as what they were trying to achieve was peace, one, at least, that might be sustained for a few hours.

Her father rarely spoke to her about his time in active duty or about the work in which he now engaged. He had said once in a context she could not place that the best way to ensure cooperation was to threaten force. Marie, knowing nothing about Caribbean politics, questioned now if her best friend’s latest move was an echo of the self-same strategy.

“It is like how Farhad and Ismael always sit together at lunch,” Susan explained. “Aberdeen Declesias and Alexander Hamilton are both from the Caribbean, so they will have something to talk about at least. We will put her with the Adams’ at his table. How many more of these do we have?”

“Neither Farhad nor Ismael are actually from the Middle East,” the blonde corrected, “they were both born in London and if you think they get on, mention to Farhad that the Arabs invented the zero and wait for the fallout.”

“Um … sure, okay,” Susan squinted, “but is there a centuries old intellectual debate over the origin of a mathematic principle between St Kits and Haiti of which we should be sensitive when it comes to seating?”

Marie thought about this for a moment. “Not that I’ve heard of.”
“So! That is Declesias with the Hamiltons and Adams’.”

“Okay,” she consented, still unsure.

“Who’s next?”

Marie could see why planning the seating arrangement for a wedding an ocean away had all but defeated Arthur. The embassy, in so far as she could gather, was either intruding or had offered to intervene as, sudden though the wedding was, protocol had to be observed. This meant inviting a number of dignitaries and high-ranking local officials in addition to the guest list the bride and groom had drawn up, itself a number that did not divide well. Luckily for the Foreign Office, however, Marie Robinson had nothing to do but delay disciplinary action that morning and Susan Bertie found the task of flirting with a girl over an intern’s phone more stimulating to her mind than talking about Dorian Gray with a number of classmates who had not done the assigned reading.

Susan was generally good at internet research and had, in between texts, helped Marie in her self-assigned task of finding out as much about the people who would be present as possible in Arthur’s extended absence.

Marie had been to several such events before. Her parents were famous. Her neighbour owned and edited a tabloid. She fenced at the same club as a member of the aristocracy’s upper echelons. She had connections, rather, she had a talent for imitation and a knowledge of how these things went.

She had called the embassy at the number listed on the initial print out Arthur received, and, using a close approximation of his voice learned that the while ceremony had a location, the reception did not. Susan, meanwhile, had been on Facebook (“Why do old people always have an open account?” Marie had wondered aloud. “They don’t know how to change their settings,” her friend had replied.) and discovered that prior to becoming a lawyer, Anna Strong had worked in a local bar that had, during her tenure, Dutch, Bavarian and Irish themes. Susan was thus of the mind that the bride would like it if they were to book out a sizable Irish Pub in Albany for the reception, one that had received good reviews on Yelp and was expensive by local standards. The two had then watched multiple videos on YouTube of Cornwallis giving speeches until Marie felt she had a good enough concept of the man’s accent and lexicon to pass herself off as the Ambassador to the United States over the phone. His air of authority was slightly diminished by a sensibility Marie had to play up, even whilst requesting that the Irish whiskey on offer be replaced with Scotch for the event – having heard the younger Hewlett siblings object to being served anything that did not taste like lighter fluid often enough over the course of her life that she could reasonably assume Edmund was required to feel the same way. Despite her staged faltering, the bar staff were only too happy to oblige after Susan had provided her uncle Cholmondeley’s credit card information which she had been told time and again to use only in the event of an emergency. (“He is on Ways and Means, he will figure out a plan for reimbursement. Plus, it is a Royal Wedding! Needs must!”)

Inspired by this first success, Susan came on a plan of her own and rang up Effie Gwillim at her office whilst Marie, pretending to be her mother, put in a call to Paris. (“Hi, Miss Gwillim, this is Susan Bertie, yeah, Marie’s friend. Listen, do you remember when you let me try on your wedding dress and told me that I could have it one day – do you think I can maybe have it now? No, no, not for me …” - “Ah! Marie, Chérie! Bonjour, Oui, oui, c’est moi. J’ai un service à te demander… tu te souviens de la robe de mariée? Celui que vous avez fait pour Effie Gwillim? Voici la chose …”)

Within the hour, Gwillim’s entire bridal wardrobe was being shipped by one of her assistants to the United States and Marie Antoinette had been so kind as to send her fashion label’s lead designer Rose Bertin to New York to make the adjustments the Instagram accounts of Anna and her ladies told the teens were necessary at no cost to the Crown (assuming, no doubt, that after a disappointing fall collection the publicity of clothing Richmond’s heir presumptive and his curious
bride would be enough to save the business from filing bankruptcy.) Edmund and his groomsmen
would be required to wear the Tartan of his house (which Marie had - in a voice borrowed from
Ellie Hewlett - called upon the princess’ personal secretary to attended to.) Whilst she was
gathering herself after having a simple conversation with a man she knew primarily as a contract
killer, flowers for the ceremony had been purchased and Susan’s extended family had been
reimbursed for their cooperation.

“Entertainment?” Marie posed.

“Anna’s friend Caleb looks to be in a band with Edmund’s housemate Abe, I’m sure that has
already been arranged.”

“Seating?”

It was this part that proved the most struggle. Ordinarily, the bridal party would be seated at their
own table, with the best man and maid of honour joining the bride and groom and theirs. However,
the bar’s banquet table could sit but eight and Anna’s mother, father and younger brother had to be
accommodated. As Cornwallis was required to play the role of Edmund’s family (who would not
be in attendance) and protocol require that his Lady wife be sat at his side, the girls had elected to
afford the final chair to Lafayette, whom Marie had learnt form Versailles at least ran in the same
circles as the groom’s younger brother Eugene. Perhaps he and Edmund were friends as well,
perhaps not, but the man came from affluence and they needed another person to balance the table.
As Cornwallis’ request to be seated beside to the French Ambassador could not be accommodated
(for the Dutch, Swedish and Spanish monarchs were also sending administrators and none should
be given preferential treatment over their neighbours) putting Layfette beside his Lady felt the
closest compromise. It felt, at any rate, far fairer than having to decide between the best man and
maid of honour.

Facebook caused what should have then been the easiest part of the seating plan to quickly fall
apart. Jordan Akinbode, one of Edmund’s grooms, and Abigail Ingram, Anna’s maid of honour,
had broken up a week before and therefore could not be seated at the same table. To move one but
leave the other would only call attention to this and the girls agreed between themselves that
heartbreak should be left out of a wedding. They began digging at all available information at the
best ways to evenly divide the bridal party between the other distinguished guests, finding in the
process deeper interpersonal problems than the one they had originally sought to solve.

“Do you have any idea how hard these people are to Google?” Susan whined to Arthur when he
reappeared in homeroom some two hours later. Marie stood up when he entered, hoping that her
hated classmate would be forthcoming with news pertaining to her father. He seemed more content
to listen as was often the case.

Okay I swear to God, everyone in any position of power in the U - S of A was named after a
founding father – do you know how many links I clicked only to find myself reading Hamilton
fanfiction?” Susan continue to complain.

“Did you also discover Turn?” Arthur inquired with little interest.

“No, we ended up putting the office rather than the name into Wikipedia, and then clicking that
link on the side bar to take us to the page about the current holder, and used the footnotes to figure
out the rest. We are almost done. What is Turn? Jesus you have no idea how many times we’ve
had to re-do this, if there is another scandal -”

“It is not a scandal,” Marie interrupted. “It is Abigail’s novel about, presumably, everyone she
knows, just set in the colonial era. They are all spies or something.”
“We are spies, my friend.” Susan grinned at her own description. This was only to say that they were experienced in giving their classmates the attention of celebrity on social media and had figured out in grammar school how to use Wikipedia on homework assignments without citing the site as a primary source. Still, the two had worked a wonder.

“We are. And damned good ones!” Marie agreed. “And even better party planners. Arthur, look, we booked a venue, arranged flowers, wardrobe in accordance with the standards I know nobles to have, we are almost done with seating plan for the reception, entertainment has, we are assuming, already been arranged, but we got information about the acoustics and compiled a list of local musicians should this in fact need to be sorted – and we got the embassy to reimburse everything already, and we did all of this in a few hours from a basement in London, thousands of miles from where all of this is set to go down. Susan and I could run the damn world,” she declared after having tallied all of their tasks on her hands.

“Yeah, that and I have absolutely scurrilous selfies of one Kitty Pakenham of which I am equally proud at having acquired on your behalf,” Susan bragged. “Shocking as it is that your ‘girlfriend in Ireland’ exists in any sense, I have to know – Kitty’s titties – they real?”

Arthur said nothing but his lips hazarded into a rare smile that told too much. When he spoke, it was not of his girlfriend. “I could run the world,” he seemed to applaud himself for their efforts. “Susan, did I ask you at any point to help me make amends with Kitty? You accuse me of being absent of strategy but consider, a few hours ago I mentioned to you and Marie that I had a party to plan, left, came back, only to find it nearly completed as I well knew it would be.”

“You tricked me?” Marie accused, rewording what Arthur had just freely admitted in a way that better fit the narrative she had long since written him as having.

“In a sense, sure. But you live for this sort of thing as is evident from every class project we’ve ever worked on. Now you can hold this over me as well, whatever that is worth to you,” he dismissed.

Marie found the tone disheartening. “You didn’t … you couldn’t trace the IP address?”

“Oh, that, no that I sorted before going to my second block. Your dad – at least his phone – is in a McDonalds in Greenwood, South Carolina.”

“What do they have there?” Marie asked.

“Free Wi-Fi? Dollar menu? At his hour in the US probably breakfast options. I am fairly certain chain restaurants follow a standard uniform.”

“You know I meant Greenwood.”

“Not much.”

“So, it is not like a strategic military strong hold or something?”

“I think it is just a town that was hit hard in the economic recession. I’m sorry I don’t know more. My flight is on Saturday morning, I can’t promise anything, but really, if I find anything – did you put your number in my phone?”

“No,” Susan answered for her, “but I sent Kitty’s compromising pictures to myself for tit-spiration. Marie – have you seen this? – God damn that bitch thirsty! Oh, I love it. What do you think though? Time to take a selfie of our own and tell her she deserves better than to be outsourced to a couple of strangers?”
“That is your girlfriend?” Marie blinked in seeing the girl for the first time. Kitty Pakenham was far prettier than she had suspected and as such she found herself lost to the logic of it all. “What the actual fuck, man?” she asked, both of Arthur and the concept of God she had but could not define.

“Yeah, let’s text her.” Susan agreed with a practiced pout.

“No, wait -” Arthur began to object.

“Or, you know, you could maybe say ‘Thank you. I could have never done this on my own and I am within your debt.’”

“What do you want then?” he asked instead.

“You can start with the apology. Marie wants better information than ‘some McDonald’s in a non-strategic town’ and as for me … I’ll let you know, Love. First, come out with it,” she encouraged in a tone that left no room for further argument.

“Thank you, I could have never done this on my own and I am within your debt,” Arthur repeated with a sigh.

Susan returned the phone that had amused her all morning to its rightful owner, telling him to text her if he learned anything. Marie trusted her to pass it on, not wanting to talk to her classmate directly if another option existed.

“Good, let me show you what we’ve come up with, then,” Marie shrugged.

John Graves Simcoe and his plus one were to be seated at the closest table to the newlyweds along with Abigail Ingram and her son Cicero. Being that Abigail had been used in a political campaign a decade or so prior, she knew Peggy Shippen, who was to be sat between her and the Defence Secretary George Washington, who himself would be attending with Martha Dandridge, a research psychologist with whom he had worked previously. “We thought about putting DI Tallmadge at the same table, but being that Peggy is part of the whole Arnold scandal, we switched him out for Judge Woodhull, whom I am sure will appreciate the honour and won’t mind not sitting with his son, who has to work the evening anyway, being that he is in the band and all,” Susan explained. “At least that is what we are presuming.”

“There was some drama a few years back following an article Anna’s father wrote for The Atlantic, so I had some hesitations about seating Misters Smith and Woodhull so close to one another,” Marie admitted as Arthur studied their chart, “but I think Anna’s parents have more problems with each other to worry themselves with external feuds, just speaking from personal experience. The man kept a mistress in DC for seventeen years while the two were still married. She, the other woman that is, won’t be in attendance.

“And anyway, they will both probably be too focused on their daughter to pay one another much mind at all,” Susan suggested diplomatically.

“Yeah, okay, so as to France who is Cornwallis’ concern, we sat him with the governor and his family at the adjacent table, where the two ambassadors could easily lean over to talk to one another if it be that necessary,” Marie prattled, “I assume Rochambeau speaks English in accordance with his post, but should such be lost to whiskey and wine Lafayette is close by to translate. Originally, we were going to place Declesias at the same table also in that capacity but as it turns out the ambassador’s son defrauded a charitable organization during the relief efforts that followed the earthquake back in 2010, leading loads more Haitians to die than otherwise might have. He never faced prosecution, and based on Miss Declesias’ Twitter output, I’m sure the
matter would come up, so we sat Anna’s boss there instead, being that the governor is of Italian origin and Akinbode studied in Rome.

“The Adams’ we placed nearly as far away as possible, as Abigail Adams is currently litigating against Anna and Akinbode, but had to come because her husband is a senator and he had to be invited. On that same note, the Clintons are not coming being that Hillary is running a campaign, so we put the Hamiltons’ and their children at the table in their place, being that the two families share political views which is something that you have to be very careful of in America,” she paused, “You don’t happen to know if there is some cultural, maybe maths war going on between people of Caribbean decent, do you?”

“I don’t.”

“Okay because we have Declesias as that table then.”

“I hear Hamilton likes to debate so I think that will be alright regardless of whatever divisions we might not be able to anticipate,” Arthur gave.

Susan smiled. “As to the other two bridesmaids, this one actually worked out quite neatly – Sally and Mary are both ‘with the band’ as it were, that is Sally’s brother Rob is the guitarist and Mary’s husband Abe – Judge Woodhull’s son – sings and plays the base,” she explained. “Mr Townsend is officiating the ceremony and we sat him there with his kids, the Woodhulls, the drummer Caleb Brewster and DI Tallmadge – whose father is also a preacher so that works out in terms of relatable interests and experience.”

“No, it doesn’t!” Marie exclaimed suddenly. “Oh my God, I just remembered, Mary Woodhull is a suspect in the Arnold investigation. Edmund sent a text to Effie this past Sunday when one of Tallmadge’s subordinates broke her ankle whilst working under cover, Simcoe was arrested for some reason because of it and anyway, Effie wrote my dad asking if it was alright to start a riot I guess and that is why The Daily Mail ran that headline on Monday “New York Imam states that FC Arsenal has nothing to do with Islam” which I suppose is why Özil is suddenly looking for a transfer.”

“Is he the one who looks like a frog?” Susan puzzled.

“Yeah … but, look, Tallmadge can’t be seated at that table.”

“If there are suspects in attendance, why is he even going?” Arthur put forward. “Can we strike him from the list?”

“His name was on the one you were originally sent from the embassy, he is probably going because there are so many suspects there – Arnold disappeared in Setauket, right? It could be that anyone with a connection to the town is being looked into.”

“We can help,” Arthur suggested. “Don’t move Tallmadge … don’t let anyone involved in the police side of the investigation sit at the same table.”

“Divide and conquer?” Marie asked with some excitement.

“Exactly. Where did you girls place to prosecutor?”
Theodosia Burr lived up to her word. Seven minutes after the phone they had found had enough of a charge for the lock screen to show up on the display where an empty battery had previously flickered, she, Pip and Cicero were confronted with an image that served to test their resolve far more than anything Coach suggested they might otherwise find in the woods.

As Thea was the first to see it, she was the first to speak.

“Gross,” the girl declared, handing the phone over to the boy who had been a friend since birth.

Pip’s eyes grew wide. “Isn’t that -” he tried to ask.

Peggy Shippen, Cicero found he could not answer over his rising sick.

The youngest daughter of the former Pennsylvania governor was a beautiful woman, to be sure, but Cicero, who had known her since birth, could not see her as a seductress and yet like both of his friends, he found could not look away. The room was quiet as Pip opened the photo album to reveal additional images of Peggy in positions compromising enough to constitute as pornography. Cicero swallowed, thinking about her social media presence and the sorts of pictures she presented of herself to a more public audience, Pumpkin Spice Lattés and patriotic signalling, the packages she and her sorority sisters put together for soldiers stationed overseas at Christmas, the house during pledge week – nothing scandalous, seditious or sexy in the least. The most exposed he had ever seen her was in an image of the girl she had been when she was not much older than he was himself, and this only because she was still in her cheerleading uniform when she had been crowned homecoming queen back in high school.

Cicero felt betrayed at the sight of her exposed nipples, of her manicured fingers reaching down to touch her maidenhead, by the occasional images her boyfriend sent in response to these attempts of arousal – attempts, which, for the man whose phone they found, seemed to have worked.

“Wait, wait, go back,” Thea said when Pip had quickly thumbed past a picture of an erect penis on the end of the long, muscular torso of a man who could afford a Rolex. It looked to be taken in a hotel bed – that was, the sheets were white and the television in the background was smaller than what it seemed a man with a fancy wristwatch and a brand-new iPhone he could afford to lose would otherwise have in his own home. The three heard the door open downstairs and Pip was quick to break their shared silence by announcing, “I don’t think we should be looking at this.”

“By which you mean your dad is home?” Cicero slighted him. He knew Pip thought him immature in that he did not seem interested in girls – it was not true, but Cicero was uncomfortable talking about it, especially to his best friend giving the wider constellation of which his crush was a part. Pip and Thea were no longer as close as they had been, but Cicero was sure he still thought of her as a sister, as was evident in how quickly he passed over the images he deemed most indecent for her pretty dark eyes.

“Go back,” Thea said.

“What are you -” Pip began. Thea reached over to the screen and enlarged the image, showing the city’s skyline from the window. “I think this is Trump Tower,” she said, scrolling the display past the small television Cicero could now see was switched over to Fox. “Who jerks off to Sean Hannity?” he heard himself ask.

“Benedict Arnold,” Thea said, enlarging the image a bit more to show the faint image of a dark-haired man with a chiselled jaw not looking at but still vaguely visible from the mirror hung on the hotel wall. “We have to tell my dad, or yours,” she said to Pip, whispering further, “Maybe the initial reports were true, maybe Peggy Shippen lured him to Setauket to kill him.”
“Are you kidding me? Do you have any idea how much trouble we will be in if -”

Pip stopped when he heard his mother scream. He hastened towards his bedroom door which opened before he could reach it. Four men stormed in in a matter of seconds with their rifles held at the ready. “Hands on your heads!” one of their number shouted. “Where we can see them! On your knees! On the floor! Face down!”

Cicero Ingram did as he was told, until he decidedly did not.

Someone kicked him on his side after patting him down in a weapons search, telling him to be still when he writhed in reaction to the pain in his ribs. He did his best to obey.

Then, however, he heard Thea begin to cry in panic and realised that the police posed threats to her as a girl that he as a boy did not face. Pip told these men who they were by way of their parents’ professions – his father ran the FBI’s Manhattan branch, Thea’s was an ADA, Cicero’s step-dad a famous civil rights attorney. He was told to be silent and still. He was not. Thea began to beg between the sobs she was doing her best to mute.

Cicero could not stand to hear his friends in such distress. He moved to rise, to help them if only by way of distraction.

As soon as he lifted his head, he heard a gun go off.

Abigail looked breath-taking in the fitted purple dress she had worn on their last anniversary, an anniversary, he reminded himself when she greeted him with a painted smile, that had proven their last. Jordan Akinbode blinked, taking a brief moment to adjust his expectations for the evening ahead.

When he had booked the reservation three months prior, he had every intention of proposing that evening, a day before they had been set to move into their new home. Now, he met her in a capacity that felt professional though he had been clear to say ‘as friends’ over the phone that morning when his early alarm came with the reminder that he had once made evening plans.

Their greeting was cordial and Abigail was not altogether cold when she declined his arm or his offer to pull out her chair. They sat face to face with the sort of small talk that felt like silence, antidotes about the week that had elapsed since their break-up that made no reference to the event or the emotions it entangled. Simcoe was coaching Cicero’s team in Anna’s absence, the hotel Jordan was staying in had an indoor pool that was open until nine in the evening. The two stared at the bottle of champagne he had order especially for the occasion, lifting their glasses without toasting when the waiter poured it for them and began describing a menu which Jordan had forgotten he had prearranged with a four-star chef. Abigail nodded politely, looking more pained with each word. Before the young man had finished, Jordan politely dismissed him. He reached again for his glass and felt Abigail’s fingers graze his own.

“I can’t do this,” she said.

“We’re not,” he replied. “Abigail, you’ll pardon the pageantry. I … happened to be in the city and saw only this morning hat I had made this reservation. It was too late to cancel and, much as I cherish your company, I know it is over and I know it is to soon, but I fear there is a matter you and I need to discuss.”
“What then?”

“Whatre?”

Abigail rose as though she meant to leave, Jordan remained seated. “Edmund Hewlett drove me back down to New York last night after I received a call from DI Tallmadge who happens to have been my best friend back in high school. I wasn’t myself in the capacity to operate a motor vehicle upon learning that a friend from soccer was taken from my new place out in Brooklyn to the ICU.”

“My God,” Abigail whispered, retaking her seat. “Jordan, I’m sorry.”

“But not surprised?” he suggested.

Abigail swallowed the champagne that remained in her glass before asking, “What makes you say that?”

“I’ve not had much sleep,” Jordan admitted. “Hewlett and I met Tallmadge at the station, most of the rest of the team was waiting there … in the lobby, obviously excluding André who is off in rehab, Anna who stayed behind in Albany that she might cover should I not be on hand to cross examine a number of witnesses I was not expecting Adams to call, Joyce, that is the man in critical condition, Robeson, his ex, the man the police have in custody for aggravated assault, and Rogers, for reasons I’ll come to in a moment. I spoke to Tallmadge for a while, answering a few standard questions, reporting a separate incident that I felt might appeal to his scope of interests insofar as the investigation is concerned, giving permission for him to search my property – you see I have reason to believe now that Benedict Arnold might have been held there in my absence,” he told her without emotion.

Abigail reached for his hand again, this time not as a caution but as a comfort. Jordan returned to the ring he meant to offer her that evening in what now felt another life altogether. “You know,” he said, taking his hand back slightly from one that certainly was not on offer, lifting his own glass to his lips without making a proper toast, “I read the latest chapter of Turn. I’m … I may have over reacted in my critique. My friends have really shitty sides to them. So do I.”

“That isn’t what I meant -”

“You are an excellent writer, Abby. I am sure you found the precise words you intended,” he dismissed. “But that is … that is not what I came to say. I should probably ask that you keep this to yourself, but I hear you are still living in Setauket - Whitehall at that - and I know nothing stays secret in small towns. Anyway … Tallmadge asked me to step away at one point, having news that he first wished to share with Simcoe and Hewlett. A friend of theirs from back in Britain died while in the FBI’s custody on Monday evening, apparently from heart failure. He would have been thirty in August. I don’t know that the family had been informed at that point but it is … he certainly had connections. Curiously, the soccer team I follow tweeted their sympathies not that long ago, well in the morning here, mid-afternoon over in Europe. I never met him but I went to his wake last night which is where I heard a number of things that … gave me enough alarm that I didn’t want to catch the train back to Albany without speaking to you. You see, I don’t think Colonel Tarleton die of heart failure. A few hours before he was due to address Capitol Hill with regard to Arnold’s defence bill, he sent Simcoe a number of files pertaining to research your former boss was carrying out over an extended period … on my soccer team.”

“I know,” Abigail nodded. “It is why I objected to Anna and Edmund after he first proposed. That was John’s idea as well and -”

“John?” Jordan accused. “Abigail how can you, how could you -” he began.
Yayo, yayo

Moo-la-lah

Yayo

Better have my money! Rhianna interrupted over the soft violin music playing in the restaurant. Abigail’s eyes grew wide and she reached for her purse. “I should really change that ringtone,” she muttered to herself, embarrassed of the looks she knew herself to be receiving.

Y’all should know me well enough

Better have my money!

Please don’t call me on my bluff

Pay me what you - “Hello,” she answered, holding up her finger to Jordan before pressing it to her ear. “No,” she said after a moment, falling into a wail as soon as the word was spoken. Jordan rose and flew to her side within seconds of her collapse as did the waiter and a number of men within their immediate radius. He had never heard a sound so pained. Still knelt on the floor, half holding his former lover, he freed a hand, feeling on the table for the phone where Abigail had let it drop. One of the other patrons passed it into his hand. “Should I call anyone?” the man asked. “A taxi,” Jordan answered. “Put this all on my charge, they took my credit card information when I made the reservation,” he said blankly, vaguely aware over Abigail’s heavy sobs that his server remained within the vicinity. “Space?” he demanded. “Might we have some space?”

He looked at the last number to have called and found it registered to the Manhattan police station.

“My boy,” Abigail heaved.

Jordan Akinbode thought of every news article he had read in recent times regarding police shootings of young black men. He thought of the cops who swarmed Setauket and the crime that had already born so many others. He thought of John André and understood in an instant how easily the doctor had accomplished what he had intended to.

Jordan Akinbode’s mind went blank but for the thought of killing whoever dared to harm the boy he considered his son.

Chapter End Notes

This is not so much a note as it is a request. In the first scene, Marie briefly considers American gun culture and in editing this chapter it occurred to me that the US Midterm Election season has begun, (having spent a goodly portion of my free time this week reading up on all of the primary results.) You guys, understand this is not a critique I am in no way qualified to give BUT if a candidate in your district happens to shoot a TV-spot showing them assembling and/or shooting a firearm, link me up in the comments. As an outsider, this particular practice of propagandising looks like a cultural call back to the Revolution – am I wrong? Do you see it too? I am just
interested in that pseudo academic sense that finds its way into the notes section of
fanfiction.
Speaking of …

**Schalke 04** is a football club from Gelsenkirchen that functions more as an official
state religion, and a fanatical sect at that. **Veltins-Arena** actually has a church in it, so
there you go. Got that? Okay. Now go and open two additional windows in your
browser and do a Google image search of the Duke of Wellington during his Flanders
Campaign whilst looking at stills from the German cult classic „Fußball ist unser
Leben” and tell me you don’t see it. Oh, about **Arthur Wellesley** directly (assuming
that you’ve not read the extensive, actually substantive notes I’ve left where he has
appeared in other fic) here are some relevant highlights: he was legit a high school
loser who went on to become one of the greatest military leaders of all time. He served
in parliament and as PM (twice!) and historically really hated a colleague whose name
you may have noted he has yet to learn in the scope of this story*, sentiment, by the
way, that was mutually reciprocated. Personality wise, he was a terrible host,
exceedingly haughty and yet somehow simultaneously a world-renowned womanizer.
Were The CW to turn his angsty teen romance with **Kitty Packenham** into a short
lived series a la “Reign”, I am not at all ashamed to admit that I would binge watch the
**** out of it.

In the best unexpected epilogue ever, after her death, Mary Robinson’s daughter
became best friends with Ban Tarleton’s wife. **Susan Bertie** was the natural daughter
and heir of Robert Bertie, 4th (and final) Duke of Ancaster, raised by the
Cholmondeley family. She was actually four years Marie’s junior if you are here to
fact check and here is just four inches shorter as everyone’s age has been slightly
skewed in this story to match with a three-month timeline. Her H+S personality is a
synchronization of her reported religious overtures and a tabloid piece penned by the
one and only Perdita. The only picture I could find of her depicts a pretty young
woman dressed ‘a la turque’ (as was the fashion of her age) practically
begging me to
write a piece about this fictionalized 21st century version following whatever left-
leaning politician puts a call out on Twitter for women to show solidarity with the
local immigrant population by wearing a hijab for a day in the ultimate example of
good intentions born out of a complete lack of understanding. Tja. H+S has no chill.

**Rose Bertin** was a French milliner and dressmaker in the employ of **Marie
Antoinette**. She was the first celebrated fashion designer.

**Donatien-Marie-Joseph de Vimeur, vicomte de Rochambeau**, son of the more
famous Jean-Baptiste blah blah blah was a French soldier and one of the greatest
villains of the Hattian Revolution. He fed his dogs with the flesh of prisoners of war
while others watched to give but one example.

**Babylonian Mathematics** incorporated a placeholder rather than a positional value
(0) which was indicated by a space between sexagesimal numerals (multiples of 60),
by the mid second century, two slanted lines were used to indicate this value, not a true
zero in that it was not used in isolation or at the end of a number. **Egyptian
Mathematics** by contrast used a positional value in accounting and engineering as
early as 1740 BC, but really, this is one of those themes in maths that regardless of
how you begin the conversation, the topic will quickly shift to the **Battle of
Nahāvand**, fought in 642 between Arab Muslims and Sassanid armies. The battle is
known interchangeably as “The Victory of Victories” and “The Arab Rape of Persia”
depending, I guess, on which side of the line your ancestors stood or sympathies stand.

**Greenwood, SC** is the closest city to where the historical site of **Ninety-Six, SC** once stood. (Alte Liebe and all that.)

*This is important.
**** This is an expletive. I just really don’t like to curse.

As always, thank you so much for reading!
Up Next: Ben and Alex deal with the results of their bad professional choices.
The Unrelenting (Pt.2)

Chapter Summary

Agent Morgan is given a lesson in linguistics by a shameless heretic whilst driving through the Bible Belt. His higher-ups in New York contemplate their next move when a surge in Mali leads to a hostage situation in Paris involving the wife of a once trusted foreign liaison. After giving an execution order, events much closer to home cause ADIC Hamilton to question Washington’s judgement.

Meanwhile, DI Ferguson tries to look a gift horse in the mouth, DI Tallmadge surrenders his badge and service weapon, Akinbode helps his ex and her son through a horrible situation without any expectations of the relationship, causing Abigail to re-evaluate her own in the most unlikely of company. Peggy finds herself with Aberdeen on the other side of a picket line after learning of her godson’s arrest and further reassesses her allegiances upon learning what André sent Arnold in her name. Mary begins to question her husband’s alibi. Arnold learns the extent of his troubles whilst ill-poisoned to address them, and, back in London, Marie takes her wee small dog for a short walk (without having to be asked to do so), has a serendipitous encounter with a man she knows to be a killer and directs him to the enemy within.

Chapter Notes

Firstly, if I owe you a comment, you will get it today – I promise!

So, as the summary suggest this is a long update where a number of small but influential players get to have their say. I could well have divided it again but I’m about to head off on my first family holiday since well before high school ended in which all of my many siblings and their significant others will be present (super excited! When I get back I’ll let you know about the trip and if my [tw]intuition is up to mark … ;) so I wanted to get all of this down and out before I leave the country for a few days. Without any unnecessary adieu then, I hope you enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Daniel Morgan had believed the detainee when he commented out of hand that nothing truly frightened him. Nothing, after all, could prove terrifying. At two in the morning at a mostly empty truck stop in rural South Carolina, nothing was all they had.

Nothing, and two cups of coffee, warm enough to warrant the consumption of the beverage if not the cost. Morgan walked out of the brightly lit petrol station and let the slightly damp stillness of what a few hours would turn to fog burn against his dry eyes. He had been driving for ten hours now, stopping on occasion when his captive dozed off, lying when he roused him in telling the boy that he had been out for some considerable timespan or another.

He suspected Tarleton believed him, having no means by which to check.
Even when the stereo was on, the interrogator purposefully kept the clock function secret and it had been quite a long while indeed since he had let anything on his dashboard illuminate save for the speedometer. Knowing that Europeans visiting America were uniformly keen on hearing music that had yet to be released in the places they called home, Morgan had decided on a backroad route, inviting static after fifty or so minutes of lulling his captive with an artificial sense of comfort through subjecting himself the sort of music he anticipated would prove within the colonel’s realm of interests. As he had suspected his man would, when the Top Forty faded out, Tarleton had started talking if only to spare himself from the abrupt radio silence he had unwittingly confessed himself to fearing.

As the English attaché’s digital footprint told and his deportment served to demonstrate, Tarleton had not had anything approaching a full night’s rest since his plane had landed. Morgan had known very little else about the man when he had placed him in the back of an unmarked squad car but could tell immediately from the level of restlessness the officer exhibited that Tarleton was the sort of officer to satisfy himself to tactics whilst neglecting logistics, and that, as such, his success in the impending interrogation was but assured.

All he had to do was wear his opponent down enough to get him to expose his flanks. Tarleton altered between being refractory and reckless as Morgan had guessed he might. After ten hours spent in the same automobile, the road was beginning to seem endless, confident though the FBI Agent otherwise felt that he would soon reach his destination.

It had been an hour or so since the conversation in which he himself was barely participating had made much cognitive sense. The boy was ready to break. Morgan set the coffee he had bought on the hood of the car and, preceding to drink his own within full view of his passenger while he had a cigarette, he fumbled his way through the delicate act of texting a teenage girl in London, pretending for a moment that she was his own daughter as he had for the past few days, as his foreign counterpart had evidently done for more than a decade. Morgan frowned at the last message he sent, wondering if he had phrased something in a way that would call the sender into question when he did not receive a response.

The uncertainty posed by non-combatants was unsettling.

Daniel Morgan had been pulled from National Defence into National Security and excelled, by and large, in both positions. All the same, he tended to favour assignments like these in which there was a tongue in cheek understanding between both him and the man he was meant to interrogate that civilian life was a fallacy in which they would never fully share. He had served on the same front and with the same men as the one whom he was currently assessing as a security risk whilst acknowledging a certain air of professional familiarity between them. It was therefore more difficult to guess at an imitation of the man Tarleton pretended to be before those who had never spent weeks on end in camouflage. The best Morgan could do was to address the colonel’s disobedient daughter as though she were a soldier who had broken rank. He had no experience with this part of private life and most of the foreigners he assessed were single and slightly younger - social outsiders who had adapted fundamentalist views after spending too much time on YouTube. They did not have children. As Morgan saw it, they did not have anyone.

Then, neither did he.

Though Daniel Morgan had fathered a family, his own children held him at a distance and had been raised with more personal dignity and discipline than to engage in school yard skirmishes – at least, insofar as he knew. He swallowed the slight sting of what he failed to recognise as sentiment along with the lukewarm remains of the rest of his coffee. Little Marie still had not written anything back.
Returning the device to his pocket and finding that the fresh air was only adding to his own
exhaustion, he opened the back door and handed the other paper cup awkwardly to the man whose
hand and a half were wired together wrists.

“He saves,” Banastre Tarleton greeted. “S-a-v-e-apostrophe-s. I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“It is about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” Morgan replied gruffly of the billboard on the
opposite side of the motorway.

“I grasp that it is mean to be,” the colonel criticised, “but the sentence as it is written makes no
sense whatsoever. ‘Saves’ is the third person singular form of the verb ‘to save’, but the genitive s
nominalises the word and the action is lost, unless the apostrophe is instead meant to designate a
conjunction, so it says ‘he save is’?” he asked, answering immediately, “No. Then you would need
a predicate object or adjective and even with one – presuming ‘save’ then would be used as a
proper noun – why use a personal pronoun then in the first position? No. It makes no sense. Or
perhaps my American is not quite so polished as I’d supposed.”

He had yet to take a sip and Morgan was already regretting his strategy of keeping the man
perpetually sentient though caffeine. The more hours that passed in one another’s company, the
more melodic the man’s speech became as he grew too weary to fully conceal his given accent
with another. It was a waltz that would not end. Morgan slammed the side door harder than he had
intended and stretched his weary legs a final time before returning to his seat. “When they told me
up at the Pentagon that you were ‘kind of a Nazi’ I had no idea that sentiment was intended to be
taken in the grammatic understanding of the word,” he chided the colonel lightly as he shifted
gears and pulled out of the carpark.

Tarleton looked perplexed. “Again, you’ll forgive me, I really don’t follow. Unless you mean …
O’rite, yes, yes that would make sense. I would have, of course, phrased it quite differently, but I
fear we Brits have a tendency to over-explain by comparison. Curious, really, how a language
can’t be entirely understood over barriers that are purely cultural,” he mused.

“Over-explain something to me then,” Morgan suggested, hoping to hear a bit more about his
captive’s proxy friendship with a particular tabloid editor.

“O’rite, so for us, the Second World War ended quite a long time ago,” the colonel paused,
amending, “that is, unless Brussels is demanding more money from the Krauts to bail some other
partner state out of financial ruin, then it is back on in full force - the Germans are ‘Nazis’ no
matter how large a percentage of their taxes are allocated to Greece or Spain or the fucking Irish.
We would hesitate, however, to use century-specific political nomenclature in order to describe, as
you seem to, the alterations in orthography as were handed down from the government around the
time I was on a fool’s errand to try to learn that blasted language, although … it should be said that
I don’t entirely disagree with the assessment - a parliamentary decree to change various spellings
indeed seems a nod to fascism,” he rambled, “I know you did that as well, at some point, as a
United States, abandoning diphthongs that hardly alter the pronunciation of certain words, but I
hadn’t realised the thing you have with apostrophes as that billboard so demonstrated. Tell me,
what does it mean – rather, how am I meant to read it?”

Agent Morgan inhaled deeply. Tarleton said nothing of value yet managed to insult God, America,
most of central and southern Europe, legislation and language all within a single breath. He should
by now have come to anticipate misplaced hatred masked as hauteur but the younger man’s
arrogance continued to find him off guard.

“He saves,” Morgan articulated, mocking the exaggerated emphatises of Tarleton’s chosen tone.
“America is a Christian nation; our Bill of Rights is based on the Ten Commandments. We print
‘in God we Trust’ on our paper currency and added ‘under God’ to the Pledge of Allegiance - a poem our children say to the flag every morning - during the Cold War as a further reminder to all as to why we are the Greatest Country on Earth back when it seemed we had some measure of concurrence on which to balance our ambition. And yes, we remind our citizens of the way to salvation on the sides of our motorways. It is so engrained in us since birth I would not have noticed the apostrophe had you not pointed it out. It is a typo. It doesn’t change the meaning.”

“Is it correct though, in context?”

“Everything God ordains is correct.”

“That is interesting,” Tarleton considered as he tried to draw a comparison. “We haven’t that intensity in the Anglican Church. Henry VIII made his own religion when the Pope wouldn’t grant him a divorce, and even having been to service several times as a child all I can really tell you about the state religion is that we have Jesus, too, the Queen is the hereditary ‘Defender of the Faith’ with her full proper title, and her consort, Prince Philip, is a volcano-God or something. I guess that is how he is still kicking about, yea? But it is not really exciting the way your American take on Christianity is. I’d bet the reverend whom God ordained to pay for a billboard with a typo in it - what with money putting Trust in His name - gives those kinds of fire-and-brimstone sermons on Sunday and is quite good to listen to from the perspective of entertainment and spectacle. It funny, I hadn’t really thought of American English taking on those dimensions, but it is the same thing as you have with Arabic ‘innit? At least as a non-native speaker, you are either quite good at reading or speaking it and I’m certain it comes as no surprise that I’m rather an example of the latter-”

“You learned Arabic but German defeated you?” Morgan frowned.

“I’d had eight years of the one and have had to use it in my professional life since. I took two semesters of German and honestly all we were taught was that the word we just learned is spelt with a double s now instead of an ‘ß’ – which helped optically as I and many others were otherwise want to read it as an upper-case B. Ultimately though, the only word I learned was ‘Tor’ - meaning ‘goal’, which was quite frankly enough as the only reason I switched out of Spanish was because the German classes got to go to the World Cup.”

“Why Arabic and Spanish then?”

“Oh, I wish I could claim that at ten I’d somehow had a decent compass for the direction international conflict and trade would soon take, but alas, my reasons were far more base and bland,” he answered without amusement. “You see, I attended boarding school and television was not otherwise among our entertainment options, but in Latin America telenovelas were quite in vouge and in Spanish we spent the second half of each lesson watching serialised drama about sexed-up drug cartels. Turkey at the time was also in the business of producing television programmes by this general construct, and these were all dubbed into Arabic so on Fridays we got to spend the full hour in the Valley of the Wolves, which was brilliant before Erdogan and all of the others all declared caliphates in terms of censorship in that whole region. Britain, not even America could touch on that level of gratuitous violence. Before, I mean. It is kind of weak now though the story lines haven’t much changed since they stopped showing carnage. Apropos, that, in a round about way, is how I learned American, too, through film. My father won our city small damages from Sony, you see, on account of ‘The Patriot’, and now when my siblings and I get together we watch a bunch of Mel Gibson movies in what I wish I could claim was irony but in truth I’m not cool in precisely the way one would need to be for such, I suppose.”

“Mel Gibson is Australian,” Morgan responded. “Something was lost in translation.”
“Is he now?” Tarleton asked with what seemed genuine interest. “I’d not have known. His films are all about how much he hates the English or how much he hates women, and these things are, from my understanding of having served with a number of you in Iraq, as fundamental to the American mentality as denying a collective tendency towards the same casual racism you have been uniformly quick in calling out in me, mind, or, if you prefer, as fundamental as your tangent fear of the money-God who apparently saved the world from socialism.”

“You fault Americans for having a comparative lack of history, yet you protest our honest portrayals of the past,” Morgan observed.

“No, no, I am well aware that is how you see yourselves, and that you truly believe as much, I’m just not sure how you quite came on the idea,” Tarleton countered. “You wrap every war in this false concept of ‘freedom’ which is such a substantive abstract as it is, rather than to say, as all the other great powers always have, that you are fighting over economic interests and only later calling it ‘prestige’ for the history books. I’ve been to many your officers’ messes in the Middle East without once encountering a man not there to line his own pockets. Of course,” he grinned as a jackal might, “I don’t fault you, we British are the same way and always have been. That was the entire point of the Revolution - which, by the way, you only won because taking a cost benefit analysis it was not in Westminster’s interest to continue to fund you as a colony.”

Morgan bit his lips before they could betray him with a smile. Tarleton did not realise how easily he had been trapped.

“No! Don’t object!” the man objected, again misjudging his own position. “You put God on your currency and ought therefore, one would think, to tell more stories to school children about biting the hand that once fed you than that one about throwing tea into the Boston harbour. But that is the way that markets go, ‘innit? Not every investment pays out in the end. Oh … and speaking of owning our history honestly and thusly apologising for all of its ills,” he continued to rant, “Liverpool as a huge museum about the horrors of slavery. Where is America’s? Hiding behind a glorified statue of a confederate general and the snowflakes there to protest it?” Tarleton spat.

“In Baltimore, I think.”

“Oh.”

The colonel was quite for a time. Morgan did his best to find bumps in the road whenever he saw the younger man try to rest his head against the window. The forests that lined the roadside turned to fields and back to trees again. Morgan made a few mental calculations based on the conclusions he had drawn about whose pockets, specifically, Tarleton spoke of benefiting from the current conflict. He glanced back at the boy in his rear-view mirror. The colonel was slight and slim - though, by the way his uniform wore, had likely had a sturdier build than he did now while on active deployment. His features were all vaguely effeminate and his cheeks, even covered with three days’ worth of stubble still had a slight cherubic quality that usually disappeared with adolescence to them. In a word, he looked like a child, one incapable of rising to the responsibility of his rank. Morgan guessed that the boy’s superiors were keen to ignore the reduction in security clearance he had suffered on account of a past court martial when it otherwise met their ends. The boy had seen more than he was meant to and in his youthful arrogance thought to use this to enhance his standing. The FBI Agent wondered if things might have played out differently for his suspect had Tarleton’s commitments not abruptly been called into question by some titbit he had yet to let slip.

“So, are you fluent?” he asked him, attempting to return to the warfront.

“In?” Tarleton blinked, returning to the road from wherever he went within his idol thoughts.
“Arabic?”

“What does it mean to be fluent? I could conceivably live in that language without ever feeling at home in it,” he complained. “American English is the same way. You and I, we understand one another now because I am using my ‘BBC voice’ and you your ‘CNN voice’ and this is natural in a workplace environment. It is called ‘code switching’ and we do it based on expectations we naturally ascribe others as having. Were I to suddenly fall into the heavy dialect I use at home, you’d not understand a word, and vice versa, one can only suppose. I’ve been here for some number of days, maybe, I don’t know how long exactly – hours, I’m sure, have a slightly different calculation as miles and pounds on this side of the pond and I’m positively exhausted from the posture of it all. I don’t know how it is for an American, but to speak properly as they do down in Oxfordshire you have to sit slightly straighter, stop your words in your airway an instant before they enter your mouth and recreate the sound that is lost through a slight nasal inflection. ‘Posh’ is an excruciating exercise and I’ve no idea how I might keep this up indefinitely in public or at all within the scope of my purely hypothetical private life.”


“I’m sorry, I hadn’t realised.” It sounded earnest.

“No, you misunderstand. We go camping, hunting, fishing, talking isn’t imperative, in fact it is a hindrance if anything.”

At this, Tarleton winced. “How does anyone who served in the armed forces possibly have any want to spend a weekend in a tent? My ex is um, without intending any disrespect, the very portrait of an Essex girl and we two once went on an outdoors holiday together, over the course of which I was ready to pack up and find a hotel days before she decided that she had had quite enough of life without strap-backs and tan-towels.”

“I grew up with it. Nature.”

“I’d bet,” Tarleton smiled in a way that told very little of what he meant. “Any road, I can’t do American. I’d get too caught up on understanding irrelevant differences like apostrophes to move on with it in any effective way. I’m sure it is the same, any language aside from one’s own, never quite being at home regardless of how proper you can make your pronunciation sound or how many verb charts you’ve committed to memory. It has its advantages, though,” he yawned. “I can always tell my fellow fakes. In Iraq in security briefings we had this Indian translator who somehow passed himself off as both Arab and local whilst sounding like he was straight out of Surrey, which caused me to pay a lot of attention. Ultimately it led to how I wound up in this position of knowing about all of the misdeeds government does in the interest of money which you call freedom and mistake for God. Which is why, I suppose, I’m about to be shot in the back of the head and dumped in some shallow ditch. In that light,” he considered, “‘advantage’ was probably a poor choice of wording on my part. ‘Amusing’ is closer to what I’m sure I meant.”

“Amusing? You mean to say that scenario you describe doesn’t scare you?” Morgan smirked. Tarleton did truly look a shade paler when he glanced back at him in the rear view. He had, however, no intention of letting the lad fall to any more harm than that which would have been asked of any service member during an eighteen-hour shift – exhaustion that lead to dangerous disregard for protocol. Sleep deprivation, as military studies had shown, was as disruptive to basic functioning and the time it took to react as alcohol, which was why it ranked as the leading cause of death in the world’s most powerful naval force. The colonel was clearly already past that point. But then, he was not the one driving. He faced no threat of physical harm but he need not be
informed of this. Not yet.

Tarleton took some time considering his answer. “We fear the unknown,” he said slowly. “I know full well how your organization likes to operate, so why should I be scared? I might ‘dread’ it the way I would dread a transfer through Brussels or a flight with Lufthansa, but that is rather born out of experience and I’ve never exactly been executed so … if anything the fear you expect from me would be a sort of synchronisation of violent imagery our minds are want to borrow from screens of various size and a pain that has already, as consequence of my own actions, mind, become a near constant - not getting to see my girls grow up, to name it.”

“You have kids?”

“A toddler and a pre-teen. You?”

They had had this conversation before. Tarleton was too tired to realise.

“I …” Morgan shifted, “I want to know exactly what a man like you who seems to have enough to lose thinks is worth dying for.”

“Capitalism, innit? This thing about Arnold’s defence bill, I could get fired for it, and were my own economic concerns not such as they are I might have made more of a stand when I enjoyed the attention of Washington if not, well … Washington. No, you and your bosses and Cornwallis and whatever it is exactly that leads his hand all want me gone because I suppose I wasn’t meant to know about the whole inside trading scheme you forced upon Hewlett and Simcoe after framing them for the crime you are simultaneously using as a cover. Something got lost in the wires on that one, aye?”

It was the first Morgan had heard of any it. “Maybe we can come to some sort of agreement,” he suggested, pulling the vehicle into the emergency lane as he came to an abrupt stop.

“How?” Tarleton snorted when Morgan had turned around to face him. “We don’t even speak the same bloody language, you and I.”

There were no words for precisely how much he resented the man seated across from him in blatant ersatz.

Billy Lee was The Pentagon’s Press Secretary. His public role was to stand in front of a core of reporters, providing statements that told little and left even less room for question or comment. Alexander Hamilton did not know if Lee’s continuance of this particular posture in the private walls of his office owed itself to the perils of occupation or if such had always been present in the man’s character. He knew however, that the subordinate’s taking of this meeting meant that Washington was unwilling to talk. Still. After three days of telling him to wait.

Experience might have instructed Hamilton to expect his boss to send a key staffer to take the talks they two had scheduled, regardless of the events that presently gave Washington good excuse for his absence. With this thought, his ire expanded. He inhaled deeply to stop himself from screaming. Lee, after all, had come merely as a consolation, he could not be faulted for following the orders he had been given. Insulting though his presence here was, it was intended as an apology and there would be no justice in verbally assaulting the messenger he had been sent.
“I think we might want to talk to Mary Woodhull,” Lee said. “UNICEF is the only party to come out of this ordeal with its reputation intact.”

Officially, they were meeting to discuss progress in the Arnold investigation. Off the record, they were drafting a statement together, the sort that would require Lee to take a five o’clock commuter flight back to the capitol. Hamilton nodded his coming understanding of why he, explicitly, had been asked to set aside his own considerable workload in order to assist in this task. “I think we might involve Tallmadge,” he said, reaching for his handset.

“He hasn’t the security clearance. This doesn’t leave this room,” Lee warned before Hamilton could lift the receiver.

“She is among the detective inspector’s primary suspects in the Arnold disappearance.”

“This isn’t related,” Lee dismissed.

“If you are right, and she knew about the planned attack ahead of time, it might be,” Hamilton countered. He kept his voice low and level but, in his mind, he was standing, shouting at the man whose chair Lee filled. Hamilton had himself served as a secretary to Washington when he had been a young officer in the US Army and thus appreciate how very difficult Lee’s job was now. He had sat on the opposite end of similar desks decades before, knowing that there were only so many was one could admit that their superior officer could be a stubborn fool without risking accusations of insubordination. Billy Lee was better at this task than Hamilton himself had been, but barely. The subordinate’s expression, if not his words, spoke to his shared disquiet.

The FBI was meant to be assisting the NYPD to locate and rescue Senator Arnold. Hamilton realised far later than he was like to admit that this ought to have been an instant tip-off that the operation was not to follow standard proceedings. Ordinarily, local police would assist the feds in their search where needed as Hamilton’s field office was far better equipped and enjoyed more rights and resources. Prior to Washington’s arrival, he learned that his only role in the operation would be to delay police progress within what his boss considered reason. For Hamilton, it had already taken too long. Political strategy aside, an American hero had been captured and was being held captive within their own boarders. Every second that elapsed since his disappearance was an embarrassment to the oaths they had all sworn before assuming office.

But this seemed to weigh on no one’s conscious save for his own.

Arnold’s defence bill had previously stood no chance of passing the house floor. Now, by Washington’s design, the shadow voices in government were being echoed by those in the streets. The US and her allies were assured of the bill’s success, of the improvements to policy and precedent for what could be employed in the interest of national security on the Homefront and abroad. It created additional opportunities for cooperation as well by putting Lafayette in touch with Edmund Hewlett that he might put into motion the market adjustments that would create currency conditions to help the trade deal pass - conditions that the uncertainty that followedArnold’s abrupt disappearance had furthered in everyone’s favour.

Lee was right. Hewlett and Simcoe had never been meant to become suspects in the Arnold case and alerting the NYPD of their suspicions around the latter’s alibi would not serve their greater objectives.

Still, Hamilton was beginning to share the belief he knew some of his men to hold that either everyone in Setauket had something to do with the missing senator or the entire operation was an inside job. For all he knew, it may well simultaneously be both.
“Do we at least let him know if we decide to speak to her?” Hamilton asked.

“If you uncover anything relevant to Arnold,” Lee answered without inflection.

“As whatever she may have to share will more likely than not pertain to the Hewletts -”

“No. We already have enough problems abroad,” Lee sighed, shutting his eyes. “Four members of that branch of Britain’s Royal Family are in hospital recovering from,” he paused, searching his tired mind for inoffensive phrasing, ultimately only able to conjure, “our intervention thus far, shall we put it.”

“Four?” Hamilton blinked.

“Eugene, as you well know,” Lee said with a hint of waning, “Eleanor, and now of course Fabienne and her newborn son.”

“Eleanor?”

“Has a bed in Edinburgh for ‘exhaustion.’”

“Is that a polite way of saying ‘drug use’?”

“No, the blood tests came back clean. It’s a polite way of saying anorexia. Or acute paranoia. Apparently, DI Ferguson was with her when she collapsed and put one of his men on guard at her bedside. When she woke, she panicked that the fluids she was being given were poisoned and she had to be restrained. Ferguson has been serving sentinel since, upon being cleared in the internal malpractice inquiry that immediately followed his ordering an ambulance, that is.”

Hamilton shook his head. “That cops would police their own in situations like this.”

“You’ll hear no argument from me,” Lee concurred.

“We can’t be any more blamed for that incident than our Scottish colleagues. Eugene was a mistake,” Hamilton admitted, “but he and Fabienne aren’t -”

“In the line of succession due to the wife’s confession, true, but as the Crown is giving every possible signal that they would prefer Edmund who is also marrying Catholic to inherit his uncle’s title, I suppose so that they not risk having to recognise a potential Queen in or perhaps of Scotland when the union is already so weak … we can’t let this line of questioning proceed against the all-but-officially-recognised heir apparent. The entire situation is too delicate. Obama made it clear to Cornwallis this morning that should Brexit pass, the US won’t be keen to open separate trade negotiations with the UK. The Ambassador turned around and told the President that if his attaché’s body isn’t returned to British soil within a week he will make sure our current arrangement won’t pan out either. He was bluffing, naturally, but we’ve orders from on high that Hewlett and Simcoe need to be protected from further police inquiry. The problem is that even Tallmadge in a position that would allow us to relay any of this to him, having met the man, I well suspect it would only increase his mistrust.”

Hearing it said, Hamilton realised he felt the same way.

“What if they did it though – Hewlett and Simcoe and maybe Mary Woodhull along with them,” he shook his head and pivoted, “What body?”

“Tarleton?” Lee tried. “The former field officer whose current lack of security clearance was conveniently overlooked in hopes that he would share Edmund Hewlett’s confession with the
family prior to Ferguson opening his investigation? The one we took into custody after he shaded John André’s research with The Daily Mail? No,” he assessed, reading Hamilton’s expression. His volume rose and pace of speech quickened. “Of course you weren’t informed. Of course, you, in turn, didn’t, couldn’t inform your field agent. You need to get Morgan on the phone, now,” he ordered. “Apologies, it’s not you,” Lee said, exasperated, as Hamilton dialled.

“He is out of network,” the ADIC replied of the dead line.

“Which means presumably he hasn’t heard that the colonel died Monday afternoon of heart failure, or that French field General Bouchard now, consequently, has a grandson named after him,” Lee shook his head in what felt like defeat.

“Wait,” Hamilton swallowed back a laugh, “The end result of all of this is that there is some poor baby in Paris whose name is literally ‘Ban the Butcher’?”

“Pretty sure the parents are opting to hyphenate on the surname,” Lee said, the historical reference clearly wasted on him. “Maybe you are right though. Maybe ‘congratulations’ is all that can be said. Still, we need to issue a public statement and wash our hands of the rest,” he said, lifting his pen.

Hamilton nodded.

The operation from The Pentagon’s perspective was a success. To its Press Secretary, it was the ultimate Pyric victory. The Foreign Legion had moved into Bamako at 7:21, Greenwich Mean Time. By noon, a new government had been established and all but installed. This would, as Lee explained, taken up five minutes of the western media’s attention for two days tops and within a month the public would have forgotten the incident in its entirety were it not for teenagers with smart phones. The video itself of the first shots the that had been fired by NATO troops in an area where they were not meant to be engaged, had it instead been posted to YouTube, could have been blocked or taken down before anyone had time to respond or react. As it was however, the footage had been sent directly to a young man living in Paris on asylum who took matters into his own hands. The police had been quick to respond, but so to had the press. Within the next twelve hours, Alexander Hamilton was all but certain, the world would know what he now did. Within a day, they would know the facts that until this point had alluded him.

On Monday evening, the French Ambassador to the United States had, with his British counterpart, orchestrated a land sale between a drug lord and a rebel leader whom the US Government considered a safer bet than the Islamic-leaning regime that had been in power. This was fairly common place in international diplomacy, as was the operation Hamilton himself had been tasked with facilitating, namely, convincing a known corporate criminal and his otherwise above-board banker-friend to make a series of investments that would stabilize the Euro enough against the US Dollar to ensure that a trade deal that had been negotiated for the past decade would pass in the current congressional session. The United States could not risk letting the deal sit until after elections and the European Union needed terms that would allow them to continue doing business with the nation supplying a third of the member countries’ collective GDP. It was standard practice. It was against the law he had sworn to uphold -

It would have been entirely irrelevant had not these two operations converged around the same cast in the aftermath of Benedict Arnold’s disappearance.

Hamilton had seen an opportunity to appeal to Edmund Hewlett’s weaker character aspects when he had received a call informing him that DI Tallmadge intended to drive out to Setauket to ask Hewlett’s fiancée Anna Strong a routine series of questions as she managed the bar in which the senator was reported to have last been seen. It was perhaps negligent of both Lafayette, a foreign
official whom Rochambeau had positioned in his office with Washington’s blessing, and Hamilton himself to assume that Hewlett would not be called in for questioning. Neither, however, could have predicted that in the course of the interview with the NYPD, Hewlett would become Tallmadge’s primary suspect. Still, the plan had functioned to the extent they had needed it to. Simcoe had made the right companies profitable when both sides needed them to be. Hewlett, however, had done everything in his limited sphere of influence to ensure that the police continued to focus on him, everything including confessing to the crime that had first brought his name to Hamilton’s attention.

Action had been swift if ultimately ill advised. Tallmadge had followed protocol and given the confession to the appropriate authorities; the British had shared the information with two government employees who could accomplish the least with it - DI Ferguson whose findings would result in a mistrial, and Colonel Tarleton, whom they had reason to suspect would use it to facilitate his own interests. Hamilton saw a clear problem in the European practice of encouraging military officers to pressure individual politics, but it had not been his call to make. From what his information told him, however, the call had become his to answer. Tarleton had shared the Hewlett tape with a criminal above prosecution shortly before boarding a plane to Washington in hopes of keeping Hewlett wealth in Liverpool by exploiting familial sympathies. Hamilton, knowing nothing of the confession at the time, had not afforded the family proper enough time to react. Eleanor Hewlett had called her twin brother shortly before FBI agents cornered him his Copenhagen, asking that he make the money that had just cleared her account disappear. Eugene turned and invested the sum in several New York properties, including DeJong’s Tavern, either not knowing of Edmund’s involvement at all in these various proceedings, or knowing full well and wanting to make a last stand but putting a portion of the money Cornwallis and Rochambeau had spent to feed a rebel army in Mali into the bar where Arnold was last seen, telling Tallmadge - were he so clever as to ask - that it had all been an inside job.

In light of the mornings events, it seemed the inspector would connect these things regardless. As General Bouchard fired his first shots indiscriminately upon soldiers and civilians, a teenager took a video on his cell phone and sent it to an asylum seeker who shared his political leanings. As a result, six young men quartered in Paris whom the authorities had failed to identify as holding enemy affiliations cornered three women of considerable affluence and influence in a petit Montmartre boulangerie, holding them, their children, the staff and the shop’s other guests hostage while making demands on the general to order a retreat. Bouchard’s response to the news, had it reached him – something Hamilton had been told that had yet to be confirmed – was to meet fire with fire. In Mali, far more men had died than necessary. In France, eight civilians had been locked in a bakery. Hours later, nine emerged.

The Father of the Legion had, in such time, become a grandfather, his daughter attended to by a fashion designer and the baker’s wife, both mothers themselves, while the third member of Fabienne and Marie’s morning congress provided for the safety of all of their fellow prisoners without revealing her name, credentials or her husband’s strategic importance.

When Hamilton first heard of how Adrienne was able to intervene, he wondered what would have happened had his friend found out that his wife and small children had nearly been made casualties of a war no one would have otherwise known or cared was being fought whilst the event was unfolding. He knew that had it been Eliza and their son and daughter imprisoned for hours under the threat of summary execution due to overlooked or ignored checks on an operation in which he had been part, he would need to be removed from the case. He knew that this alone would do little to silence him personally and felt that Lafayette might just as easily find himself in the unenviable position of an impossible choice, asserting his rights when he had knowingly neglected those of many in the hopes of ensuring tomorrow would come, questioning if it still could in the wake of what would amount to a confession. Washington was likely with him now,
trying to keep the man calm.

The metro police and gendarmerie had killed all six perpetrators, as Lee relayed of events abroad. The hostages were currently being held in a secured location, excepting Fabienne who was in hospital under watch with her poorly named but otherwise healthy son.

The French were focused on the baby, who had yet to be identified. The only hostages who were named were the owner and his wife, both of Jewish decent causing he country to wonder if they struggled with problems of Anti-Semitism. Eventually, the police would need to release a statement, perhaps one that would turn the victims into heroes and limit the narrative to the streets of Montmartre, ignoring French, British and American involvement in Mali entirely.

But secrets were increasingly hard to keep.

“I want to know what Mary Woodhull has to say to all of this first.”

“Do you think she knew?” Hamilton asked of the woman.

“I think either way we have a big problem and should proceed with as much cation as possible. From my understanding, the day Arnold went missing, it was reported that UNICEF had collected money for a school that was never built, a headline that was reduced to a line item in a local paper in the wake of more immediate events. Mrs Woodhull, in her role as Deputy Head of Public Relations, was tasked with the cover up. Now, we at this time cannot prove that the orphans and widows she was able to have pulled out of a warzone prior to them becoming potential casualties was done with prior knowledge of the surge, if Lady Eleanor knew any of the specifics, or if this was all lucky coincidence. Still, she is too close, Woodhull and we need look into any further leaks.”

“I don’t like what you are asking me to do,” Hamilton admitted.

“We will get the press to focus on the human aspects, the children that were saved, the school it works in everyone’s interest to pretend was run by a large international advocacy organization, the baby born in a bakery when sudden stress found a young mother in labour in her thirty-eighth week, the fact that Adrienne Lafayette and Marie Antionette were able to intervein to the extent that there were not civilian … well, no Caucasian casualties. No one needs to know why the hostages were taken. We can relate it to inequality -”

“We can’t. All six were shot, if you assign economic motive to their stand you’ll make them into martyrs, and many would be happy to insert themselves into the narrative you would be giving,” Hamilton advised. “Speaking from a law enforcement perspective, no organisation that I know of has the resources to deal with the people who consider themselves have-nots. They don’t realise just how widespread cut backs have been,” he sighed. “We are not an army anymore, we are a militia, and the mob we face is often better armed.”

Lee nodded. “That is a fair point. I have orders all the same to make sure our limited involvement in West Africa isn’t made public. The surge was intended to end the conflict, not elongate it,” he paused, adding privately, “I don’t know what the fuck Bouchard was thinking.”

“If he found out his child had been taken hostage in his own city by regime loyalists, one can’t hold him accountable.”

“All the same, we need to take care of everyone who knows and everyone who might have combined position and motive to effectively act against our collective interests. Washington told DS Yilmaz of the NYPD yesterday within earshot of her boss that Tarleton died of heart failure on
Monday afternoon. He personally called Cornwallis informing him and expressing our deepest condolences once we became sure that Tallmadge or another member of his team would relay the information to the necessary parties in André’s research group, causing them to cooperate in the way Dandridge predicted. But now we have a problem. The embassy wants a body. Tell your man Morgan to produce one.”

Before he left, Hamilton asked, “Do you ever hate that this is how the world is run?”

“Without men like us it would descend into chaos.”

“And Lafayette?”

“Washington has it under control.”

Unfortunately for world affairs, the first thing Hamilton heard when he got Morgan on the line an hour later was that the FBI had reason indeed to speak to Simcoe’s supposed mistress.

>>According to Tarleton he has a history of this sort of behaviour. For the past year or so, Simcoe led everyone in London to believe that he was in a committed relationship with Anna Strong, until quite recently a married woman – saying that he had left his beloved Elizabeth Gwillim for her and she her husband Selah for him, only for it to come out within weeks of her divorce that the affair, supposing there had ever been one, was entirely one-sided. Tarleton is vain enough to imagine this has something to do with a school yard rivalry between Simcoe and himself, a poor attempt at imitation of my suspect’s more illustrious experiences, but I have share his doubts with regard to the current affair Simcoe claims.<< Morgan reported, sounding annoyed that he had been made to listen to something resembling a love story within the course of a high-stakes interrogation.

“The thing is, Mrs Woodhull corroborates his story.”

>>Is there evidence that speaks to the same?<<

“None,” Hamilton gave. “The NYPD did a sweep of Whitehall, the residence of Judge Richard Woodhull, his son Abraham, daughter-in-law Mary and their son, a boy of six. Edmund Hewlett resides there as well, Anna Strong did briefly, Peggy Shippen is currently staying at the place and John André’s administrative assistant Abigail Ingram and her son Cicero recently moved in as well. Aside from Hewlett and the Woodhulls, everyone else took up residence within days of Arnold’s disappearance and the only piece of evidence that could relate to the senator which the NYPD was able to uncover was a soccer jersey with gun powder residue that Tallmadge’s team have already been able to write off as a red herring,” he explained. “Hewlett and Simcoe got into a bit of a row, Hewlett was washing his blood-stained clothes in Simcoe’s machine when a friend of theirs broke things off with the woman he had been seeing for ten years and they, along with a group of their friends, went to a shooting range to cheer him up. Simcoe lent him a shirt and a pair of shorts. As to the affair, the one between Mrs Woodhull and Mr Simcoe, we don’t have anything to support it, even within their financial records, save for a few line items on Simcoe’s most recent credit card statement.”

>>Is this all within the time frame of the disappearance?<<

“Give me a moment to check,” Hamilton said. As he waited on the file to load, Morgan proposed

>>Why do you suspect that Hewlett and/or his many housemates would intentionally plant
evidence suggesting a link to the crime?<<

“Its … complicated.”

>>I heard a rather simple explanation not that long ago, may I?<< Morgan scowled. >>A number of European Ambassadors to the United States, along, perhaps, with our cabinet, came on a means of market manipulation to create optimal conditions for a trade deal to pass in a window populist politics is forcing shut sooner than anticipated. Your man Lafayette saw an opportunity to make contact with Simcoe through Hewlett when he accompanied you and Tallmadge on a routine initial inquiry to Whitehall, never suspecting that they would both become actual suspects in the disappearance. Hewlett, thinking he overheard the information only because there was interest around him decided to keep it that way in hopes of increasing his own share of profit, not seeing the bigger picture – and how could he have? Eventually he came to suspect his friends of having committed the crime, and, paranoid that this woman Anna would leave him if he couldn’t provide her with the life his last name promises, made a confession in hopes of keeping Simcoe -on whom he is entirely reliant financially- out of jail should any details of their insider trading scheme be discovered. Sound about right?>> It sounded accusatory.

“Yeah,” Hamilton swallowed. “That is what we are working with. How the hell did Tarleton know any of this?”

>>Oh, this is where it gets interesting,<< Morgan said acidly. Hamilton understood, even shared the anger but did not respond to it. >>You see, it doesn’t surprise me at all that Hewlett would assume that he would be able to walk away with obstructing evidence or any other charges we might, in a fair, just and equal society, think to laden or at least threaten him with. Not so in Britain. The cop put in charge of the investigation into his family’s financial history? It turns out he has a damning personal connection to the Hewletts and as such anything he uncovers could lead to a mistrial if it even makes it to court. This wouldn’t, however, exonerate Tarleton’s late father, who eliminated Liverpool’s deficit during his tenure as the city’s mayor partially through business contracts made with this most noble line. Ironically it would seem, due to our department’s swift arrest of youngest son Eugene, a shipping arrangement that is about to expire was not moved to Copenhagen as planned. Upon examination and in no surprise to me, it works out that Tarleton played a part in creating the scenario that would lead to this outcome.

>>The French and British had a plan to coerce Lady Eleanor into selling a plantation she owns down in Mali to some rebel insurgent for a negligible sum, gifting the man, in essence, a profitable crop from which to feed his army -if you follow my meaning - without further European interference as the surge is unpopular and no one wants to see the conflict escalate into another western proxy war fought on foreign soil. The transfer of funds, which would implement both Cornwallis and Rochambeau, happened within hours of Edmund Hewlett’s confession that opened a separate inquiry. Now, by some fault in the system, Tarleton, who lost his security clearance after a gross abuse of power, was sent a recording of Hewlett’s entire confession and took this to his ‘friend’ Lady Eleanor, warning her to make any funds disappear. As the brother is a junior CFO, she turned the assignment to him, he invested with Simcoe and outbid his old friend on another property in Setauket, the one in which Arnold was last seen and Edmund had wanted to buy for Anna.

>> Our department, as you know, flagged this transaction immediately and arrested Eugene, as per Tarleton’s design, before the boy could sell Liverpool out in favour of the Danes. I’ve looked into this, the colonel’s younger brother works for the current mayor in addition to holding a seat on the Liverpool City Council, which itself is again deeply indebted to individual members of both houses – Hewlett and Tarleton, that is, here, partially, over a proposed new stadium for Everton which I was told at length is a soccer team. But this isn’t, strictly speaking, our jurisdiction.
So, to recap: we have international actors in their official capacity orchestrating a sale between a war lord and a drug cartel, itself partially underwritten by the British government in return for the funding of essential services tax revenue can’t meet in this recovering recession. We have a military attaché blackmailing an ambassador with information about this exchange in order to get his friend released from FBI custody, a detention, mind, which he all but ensured and from which his city and perhaps extended family benefited, at least in the short term. At the same time as all of this is going on, Edmund Hewlett and John Graves Simcoe were themselves coerced into committing a crime to the overall benefit of the world’s economy, and to ensure some measure of individual profit in this venture, Hewlett made himself out to be a suspect in Arnold’s disappearance as it was within these contexts that he initially leaned of the scheme, wanting to keep a connection to Lafayette open yet obscure.

Now, as to whether or not he is covering for Simcoe or anyone else in relation to Arnold specifically I cannot say and neither can my suspect. To the property text that first brought Tarleton to our attention, returning to alibis and accusations of false affairs, he had written Simcoe to simply to gloat, essentially, that he had discovered Anna had been a lie all along. Sir, Morgan addressed him sounding ever-more world weary, after hours spent in interrogation, I have to believe Tarleton when he says that his suggestion of buying property was not born out of designs of exposure of further enrichment – he is not held in enough regard by his siblings to know of all of their holdings and with good reason. What I do think, however, is that he had either just tricked Eleanor into having Eugene move her money around in a way that would lead to his arrest or was intending to do so shortly in hopes of creating more market interest in a backwater to allow for Eugene’s eventual release after our powers played into Tarleton’s own immediate purpose without anyone catching wind of his intrusion into any of it.

“It worked. Eugene Hewlett’s wife, Fabienne Bouchard, daughter of the same, was evidently so grateful to Tarleton for using his influence to free her husband that she named her son for him. You’ll see something about that in the news in the coming hours.”

Oh?

“The Legion’s surge in Mali led to a hostage situation in Paris,” Hamilton explained quickly. “Listen I … I need to know, is it possible that Mary Woodhull knew about the attack before it took place? The reason I ask is this – Hewlett, that is, Lady Eleanor, gave sanctuary to women and war orphans whom UNICEF, Mrs Woodhull’s employer, are now accounting for, claiming them teachers and students the school which we were readying to take the charity to court over. They have all been relocated and there is nothing left to link the Hewletts or their internal allies to the land in question.”

Nothing save for Tarleton. Morgan remarked, likely already of Washington’s mind on the matter.

“No, nothing at all. We need to discuss how the interrogation is to conclude in a moment, but to return to Mary Woodhull, we know she and Lady Eleanor spoke yesterday, and that it was Woodhull who initiated the conversation. She has been involved in every turn of this saga and I am beginning to suspect that, like Tarleton, she is far more involved than she lets on. So far, we, or rather the NYPD has been operation under the assumption that Simcoe has been using her as an alibi for the night of Arnold’s disappearance, but the opposite seems to me the case. Presuming that Simcoe’s delusions around Anna Strong – Mary’s college roommate, mind – were so encompassing that they were known in London, Mrs Woodhull would not have needed to be especially perceptive to trick Simcoe into thinking that they two were in an illicit relationship, the only evidence of which I see places them in the relative vicinity of where Arnold was last seen on the night in question.
“According to Google maps,” Hamilton expanded, staring at his monitor, “he purchased condoms and cigarettes at the next petrol station out of town, if driving on the street one would take if they were trying to get to the Connecticut side of the broader from DeJong’s Tavern. She seems to be in communication if not corroboration with the entire Hewlett family – and, there is this: a witness recently came forward with a story that puts her husband, Abe Woodhull in direct contact with Arnold, whom we now have reason to believe is still alive. There is something more here.”

>>I’m afraid I can’t expand. My suspect thinks Mrs Woodhull a figment of Simcoe’s imagination, apparently with good reason.<<

“Yeah … so do I,” Hamilton bit his lip, pitying the man who circumstance seemed to set up in the worst of ways. “So do I. On Tarleton - do you think you can get anything else out of him?”

>>I don’t think that we can get anything from him that would not in turn incriminate one of our own. That is the downside – well that and, my friend, have you ever met the colonel?<< Morgan complained.

“No,” Hamilton told him, “and I never will. Officially, he died on Monday afternoon of heart failure. I need you to make that happen. The family has already been notified and we don’t have a working plan of how to deal with the embassy if the body is not returned to them in a timely manner.”

For ten seconds, the line went silent.

>>How do you expect me to make it look like he died of natural causes three days ago when -<<

“Washington gave the order. I just became aware of it,” Hamilton told, his tone doubtlessly betraying his frustration. “Apparently, his heart stopped due to stress that an autopsy can easily explain as owing itself to and the aggravation of an old service injury. Just pump him full of that Monster Energy Drink that so many teens die from over-dosing on. Take him to McDonald’s and then stick him in a morgue’s refrigerator. Just get it done. Within twelve hours no coroner will be able to say exactly when his heart stopped. If we say Monday someone will sign off on it.”

>>It is the logistics rather than tactics that give me pause. I was texting with his teenage daughter not that long ago.<<

“That does impose a problem,” Hamilton nodded.

>>She is a deeply troubled thirteen-year-old. No one will believe her without any physical evidence. We can get a message to the Hewletts and their associates if we don’t want to involve Scotland Yard. They problem lies in that we may need Tarleton’s for any charges that may later be brought.<<

“I’ll think on it. Take him out for his last meal and call me when it is done. I’ll talk to local about Mrs Woodhull -”

>>Being that she is a judge’s daughter -<<

“In-law … not for long perhaps, if she keeps this up. Good thinking though, it might get her to adjust her alibi. Either way, if we give her to Tallmadge after making sure her business with our global partners is limited to her interest in making the Arnold charges disappear or defect from her person or possibly her husband’s, perhaps coming to a plea agreement if that is not the case and she is more involved with the powers as they be than Washington is presently keen to inform me of, it might distract Tallmadge enough from Hewlett and Simcoe for the time being -”
Wasn’t Genovese supposed to do that? Morgan inquired.

“That was a happy accident, we had nothing to do.”

The arrests and murder were all around the opium trade. If that wasn’t us, whose hand was on that trigger? the filed agent interrupted. The question gave Hamilton pause.

“We have to deliver Tarleton to Cornwallis by Monday at the very latest. That is your window. See if you can get anything from him in the meantime that … we might use to further strengthen our alliances,” he said, implying blackmail. “In the meantime, I need you to cease communication with his children and I’ll think on what to do to erase the existing evidence without corrupting that which we might want to later use. I’ll give Mary Woodhull to DI Tallmadge in hopes of freeing up his other suspects for our intended purposes. We’ll say farewell, I need to get on this. Good work, Morgan, and good luck.”

Next time you are in Virginia, you are taking me out for drinks for this one, he laughed, suggesting, A beer for every hour I’ve spent in that man’s company.

“I look forward to it. Cheers.”

Cheers.

The hours passed quickly without word. Most of Alexander Hamilton’s colleagues had retired for the day when his phone rang. He recognised the number as belonging to the NYPD. Seeing that it was after six, he wondered why it had taken so long for DI Tallmadge to contact him. He had sent the email outlining Mary Woodhull as a person of interest hours ago.

“Hello, Ben I was just – Eliza?” he stopped as his wife, sobbing, explained that she had been taken in for questioning, that his son and goddaughter were both in hospital following a police raid on their property and that Pip’s friend from school and soccer who had also been injured in a police attack had Benedict Arnold’s phone and was refusing to give it to anyone but him or his friend Aaron Burr, who had driven to hospital to meet the children after Tallmadge expressed concern that Thea may have been sexually mishandled by his men. Alexander Hamilton was certain he must have misheard. “Can you repeat that, please, slowly.”

ALEXANDER! Eliza wailed. DID YOU KNOW ABOUT THIS?

“Of course not, it doesn’t make.”

Get down here! Now! They want to charge me and the kids with withholding evidence in the Arnold case. Washington is refusing to speak to me – please, Alex, our son she began to sob. “I’m on my way.”

He grabbed his badge and service weapon, leaving without thinking of his coat, computer or the door he left open behind him.

Mary Woodhull sat in the back of her Jeep in the small third seat between her son in his booster
chair and her housemate Edmund Hewlett, who, like the two girls in the front, was otherwise occupied with an argument he was having with someone over the phone. Mary’s bandaged leg was uncomfortable in this position but, excepting Thomas, she was the smallest of their party and had contented herself to this pain without complaint. Even if she had someone to talk to, she had nothing to say for herself.

Abigail’s son Cicero had been taken in by Tallmadge’s men for finding the phone that had escaped her and John’s search.

He had been assaulted and arrested because she had driven Anna’s sedan into a senator.

He was twelve years old.

Mary’s day began much differently than it seemed it would end. She had spent the better part of her morning in her boss’ office being congratulating her on her quick thinking, being told that the orphans she had had a hand in securing as a cover would have all been dead had UNICEF not had her to intervene. It was good press. She could expect a promotion. Her day continued as such with the blissful, optimistic ignorance she often faulted her assistants and interns for holding around the work they did. Mary Woodhull, Deputy Head of Public Relations, had saved 120 women and orphans, more than the 80 she had been bold enough to ask for. For all of her wrong, she had done a great right that surely exonerated her in the eyes of eternity, that promised to afford her time to make amends for the rest. John had ended their affair, allowing her marriage to end on equal terms. The news told of a new lead, and Mary was confident that when she returned home she would return to her new normal, the parts of it she was beginning to love, the friendships she had made with Hewlett and the women who lived in their household - a foster family of her own choosing, happier than those she had known in her youth.

Aberdeen had picked her up at work early that afternoon after picking Thomas up from kindergarten and the three of them had gone out to lunch to celebrate the possible promotion and what it might mean for a move back to the city both she and her au pair so loved. It was not until they returned to Setauket that reality began to show how ugly it still was. There was a message on her home answering machine from the police saying they wanted to speak to her husband. Peggy, who had borrowed Anna’s car from Edmund while he was at work – likely to visit her boyfriend and provide him with the false report Mary had concocted to disrupt the research that had destroyed the lives of John and his teammates– returned to Whitehall after picking Edmund up at the planetarium and confirmed Mary’s worse suspicions by way of a traffic report in explaining her tardiness. There were cops absolutely crawling over the other side of town, they two had tried an alternate route, only to find this other road was blocked as well. Peggy had no way of knowing this, but the streets she was speaking of were those that lead to Rogers’ halfway house and the house she and Abe owned that would forever remain half-finished.

Abe, her husband, the father of her child, was being looked into in connection with her crime.

Slowly Mary came to realise that she had no reason to anticipate his innocence in this affair.

She busied herself with housework thereafter, refusing help in the kitchen until demanding that someone bring her the phone when it again rang. It was the police as Mary had well suspected. This time they were not looking for Abe, but rather for Abigail, whose son had been taken in for questioning.

Mary’s heart stopped with this statement.

Cicero was twelve, a fact to which her mind was in constant want to return. He was likely injured and was sitting at a cell down at the station because of something she had done, something she
would have been prepared to answer for at this point if she did not expect her husband’s hand, if she did not worry over where that would put her own son were they both exposed. She could not reach Abe on his mobile. All she could do was ride to police headquarters in the backseat of the SUV injury disallowed her from driving, intending protest rather than to provide the confession that would see the poor boy freed.

Twelve, she thought over and over again. Words repeated tended to lose their meanings to individual syllabic sounds – not so with numbers. Numbers were fixed and finite. Cicero Ingram, the boy taking part of the punishment for her crime whilst she sat in comparative comfort, was only twelve years old.

Mary Woodhull had never hated herself more.

For a moment, the screaming around her stopped. Mary missed it immediately for it had felt as though her chaos was not contained to simple, secret thoughts. Without the clamouring voices to fill the air, twelve was all she heard.

“I got us the permit,” Peggy said from the passenger seat, turning to flash a smile at Edmund, Thomas and herself. “When we get there I just need to go in to sign for it.” The woman who had just gotten off the phone was nothing of the girl Peggy ordinarily offered to the world. She had been on the phone for the past forty minutes since Aberdeen announced her intention to organise a protest with her political allies, frantically texting and tweeting until Peggy inserted herself into the frenzy, arguing that the goal was not to get arrested. For this to be effective, it had to be done right.

“Good job, Peggy,” Edmund said, his hand over a receiver he was quick to return to.

“Good job,” Mary echoed almost mutely.

“That is one way to work your white privilege,” Aberdeen quipped as she merged into highway traffic.

“A simple thank-you would suffice,” Peggy bit back.

“You only care now because this affects you directly -”

“This entire case is a design against everything I hold dear,” Peggy conceded. “I’m a suspect in Arnold’s disappearance. I’m on academic suspension from my university when I should be handing in my thesis and taking my final exams. I was kicked out of my sorority – and yes, Aberdeen, my godson was arrested. My godson! A little boy I knew and loved before he was even born. So yes, maybe I am selfish, maybe I would care a great deal less if some other black kid had been fired upon for holding a cell phone – but it was Cicero, and I can all but assure you that I am the last person anyone wants to have on the other side of a picket line. Think of it as keeping your enemies closer if you must, but if we handle this in a law abiding, organised fashion, we will get a large share of public opinion on our side.”

“I don’t see you as my enemy,” Aberdeen said. “Stay woke. That’s all. This isn’t a ‘black problem’, it is a societal one.”

“It is a law enforcement problem,” Peggy countered. “And I’ll make sure they know it by the end of the day.”


“Edmund, trade phones with me?” the blonde said, again turning slightly in her seat, “I want to call all of your former students and colleagues to meet us down at the barricades.”
“I’ll get all of my interns and all of their considerable social media followings on it,” Mary offered, composing a text, curing herself for not thinking of this before. Peggy nodded her approval.

Edmund, however, was too entrenched in his own tirade to give any of them much of his mind. Mary was again given to ease-dropping on a conversation physical proximity disallowed her to ignore.

Shortly before leaving the house, Edmund Hewlett had received a call from the inspector leading the case against his family that had been opened following his admission to a decades’ old crime, informing him that his younger sister was now in hospital after collapsing from what he described as grief and the medical profession would likely name malnourishment. Mary worried all the while that her name would come up in conversation – that the cops would want to know what she had to say to a now-broken noblewoman within an hour of her fall. Eleanor’s health, however, had not been the primary reason for Ferguson’s call. Neither, to her continued relief, was Ferguson suggesting (as Edmund himself seemed to believe) that Banastre Tarleton had died because they two had decided to hide a soccer jersey that had once belonged to him under Edmund and Anna’s mattress to confuse the police during their sweep.

No. DI Ferguson was, with reason, trying to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Prior to proposing to Anna, Mary learned from what she had overheard of the conversation happening next to her, Edmund Hewlett had sought to buy a visa outright with the money he hoped to raise by selling a few of his horses, among which was one that had been convicted of an earlier crime. Within a few hours of leaning of the colonel’s untimely demise, he had called his older sister, asking her to cancel the sale which was still up for bid and simply donate the horses to a farm outside of Liverpool that was involved in some sort of charity for the disadvantaged and disabled. Ferguson saw this as an admission of guilt and attempt to hide possible evidence. When he said as much to his suspect as much, Edmund, though ever disciplined and polite, became angrier than she perhaps had ever seen him.

“Hostile?” he continued of allegations Mary could not imagine anyone would ascribe to his present tone. “Why am I hostile? You have been on this case for less than a week and have already succeeded in putting my little sister in hospital again, this after we all know how well that worked out for you the last time – Sir, I’m sorry, I’m not interested in whatever internal investigation and acquittal, we’ve been there before and here we once more and I can’t think that is by accident if you won’t afford me the benefit of the doubt in accepting that I wanted to do a nice thing for a family I’ve –

“You know what? Why don’t you do the same, why don’t you personally drive the horses down to Liverpool and ask them your ridiculous questions in route if they are such a concern,” he suggested, his face twisting into a terrible frown. “The fact is this, Emma put a bid on the animals, half of what I was initially asking, saying that we could recoup the rest in charitable donations which Edna tried to sell me on being that she deals with such things on a day-to-day. I saw Emma had recently withdrawn her bid and after getting off the phone with William this morning know that to be because their brother died with so much debt to his name that – do you know, he called me asking if I might use my position to expedite the death certificate that they could cancel out Banastre’s open accounts before the first that no more interest can accrue, wanting to pay off his creditors before they come after his life insurance policy meant to pay for his two girls to receive a top education through collage,” Hewlett began to laugh, “And I had to turn around and tell him that where I would love to help, after a week of begging Lord Cornwallis for assistance, he finally sent a fax to my office this morning, not containing anything I’ve repeatedly asked for, mind you, but rather wedding arrangements that I’m certain I don’t want my government anywhere near. He still isn’t taking my calls.
“So yes, I am a bit irate, Sir. I’m livid. I’m livid that you and your colleagues put two of my siblings in hospital, I’m livid at my government for doing literally everything but its job, I’m livid that I’ve now a close friend in hospital, one in jail, and one in the morgue. I’m livid that a twelve-year-old boy I live with has become the latest casualty of police violence against a minority population and that rather than helping in the protest arrangements I’m on the phone talking to you about a fucking horse. Go back to the opium den you call an apartment and for the love of God stay away from my siblings because I promise you this, Richard, you’ve never truly seen me angry. John André wrote an entire research experiment on the topic. Go look at your real criminals if you want to do anything of merit here. Good day, Inspector!”

“What?” Peggy snapped upon hearing her lover’s name evoked.

“Girl,” Aberdeen started before adjusting, “Stat texting Mr ‘Ewlett’s science nerds. Let’s make a scene.”

Mary sunk in her seat as they approached the station, worried that everything she said and did protected the wrong people when she saw the crowd three innocents had already drawn. She was the reason they were all here. She, and possibly her husband.

“Mommy?” Thomas asked. “What is going to happen to Cicero?”

By the time Ben Tallmadge had made his way back to his office, the name on the door had already been changed. Adjusting his hold on the small cardboard box that would soon contain the whole of his adult life, he gave a single light knock before entering to find DI Yilmaz standing behind the desk that had been his, looking at a framed photograph that he suspected still was. She did not look up when she greeted him with, “Ben, you have to know this isn’t what I wanted.”

Where he had but one, she had been given five boxes, still stacked neatly behind her in the space between the wall and a window with a view to the brick of a neighbouring building. Ben visualised her desk as it had been, wondering if so much consideration was comparatively needed for the contents of a cubicle littered with Post-its an personal artefacts – a picture of her and her sisters as teenagers with costumed characters at Disney World on the only family vacation hers had likely ever taken, coloured fairy lights she left hanging year round as she did not share his association, a scarf reading G-A-L-A-T-A-S-A-R-A-Y which had always reminded Ben of a sing-song about the spelling of a southern state he had learnt as a boy, and various bags of half-eaten Salt and Vinegar crisps that she could comfortably leave on her desk without worrying that anyone on the team would have any want to steal them. Ben gave her a weak smile. “It is what I wanted,” he told her in a tone that said far more than he presently felt he was willing to voice.

“I don’t believe that, I don’t even think you believe that,” Yilmaz swallowed.

Ben was agnostic if put into that too-familiar construct. “I resigned,” he said.

Yilmaz nodded. “I heard.”

He had been downstairs when a warning shot was fired. Leaving Eliza Hamilton to his sergeant to constrain, Ben had rushed up the stairwell to provide backup to uniform, weapon at the ready, prepared for the battle he had come to fight. What he found instead was a firing squad and three terrified children, who, it was immediately clear, had been too thoroughly frisked. Ben had ordered
his men to stand down, to leave the premises entirely and return to station where he intended to pursue disciplinary measures. He had announced this with hopes at winning back the children’s trust, but his tone had had the exact opposite effect of that which he had intended. They were extremely hesitant to rise when he told them to. Ben realised with horror that the boys, at least, were in some measure of physical pain. He rang for an ambulance as a precaution. The girl looked at him with empty eyes without moving at all. Ben would later learn from her father that one of the uniformed officers assisting his team had spent too much time feeling at the girl’s inner thigh in such a way that though very little pressure had been applied to her person, her contusions would be far more extensive and lasting than the ones which would come to speckle her friends’ bodies in the coming days. ‘I’m sorry,’ she said, lost to herself and her words.

‘Don’t you dare try and say ‘your boys felt threatened’,’ said the lad whom Ben would soon learn was Alexander Hamilton’s son when his colleague used the same language to address the situation. ‘You see two Blacks and an Afro-Carrabin Asian kid looking at a cell phone and react with force?’ he accused. ‘We did nothing wrong!’

‘May I see the phone?’ Ben asked, kneeling down to meet the boy at eye-level.

‘Why? So you can call it a gun and pull out yours?’ the young Hamilton challenged. ‘I know how cops see things differently,’ he spat.

‘No. You can’t have the phone,’ the other boy told him. ‘But I will give it to your boss, to Thea’s dad.’

Ben nodded his understanding. He trusted the cops even less than the children had just unintentionally and inadvertently subjected to an unreasonable search. Much as he presently resented it however, he wore a badge that came with certain responsibilities. ‘We think it might be connected to Senator Arnold,’ he tried again. Ben saw that the ceiling light fixture had been shot out, either directly above or close enough to where the boy had been laying that most of the debris had fallen into his hair. Ben reached out to him. He took a step back.

‘Look man, it’s a phone, it wasn’t a weapon until you made it one. I made a voice recording ‘cause I know you got to document this shit and I’m not risking having you delete it until I let a prosecutor hear it.’

‘Good thinking,’ Thea whispered.

‘I’m not going to delete anything on the phone,’ Ben said, trying to assure him with a smile, ‘I couldn’t, even if I could we have ways of recovering –’ at this the boy began to sweat.

‘Did you delete anything?’ Ben questioned him. Shortly thereafter, he found himself giving Cicero Ingram a Miranda warning and taking him back to the station. He had known from the moment that procedure had forced the boy into handcuffs that this was to be the last time he would ever drive to that address. The streets he had sworn to protect all felt foreign. He turned on his navigator when he reached the first light - unsure, exactly, where he was or what he was doing, all but certain that all of this was terribly wrong.

Hearing this, Ben’s former sergeant did not comment or attempt to console him. When she smiled he knew it held no meaning. The gesture was returned as it was given, a habit, nothing more.

“We have her in custody now,” Yilmaz said of the girl in the photo Cicero Ingram had sought to protect. “The images were all easily recovered, I’m going in to speak with Miss Shippen once CSI is finished printing the correspondence we’ve cited as relevant.”
Ben nodded. “Good luck. She pulled Jordan Akinbode to her defence as soon as he’d finished berating me. Well … I don’t think he was quite finished. I don’t think he was wrong, either, I just …”

“I know,” Yilmaz said. “I know why you went in as hard as you did. I don’t trust the feds either, not for a second.”

“I don’t really know how much of it is their fault,” Ben told her. “When I got back to the station Hamilton was there with Washington, Dandridge, Burr, Clinton and Jordan - who was present as Cicero’s lawyer – that is the boy who wouldn’t give me the phone and tried to tamper with evidence in order to protect his godmother’s reputation and moral character. My friend from high school’s ex’s son, if you’d believe it,” he shook his head. “Small fucking world. Anyway, Hamilton,” Ben shut his eyes, trying to remember every detail of his dismissal as though it were a crime scene, “he was clamouring for my redundancy as vigorously and vehemently as any of the others, but when Washington suggested to the Chief and ADA that I be relieved of my duties and I responded by handing in my weapon, he seemed … how to put this? He looked almost ready to do the same. Before I left, I accused George Washington, a cabinet member, of abusing executive privilege, of intentionally withholding evidence and prolonging the investigation to meet his own ends and Hamilton - my enemy moments before, a man who giving the treatment afforded to his wife and son had every reason to see me as his - echoed my distress.

“I’m going to find Arnold,” he swore. “But I don’t think I can from the inside. Maybe you’ll have more luck than the rest of us.”

Yilmaz nodded. Ben joined her behind a desk that had long been his and began to empty its drawers of the few contents he was allowed to take into his new civilian life. His replacement looked away, signalling to him that she had no intent of policing him if he sought to swipe a copied file or two for private purposes. He appreciated the gesture of solidarity, but did not want to start his life on the other side of the line on the wrong side of the law.

“I didn’t mean it that way, you know,” he said. “We’ve had our problems in the past, but your promotion … its deserved. Too long in coming, at that.”

“Its political,” Yilmaz dismissed. “Four years ago, they didn’t want to give the job to a brown girl, now that is the only reason I’m in this gig. The NYPD doesn’t want another white, male copper stepping out in front of this near-tragedy.”

“My promotion was political,” Ben argued. “it was a ‘thank you’ from Nancy Smith for facilitating her rise to power. It was a one-night stand with a widow I met in a support group that turned my life upside down a few days later when she shot a man who tried to rob her with an unlicensed weapon after the police failed to respond to a 9-1-1 call and hung herself in a jail cell where she was being detained. Still I … I’d like to believe I did some good in my time here.”

“I think you’re going too soon.”

“I think I stayed too long.”

“You see this?” she pointed to the stack of boxes, “Its just been sent over from the FBI. We’re back on the Pharma case, in an advisory role, naturally, but -”

“Doesn’t it strike you as odd that we were given full control over Arnold?” Ben interrupted, unable to leave the matter at rest. “Every co-op we’ve ever done with the feds has been with local taking their command. Here, it seems that we were put in charge because we have to wait for warrants and other forms of permission they needn’t. I honestly think Arnold must know something about André
that Washington doesn’t want his own men to discover.”

Yilmaz was silent as he packed up his things – a picture of Nate, an unused office set that had been a Christmas present from a friend time had made into a stranger when Ben had ceased having outside interests or people who might know him enough to know what those were, and a used cup from the automatic coffee machines he had been holding onto for a few days out of sentimentality.

“Can I call you? For advice, or testimony?” Yilmaz asked as she opened the door that now had her name on it.

“I don’t … I need some time,” Ben told her.

“I understand.”

“Hadice, take care and um, without intending for this to come off as sarcasm in any way: thank you for serving this beautiful country of ours. I’m sorry about what I said about your hijab, you look very American, I mean, I don’t think that has anything to do with your promotion one way or another, you deserve it and I wish you all the best, I just … I’m probably going to go to my parents for a few days, figure things out. Take a break from the city and the diagrams that have decorated my living room walls for the past eight years.”

“I wish you all the best.”

“Likewise, Detective Inspector,” he hugged her. The gesture was empty, reactionary when it was made, but in short time to come Ben Tallmadge would be glad for the simple act of familiarity and compassion. He would never meet Hadice Yilmaz again in this life and though part of him already regretted his decision to leave the force entirely, on Monday he would weep before his father and hers how happy he was to have been able to part under terms that felt proper.

Abigail Ingram felt that she was slowly suffocating from the pressure that had been building in her chest since she entering the back of an ambulance with her son. It was the wallpaper - designs that were always dated with patterns one’s eyes could not quite place; it was the artificial smell of sanitation – alcohol and plastic that barely met the air between being ripped out of a wrapper, used and tossed into a rubbish bin marked Biohazard; it was the mechanic sounds that signified nothing to her untrained ears but betrayed concern upon the faces of the professionals who understood this language. Abigail felt lost to her own entirely.

The doctor frowned and she opened her mouth the inquire but her voice could barely manage a muted hum. She felt a hand upon hers as the man beside her asked if something seemed amiss.

Abigail looked over at him, searching for the adjectives she had used to describe him in the past, wondering if they would serve her now. It was the way of hospitals. The presence of place was so forceful that it took all one would otherwise have to offer the world and reduced it to undo worry. Abigail was a writer without words. There were none, perhaps, in this purgatory, none that could encompass the extent of all she felt and all she did not.

“IT seems to just be bruising, I still want to run an x-ray,” the doctor said. To her son, he continued, “Does this hurt?” The boy winced but said no. He was fine.

“I can always tell when a man is lying,” Simcoe cautioned him. Cicero smiled and his coach, to
Abigail’s surprise, returned it. “I wanted to give the phone to you when we found it, I really did,” her boy said. Simcoe nodded. “You’re not going to keep me on the bench on Saturday, are you?”

“No for that reason,” the coach assured him, rustling Cicero’s hair slightly against his lively protests, stopping when he saw the white dust from what had been Pip’s ceiling before the shot fall from it. Abigail swallowed. Simcoe asked the doctor if the substance could be tested, making the overworked ER resident smile at the correct pronunciation of his surname. The two spoke for a moment in another language Abigail could not place until a nurse came for her son in his cot and the doctor listed off a number of other scans and tests he wanted performed.

“It will be okay, Ma,” Cicero told her. He had said the same at the police station, in the ambulance, and prior to his initial examination.

“I know Baby,” Abigail kissed his forehead against them embarrassment he feigned.

The doctor left with the nurse and their patient. They left the curtain open. They left her alone with John Graves Simcoe, who pulled her into a strong, awkward embraced, the kind of comfort offered by someone whom Abigail supposed had seldom himself been held. Unconsciously she wrapped her arms around him and fell into a wail she muted within his chest. He promised her that the parties responsible would be brought to justice, that he had spoken to the doctor about a number of other tests that might be run to the boy’s benefit – in the best scenario, just to ensure that nothing was missed, in the worst, to be used in court.

“Did Jordan tell you?” she began to ask, stunted and stupid. Simcoe had told her when they met in the lobby, both looking for change for the vending machines, that he was there visiting a friend. She told him what had happened to Cicero and his friends as though it had happened to strangers and she had simply seen it on the evening news. He asked her what she wanted and she asked him to stay, unconsciously understanding from the way his fingers tapped against his thigh as he made a show of examining the refreshments on offer that he was even less equipped to meet this news than she, her friends, or her ex had been. He told her that had he had his phone on, he would have been at the protest with the others. Abigail replied that she did not want this. Any of it. But she wanted him to stay.

Her boy liked him.

She never had.

“No, we’ve … not spoken. I’d assumed he had taken the first train back to Albany this morning,” Simcoe answered distantly. Abigail remembered that Jordan had driven down with Edmund Hewlett the evening prior following an assault that had taken place at his residence. One that she might have prevented. She assumed that this was the friend Simcoe had gone to visit on his way back into the city and mumbled into his chest that she was sorry. So sorry. He did not seem to hear her. “I’ve experience with this sort of thing. Hospitals.”

“Have you been in so many fights?” Abigail asked in spite of herself, breaking their fragile embrace.

Simcoe snorted back a laugh. “Sport,” he answered, adjusting quickly to assure her, “Not at your son’s level. A friend, well, the brother of the dorm-mate I had at boarding school is a scout, someone who looks for potential signings for a professional team in Italy. Anyway, in England we have to do work experience at fifteen, sixteen and my friend wound up interning for this brother for a few weeks. Being that I was better at English, I offered to edit the paper he had to submit – which, mind was more work than I had actually done in the whole two weeks at the bank I’d applied to … anyway, I learned about all the medical exams potential players have to undergo, and
being that I’m naturally inclined to hypochondria, began insisting on the same probes whenever I so much as twisted my ankle during training,” he offered a smile. “It is how I can tell you that as awful as it is that Cicero got hurt in the way that he did, it is unlikely that he has suffered anything worse than the bruising the doctor originally diagnosed. Naturally it hurt when he pressed his side, but if Cicero was suffering from fractured bones or internal bleeding, he would have screamed – hell, he might not have even been conscious to by this point,” he paused. “Your son. He is incredibly brave. I’m so, so sorry for what my negligence has forced upon him – I had told all of the kids to stay where I could see them after training – which they did, mind, which they all did. I never, really, never would have anticipated that he would have found Arnold’s.”

“Isn’t your fault,” Abigail said. If anything, she worried it was hers. After a moment, she continued, “They tried to pin him with participating a conspiracy to obstruct justice. He, that is, let me start over. My friend Aberdeen who you met on Tuesday, she warns us – Cicero and me – every damn chance she gets to be vigilant against the police. To know our rights, make records and that. My boy, when the cops came upstairs, he made a voice recording and then wouldn’t surrender the device to the arresting officer until his attorney and a prosecutor had been given a chance to listen. When he finally gave the cops what they were after, they discovered that he had tried to delete a number of saved photos from it. Photos I wish he ain’t never had to see – but I am proud. Cicero, he was trying to protect one of my closest friends.” Abigail rested her elbows on her knee caps and, leaning forward, buried her face in her hands. “I should have said something sooner. I don’t even know if I have the words anymore.”

Simcoe mumbled soft assurances that everything would be okay as he gently rubbed her shoulders with once of his enormous hands. Fear, Abigail remember. That was what she always felt around him. She felt it still, but not in the way she knew.

“You are not at all who I thought you were,” she said after they two had sat long enough in each other’s silence for the transient sounds of machines and monitors to fade into a static that seemed to Abigail an absence of sound in itself when her senses had adjusted to it. “I shouldn’t … I mean, I shouldn’t have had an opinion on you one way or another.”

“I’m one of Jordan’s best friends,” Simcoe replied. “It is only natural that you would.”

“You must already hate me, then,” she said. It took him a while to answer, and when he did, it was indirect.

“It is not my place to say, but I think you have made a mistake.”

“I’ve made many.”

“I mean, with Jordan. He loves -”

“You’re right. Its not your place to say.” The truth was, Abigail was not sure if the man she had loved for so long still felt the same way about her. He had responded to the distance she created between them at dinner with neutrality. When he accompanied her to the station, he had been nothing more than the man he was at work, the man she had always wanted him to be but had never known and now never truly would. Where once he had smothered her with affection she felt guilty at receiving, they had parted upon his getting the charges against Cicero dropped as though they had never met before. Jordan had gotten a number of officers - including one he had been friends with since high school- fired or put on unpaid suspension. He had gone to her take up her friend’s defence when he was told in passing that Peggy Shippen was in an interrogation room and requested and required his intervention, saying goodbye to Cicero by patting him on the shoulder. He parted ways with Abigail by means of a handshake and an empty statement about getting her and her son in touch with a civil rights lawyer he knew and several non-profits that would cover the
costs. There was nothing there. Nothing left between them.

What Abigail did not know and would not learn until the weekend was that Jordan, with the hand that shook hers as though he had never knelt to kiss it, was currently in the same hospital having it bandaged after breaking it against a brink wall in a fit of immense anger and frustration, the pain from which he had been able to spare his loved ones but not himself. When she saw it, he would tell her that he was sorry and explain a number of things beyond his control as though he bore the fault.

“I ruined him. Us. My whole life and that of all my friends, and for what?” Abigail demanded, more of herself than of the world she felt she had surrendered. “I knew what André was up to. It is why I didn’t want Jordan playing soccer when he first joined your team. It is why I’ve always been afraid of you, personally, why I objected to Anna and Edmund’s relationship,” she added quietly, “Why mine ended.”

“Madame -” Simcoe tried.

“It could have been -” she asked, retreating into memory. “I tried to talk to André … at least I told myself I did. I should have said more. I even knew, I knew what he was doing, texting Arnold, pretending to be Peggy – but who was really pretending here? I told that girl she was my friend, that I loved her like a sister and when she asked me point blank why I didn’t want her spending time with my boss I choked and said something about his problems with alcohol because … how can you even approach that? How could I have said that I knew him to be using her likeness for months to seduce a man who is now missing, that as such she is a suspect in his disappearance, a crime for which she was kicked out of her college and sorority without trial or conviction. How could I have even let things get to a point where that could and should have been a conversation? She once saved my life and I went and ruined hers and my son, my son was the victim of police brutality for trying to conceal an error of judgement – my own. I put him in that position, him and Peggy … and you. Anna, Edmund,” she began to list, “everyone on your team, everyone they love, Cicero’s friends and their parents and people none of us have ever met – Senator Arnold to name just one. And now this man might be dead because I wanted my boy to go to the best school in the city and couldn’t see the consequences for anyone else.”

Simcoe crocked his head back slightly, causing his chin to double on itself as he stared at her with widened eyes void of emotion. She did not expect him to say anything. If she herself did not have the words – how could he?

“I didn’t sleep with him. André. He just helped pay Cicero’s tuition. I let myself be a slave to that, let it silence me and now all my words would be wasted -”

“That is why you wrote ‘Turn’ is it not?” Simcoe asked, briefly sounding almost pleased with himself. “As a warning to us?”

Abigail had never considered her creative output in quite those terms.

“You would have had access to André’s files as his administrator,” he continued. “I’ve … read them as well. Tell me, in your professional opinion, do you think me capable of such acts which you mask as art? I only ask because I don’t know what to make of it. I hurt the only woman I ever truly loved and lost all of my friends back home in a single episode I can’t even recall. There are times I have to fight so hard to be present and times in which I haven’t realised I’ve lost this inner battle until I’m washing my best friend’s blood off of my hands, panicked because I have a planned engagement and I can’t recall who I was moments before or who I am meant to be when I arrive. It is alright,” he told her when he saw this admission made her sad. “I’ve grown reserved, I think, without realising it until circumstance asked otherwise of me. I’ve tried everything, everything to
cooperate with the officers to whom I’ve spoken but I’ve been met with mistrust, hostility and bad faith at every turn. I don’t know what I am meant to do. An undercover constable broke the ankle of a woman I was seeing in attempt to draw out my worst – less extreme but not altogether different than what your boss hoped to see affected with the attempt he made on Hewlett. The kids I coach were similarly brutalised, which, while I realise is evident of a systemic issue of its own – I can’t help but to think there is some element of intellectual contagion to all of this. I gave everything I had to DI Tallmadge last night. We spoke of our shared distrust for federal agents, a friend of mine was – it is irrelevant here but we were at the wake I thought to throw him. It is probably why, at least it could serve as an influence on Tallmadge’s behaviour today in regard to … the name ‘Hamilton’ if I had to guess. ‘Burr’ too, maybe. My honesty put them at as much risk as your omission, if I am right.”

“The difference is, you weren’t looking to profit,” Abigail answered after considerable consideration.

“You were trying to do what was best for your son.”

“What do I do now?”

“Did you know?” a woman asked.

It was the problem with people. Names were used in introductions and reduced thereafter to private expletives in argument. He saw the same in the scope of his own life. His wife had called him ‘honey’ and his colleagues addressed him by his rank. He did not have any friends but he was certain that if he ever had he would only be ‘Benedict’ to them in moments of conflict and might otherwise be known by a greeting, a ‘hello’ specific to him only within a visual context.

At the moment, he was blind.

He knew he was in a garage, one filled with boxes that had not been here much longer than him for cardboard had a very distinct smell and the moisture in the air told that it would not take long for mould and mildew to diminish it – slowly at first until it was in time forgotten as he was beginning to fear he had been. At first, he imagined that he was again imprisoned in the house in Brooklyn he had been too slow to escape on his injured leg, hiding from Private Woodhull under an unfinished back porch until he heard the boy wake and rush into the night to chase a shadow through the darkness. He should not have let fear choke him when he had the momentum and this fact alone had him convinced of the righteousness in all that John André had proposed.

Benedict Arnold was a solider.

He should have been able to fight through his doubts rather than succumbing to them.

He did not know what may lie behind the hill, what would have happened when he made his way to a police force ostentatiously tasked with yet seeming hostile to his recovery. He had known, however, that he could expect a severe reprimand staying in the area where he had been retained, where he could easily be recaptured, where he ultimately remained. Arnold took a deep breath through his nose, his only option as his mouth was gagged and bound with duct tape, wrapped several times tightly around his head. Part of his ear was covered affecting his hearing, his hair, he had been certain, would need to be cut – but this assumption was born out of a foolish notion that
people were looking and that he would be found.

For a while, he had thought himself in the basement of the house he had quite nearly fled, attributing the cardboard to a man in the process of moving in - a man, he had been told, who would be gone for weeks to come. Then, he heard the voices. A man. Multiple women and children. It was not that to which he had recently become accustomed, no manifestation of suppressed memory or desire present in place of the pain the drugs had quelled – these were people.

They were present.

Maddeningly, they had no idea that he was.

Arnold tried to call out but he could not even hear himself when he tried. He spent hours struggling against his constraints to no avail, finding with every tug against them they only grew tighter, cutting into his skin and causing him to cry in frustration. Benedict Arnold was covered in his own blood, filth and bile. He was badly injured and sobbing on a concrete floor, alone but for the sounds above. He listened and felt less lonely. Sometimes these strangers said quite a lot and sometimes it gave him a sense of place and purpose.

Sometimes, they spoke of him.

These great patriots hoped to yet save him, unaware of how very close they were in both prediction and proximity. He imagination became more refined as the hours passed under their company, seeing them initially as his American ideal, the hardworking men and women forgotten by Washington who shopped at Walmart, watched blood sport and drank Bud Light. The man looked a lot like him, the women like the ones he saw in media and was conditioned by culture to consider attractive – young, leggy blondes who read news for Fox, the real news that had not corrupted by the liberal agenda. He listened now with altered images at play, longing for a fight, longing to learn the names of his would-be saviours.

“Ah, that is I – I had my suspicions,” the man said. It was not a clear answer and Arnold appreciated this, honestly only upset women and he might have done the same in an attempt to deflect. She, whoever she truly was, would undoubtedly become emotional all the same, enough so, perhaps, to address him, that Arnold might know his neighbour by name.

At the moment, he was Scaevola, the boy who had been first over the wall but had not made it back to base, who spoke of war and wounds whilst wearing a jackal’s wide grin, bragging about the tenacity of his troops when he lay awake in Arnold’s lap awaiting a three-volley salute. It was the accent as much as it was the parts of himself he had seen in the boy he once told to suffer bravely. The man upstairs likely was not wearing combat gear but the visual gave Arnold nearly as much comfort as it had when he had heard the same and seen himself – boxers, beer, and beautiful women of whom he could have his pick.

“It doesn’t change anything,” Enyo said after a while. Unlike the Englishman whose company she kept, she sounded like she had been so lucky as to have been born in the Land of the Free, but having heard her voice on various prior occasions, he anticipated she would follow this statement with something cutting and needlessly cruel in the art and manner of a young woman who ran a cartel and claimed it as charity on a tax return. “Why should I care if he has another? He was never mine. Anyway, John he isn’t … he is not the reason I want to leave,” the woman continued of her erstwhile lover ‘John’ much in the flippant manner Arnold had expected.

She lowered her voice and this annoyed the senator, who struggled to adjust himself as much as he might without further aggravating his constraints and spurning them to again open aggression against his person. “I think Abe is involved in Senator Arnold’s disappearance, I think he is
holding him captive. Good God, what if that is the reason he hasn’t been at home since the news broke? What if all this time, all this time John was right and he’s – my God, that makes him a traitor, doesn’t it?”

“Mary, I doubt that your husband would have either the intention or the intellectual capacity to -”

So, he thought, this was Mary, the wife his former private neither loved nor wanted to lose. Arnold felt himself soften to her slightly when he heard another woman storm in with the same accusations.

“You knew! You all knew and not one of you warned me!” Peggy Shippen shouted. He saw her without seeing her for she sounded exactly like the girl he had long imagined on the other end of the line. Arnold tried to instead to imagine her as one of the female anchors at his favourite news station and this worked for a while until she continued, “They found pictures of me – well not, not of me, pictures where my face was super-imposed over some porn star that André sent with some filthy, flirtatious text to Senator Arnold! You … you don’t understand, I lost my virginity to this man, this man who betrayed me and ruined not just my life but Arnold’s as well for all we know. He is the reason the senator even visited Setauket, why Cicero, Pip, and Thea were shot at for finding a phone – and you let me visit him! How could you? He destroyed me! He destroyed everything that was once good in this town.”

“Ee did not destroy you!” Rhianna then countered. “You are stronger today than any girl I ‘ave ever known and if you say ee ‘as taken something from you, then take it back with retributions.”

“How?” Peggy wondered.

Peggy Shippen was a mirage as she had always been, no more real that the dead colonel or the Caribbean pop star or Mary Woodhull whom he half imagined as a jilted wife, half as a seasoned killer, ludicrous as he knew this to be. Peggy Shippen was not the man who had broken his heart, but she might well have been the girl upstairs intent on avenging her own.

Benedict Arnold tried to scream as the four continued to conspire. He had to get out of this cell. He had to get away and warn the only person who had ever approached him with sympathy and understanding, even if it had all been for show. He wanted to shout up to Scaevola that he still was not sure if love stories could have sad endings, but he knew that his would not. For all that André had done wrong to achieve his ends, the world, or so Arnold was convinced, would be a better place if his research were to become standard practice in the military. No serviceman or commissioned would again know the same crisis of confidence that now kept him in chains. If they died, they would die with honour, buried on the battlefield under an American Flag waving victoriously as God had intended.

And he would lie comfortably with John André on his couch, admiring the man’s brilliance and beauty whilst arguing over topics domestic and mundane.

His love story, he swore, would not have a sad ending. Not if he could help it.

Marie Robinson felt done with the school day a fair few hours prior to its conclusion by the clock. She slipped out at lunch and took a leisurely stroll back to her flat, assuming her mother would be none the wiser as work would surely hold her up until the early evening - should she not over the
course of whatever empty contribution to culture she might be making find herself a date that would last well into the next day. Marie fixed her headphones over her ears – more accessory than instrument as over the past few months she had only used her Beats to listen to Taylor Swift and talk radio, and today used them only to block out street sounds with silence. London was marvellous when it was reduced to mere imagery. She walked amongst tourists in the prettier places in town, feeling as though she imagined she might if she had come here from afar and met the city simply though what she saw on a damp afternoon after the morning drizzle had seemed to wash London of its filth before the day’s waste was laid out once more. It took nearly an hour of finding herself in the reflections of shop windows and small puddles for her to truly see her own face, to remember who she was when not lost in a weekday day-dream for her to finish the five-block route from college to her front door. She had decided to use the rest of the hours she suspected to still have alone to revise for the classes she was missing, and though her dedication often left her faults exposed, pressing the button to her floor in the left at shortly passed one in the afternoon left her feeling so guilty about skipping that her commitment to make good on what teachers, coaches and councillors called her potential rose with each passed storey.

When she walked out into her penthouse however, this ambition collapsed.

She found her mother sobbing on the living room floor. Effie Gwillim, herself crying in that quiet, reserved and respectful way ladies of proper breeding were brought up too, was hugging her lightly, running her fingers lightly through her mother’s hair, rather, across the fine stubble that covered her scalp, the wigs Mary Robinson wore for the world forgotten in her hour of agony. The sight stopped Marie in her tracks. Her mother called to her but Marie did not move.

She knew this scene. Part of her had been imagining it for the past five years, but in her head, she had always cast it differently.

Mary Robinson was dying of cancer. Since her diagnosis, Marie, along with her mother and father, had visited a family councillor periodically in hopes of learning to cope with what various doctors had cautioned was inevitable, that Marie might understand and accept that she was likely to lose her mother before sitting for her A Levels. It was ever-present but she never consciously though about it and whenever her mother’s health was the topic of conversation Mary and Ban had both put on such a show of positivity that on the occasions that did remind her of how she had been conditioned to mourn, Marie assumed that she, too, would be able to meet death bravely if it ever dared to show up, something she secretly had long doubted in spite of diagnosis and guided discussion.

Her mother called for her and she understood that which she could not comprehend. In her mind, she had always seen herself in the place of the woman whose name she shared with her dad holding her and saying soft things while they listened to the albums Marie had hated throughout her adolescence but would likely play on repeated for months just to hear her mother’s voice, regardless of what she said, sometimes falling into arguments with her and then weeping over the fact that this had so long been their refrain, that she had been willingly distancing herself for years, afraid to love when she had been told to let go.

Now she felt her cheeks were wet. Her mother would die some time in the next six years and she would have no one around who could possibly comprehend how much she imagined herself missing her the way a better daughter might. Death had instead come for her father far before his time and having never prepared for this eventuality, Marie felt her pain turn to anger and she began to scream - first at the dog, who, whimpering, jumped up at her kneecaps by way a greeting, looking for a pat though he knew he was not meant to do so; then, at Effie and the blatant cruelty of her false friendship.
“You bitch!” Marie shouted, stopping both women before her in their ridiculous performances of what it was to feel pain. “How dare you – how fucking dare you sit here, in my house, with my mum and cry for my father who is only gone because of the lies you told in your bloody rag! If I read any attempt at a eulogy tomorrow I’ll make damn sure yours is next! How dare you! You ruined my life! You ruined my family! My dad never cheated on my mum, never! And certainly not with my godmother who won’t even let anyone below her rank touch her. And now Ellie is gone and she isn’t coming back either, my parents broke up and my dad is dead and how can you – you who initiated all of this in some sorry attempt to sell a few more subscriptions or add-spots or whatever the fuck it is you were after, how dare you sit here, in my house, hugging my mother acting like you are sorry about anything other than some projected loss of revenue. Get out! GET OUT! You are the reason my dad is gone – the reason he is dead,” she said it first because she knew she had to. Now, it seemed she could not stop. “He is dead and you mean to write about it and,” she broke out into a sob. “I think Mou, I think he needs to go out. I’m going to take him,” she told, still not moving, speaking quickly. “Mum, I’m sorry for everything. I’m sorry I let my grades slip last semester, I’m sorry I sipped class today, I’m sorry I – Dad is disappointed in me, too. Was disappointed,” she corrected. “He said so this morning. It was the last thing he ever said to me. I’m sorry. I’ll do better, I promise I will -”

She felt her mother’s arms around her.

“Listen to me,” Mary said. “You were your father’s pride and joy – there was nothing, nothing in this world he cherished more. I’m sure he is looking down on us from heaven now and I am positive that you are the reason the angles let him in. You saved his life and his soul and he said that all the time. Don’t think, don’t ever think for a moment that he wasn’t always proud of you. He loved you more than anything else in this life.”

“Is that why … you broke up with him?”

Mary blinked. After a short glance back to Effie who had not moved, she said, “No, that why we stayed together as long as we did after our own love ended. Ended? No. Took on a different form. I love – I’ll always love your dad. Adult relationships, all relationships are complicated, we know that, don’t we?” Marie held her mother tighter and Mary bent slightly to kiss her head they way her dad had done and this unconscious gesture only made her cry more.

“Today? You talked to Ban this morning?” she heard Effie question over Mou’s little yips and all of the tears that seemed such an underwhelming testament to how much she hurt for the man who had raised her as his own.

“Go away!” Marie again found herself screaming. “Haven’t you profited form our pain enough as it is?” She saw her mum as she was now on the cover of The Daily Mail with some headline speculating over what the next album would sound like now that her erstwhile lover was dead. In her mind, Marie read these words over and over and knew her classmates and teachers would as well. At school everyone would try to give her a hug and tell her how sorry they were for her loss and it would all be lies because no one else knew as she did what it was to have the most painful, private moments of one’s life opened for press and public scrutiny before proper relationships with ends could be formed.

“You know what the worst of it is? He really thought you were his friend! He really thought that! Just stay away, stay away from us, stay away from my aunt and cousins and dog anything that was ever his,” she said to Effie while snatching up Mou who continued to cry at her ankles. “I think he needs to go out for a walk,” Marie told her mother. Mary nodded.

As the door closed and Marie waited for the lift to descend, she overheard her mother apologise for
her conduct and felt a sting of betrayal.

The walk did not last very long.

Marie took a seat on a bench on the opposite side of the street in a patch of green the city had plans to extend as it was slightly too small to currently qualify as park ground, looking at her building, wondering if she would ever go back inside. Mou ran around her feet until jumping up to lick the salt left by tears she no longer cried, feeling guilty over not knowing how, precisely, to feel. She dialled her father’s number to hear his voice on the mailbox, worried that soon it would be shut off and shortly thereafter she would forget the sound. At the beep that followed, she promised him all of the things she had sworn to her mother about being better, about making him proud. She called back again and told him how sorry she was that she told him not to call her before school, she had been rather mean, she remembered, but what she had really meant to say was that she missed him too much and she didn’t want to cry and mess her face up, and that she was sorry she wore make up too, and that he was probably right, it probably was clogging her pores and making her acne worse, that he was probably right about so many things, that she never asked him, but since he had been to the middle east, did he know for sure who invented the zero? She called back and began asking a lot of things she did not know but reasoned her father might, apologising when she thought she should have learned this in school, apologising when she asked if he knew who her biological father was or if he had ever met her mother’s husband – because this didn’t matter and never had, she said when she again had to call back after being cut off by a two minute timer. He was he real dad and always would be.

She realised dusk was beginning to set when a car she recognised rode up with its lights on. Marie rose. Ellie was back in London and she would tell stories about when she and her dad has been kids and it would seem like he was still there to tell the princess that she was wrong about how she remembered some score - either in football or one that had yet to be fully settled between them. Marie found herself smiling. Then she noticed that the flags that signalled Lady Elanor’s personage were not present.

A man she knew just enough to fear got out of the diver’s seat and expressed his sincerest condolences. Marie realised how much this sounded like a threat and was suddenly, acutely aware how very alone she was.

“Why are you here, Mr Patel?” she asked, holding Mou who began to bark the way all dogs did by way of warning.

“I need something from Effie Gwillim, do you happen to know if she is in residence?”

“What do you want?” Marie glared.

“Eighteen million pounds, immediately if not sooner. My employer insists. This isn’t something you can help me with, is it?” He bent slightly to meet her at eye level. Marie’s gaze narrowed. She wanted to retreat and run away but that, she reminded herself, was not the way her father had raised her.

“Effie Gwillim is at mine,” she answered darkly. “I’ll take you to her if you can make her disappear for good.”

“I assure you such is within my skill set,” Patel smiled.
Chapter End Notes

I know … I am tired form reading that, too. What was I on about, anyway? Well -

**Daniel Morgan** was a gifted battlefield tactician whose strategy at **The Battle of Cowpens** proved a turning point in the American Revolution. Among the allusions made to the man and his legacy of which there were many, after the war he became quite religious, his descendants fought for the Confederacy a few generations later and his (contemporary) outdoorsy family? Oh my God you guys – **Daniel Boone** was his cousin. Who is Daniel Boone? An American folk hero I for some reason had a picture book about as a wee small child, who then in turn I pretended to be at four or five when my brothers and I went to play outside by hitting each other with sticks. Good times.

It is mentioned that Morgan works in **National Security** and that is because there is a graduate school in Washington DC in this field named in his honour. (This isn’t related but on the topic of schools named for figures who appear in this story – Elizabeth Gwillim Simcoe has kindergartens and secondary schools named for her on two continents … so does Banastre Tarleton, which makes no sense but kay kay, call it what you want to.)

**Prince Philip** is not a “volcano-God or something” as asserted … at least, within the Anglican Church. The Kastom people on the southern island of Tanna in Vanuatu, however, believe him to be a divine being. Not even going to front, this is my absolute favourite thing about the world that we live in today and about religion full stop.

**The German orthography reform** (German: *Rechtschreibreform*) was (according to the English Wikipedia page I used to translate the word) “a change to German spelling and punctuation that was intended to simplify German orthography and thus to make it easier to learn, without substantially changing the rules familiar to users of the language.” This is of course BS. It was an attempt to sell more Duden copies, which is a book that just lists the proper spelling or words. Last night as it happens I got into a fight with a colleague over triple consonants preceding a vowel in those words we build by shoving two nouns together. I said ‘sss’ was correct. She said I should have used a hyphen. The Duden App I paid oh so much for? Said that we were both right. This is why no one learns German.

**Valley of the Wolves** (Turkish: *Kurtlar Vadisi*) is a long-running action series around a fictional branch of the Turkish secret service. As was alluded to in the text, Turkish television is, in general, widely dubbed and distributed throughout the middle east. Of all the things I resent the current regime for ruining (the constitution, human rights, the economy, the Super Lig (by which I mostly mean Fenerbahce …)) the increased censorship of melodrama probably would not make the top ten, but it is on the list, to be sure.

**Galatasaray** is a football club out of Istanbul. If you have heard of them it is probably because a decent player in the league you follow is on the wrong side of thirty and hasn’t the international name recognition to go play out the rest of their career in the
MLS or China.

The City of Liverpool has a history dating back to 1793 of lending local tax revenue to private parties to fund capital projects to the benefit of the entire city’s population (though high interest rates and increased trade) and **Everton’s stadium** is no different. The club across the way (for now) famously in the past decade bought up a lot of lower income housing around Anfield, accelerating the decline of the area and making people panic over any notion of ‘football stadium in Liverpool’ regardless of how the rest of that sentence reads.

Some historical context: in Ben’s POV, he mentions Washington as “a cabinet member intentionally withholding evidence” which feels pretty common place these days but we had different societal norms back in 2016 (which I might better phrase as we HAD societal norms back in 2016 …) and such would have been a scandal.

Okay lovely faces! That’s it! I’m off! And when I return well, you know what I am just plain sick of? Every man in this story. Every. Single. One.

Up Next: Anna’s hen night ;)

Till then!
The Charge

Chapter Summary

Two bluestocking-types talk tabloids and torrid affairs of the heart in a hospital cafeteria as a temporary alternative to actively acknowledging loss. Upstairs, a cartel boss shares a tender moment with a corrupted cop prior to the inspector being implemented in a crime he had no cause to commit against an American counterpart. In Albany, Anna considers calling off her wedding as Mary fills her in on much of what she has missed back home.

Chapter Notes

This was not the chapter I intended which begs the question – are they ever? Initially the update went back and forth between Edinburgh and Albany, and you will see more of the latter at some point in the next few days. My eyes hurt from editing, and, in the interest of yours, twenty-odd pages seems a decent cut off. We will see each other soon, until then – let me leave you with my latest observation involving eighteenth century war-politics and modern sport:

I learned this week, partially through binge-listening to the American Revolution podcast (which I cannot recommend highly enough!) that is was pretty standard practice for commanders who lost a few pitched battles to be recalled and replaced, echoing sentiment I can especially relate to after watching my beloved FC Bayern lose three points at home to Gladbach this past Saturday. Tja. I’m not in a good place right now. Neither is my team (sixth!) In said sprit, can we please recall Kovač before winter sets in?

… I guess that sort of brings me back to those warnings I used to like to do: Kingsley Coman has a short cameo in this chapter (in which a lot of side plot takes frontal focus.) You’ll like the second half better, I promise. Still, I hope you enjoy this for whatever it is worth.

Oh, and to be particularly (and almost needlessly) sappy before getting on with it, thank you so much to everyone who has clicked, commented on and given this fic kudos. I know it looks lame and unremarkable - me, actively celebrating the hundredth like when I even begin to consider the attention and acclaim I know some of you to enjoy by comparison, but I was planning on this anyway as I was over the moon last week in gratitude for all of the support I’ve received recently and over the course these past two and a half years – so much so that I went on to tell the poor girls in every group chat of which I am part, people who I doubt realise that I write at all. I’m sure I will do the same when I reach an arbitrary hit count, and anyway, to play my own self out – a million thanks to each and every one of you! I hope you all take the time to celebrate your every success, however small these may seem in the (imagined) eyes of others.

You all deserve to be showered in confetti, and I mean that from the bottom of my heart. XOXO.
It was a long story; one that told of the marked difference between influence and power; one that spanned from the Norman Conquest to the current era which critique named as post-modern. Narration largely took the form of medieval deed, business charter, taxation and other forms of public record achieved for reference in future dispute as most events that escaped memory but not conscious often did. And how conscious, Mary Anne thought as she listened, how very conscious and prideful the family was of their illustrious past - each member posing themselves as though they had personally ruled the patch of land that once bore their name by popular consent rather than Royal charter since the first French ships had landed on a distant, southern coast on a Friday that lent its date to centuries of superstition.

If the story began and ended on a Friday night, had it consisted of a single scene, Mary Anne Burges would have indeed envied Emma Tarleton in all of her conceit.

The fact that they were here on Saturday afternoon, however, in a cafeteria that did everything possible by way of its décor to remind one that they were in hospital, was indicative enough that the concept of narrative that existed in collective conscious escaped nature entirely. Life, her school friend seemed to say with every word and act since its opposite had entered her vocabulary anew, simply went on. Life was entitlement; life was imprisonment. Life was the way those of privilege and prestige had been told to express their grief.

In a word, Emma was on the attack as she presumably had been since she had first heard the news.

Mary Anne, or rather, a piece popular fiction she had peened under a pseudonym know only to her closest friends, had, somehow - out of all of the print media available in the lobby kiosk with which Emma could take umbrage - become the southerner’s stated target.

‘It is not realistic, the sex,’ Emma commented as she skimmed a few pages in the middle of Mary Anne’s latest, a 190-page epic of love and war set during the Third Crusade.

‘It is a romance novel,’ Mary Anne responded dryly. ‘It never is.’

Emma proceeded to go to pains describing that she meant the very opposite of what Mary Anne heard (and had heard of the genre from every woman honest enough to admit that ‘love’ – however one was given to define it - was a poor consolation when comparing a penis to anything requiring batteries.)

‘No,’ Emma insisted with an inappropriate smirk, handing her niece off to an elderly woman Mary Anne had more than enough reason to mistrust. ‘What I am saying is that Al-Adil could have done far better by Jeanne d'Angleterre, and how!’

Half an hour into this justification, Mary Anne was convinced it might be in her interest to entirely re-concept the sequel her publisher had already paid for.

“I think it is circumcision, to be honest,” Emma commented on the vigour of the neighbour whose name she had failed to learn before taking him in her younger brother’s twin bed, vigour she was ready to attribute to the whole of his race.

Mary Anne nodded for her to continue, glancing briefly over her shoulder at the little girl who by this point had finished the ice cream she was excited to have in the morning and had since moved on to a colouring book she and the inspector’s mother looked to be happily completing with the
five crayons that had come with it. Remembering Banastre in a sense she nearly never thought of him - doing the same with the girl’s ‘sister’ a decade before partially in an effort to train his non-dominant hand post-injury – Mary Anne quickly looked away.

She had not cried when she had been given the news. She, too, belonged to the social strata where such would be seen as slander upon one’s own good name. Seeing Banastre’s biological daughter and her baby-sitter, Mary Anne’s eyes did not swell with a single tear. Instead, they simply watched on with caution. There was too much that might yet go amiss.

Ellie Hewlett, Inspector Ferguson had informed her in hushed tones, had, in contrast, wept bitterly at the loss. She had cried until she collapsed form the effort. However, by the time Mary Anne had made it to hospital to visit her a few hours later, any initial sorrow had evaporated - concealing what the solicitor cum genre-author was certain was careful calculation with a mist more audible than visible yet still entirely reminiscent of the cover taken by Ellie’s ancestors drawing their rivals into the lowlands to be slaughtered. It was a comfort. It was a curse. It was a caution that however corrosive it could be to one heart and mind, life continued.

Mary Anne wondered if Georgie was old enough to understand that she would never see her father again, that this was the reason she was allowed to eat ice cream instead of breakfast, the reason that adults for whom she would otherwise be a non-entity were suddenly treating her as though her existence was anything more than an afront to the historical bearers of her surname.

She wondered if the child had cried.

Emma, Mary Anne was sure, most certainly had not. Nor had her mother or her younger siblings with whom she had spent the early part of the previous evening. No. The Tarletons smiled until they were afforded enough impulse to argue or take the initiative to attack. They should have long been awarded with a noble prefix for such constant conformance to said conduct -

Then, perhaps not.

“English blokes – I mean,” Emma stopped abruptly, avoiding using the term ‘white’ or ‘ethnic’ by gesturing vaguely to her face, “it is like you go ten minutes until they feel done and if you are lucky they won’t go to sleep directly after. And here I was after a good half-hour of this lad trying to make me scream as loud as the people downstairs who themselves were two hours into this tantric breathing nonsense – Sorry, not to tangent,” she babbled, “but how fucking pretentious can one be in their attempts to cheat the social safety net out of an extra, what is it now that welfare recipients get for each additional child?” Emma shook her head, disgusted by those she was happy to designate as derelicts based purely on postcode. “Any road, back to the next-door neighbour - who had just been in me for a half-hour – he goes to the window to have a fag, and I am sort of half laying there, myself exhausted, ready to call it in. When finished with his smoke though, the lad turns around, completely stiff after having barely had time to recover, and asks if I’m up for another round as though that were even a question. Hell fucking yes! Let’s have at it, aye.”

“And did you?” Mary Anne prodded.

“We might have lasted all night had Edmund Hewlett not called to inform me that my bid had been accepted after I’d pulled it, rather, that he intended of making a charitable donation of his horses to my foundation, freeing me up to sell one of my champions in order to cover whatever portion of Ban’s debts Izzie and I are due to pay off,” she said breezily. It was the first time she had spoken her brother’s name in the hour since they two had met. If she was conscious of this lapse, she did not linger. “Arab men though, defiantly worth one’s while,” Emma said slyly, side eyeing a passing doctor who happened to wear a beard.
“Circumcision you say? Maybe that is why Anna, excuse me, ‘Lady’ Anna is so eager to become Edmund’s bride,” Mary Anne winked.

Emma’s jaw dropped. “Mary Anne,” she smiled darkly and in teasing tones continued, “Ellie’s older brother? Why I never!”

“It isn’t like I have seen it,” Mary Anne defended, feeling her cheeks flush with the thought. “I just read somewhere that all nobles were, you know … cut.”

“Where on earth did you hear that?” Emma wrinkled her brow. Mary Anne cast a gaze on the pile of newspapers between them, bought from the kiosk and intended as gifts for the two patients they were both here to see. “They have been printing a lot of such material lately,” she offered flatly in response.

“Aren’t all Americans cut though?” the Liverpudlian frowned. “Like what is Anna’s basis of comparison?”

Mary Anne thought on this for a moment. “I think most Americans are mostly good C-and-E Christians like us, only in the south they go every Sunday for service and that only Jews, Muslims and members of the nobility circumcise. If that last bit be true, it was probably a novel experience for Anna as well.”

“What is a C-and-E Christian?”

“Christmas and Easter.”

“Both? Oh friend, you have me beat,” Emma paused then asked in earnest, “Do you think we have church every Sunday? In the UK?”

“Might do.”

“Yea.”

Mary Anne took another glance over her shoulder before allowing her gaze to drift back to the pile of purchases stacked on the small table between Emma and herself: a copy of every British newspaper on offer (excepting The Daily Mail whose cover story was an obituary better left unread), plus two of the most recent paperback romance novellas Mary Anne had penned, another colouring book and stuffed animal for the niece Emma barely knew and all twelve copies of The Mirror the shop had in stock, something Mary Anne struggled to understand.

“I’ve never seen anyone do that outside of film,” she gestured to the separate stack of self-same papers. “Buy up the whole lot of them, I mean.”

“No?”

“It isn’t as though Eugene doesn’t have internet on his phone. I’m sure he has a news alert around anything connected to Fabienne and their child.” Mary Anne chided, finding she could not quite say the name either. “If I may be so bold and so very inappropriate – do you know if it is true? I mean, Coman isn’t the best fit for Bayern -”

The baby, which a primary competitor of Mary Anne’s best friend had by some means secured a picture of, certainly did look like the man suspected of being his biological father.

She was glad Effie Gwillim was not involved in the rumour, however tasteless she found it that The Mail had gone with an obituary before an autopsy had been performed. In truth, Mary Anne
felt bad for the Tarletons, the Hewletts, for everyone who existed in their respective peripheries – the young man who had taken advantage of Emma’s pain by allowing her to take advantage of his (otherwise objectionable) presence; the inspector who seemed alone in his confused grief, sitting upstairs with the twins and the ennui that might characterize their stance on the series of calamities that seemed to plague their noble house of late; the newswoman, meant to be objective, alone among their group of friends in expressing her ire in a rare nod towards activism by means of an article she ran intended for an ambassador who may never read it; and the French footballer whose name had somehow been the one to surface in the confusion of a surge of Legionaries in Mali and the hostage situation that answered the assault back home in bonne Paris -

There was some acronymed, American organization behind that one, or so Mary Anne was certain.

Emma shook her head, frowning. “Yeah but he wasn’t even playing at PSG when Fabienne got knocked up as the article implies; he was at Juve. My sister-in-law and her family just have the market cornered on moving French midfielders around to enormous profit after letting them wear that zebra-jersey for a season or two. William’s phone is probably blowing up today though – but no. There is no truth to it, and even if there were, my brother wouldn’t have seen such as a deciding factor in the way he does business. I know the actual story behind it – ah,” she readjusted, blinking several times, “‘it’ meaning the breaking of vows, not the baby, of course not the baby. Sorry, I’m tired.”

“Out with ‘it’ then.”

“Bitch,” Emma extended the tip on her tongue. Mary Anne offered hers in return. “O’rite, so, Fabs walks out of her office at the Louvre - intending on having a cigarette or something, you know how they are on the continent - when she runs into one of those souvenir sellers you meet all over Paris trying to peddle whatever wears he was carrying off on her – in English, of course, which I take it is the height of offence for any native-born Frenchwoman. She spat at him and the two exchanged offences until they came on the idea to exchange bodily fluids – *et voila!* Twenty-plus-ten-eight weeks later we have little Banastre.”

“Trente-huit,” Mary Anne corrected. “They have a word for thirty. The addition starts at sixty. How do you know any of this?”

“How do you?” Emma squinted.

“French?” she puzzled. “I grew up with it at home before I even began school. Beyond which Fabienne and I were roommates back at York. I spoke it constantly with her and Effie and everyone else in the honours class. I’m meant to be the kid’s godmother for crying out loud and Fabienne never told me -”

“Aye, aye – don’t be offended. I’m getting this third-hand,” Emma told, raising her two. “Eugene rang Ban up when his wife confessed all of this to him after taking a pregnancy test – you know because this was around the same time Mrs. Robinson was reported to be having yet another extramarital affair with the aptly named Sir Fox. Some tabloid - Effie, probably, let’s face it - asked Ban if it was true and he must have been in a way because he answered ‘Perdita is a quite generous lover’ – artfully calling his soon-to-be-ex a whore, and causing Gene to think, maybe I don’t know, that he would have good advice to give being that he’s been on both sides of cheating oh-so-many times? But you know, my family’s public stance on such matters came into play—” Emma rolled her eyes and began to rant. “We are all hypocrites, you know. I’m on the pill myself – so is Izzie, and John I’m sure would use a condom if women were interested. Charlotte had her tubes tied after the accident and Ban had a vasectomy as a condition of my helping him out with child support around the third time he had the nerve to ask. William and Chiara love wealth more than they love each
other – I doubt they share a bedchamber or have since their son was born. Clayton … well maybe, what with his four daughters,” she considered, “but no. I think we all enjoy the preaching more than the practice: Fabienne had to keep the baby and Eugene had to accept it as his own because we all so like to pass Christian-style moral judgments on this one aspect of other people’s normal, open relationships. To be honest I would probably have told him the same thing had my advice been sought. Still,” she shifted, returning her gaze to the tabloids, “with all the crap in the world today, I don’t want to risk Eugene seeing that the speculation his immediate family will be subject to ad infinitum has already begun. Hence,” she gestured to one of the many copies of Kingsley’s face.

“I think everyone is a casuist when you get down to it. I’m a divorce lawyer who writes silly romance novels in my spare time,” Mary Anne gave in an attempt to shoulder some of the responsibility. She did not know what she would have said had she instead been asked what should be done. The word ‘prenup’, she was certain, would have come up though.

“Good for business, ‘innt? People can’t get divorced if they don’t fall for the traps of love and marriage,” Emma seemed to congratulate.

“People wouldn’t cross the Irish Sea with the intent of abortion if your father hadn’t railed so loudly against medical tourism. We learned from the best.”

“Ceterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam,” Emma mocked the former mayor’s repetitive nature. “I think in a lot of ways Ban believed all that shit though as Georgie and Marie stand proof,” she continued after what felt a long while, in the meantime skimming the book Mary Anne was beginning to think stood no chance of being surrendered to Ellie and Eugene’s amusement with the rest of the loot. “What do you think it is like? Love? It is like the Hewletts, isn’t it? Excellent PR,” she gestured to the stack of less reputable daily papers running another cover story about Anna and Edmund, “That, or it is like my sister – stubborn denial,” adding almost mutely, “I don’t think I can go back.”

“Upstairs or to Liverpool?”

“Both … maybe.”

“You can stay at mine,” Mary Anne offered.

Emma gave her a weak smile before offering more context to her earlier literary critique.

By her own account of the day before, she had felt distraught upon learning of her brother’s passing, whilst her sister refused to meet the news at all. The two owned and operated a horse-farm together about half an hour outside their ancestral seat, combining their inheritance and personal assets to fund the project. Emma was an equestrian by trade and trained animal and rider for competition. Her sister Izzie cared for the horses, who, after a few years on the circuit, were retired to the charitable part of their venture, where the girls taught children with physical and developmental handicaps how to ride.

Izzie had been subject to a similar such therapy as a child, which, mentally, she would always remain. It was after seeing her sister in a saddle that Emma decided she, too, might take up the sport. Since they were girls this had been that which connected the two sisters deeply, for they were unequal in every other respect – a reality Emma was at least in the active practice of refusing to openly acknowledge.

Most of the time; time which was mostly spent together.
The evening prior, however, the resentment Mary Anne had personally long expected Emma of guarding escaped her in the worst possible manner; she struck her sister outright in a moment of frustration, and, horrified at her own action no doubt, fought the girl - heavier then herself by four stone at least - into her truck and driven to her mother’s place, explaining to the old dame that she could not be around her sister anymore that evening.

Emma did not expand on the exchange that followed, sufficing to say that she expected after the obligatory wake she would not be invited to attend any family function for quite some time. Restless thereafter, she had taken the initiative to borrow a spare set of keys to her late brother’s flat and had begun moving boxes and disassembling all the she had found built. Banastre had lived in a converted house in Toxteth in a small room with boarded windows and a padlock on the door. When Emma walked inside and saw that the neighbouring flat was of the kind that sometimes featured in the nightly news, she understood the precaution.

The door had been open and she had counted them.

They were five altogether.

Five young men in their early to mid-twenties sat around watching an Imam on YouTube, creating a community of themselves which Emma was cautioned by prejudice to see as a terror cell. She was quick to lock herself in her brother’s flat and it was not until she had found a firearm in one of his desk drawers that she trusted herself to begin bring that which she had boxed to her vehicle. When the men saw her struggling they rose to lend her a hand which she was reluctant to take.

‘I hit my sister,’ Emma had said by way of introduction, explaining for reasons she did not understand at the moment and, hours later, still seemed lost to, that Izzie was being a brat but she was mentally handicap. Emma did not know if that made the action worse. She felt that it did and felt awful that she felt that way for all of her parents’ insistence that there was no such thing as a deficit that could not be overcome. She said too that her other sister was a paraplegic and that her brother had a crippled hand, and then - in spite of her better judgement - that he had died overseas.

Monday. That was why she was collecting his things.

Hearing this, one of the lads left to make her tea, another ran down to the corner store to purchase milk in deference to her Englishness, (returning after Emma had already warmed herself with a cup she described as a culture shock) with two older men – men whom Emma recognised from The Liverpool Echo as having been in various court proceedings against one another for the past five years.

‘I don’t know that I believe in God,’ she said to the Imam and the Reverend whose neighbouring centres of religious service were in constant conflict of city noise ordnances; the lad who have gone off to get the milk explaining to the former what had happened when they bumped into one another at the store, asking about scripture he might cite to lessen the pain of Emma’s loss. The Imam had rung the only Christian whose number he knew, setting aside centuries of difference to comfort a complete stranger with the promises of paradise.

It meant a lot, but Miss Emma Tarleton could not take them at their word. ‘I don’t know that Ban did either. When he was serving in Afghanistan, the British Armed Forces were in the process of constructing a school on the base. A local boy he had thought himself to have befriended came one day with a bomb vest and he was told to shoot. His finger froze on the trigger and the child died anyway, taking all of his classmates with him. After that … Ban stopped being able to sleep. He stopped any pretence of peacekeeping. He just opened fire whenever opportunity allowed and sought out dangers where they might not otherwise exist. I don’t think he thought about it. In the end I don’t even think he felt it. It is why he never sued for dual custody of his daughters. I think …
I can’t believe in God knowing that he knew so many devils.’

God is all merciful, both preachers told her. God is all-forgiving.

‘Then why aren’t we who were made in His image?’

Meanwhile, the lads helped Emma move everything from the flat they could fit in her truck bed. One accompanied her back to her mother’s home to empty Ban’s possessions into the garage. When they went back for what remained, finding that everyone else had either left or retired for the evening, Emma sought her own salvation through sin, which ultimately lead her to sit in the cafeteria of an Edinburgh hospital, complaining that the hate-sex between Saladin’s half-brother and the Lionheart’s little sister would have been as every bit as heavy as it was hot.

Because of circumcision.

Because the immediate always proved a more comfortable topic than the Eternal.

Mary Anne glanced back at Georgie and her nanny, now accompanied by one of Lady Eleanor’s bodyguards, a man she thought she recognised but whose name she couldn’t place. Emma, she noticed, had been watching them the whole time.

“Might just take you up on your offer,” she yawned. “The afternoon anyway, just to get some rest. I have to go back and partake in all of the theatre involved in in funeral preparations and debt management. It is strange … thinking that is all that is left. We’ll argue for a few days about the percentage of the fiscal burden that we’ve been left to shoulder – no one wants Mum paying off another of Ban’s credit cards and my brothers have already given so, so much of their individual earnings to support him over the years … and yea. I guess that is it then. For a few days we will remember him as a series of supercilious purchases and bad bets and then we will get the body back from America and put it in the ground, say a few nice things about him at the funeral and conversation will just cease. It will be like when we get together at Christmas and something reminds us all of Daddy and we share a smile but are hesitant to speak because at first it feels too soon and then, over time, too far-gone. So, all that is really left to us is the immediate mêlée, and it seems I struck the first blow.”

“Maybe she doesn’t understand what happened or why you were angry,” Mary Anne suggested of Izzie.

Hearing this as a slight, Emma narrowed her gaze and dropped all niceties in her tone. “My sister is slow, but she shares our same world. She understands death,” she seemed to warn.

“Em, that is not what I meant -”

“I don’t know that I do though. Understand, I mean. It is terrible to say, but I don’t know why my brother lived as long as he did if he was ultimately destined to die from this same bullet. How many times did he ruin his life since? I mean, not that he ruined … he seemed to be having a good time. But I don’t know how I am supposed to play with my niece whom I have met on all of four prior occasions, whom I doubt has any idea as to who I am – to be the umpteenth random ass adult who gives her gifts with the message that I am sorry for her loss when, do you understand – what the fuck right do I have to her loss?” she began to ramble. “And Marie. And we will have to invite Mary-fucking-Robinson to the funeral and the thought just makes my stomach turn when I consider – I hate that woman so much. And you know, I’m going to be in church, knowing that she is sitting somewhere behind me wearing Prada on what she ought to recognise as a Primark budget and I’ll be thinking of nothing beyond the financial ruin that woman brought upon my brother. And then I will hate myself for it. I wish so much I wasn’t -”
“You’re not,” Mary Anne assured her, reaching out for a hand that had formed itself into a fist.
“Emma, come on. Give yourself a break right now. Anger is an appropriate, acceptable reaction
and yours is just looking for a place. It will pass. Look, with family law I have to help various
parties consolidate debt all the time, I know the procedures. When you get back to Liverpool and
have time to go through all of it, if you want you can send Banastre’s financial records to my office
and I’ll act as an arbitrator between your family and his creditors and ‘Mary-fucking-Robinson’ if
need be. Then you and I will go to some overrated club in London and spend the night having
completely average sex with Whitehall-types and wake up directing our ire towards the
government and the patriarchy as nature intended.”

“What would I ever do without you?” Emma chuckled.

“Read too much into Kingsley Coman’s supposed love-child, as it seems,” Mary Anne winked,
taking on of the copies of The Daily Mirror, flipping to find the article. Something on the back
page caught Emma’s eye.

“Can I ask, what do you think of her in Scotland?”

“Anna?” Mary Anne confirmed, flipping the paper over to find yet another picture of the world-be
princess entering the Albany Court of Appeals.

“Yea.”

“What do I think of her or what does Scotland think of her? I guess it is mixed in both cases,” she
considered. “I think the public is buying the whole Cinderella-story concocted by the Hewlett
propaganda machine … but it is, honestly it is such bullshit. Anna Strong is a solicitor whose entire
family has a background in the legal profession and have held numerous important government
posts. One of her grandfathers sat on the US Supreme court, all four grandparents were judges. Her
mother is the DA of New York City and I had to read her father’s article about Richard Woodhull
while I was in law school. This is not a rags-to-riches story the media wants to make it. But she is
charming, somehow. I can’t quite place it.”

“She is relatable,” Emma suggested. “She is pretty but in a way the can be achieved with like drug
store products and a gym membership one uses once or twice a month when they see it on their
bank statement. And apparently, they met in a bar without first having seen one another on Tinder,
so I’m sure Lifetime will make a movie of it like the one we got for Kate and Wills. I’m into it.”

Mary Anne snorted back a laugh. “Alright, I am so down for this but only providing they get Burn
Gorman to play the role of Eddie.”

“Who?”

“Just this really odd-looking … wait,” Mary Anne said, pulling up and image of the actor on her
phone.

“Oh. My. God.”

“Am I awful?”

“You are accurate.”

“I will write a strongly worded letter to their production department with my suggestion,” Mary
Anne smarted.

“And for Anna?”
“Meghan Markel.”

“Again who?” Emma squinted.

“An American actress I heard Harry was snogging up in Soho. They don’t really look alike, Anna and Meghan, but I hear the actress has made it through casting,” she winked.

“Charming.”

“Really though, I just can’t get behind the hype. I’m sorry. When I think of the twins upstairs and how much their love lives have been reduced by and to their last name, it seems so unjust that Edmund be allowed to go off and lead a relatively anonymous existence in the colonies, find himself a woman whose appearance might suggest that she reads neither Vogue nor In-Touch, hides his social status behind science as though this was some poor rendition of an eighteenth century comedic opera when Edna had to marry herself into the local nobility in order to retain her title as Ellie is being forced to, and Fabienne was so objectionable to the Crown as Eugene’s bride – I’ll note, for the same reasons that Anna is so well-received – that now neither visit the island if they can at all help it. Its politics.

“You like Anna in England because any children their union produces will be ineligible to inherit their English holdings, breaking up the Hewlett’s power, which some Scots also want to see happen; some, including Ellie and Eugene, who, if you were here earlier, apparently hope for the fall of the house.”

“You are wrong there, friend. I don’t have a care for any of that nonsense. Frankly I stopped watch Game of Thrones when they went off-book. I can’t even make up my mind about the Brexit referendum which will have actual real-world consequence. I just like Anna, because … I don’t know, really. Maybe I read too many medieval-themed romance novels.”

“Well, we will have that anyway though, the fall of the House Hewlett, even if if Edna instead inherits her uncle’s seat. Then all of the lands and titles they have collected throughout the centuries will be passed to Edwina under Scots Law, the provision that eldest daughters are legitimate heirs recently adopted by your parliament as well because the Duchess of Cambridge doesn’t want to know the gender of her baby before it is born. But here is the thing that everyone seems to be missing – we might colloquially, collectively, still call Edna ‘Hewlett’, but her daughter belongs to the Douglass-Chaplains. The name will pass into the pages of history in this generation, but, if possible, I’d prefer to keep the relative autonomy we enjoy as a result of their ancestral efforts all the same.”

“So, in summary, you don’t like Anna because you don’t like Edmund?”

“In essence.”

“Christ. Are you still sour about the Six Nations?” Emma teased. She had a point. England had beaten Scotland in Edinburgh in the ongoing rugby tournament a month prior. Mary Anne, who had been born in the latter but educated in the former and who currently had offices in both capitols, considered herself ‘British’ unless there was an international sporting event playing on her loyalties. It occurred to her how much Edmund’s marriage was seeming to resemble one and she was ready to say as much when, as she noticed Emma straightening her posture. A manicured hand reached over her shoulder for the Mirror copy Mary Anne still held.

“Hi girls. I see I should have taken the Pentagon up on the offer,” Effie Gwillim commented, slowly surveying the collection of papers, not finding her own. “You may want to pick up a copy of The Mail on Sunday tomorrow though, I countered Billy Lee’s proposal with an ultimatum of
“They were sold out,” Mary Anne covered quickly.

“No. It was my choice,” Effie dismissed. “The Daily Mail was approached first with this proposal and declined to participate in this particular charade.”

Emma frowned. “The Pentagon is in the business of generating rumours about footballers unknown outside of Europe?”

“They are when it accomplishes their objectives,” Effie told her. “The hostage-taking in Paris was an organized response to a siege in Bamako the Foreign Legion led. The government was overthrown in an afternoon and had Fabienne not had her son under in such dramatic circumstance at roughly the same time you might have read something in The Guardian inquiring as to why French and British troops participated in a coup, outside of NATO oversight.

“We will wonder about it in ten years or so, I’m sure, once the people we’ve put into power stop with a semblance of democracy as these things tend to unfold,” Effie continued to explain without enthusiasm. “The Pentagon, in an effort to cover this and a few of its other notable recent mistakes, pitched me on the Coman piece. I don’t follow footy but putting the name into Google told me that William Tarleton is his manager. Seeing this for the ploy that it was, I informed Billy Lee of my intention to publish the André/Dandridge research which Senator Arnold wants implemented as standard military practice should Ban’s body not be returned to British soil in such time that a proper autopsy might be performed. Suspecting that a competitor was sure to take Lee up on his suggestion, and that as such William would not be available to exercise his power of attorney rights in the interest of Ban’s estate, I took the liberty of then calling Cornwallis myself to provide him with the same incentive. If either of you bothered to read the eulogy I’d written -”

“I did read it,” Mary Anne said. “This morning. On my phone. We bought this many copies of the Mirror to reduce the risk that Eugene would see the material. He is not taking the situation well.”

“Would you?” Effie asked. “Emma,” she adjusted, moving to give the other petit brunette of their congress a hug. “You and your family have my deepest condolences. If there is anything I can -”

“I’m sure you have done enough,” Emma stammered, slightly dumbfounded by her friend’s day-to-day. “Actually,” she considered, “you can say goodbye to Ellie and Gene for me. I think I want to head out.”

Mary Anne reached her keys out of her purse, removing the one for the door to her flat. “You know the address, right?”

“Yea. Thanks for this.”

“We’re good, you’ve given me enough literary inspiration to last a sequel,” Mary Anne replied, pressing the key into her hand with a light squeeze.

“Cool, go for it. Cheers, Mary Anne, Effie,” Emma excused herself, giving the editor a slight nod before walking a few tables over to give her niece a proper goodbye.

“Ferguson’s mother,” Mary Anne explained of the woman left to watch Georgie.

“What is she doing here?” Effie asked.

“What are you?” Mary Anne countered.
“I’ve been summoned. Apparently, my Lady has a business proposal.”

“You make that sound ominous.”

“Doesn’t it always with the Hewletts?” Effie shifted as she moved to examine the rest of the morning’s headlines. “I hate that woman,” she said of Anna Strong. “She is the one whom John implied he’d left me for. Seems either that was a lie, of this whole pack on nonsense that the wider press is creating around her and Edmund is.”

Anna Strong could not complain.

This was not to say that she did not want to, for she did; she wanted to cry and kick and scream. She wanted to take what was left of her wine, return to the drawing room that had been converted for the purpose of alterations and altercations and toss it onto the gown she was sure would be suffocating even after its bodice had been reworked to fit her figure. That afternoon, Anna had learned what she was sure was the French word for ‘fat’ – ‘gros’ which, if analgised, encompassed the extent of her feelings around the whole affair. It was gross. It was reductive. Anna felt lost to herself in the folds of silk, in the newsprint narrative of who she was, namely Edmund Hewlett’s bride-to-be.

Anna worried that she did not know Edmund at all.

He was stranger to her now than he had been when he occasioned her pub at the weekend, exchanging few words with her that extended past his order, which had always been the same.

For a long while, she had simply though of him as ‘Magners’ and she was beginning to wish he had never sought more from her than too-sweet cider, that she had never known him as a lover – As a liar.

For everything else he might have been or let himself become in Setauket, Edmund Hewlett was a titled landholder, a future duke, a prince of the blood, this, despite his disinterest in any conversation connected to the realities he claimed in their latest argument that he never hid, hanging up shortly after Anna had countered that omission was its own kind of untruth.

Her life had become a hell in the last week, its flames in the form of camera flashes, the paparazzi and reporters of ill-repute gathered in a mob outside the hotel, the courthouse, wherever she found herself. She had called Edmund from a bathroom stall, crying on her lunch hour into her would-be bridegroom’s mailbox that she could not take the attention she felt she was not due. When she collected her mobile from the locker outside the courthrooms, ten articles were waiting for her on her lock screen. Trouble in Paradise? they asked. When Edmund rang her back that evening, he told her she was over-reacting. The yellow-papers would lose interest after the wedding. They had never any interest in him before.

Edmund Hewlett seemed to have no interest in her troubles himself, at least, not when compared against all that was transpiring at home without her.

Perhaps he was right.

She could not complain. Her friends needed this night. They needed the fairy-tale to be true. They
needed to sip expensive wine while wearing haute couture. To pretend that this resembled real life. They needed this because their realities were so much worse than that which had become her new standard.

She could not complain, even if she had a voice to.

No one understood.

No one she would have expected to make an effort to, at any rate.

On Thursday afternoon, Anna had been slow to leave the courtroom after filing procedural claims on her boss’ behalf when she had been approached by the opposition.

‘You did well today,’ Abigail Adams assured her. ‘It gets easier. I remember my first time before this bench, I was a bundle on nerves, and that having a few years of experience in the lower courts to draw on.’

Anna smiled, unsure of how to respond. Abigail continued the conversations in the manner by which she was obliged, saying her mother was so proud, which Anna was sure was true. She had realised throughout the course of the day, however, that she had not fallen out of love with law but rather she had become infatuated with locality. She missed Setauket. She missed her job at the bar. She missed being in the know. She wanted, badly, to go to a home she was beginning to fear she would never see again in any way that she recognised.

‘I don’t know what I am doing here,’ she admitted. ‘Not in terms of argument – it has admittedly been a while since law school but I was raised in this environment and,’ she shifted. ‘My fiancé abandoned me last night with scarcely a word. I found out this morning that he and Jordan left because … a friend, um … stabbed another in Jordan’s new home. They are both in ICU now. The assailant injured himself whilst in police custody. Sorry,’ she shook her head. ‘It is the first time I am saying this out loud and I don’t know why I’m burdening you with it … I just, I’m in shock. All of it I’m in shock. A kid … I mean I guess he is a grown man now, um – he was a kid when Edmund knew him passed away a few nights ago. Here, well, in America. Anyway, Edmund is really undone by all of it. I don’t think I will see him until the wedding. I don’t think he wants to see me. I don’t think I can do this.’

Abigail nodded her empathy. ‘I know it is not the same, but my life is continually turned upside down every election cycle. It has become routine – the press, the emotional absence of my partner, all of it. Sometimes it can still cut like a knife but in time if feels less like an assault and more like an out-patient procedure, if you’ll allow my mixing metaphors.’

‘Sure,’ Anna said.

‘You should keep an extra suit on hand, wear it every day to and from the courthouse, after a while the press will stop buying pictures and the cameras will become scare. Leave through the back – keep conversation with your driver to a minimum and for God’s sake, take your mother up on her offer to pull some strings and provide you with a detail,’ the opposition’s lead attorney seemed to scold.

‘I’ll be fine,’ Anna said. She did not want a police presence. Not while they were in the process of upturning everything that had been dear to her at a home that felt further from her the more time that elapsed, as though there were a direct correlation between time and distance regardless if one was in motion or not.

‘I’ve always found that ‘fine’ is a contranym when we women use it.’
When she had finished packing her things, Anna followed the ADA to the back doors, finding Richard Woodhull in his role as Chief Justice awaiting his ride.

She gave him a nod.

He, in turn, gave her more consideration than she was prepared to expect.

A couple he knew in the area was currently residing in their winter residence on the Cayman Islands. He called them that morning, explaining her situation as he understood it. ‘I never though much of Hewlett, if I’m made to be honest – that is to say I never attributed his … behaviour to birth status.’

‘You think he is a snob,’ Anna commented, wondering if Richard was aware of how blatant his hypocrisy could prove.

‘I think that … our friends sometimes ask a lot of us, of our patience, of our generosity, of our understanding – without seeming to have any understanding themselves. I think it is in times like these we need to look past our differences to our commonalities. All this is to say, I’ve arranged a temporary solution to the matter of your quarter. I have a home in the area, it is a gated community with a security staff. You won’t wake up to reporters outside your window.’

The next morning, Anna realised she had no choice but to accept.

She asked Richard why he was being kind to her after all of these years, wondering if he sought some form of royal favour in return, not knowing precisely what that meant – not knowing if he had any more of an idea than she did on the matter. Richard, however, spoke again about friendship. Though he was acting in kind, his words around her father somehow felt forced. He had not forgiven him. When she phoned her father at noon, she had learned the judge had not reached out at all.

It was not until Saturday, surrounded by her bridesmaids and the more tangible illusions that she finally understood the true reasons for Richard’s sudden turn.

“Anna,” Mary said, “Join me for a sec? I want to step out for a smoke.”

“Sure,” Anna replied, hoping that she did not sound too weary in front of her friends.

“I quit a few months ago,” she went on to refuse Mary’s offer when the two had close the back door behind them. The motion censor light went out and Mary kept her movements small to keep the cover of darkness. Still, she lit a cigarette – a Gauloises, the brand John smoked. Anna had had quite enough of the French in any form. “It is probably half the reason I’m getting so ‘gros’” she snorted. “Well that, genetics, my long-suppressed stress eating tendencies -”

“Anna,” Mary interrupted, her voice a hoarse whisper. “We have to be quick. I … think Abraham is helping Robert Rogers hold Arnold hostage. In fact, now I am all but sure of it. Anna, you have to help me. Us. Please, if you have even half the love for Abraham I suspect he has always had for you -” the woman, though her tone was steady, seemed ready to sob.

“What? Mary, that is impossible.” Anna objected. “I can’t for a moment believe -”

“He hasn’t been home – he is never home but he is home less now than he was before. I mean I have not seen him at all in a few days. I know he has been there, in the house I mean, because he has taken some of his things, thrown laundry into the hamper – his tooth brush is just gone. The last I heard of him … look, I don’t know if you heard but Lewis Brewster left Setauket – he is living with the Wakefields now, temporarily – he, uh- Abe went to buy weed from him but he did
not have enough money so Lewis went back to Rogers’ halfway house with him where he was imprisoned for the night. John Robeson was in a state after having tended to Benedict Arnold’s wounds, but when Uncle Lewis woke in the morning, all four – that is Abe, Rogers, Arnold and Robeson were gone. Lewis went to Caleb’s boat and relayed all of this to both his nephew and Dr Wakefield. And … I only know this because Wakefield told John, Edmund, Jordan and Ben Tallmadge – who was still attached to the investigation at the time at, or on the way to Banastre Tarleton’s wake. Now the whole town is on the lookout.

“Before all that shit went down with Cicero and his friends,” Mary continued, “Tallmadge got a warrant to search Rogers’ property and worksites. I know for a fact that they found evidence … as such was presented to me yesterday in an interrogation with the FBI,” she swallowed. “With ADIC Hamilton himself, who was interviewing me with regard to an entirely separate matter it serves no purpose to get into.”

“Mary -”

The smaller woman shook her head, backing out of Anna’s attempted embrace. “I … don’t know where my husband is. I also don’t know if we are entirely rid of rid of Tallmadge, given that he and Caleb seem to be seeing one another. Anna, everything has just gone to hell and so much of it is directly my fault. If only I had found a way to talk to Abe in the beginning, before John and I … before … Tallmadge is going to find my husband if he hangs around much longer. Fuck, he is more likely to visit Caleb than he is our home -”

“I … I would not worry about that,” Anna tried. “Caleb doesn’t bring boys home -”

“No?” Mary countered sharply. “You haven’t been around. Ben Tallmadge has been camped out on his houseboat since surrendering his badge.”

“What?!”

“Anna, look … Abe is not safe in Setauket. He is without friends and I am sure he knows this or is soon to learn. If he comes here I … I need you to call me. Not Richard. I know he suspects him, too. I need to speak to him, before the wedding at least -”

“Should I cancel?” Anna offered, shamed at how free her soul suddenly felt speaking the question aloud in any context.

“The wedding? You can’t!”

“Mary you have seen the seating arrangement -”

“Wouldn’t calling it off be an admission of guilt? Don’t you get it? We are all guilty, Anna.”

“André is the guilty party here. When they find him -”

“André is ignorant,” Mary dismissed. “He knows nothing about whatever Rogers is engaged in. They found his truck, by the way, in Philomena’s garage. It matches the description both we and the NYPD were working from. Now Philomena is a person of interest as well … especially giving that she seems to have burnt all of her husband’s belongings shortly before he went to rehab. Peggy was a witness to this and told Yilmaz and her team that it was all a lover’s spat. I don’t think they entirely believe her, but maybe … her having visit André helped in that regard. Maybe.”

“Um -”

“He is at Belview,” Mary interjected. “It is a long story.”
“Why Peggy? What has she to do -”

Mary pressed her lips together and averted her gaze. “He is a monster, André. He is the reason that the cops made the initial connection between Peggy and Senator Arnold, having posed as her online. If that was not awful enough in itself … he slept with her, Peggy being ignorant to all of this until she was shown evidence from the phone Cicero found in which she was presented in compromising positions – all Photoshop, of course. Peggy volunteered herself. Hell hath no fury, as they say.”

It was too much. “Why hasn’t Edmund told me any of this?” Anna wondered aloud. “I … shit. I have to cancel this wedding. I have to -”

“All, Anna. Please. Understand me when I tell you that you can’t.”

“I don’t want to marry him, Mary!” Anna blurted out before she could stop herself, louder than she would ever have intended.

“Yes, you do,” Mary returned. “You want to marry Edmund Hewlett – you just don’t want to marry the Edmund, Heir Presumptive. What if I told you that … a week from now that will no longer belong to the scope of your concerns?”

“Well then I would ask what you aren’t telling me.”

“The interview with Hamilton … was the result of a conversation I had with um, a cartel boss who helped me get ten dozen African orphans out of a warzone prior to the escalation of conflict. That is how talks started anyway. The rest was,” Mary paused, reproducing her lighter and illuminating the porch once more with the jolt of her movement. “Anna, are you sure you don’t want a cigarette?”

The only thing Anna Strong was sure of was that her secret want to complain, to kick, scream and cry was entirely warranted.

Ferguson fidgeted in his chair by the window – consciously avoiding eye contact as he continued to shift, silent but for the sum of his small movements. Ellie Hewlett wondered if he was using, how long it had been since he had had a fix. He had been calm at the house where he had thirty years of financial records spread out over the length of the dinning table of the castle’s grand hall, ordinarily an attraction for foreign tourists and their camera-phones, now ‘officially’ closed for renovation.

It was strange, Ellie had long considered, how easily strangers could belong. They still came and went from ten until six each day to bear witness to events long before their time. Death was a great equalizer, or so it was said by those with no interest in history, but the footsteps whose echoes found their way into her private chamber day in and day out spoke to a contradiction. Death, Ellie though, was every bit a discriminatory as life. One day, everyone who entered would one day depart – very few would have their homes opened several hundred years later that people from another time and place could take pictures next to massive paintings of them at the height of their power.

‘My ancestors were Jacobites,’ Ferguson had commented when she found him staring at an oil rendition of Edmund the First, his hand rested on the hilt of the sword said to have slain so many of
the men she took the inspector thought of as his forefathers. ‘Oh? Mine were compelling,’ she had responded. ‘It seems they still are.’

Ellie stared at the faded scars on her wrist, wondering if death would reduce or elevate her when at last it came, remembering the girl she had been in making them, her anger and ire at the neglect she no longer had to fear. Ferguson had left her alone in an interrogation chamber after announcing that John Graves Simcoe had betrayed her to his subordinate. Ellie pulled against the cold metal of the handcuffs that had been forced upon her without necessity (for she had willingly accompanied the arresting officer) until her skin broke, letting it cut deeper and deeper still, knowing, ultimately, that Ferguson would be the one left to face this pain.

His present problems with addition seemed a fitting revenge and she wondered at times if he actively though of her each time a needle pierced his skin. She looked at the saline being deposited into her bloodstream and began scratching at the tape and gauze holding the injection in place.

“Stop,” he told her. Ellie said nothing in response, electing instead to pull at the tape with careful caution. In an hour or so, a nurse would return to replace the bag with another and new needles would follow. Removing these would hurt considerably less if the manoeuvre was not rushed as it had been time and time before, as history instructed was the case in any means of operation. The inspector rose and reached for her right hand, pulling it lightly from its task as he promised her that no harm would befall her here in hospital, no, at least, under his watch. When Ellie had first woken up she had been overtaken with panic at the sight of the IV, at the monitoring devices attached to her person. Quickly and without calculation she had begun ripping the tubes providing her with nutrition from her skin, wild and hysteric with the idea that she was being poisoned. Another cop had been on duty and a number of nurses had come to assist him in restraining her. Ellie had been forcibly sedated. When she awoke anew, Ferguson had returned with a number of questions she had been too honest in answering, the effects of chemically constructed exhaustion on the conscious mind. She felt his calloused finger trace itself softly across the old scar that had destroyed his career with a familiarity and care that never translated to his words. Ellie shifted, reaching her hand around his wrist, sitting up enough to pull at his sleeve.

There was no recent bruising, no signs of injection. Wordlessly, he shook himself free of her hold and rolled up his other sleeve to her satisfaction. Ellie traced the veins visible beneath his pale skin in the coolness of her current quarters, remarking on how much strong her was than he looked. Ferguson smiled in spite of himself as though he had mistaken her comment as a compliment. It was not.

Not that long ago, these arms had held her tightly enough to leave contusions, ones that suggested violence to the medical staff and saw an internal investigation opened against the inspector.

Were only that he had been removed from the case for the offence.

Ferguson had, with the help of Eleanor, her sister Edna who was also in residence and their respective staffs uncovered enough evidence of bad business against her father that charges could be brought if the Crown had a mind to do so. Ferguson’s name was enough grounds to dismiss all of his team’s findings. They both knew as much. She wanted badly for him to hold her again as he had and felt her eyes fill with tears.

The conversation Ellie had walked in on days prior had been short, or maybe it had not. The ending, however, was abrupt and Ferguson looked as though the call had aged him, slouching his back and shoulders when he returned his mobile device to his trouser pocket, standing in this stunted shrug long enough to let her know she had not misheard.

‘No,’ Ellie said though she knew she should not speak. The inspector straightened and turned to
face her, offering some kind of condolence as though she could acknowledge it as anything but an attempt to confirm his working theory. ‘No,’ she repeated, this time half muted, choked by the tears she could not let him see her cry for reasons of practicality rather than pride. They continued this was for a while, him with broken fragments of sympathy he did not possess, her with negations that progressed northward with each repeated utterance until ‘no’ became ‘nae’, until they both dropped the common tongue for Gàidhlig, in which sense could more easily be ascribe to the crushing sorrow she felt. ‘How does one mourn for the person who caused the sun to rise whenever he was near, no matter how dark the night seemed?’ she asked, the closest she had ever given to a confession. She realised his hands were on her shoulders, tightly as though he expected her to fall, as though she already had. ‘It is shock,’ she tried to collect herself. ‘It is not what you think.’

‘You don’t know what I think.’

‘You always think the worst, but you didn’t know him,’ she said, laughing in spite of herself, in spite of everything that was and everything that could and now would never be as she amended, ‘it is not to say that I harbour any illusions that Ban’s company would have changed the things about him I know you to hold to be most true.’

‘You love him,’ he assessed in exact way she hoped he would not. ‘I don’t need to have liked him to be sorry for your loss.’

‘Love?’ Ellie sobbed. ‘How long have we known each other, Richard?’

‘Long enough to abandon animosity in times like these, I’d hope.’

‘And yet you make such accusations.’

It was too much. Sorrow gave way to dread and Ellie had felt lost to her senses. Thanks to her own, earlier actions, Ferguson was in no position to pursue charges against any member of her immediate family, but this caveat against prosecutorial measures did not extend to Tarleton and the crime he had committed for her under informal contract. Now, Ellie had more reason than she might have ever expected to play down suspicions. Mary Woodhull had heard enough of their family history form John Graves Simcoe to access that Ellie had ordered the death of the wrong man, that she needed another corpse in order to keep her end of a devil’s bargain.

The problem was, Ban had died before his initial target.

The problem was that Ellie did not know how her uncle would soon fall.

The previous spring, Edna had called upon her in London during a state visit, content with her latest move in a long game of geopolitical chess. The duke had requested her daughter to stay at his residence, something, or so Edna had interpreted, indicating his favour. Ellie had an entirely different experience with their uncle and in enmity that turned quickly to echo explained the sum of these to her sister; herself suddenly of the mind that the man who had hurt her had to die.

The problem was that subtilty had abandoned Edna on her return to Richmond, disallowing Ellie the room she would normally enjoy in such a manoeuvre. The duke was on guard and his dissenters could not open revolt without risking collateral damage to the reputation of their house and the economic concerns tied to it. All Ellie could do was await that someone with a similar skillset to her own would fall so far from power and grace that there would be no question of a connection between agent and contractor.

There were a number of reasons Banastre Tarleton was not ideal, not the least of which was that she had loved him once and loved him still, but the colonel had created a circumstance around
himself in which it was impossible for them to not part ways indefinitely. She used her influence to lessen the disciplinary action imposed against him for his recent conduct in service to the Crown and promised that her father would renew a set of contracts due to expire the following years. This latter part of their agreement had proven an impossible sell to the board. The two had not spoken in months when Ban had come with a warning of her brother’s confession, with the news that he had finally found an opportunity to act, with the plea that she try harder to keep jobs within his city, with what time had turned into a goodbye.

How bitterly she had wept before a man who, if not called upon to lead the coming investigation, would certainly be interviewed by those who were.

That was the problem.

For everything else, Ellie - or rather, the unlikely ally she had found in Edmund’s landlady- had a plan.

“What time is it?” she asked Ferguson.

“Just after two,” he told her. She looked at the saline and frowned. “If you want to try to eat something … if you don’t trust … I could go out -”

“Its fine,” Ellie dismissed.

“How open is that offer?” her brother asked from the hospital bed beside her own.

“What are you after?” Ferguson asked.

“You know what I could really go for? You know those frozen dinners, the ones with plastic over them what you stab with a fork to make wee small holes for ventilation before sticking it into the microwave for five minutes?”

“That is every frozen dinner,” Ferguson frowned.

“I want one of those but with meatloaf and mash and about two fingers worth of green veg,” Eugene specified.

“How is that different from hospital food?” Kolina smarted from the corner of his cot at the same time Ellie chided, “Wow, Paris has turned you into a true gourmet.”

“Really Ells? What is your measure of judgement?”

“Glass houses, Gene.”

“I’ve something like that at mine, I’m sure. It is not far, I’ll go. Wanker, spot me twenty quid, yea? I’m going to drop into Tesco and get a few sandwiches for you, me, your mum, Georgie, Mary Anne, Emma, Percy and whatever the bloke you’ve got stationed down the hall is called -”

“Jones,” Ferguson responded, producing his wallet.

“And Ells, I’m getting you a salad. You are so dumb, really, the both of you,” the girl began to chastise, anticipating the protest Ellie was mentally preparing. “You are both so afraid of your mother poisoning you that you’ve not realised she’s outsourced the operation – not to me, or the fuzz, or the nice men and women of the medical profession – no, no. You’re doing that work for her, you are, with your refusal to touch a fork to anything. I’ll not be having it! No,” she shifted, addressing Ferguson, “I’ve changed my mind. Give me a bit more as I’m popping into the grocer’s
anyway. I appreciate that your situation is not the best but you can’t rely on charity to meet all your mum’s nutritional needs. Trust me, I did my hundred hours. You need more in your flat than cup noodles, and this for yourself as well.

“Look at how fidgety you’ve been all the day. Do you know what that is, Wanker? It is bloody dehydration. You know I’m just,” she closed her eyes as though she thought the blackness beneficial in helping her find the words. “It is making me right ill, how little regard the whole lot of you seem to have for your own lives. My daughter’s father died of a clogged artery, something so easily prevented with the slightest personal consideration and I’m angry beyond words but insofar as his weakness has exposed all of yours I find I have quite a lot if need be.”

Ferguson produced another fifty-pound note but grabbed Kolina’s hand for inspection before she could take it from him.

“You have fingerprints,” he commented.

“Is that something remarkable? Something worthy of remark?” Kolina squinted.

Ellie, however, had no trouble following.

“I eradicated my own as a girl,” she explained. “It is something of a standard practice in my line of work.”

“Not mine,” Kolina countered, taking her hand back and the money along with it.

“Your prints were not on the documents you gave to Ellie to mail to North America.”

“Were they dusted for some reason?”

“Only my own were found,” Ferguson replied. “If I seem nervous, that is why. It is not drug use or dehydration, but go right ahead, get us some sandwiches and a few provisions for the house. It seems I won’t have much of a chance to get to the stores myself in the coming days. DS Yilmaz – DI now, it seems, has enough reason not to trust me as is.”

Ellie swallowed. “What happened to DI Tallmadge?”

“Resigned over alleged brutality.”

“That would not be the first time such allegations were made,” Eugene commented, seeing, no doubt, the dread on her face.

“Yilmaz believes Edmund is guilty of Senator Arnold’s kidnapping, or killing,” Ellie frowned, “I’m not really sure what crime the NYPD is looking to prosecute, if they themselves know -”

“I can find out for you,” Kolina offered. “Get into their system.”

“There is no need. They are still operating under the assumption that Arnold is alive,” Ferguson interjected. “Only now the FBI has taken over the case Tallmadge was building against Big Pharma with respect to the city’s opioid epidemic. Yilmaz rang me not that long ago to say that I should expect a call from a Robert Townsend. The more I look into it, the less I like it – it seems you are not the only ones trying to influence the scope and outcome of this investigation.”

“Then be the man to tell the truth,” Ellie said. “When Townsend gets around to calling, tell him that you’ve spent the past decade investigating drug cartels, occasionally undercover. Your service record speaks to it. Find out what he wants to know, what else might be helpful in bringing down
my American counterparts, I’ll talk to my solicitor, and then I’ll talk to you. I’m sure we can come to some kind of understanding.”

“Was this your plan all along?” the inspector asked.

“I expect those I do business with to keep their word. There are consequences for those who disappoint. I asked the Five Families to provide protection to my elder brother and he has since been arrested for a crime he would have no want to commit. And now I see no reason not to back out of my end of the arrangement, namely, not interfering with their share of the market. So I’m going to … destroy the market, if you’re agreeable to it, that is. Honestly Richard, I’m the most effective double agent in the field and you are singular in your refusal to afford me due credit.”

“I suppose you are … now that Tarleton -” he stopped. Ellie did not know what he meant to imply but she did not like it.

“And while you somehow dismantle an organization the full force of US domestic policy has failed to overcome since Nixon officially declared the county at war with drugs, I’m going to get us lunch and some tea, yea? You can’t well plan a siege without provisions,” Kolina shook her head. Ferguson followed her into the hall.

“I wonder what the world is like beyond that wall,” Eugene commented after a few minutes had passed. “Mary Anne and Emma have been gone for quite a while, too.”

“You asked them to bring a few newspapers up to us. They are probably just looking for ones without reference to Edmund and his Anna.”


“No, I am – I mean, aside from the whole messy business he has found himself in with this Yilmaz character -”

The door creaked open. Ferguson reappeared with the same absent expression with which he had initially met the news of Tarleton’s demise. “You needn’t worry about that. I just got off the line with ADIC Hamilton. Hatice Yilmaz is dead. Ells,” he swallowed nervously. “I – I’m going to find a doctor. You need dis discharge yourself, you need – unless, did you …”

“How?”

“You have an alibi, of course you have an alibi, you always do and they are always beyond question … but where has your second been these past few days?”

“Patel? Why, down in London. Richard, I had nothing to do -”

“She was sent a package exactly like the one Genovese received. Rather, it was Tallmadge who was the addresssee but Yilmaz had since taken charge of his command. They believe a bomb detonated upon the package being opened.”

“My tastes are far more refined.”

“Do you know anyone who could have built such a weapon?”

“Anyone to have made it through year eight chemistry. Now as to who could have gotten it through the post, that limits the range of possible suspects slightly.”

“Right now, I’m their best lead.”
“You have an alibi.”

“I have you.”

Ellie Hewlett shared his scepticism that somehow, she was not and would never be enough.

Chapter End Notes

I know, that felt like an our you’ll never get back. Let’s have some notes.

Geography:

Merseyside was once called Tarletau and many a Lord Mayor throughout the course of history has been a member of the Tarleton family, who seem to have inhabited the area since the Norman Conquest.

People:

Kingsley Coman is … out on injury. (I am willing to venture that will prove true regardless of if you are reading this hot off the press or long after this epic’s conclusion.)

As mentioned in the text, Al-Adil was the half-brother of Saladin and Jeanne d'Angleterre was the youngest sister of Richard I of England. I would be genuinely surprised if you couldn’t find a novella of the 50p variety around these two who simultaneously (though separately) through absolute bitch-fits when it was suggested that the wed in the interest of a cease-fire.

Though Mary Anne Burges did not historically write romance novels (…that we know of), she did anonymously pen a bestseller entitled The Progress of the Pilgrim Good-Intent, allowing her an independent life. She also gave us the sketch of Elizabeth Gwillim-Simcoe.

Quotes:

“Perdita is quite the generous lover” was legit lifted form an eighteenth-century tabloid in the exact context in which is was used in the text.

“Ceterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam,” was Cato’s catch phrase, the manner in which he is reported to have ended every speech, regardless of its topic.

Sport:

Six Nations is an annual Union Rugby competition between the teams of England, France, Ireland, Italy, Scotland and Wales. It functions as an unofficial European Championship.

Thanks for reading!

Up Next: Aberdeen opens up to Peggy about Port au Prince, Abigail and Jordan break
a hotel headboard, Effie gets in on insider trading
The Court

Chapter Summary

Aberdeen strategizes while she shares parts of herself (and a bottle of champagne) in a cellar with a close friend who felt unlikely-at-best only days prior. Ferguson and the heirs to House Hewlett move to gain the system as per Mrs Woodhull’s plan; a reluctant Effie is handed a head on a platter and offered its crown. Abigail and Jordan make up and break a headboard off a hotel bed … only to wake up finding that nothing is quite so lovely in the light of day as it seemed the night before.

Chapter Notes

As promised, here is the second half of the single chapter I originally intended to post. If you have not been here in a week or so, it might be worth your while to click back to Monday’s update, which was mostly about the press around Anna and Edmund’s union and the pressure the unprepared bride is now facing. But here are a few more stories of love and revenge for you, the world’s very best readers. ♥

I do have a warning that this chapter opens rather brutally. I don’t consider the action described especially graphic, but it could create some discomfort for a more sensible audience – proceed with some digression, and, as always, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aberdeen Declesias did not like dark places.

She stumbled around the cellar and its strange scents, nothing like yet reminding her specifically of the debris left by the earthquake as she bumped into objects she had never seen and thusly could not conceptualise instead turning what Anna had told her were wine caskets over in her mind until she saw the reminds of the house she had grown up in and those decimated around it; the places she had searched for her mother and the baby for weeks until she began looking for their names in registers - again to no success.

At the time they had taken her to live in a tent, the power had not been turned back on in the neighbourhood she had grown up in. Aberdeen still was not sure if it ever had been. She remembered clearly the lanterns in the middle of the tarps made to house six men which she had been made to share with twenty, illuminating the stains that quickly came to cover the white material, creating shadows of her and her displaced countrymen, creating night anew. Those lights, she knew, had been run on battery. She knew this because when they died after a week, the French foreigner aid workers had refused them replacements.

Aberdeen had taken it upon herself the precure these and other provisions she felt her people were being denied, seeing that the student volunteers and those put in charge of organising aid slept far more comfortably, their stomachs full. She was often in their camp, hoping for word of her family, word that had never arrived. Then, after a while, Aberdeen had stopped looking. It was around this
time that she began scouting for supplies.

Three nights after she had spirited light and drinking water back into tent-city (for that which had been provided to her and her compatriots had been distilled), she heard one of their Humvees sputter though the area which a separation of the temporary structures designated as a street. A man jumped out of the passenger side and demanded to know who had stolen from him. He repeated this several times to little understanding – the majority of those displaced having lost their school French to the passage of time. Aberdeen’s mother had worked for the government and, as such, she had been exposed to the language of the bureaucracy since her birth. She excelled in the subject at school, primarily because she knew she would need it to understand common law.

In the camp, she spoke creole.

The man talking did not.

In the light she had stolen, Aberdeen saw girls her age and a little younger exchanging frightened looks with one another, afraid to look at her directly. Dogs began barking which made the smaller children cry.

The man laughed; the sound was worse than the sum of all the cries and screams Aberdeen had heard since the earthquake hit. It was nearly as bad as the ones that then remained absent and had in all of these years since, familiar voices long since forgotten which she was certain she would recognise if only they would once again speak. In the moment that leant the memory however, Aberdeen had been certain that she would be reunited with her family in a moment’s time.

She went out to face the officer calling for her blood in the street, and, in a dialect borrowed from the metropole which she had practiced to perfection returned fire, confessed by way of countering that she had seen them playing cards in well-lit rooms until late in the night, that it was not her that had stolen from him but rather he who was stealing from her and those whom with she shared the camp, taking from all of the plenty which the country he was representing in an official capacity had designated as relief. For this offence, he smacked her as hard as she knew he would.

Aberdeen did not cry out when she fell, refusing to give the cruel man this satisfaction. Nor die she cry when he kicked her with his steal-towed boot, but when the dogs came to taste her spilt blood she could not help but to scream out in fear.

She had never told anyone about this incident. Not even the friendly Americans she met in the hospital to which she was later moved, helpful but for their sense of self-righteousness, sometimes born from dogma, sometimes simply from the box they checked at the Department of Motor Vehicles when they had first been able to register to vote months before. Not even Mary Woodhull, whose dual-lingual dictionary she shared, then stole in hopes of learning enough English to take her to New York, whose outskirts had in the time to elapse since become as much of a nightmare as those of Port-au-Price.

Haiti did not often return to haunt her active mind, but Aberdeen Declesias still hated darkness where she knew there should be light.

She tripped over a box and head herself sniff back a sob. She was fifteen and looking for her mother and the baby in the wreckage where her city had once stood. She was sixteen and petrified that she would be devoured by dogs in front of the other sickly children for the crime of taking back that which she considered to be theirs. She was twenty-two, upstairs at a bachelorette party, tipsy and laughing with her friends over how the plans the British Embassy had drawn up so resembled the wedding in the Twilight franchise that it seemed as though the decorations had been thought up by a twelve-year-old girl; suddenly becoming sober and straight-faced when she saw
the name Rochambeau on the guest list.

She would never forget that name.

But Aberdeen did not say anything to that affect. Instead, she announced she would go help Peggy – who had thankfully been gone for quite some time – locate that bottle of bubbly she had gone looking for. But the cellar was dark and Aberdeen was frightened. At least, she consoled herself, Edmund was as angry at the Embassy as she was. She would talk to him when she got home. Maybe he could get Cornwallis to negotiate on this single detail. It was his wedding, after all, much as the world had want to claim it.

Aberdeen head another small sob and this time knew it was not her own. “Peggy?” she called out, glancing blindly about her.

“Aberdeen?”

“Yeah,” she answered, timidly tiptoeing in the direction she thought to have heard her housemate’s voice. “I came to check on you, everything alright?”

“Of course,” Peggy replied with forced mirth. “Of course, I just – sorry, you’ll excuse me I’m – I’m not – I don’t wish Anna to catch my case of cold feet. I just need a break from the romance for a few more minutes,” she sniffed. “I … did find the champagne if you want to join me.”

“I don’t want to go to the wedding either,” Aberdeen admitted, following the small sound of Peggy’s slight movements until she saw the girl illuminated in the glow of her iPhone. “I don’t think I even want to be ‘ere now.”

“Because of Sally?” Peggy prodded. Aberdeen did not know her former crush’s younger sister well. Mary, too, seemed wary of her, eventually hazarding to ask what her relationship with Mr Simcoe had been like which seemed to find the girl off guard. ‘Brief,’ Sally answered. ‘Hm,’ Mary agreed, though afterwards the two seemed to find each other most disagreeable, sharing smiles only for the sake of the bride. As much as she had pitied Philomena Cheer who had been unable to attend due to a house arrest restricting her to the apartment she paced and Anatevka where she continued to create for paying audiences each evening through her performance, she was now glad John André’s wife was not among their company. Mary’s envy expressed itself in small snorts and snide looks. Peggy’s, Aberdeen was certain, would have otherwise proven far more disquieting for all if faced with a perceived rival.

Outside of the tension between her boss and another bridesmaid, Aberdeen had not given Sally herself more than a passing thought throughout the whole of the evening. Certainly, she had not thought to ask after her brother. Some things, she had come to accept, were better left in dark corners where no one dared venture.

No one save for Peggy Shippen.

“Because of Robert, you mean?” Aberdeen clarified. “No. I … it is the whole seating chart for the reception. Maybe it is Rob, on some level. I’m at a table with his boss, but that is really, that is negligible. It is everything else that ‘as me frightened.”

“I didn’t think you were scared of anything,” Peggy said with a smile that spoke to admiration.

“You would be surprised,” Aberdeen answered awkwardly.

Without knowing why, she sat down beside her new housemate and began to relay her experiences of the younger Rochambeau, letting the darkness take the detail and the tears that escaped her in
relying the narrative until this again felt part of the past rather than the impending future. “It is just so fucked up – all of it. Abigail told me that Edmund asked Anna to marry ‘im so that ee could stay in the US quasi-legal after failing ‘is exams, and this because ‘is parents wouldn’t give ‘im a loan of sixty-thousand – which not to bring politics into it but ‘ow fucked up is that on its own, that the rich can just buy their way out of the process? And it turns out that Mr ‘Ewlett is rich, exceedingly so, at least ‘is family is, and because of this it is all over the papers and Anna feels like she ‘as been deceived. And she ‘as! We all ‘ave by the men in our lives as of late. Mr and Mrs Woodhull as simultaneously cheating on one another, Mr Simcoe tired of this and moved on to someone new – and so quickly, I spent two years thirsting after Robert Townsend only to find ee is a plain-clothes copper – and that no one ‘as warned me of this when there would ‘ave been so many opportunities to do so? It is so fucked up!”

“Maybe they tried,” Peggy suggested, succumbing again to the same sorrow that had plagued her since Cicero’s arrest, since being detained at a police station after she had gone to sign paperwork to give the subsequent protests legal legitimacy. “Everyone tried to warn me about André but I was too much of a fool to listen … or maybe, with Robert I mean, they just didn’t know. The cops here, they are tricky.”

“Someone knew about Rob. They must have. There are not normally secrets in a town the size of Setauket.”

“There is Arnold,” Peggy said. The senator’s name created a haunting chill.

“Yeah. And we are all to be seated by ‘igh ranking officials tied to the investigation of ‘is disappearance. Anna is upset because it seems confirmation of all of the truths Edmund ‘ide pertaining to his status, but I think it is them pretending that we are at a party, when really they mean to use it as an interrogation … no? Maybe? I am lost for the word. Do you watch ‘Game of Thrones’?”

“The Red Wedding?” Peggy laughed unexpectedly. “I mean I doubt highly that the band is going to massacre us all, but I think you may be right, that it is a trap – or,” she paused, “an attempt at entrapment. But maybe that is for the best.”

Aberdeen blinked. Peggy’s smiled did not fade, nor did her sudden enthusiasm as she continued, “Look, all the evidence they have collected about everyone in town seems circumstantial or straight out planted. It is as if they are trying to cover their own crimes, thinking that we are not clever enough to see through it. But maybe … we will have the opportunity to prove as much. I’m at a table with Dr Dandridge – André’s research partner. I’ll ask her about the phone and she will be keen to talk about it, because before I broach the topic I’ll get the French Ambassador to admit that his son defrauded the people of Haiti through ‘charitable’ pursuits, make a recording – same as Cicero and yourself - hopefully bringing him to justice for his embezzlement and blatant cruelty. If I learned one thing this week it is that cell phones really can be turned into weapons. Anyway, Washington relies enough on Rochambeau Sr. that he and Dandridge will be happy to change the subject. They won’t see the rouse.”

“‘Ow do you propose to do this?”

“I was president of my sorority chapter,” Peggy snorted. “I know how to call a bitch out and make it seem like we are just having a heart-to-heart. I was going to go to law school in the fall, well … until André.”

“If you can get evidence against Rochambeau from his father, you still can. If you can get Dandridge or Washington to admit to anything at all -”
Peggy shook her head. “Not if the cops are tying me to Arnold.”

“They can’t! They can trace the IP address back to André -”

“It was sent from an unregistered phone number. Pay as you go, you know?”

Clearly, Aberdeen knew more about such matters than Peggy herself. “But is was sent from New York and as a sorority president you ‘ave an alibi for the time most if not all of the correspondence was taking place and tons and tons of witnesses to corroborate that your being in Pennsylvania,” she argued. “I want to be a lawyer, too.”

“You’ll be a really good one, I’m sure of it.”

“So will you,” Aberdeen tried to assure her, giving Peggy’s hand a small squeeze. From it, all the Pennsylvanian seem to take was pause.

“I couldn’t … I wasn’t helpful when you needed me to be. I was scared and André saw right through it. God I’m such an idiot!” she chastised herself. “You warned me, Abigail warned me – Philomena – who I thank God isn’t here warned me as well but I … I gave myself to him, Aberdeen. Not only have I ruined my life here on earth but premarital sex is a sin. I thought he loved me. That we would run off, elope – Jesus,” she shook her head. “Do you know what he said to me? That the only reason I fancied him to begin with was that he evokes all of the darker sides of myself that I seek to hide and hide from, because he is selfish, manipulative … effeminate. Because he is as close as I dared to come to the fantasies I … and that that is why Arnold -please don’t repeat this,” she whispered, her voice going rasp.

“No,” Aberdeen consented.

“Why Arnold repulses me so with his hyper-masculinity. André was saying that I was, am … queer, somehow – that he suspected it from that start, that I was so dry when he entered me that he … giving that he has the ear of so many in government, people who I know and who I need - Aberdeen, he could ruin what little is left of my reputation if he wanted to. And I know that is nothing compared to what he has put everyone else through recently, but to sit there, pretending I was infatuated with him afterwards … it was awful.”

Awful was an understatement.

Aberdeen though about this for a long while before she spoke. “I think ee is just trying to control you through fear, the way ee does everyone else.”

Peggy looked at her as though the thought had crossed her mind previously, as though she had grounds to dismiss it. “I’ve never had a boyfriend,” Peggy confessed. “Well, except for Freddie, but he hardly counts as we only ‘dated’ to give him cover. His parents work for the RNC – I’m sure you understand. Ironically, they ended up cutting him off after high school despite all of our better efforts – but this because he told them he wanted to go to beauty school instead of Brown,” she snorted. “But between him and André, there was no one. I didn’t even consider that perhaps there ought to have been, well, not until now. Maybe I was too preoccupied with my sorority sisters. What if there really is something wrong with me? What should I -”

“There is nothing ‘wrong’ with you!” Aberdeen interrupted. “Even if everything André implied is true there would not be and I think you’d not have to dig too deeply into yourself to know it to be true, what I say. But it is so: ee probably saw that you were nervous, and, worried that you didn’t fancy ‘im any longer after what ee did – really, as though it were possible that you could – ee tried frightened you by threatening your ideas of Christ and conservatism – that you would provide
him with kisses to ‘prove’ ‘im wrong. ‘Ee is playing you, bitch … why not do the same?’

“I am,” Peggy insisted. “I told him everything that you, Abigail, Mary, John and Edmund told me to. I’ll continue to do so it is just –”

Aberdeen shook her head. She had experiences in such dealings. Whatever André had taken of Peggy’s self-assurance, Aberdeen felt certain that she could steal it back. “I can tell ‘im these things instead. I can also tell ‘im that what ee said to you absolutely broke you, that you are upset beyond consolation, that you can’t see ‘im again. Let ‘im know ee lost something ee seems to ‘old dear through the implementation of ‘is own methods as apparently it is not enough that Mr Joyce is in ‘ospital and Mr ‘Ewlett was too and Mr Arnold is missing, and this all by ‘is ‘and. None of that was personal enough – but ‘is idea of the love ee ‘as for you is. Let’s take that away. See how ee likes it to lose.”

Peggy nodded her consent. “I think you might just be a genius.”

“I think we ought to pop that bottle. My idea is merely a variation on yours,” Aberdeen returned.

Peggy played some music on her phone while they passed the champagne between them, laughing as they exchanged lighter antidotes for their own lives and shared scopes of interest.

“Do you have a signal down here?” Aberdeen asked when the two verged into a conversation about cultural appropriation after she had commented on how much hip-hop Peggy had I her playlist. “I want to introduce you to something I’m clearly not the intended audience for,” she offered diplomatically.

“I have a … bar, you can try,” Peggy said. Aberdeen opened YouTube and found footage of Culper Ring’s latest performance, complete with someone screaming ‘No clit in the pit!’ loud enough that it could be heard over the heavy sounds of everyone on stage preforming simultaneously sections of music that in any other genre would have been solos.

“I think ee was talking to me,” Aberdeen smiled proudly. “I think I broke ‘is nose for it. The punk scene is such a white, masculine place as is – you ‘ave no idea what it is going to shows as a woman or person of colour – I’ve to be ‘arder than all of these little bitches, all of them angry about their big ‘ouses in suburbia and the white-picket fences they stand to inherit from their parents and as such are looking to rebel.”

“You are right,” Peggy gave. “I have no idea what that is like on any level. What the hell is this?” she frowned, her eyes fixed to the screen.

“It is freedom!” Aberdeen explained. “I’m pissed over my white-picket fence in Setauket too, ‘aving moved there from the city - amongst a ‘ost of other, more pressing matters, of course, but I am allowed to be and it is bloody exhilarating, especially giving in normal life, we as women are not permitted to be anything but polite and docile regardless of what is going on with us – internally or externally. I swear you’ll love them live. Culper Ring. Really, it is a pity Mary ‘ates Abe so much right now, I think of us all she could most benefit from a mosh pit.”

“Wait a minute. This is Culper Ring? This the band the British Embassy arranged to play at the wedding? The Lannisters send their regards, indeed,” Peggy rolled her eyes.

“No accounting for taste,” Aberdeen stuck out her tongue.
Effie Gwillim never thought about death yet the abstract acted as a weight against how she met the world. ‘Orphan’ had been her identity since birth and though she had no prior construct in place to conform her behaviour to the pity on constant offer throughout her childhood and adolescence, she had adapted at a very young age and understanding of who else she was likely to lose in an untimely manner and all of her adult relationships carried traces of this reserve.

Naturally, it was upsetting that the twins were in hospital, but to Effie this hardly came as a shock. Eleanor and Eugene had both been plagued by nutritional deficiencies since puberty. From girlhood going forward, Effie had spent much of her mental energy preparing for and thus protecting herself from the eventualities of the pain her friends seemed determined to suffer and inflict.

They would both die if they remained determined to continue in this fashion and that was precisely what made the editor so mad when she saw them broken by what seemed a collective resolve to resist any intervention.

The twins were not martyrs. Effie had travelled to Scotland primarily to disabuse them of this idea the two seemed, certain as she was that any business between Ellie and herself could have just as easily been seen to digitally or at a later date. She hated hospitals, the desperation of entry and the depression from which there seemed no exit. Mary Anne made chit chat in the elevator while Eleanor’s servant remained silent – further reminding her of her last experience in such a setting, of the explanation she had been given by a source she had since lost. Sometimes Effie wondered what would have happened had those who were present to provide for her defence simply had not - if she would be dead, if she would have married, if either fate would have been worse than the world she had been left with. Ignoring Mary Anne, she fixated on Patel, the only member of her rescue party now present, suddenly loathing him with every raw, feral part of herself that became ever harder to suppress as she followed him to the private room in which the twins had taken residence, neither of them wanting to risk a harm not self-inflicted.

Ferguson and Eugene with both sporting patchy stubble and deep cycles beneath eyes that seemed not to have shut in the past fortnight. Eleanor, despite her bruising, looked as lovely as ever, causing Effie to question if the contusions Ferguson did not look as though he had the strength to inflict owed themselves more to centuries of in-breeding as opposed to acute pressure, if John had not given Edmund quite the beating all were so ready to believe, including Effie herself.

She stepped inside and took another survey of the five who kept her company -

How she hated them all.

“I hope you’re happy,” Effie said in lieu of greeting. It was a low, dark sound she did not entirely recognise as having been produced by her person. Fixing her eyes entirely on her roommate, she continued, “In truth, I cannot believe Banastre is dead, but I swear it would kill him if he had to see you like this … here,” she said, shoving an old show box she had carried from the car into the princess’ hands. “I saved these for you. I’ve been saving them since college. You should have read them.”

Ellie opened the box, surveyed its contents and without betraying any further sense of curiosity reburied the dead letters on her nightstand. Ferguson stared at the object with the same heightened interest Effie had rather hoped to evoke in the addressee. Ellie gave the slightest shrug which the inspector understood as permission to examine her personal correspondence. It was as close to a response, Effie realised, as the colonel would ever receive from her hand.
Letting aggravation turn into accusation, Effie resumed in a demanding tone admittedly learnt from her aunt and the admiral serving as her surrogate parents, “Why didn’t you? Why don’t you ever listen? Why do you have to let so much go unsaid?” she spoke as though scolding a small child.

Ellie remained unmoved. “What does it matter now?” she posed. “If I might - did it ever matter especially? In light of what happened I would say that what you said to Banastre was more of a determinant to these recent events than anything you so comfortably accuse me of omitting.”

“He loved you.”

“Is that relevant?” Ellie asked with decided indifference. “Darling this is by no means the conversation I called you here to have but if you are insistent on this as a construct, what Ban loved was narratives that fit neatly into the ideology he adapted to extirpate whatever feelings of guilt he must have surrounding -”

“Actually, it all does feel far more innocuous than one would be tempted to assume,” Ferguson said of the letter he was skimming. “The colonel insinuates that mass soy production in Central America is as detrimental to the larger eco-system as the keeping of livestock for human consumption and seems to have included a list of referenced studies and source material, inviting Ellie to counter. He then goes on to say that such soy is fed to the forces in mince-meat breakfast-sausage, later writing about the developing system of trade-based commerce of available food rations on base – the Americans being notorious for denying their servicemen drink decades after prohibition and that, as such, he a few fellow commanders he names plan to sell shortly after cash takes the place of chocolate and cigarettes – which the Americans have cornered in terms of trade. If successful they will go to Lebanon for a weekend of leave. – A week later from Beirut, he admits that he had been unaware that the people spoke French or that much of the national cuisine caterers to vegans, saying that he would have done better bartering his beer against something more substantive than paper currency or plane tickets. In short, it seems to be a mere record of base observations.”

“Satisfied?” Ellie inquired.

“He loved you,” Effie repeated, hoping for a reaction of any kind. “Read between the lines, he was trying to remind you to fucking eat something so you wouldn’t wind up like this.”

“Oh? I never knew him to be discreet,” Ellie commented. “On that count, let us, rather instead speak of how he responded when you yourself told him that Edna and I are only half-sisters. And this from your place of knowing how many people suffered and died to keep that secret, which I suppose is where the story begins and ends. Some things are simply better left unsaid, Effie,” she laughed without smiling. “Now, did you consider my offer?”

Effie looked at Ferguson nervously. At Mary Anne. At Eugene, wondering if he was fully aware of what his sister’s servant had said to bring her here. She bit her bottom lip.

“I’m not talking about anything illegal,” Ellie raised her arm to her chest in mock-offence.

“I have the funds available. Tell me why. Why now?”

Ellie ticked her tongue against the back of her teeth. “The only thing I find particularly remarkable in all of this messy business is that John André seems to think his idea of being unable to defeat an enemy without becoming that which is combatted is in any way new or notable, that he has furthermore been able to convince the American government - itself a far grander exemplar of the same symptom than my brother and the others you state were targeted, that that which he has proposed by way of this study is worth defending in such a self-defeating manner as kidnapping or
killing Arnold to ensure the bill will make its way through legislature,” Ellie summarised, still with a practiced air of boredom to her voice. “Can we play this game for just a moment, you and I? America has been fighting to establish western style-democracy in the Middle East since we were children, and yet on the home front,” she paused in consideration, trying to correctly recount particulars, “You told me recently that the Republicans – those are the ones who like war, right?”

Effie shook her head, “They both like war, the Republicans are the ones who are honest about it.”

“Ah. And they are the ones you say are going to sweep the coming election – legislature and executive – in an attempt to force change upon the judiciary.”

“They are going to try,” Eugene snorted.

“No,” Effie shook her head, “if the social media algorithms remain unchanged and public interests continues to lead them to the sorts of stories currently generating the most clicks and shares, they are going to succeed.”

Ferguson squinted his scepticism. “For all the money spent in a campaign across the pond you expect us to believe -”

“My office is constantly monitoring reader behaviour,” Effie dismissed, growing ever more impatient with all parties present. “Most media concerns that don’t operate congruently as social activist platforms do the same. The Republicans will win regardless if they are forced by the base to nominate Trump after this current show of primaries or not. And yes, the Court has a great deal more to do with that than the Wall. Ellie, what are you attempting to come to with this?”

“It is about God, isn’t it?” Ellie asked rhetorically. “They want to overturn Rowe to limit abortion access and, by relation, women’s rights, likely quoting Corinthians in the process though they have a Constitution which they hold as sacred as the whole of the Holy Scripture that contradicts it in statute. My point is, when I was a child the Bush Administration made a great show of delivering women from the oppression of theocracy and half a generation and a few wars later the same party is looking to hold half of the population to a standard set some two thousand years ago. But this isn’t hypocritical in any way as Christians press their hands together to pray and Muslims raise theirs,” she demonstrated, making as much of a production of rolling her eyes when she had finished. “It is natural, you become the enemy simply by the act of engaging them. That André has found a way to make this strategically, or, more likely, politically advantageous … I won’t say it is nothing, but that it is worth such a gamble? Especially giving all he and his allies stand to lose in targeting Edmund?”

“It is not nothing! It is John, its Edmund – dear God Ellie! You can pretend to me, to yourself, to whatever your purposes may be that you don’t give a damn about what happened to Ban -”

Finally, she had her engaged. Ellie sat up straight and began darkly, “I’m going to stop you there -”

“But your brother? Your own brother?” Effie continued to attack. Ellie retreated back into herself.

“Oh,” she smiled. “I gather you mean that rhetorically. Would it surprise you to learn that I have organised a response?”

“No,” Effie shook her head in disbelief. “Honestly, no, not in the least, but you could act like you - like this is affecting you -”

“Is it not?” Ellie spat, gesturing vaguely at their surroundings. Effie felt her heart, remembering that for everything else she might be, Eleanor Hewlett was first and foremost one of her oldest
friends. Yet here she was, attacking a girl who had been confined to a hospital bed for no other reason than wanting to know the full extent of her agony was shared. Ellie did not raise her voice but she was angrier than Effie had ever seen her before when she continued, “Elizabeth, I stopped being able to eat after Edmund’s stroke and half a lifetime later I’ve never entirely resumed the practice. When I learned of Ban’s defeat I sobbed myself into a stupor only to wake up here to your – specifically your brash judgement and stroppy speeches that have plagued every sorrow I’ve been made to suffer in the whole of my life. I’m sorry if you find it offensive that I don’t weep before you now, that I don’t console myself with old dispatches you seem to mistake as love letters, which you seek to name as an appropriate way to honour the deceased. That was not our relationship, full stop, no matter how much your readers liked hearing that we two were off in Bali together when we had neither met nor spoken in months. No matter how much I may have wished from time to time that I’d been born into a world where such an affair would even present itself as a possibility. I am my lands, their profits, the protector of my people and nothing more. Certainly not the love-struck twat you seek to paint me as, even now. Algorithms may key you in to who is likely to take the next election, but how very dare you stand before me and suggest that your numbers know my heart? A heart not even I have any privilege to. You have no dominion here, Effie, and no right to imply that I owe you any amount of my private grief.”

“Ellie, I’m sorry I -”

“I’m glad you’re here all the same,” Ellie dismissed her after taking and releasing a deep breath. “We have certain lines of succession to discuss. Does the name Mary Woodhull mean anything to you?”

It did. It took Effie off-guard. “That is um … the girl John says he is having an affair with now that Edmund has made is intentions towards Anna known, right?”

“She is Hamilton’s prime suspect in Senator Arnold’s disappearance,” Ferguson interjected.

“Sorry I – so they are no longer looking into John and Edmund? Actually – can we maybe have the room?” she asked. No one moved to offer her seat or relative seclusion.

“Eugene, as you know, is a party to this negotiation. Mary Anne is acting as my solicitor, and the inspector is bought,” Ellie explained.

“Bought? By which you mean you stole my couch?” Ferguson muttered, either confused or dismayed.

Ellie smiled. “Keep your friends close and your enemies closeer, Effs. As I’ve stated, what I am suggesting isn’t illegal, but if I dismiss Ferguson he will have reason to believe there is something here worthy of his attention. There is not, and though it was not planned, the FBI now has questions for him in reference to the murder of DI Yilmaz, which, though I cannot personally provide answers to, I happen to have at my disposal a sufficient compensation as to satisfy those who would see DI Ferguson fall. But it is all a little tit-for-tat, you see, I need something in exchange for my cooperation which I am more likely to get if I keep my operations open and orderly.”

“What are you after then?” Ferguson wondered.

“The law and order that seems to elapse our regal authority,” Ellie sighed. “Please, be patient and allow me to explain.”

Twelve days prior in the small hours of Monday, the twenty-ninth of February, the French Ambassador to the United States approached his British counterpart with a plan to expedite a UN
exit strategy in West Africa after being made privy a report from Paris placing British troops on a privately owned plantation – functioning, essentially, as a garrison for a cash crop whose illicit sale back on the island provided profits on which a number of health and human services relied.

“Rochambeau approached Cornwallis for, as you know, he sits on Hewlett Industries’ Board of Trustees, giving him limited oversight and access to the charitable outreach branch of company spending that I administer.”

Ferguson snorted at Ellie’s description of her department and looked as though he meant to object, but Oliver Patel, whom Effie gathered he knew in a capacity beyond his official title of private secretary took a half step in the inspector’s direction, silencing any edits he may otherwise have thought to offer.

“Absent of my consultation, Cornwallis stuck a deal with the French to sell land owned in my family name for far below market value, feeling that the British position there was untenable. What I was offered at the time and had no choice but to accept, in addition to the three-point-five million I was told to immediately liquidate, was asylum in England for the hundred or so women and young children displaced by the continued conflict in Mali.”

Eugene took over the narrative. “It took two days for me to process the request, there having been a delay in the initial transfer of funds from the French side. In the interest of expediency, I thought to borrow from the Wessex model of money-laundering -”

“Don’t put it in precisely those terms,” Ellie interrupted, her eyes shifting again to the man most interested in cooperate crimes and corruption.

“Oh, I’ll put it however I want, Love,” Eugene sneered. “Ban had me arrested and beaten, and, though I doubt this was a stated objective of his little operation, all but ensured that I’d miss the birth of my first child - this after all everything he told me when,” he stopped and shook his head. “I’m sorry he is dead, I am, but I don’t owe him shite – certainly not the pretence that the whole of his extended family is not every bit as corrupt as the ones we were all born and/or forced into. But unlike the charities funded form significant portion of my families’ total income, no one else in society is profiting from the Tarletons’ ventures, except, perhaps, the people of Liverpool who I will be only too happy to never hear anything of again so long as I live.

“At any rate, I was not the only one to follow Danny’s lead of snatching up property, though my reasons for doing so had some element of altruism; as you’ve read, I’m sure – and perhaps even printed – I don’t know I haven’t been given a copy of the Mail in the past few days and your app is nothing but advertisements,” Eugene slighted, “my darling brother is getting married. Now you’ve all met Edmund and as such I’m well sure share my scepticism that his bride may well be bought, so I added a bit of incentive, biding out a competitor for the bar Anna worked at, which she now owns outright, or will, rather, when she becomes Anna Hewlett, future duchess-consort, sometime next week.”

“Thursday,” Mary Anne offered. Eugene simply nodded. “This prompted a call from John Graves Simcoe, a school friend who works in personal finance to whom I’d previous entrusted the management of my trust fund – asking that I withdraw my bid, which at that point had already been accepted unbeknownst to me. In the course of the conversation he cued me in to what I might to with the remaining two million I needed to get off the books for reasons of national interests – namely, buying an empty flat off of a Russian oligarch, a sale which he arranged, also bought for Anna Hewlett, who I still half-suspect will never exist. The goal was to get rid of the money. If she should marry my brother, we can explain it as a wedding gift. If not, I imagined it doubtful that anyone would be particularly interested in either property, learning only after that Senator Arnold
was last seen in the self-same bar French blood-money had just bought.”

“The ambassadors’ joint action is new to me, but with reference to Arnold, perhaps you should purchase a subscription to my paper if the app isn’t working for you,” Effie said flatly. At this, Mary Anne made a show of opening a single-serving bag of crisps she had purchased in the cafeteria, popping one in her mouth before extending the offer to Ferguson and Patel, both of who silently declined. Eugene, however, asked. Effie wondered how anyone in their right mind could be so comfortable in such a conversation.

“At the same time this was going on,” Ellie continued, “I was in the car with Tarleton, who advised me that Edmund had become a prime suspect in Senator Arnold’s disappearance – primarily, I am assuming, because of this DeJong Tavern which ultimately French taxpayers bought in an effort to avoid a full on invasion of a former colony, and now through thanks to a general incompetence on the parts of our appointed officials and the pressure they put on my brothers and I is now owned by Anna Hewlett – a non-entity until this coming Thursday.

“Tarleton was heading to Virginia when he had gotten word of this. I believe his current absence of security clearance was overlooked in Cornwallis’ personal interest – knowing that the NYPD would share the confession with those in the power to prosecute, or rather, those who had ought to be empowered to do so in a constitutional system of government,” she said with a nod towards the inspector, “but to spare you my critique, I quickly learned that Edmund and by extension John may have played a role in Arnold’s disappearance and that the wedding gift Eugene had arranged would only increase police suspicion on all counts – the kidnapping, the backroom politics, all of it.”

“So, she called me right before boarding and I did the only thing I could do, expecting that I would never make my meeting in Copenhagen – and rang up a French columnist who hates both me and Fabienne and told him and gave him a story explaining my absence from public life for an undetermined period,” Eugene said. “I, or Marat, or some unnatural combination of both given narratives was satisfactory enough to the press that no one sought to investigate my absence. The deal in Denmark fell through and as of this morning I’ve come to learn that I have as such been made redundant. Which, in short, is why you are going to pay me current rates for the shares of my father’s company I am due to receive when he dies or steps down. They will be transferred to you retroactively.”

“How do you seek to put any of this on me?” Effie demanded, hoping as soon as she had spoken that Ellie would not answer. The philanthropic princess had alluded to the article that had cost Effie’s own father his life in the onset of the conversation. Ferguson, perhaps distracted by Tarleton’s warfront correspondence, had not made anything of it at the time. Effie looked at him again, wondering how long this grace would last.

“They will be transferred to you in the near future, as will control of my own fifteen percent inheritance … in a roundabout way,” Ellie attempted to assure her. Effie merely waited for the bomb to fall. “You see I don’t need this money and, like Gene and Edmund, want as little to do with the family as can be arranged, but with Ban’s untimely death … it seems I have to take measures to ensure that his daughters are provided for. Marie is my goddaughter, after all, and I hold Banina and her mother Kolina just as dear. Being minors, the girls need someone to represent their interests, and my appointing you to act in this facility insofar as their company stakes are in question until such time as their respective twenty-fifth birthdays as I’ve no interest whatsoever in extending myself in that specific capacity … why,” she blinked as if to feign surprise, “that puts you at fifty-two percent ownership, though part of it be only custodial. You’ll have a clear majority on the board – you be the chairman, Effie, and can see Cornwallis dismissed should you see fit,” she smiled. “You finally have your crown, and oddly enough, you’ve John’s latest rebound, Mrs Mary Woodhull to thank for it, which, as it happens I’ve been able to arrange for you to do in
person late next week.”

“What? Ellie, with respect -”

At last, Ferguson spoke. “To ease your distrust, I have enough evidence against the brothers Hewlett – Edmund and Edward, that is, to warrant immediate removal from office should the Crown be want to act. Assuming the Windsors continue to see it in their interest to bestow enough privilege on the Hewletts to keep them from seeking direct power in Scotland, for which through Edna’s efforts they already have the backing of parliament and clan leadership, the threat now exists that I will be forcibly removed from my post in connection to what may become an investigation into the murder of DI Yilmaz … being that Eleanor arranged for my prints to be found on documents linking Pfizer to the Five Families,” he paused and shifted to his favourite foe, “Don’t look at me like you don’t know that I can see right through you.” Ferguson shook his head free of whatever sentiment he held towards her and continued, “Now, either the elder Edmund can step down from the Board of Directors in favour of his children who he misused as minors in order to hold that position, or I can surrender all of my findings to my replacement, who is unlikely to share my personal history with the whole family, giving more weight to the documents I was able to uncover with the help of Edna and Eleanor when turned over to prosecution. It is far from justice, but it is as close as we mere mortals will ever be able to approach.”

“If exposed, my father’s bad business practices would set stock prices into freefall to no one’s benefit. Job loss at such a tremendous scale would have a ripple effect throughout the entire economy. This avenges all aggrieved parties without creating a disastrous effect on the workforce -”

“Which means that in the end bloody Ban Tarleton gets what he wants as per usual,” Eugene rolled his eyes.

“Put another way,” Effie said, “finding no other roads open, the six of you if we are including Mary Woodhull as a party to this venture – are blackmailing the realm’s largest landowner as well as the owner of a highly profitable company as a means of punishment for a crime you can’t bring to court? And I am meant to legitimise it?”

“It serves neither you nor I to get into the grounds of the matter,” Ellie seemed to caution, “but I don’t think there are many who want to see my father and uncle face some form of justice as much as you must.”

“Plus, you can fire the CEO and put someone in his place who understands the North American markets to which we are planning to expand,” Eugene attempted to incentivise. “I have a short list that should prove to your liking. A very short list.”

Effie was sure it consisted of but a single name. They truly meant to punish everyone to have ever wronged her. They could not know how much this hurt to hear.

“Is that to imply that Mrs Woodhull is seeking some personal enrichment? Are she and John so involved that -”

“Aren’t we all trying to better our lots in some fashion?” Ellie mused. “But no, it is not what you think. Things are ended between she and John, at least romantically. I mean I imagine they are both guilty of kidnapping or murdering Senator Arnold but that is a separate matter, one I’m more than happy to leave fully in police hands. In terms of enrichment … the woman is employed by UNICEF as its deputy public relations director. She needed to create a cover for a school that would have existed but for funds embezzled by her superiors and wanted to know if I had pupils that could be provided to that end. Cornwallis, who by every account seems to content himself with
idleness, failed to provide on the protection he offered the women and children I previously housed, fed and educated, so I entrusted them to her organization’s care, having had no other solution. In exchange for this, Mary told me what John apparently gathered from Ban shortly before his death and offered me a few suggestions on how to clean up a mess, essentially amounting to putting company control in your capable hands, where your late father wanted it since before either of our respective sagas began. Does that satisfy you?”

“Alright,” Effie consented.

“Good, I’ll draw up all of the paperwork as it pertains to Mary Elizabeth Robinson and Banina Georgina Tarleton,” Mary Anne announced, rising from the stool in which she had been sitting, “and Effie, if you just want to swing by my Edinburgh office before taking your leave from us – I plan to stay up north through the Easter holiday.”

Ellie blinked. “Speaking of Georgie, I really expected her mum to be back by now with lunch. Fergs, would you be a love and see if they have any fruits or salad in the cafeteria downstairs? I’ll cover the cost.”

“I’m not a fool, Ells, but if I do your bidding and leave this room you are going to make an attempt to eat whatever I return with.”

“Fergs? Ells?” Effie wondered at the familiarity, questioning if the hate-sex she had long expected the inspector of desperately wanting to have with her friend had at last materialized, resenting him all the more for this product of her mind.

“So long as ‘whatever’ contains no animal products you have my word,” Ellie gave. “Patel, will you also do me a favour and fetch Percy from wherever it is he is hiding, I think the time has come for me to make that introduction we discussed. Effie,” she said when the three had left the room, “I realise I’m already asking a lot of you, but I find I have to beg another favour.”

“Why am I not surprised?”

“Eugene will have enough to purchase his full freedom from our family, Ferguson gets his approximation of justice, Mary Anne gets the fee we previously agreed on – you’ll get to be on the cover of Forbes, The Economist, Business Weekly – all of them I imagine, for your coup. Mary Woodhull will likely get a promotion for her role in this, but happy though I am to use my influence to facilitate these dealings, I feel as though I’ve been deeply wrong by our embassy among many others all currently located across the pond and I want revenge, though, at present I find myself unable to exact it personally. To that end I am prepared to offer The Daily Mail exclusive press coverage of my brother’s wedding, as long as you are willing to personally accompany whatever sized team you wish to send. Of course, I’ll provide protection.”

“And what exactly do you expect me to do when there?”

“To cover the event. Nothing more. Enjoy the party. I’m merely asking that you attend.”

“Why?”

“So that I have an excuse to send my new bodyguard overseas,” she smiled the way a politician might, letting the expression fade just as quickly as it came. “You made a lot of accusations earlier against my own heart, would it please you somehow to have them verified? I love my brother, Effie, and yes, if it please the court, I loved Ban far more than I recognise was proper or would ever have been able to realise. I don’t know exactly who is to blame for his demise but I find the news has me stimulated to a vindictive asperity not easily restrained.”
“What do you mean to do?”

"Caedite eos. Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius,” Ellie grinned, her narrowed eyes growing blacker with each dead word she uttered. “Come, my dear, was there really ever a question?”

When the door opened and Percy Nantaba introduced himself, Effie Gwillim was sure that the cartel boss who employed him truly did mean to slaughter everyone at the feast. Her only hope of stopping it would be in uncovering the truth before this man could be given orders to act.

Abigail Ingram left early, which was to say that she left. The other bridesmaids were staying overnight, but Abigail, hesitant to leave her son overnight with friends in Setauket, had taken him with her upstate, having arranged to use Anna’s prepaid hotel room for the night’s housing.

Cicero had spent the day with Jordan, who, despite his justifiable coldness towards her seemed more than happy to spend time with her little boy, and Cicero, or so Abigail felt assured, may well benefit from being around the man who had so long served the role of father in his life after the trauma he had endured days before. It was slightly after nine when she returned to the Hilton Garden Inn in an Uber she refused to let Anna pay for; to her surprise, Jordan had already sent her boy to bed.

“It is his bedtime,” he shrugged when he opened the door, handing her the extra key card rather than inviting her in.

“I thought you would both take advantage of the freedom,” she hazarded to smile, noting the stains on the bandage covering her former lover’s hand, rested on the doorframe as though Jordan were making a conscious effort to appear casual in her presence. Abigail suddenly found herself wishing he would instead pull her inside and be as rough with her as he said he had been with a wall outside the station after the inquiry had ended.

“Don’t worry, he is tuckered out. I think he is happy for the excuse my enforcement of your normal rule gave him to retire. He is just next door I have the spare key card -”

“What all did you boys get into today?” Abigail asked, pushing her way past him and taking a seat at the side of his bed. “Can we … just hang out for a few minutes?”

“Of course,” Jordan consented as he began a losing struggle against a smile, surrendering his guard all the more as he recounted the day. “Um, Cicero was a little mad in the morning in the morning when you dropped him off that Coach Simcoe didn’t want him playing in today’s match on account of his injuries. It was impossible to make him understand that that was the right call, so rather than argue the matter, I took him up to The Irish to watch the Prem – we took a walk around town afterwards and then went back for lunch and I tried to sell him for maybe the thousandth time on Juventus, but apparently Edmund Hewlett takes umbrage with club management and – yeah. It was a dull fixture anyway, we left at half time but the thing ended nil-nil.”

“That means neither side scored right?” she asked. How could I have ever let you leave, she meant.

He sat down beside her. “Yeah. After that we went back to the hotel, went for a swim, I spent about two hours trying to teach him how to shoot a three pointer on the basketball court and then went to see if he would have more luck at the arcade. I slayed at Hoop Fever and Air Hockey but he had me at Skeeball and Whack-a-Mole, so in the end we called it even, ordered a pizza from the
place next door and came back here watched some kid’s show on Nickelodeon while we ate and 
then called it a night.”

“Thank you,” Abigail said. “I don’t know if Edmund was also having his stag-do today, but -”

“My pleasure, truly.”

“Jordan, um … really I,” Abigail stopped, suddenly unsure of what she wished to say: That she was 
sorry? That she was grateful? That she missed him? That she had been wrong to walk away from 
all that they had been?

Uncertain of where to start, she blurted out, “I saw the seating arrangement the powers that be drew 
up for the wedding. We are not at the same table.”

“Oh,” was all he offered in response.

“Maybe you will still save a dance for me?” she tried.

“Do I have to wait until Thursday?” he surprised her with a teasing smile.

Before Abigail knew it, she was naked in Jordan’s hotel sheets with her legs wrapped around him 
as he pressed his shaft deeper and deeper still as though he had the intent to impale. Drops of his 
sweat found their way past her lips as she moaned his name out in pleasure. His hands, broken and 
bandaged after meeting a brick wall in a moment of frustration following her son’s arrest, were 
braced against the headboard until the piece could not long keep his pace, breaking from the 
screws that attached it to the bedframe. She begged him not to stop. He obeyed.

The damage, he laughed, was already done.

The night passed in such fashion before Abigail discovered just how reaching these words would 
prove.

When morning light began to fill the room they had shared, nothing felt broken beyond repair. 
Jordan loved her still as she loved him. They rest, Abigail was certain in these small moments, 
could surely be worked out.

As had always been their routine, Abigail took it upon herself to prepared the coffee whilst Jordan, 
groggy, struggled against the weight of his eyelids and the sheets in which they had slept. While 
she filled the canister with water from the bathroom faucet, she heard him turn on the news.
Abigail smiled at herself in the mirror, naked but for the shirt she had stolen from the floor, feeling 
that her life was waiting for her precisely where she left it before fear had tried to take it away.

Soon, she told herself, this would all be over.

Jordan would come back to Brooklyn and they would be the family she had always imagined them 
becoming.

When she sashayed out of the bathroom, however, she heard her lover speak and her infatuation 
ended as quickly as it had been renewed.

“Holy shit,” Jordan muttered, eyes fixed to the screen. “I have to call Ben.”

“Tallmadge?” Abigail clarified, unsure of how she even got the word out, such was her shock.

He continued to reach for his mobile. “Abby – his former sergeant was murdered yesterday in an
attack intended for him, it is all over the news. I’ve known him forever. I have to check up on him.”

“Jordan – his men could have killed my boy! And you want to call him to see if he is alright? Are you fucking kidding me right now?” she demanded, growing erratic.

“Abby, he resigned over the incident, he is or … was a friend. My parents go to his father’s church, I can’t just -”

“You know what,” Abigail decaled as she began collecting her clothing from the floor over which it was strewn, moving in deliberate, hard stomps. “I can’t either. Last night was a mistake.”

“Abby, please just -”

The picture of DI Yilmaz on the television faded to one of the man whom she had replaced. On the opposites side of the split screen, over a caption reading ‘LIVE’ in regard to coverage around a death, 1PP could be seen, entirely evacuated blocked off on the street, ashes over what had once been a corner office on the second floor. All Abigail saw in these images was the debris that had fallen from Cicero’s hair when Coach Simcoe had teased him during his visit to the ER, rustling bits of the Hamiltons’ ceiling free from her son’s his tight curls.

“He sent my son to hospital, I don’t see that there is anything more to discuss. If you call your ‘friend’, delete my number. Your choice.”

Chapter End Notes

We need to talk about this Nations League. I’m having an ethical/intellectual dilemma around the new system of international qualifiers – wanting to boycott it because FIFA does. not. need. more. money. and the US/Canada/Mexico hosted World Cup will essentially be open to any country who can front the transportation costs. But alas! I have absolutely no willpower with which to take a stand and will probably spend the weekend complaining about concept and corruption until Holland finds an opener and the conversation shifts back to Germany’s poor form. You feel me?

No?

Right. You are here for notes. It is cool, we can talk about the chapter, too.

Culture:

Anatevka is the setting of the musical Fiddler on the Roof. It also happens to be the German title of the production.

Quotes:

“The Lannisters send their regards,” was what was spoken by Roose Bolton in season three, episode nine of HBO’s Game of Thrones. In the books (A Strom of Swords to be specific) the quote is instead "Jaime Lannister sends his regards" playing into the Lady Stoneheart sub-plot the series cut for no discernible reason.

"Caedite eos. Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius.” is commonly translated as “Kill
them all and let God sort them out” and is attributed to Papal legate and Cistercian abbot Arnaud Amalric prior to massacre at Béziers, the first major military action of the Albigensian Crusade (also known as the Cathar Crusade, the Cathars being Gnostic revivialist whose lasting legacy was to have inspired and given example to the word genocide, first coined eight centuries later.) In an example of how history bleeds into other disciplines, I know too much about this conflict because the Bishop of St Denis to that time was something of a maths nerd who worked out improvements to existing weaponry and thus made a small contribution to practical geometry. (Moral of the story: If you are ever siting in a survey course wondering ‘how will I use this in real life?’ I guess just wait for a religious schism in southern France. ;)

“[…] stimulated to a vindictive asperity not easily restrained.” is the quote from A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, in the Southern Provinces of North America* that every biographer makes use of in discussing the Battle of Waxhaws, where, thinking their commander dead, Tarleton’s men massacred troops trying to surrender giving rise to his name becoming synonymous with a refusal to take prisoners. And several chapters after trapping the character under a dead horse as it were, I finally worked it in. Obligation fulfilled. We can all go home now.

*If lengthy notes sections that are as readable as the chapters themselves happen to be your thing, boy oh boy, do I have a book rec for you.

That is it for my notes though. I guess we will meet again sometime after the international break!

Up Next: Ben learns that surrendering his badge saved his life, Caleb learns Abe’s role in Arnold’s kidnapping, Abe confronts the other Robert who has wronged him as of recent and days before her wedding, Anna is left with an impossible choice. It is an all-Culper chapter, baby! Three guesses on to what noun I’ll elect to have follow the definite article -
The Ring

Chapter Summary

Robert Townsend solves a mystery is not a murder, teaming up with Abe, Ben, Caleb and Anna to pinpoint who has the most to gain from Arnold’s continued absence from the political stage. Philomena Cheer is arrested and detained. A plot is hatched to confront several enemies within at a wedding reception, but the bride-to-be wants no part in it.

Chapter Notes

So for context, probably like most of my readers, I’m in a number of email chains and WhatsApp groups around the 18th century. On the American Revolution, my little brother came at me this week with ‘of course you are more interested in the British lines, you are a euro-centric snob’ and then he went on with accusations of my also being ‘arrogant’ and ‘superficial’ (but when this particularly heated conversation about the Southern Theatre inevitably turned into a discussion on … ahem … the Super League (not ‘Lig’) I got him to admit that I likely know more about sport and English spellings … ;) Ah. I don’t know. He was probably accurate on all other counts, which is probably why I am none too keen on this chapter –

Well. Almost. Not quite. While my euro-centric snobbery may play a part, I consider every POV presented here among the saddest so far and getting it all down proved rather difficult for me as a writer. I suppose that is to be expected this close to the climax. Any road, though I feel this reads like a 10,000-word deficit, I hope you enjoy. (At least I was able to spare you Abe’s direct perspective! We can still be friends, right?)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They were twelve altogether; red, long-stemmed, adorned with white sprigs of baby’s breath that worked against the roses like a delicate strand of pearls. Philomena Cheer had displayed the flowers in the middle of a kitchen table that went otherwise unused days before after she had found them in her dressing room. ‘Not those,’ her lover had bidden her, watching on from the doorframe as Philomena collected cards from within the flowers as she did ever night in order to write thank you notes before sending the bouquets themselves to a local children’s hospital. ‘Those are from me.’ They had made her happy until she had taken them home, placed them in a vase and removed the short missive that spoke of a move, words that served to paralyse when she saw them in writing.

On Saturday afternoon, Philomena sat at the table with the roses wishing they would wilt.

She was not angry with Charles, but the flowers he had given her on the same day she had filed for divorce felt all too intrusive on their own merits.
She had not brought home a bouquet from backstage since her name had first appeared in a Playbill more than a decade before.

They did not belong here in this flat.

And, as the card they contained reminded, neither did she.

Philomena sipped her camomile in the afternoon hour that constituted her morning, considering making a phone call to her understudy in an atypical episode of stage fright. It was this same wish for avoidance, however, that stopped her fingers when she reached for the phone. Anna Strong was having her hen-do; Philomena realised that were she not working tonight, she would have no valid reason not to attend.

She was no more upset with Anna and the other bridesmaids than she was with Charles or any other member of the cast and crew. Philomena, had she a mind to blame the mood on anyone, might have consciously considered how sorely disappointed she was in herself. She felt anxious before the curtain opening on this coming act of her adult life, playing a role entirely hers to create. Previously, she had paid her rent and paved her way pretending to be a recovering drug addict for Robert Rogers and a happy bride for John André, or rather, for the state institutions these men needed to convince to their own selfish ends.

Sometimes, Philomena still felt lost in her latest act.

Her heart suddenly ached for her husband as her body began to recall the pressure of his on the last night they had spent together as she glanced about at things familiar, hoping to forget the roses and her anger at their intrusion, at the reminder they served that so much of what she relied on was an illusion. A final performance lingered in the room, in the air, in the now-stale scent of fire and smoke, more fitting of this set then the flowers and their false promises.

She loved Charles Lee. It just happened that he loved her more.

Without much consideration, Philomena pulled the vase from the table and carried it back into the kitchen with her used tea mug, cutting her hands on thorns as she struggled to push the flowers down into the rubbish bin against the rest of its waste, letting out a small cry of pain that turned into a mournful wail when it occurred to her that she had destroyed something beautiful upon seeing the delicate petals broken along with her estranged husband’s liquor bottles and the mundane remnants of modern consumer culture - Kosher packaging that substituted more substantive forms of religious practice. She snorted back a bitter laugh, remembering John’s usual ridicule around her grocery store shopping cart as it compared to the goy’s seemingly earnest attempts at the Tanakh when over-eager to impress (or impress upon) any number of people of his chosen profession and her given faith.

He had never converted but liked to play at the part, criticising her weak expressions of a culture he himself did not share.

How she had hated him for it.

Sometimes Philomena would amuse herself, speaking Yiddish with John’s guests as he tried to follow along from the German oral overlap, forgetting his grammar entirely as he worked to incorporate words unshared, words she had no evidence to suggest he truly understood as he sat with a wry smile, with his underserved satisfaction of self. It was the same look he gave her after sex on those increasingly rare evenings where he was sober enough to maintain an erection. Philomena’s forced moans of ‘pleasure’ had been another mockery which the man who had married her fame and her name was himself simultaneously too daft and too vain to appreciate for
what they were.

John André had never appreciated her at all.

He had never even appreciated the various women he wanted her to be in fitting with the whims he mistook as intellectual interests or high-minded ideals, instead, seeking out or merely inventing other versions.

Sometimes she smelled her perfume on his neck, which John justified wearing in a want to feel closer to her. To feel her beneath his skin. She imagined he squeezed himself into her slips and dresses when she left for the evening and he drank at home, pretending in these lonely hours to be her or Peggy or possibly hundreds of other women he vaguely resembled with his now-long blonde locks and practiced looks of boredom. John André was the most conceited man she had ever known. He was also the most insecure. He spoke multiple languages but could speak of no real friends; held multiple post doctorate degrees in psychology but did not seem to know himself at all – or have any desire to.

He contented himself with pretending.

But then, so did she.

Philomena Cheer could not bring herself to look away from the broken bouquet, unsure if she could truly be content with someone as confident as Charles Lee after having been or at least having represented an unrealizable ideal to a weak, cowardly man for so long. She inhaled the last lingers of the smoke she had started, of the sketch John had made of her body when she had been much younger and had more recently marred with Peggy Shippen’s pretty face - a sketch that had really always been of him. She pictured him inventing the girl for poor Senator Arnold, or for himself, wondering if he was able to justify this as professionalism, as a means to an end; if part of him knew that this entire scheme was another misguided effort on his part to seem someone worthy of being loved.

Did he somehow not know that everyone struggled with the same?

Philomena felt a twinge of jealousy as she thought of Arnold, Peggy, John and how she herself fit or did not into this constellation, fearing she fell only loosely around the affair the way her clothes sometimes wore when her husband secretly borrowed them in her absence. Nothing about the situation he had created surprised her particularly, but the thought that she was no longer his muse stung more than she knew it should. She had met Peggy in passing and seen her a few times on the news since. The girl seemed to have enough natural charm about her to disguise an inner ire were one not actively looking for it. Philomena wondered to what extent her estranged husband had drawn this anger out in however he sought to blame his deficiencies on Peggy when they inevitably presented themselves in his efforts towards intimacy. She wondered if John better loved the idea of Arnold instead, if it was easier to be himself with the senator while hiding behind a screen, if her husband shared in her secret sensation of only truly knowing oneself and what one wanted when pretending to be someone else entirely.

Philomena had fallen in love with Charles on-stage long before ever letting him hold her off-set.

She stared at the flowers, half-aware that she had never really let the man she was prepared to leave her husband for into her life at all. She did not know if she was truly ready for something real. Her marriage had been a mirage for passers-by, for paperwork and for an occasional and altogether ordinary fuck. Charles Lee would likely ask her to marry him within the next few months and she would likely accept. They would lay in the bed they would soon share and laugh at the fanfiction teenage theatre nerds had written about them, find the accounts they themselves had
posted under when they had been fourteen and chasing roles in school productions and then
laughingly try to imitate the more elaborate phantasies of their over-eager virgin minds. They
would file their taxes together. They would fight over wallpaper and whose turn it was to take the
dogs for a walk. It would not be the way it was now. It would not even be the way she imagined it.
It would be real. Philomena worried that after a few years had passed, she would have to consider
that that which she had with John André had once been as well.

Their set still stood and even in the absence of her husband, his costumes and his props, there was
simply no space for flowers in this flat; sad, though Philomena was, to see stems and petals
separated by ordinary objects of personal preference but no symbolic value.

She returned to the table, took her phone from it and was in the process of placing an order to have
flowers delivered to Charles’s dressing room in reciprocation and replacement when her doorbell
rang. She frowned, glancing at the time on her phone. It seemed late for a delivery and she was not
expecting company. Philomena pulled her still-unwashed hair back into a loose bun, retied her
bathrobe and walked to the door pressing for the outside speaker before hearing a knock. She took
a step back. Her building was private. No one could enter from the outside without giving address
and reception always rang on the landline before sending anyone up.

“Philomena Freud?” a voice echoed through the outer wall, “FBI. We have a warrant to search
your property.”

She opened the door with measured hesitation, returning to the night she had at her husband’s
bidding pretended to be Peggy Shippen on Senator Arnold’s answering machine. John had been
using a burner for this communication – the cops would need to have found it in order to trace it,
and even then, such would have proven difficult without a signed contract. A thousand scenarios
flooded her mind as a ginger with round cheeks and an unplaceable accent introduced himself in a
string of acronyms. Behind him stood his boss, a man who needed no introduction whatsoever.

“Your excellency,” Philomena choked, bowing her head slightly as she spoke, searching it for
protocol, finding herself lost.

“Ms Freud,” George Washington greeted formally, extending his hand and squeezing hers in a
manner that failed to distinguish itself between friendly gesture and power-play. “We have reason
to believe that you are presently storing a vehicle for a Mr Robert Rogers in your building’s private
parking garage. Is that accurate?”

It was. It was also the furthest thing from that which she had expected and subconsciously
prepared for. Philomena shook her head in disbelief rather than denial. “I – I’m sorry,” she found
herself stammering, “I know the tags are expired, but I didn’t think – the truck isn’t in use and I
didn’t think it was a crime to hold on to it until Robbie can make whatever repairs necessary for the
state inspection. I offered to pay and really if I had known it was illegal even when parked I would
have insisted -”

“Miss Cheer, forgive me, Ms Freud,” the agent interrupted. He had introduced himself as
Hamilton, or he had not and she was already sour over a Tony Award she well suspected she would
not be taking home this year. Hamilton. She turned the name over in her mind, wondering where
else she had heard it recently, if she should make an effort to take shelter from him in subtle
distance as he himself seemed to create with regard to Washington. Feeling her cue, she corrected
her choreography, transferring her weight from her toes to her heels as she told him, “Cheer is my
stage name. It is just the English version of Freud. Both are fine.”

“Ms Freud, you are not in trouble,” Washington told her in a forced fatherly tone. “We simply need
access to the vehicle. We believe it to have been used in a recent crime.”
Philomena gaped. “No that is impossible. Robbie wouldn’t -” she stopped against all that she recognised as evidence to the contrary. She felt Washington’s hand on her shoulder as she began to cry. “I didn’t - I swear I didn’t … it didn’t ever occur to me -”

“I know this has been a hard week for you -” Hamilton tried.

“Senator Arnold -” Philomena continued, following fears she had not known herself to hold. Washington took his hand back, his ever-ridged posture growing stiffer as he spoke. “Ms Freud, the tip off we received is not related to Arnold directly, but if you have any information, I believe it to be in everyone’s best interest for you to accompany my Assistant Director back to base.”

She barely heard him. “John would … no. No, I can accept – I mean I can’t accept but I can believe that he might have run experiments on that soccer team of his for the senator, that he’d play at Miss Shippen in all possible manners, but Robert Rogers is his best friend – his only friend, he would never involve him - it is impossible. It is impossible. Robert is too smart for John’s tricks. He can be a bit of a scoundrel, but he would not let himself be manipulated into … was it, was it an accident?” she asked almost hopefully. “Is that why the truck can’t pass inspection? Was Arnold -”

Philomena stammered, speculated, sobbed at the seeming extent to which she was more than wilfully ignorant. Robert Rogers was her friend, too, and had been for far longer than he had been her husband’s. She considered that she had it all wrong, that Robert had called John after a minor roadside altercation with substantial consequence and that everything her husband had said and done since had been to lend the man cover. This theory did not consider or contend with the extent to which John had previously been in communication with Arnold, with his work at Columbia or Dr Dandridge convincing him to commit himself to a highly secure mental health facility, but it came as comfort, cold as she could acknowledge that sounding. Philomena continued to ramble, barely coherent as she sought any sign of confirmation in the expressionless faces for her company. Eventually, ADIC Hamilton interrupted after receiving a slight nod from Washington.

“Philomena Freud, you have the right to remain silent. Anything you say will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to have an attorney. If you cannot -”

She shook her head again, herself still mistaking shock for sense. “I can’t call her … I - my lawyer is hosting her bachelorette party tonight, where I should, where I would be if Charles hadn’t – the flowers. Mr Hamilton, forget my attorney. If I’m being arrested, you have to allow me ring my understudy.”

Force of habit found him on the corner he had called home until quite recently. In New York City, buildings without the usual indications of life and commerce were eerie all unto themselves, at Rivington’s Corner, however, it was the light that had yet to be turned off that pulled at him like a black hole on the busy street.

The Newsroom had been closed for the past week, as had the local paper that had leant the restaurant its location and name. Robert Townsend had been part of an undercover operation that had cumulated in a raid upon his gathering enough evidence to arrest the parties responsible for printing counterfeit currency, most of which had wound up under the floor boards of those houses in North Korea that were situated along the Chinese boarder – the life savings of entire families hoping to eventually flee oppression or inflation.

Robert had been recruited by the FBI’s monetary crimes division before graduating university. Ten
years into the job, he did not feel much of anything around the assignment – neither the one he had recently completed nor that which had found its way to his desk that same morning, though as with anything else he had ever worked on for the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the facts would long lurk in his absent mind, troubling him in moments that might otherwise lend themselves to life.

He knew, for instance, that he had turned off the light in his old flat prior to leaving it stripped of any sign of him.

He also knew who might still have a spare key.

Robert found parking five blocks from the door, better, he noted on the walk back to his former residence than he had ever happened upon while living and working in the building. When he entered the back-stairwell, he could hear the very voice he had anticipated rehearsing for the same conversation Robert had also been preparing himself for over the course of the last uncomfortable week. The low-level field agent expected that Aberdeen Declesias had informed on him to her employers after her interrogation with Agents Cato and Mulligan as had been ADIC Hamilton’s plan.

Though he had seen the logic to it, the operation could not have come at a worse time for Robert, readying as he had been to move in on The Rivington Gazette, worried that his cover would be completely blown.

Hamilton had assured him that as Mary Woodhull was being considered as a primary suspect in the Arnold Investigation no confrontation would come immediately, and, in this respect, the ADIC had proven correct over the course of the days of particular concern. Still, Robert knew what awaited him to be fully deserved as he listened to slurs against his person, profession and religious confession from the base of a set of stairs given to creaking sounds. He, ‘the Quaker shite’ in question, hazarded the ascent. Abe either did not hear coming him over his own frustrated ire and desperation or had no working concept of the way voices were given to carry.

When Robert opened the door, Abe seemed altogether unaware of his present company, continuing to speak to absent parties – his father, his housemate – curiously, no one to whom Robert knew his friend to be particularly close with.

He was a difficult sight to behold.

Although he had always been thin, Abe looked as though it had been days since he had eaten and longer still since he had last slept; a cut, perhaps one requiring medical attention, ran the width of his forehead. Abruptly, Abe stopped pacing the small room, empty but for a plastic barrel of white paint and a roller that looked to have since served the purpose of erasing two years’ worth of organised evidence from Robert’s old living room wall. The short man stood before him, looking perplexed, angered and relieved all at once.

“I’d offer you a seat, but,” Robert started. Stopped. “I was on the way to my father’s when I saw the light was on. If you want, we could … Sally is up in Albany and the old man retires early -”

“Is Sally even your sister or does she wear a badge, too? I thought Quakers didn’t carry guns -” Abe began to ramble.

Robert removed his service weapon from the holster hidden by his jacket. “It isn’t loaded,” he said, demonstrating the empty revolver by spinning it for inspection. “Here.”
Abe nodded, electing to take a seat against the back wall rather the weapon he had been presented. “I’ve nowhere else to go,” he told Robert in defeat. “I never thought I would see you again and—”

“You never thought you would see me again?” the agent tried to smile. “We have a gig this coming Thursday – Anna’s wedding, remember?”

“The wedding. The wedding! I don’t even know your real name.”

“It is Robert Townsend. Here, if you don’t believe me,” he produced his identification badge as took a seat beside him.

“You were working undercover with your real name?” Abe asked as he studied to contents of Robert’s wallet.

“For the kind of work I engage in for the FBI, an alias isn’t necessary. I left school a month prior to graduation so a series of medial jobs doesn’t attract the attention of the algorithms most HR departments use in their hiring process. I am my own perfect alibi.”

“The hotel where you were working when we met—” Abe began to inquire.

“That was a cover, too.”

“What for?”

“I’m afraid I am not at liberty to say, he paused. Considered. “I think you and I need to have a talk about my current assignment, however.”

What little colour contained in Abe’s face faded. “Senator Arnold?” he asked.


Abe continued to stare at the badge that had recently come between them. “Rob there is something I have to tell you. I need your help more than you can possibly know.”

“Abe, your wife—” Robert stared. As soon as the words left his lips, he knew he had spoken them in error. ADIC Hamilton had spoken at the lengths he was given to by the folly of his character over the importance of assuring Abraham Woodhull that he still had many friends, that Robert Townsend was still among them, acronym or not. The terrible reality in all of this was that as had been the case with each and every prior assignment, little acting was required. Robert truly did consider Abe a friend, which made his job difficult in ways he had never found it before for empathy failed his nature. He saw the world as a series of facts sorted into the laws which society had agreed upon for its governance. As such, he had to entertain the possibility that the Woodhulls were criminals. In the case of Abe, this was as impossible as it was easy. Robert was simply too close to his target. Hamilton told him not to fire a point-blank shot. ‘Your wife’ had proven a devastating hit.

“Mary has nothing to do with this,” Abe exclaimed, “Dear God I am just trying to keep her and Sprout safe. I can’t … I can’t do this. I can’t even go home to see them; the NYPD is looking for me and I – I don’t know anything. I don’t know anything. But he will kill them if I am found out. He has killed before, he’s—”

“Who is he?” Robert tensed.

“Robert Rogers.”
According to the narrative that followed, Rogers had found Arnold on the same back road where he had killed a teenager a number of years prior. The slaying that had never been solved. Abe had been forced to exchange his set-to-expire registration tags for Rogers’ and the vehicle that had killed Samuel Tallmadge, the elder brother of the now-resigned detective inspector, had been hidden away with this ruse - put in Philomena Cheer’s garage in exchange for a favour Rogers had mentioned either having done for her or her husband -

“John André,” Robert interrupted.

“I think so,” Abe squinted. “I think I’ve met him once or twice, I don’t – I don’t know him. I don’t really even know Philomena. She was already famous by the time I reached the legal drinking age and when Caleb and I used fakes at DeJong’s back when she was working there, I tended to avoid her as much as the space allowed for reasons obvious. I don’t think she knew,” he was quick to clarify as vaguely as one might.

“About the hit and run?”

“About the underaged drinking I was engaging in around twelve years ago. I don’t know how much she knows about Samuel Tallmadge, or anything else Rogers has gotten himself into. I’m sure she is innocent. We are all innocent, Rogers probably just has something on her – her husband maybe, I don’t know.”

“We will look into it. About Arnold -”

“I wanted to go to the police,” Abe explained, almost frantically. “I wanted to go immediately but it was all over the news that Tallmadge had been given charge of the investigation and Rogers refused, telling me that he has been avoiding this man for some fifteen years or so and that if I said anything – even when I told him that the statute of limitations had passed, that he could neither be tried nor convicted for the death of the inspector’s brother – he, I, he threatened my wife and Thomas, saying he would kill them too if I didn’t help him to hold the senator until a reward was offered.

“A few days, when none was forthcoming, when John McCain got up on the Senate Floor declaring that The United States of America does not negotiate with terrorists – am I a terrorist now?” he seemed to ask in earnest. “I was just trying to keep Arnold alive and my family safe.”

“You are a witness,” Robert tried to reframe as he grappled with that which he was being told. “A victim, perhaps. Abe -”

“Rogers saw most of his business dissolve after the housing bubble. He spends all of his time watching The History Channel and thusly wants to retire to Alaska. He is just looking for a pay break to make that happen. I admit I wanted to help him achieve this stupid dream if only to get him away from the people I love, from Setauket … so I … when the government made it clear that they had no intention of paying a ransom, I … did my best to help Rogers blackmail someone who he thought just might. I’m not a victim, Rob.”

“Abe -”

The man shook his head. “So, I … I didn’t know this before but my housemate, my dad’s tenant rather, Edmund Hewlett comes from considerable wealth. I mean, you know him, he is a snob but he is actually a Lord Peer or, his dad is or – I mean it is all over the papers.”

It was the incident Robert’s unit was currently looking into. “Edmund’s uncle is the Duke of Richmond and the largest landholder in the realm,” he explained. “The family either directly owns
or administers much of Scotland and their business interests provide for a considerable portion of the British economy. It has come to our attention that the protection Edmund was thusly afforded here in the United States took such a form that allowed him to live in relative anonymity.”

“Until he was arrested,” Abe said. “I know he didn’t commit any crime, but according to Rogers, the family might not.”

“It is funny that you should phrase it exactly that way,” he shook his head, unable to elaborate, “If the Hewletts are known to history for anything beyond business savvy it is their brutality. I am surprised someone from Scotland would court such risk.”

“I don’t think Rogers knows history beyond a few episodes of Vikings or believes much in the way of popular mythology at all. He says there are all of these bullshit stories about them – the Hewletts, I mean – in the British press and that it is generally assumed they pay out a great deal to keep much more covered up. Anna was already pictured on the front page of The Daily Mail the day after Arnold went missing, and Rogers came on all of these … ideas for how to exploit it. But I thought, if it is true, even marginally – I wanted to avoid making enemies like the Hewletts by these means … and at the time, to be honest, I really did believe in my heart that Edmund had something to do with the crime that found Arnold on the road where Rogers just happened to be. I don’t know why. I think it just has to do with the fact that I’ve never much liked him. But I talked to him, Hewlett – and he’s not. Guilty, I mean. Rob, he, Simcoe, Anna, Mary … I think Aberdeen and Peggy now, too, are trying to gather evidence on their own – going door to door under different guises to look for anything suspicious and then report to the police so that Hewlett and Simcoe at least can prove their own innocence. I mean, it must be working. There were cops outside of Rogers’ house yesterday morning. But they won’t find anything. To protect my family and … to try to stop him from blackmailing a bunch of powerful nobles, I told Rogers about this plan after Hewlett told me, and we were … we were moving Arnold around as a result until -” he stopped and began gesturing at his forehead.


“We took him to Jordan Akinbode’s house in Brooklyn. I was meant to guard him, meant to keep him drugged, but we were blocks from a police station and just a few doors down from the DA’s residence. I thought if we staged an escape - if Arnold simply got away then Rogers couldn’t take that out on my family, could he?” Abe seemed to beg. “So, I did this to my forehead at the senator’s urging. Then Arnold knocked me out and when I awoke, he was gone, as I well knew he would be. I then went back to Setauket for Lewis Brewster and John Robeson who were also dragged into this against their will – but now Lewis is gone and no one seems to be looking for him, and Robeson. Well. That has been in the news, too.”

Robert nodded solemnly. “Robeson is currently being treated for self-sustained injury. Once released he will be taken to Belview for psychological assessment. We know where Lewis Brewster is and your story collaborates the one he was able to provide.”

Abe’s pupils retracted. “He went to the cops? Is that why -”

Robert Townsend took a deep breath. Abe seemed willing to cooperate, but his trust was too easily shaken. “Last Monday, a military attaché from the UK died while giving testimony to one of our more senior officers down in Arlington. There has been a series of errors with regard to seeing the body returned to the British embassy which has called much into question on both sides, especially around the manner of the interrogation. It works out that on John Wakefield’s secondary school records bore the same address as … we will just leave it as my departed foreign colleague, but the matter was quickly cleared up when we went to talk to him at his current home address to see if he
might have any information,” he swallowed, worried that he was saying too much, worried that it was not nearly enough, certain that he needed to strive to keep things as familiar as they could possibly prove under circumstance. “Wakefield’s mother worked for the attaché’s parents on a part time basis and used the address for districting, something the family and Fenway Sports Group, if you’ll believe it, were able to document. The Red Sox owners actually are every bit as evil as we long believed.”

At this Abe snorted. Robert watched as his friend tried not to smile, likely imagining a police unit existing to hate the same teams he did. “Apparently,” Robert continued, “a few years back FSG bought up a bunch of property around another stadium they own in the City of Liverpool for the expressed purpose of letting the district fall into disrepair and hastening the process of urban decay, planning to eventually build more parking for tourists. Anyway, as a result, Wakefield’s actual housing records were on file right up in Boston, so that worked out rather neatly. Well – the attaché’s family is filled with high powered sports agents and attorneys who speak in the manner you would expect such individuals to, as dose Fenway – and like Bostonians besides -” he tried to joke. Humour had never proven among Robert’s assets. “They had some fun with the back and forth.”

“Long day?” Abe echoed with a light smile.

“This was back on Friday,” Robert told him. “I’m still getting calls from both parties but -”

“So, Uncle Lewis is with Wakefield then?”

Robert nodded but spoke a contradiction. “Was. Since giving a statement he has been moved to a secure location for the time being.”

“You mean prison?”

“I mean Witness Protection.”

Abe pressed his thin lips together as he let the words sink in. “Rob could you … could you work out then the same sort of deal for Thomas, Mary and me? My father can call on a police escort, unless -”

“We are not looking into your father, Abe. I can work something out for you and Thomas,” he tried to assure him though he was not so sure himself.

“And Mary -”

Trust was simply too easy to shatter.

It took Robert Townsend a long while to respond, still fighting between his roles as friend and agent. “Abe … we need to have this conversation, but it needs to happen in an interrogation room, likely with legal representation present. Your wife may well have abetted in several acts of treason and murder.”

“Are you mad?” Abe accused as Robert had known he would. He jumped to his feet and again began pacing as he spoke, his arms making choppy gestures that always seemed to fall short of flailing, his hands ever-wanting to return to pressing against his injured forehead. “This is Mary, my Mary we are talking about. She is not – my God she is the last person who would ever be involved in -”

“I understand from a number of my colleagues both foreign and domestic that, in a week’s time, the head of the Hewlett family will meet an untimely end. The murderer has already been detained and
dealt with under a guise that doesn’t address any act of wrong doing as was the Crown’s right to request. The problem here lies, as it often does, in the cover up. You see … thinking it expedient to pin Arnold’s disappeared on the same man, presumably without knowing anything of his actual - extensive - wrongdoings, your wife hid a soccer jersey that had once been in his possession among Hewlett’s things, deflecting some of the attention from her apparent lack of involvement with one of the crime’s prime suspects. My superiors now believe that rather than her providing John Graves Simcoe with an alibi, he was giving her one which proved harder to create than either party had expected when Tallmadge secured a search warrant for Whitehall. The jersey was meant to distract from the fact that there were no signs that Mary and John even knew one another prior to the night in question, and, from various other testimony we have been able to ascertain, it seems to us that the affair in its entirely was a ruse. But that is really the least of Mary’s problems right now,” he told him in a tone suggestive of his department’s want to lend its assistance.

“What are you saying? Mary and I aren’t in the best place – we haven’t been for some time. You yourself know as much. Why am I telling you this? What has the state of my marriage or Mary’s love life to do with some English commandant who committed a serious crime in the general time frame Arnold went missing? Where is your information even coming from?”

“The man whom Mary and the allies you give her – Simcoe, Aberdeen, Hewlett, Anna … not Peggy, not to that time – tried to pin Arnold on all but confessed his real crimes to Simcoe the night before his demise, sending Simcoe classified information over the course of this conversation I’ve myself not seen and as such cannot discuss further, beyond to say that it implements … someone you identify as a loose acquaintance of yours in both the Arnold case and a number of other major crimes that have taken place locally as of late. In return for this information, information Simcoe does not seem to have at any point asked for, professional advice was sought, which seems to me to continually be Simcoe’s greatest undoing. Here, however, it seems as though Simcoe did not act alone, instead going to your wife for advice or assistance.”

“What exactly do you think Mary did?” Abe hissed.

“I’m hoping you can convince her to tell us,” Robert told him, standing to meet the gaze Abe was reluctant to give. “After Simcoe left her office, we know that Mary spent around two hours speaking to a known cartel boss over a secured line -”

“Not Mary. Are you out of your fucking mind?”

“- Arranging, at least, for a number of widows and orphans to be moved form a plantation whose sale was readying to funded a French surge – removing them from the threat of harm and making it look as though an orphanage set up by UNICEF executives as a money laundering operation is and has long been legitimate. As it works out the original story about the orphanage of ill-gains broke the day Arnold disappeared and might have been a major news item had he not dominated the twenty-four-hour cycle -”

“You are not saying that Mary had something to gain from -”

“That she is benefited from Arnold’s disappearance professionally is inarguable,” Robert said. “The question there is to what extent is it circumstance. What we can prove without doubt, however, is that she has had a hand in the sale of the century. I had a long conversation with a Scottish colleague today who was either himself involved in the crime or is about to be severely done in in the cover up, either way, judgement is not mine to pass. I can say however that the FBI has every reason to trust the authenticity of the information he otherwise provided. As it involves Mary, it seems she came on a plan to ensure that every guilty party is dually punished as much as the clear preference of the court system allows and that innocence is spared insofar as it can be said
to exist. I gather there are some pseudo-moralistic justifications for this coming crime that will never find its way onto a court docket as the perpetrator is already dead and other faces need to be saved in the process, but Mary made the entire expenditure profitable to Britain in convincing two Hewlett heirs to abdicate, or rather, sell out. Sort of. Either way your wife’s plan protects a substantial sector of the economy from speculation that could lead to collapse.”

“Then how is that a crime?”

“Timing. She convinced two primary shareholders to agree to sell to a competitor before they have any legal right to do so, suggestive of collusion. Then, there is the true brilliance of your wife’s scheme - the majority will be held in name only, being that the buyer will merely be acting in the interest of two minors until they come of age, for the younger – a span of twenty-two years. These new, inactive owners in question happen to be the ward and the natural daughter of the murderous commandant who died in detention after opposing Arnold’s plan while meant to be acting as an attaché to help market the bill to the Senate. The ward’s mother has been diagnosed with terminal cancer, where the mother of the man’s illegitimate child is still in university, still but a child herself. Both women are deeply in debt, and giving the reported relationship between the soon-to-be-chairmen of the board and the soon-to-be-deceased, a desire to make sure these girls who have otherwise been left with nothing are provided for will keep the new chairman’s ire and ambition in check, insuring that business will stay in Britain, that the company won’t be divided or dissolved, that she won’t allow or encourage any decisions that might adversely affect stock price in the long term.”

“And? But?” Abe wondered.

“And-but, to speak of collusion, this chairman happens to be the former fiancée of your wife’s so-said partner in crime. And-but my office received a report out of South Carolina this morning that the corpse we have been trying to return to the British Embassy for the better part of the past week doesn’t exactly exist due to a problem in our lines of communication. But those are the problems of statesmen and diplomats; our problem is bringing said statesmen and diplomats to heel. And that is where we want your wife’s help.”

“Who exactly is ‘we’? Robert – how should I trust you? You lie and have lied for years about being a spy, you threaten my au pair and now my wife -”

“It is not a threat, it is an opportunity. To many factions are currently benefiting from Arnold’s absence. Her testimony would force them to reveal themselves, to stop them from using the senator’s missing status to the detriment of the American military, but we have but a small window of opportunity. The fiscal threat my office could put on the institutions of power might just prove enough to save Arnold from his prison and save the allied forces from tyranny.”

“You don’t even know where he is. I don’t even know where he is, and Rogers is -”

Abe Woodhull was too petrified to entertain the ideals he would have otherwise found appealing. Robert Townsend tried anew, “To answer your question, Hamilton, Mulligan, Cato and myself, as well as Ferguson over in Edinburgh and, almost ironically, certain leaders of the criminal organisation in which he is imbedded, a number of senators to have read the details of Arnold’s defence bill, the commander of the French Foreign Legion and the new President of Mali, the lawyer Jordan Akinbode, possibly Lafayette, possibly Tarleton, possibly Tallmadge and certainly Simcoe and everyone with whom you now share your residence … though they may not yet be aware.” The shared enemy was ever larger in number and more powerful in office, but Hamilton had warned about making the Woodhulls aware of this just yet. “Abe,” Robert continued, “we have to act. You have more friends than you think. Thomas won’t grow up without you and Mary to
guide and protect him. I believe your story about Robert Rogers, but not entirely on its own merits - we have other reasons to suspect his involvement and to suspect that it may not be as voluntary as he is able to acknowledge.”

“What do you mean?”

“John André. Arnold funded his research and disappeared when the promised results could not be delivered without disastrous side-effect. If you can get to Mary, get her to turn on Simcoe,” he tried. The name André did very little to arouse Abe’s anger. The name Simcoe just might.

“Robert, as objectionable as I find the man, I’m worried he is the only force that can keep her safe from Rogers. Like Arnold, no one has any idea where my ex-boss is. He could be -”

“We’ll get him,” Robert assured. “Let me make a call. Collect on the vehicle that killed Samuel Tallmadge.”

Abe shook his head. “You know what the worst thing about that – about all of this is? That happened some fifteen years ago. The statute of limitations has passed. I was dumb enough to tell him as much -”

“You really should have finished law school,” Robert nearly laughed, “We can’t get Rogers for manslaughter, but with your testimony we can book him on blackmail and charge him with treason. He won’t stay missing for long once the incentive to hinder the Arnold Investigation from within is turned on those presently benefiting. We’ll save the senator from whatever predicament Rogers has him in at present. Together. As friends.”

“Blackmail,” Abe smiled.

“The devil is always in the details.”

Caleb Brewster picked him up at the station shortly after the former detective realised that he had no one else to call.

Along with his badge and service weapon, Ben Tallmadge had been made to turn over the keys to his squad car. There was a subway station scarcely a block away from the building. Ben, with the boxed remnants of what had once promised to be an illustrious career in policing, could well have been home in three stops, but he did not think of this. He did not think at all. He had sat on the three-step concrete stairwell on the side of the building - the front entrance having been sectored off as a crime scene - ignorant to the hour, to the weather, to the people who passed him by. This state followed him throughout the city. Nothing had quite changed in New York yet nothing appeared as it had before; for the first time in a long while, Ben was not preoccupied with the thought of things seeming misplaced.

‘What are you thinking?’ Caleb, who had done most of the talking as Ben accompanied him to the final few streets of his mail route, had asked when they at last approached his building.

‘Nothing.’ Ben answered honestly.

‘Give me your keys, I’ll run upstairs and get Heidi, you two can both stay with me on my boat for a few days. For as long as you need.’
Ben smiled but shook his head. ‘I’ll go,’ he answered. ‘You can’t park here … take a ride around the block and I’ll -’

Caleb laughed. ‘Benny Boy, it’s a mail truck. I can park any damn place I want.’

‘Not in a fire lane,’ Ben answered. ‘Title thirty-four, section four, paragraph eight of the DOT’s Traffic Regulations clearly states -’

Caleb broke out into laughter. ‘Wait, you are a homicide detective and you can quote the most mundane mandates of municipal legislation from memory? What the hell, eh.’

‘I can do the same with the Bible,’ Ben tried to smile. ‘It is the curse of being a preacher’s son. Books, chapters, verses, it all just sort of stays with you and follows you into other disciplines. And I’m not a detective … not anymore. I suppose now I’m just a nerd.’

Caleb, in contrast, was without contest the coolest person he had ever encountered. Ben swallowed, wondering why he spoke the way he did though he had just provided an answer to his company. Caleb’s eyes echoed with laughter though his had ceased and Ben, who had not suffered a single thought since shutting the door to what had long been his office - a door that no longer bore his name - was suddenly and acutely aware of all the ways in which he was comparatively awkward. Caleb wore a cowboy hat, ripped jeans and an unruly beard to the USPS uniformed shirt, itself adorned with a few pins promoting bands Ben had never heard of. He was a god among hipsters with a devil-may-care approach if not attitude. Ben wore a buttoned-down shirt and buttoned-up suit. He talked about line items and looked like his mother still combed his hair and packed his lunch, cutting the corners off of the bread. ‘What are you even doing with me? Anymore? I’m not a detective. I’ve nothing more to do with the Arnold case. I’m back to simply being boring Ben Tallmadge and -’

‘You’re alright, you know that? C’mon, give me your keys. I’ll be back down in a minute,’ Caleb winked, leaning over to kiss him on the cheek; Ben fighting through whiskers as he turned his head to find his new lover’s lips.

For the next few days, it truly did seem that he was alright, that the world that he had tried to bring order to had somehow established it all on its own without Ben having to exert any effort towards his cause.

He and Caleb grilled fresh fish on the back of the boat, swam naked in the sound, hiked in the woods and wrestled under the sheets. They listened to old records and the sound of the tide, watching the sun rise and set - filling the time between with countless kisses and conversation that served no motive beyond coming to know one another better. By Saturday morning, Ben Tallmadge had come to realise and accept that he was blissfully, helplessly and completely enamoured, aroused, infatuated and in love with his former suspect Caleb Brewster, though the condition regarding the circumstance under which they two had met barely entered his mind.

Still shy of his own positive feelings, Ben failed to voice this, instead becoming nervous when Caleb again asked him what he was thinking, this time standing naked in the kitchenette two feet from the bed brewing coffee. Ben, stuttering for a suitable response, brought up his father’s invitation for the following afternoon. ‘Come?’ Caleb grinned. ‘Course I’ll come fer a home cooked meal with your mom and pop. Just wish you had said something sooner, Benny Boy, I’d have gotten my suit cleaned and asked Annie for a wine recommendation.’

‘It is casual. Dinner.’

‘What we’ve not going to church first? I was hoping to see how through your knowledge of
Ben himself had not planned to go to service the following morning, not because he continued to feel himself an affront to his faith or to his father’s pulpit, but rather due to a dread that returned to him when he considered the congregation.

As was the case with most fear, Ben’s turned out to be unfounded. The weekly church-goers welcomed him and Caleb warmly back into their flock. Even Jordan’s parents, the doctors Akinbode, embraced him warmly. ‘Thank God! Oh, Jesus be praised! I thought you were lost to us,’ Jordan’s mother cried, hugging Ben tightly the instant she saw him, the brim of her church-hat cutting at his face.

‘You take care of him, you hear?’ his former friend’s father said, shaking Caleb’s hand. ‘Ben, we were so, so worried.’

For the next few hours, Ben assumed the Akinbodes’ flustered concern to have been for his mortal soul.

Then, sometime after dinner, the phone rang.

Ben was sitting in the family living room with his father and Caleb watching March Madness, his old man exaggerating how good he had been on a basketball court back in high school as he tended to whenever he found a willing audience for this particular fictional narrative.

“I was as tall as I am now going back to when I was a sophomore – that is really the extent of my natural talent, honestly the only reason I could dunk.”

“You are too modest, Ben,” his father smiled. Turning to Caleb, he began describing a winning shot that had taken the school to regionals, failing to state that they had gone home in the first round, as Ben, blushing, was quick to remind him. “Peter 5:5, Father, - ‘God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble’,,” he quoted with a wink to Caleb who shared his laugh. “I’m not being modest, I’m being honest. It makes me uncomfortable, you pointing at the telly, telling my new boyfriend that I could have gone pro. It sets me up. I imagine you are going to want us to roll out the hoop onto the driveway and have me prove it, but I can barely move after Mom’s meal.”

“Hoping I could entice you to motivate me to go work some of it off – there is a pie to follow! Best make room,” the reverend said, smacking a stomach that had grown round with age.

“A pie?” Ben asked. This surprised him especially. He had assumed his mother had refused his and Caleb’s offer of help in cleaning up after dinner having herself not used the room much in years, embarrassed that in her long depression she had forgotten where much was kept and refusing any assistance that would come with questions of where things went. Ben worried she was over-exerting herself. She herself had only recently begun attending Worship again, and though Ben believed it hard for her, his mother seemed to make an effort to be the perfect preacher’s wife she had been before losing her eldest son. Ben’s heart broke at dinner when he heard her comment that it was lovely to have the house filled with the laughter of boys once more.

Caleb knew the story of how Samuel had been killed in a hit and run, and, in the living room where
they sat after supper, had grown rather quite after he had examined a picture of the boy who had been meant on the fireplace mantel, perhaps looking for a family resemblance between Ben and the late brother who had always been the more handsome of the two, perhaps not wanting to inquire, not wanting to risk upsetting his hosts after the reverend, noticing his interest in the open family album had simply referred to Samuel in hushed tones as ‘and that is our other son.’

The past few years had been especially difficult on Ben’s father - losing his eldest in a roadside accident, losing his wife of nearly thirty years to the grief that followed. Ben could tell that this was the happiest and most relaxed that his dad had been in years. They felt like a family again. The house felt like home. Boys’ laughter was more lovely than perhaps even his mother knew, his boy’s in particular.


“What for a slice or a shoot-out?” Ben inquired. Their increasingly rowdy conversation ceased when Ben’s father turned down the volume of the television they were talking over, held up a finger and reached for the phone. “Benenhaley,” he greeted a colleague, “Wa ‘alaikum, did you just see that layup? What – no he’s – I’m sorry,” he said, pressing his hand to his ear, rising and walking in the direction of the registry, “can you repeat that?”

Caleb’s eyes followed the reverend around the corner.

“Yosef ben Ali is the Imam at a mosque two towns over,” Ben explained. “He and my dad have been running Inter-Faith youth programs together for years and calling each other at half-time of whatever sport is in session … maybe to pray. Watch though, my dad will come back out in a few minutes and tell me that the Turkish word for ‘basketball’ means literally ‘tall men’ and he will play with that on the edge of his tongue until he is saying ‘Tallmadge’ – until I agree to shoot some hoops with him,” he snorted, shaking his head. “God love him, though.”

Caleb gave him an inquisitive look, “So, I’m your boyfriend now, hm?”

Ben blinked, recalling how easily he had referred to Caleb in such terms to his parents, how the two had never discussed it before. “Ben … look I, I want this, I do, but there is something – something I think I need to say first.”

“Caleb, I’m sorry – I should never have been so forward, I hadn’t -”

“Ben,” his father interrupted from the door frame. “Can you join me in my office for a moment?”

“I don’t know,” Ben buried his face in his hands. “I don’t know if they will want to question you.” The two walked the length of the driveway together as Rev. and Mrs Tallmadge collected the dessert into Tupperware. “They will want to talk to me, I’m sure.”

Ben was shaking, and not from the early evening chill. Caleb wrapped his arms around him all the same. He had spent the past hour talking to his almost-boyfriend’s mother in the family kitchen, feeling his guilt grow as he helped her knead the dough to the best of his ability – even in the early stages of palsy, he felt that he had the more capable hands.

Samuel Tallmadge had been weighing heavily on his mind since dinner had concluded. The picture over the fireplace was the same the appeared on a road-side cross on the tree lined road not far
from the pier. He had been thinking of the boy a fair bit since he and Abe had last spoken several
days before, failing to fully connect Ben’s loss to the crimes his best friend ran from.

‘I don’t … know what I am doing,’ Ben’s mother had confessed to him while her husband and son
convened in the pastor’s home office.

‘S’alright Mrs Tallmadge, I’m sure between us we can figure it out,’ Caleb had tried to assure her.

‘You are a very sweet lad, Caleb,’ she said distantly. ‘I’m sorry. I’m not used to this. Not – not the
idea that Ben is, that my son is – that I won’t have grandchildren,’ she adjusted. ‘I don’t think I’d
make for a good grandmother anyway.’

‘I’m sure that isn’t true.’

Mrs Tallmadge wiped at the corners of her eyes. ‘My husband cooks, most nights my husband
cooks. I used to do these things. I don’t – my son, my eldest died shortly before finishing high
school and I’ve been … I haven’t kept much company since. Ben was always his father’s son, when
he was little – before Sam died, I always imagined he would become a priest. But Sam, he was
always mine, he was – I’m sorry.’

Caleb had moved to give her a hug but stopped short, remembering the dough stick to his hands.
Mrs Tallmadge laughed slightly at the sight of him. ‘Here,’ she said. ‘Water will just make it
stickier. Use flour,’ she demonstrated, pouring a pinch into his palms which Caleb then rubbed
together, following Mrs Tallmadge’s mimic. To his wonder, the dough cleaned itself off. ‘I don’t
know much about baking,’ he admitted.

‘Little family trick,’ Mrs Tallmadge winked. ‘Stick around and I’ll teach you everything I know –
the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach after all and my boys have all always more than
appreciated a quality tart.’

They worked together and had barely gotten the pie into the over when Ben and his father entered
wearing identical expressions. Hatice Yilmaz, Ben’s former DS who had been prompted upon his
resignation, had been badly injured in a mail-bomb explosion, having opened a package that had
been addressed to her former superior officer – to Ben. Her father had been on shift at the hospital
when she had been brought in; banned from the operating room from a surgery he knew from
practice was unlikely to prove successful, RN Yilmaz he rang his other daughters, calling on them
to collect their mother, to come and pay their last respects. Ben Ali had gotten all of this from
young Madison whom he tried to comfort with Quranic verse over the phone. Before leaving to
join the family at hospital, the imam had called the reverend to make sure his son was alright.

Ben had not known.

For Ben’s mother, it all seemed too much. She wept openly and instantly at the ease with which her
only living child might have been taken from her, for the poor mother who would now have to bury
her eldest as well, insisting on accompanying Ben and the reverend to hospital, to pay respect and
offer whatever support she could give.

For Caleb, it truly had been too much the bear. He left the Tallmadges to their shared shock and
grief and set about pacing the driveway, hating himself for not remaining inside, for spending as
long as he had with Ben’s mother without telling her what he now knew. He hated having to be the
one to give Ben the news, that Abe had put him in this position that would surely cause everything
to collapse between himself and the only man whom he had ever truly loved.

“I really doubt it, I mean. Maybe,” Ben continued to ramble, short of breath the he now stood still.
“The package was intended for me. I think the working theory, well, my working theory, were this my case, would be that someone in either the Genovese or Gambino crime syndicate was seeking retaliation for this past Tuesday. I understand if you don’t want to come along, I – I know you fear doctors and diagnosis, but I -”

“Ben, I realise this is probably the worst time to say anything, but I was han’in’ out with your mom and … I really. I really have to tell you something, and I have to tell you now because if I don’t -”

“What? What is it?”

“I know who killed your brother all those years ago. I wanted to tell you earlier … but it, it is better now than before all the police I’m sure we are about to meet.”

Two weeks before, Anna Strong had a fair share of doubts surrounding her upcoming nuptials. Though far from the normal fears of a bride to be, she could contextualize her doubts. The problems she then felt she would face all had solutions, she could post more photographs of herself and Edmund on Facebook in case the INS questioned the validity of their affair. She would tell her still-false fiancé that she had fallen in love with him, and surely, surely, he would respond in kind, or, in what she had then fear was the worst-case scenario, would kindly let her down.

Now, she found herself in Albany, working as a solicitor for the bar she had managed had been turned into a crime scene. Her car had played a role in Senator Arnold’s disappearance as had nearly everyone she knew. One of her bridesmaids was being detained by the FBI. Three of the children she coached on a rec centre soccer team had been brutalised by the local police unit investigating the crime. Her childhood sweetheart was being threatened by Arnold’s true captor. Uncle Lewis had been moved into Witness Protection. One of New York’s finest had met a bloody and brutal end meant for an officer who had recently been relieved of his position, whose reasons for wanting to get to Rogers and André had a far more personal agenda than that around the assignment that saw her Edmund become the prime suspect in a crime he had no cause to commit -

But Edmund had committed crimes, and he had done so, quite literally, in the name he meant to give her on Thursday afternoon. Anna Hewlett, not ‘Mrs’ but rather ‘HRH’.

She felt herself grow ill the first time she saw it and felt the same sick rise from her stomach to her throat as the men around her spoke. Robert Townsend, who had been her friend for years, had a badge behind his various odd jobs and was here at the request of ADIC Hamilton, seeking shelter for a witness outside of official channels the feds had reason not to trust. Ben Tallmadge, formally of the NYPD, the man who had arrested her fiancé, led the operation that had put Cicero, Pip and Thea in harm’s way, who had closed DeJong’s Tavern and upset every aspect of her life was making the same pleas; echoed by Caleb Brewster, whom Anna had long thought to have had better judgement on so many fronts.

As his wife had suspected he might, Abe Woodhull sought sanctuary here in the house which his father had arranged to spare Anna from media scrutiny - at least, that was how Richard had framed it when he had handed her the keys. It now seemed clear that the judge’s real interest was in protecting his son, which might have been admirable, had Abe not admitted to having held Benedict Arnold hostage for the better part of a week.

Anna did her best to swallow her sick as the men spoke spoke, detailing a plan to detain those
benefiting from the senator’s continued absence from the public and political stage as her wedding reception, using the seating arrangement the British Embassy had drawn up against them.

They told her that what she could ignore she could not escape.

Edmund had planned to become a suspect for his own financial gain; John and Jordan had been placated into helping him. Mary’s effort to shift some of the evidence away from the man who had given her an alibi by hiding an Everton jersey under Edmund’s mattress had led to an order that was supposed to have seen a young colonel shot, something, Ben had reason to suspect, that Edmund had been quite comfortable with himself.

It was too easily believed and thus too much to bear.

“Spousal privilege,” Anna murmured to herself. It was the same answer she had given Charles Lee to relay to Philomena Cheer when he rang that morning, the one she had just given to Mary Woodhull via text and was about offer Abe as well. “That is why I have to marry him.”

“Anna you don’t have to do anything,” Abe insisted.

“Edmund asked me what I would do if … I can’t. I can’t! Excuse me please,” she gasped as she brushed past the men, making it to the back porch before expelling the snacks that had supplemented a proper supper. She began crying as she felt Abe’s fingers in her hair - crying for their shared youth where their greatest fears involved college applications, SAT scores, and their parents finding out the they had snuck out, had sex, or had borrowed the keys to the liquor cabinet. “It used to be so simple,” she said.

“It was never simple,” Abe counted, rubbing her back as they both looked over the guardrail out into the night. “It was just easier to fake when there were not so many eyes watching.”

“Abe I can’t marry him. Not because I don’t love him – I do – I do. I love all of the awful, dark sides to that man and I have never been so disgusted and disappointed in myself – but I hate, I hate that he would leave me in the dark like this, about so much – his heritage. Oh, I’m sorry hereditary fucking title, his crimes and cover ups and, I can’t do this. I can’t marry him. I don’t want us to wind up like you and Mary. If only you had talked to one another form the beginning, none of us, none of us would have ever been in this mess -”

“How dare you put this on me, Anna. What was I meant to say to her? Rogers told me that if -”

Anna Strong had officially both heard and had enough.

“Abe, don’t you get it? Mary was the one who crashed into Arnold in the first place, in my car, on Edmund’s Xanax after having drunken her way through a few chapters of Pride and Prejudice on your father’s wine. The affair with John – everything that followed was not real until you forced it to be through avoiding her, same as you’ve always done – same as you did to me… as Edmund is doing to me now. I can’t do this. I can’t marry him. And you can’t stay here avoiding your wife. You aren’t protecting her, Abe. You’ve pushed her right into harm’s way! You pushed her so far that now none of us can help her even though the rest of us have been trying. This is all your fault!”
Alright so to answer the question that I am sure is hot on you mind, last weekend I was in a hotel in some other city, having spent the night before at a UK-ex-pat meet (I’m not British, it is a short but fully uninteresting story) when my husband turned on the news and I first found out about The Super League. Having drunken my weight (ca. 2 pints, I’m pretty small) in cider the night prior, I broke into sobs and rushed out to a kiosk to buy Der Spiegel, and (not having fully recovered my senses) upon seeing that Liverpool is among the founding members of this travesty, sucked it up and officially joined Everton, having never held any real loyalties to either Merseyside outfit before. I kind of regret it. I get a lot more emails in my spam-folder now, which I suppose is deserved.

There is absolutely no moral to this story.

But there are notes to the one you just read, so here we go …

Sport

**Fenway Sports Group** owns both the **Boston Red Sox** and **Liverpool Football Club**. I’ve mentioned in a prior chapter their buying up property in Anfield and thus accelerating the area’s decline - no idea if FSG’s North American operations take on the same form or if the City of Boston is as dependent on revenue from franchise-related tourism as the City of Liverpool is that its governing body would permit such practices (this isn’t an invention of this fic by the way – combined, Everton and Liverpool account for twelve percent of the council’s revenue!) FSG’s property subsidiary is also located in Boston and I just love the idea of a family of over-energetic real-estate attorneys and sport agents finding this familiar outlet to unleash some of their anger on to no real end (and poor Robert Townsend being briefly caught up in the conflict.) I’m fairly sure this is how revolutions begin.

A **layup** in basketball is a two-point shot attempt made by leaping from below, laying the ball up near the basket, and using one hand to bounce it off the backboard and into the basket.

**Historical Appropriations**

**Joseph Benenhaley** was born as **Yusef ben Ali** and was the only Ottoman Turk to fight in the American Revolution. For his services, General Thomas Sumter granted him land in South Carolina and his descendants (who identified as Turkish and intermarried with the local Native population) went on to face decades of racial discrimination in the American south. I don’t have any evidence that he was particularly religious, but we all like to see ‘ourselves’ in history and being that my family was happily situated in eastern Anatolia at the time, I had to give the guy a shout out somehow.

**Language**

**Yiddish**, from Yidish-Taitsh – meaning literally ‘Judaeo-German’ - is the historical language of the Ashkenazi Jews who lived in the HRE. As the two modern languages share a root, in its spoken form (especially in the New York dialect) Yiddish and German are mutually comprehensible. 63.43% of American Yiddish speakers live in New York and it is spoken as a first language by 88% of that particular Jewish
The greeting “as-salāmu ʿalaikum” meaning 'peace be upon you' is Arabic and used between Muslims worldwide; the response is “wa-ʿalaikumu s-salām.” However, Salām is one of the 99 names of Allah and is therefore omitted in greetings to non-Muslims, which is why Rev. Tallmadge answers his Muslim counterpart with ‘Wa ʿalaykum,’ a greeting used among members of different faiths.

Basketball in Turkish is Basketbol. It describes the same two aspects of the sport as its English counterpart.

… and that is it for this round. If you are up to it let me know what you thought.

Up Next: Aberdeen puts André under pressure; Washington, anxious over the loss of Arnold, is less lenient than his lover might like when hearing the former doctor’s plans and pleas. Simcoe is made redundant, Mary confides in him as the two prepare to say farewell. Gwillim gets on a plane; Hanger gets held up at a picket line. Anna continues to have cold feet, but hours before the wedding, it is not the bride who up and bolts …

(Also – my birthday! You guys know what I’m hoping for, right? Comments? Kudos? José Mourinho to get the sack at Man U and take Kovac’s job at Bayern just to make it that much more of a media circus? That Arthur Wellesley / Kitty Pakenham teen drama I keep trying to pitch? … I’ll settle for trying to get this apparently massive update out, I suppose. See you at the end of the month!)
The Fire

Chapter Summary

Aberdeen puts André under pressure; Washington, anxious over the loss of Arnold, is less lenient than his lover might like. Simcoe is made redundant, Mary confides in him as the two prepare to say farewell. Gwillim gets on a plane; Hanger gets held up at a picket line. Anna continues to have cold feet, but hours before the wedding, it is not the bride who up and bolts …

Chapter Notes

I began writing this chapter in good faith, planning, of course, to update on my coming birthday. Then I saw the word and page count and decided I could not do that to you guys, so here is another chapter that accidently became two, the rest of which will come in exactly a week. <3

If I am not mistaken, Hide and Seek is now half-a-million words long (or close to it) and I am not going to lie, I feel like most of them might be in this particular update’s end notes. Since we take a little detour on the B50, it might be in your best interest to check them out first.

You back? Great! Now forget schlager for a few minutes and start the weekend right with some lukewarm break-up sex.

As always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mary Woodhull had no reason to fear her husband’s intrusion; still, so long as she remained a wife, she refused to desecrate her own sheets with another man’s sweat and semen. In Hewlett’s partially detached flat over the garage, she gave into her carnal desires with the man who had come to kidnap her housemate, with the man she had known for the two weeks that had seen everything she thought she knew engulfed in flames.

There were sparks between them still, but it felt more of a heath than a house-fire; warming, calming, familiar though the affair had been abrupt; though they both knew they were on their last embers regardless of how their love continued to burn. The sex they shared no longer felt like an invasion. John kissed her gently and lightly ran his calloused fingers over all the parts of her which Mary otherwise had reason to hide and hide from – her bony shoulders, the cellulite and sagging skin of her midsection, her small breasts that hung with the weight of the milk they had once carried. He looked up at her as though she were the most beautiful woman who he had ever seen and said as much, both with his small mouth and the sizeable member that tore her in two, regardless of how slowly she rose and fell; her thighs, sticking with their fluids, enjoying the same tingle from this effort as those worlds beyond the folds of her lips. John’s small moans of pleasure
met her heavy breath in a melody Mary felt she could listen to all night.

She hoped he would not speak.

There was nothing left to say now save for a final farewell.

John Graves Simcoe had arrived at Whitehall at shortly after seven, intent on pranking Edmund into attending his own bachelor party, a planned finale to a shared youth that had itself gone on too long. Edmund, however, had left for Albany shortly after work that same afternoon, taking Peggy Shippen and her ever-pacing feet away from Whitehall that she might enjoy the company of the hairdresser she had dated in high-school and arranged for the wedding rather than waiting around a house that was not hers for news that might not come. Mary herself did not share Peggy’s worries over Aberdeen’s whereabouts. The au pair had gone to Belview on her own initiative that same afternoon, intent of interrogating John André and was likely still in the city toasting to her own success with a few of her friends from CUNY Kingsborough before taking the last train back out to the suburb of Setauket.

John had given a slight nod when Mary relayed all of this from the doorway, sent a text to the shared group of friends awaiting Edmund and himself and confessed to not being much in the mood for a celebration. Mary invited him to join the Ingrams, Thomas and herself for supper, which would have proven a silent affair were it not for Cicero and the questions he expected his coach might have the answers to.

‘And, did you hear anything?’ the boy asked, scooting himself so far to the front of his seat that the chair began to balance alone on two legs. Abigail, seeing this, reminded her son of his table manners, apologised and with a sharp look forced Cicero to follow her lead with an adolescent lack of enthusiasm that took a sharp turn back to hope when John moved to answer. Theodosia Burr had not shown up to training that day, nor had she been at school for the past four. She was not answering his texts and Pip had told that when he went to her house with the homework and course notes she had missed the day before she had not wanted to see him. For whatever reason, the team imagined that Coach Simcoe would have more success at reaching out to their school- and sport-friend then they were collectively.

‘I think you just need to give her time,’ John said with some measure of sympathy.

‘That’s bullshit,’ Cicero countered, ignoring his mother’s reprimands. ‘Maybe she thinks she wants to be alone, but she doesn’t. No one wants to be alone after something bad happens. You could just say … maybe, that if she comes back to the team you’ll let her play striker and let her start for the rest of the season. I promise no one would complain that it wasn’t fair. She could just -’

‘I don’t know if that is my call to make,’ John said solemnly. ‘Cicero,’ he shifted, ‘I am not going to be your coach for that much longer.’

‘Why?’ Cicero shot up in protest. ‘You promised you’d see us through to the end of the season, that we could finally win a trophy. When Miss Anna comes back, she can be your assistant, not the other way around.’

A look of understanding overtook John’s features as he gave a half-nod that contradicted his words. ‘Anna has a few caps for her national side, I trust her judgement when it comes to football and so too should you.’

‘And how many players-turned-managers embarrass themselves and their squads -’
'Cicero, I was made redundant this morning,' John interrupted. 'I arranged a number of interviews for when I will be in London in a few weeks.'

'But you promised -' the boy began.

'Life doesn’t always play along,' John told him. Mary said nothing but felt sympathetic to both arguments. John had never put that which they had into lofty declarations, direct statements that could only serve to disappoint. His promises to her were hinged on interpretation; Mary had long allowed herself to imagined that he loved her when now it seemed that for all of the lust, envy and rage behind which he hid, he had all along instead been asking for someone to love him, to convince him that he was deserving of such sentiment. Mary had failed and he found another to take the untenable place she held briefly after fearing herself to have committed a far more unspeakable sin. The memories they had made still held her heart. She swallowed sharply to stop it from rising in her throat. Life doesn’t always play along, her thoughts echoed. Cicero retook his seat and she found herself hoping that the week since he and his mother had moved into Whitehall would not cause this sentiment to long way on his heart or mind. He was far too young for the sort of disappoints one could not quite define.

The five finished their dinner in silence. Afterwards, Cicero had insisted on helping Mary clean up the kitchen, which she only accepted as the result of her cast as she very much wanted time alone with her thoughts. Abigail had asked John for a cigarette and went out back to phone Aberdeen, again without success. For his part John had played with Thomas, eventually bathing him and putting him to bed when it became clear that his nanny would not return in time to do so. Mary offered Abigail her compassion when the latter again began to express a growing sense of guilt over the girl’s continued absence.

'We both had terrible mothers, you and I,' Mary said. 'It may have helped shape us, but neither of us carry that trauma as a scar. It is age, I think. Even with all of the errors I made personally, I never look back on my youth with regret. Aberdeen is twenty-two. She is hyper-political and hyper-engaged and has in the past two weeks found more than a few places where her voice can make a positive difference. She’ll be fine. So will Peggy. Even with everything they are facing right now, the two discovered at the dress fitting that they share identical measurements and spent all of last night playing dress-up in each other’s wardrobe, laughing it up as though nothing existed for them beyond questions of what to wear to what club now that they are both decidedly unattached.'

'As though single women in New York didn’t have enough problems without the competition the pair of them will surely pose,' Abigail tried to smile.

'As if,' Mary laughed though she continued in earnest. 'It will be fine. They will forget their undo arrests, or they won’t but they will be able to find strength in it. The same way with Cicero, Thea and Pip. They are all going to go on to rewrite history and we’ll be there to watch on in wonder.'

Abigail nodded, then took pause. 'What about Philomena?' she asked.

Mary did not have an answer. Their fellow bridesmaid had been arrested three days before and remained in detention. Mary pressed her lips together, considering the actress and all of the others she herself had so seriously injured with her keeping of secrets. 'I’m revising for a law-school entry exam. Anna’s helping me. Peggy and Aberdeen as well. Richard keeps an enormous legal library in his study. We’ll figure out a way to clean up this mess.'

'It is all my fault,' Abigail repeated, shaking her head.

'Trust me when I tell you it isn’t.'
More she could not say. She did not have the words.

Two weeks prior, Mary Woodhull had gone to pick her husband up at DeJong’s Tavern when she knew that she should not have been behind a wheel. She crashed into a stranger and sought to cover up her crime, but by the time she and John had returned to do so after closing it had already been too late – Senator Arnold had vanished into the night.

Yesterday, Mary Woodhull learned that he had been found shortly thereafter by the contractor who never seemed to make any progress on the house she owned on the edge of town, that her own husband had been forced by a threat to keep the man hidden.

But it had not been Abe who had delivered this news.

Perhaps things would have now been different if it had.

Caleb Brewster and Benjamin Tallmadge, formally of the NYPD, had been waiting for her when she got to work on Monday morning, warning her that she would soon face interrogation at the hands of the FBI, by a unit sympathetic to their plight. When ADIC Alexander Hamilton arrived himself and told her what she was actually being changed with, Mary rang John, asking if he could give her the name of a good solicitor.

‘Anna and Jordan are the only lawyers I know and they specialise in corporate law,’ she told him over the phone.

>>>Jordan might be the best person to take on your case.<<

‘I’m going to take a plea deal,’ Mary had told him. ‘I’m not going to admit to your involvement, but as they are building a case against André and his friends in Washington, it might be in your best interest to do so. The lawyer … I need for my divorce,’ she began to rant, ‘Had Abe come to me at any point in these past few days, had I felt that I could have gone to him, none of our friends would have suffered as they have. Philomena has been arrested and Washington believes her to know far more about Arnold than she possibly can. Uncle Lewis is currently in Witness Protection and John Wakefield was erroneously charged with withholding evidence. John Robeson was driven to brutally attack his boyfriend Charles Joyce who remains in a medicated coma. It is believed, well – if I am not mistaken -Eleanor Hewlett confessed to starting a war between the Five Families, seeing a failure to protect Edmund from police suspicion as a personal betrayal. She’s since relayed vital information through official channels leading to a number of prominent arrests – an enormous victory in the opium war had this not come at the cost of DI Yilmaz, guilty only of having been promoted after Ben Tallmadge resigned over allegations of police brutality, which, to hear Cicero speak of his friend Thea, seem warranted though Ben seems as far as one might imagine from the man I mainly know from Nancy Grace.’

>>>And Banastre Tarleton is dead.<< John said after a long silence.

Mary sighed. ‘And I exploited that to my own professional gain, unwittingly exposing in the process the illicit dealings my own State Department … and yours, and others, others to be sure. I’m taking the plea deal. I don’t see any other choice. I should not get to walk away from this as a free woman, but I’ll take the option if it is open to me. I’ll take it further. Abe won’t speak to me, even now that he has admitted to having committed crimes that surpass my own. Neither of us – none of us – would be in this place if I had a marriage worth its name.’

A woman named Mary Anne Burges rang from Edinburgh an hour later asking only for a fax number. When Mary returned from giving a series of statements, she had the document on her desk.
Mary would never meet her lawyer in this life or the next. She snorted back a laugh when she read and signed the petition. The whole world had seen that she and Abe were over sooner than Mary had been able to admit it to herself. They would share custody of their son, provided Abe accepted the same terms of agreement and would not find himself in a federal prison. Mary considered calling Caleb to ask him to deliver the papers to the home Abe and Anna were both hiding out it – so very like and so very far removed from what had been Mary’s greatest fear upon first seeing her old friend at Whitehall. She considered sending the papers with Edmund and Peggy as well, but ultimately decided that she would need to speak to her husband herself. At least this once.

To John, she had yet to say another word.

She rolled off of him, utterly breathless, sinking herself into the soft pillow beside where her lover lay. They were silent for a time as they both struggled towards their own senses stuck, as they were in a shared euphoria. When the thrill of their sex had subsided and their hot sweat had been given time to grow chill on their naked skin, Mary curled herself against John’s tall, muscular frame.

“No,” Mary answered honestly. “I want you to go back to England, to leave this hell behind.”

“Me?” Mary smiled. “I want to take a bath. I want to wait for the FBI or the NYPD or whatever other acronymed organisation my ‘witness testimony’ is meant to assist in endlessly bringing this case to a close to kindly take their equipment and police tape from my property. Then, I want to burn the house to the ground and collect on the insurance. I’ll get a place in the city for Thomas, Aberdeen, Peggy and myself –”

“You can have mine,” John offered.

John’s morning had begun not altogether unlike Mary’s the on the previous day, with Alexander Hamilton at his office, asking questions about the capital fraud in which he had accidently engaged after his efforts to flee from a fight which he had easily won found him privy to the influence of personal failings. John evaded and Hamilton left him with his card, stating that he had no intention of bringing charges. Before his lunch hour, John had been called in to Human Resources where he was met with a few higher ups who had come to the decision that his continued employment was not worth the risk. John explained that Hamilton’s son played on the soccer team he had recently come to coach. Barclay’s returned with the same allegations the ADIC had been himself unwilling to suggest – insider trading. John had recently passed enormous sums between the purses under his management, most of which, Mary realised as the narrative was relayed to her, she knew far more about than he did. He had been fired for a deal he had no hand in facilitating outside of a half-empty exchange in her office the morning after learning that a man to whom he had made promises in emotional duress had died unexpectedly. He had been fired because of her. Mary said nothing.

In the end there was nothing to say. Sometimes life simply did not play along, and sometimes it did. John had long planned to go. She had let him help her out of her dress, hoping for him not to speak.

She was the reason he was leaving. A word from her would make him stay. No. Not a word. Three.

But some things were better left in the shadows, Mary decided in sudden empathy with her husband, with Hewlett, with all of the other men who entered and exited her life without regard.
John would soon forget her. She did not want a reminder.

“My policy only covers up to a million and I need most of that money for education,” she told him with a forced smile. “Thank you for the offer but your flat is so far from my price range.”

“I need to get rid of it,” John dismissed. “If I am to leave New York, I’ll not be returning. If you want it, it is yours. I have money enough of my own to see me through.” It was as though he had hoped for her to ask him to take her with him, away from the friends and the dreams she had only so recently reconciled, to take Thomas an ocean from his father.

He gave her a pained look, pleading for those words that remained unsaid.

“You know it has to be this way,” she told him.

“Mary … I loved you.”

“As did I. Almost.”

“Almost,” John seemed to agree.

Sometimes life refused to play along with pleasant dreams. Sometimes, however, it was people in whom these fleeting desires were bound.

>>I paid ten thousand pounds for this ticket,<< he heard Effie Gwillim chastise, doubtlessly through a closed toothed smile with a fixed glare at the unfortunate first-class steward unlucky enough to be servicing his sometimes-boss’ first cross-Atlantic flight. George Hanger could imagine within reason that the owner and editor of The Daily Mail had never flown commercially.

He, by comparison, was something of a seasoned veteran in this theatre of constant conflict and thus was not surprised when that his plans had changed due to civil unrest.

George had rung Effie in hopes of getting her to cover the cost of a last-minute flight he would be lucky to make. Frankfurt Flughafen was a little over an hour away from Frankfurt-Hahn over the B50, but more than five by bus or train. The taxi ride would surely see him parted with all of his cash and the duty-free pricing he would find in Paris did not apply to prepared food. George’s stomach was already making sounds of protest that rivalled that of the picket-line he had left behind, itself almost a self-fulfilling prophesy. He looked at the traffic ahead and the overhead timer that tallied up his toll. €35,50. €35,80. €36,10. The car had driven less than a quarter mile if his conversions were correct.

“Ten thousand?” he asked, pulling out his earpiece and switching on the blue-tooth to free up his touch screen for the purposes of consulting Google on the question of what was causing the current hold up – if Rhineland-Palatinate was on school or public holiday, if there had been an accident or if in precisely four minutes when the hour changed the afternoon DJ would inform the listening public that delays were due to non-descript animal presence on the motorway between the day’s top three headlines and a Netto commercial that always made George wonder if the discounter also sold contraceptives. ‘Dann geh doch zu Netto’ a child’s scream echoed around his mind as his stomach began to beg for Milka chocolate – now €0,77! Twenty-nine percent below the market-average! - regretting his decision not to breakfast before checking out of his hotel that morning.
On George Hanger’s page on Wikipedia, he was cited as being a journalist for the German broadsheet ‘Bild’ which according to national press laws could not call itself a newspaper. This was only half true. George was a freelance sport journalist whose work was often picked up by the German tabloid before being dispersed to several English-language syndicates, letting him make up the pay-difference with the work of translation, doing nothing for the fact that he had to cover his own insurance and transportation costs.

>>Last minute,<< Effie answered. It was unclear if her audible annoyance was with him specifically or some small matter of mild inconvenience of the kind that men regarded as irrelevant but made women sour all-the-day, so George pressed on.

“Damn, did you try any of the infinite online booking sites? I got a ticket from Frankfurt-Hahn to De Gaulle for less than it is costing me in cab fare between the two airports that for whatever reason want to claim to be located in one of Germany’s ugliest cities. Then from there,” he began to pamper her for a reimbursement request, perhaps a bit too hopefully.

>>Why aren’t you at your gate?<< Effie snapped. >>The flight I booked you leaves in thirty -<<

At this George began to laugh. “Thirty … days or so? Effie, Effie, don’t you follow the news, Doll? Lufthansa just declared a strike -”

>>They also said it is going to be over soon -<<

“Ah. To be so young, so innocent” he teased. “Let’s take that statement in the context of the firm’s recent history. Were I to wait on my flight, not only would I miss the Hewlett Wedding, I’d miss Eurovision, the Euro Cup, the Brexit vote … what else is coming up on the news cycle distraction calendar? That vote they are having in the US in the fall? Never book a flight through Lufthansa if you’ve places to go or people to see. The airline exists for the purpose of making excuses: ‘oh, I want to come to your baby shower, really, I booked my tickets months in advance but you see, the airline is on strike,’” he imitated using a higher voice suggestive of no one in particular though this example was born out of personal experience. “And there is such a reasonable chance that it will be that that answer works even when no one is trying to renegotiate an already generous retirement package – just wait around a few hours. Now, I did my due diligence and hung around the check-in for about an hour while bad English was being spoken between tourists stuck in the purgatory that is the FRA – not the worst airport on the continent, mind - but still hardly a place anyone wants to hang out for weeks on end. Then, and this is where you come in,” he said, meaning re-compensation with the personal pronoun as he attempted to prove his worth, “I overheard the Verteidigungsminister and a few members of his staff making alternate travel arrangements and booked the same flight from Paris to New York, first class. That will only set you back six-thousand quid, quite a deal when one considers what you paid.”

>>The what? Who?<<

“Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben,” George said fancifully, seeing the full name in the search window when he typed in the term looking for an English equivalent, now so long latent in his vocabulary that it had gone forgotten. “The Defence Minister. Sorry. He has a meeting with Washington at the UN building in New York tomorrow afternoon and if you are looking for a spy, well, I should doubt another such opportunity is likely to present itself.”

Effie Gwillim was slow to respond.

“I’m really talking one for the team here,” George continued, watching his personal costs increase in the cab’s rear-view mirror. €49, 20. €49, 50. “Not only am I giving up my excuse for not going to my brother’s for Easter – having my tickets booked though the world’s most consistently
inconsistent airline, that nod to the fallacy of ‘German Efficiency’ that is Lufthansa - but von Steuben is a known Gladbach fan – tattoo and all. They won at the weekend and tend to be the worst victors in Europe. As proof, whilst he was cursing at the airport staff the return his already-checked luggage -which included a number of drugged canines that became a bureaucratic nightmare in themselves - he recalled every pass, every tackle, every erroneous detail of this game he was at. I’m just standing, watching like oi, you were playing HSV in Hamburg, one-nil is nothing to get excited over.”

>>Question,<< Effie interrupted, >>why was the Defence Minister even on a commercial flight? Why is he swapping it out for another? Couldn’t he just have taken a machine from the Armed Forces? Can’t actually all cabinet members do so?<<

“Not if his goal is to avoid detection. But as I said, Gladbach fans are the worst victors. He was too vocal and gave himself away. I’m going to do my best to figure out what his mission is in the seven or so hours we will be suspended together in stale air.”

>>Do you think it has anything to do with Arnold’s bill?<<

“That would be my best guess. Apropos, speaking of the senator, why did you decide not to publish? Did Cornwallis finally come through?”

Though they worked in the same branch and shared many associations, George Hanger and Effie Gwillim rarely spoke or sought one another out, professionally or personally. He had been surprised when she rang him up several days prior asking if he would be willing to compose a eulogy for a mutual friend, more surprised when he had been asked to accompany her and a handful of Daily Mail staff writers to cover Edmund Hewlett’s wedding to a woman Effie clearly did not like. ‘I’d be happy to help you out with Ban’s public defence,’ he gave, ‘but I doubt I have much in the way to offer your Royal Wedding Watch.’ - ‘That is just it,’ Effie had explained ‘I need to find out what happened to Ban – what exactly happened – before his death can be made into an excuse for others to follow. Please,’ she had begged, proceeding to tell him about the last correspondence she had had with their fallen friend and her plan to threaten the ambassador with publication.

>>No. I … I could not do that to John. This all really fell into my lap after that woman he says he is seeing was injured in an association football match and he lost it on a player from the opposing team. I didn’t want to risk -<<

“Effie, don’t take this the wrong way but you know nothing about hobbyist-athletes,” George snorted. “That is basic Sunday-league etiquette, that there. I’ve been in so many trifling insignificant skirmishes which you’d write up as acts of war it is senseless to even count them. So John put some poor bastard in hospital. That is nothing remarkable, not when you have a bunch of non-professionals on the pitch.”

>>He’s not – he is not a cruel man, George.<<

“Oh, I would beg to differ were we having a different conversation, but instead I’ll just offer up my favourite antidote in kind. Paddy Ferguson gets a pass from you for the most part, or? Being that he’s never given Ellie Hew the gracious hate-fuck they both so richly deserve from one another -”

>>Why must you be so vulgar?<<

“Apologies,” he said quickly, not wanting to dwell on the fact that Effie was the editor of a trashy tabloid and not herself one of the princesses that graced its pages. “But you wouldn’t say he is demented in some irreputable sense and it isn’t as though he was the target of some secret
government project to turn trauma into a weapon.”

>>Where are you going with this?<< she asked sharply.

“Union Rugby, some match in a boarder town half a lifetime ago. Now from the way it was relayed to me, this was a pub match, not even truly organised teams – just a load of blokes who I guess ran out of beer money and were looking for a way to pass the time. I’m not entirely clear on what or that Fergs did anything in the first leg to do this, but he was playing hooker and got himself caught -”

>>Must you be so vulgar?<< Effie repeated harshly, sounding quite like her more-famous aunt.

“Hooker?” George questioned. “It is the position between two props in a scrum, they hook the ball …” he tried, surrendered, “you know what, you’re not going to understand this and I’m not going to be able to explain the ins-and-outs of a game without you’re having something to really go on -you know what? Next time were both accidently in Wales I’ll take you to a pub with a sport package and give you a full laydown, but for now – just know that a scrum is when players from both sides all sort of tackle the ball and each other at once – you got that?”

>>Sure.<<

“Any road, as I was saying this was beer league – it turned into a right proper pub brawl and Fergs got the ever-loving shit beaten out of him. Just to add injury to insult a few players from the opposition went and took a piss on him to boot-”

>>What do you mean?<<

“A literal piss,” George said with a shrug, “they urinated - I did mention that alcohol was involved at the start, probably just needed to empty their bladders. Right. So Fergs crawled back to his car, presumably to ring an ambulance, but instead of reaching for his phone, he pulled out his service weapon from the glove box and shot one of the other players point blank in the chest – killing him instantly, which is remarkable when you think on it giving that his right arm was broken at the time of incident.” The taxi driver gave him a curious look and turned up the stereo slightly. Helena Fischer’s ‘Atemlos’ was enough to kill any conversation, and George very nearly fell into a standard-issue complaint against the schlager-singer who wasn’t half so bad after two pints. With this thought, six-thousand euros felt a fair price to get out of Germany for a few days, even if he could not get his sometimes-editor to front the cost for him. “That,” George continued, a little louder over the three-and-a-half-minute-long chorus, “that is a typical Sunday for you, and that is the ‘hooligans’ sport played by gentlemen’ as opposed to footy, ‘the gentlemen’s sport played by hooligans.’ What John did was a straight red to be sure, but it wasn’t out of line or unexpected. What you have to understand is that these blokes are playing for honour and nothing more … especially in America where relegation and promotion don’t exist.”

Effie was quiet for some time. Before he realised it, George was humming along to the music. €58, 30, €58,60, the meter chimed in. He reached his wallet out of his back pocket, finding to his relief €120 and a handful of change. Google Maps placed him at his destination in twelve minutes and assuming there was no livestock incident between here and the next exit, he would have more than enough to pay his fare, pick up some Mc Donald’s during his layover in bonne Paris and still have enough to buy Edmund Hewlett a bottle of Scotch at the Duty-Free Shop in celebration of his nuptials. His finger hovered over his banking app, but George thought better than to click it before his Saturday paycheque cleared customs.

,€59,50,’ said the meter.
Wir sind heute ewig, tausend Glücksgefühle, Alles was ich bin, teil' ich mit Dir,' Helena Fisher sang.

>> I don't even … when did this happen? I can't even imagine…<< Effie stumbled at long last.

“Right, yea?” George gave himself over to laughter, slightly annoyed that the music had brought him into a better mood. “I heard about it World Cup 2006 when I first met Ban and Francis. Apparently, they were at a student pub down in Oxford having a proper session of an afternoon. Half the underaged clientele panicked when Ferguson came in - he was evidently in the news at the time and everyone there knew he was a copper – but Ban who was already well gone and drinking on a few months borrowed time at that asked what the hell happened to him and the two went on to watch a football match together getting so into the act of throwing shade on Liverpool – the club, not the city – that in the end of it Fergs wound up playing the tab that he never had to chance look at Ban’s ID if it were visible in his wallet. Clever, yea? That he was never promoted past inspector likely has a lot more to do with turning a blind eye at a bar here and there at so-said juvenile delinquency rather than with whatever paperwork was involved in explaining why he discharged his firearm into an unarmed civilian in a Sunday’s approximation of ball-sport. That is just expected. It is part of the culture. No charges were brought, and being that the game wasn’t organised by a league of any kind I don’t even think he got a booking for it. So, to circle back – you are making to much of a deal about John taking some cop out in a tackle. If anything, were I you I’d be glad the other guy only had his badge with him and not a beat’s worth of accessories.”

>> Your wrong. You are just wrong! In the conversation to which you’re referring, Ban ended up giving Inspector Ferguson expert testimony that lead him to bring charges against many of his friends.<<

It was not the reaction he was expecting and he had no reference around which to frame a response. “What? With regard to Liverpool v Arsenal back in 2005, 2006? Jesus never let him know whatever opinions he was promulgating as fact a decade before such became a trend ever qualified as ‘expert testimony’, Ban’ll -” he stopped. “I’m sorry, I … that isn’t what I meant or how I … I miss him, too.”

In truth, George Hanger did not know how to miss Banastre Tarleton. He had met him in a Public Viewing in Göttingen where he had been attending university at the time, and, upon finding a kindred spirit in Ban’s opinions of this approximation of the English language, Lukas Podolski, and the continental mis-pouring of beer, accompanied him and his party of friends across the country to lush hotels, Albanian casinos, brothels and questionable bars as their group tried to return a culturally important goat they had accidently nicked along the way. Their time since had followed a similar trajectory, leading George to half-believe his equally eccentric friend was immortal for all of he scrapes he had escaped – unscathed, smiling, planning and preparing for the following weekend as though he had not suffered so much as a hangover. It seemed all the more tragic that death had finally found him in an office in America rather than in the arms of someone else’s celebrity mistress after being chased out of Eastern Europe by some oligarch to whom he’d failed to pay a debt accrued at a card table. The injustice of the whole affair had twice robbed George of his mate in one-in-the-same-moment as the report was relayed. It left him without an appropriate means of mourning.

He had heard the news a few days prior from Margaret Spinkels, Effie’s aunt and the editor of the UK Edition of Vogue whom he chanced upon in Hamburg where ‘his’ ‘newspaper’ was printed, following her and her party of a divorce lawyer and a pop star to a strip-club in St Pauli where George soon found himself discussing the Syrian Refugee Crisis over heavy-handed cocktails with the German Chancellor and a drag queen as societally important on the continent as the Goat in Köln or the Pope in Rome – hearing and telling vulgar jokes, all of which felt completely normal
until Margaret Spinkels’ phone lit up with the text she read aloud. ‘I guess that is why Mary could not make it to her own party,’ Oliva said sadly, dismissing the scantily clad server and Angie’s offers to pay for the night that had all but officially ended. George had left himself shortly after and found his way to a hotel well out of his price range with a high-profile Gooner he was too much of a gentleman to name. ‘I’m sorry about your friend,’ she told him in the morning after he had gotten a call from Effie directly. ‘I don’t ... I kind of can’t believe it,’ George answered. ‘I don’t know what to say though I just agreed to write 1,600 words.’

The car pulled onto the exit ramp. George felt himself swallow something heavy he was reluctant to call sorrow.

>>>I know. That is why I asked you to come,<< Effie said. >>>Um ... good work already, on the von Steuben thing. Let me know what you find out and I’ll keep you posted if my office turns up with anything on our end.<<<

“Still trying to hack Ban’s computer? A tip – since government systems are relatively easy to break into being that so many people are constantly trying and the civil service simply doesn’t pay as much as any private sector IT firm, passwords need to be reset on the daily,” he offered of his own experience. “If you know when he last logged into his email, I could probably get you in myself.”

>>>We know all of the loopholes, we are in only – my staff has tried everything we could think of password-wise.<<<

“Ban looks at a scores-app on his phone each morning and uses the data from the day before so he always has a list and just works his way down from whatever is featured at the top. So, on Live Score if there was a Champion’s League fixture the day prior, that will be on top, but sometimes the only matches that took place were in Finland or like in Italy’s firth division and then he will use that – the three-letter abbreviation of the club name, a number, a colon, next number, next abbreviation. It is really just a matter of guessing what order he accessed whatever it is you are specifically trying to get into – but he usually checks his email first thing when he wakes up.”

>>>Thanks. That is really helpful,<< Effie offered before she again fell into frustration. >>>Why would he announce this? It is almost as if he is trying to <<<

“He didn’t, his brother Clayton did when Ban was complaining that he couldn’t remember his password on some social media account and then he just copied the structure in all things private and professional. I was curious, so I’ve since tried to get into both systems more times than I’m happy admitting to - save to say that it does not surprise me at all that an Italian football outfit has better firewalls than our own military, but there you have it. Britain’s Best.” George smirked, scrolling through his Twitted feed as he spoke, finding the devil as one tended to in evoking his name. He saw that Inter Milan had posted the same video he had several times scored past and while Effie was talking in her particular nagging style that never failed to recount all of the reasons that George preferred the company of the fairer sex when all that they asked was an hourly fee, he stopped to read the description. He knew the little vlogger from the videos Vodafone suggested without seeming to know his taste – make-up tips, celebrity gossip, music videos from artist he would have never himself sought out. It seemed an odd fit for a football club and for a moment he questioned if he, rather than a random algorithm, was the inattentive one.

>>>And if Cornwallis thinks for a moment that - <<<

“I’m sorry, I’m sure you are right and I don’t mean to interrupt, but do you know who Susan Bertie is by chance? Prissy-Lil-Queen-B on social media?” he asked, feeling dumber for the clarification.

>>>The girl who took my wedding, added ‘Twilight’ and sent it off to Anna Strong as pat of some
sort of school project? Sure. Why?<<

“She posted a video on YouTube this morning and you need to put it on the front page of the Mail’s website immediately.”

>> Whatever else you may think of my paper, we can do better than make-up tips from an over-privileged tween.<<

George bit his lower lip as horror scenarios filled his mind. He wondered which would prove the most effective to exploit by way of helping Susan with that for which she asked. For now, the best he could do was help her spread her call to arms. “She’s Marie’s best friend – Ban’s Marie - and she … Look, I’ll just send it to you – please, please post it before your take-off. I have to … I need to call some people. We’ll meet up again in Albany.”

This, George decided as he dialled, was definitively the worst way to meet loss and mourn loved ones. The living were given too little say in these matters.

From a certain spot of the opposite wall, John André could see a reflection in the mirror that hung above sink in the lavatory connected to his small room. He stood often in this particular place, his hair undone and often undried - turning his blonde waves into loose, bouncing curls with the kindness of distance and the detriment of sight. He had lost a contact lens a few days prior and felt his glasses distracted from an illusion he had since been struggling to make stay. John André stood against the wall, smiling at a person he pretended was very different from himself, pretending that he was neither alone nor lost nor lonely. He looked at himself and saw Peggy, Philomena, or some other woman he had made into a stranger who just happened to share enough similarity with his features that André almost knew his face.

He felt his legs weaken the longer he stood and felt his active mind betray him as well. Rather than conversing with the woman on the far wall, he returned to the long vanity mirror in his parents’ small room on a Manchester estate, sitting on the bed that faced it, covered with garments he was meant to be folding, the curtains drawn shut to better allow him to keep the company of whomever he was trying to create with his mother’s cosmetics and his own second-hand clothing. It was not sexual, explorative or self-searching. It was simply pretend. Pretending he had someone to talk to. Pretending he had something to talk about. Sometimes, young John would hear the other children playing outside and try to match his laughter to theirs, sometimes he would instead finish his chores quickly to instead return to whichever book he was reading, sometimes he would sit alone and stare at his face, wishing it to be someone else’s.

He had not been picked on at school, rather, his classmates barely noticed him and on the few occasions when he did find opportunity to engage, his book-born interests and manner of speech made him more foreign than he in fact was. He had been born in England to immigrant parents who forced him to come directly home from school each day for an additional five hours of study. This often led to his being bored in class and this filling his notes with sketches that became increasingly elaborate and he began to learn his hand, infuriating his mother whenever she found them. She would make his write his course notes anew and tear up the pictures he had made when he ought to have been paying more attention in lecture.

The pictures he made for himself in mirrors were harder to destroy but increasingly harder to create.
John André was not a Broadway actress of considerable acclaim. He was not republican royalty, an undergrad in her early twenties with the world at her feet. He was no one’s darling and to no one dear. He was an alcoholic approaching forty whose medical licence had been revoked and whose life’s research was being discredited. To the world, he was a manipulator and a murderer and for these allegations, André found little remorse in his soul. His problem lied in that he now saw himself as insignificant. It was little wonder that the women he sought to invent no longer wanted to visit, even in the form of a phantasy depiction. He hated himself and all that evaded him.

André took his glasses from his bedside table, walked into the bathroom and began cutting away at the length of his hair with the small nail-clipper in a pocket-sized manicure set he had been allowed to retain during treatment, having no set of scissors with which to make a truly dramatic statement. He managed to chop a few locks to chin-length before a nurse knocked on the door, informing him that he had a visitor. He would have dismissed the request had he less reason to wonder ‘why now?’ It had been over a week since Peggy had last given him word. Philomena had not found time to visit since he had voluntarily committed himself on Dr Dandridge’s urging, only to find that rather than the opportunity she promised for him to quietly re-evaluate his results, he was required to meet with men far less intelligent, worldly, and well-read than himself, each eager to offer diagnosis and prescription drugs that robed him of energy and increased his appetite. He was a danger to himself and others, they determined after a day. His private room was the result of this assessment. In it, he saw himself grow paranoid. At the end of the month he would be without insurance having been dropped from a practice in which he had once been a partner. Surely, he decided, it was Rogers who waited him – ready with insults and an offer of a bed at his halfway-house. André did his best to gather his hair back into a pony-tail to optically even out its length but he had cut too much for it to go without comment.

He was surprised to hear it in French.

“Did I find you in the middle of a mental breakdown?” a girl asked, not as much mocking of him as she was of the concept of concern. “Here,” she offered. He searched her pretty face for a recollection he could not find. When he saw the Starbucks-logo, he was certain she did not know him either.

“I’m not much of a coffee drinker,” he said dismissively.

“That is a Grande Almond-Milk Latté in a Venti-sized cup, the difference made up with amaretto. I figured it was the easiest way to sneak in something that may alleviate the headaches that must plague you to no end.”

She was right, but a sip that admitted his faults would do nothing to alleviate his suffering.

“I’m in recovery,” he answered, wondering if she was a fellow problem drinker, if they had met at an AA meeting, at a wine tasting, in a bar. No, he decided. She was too young. His regression to his own company was not altogether recent. John André’s famous outings had grow increasingly infrequent since the beginning of that which Belview’s talk-therapists labelled an ‘emotional affair’, colloquial language named ‘catfishing’ and André himself had thought of as a professional necessity until the senator had disappeared as a result and taken André’s every cherished hope for respect and acclaim with him wherever he hid. Their interactions had gone on long enough that he doubted his visitor would have been of drinking age prior-to. Then, maybe, she had, like himself, simply started early. This thought made him sadder than he had been in quite some time – was he truly so desperate to project himself on another that he would condemn a woman he did not remember meeting to the faults of his youth? It would have pleased him immensely to have her say that she was stealing small bottles of hard liquor at petrol stations by thirteen, that she robbed herself of something she could not entirely identify but was certain she would feel if not find if
only he would hold her naked body against his.

“Or so I see,” the young woman nearly smirked, eyeing the shortened hair around his left ear. With that, she took a seat on the room’s only stool without introducing herself, leaving André with the bed as an option of moderate comfort. He removed his glasses to make himself look younger and more attractive, rubbed the blur from his eyes and tried to regain his comportment. “What can I do for you, Miss -?” he drolled, inviting her name.

“I’m a friend of a friend. Since you so enjoy mind games, why don’t you name me, Mr André? It isn’t doctor anymore, is it? Surely you can at least tell me what scares me most while trying to get me to act on it. Actually,” she smiled so broadly with teeth made even whiter by the dark hue of her skin that her eyes forced themselves shut, “Why don’t I try to do that with you? Here, lay out on the bed, the back of your head to me, eyes closed and I’ll tell you what keeps you up at night- ”

“Are you affiliated with this institution? I’m not really a patient – I’m,” he stopped, unsure.

“I’m affiliated,” she seemed to recount, “in that I signed my name on the visitor’s sign in, gave my ID for verification, waited around for a few minutes for a female staff member to come a frisk me and followed someone in scrubs to your room. I’m told you don’t socialize outside of meal times – why do you suppose that is, Mr André?”

“Who are you with? FBI? DGSE?”

“CUNY, if anything, and then only part-time. If you must know, I’m the Woodhull’s au pair. Is your paranoia recent or is it something that you have long struggled with – because I can but promise it is about to get worlds worse.”

“I don’t understand -”

“I’m one of Peggy Shippen’s new housemates. She is … a bit distressed and asked me to come on her behalf with a report.”

“Distressed because of what we talked about when last she was here?” André inquired with equal measure professional interest and personal concern.

“No,” the girl replied, her manner suddenly stiff, “distressed more because her godson Cicero was arrested after being made victim to police brutality on your behalf.”

The au pair’s expression created no doubt as to the validity of that which she was claiming. Perhaps as such André met the news with disbelief. He was especially fond of Abigail and her son. “Not Cicero, is he-”

“When Peggy and I organised the protest, she was then taken in for questioning based on evidence recovered from a phone Cicero and his friends found while playing football. You see, she found that you had been keeping up quite the correspondence with Senator Arnold in her name. If I had to guess, I would say she is a bit distressed about this whole affair as well … but as to what you told her last week, you may well have been right – at least,” she leaned in to whisper, “she wasn’t dry when I touched her.”

John André would have assumed the young woman to have been lying had he not smelt Peggy’s perfume on her neck. She was dressed in vintage Chanel, reminiscent of Jackie Kennedy’s old Washington glamour that Peggy pulled off so well. For all André knew, the girl who refused him her name might have borrowed the skirt, blouse and blazer from Peggy’s bedroom floor and was simply engaging in the same lies he himself had lived all of his life in other people’s clothing.
Instinctively, he wanted to explain this to her, to tell her that whatever day dream she was walking through would surely vanish as quickly as it had appeared. He remembered his wedding day, his happy marriage, his beautiful, talented wife snogging some other man backstage months later. He remembered what it was to dress in the finest fashion, how his expensive suits could feel as much of a prison as the clothes he was now forced to wear, a non-descript unisex sweatshirt and track-bottoms that added twenty-pounds to his appearance. He hugged at the fabric, feeling empty without a sense of imitation. The young woman before him might well be a liar, but hearing her speak, John André realised he had no idea who he was or even wanted to be.

She gave him a knowing smile. “And there it is Mr André, you are desperately afraid of being alone but you don’t quite like the versions of people that exist beyond that which you have invented in your mind and therefore seek to punish them for these expectations which they are unaware that they are failing to live up to.”

“All are in a survey course?” André smarted in return. “Psychology 101 in some crowded community college classroom? Taking detailed notes with coloured gel-pens and thinking that you have some special insight, that your future will be that much brighter for the experience of having shelled out some five-thousand quid for a semester that is statistically unlikely to lead to a degree, even the associate you are currently on track for - itself worthless in today’s economy?”

“All you so bitter about not being Ivy or Oxbridge like the vast majority of those with whom you associate that you seek to lecture me on ‘today’s economy’ as though tomorrow will never come?” she countered. “I’m in my final semester with a 3,9 GPA which is remarkable when one considers that I learned English as a teenager in an underfunded and -fed refugee camp. Apropos, Peggy encouraged me to write an essay on the subject which has since earned me an interview with Columbia’s admission’s board, scheduled for next week shortly after hers. Isn’t that grand, Mr André? Me and Peggy, both Lioness! Oh – no,” she paused with a hit of rehearsal, “of course not, you don’t see it that way. You can’t see it that way because these plans do not involve you personally. But before I digress, no, I’ve not taken Psychology 101. I just have friends, something to which I sorely doubt you can relate.”

“Well I wish you all the luck with that,” André said, reaching for his spiked latté. “Then from one clearly conceited immigrant to another, I’d advise you to not be quite so impugnable in your coming interview. I suppose you are the sort who is always on the attack, am I wrong?”

She rolled her eyes. “Not at all Mr André – you’ve found me out. While I would love little more than to sit here and lecture you on all of the ways the world that we live in is slanted, doing so would do little to solve so many of the problems which yes, I spend my spare time railing against, so let’s us instead speak specifically on the ways you have brought problems into my home. You attempted to induce Edmund Hewlett into taking his own life, simply to inspire a certain reaction from his rival and when this experience instead brought Simcoe and Hewlett closer to friendship, rather than admitting that you, in fact, can predict very little about the way people react and relate, you pressed on, flirting with Arnold under false pretence, agreeing to meet him and then not showing up the night he disappeared. You feel no remorse. I don’t know how much of what has happened Peggy has filled you in on: Anna’s pub being closed down, Jordan and Abigail breaking up, John Simcoe’s hearing problems becoming so extreme he has to rely on an aid, Charles being sent to hospital – it being unlikely that, should he even survive, he will ever speak again - crippling for anyone but altogether catastrophic for a call centre manager. And that doesn’t even begin to address the problems you created in the targets you selected for yourself. Did you know there is a city-wide curfew now? Can you imagine what that is doing to the local economy? Well, it works out that the cop originally put in charge of the Arnold case was formally involved in the opium wars – he has since resigned as I’ve mentioned and his replacement was murdered in cold blood in what has turned into a shooting war between the Five Families, who my friends and I suspect are in
the process of being severely reprimanded for their failure to protect Mr Hewlett, well – from you. Britain seems all too ready to go to war over the death of a military attaché who read your plan and disagreed with it, Scotland is increasingly less coy about a desire to cede – here masked as a fight over succession - and if they do the news is saying Northern Ireland will have cause to follow. But … I don’t think causing the destruction of your country is anything to bring you to tears, reject as you feel you have been by Britain as the son of Swiss immigrants.

“So, let me instead go ahead and fill you in on the fates of the people you do seem to care for. Your wife Philomena is being detained by the FBI who are refusing to set bail for her release. It seems the work-truck that Robert Rogers was hiding in your parking garage was likely used in what the police now expect was a kidnapping - of Arnold, of course. It also works out that it was the weapon used in an unsolved manslaughter case that can’t come to trial being that the statute of limitations has passed, but when they find him – and they will find him, you can be sure of that – Alexander Hamilton’s son and Aaron Burr’s daughter were the other two children brutalised in a police raid to recover the phone Arnold was using to text you - so now I suspect it is personal for everyone. Ah! I digress – what care would you possibly have for traumatised children made to answer for you war crimes?” she accused. “But Peggy losing everything because you happened to see a photograph of her, find her attractive and assume the senator would as well? Rogers, your best friend, on the run for a crime you doubtless forced him to commit for you; your wife being arrested on the same charges while you get to sit here in your padded prison, having only lost your licence and title where others have lost their lives – tell me, Mr. André, “ she smiled cruelly as she openly mocked him with the question, “how does that make you feel?”

“No … Philomena, I … I asked her to imitate Peggy’s voice, she had no idea prior and I left Robert out of this entirely, I wouldn’t … Peggy, I never meant for her to even know, I … I did this all that we two could be together.”

“Do you really tell yourself that?” the au pair cum executioner squinted. “Never mind, I’m sure you have some justification that my hearing won’t help. What I want from you, Mr André, is to formally disavow your research. Turn yourself over to the investigation, cooperate rather than hiding yourself away.”

“My research could end the War on Terror, Miss,” André defended. “I know it must be difficult for someone as self-righteous as yourself, but do please try to think beyond your own small world of concerns.”

“No?” she pouted. “Then I want you to consider my ultimatum. You see, there is a vote in three weeks when Congress resumes, in which time I’m certain Mr John Robeson, who, as per your own plan brutally attacked his own boyfriend, will be moved to Belview for a psych-eval. I could give him your room number, let him know what role you played in placing Charles Joyce on life support, see if that upsets him in the same dramatic fashion. You already have a theory on that, do you not?”

He lied restless in her bed, watching her eyes as they moved across the book’s pages, wondering vaguely at when and where they rested. The content did not concern him in itself, insofar as he could tell from the cover, this was another in an endless series of musings and memoirs of active politicians that tended to sell well in election years. Martha was using it to avoid him, to avoid another iteration of the same conversation they had held in suits for half the day. George neglected her negligée which suggested much but promised little, turning his head to the bed’s canopy,
failing to shut his eyes.

“I don’t think he did it,” he said after staring at the drab, earthen tones of the fabric long enough to feel himself a much younger man, fulfilling a sacred duty to his country somewhere far from home where enemies and allies shared far less overlap. The familiarity of Martha’s light pink silk and delicate white lace caused him to feel himself a stranger in a situation that would have otherwise given him comfort. They knew one another well enough for it to have become its own sort of distance. At once colleagues, friends, lovers, and now embittered opposition, George felt left with nothing. He was nothing and neither was she and in this there was some measure of closure. Martha closed her book and did not ask for any clarification from him when she continued, “I don’t think that to be the reason The Daily Mail did not make good on its threats.”

George blinked. It was the first time they were discussing the foreign press. Perhaps it was not Perhaps Martha had ascertained everything he knew, thought or sought without his being aware. With some audible and intentional measure of defence he answered, “Had Gwillim done so, she would not have made it through Homeland Security. What my point was, the Hewletts would not have offered Yilmaz as an alternative had they played a hand.”

“The Hewletts would not have used Tallmadge as a cover if they had meant for Yilmaz to take the hit, you mean,” Martha suggested. “I am not entirely sure I subscribe. They are pragmatist who present themselves as idealists. While Edmund the younger mistakes convenience for morality, his siblings haven’t the luxury of such confusion. I should doubt as such the exclusive deal for wedding coverage was offered in compensation or that Ms Gwillim would accept it as such. No. That is not why she changed to cover story, not on anyone’s bidding and not to send a signal in relation to Ferguson’s red-hand. Truth be told, I’m far more concerned personally over their current headline, moreover, what the disappearance of the richest girl in London is doing to the public debate. It is the answer to the haystack argument from the Patriot Act - if the quintessential Nanny-State can’t find this girl with all eyes open, what good would it serve to add spy-drones?” she asked as though she expected him to have a ready answer. When George did not reply, she continued, “The technology already in place neither aides nor provides an alternative to policing and several popular political bloggers have been quick to point this out. Essentially, Marie Robinson’s sudden disappearance is an attack on all of the merits Arnold’s Defence Package was expected to gain Congressional approval and I have to think Gwillim, Ferguson, Woodhull, the Hewletts or any other the other surrogates or affiliates share at least some of the responsibility. You should have found grounds to remove Tallmadge from the investigation sooner.”

“I appointed him. You should have advised André to err on the side of caution when it came to choosing his test subjects,” George countered sharply. He rose from underneath the bed’s warm comforter and stood a few paces from where Martha remained laying, looking out of the window without seeing the night. At ten o’clock, the streets were eerily silent and the room was cold. George debated pulling a pair of socks from his luggage. He debated repacking entirely and seeking hotel accommodation but abandoned this idea in calculating the resources that would be required to give him a police escort, what that would remove from the roads where an office presence was truly needed. Instead, he turned back and asked, “Do you think there is knowledge in power?”

“Do I think that knowledge is power?” Martha tried to clarify.

“No. Is there knowledge in power? Do you think those of us in appointed positions of leadership correctly assess our responsibility to a public to whom the power vested in the offices we occupy is not directly appurtenant? We were not meant to play politics, Martha. And André … André should have never have been afforded enough confidence to allow him to have played God,” he frowned, “We need a more permanent solution than Belview.”
“Define permanent,” Martha said.

“I think my words clear.”

Chapter End Notes

I have so many notes this time that they bleed into the comment section, which is half the reason why you are getting all of this a few days in advance. Let’s get to it:

People

**George Hanger** was an 18th century eclectic who joined up with the Hessian Jäger during the American Revolution after being booted from his original battalion for dueling. Upon meeting Ban Tarleton, the latter made him a major in the British Legion so they could go about lading it up together. Hanger once took on Tarleton’s command during illness, lead the cavalry into an ambush and described the affair as a "trifling insignificant skirmish" though he himself was injured in battle. He attended the University of Göttingen as mentioned in the text (the King of Great Britain was also the Elector of Hanover to that time) and published four books over the course of his lifetime, all of which are online, free, and defiantly worth the read. His final work was an address to sportsmen, which all combined is how he wound up writing for Bild and otherwise hanging out in red-light districts with members of the elite in this 2016 incarnation.

**Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben** was an 18th century eclectic who was nearly arrested along with his dogs (really) and a few members of his staff upon seeking entry to the US with a fake-CV because he had a flair for fashion and decided that everyone should wear red uniforms. He was instrumental in bringing training, drilling, and discipline to continental troops (whom he famously cursed at in German, which made them laugh and lightened spirits.) So, knowing this, I was always under the misconception that he did not speak any English, but apparently he was fluent and just chose to curse in German … but, I mean … why? Granted I only drop Turkish when I’m watching sport (or watching Bayern’s board interact with the media in any capacity …) but Turkish is a good language to swear in. English is a great one. German … eh? Though, to be fair there has been something laughable in Uli Hoeneß’ every utterance of ‘Dreckschwein’ since this past summer, so maybe there was something of the same effect at Valley Forge. Any road, he sat on the court martial of John André, which may be worth keeping in mind going forward.

Sport
Lukas Podolski is a German footballer, or was rather back in 2006 when it matters to Hanger’s recollection of events. Now, he just does TV-spots for crisps and auto insurance and might play some 20 minutes per season in Japan.

Gladbach has come up before (if simply for the fact that for a German club they have a lot of fixtures in Scotland), but I don’t think I’ve ever talked about their tattoo culture, which I actually looked into the history behind in writing this chapter and it is kind of cool so I thought I would share. In the 90s, supporters fell into the influence of English football fans who are a little too keen on ink (for an extreme example, throw a google on John Anthony Westwood, who in 1989 legally changed his name to John Anthony Portsmouth Football Club Westwood and sports 60 club tattoos(!!!!))

Apropos, to avoid further shenanigans of the like, it is illegal to name a child “Borussia” in Germany …) but I digress.Gladbach. So a lot of fans told reporters of this widespread phenomenon (really, it knows no social or societal bounds – the crest looks like this: < B > (kind of) and if you go to a sauna or a swimming pool you’ll see it on welfare recipients and neurosurgeons alike) that they “love the club so much they feel it under their skin” and want to represent that, but at least in the region I live (this otherwise horrible place where we still have to suffer David Hasselhoff on the radio) a lot of tattoo parlours do a charity action with the emblem where if you get it inked on you, half of the price is donated to child cancer patients, which is awesome.

Now, I know at least one of my regular readers takes umbrage in my insistence that von Steuben would be a supporter of this particular side, but I stand by it. He was defiantly a top-flight foreign signing, and to that end, Borussia means Prussia and by Jove von Steuben would not be a Dortmund fan. No, no, no!

And I now hit the character limit. Click into the comments for more. :) You know what the joke here is though? AO3 deleted all of my soundtrack centric links. I guess you will never know how annoying that Netto commercial is. Schade.
The False Friend

Chapter Summary

André pleads his case; Washington arrives at a verdict. Marie’s cry for help becomes a call to arms when Susan takes to social media. Anna calls things off.

Chapter Notes

Two things occurred to me in reading the comments to the last chapter: 1) You guys have the most interesting stories of livestock interrupting your commute and I want more of this in my inbox. Please, any time, hit me up. 2) I should probably have told that story of my own firearm-at-a-rugby-match encounter with a bit more context – so here we go:

When I was fifteen, I went on a student exchange to New Zealand where we were victim to terminology that had a profound effect on my otherwise brilliantly delinquent teenage brain – we were “student ambassadors” rather than “exchange students” and we had to hold ourselves to strict, respectable standards – let me interrupt myself here for a moment and explain that then and now the only reason I can think of that I was invited to apply for this trip was nepotism (my aunt was a headmistress in the same district - I was … not an outright problem child per se, but if something went down I probably had a hand in pulling it off.) It was all in good fun, just bants, like that – but anyway as I otherwise had the grades and background for it, I ended up on this “delegation” and had to comport myself to a standard I had no use for outside of this context.

And I was determined.

… I also happened to be in a teen romantic comedy.

We were supposed to be assigned to a guest family of someone of our same gender which seems impossible to screw up, but I have a weird name and I guess that in reading my essay the school board in this small town outside of Rotorua just got it wrong. Maybe. But it was like, we were standing in a gym, waiting for our assignments and I saw *him* – everyone saw *him* – the star rugby player who looked like a super model. Guess who I was going home with? (But, um, most certainly not ‘going home with’ :) because I was a young lady now, an ambassador)

Yea … so my appearance (even now but especially at fifteen when it was a matter of concern) doesn’t at all match my scope of interests or the way I talk, and he was like … very keen on getting into my pretty-girl knickers and so were all of his mates, and all of the girls at school instantly hated me even though I swore nothing was going on (and it wasn’t and I tried to prove that.) Because I was in a teen comedy, the other girls would give me notes to give him expressing their undying love, but without signing them so he just thought that I’d written them and this went on for a while and it ended up with me deciding that I was going to have to convince this guy that I was at least twice as hard as he was so that he would leave me alone and I would not be breaking any rules (even though I wanted to, again he was mind-blowingly gorgeous.) Any
road, this strategy on its own lead me into trouble’s path just based on my personality and the way my mind works, and he just became more determine to impress me when I took up his sport. This all happened in a small town with more sheep than people and one weekend a few lads from the hamlet I lived in were playing a kind of pick up match against a few lads from a town over and he got this gun out of the basement and was like “it is protection, it is a rough area” at which I laughed because I knew basically everyone that was playing from the local pub and I answered that if he couldn’t handle it with his bare hands he was at a loss. And then we became besties.

In the movie version of this story we would have discovered there was something more there between us in the months to follow and made some declaration at a school dance and we would have finally kissed and none of those bitch-girls would have resented me for it, but being that this is real life, the most interesting thing that happened to us after I emasculated him and his stupid gun was our jumping onto a moving train and getting into a LOT of trouble for it-

I was an excellent “ambassador.”

Now nearly half a lifetime later my own students come to me with all kinds of weird and seeing my past-self in their weekend stories I just kind of nod and say ‘I understand, that is kind of awesome, and I am so glad you are telling me instead of posting this on social media because that would just be stupid’ – watching, of course, for how quick they are to then grab their phones, presumably to delete items of regret.

And todays teens on the internet is half of what this update is about! (Nice segue, yea?) Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He continually ran his fingers through the hair he had cut short – uneven, curling gently over his forehead, around his ears and at the base of his neck without the weight of the rest to rob him of a texture he had forgotten with time. He pulled at it slightly, wanting to lengthen it at least enough to obscure his too-large, almost elfin ears, wanting to feel some slight measure of mortal pain to make him forget, if even for just a moment, the effects of his isolating whims on the full of his reflection. Alcohol had aged him prematurely, fine lines crease his forehead and cracked at the corners of his lips and eyes, more from grimace than from glee. He hated the Botox meant to bring back the boy he may have once been as much as he hated the man he had become, wishing his long, elegant fingers, two of them terribly calloused from a life spent holding a pen, to again belong to another – Philomena, Peggy, Benedict, anyone at all - wishing them to squeeze around his throat, wishing he had the strength of character to meet the death he knew to be deserved as a brave man.

Instead, he was here, disguised by prescription glasses and poorly cut hair as someone confident enough to embrace his physical flaws and character faults, begging for acceptance and absolution from a world beyond that which he had previously invented in the mirror and in his mind.

“It suits you,” she said. John André did not know if he was meant to take this as a compliment. “It is too much,” he murmured of his hair, avoiding eye contact. “It is more than I intended. I suppose it’s a metaphor, an ugly one. I don’t recognise myself.”

“And that scares you?”
“I don’t know that I ever have. That does.”

“I see,” she said. Part of André had come to expect the sound of a scribbling pen but unlike every other psychologist to who he had spoken in these past few weeks, Dr Dandridge was silent, her hands still. The conclusions she had come to were the same, or so he could surmise, as those which she long held. This filled him with the same anger he had always known. He buried his brow in his palm, hoping the pressure to shatter his urge to scream, demanding to know what about him she saw as insufficient, why he was neither loved, nor admired, nor respected in their shared field of research, in academia, in societal circles. He was witty, intelligent, learned and terribly cultured. He spoke five languages and played several instruments. He studied people, their beauty, manner, charm and copied these things where his own fell short of the expectations he felt had been set. He tried so hard with such little success. He wanted to scream. He wanted to sob. Instead, he swallowed his confused emotions and asked calmly, “So where do we go from here?”

“I’m afraid at this time I can offer no guarantee that your request will be considered.”

She did not sound willing to so much as try.

It seemed as though her assessment of his capacity matched or at least mirrored the terms other former colleagues had thrown at him over the course of his stay.

“It happened, it happened I swear it did – Martha, I’m not going mad,” André did his best to convince her. “Please, this young woman, she wasn’t a mirage, something – something born from boredom or confusion or any of the tens of conditions with which I’ve been unjustly diagnosed in order that I might be prescribed the same medication used to keep the rest of the long-term patient population lethargic. I simply don’t know her name and I swear to you, it was not from a lack of trying. I’m not paranoid I’m -”

“No, you are,” Martha countered. “Paranoid,” she paused, reaching out to briefly squeeze his shaking hand. Her voice had an air of calm that caused him disease. She spoke to him as though he were a patient rather than a partner, as though her answer to his distress cry would take the form of yet more seditious drugs to help him to copy more than they would help him to cope.

He should not have cut his hair. He should have kept trying to play Peggy to someone’s inner Arnold, now longing to feel as safe as he had wrapped in his wife’s soft cashmere at night, texting the senator secrets he had only just made up, still feeling feminine and delicate as Arnold inevitably transitioned from intellectual to honest and André’s hand found its way to his large, erect member, stroking himself as he saw his bitter loneliness reflected back at him in the screen, the only thing he truly recognised. He would then speak of love and feel whole in the act.

Now he was empty.

Now he was alone.

Now he lacked the imitated beauty he felt he needed to be believable.

John André again buried his brow in his palm, wanting to hide from himself and from her.

“I know that you are not making the incident up,” Martha said, “there is no need to defend it as you are. How else would you possibly know that both Miss Declesias and Miss Shippen have interviews with Columbia’s admissions board – I checked, this is true. How else would you know Cicero Ingram, Phillip Hamilton and Theodosia Burr were the targets of Tallmadge’s raid – their names were not printed in the papers. Furthermore, her name – Aberdeen Declesias if it affords you any peace of mind – was on the sign-it sheet from earlier this afternoon. Belview keeps a
photocopy of every visitor driving licence on file and with this ID,” Dandridge half-smiled, pulling out her FBI-issued civilian clearance, “I was able to access it in your file, finding that yes, she does live at Whitehall in Setauket. Nothing you were told is unverifiable … Your assumption that my demeanour is born from disbelief, however, raises some cause for concern.”

“Why do you doubt then that she’ll not make good on her threat, or is John Robeson not -”

“I can’t discuss that with you,” Martha dismissed him.

“He was my patient, he was -”

“The project is over, John. I’ll put your request to Washington, but I have no reason to believe you to be a priority at this point. I don’t know if you have been made aware, but … a recent incident involving a young girl in London has all but killed the bill to which our research was attached on the same merits we had expected it to pass legislation.”

“London … what -” André squinted, unable to fully comprehend what had been told.

His former partner shook her head, her heavy eyebrows knitting themselves ever closer together as she continued to speak with a forced tone of indifference. “She is the daughter – ward, rather – of Banastre Tarleton, a British colonel who died a little over a week ago in FBI custody during a diplomatic mission to the United States. This happened at the request of the Crown, the colonel having committed a crime of high-treason that cannot be tried as such or made public in any fashion, being that doing so would only bring to light offences that would infuriate the population. It also happens that this man’s well-documented friendship with the Duke of Cambridge would add to the intrigue and embarrassment of the monarchy as a whole and the Queen can’t allow for it. So, by request, we sorted the matter, and for their part, Westminster and Buckingham Palace ‘forgot’ to inform the British Ambassador to the United States, thereby setting into motion a press circus that in a matter of days has seen Tarleton elevated to national hero from relative obscurity … And maybe he indeed was one when judged against justifications that can never be made public, but it is not mine to say,” she considered aloud after a long pause as though to indicate that she had more than a few opinions of the matter. “However – his little girl has since disappeared and there is a question of organised terror being at play. As I am sure you can imagine, The Pentagon is employing all of its resources to see if there is any truth to this – but thus far, the prognosis is far grimmer, at least insofar as it directly affects you, John. It seems the girl is gone without a trace and a number of political bloggers on both sides of the Atlantic are using such as an argument that the spy drones forming the basis of Arnold’s proposal would neither aid nor serve as an alternative to policing as Miss Marie Robinson has not shown up on any CCTV footage in a country that already infringes far more on personal privacy than the United States at present. The bill will be scraped, your research with it.”

André blinked in disbelief. “Not if she is found -”

“It has been nearly twenty-four hours,” Martha shook her head, seeming to know something she was not willing to relay. The span of a day was no argument to the case being made against the life’s work of the senator and himself.

“Then wait until a day has passed,” André cautioned. “Statistically children always turn up. Ordinarily investigations are not even opened until after -”

“Social media was on the case before the police got involved,” Martha interrupted, “which they only did when ISIS shared a video Marie’s best friend posted the same morning, Greenwich Mean Time, which instantly went viral due to the popularity of the girl’s YouTube channel. For the first few hours no one who was engaged in spreading the word – mostly professional soccer players for
reasons I only half understand - made any mention of who Marie was or who she was related to in
asking the public to keep an eye out – but then, it seems that The Daily Mail made this plea their
front page story on its website and other English media outlets were quick to follow – The Sun
eventually naming the runaway as Robinson, which, again, may have prompted the interest of
organised terror though we can not yet prove a link.”

“Why would there be one?” André questioned. “It is not their modus operandi – even insofar as the
way children are targeted by such groups. I’m legitimately confused. Are they saying she was
kidnapped or that she was radicalised and hoped a flight to Syria, or -”

“I think it more than likely that she is dead and has been since before the police got involved,”
Martha said. “Her mother is apparently the UK’s answer to Taylor Swift and her recent album
which already had a number of hit singles is getting even more air play than usual. Marie has
spoken to both her school and bereavement councillors on this a number of times – the songs were
evidently written about her late father-figure, from whom her mother split sometime last fall,
shortly before Marie’s thirteenth birthday. The break-up devastated her, her grades have slipped,
she recently got into a fight at school and … then there is this series of voice messages she left the
late Colonel Tarleton upon learning of his death – in ways a reaction to the ideas of him she lost
due to a series of miscommunications on our end, causing a field agent to continue a
 correspondence with her for a few days after the man had met his end.”

“To extrapolate on prior work into child psychology,” André offered, “she lost her father in his role
as protector, common to that stage of adolescence, but in this case the result of trauma rather than
natural progression. I imagine that she is apologetic in her language, trying to protect herself from a
judgement she never before suspected though he is no longer around to pass it. The press, the radio
serving as reminds may well have taken whatever resentment she bears her mother, causing a
dangerous regression to the phallic stage of Freud’s psychosexual development – in essence,
making her react to the world the way a toddler might. I don’t think her likely to take her own life.
It doesn’t fit any working profile I’ve ever encountered. She is getting the attention she wants and
when she tires of it, she will return,” he considered, reasonably satisfied with his own assessment.

“Do you think yourself qualified to offer a diagnosis?” Martha raised an eyebrow. André pressed
his lips together. The American Medical Association no longer did.

He took a deep breath before countering, “It is all marketing, isn’t it? You see me as a fraud
because I brought a man to the edge of death to discover if the therapy which I proposed could in
fact generate the results we wanted – and it did. Martha – it did better than we might have ever
expected! Meanwhile, Colonel Tarleton, who is arguably a human monster for all of the reasons
various intelligence agencies are evidently treating his daughter’s disappearance as an act of terror
rather than a cry for help gets hailed as a hero because out of all of the hundreds of people he has
killed with indiscretion over the course of his illustrious career, he happened to take out - I’m
guessing - an enemy from within whom the normal forces of the secret service did not trust
themselves to handle? It’s a pity … truly, that he had to die,” he tried, desperate to make himself
relevant, “I could have had him psychologically fit for another field command, I swear it.” He had
to make his argument, his research could not be disregarded on the basis of the public’s sudden
apprehension to Arnold’s proposed drones.

“How do you mean?” Martha inquired.

“I should admit first that I had a loose acquaintance with the man some time back through my wife
and his long-term domestic partner … he was clearly suffering from PTSD and giving the apparent
intensity of the relationship seems to have since developed a certain level of co-dependency with
this daughter-of-an-ex. My work could have given him a more appropriate outlet, it could have -,”
André paused, considered, explained, “Arnold’s concern was that our goal was to eliminate the problem we see in our own forces by causing our forces to eliminate themselves in a final act of bravery, taking the form of self-sacrifice. Cowardice was never the colonel’s problem. It was for Hewlett – but Hewlett, Martha, the point you and all of your friends in Arlington are missing is that Hewlett didn’t die.”

“Edmund Hewlett survived thanks to the skill and efficiency of University Hospital -”

“He survived because of his own sudden initiative to do so,” André argued, “ringing an ambulance before it was too late. He was playing with ideas of suicide when I met him – and Simcoe! Simcoe who attacked his former fiancée when she was ill after a tragic miscarriage, destroying in the process every aspect of his life in Britain before the treatment was accordingly altered – he pulled through Hewlett’s hospitalisation as well, meeting his fear with no unintended side effects or mental scaring. They are better off for it – don’t you see? Edmund is getting married and John seems to be happy for him. If you would just protect me as I ask, I can prove it, time will prove it, just -”

“John,” Martha cut him off, “it is believed that Senator Arnold went missing after John Graves Simcoe attacked him in a bar and Edmund’s engagement which we know you to have arranged based on his own admittance is threatening to create open hostilities in the home nations. Whatever your justifications, it is not worth the risk. Washington is presently in the process of attempting to convince Obama not to pursue this course further, to veto the bill should it be brought to his desk. In some ways, Marie Robinson’s disappearance is proving a far greater benefit to your reputation than Benedict Arnold’s ever could have. At least this way, the project will be buried without any questions being raised.

“I don’t see Witness Protection being an option, John. The argument used for the bill’s quick passage has been turned against it. Your thesis won’t stand on its own and a class-action lawsuit has already been filed against the university for its participation in this project. The government is simply not interested in what you are offering. You have to let this go for your own sake, beyond that bit of advice, there is nothing I can do to help you at this point. I’m a researcher, not a licenced therapist. Belview is where you need to be.”

“Wait,” he said desperately as she rose to leave. “For Arnold, just offer a ransom. I know the man it seems the FBI has reason to suspect is holding him and if this is the case, I can help you bring him in. Robert Rogers. Is that worth anything to you?”

“Go on,” she turned her head back to him, her hand still on the door handle. Martha Dandridge seemed no more inclined to negotiate now than she had been before he had offered to betray his only friend to her bosses.

It was over.

He knew it.

John André had lost on the merits of circumstance he could neither have predicted nor controlled.

He was spent and he had been left with little love to bargain.

He felt tears swell in the creased corners of his eyes as he asked, “Is it at least worth … do you think Washington would consider setting bail for my wife?”
“So, are you considering it then?” Martha asked.

He was, but not by her designs. George Washington sat on the edge of the bed, his lover still tucked into its sheets, both of them speaking if only to avoid the absence of city sound, the half-open window and the late winter chill it carried. When he had left her office earlier that day for a series of conference calls that disappointed in that they had fully met with his expectations, Martha Dandridge had gone to visit her former research partner at the institution in which he had locked himself away from consequence. Andrè had called sometime that same afternoon, Martha electing to let her voicemail answer, allowing George to hear the distress in the man’s voice while that sat in her Columbia office.

Almost from reflex, Martha had bit at the corner of her lip as they heard the man tell of his encounter with a community college student form some French-speaking country who had threatened him with exposure.

George Washington, however, could not bring himself to feel any such sympathy for John Andrè, moving food around its Styrofoam container for the duration of the message and sometime after, not wanting to afford the news any attention that would allow Martha to inquire over things he had no answer to, over things he most certainly did.

George looked at his watch. Benedict Arnold had been missing for two weeks to the hour. He felt ill that for political purposes recovering him had not been priority, that for all Arnold may have suffered in the name of a bill to which his was attached.

It had all been in vain.

The streets outside said nothing, which said enough.

DI Tallmadge had resigned over the misconduct of his men; the woman the NYPD had appointed to replace him was to be buried the following morning with full honours - slain in a street war started over the questioning of a suspect who George now knew to be guilty, though not of that which he had been accused.

“I cannot help but to take some measure of relief in Simcoe’s being made redundant though I appreciate the problems it poses,” he admitted.

Martha left out a long sigh, a preferable equivalent to a prying question he still felt obliged to answer. “Why do I suppose that is,” he played, pondered, “I had a call with the Commander and Chief this morning over the question of whether or not Rochambeau’s credentials ought to be recalled. We now know that he sent Lafayette to assist Hamilton with his investigation with the express purpose of feeding Hewlett information that - should he act on it in the market turbulence created by Arnold’s sudden absence - would create economic conditions favourable to Frankfurt, and, by extension, Brussels. This went according to plan and the trade deal has since been met with parliamentary approval, albeit by a narrow margin. We know that Lafayette has privately taken meetings with Hewlett, Simcoe – his now I suppose former banker, and we know that Hewlett, at least, elected to remain a suspect in Arnold’s disappearance, obstructing justice in the pursuit of a capital crime sanctioned and encouraged by our own behaviour. If this comes out, America cannot agree to the trade terms we ourselves dictated. Still … I told him no. Obama,” he clarified, “about Rochambeau. I don’t see that we have a choice but to continue doing business with him.”

“And you are glad that someone, anyone, was punished for a crime you are forced to call diplomacy?” Martha suggested.
“I’m glad the John Graves Simcoe will soon be back in Britain,” George corrected. “I dislike having him here, what with the fight I am almost having with Cornwallis over André’s research.”

Martha said nothing, though to George’s mind he had answered her question of consideration in as many words as he could spare.

“It is another tricky situation,” he continued, largely to himself, lost as he felt he was to his closest confidant. “A little over half of the test subjects are also Subjects of the Crown, and – excepting Hewlett for reasons of his place in the line of succession – subject to its laws and protections. That they are all residents – again, excepting Hewlett who currently has questionable status – it is on the American end to protect and prosecute, but the project was sanctioned and sponsored by our own government, by taxpayer funds. Britain wanted the spy drones for themselves and wanted American precedent in employing them on their own citizenry, lest this all come to a head in The Hague, and thus Cornwallis turned a blind eye on his government’s instruction – that was, until Senator Arnold went missing and Tallmadge and his team in a routine follow-up typical to conducting an investigation found evidence in André’s private practice that lead to further inquires.

“Still, Cornwallis was willingly ignorant, or perhaps simply willing to ignore the matter at hand, accepting an insultingly young colonel assigned on a diplomatic mission for reasons justifiable in relation to Arnold but altogether unrelated – Tarleton arranged for a duke to die which was within the interest of Buckingham Palace until Edmund Hewlett’s unexpected engagement to a Catholic opened a question of succession and with it a question of secession. Should Brexit pass - something the passage of a trade deal between the US and EU was intended to prevent - it is likely that Scotland will, in its comparatively greater want to ‘remain’, elect to hold another referendum of its own. We expect that it is even more likely for Scotland to leave the UK should Edna be crowned rather than her younger brother, which is why the Queen issued the Instrument of Consent allowing Edmund and Anna to wed. Now, the US would not be interested in any of this were it not for the fact that Britain’s entire nuclear arsenal is located north of the boarder, that Scottish Parliament has no means of securing it but would have no intention of surrendering it to a neighbour whom, to many minds, has kept them enslaved for centuries.”

“And you find the Scottish people’s plight sympathetic,” Martha remarked.

He did, but his personal opinions were irrelevant when met with the obstacles presented by Arnold’s continued absence. “We were meant to take out the colonel simply to tie up loose ends,” George replied without answering, “which would not have been a problem had Hewlett, Simcoe, Woodhull, Strong, Declesias and if I am not mistaken Shippen not tied Tarleton to Arnold’s disappearance by planting evidence, thus requiring Hamilton to request that he be interrogated on this matter.”

“You are mistaken,” Martha interjected. “Shippen was not living at Whitehall at the time.”

“Does it matter?” George asked rhetorically. “Because of this intrusion, something was lost in communication. The Crown did not inform Cornwallis that Tarleton was meant to disappear, Hamilton, not knowing, as this arrangement did not involve him, was unable to inform his field agent of the same. I called to express my condolences only to find that Cornwallis had his own reasons for wanting his military attaché out of the picture – apparently, because of some mix up on their end Tarleton was given a higher security clearance than he ought to have been afforded, leading him to confront the ambassador about a deal he made with Rochambeau involving a drug sale that funded a surge – that, as Obama informed me this afternoon, we ourselves helped sanction,” he shook his head in frustration, “Along with the Hewletts. Who - even incapacitated in hospital - have no difficulty bringing their wars into our offices and killing our own while simultaneously giving freely more than we could ever ask for in terms of stopping the opium trade
from which they personally benefit. They, and Mary Woodhull – who despite what André said to you - I still have every reason to think orchestrated this entire ordeal as the evidence otherwise suggests.

“So yes, I’m happy that John Graves Simcoe will soon depart for Britain on his own accord. I’d be happier still if his supposed lover would join him and if Edmund had enough ambition in him to upset Edna’s designs on being the next Queen ‘in’ or maybe even ‘of’ Scotland, if everyone who has upset this investigation from the start would simply take their interests elsewhere. Do you know what the ironic thing is? This girl, the one who is missing, the one who simply in the act of running away broke down diplomatic negotiations and has every party looking out for their own newly assessed interests … her father, to the extent of my knowledge, he isn’t yet dead. Something we cannot admit to without someone needing to stand up and answer the question of why he is meant to.”

Martha frowned. “Your scheduled conference call with Cornwallis then -”

“Didn’t happen. He sent his deputy O’Hara and I let Lincoln take over in my place. All I will have to tell von Steuben at our meeting tomorrow is that Britain is unlikely to sign off on an arms deal, Arnold’s defence bill won’t pass unless the senator is found within the next few hours - specifically by some security camera - and that our best lead in that case is to entrust the capture of the … I’m sorry, this sounds so ridiculous I can’t accept that we are affording it any credence,” he commented without composure before beginning anew, “entrust the capture of the owner of a small construction firm whom various witness testimonies point to as holding Arnold hostage to the former psychologist who got us into this mess by his trying to murder of a man who is suddenly important to keeping Britain united as she tries to break with Europe, a man who should be facing twenty-five to life for a series of capital crimes plus ten more on top of that for obstruction of justice! No. I’ve not been left in a good bargaining position. And I’m not considering bailing André out of the jail he built himself,” George frowned.

“Von Steuben’s government is in a difficult situation,” Martha pondered. “The German economy can’t afford to continue to finance a refugee crisis and their national conscious won’t allow them to close their boarders. I truly believe that the research André undertook could end the conflict in the Middle East in employed. All of the concerns raised can be counter-argued by the fact that this wedding is going forward. Prior to therapy, Edmund Hewlett was ridden with self-doubt and constantly succumb to his own fear, now, he is marrying one of the prettiest, most accomplished and most connected young women in New York, a girl he would not have had the courage to talk to at one point. Hewlett did not die, George – he overcame. As did Simcoe,” Martha tried, leaning towards him, touching his crossed arms with her soft but cold hands. He did not like it. Somehow André had her entirely convinced of his own imagined worth.

“And Joyce? Robeson?” George countered, pulling himself away from her touch. “The problem I’ve always had with psychology is that it can’t be cross-tested, we have no idea how the lives of these particular men might have been altered by André having no way of knowing the alternative in anything outside of blind speculation, but the fact remains that André invented a social scenario in this small town of Setauket that has lead to more casualties than the US Armed Forces tally between them under current circumstance in any given period of the same duration. However, should André’s hypothesis on how to make Rogers surrender his hostage pan out I might be prepared to find him … placement.”

“Witness Protection?”

“So to speak,” George answered without commitment.
He felt Martha’s misplaced fingers begin to tickle the back of his neck as she bid him to come back to bed without feeling the connection she was attempting to reassert. They exchanged a few kisses that lead no nothing further, both of them having business to see to in a few hours that required everything the night had still to offer in way of rest.

In the blackened room, George laid with his eyes open, blind but seeing events as he hoped to have them enacted. He would get Rogers to reveal his position and make clear that it was André who gave him away before putting both men on a path of collision that would likely end in a crime the FBI would finally have cause to convict. Should Arnold’s whereabouts remain unknown, Rogers would be offered a plea deal, a cell in Alaska or wherever it was that he wanted to go. If there was anything of value in André’s research as Martha suggested there might be, surely it would win hearts and minds on its own merits without the man himself.

For a long while, George snorted to himself, the same seemed true of Arnold’s Defence Bill. Now the interest in its passage had left all parties aggrieved and defenceless.

Tomorrow morning, he would meet with von Steuben and Martha would attend the funeral of DI Yilmaz in has absence, attempting to see if Ben Tallmadge was willing to resume his old post with promises of all of the support he had been denied. The following day, the two would travel in the back of an armoured vehicle up to Albany in a convoy to attend a wedding that might be better called an act of war. Washington was not certain how many allies he still had in his fight, he knew, however, better than to count John André and his few defenders among them.

It was late, the day had been long, and Anna Strong had already had this conversation with too many people to afford Edmund Hewlett the full of her attention. He spoke in short, impatient sentences, at times apologetic though altogether ignorant or simply unable to acknowledge that he continued to err. Anna did not hold it against Mary that she had relayed the doubts she had shared with her in confidence; she found it downright offensive, however, that Edmund seemed to believe the gesture of his presence would make amends for all that had transpired between them, and all that had not.

She stared at him as he spoke, longing for the seeded doubts he had failed to meet with merit – the bar she had feared he would evaluate as a lack of ambition, the pounds she had put on since giving up smoking and the questions that had troubled her active mind whenever she glimpsed her reflection – had she grown too opulent to warrant his attraction? She saw more of herself now than she ever had previously – in the media, in the mirror, in the answer she found to why it had truly stopped concerning her that her weight continued to slowly wax; a part of her that could no longer be considered small secretly hoped that she would not be able to squeeze herself into her wedding dress. The phantasy of the hated garment and all it represented not fitting her body brought a smile to her lips and Anna took another chocolate from the heart-shaped box which her ‘fiancé’ had presumably picked up along with petrol, savouring the too-sweet taste on her tongue until she noticed his shattered and ever shifting face had arranged itself into a smile to match the one which he thought he was being given. Anna, however, was well past pretending to herself or keeping up any pretence to onlookers that her pleasures had anything to do with Edmund’s presence.

“The ceremony won’t be binding in and of itself,” she said dismissively. “Edmund, though you seem more than willing to leave me in the dark over your actions and intentions, I don’t want to go into this union with you with either of us imagining that we will take the certificate down to City Hall for a stamp.”
“What are you saying?” he swallowed.

Anna took another chocolate from the box and unwrapped it slowly as she spoke, “I wish I had the words. It isn’t ‘over’ because it never really existed, did it?” she accused. “You swore to me that we would be equals in all ways, that you would honour and respect me that we would communicate, but Edmund, even ignoring all that you tried to keep hidden from me, when I’ve tried to talk to you about my problems, small as they may be in the grand scheme as it is defined by grand men such as you must consider yourself, your response – consistently – is that I ought to just ignore it. Maybe,” she shifted meanly, “maybe this is the fault of the offence I took on first date at your insinuation that ‘platonic’ was not in my vocabulary. Certainly, if I had any questions or doubts behind the meaning of ‘ignore’, I could simply follow the example you seem to go to pains providing-”

“Anna, I was trying to keep you safe!” he nearly shouted.

“You were trying to keep me ‘sheltered’,” she replied with a certain calm. “There is a difference.”

“I’m sorry -”

“No, you ‘apologise’, Edmund,” Anna corrected as condescendingly as she was capable. “As long as I am throwing Plato back at you – what you are offering, all you are offering - is a philosophic defence of your actions. ‘Sorry’ implies compunction and regret. You? You framed a man for murder and seek to defend your lack of remorse for his having since died in police custody by citing political views that to be honest I am not entirely convinced that you yourself don’t also hold. You’ve done everything in your power to elongate this investigation under the guise of protecting your friends who are among its primary suspects – this not because you ultimately give a damn what happens to John, but because you forced him into managing your finances, to break the law on your behalf. You forced Jordan into the same!”

“Anna, I did it all for you-”

“Me?” she gaped. “Don’t you dare, don’t you fucking dare say that any of this is for my sake, Edmund. You may have acted in my name but … but you know what really gets me in all of this?” she shook her head, took another praline and continued after biting it in two. “You say you have nothing to do with your family. That they want nothing to do with you … yet the only reason I am privy to any of this is because DeJong’s Tavern – my dream – was purchased in the name you plan to give me the day after tomorrow by a fucking drug cartel which your younger brother apparently has some connection to, misappropriating French taxes that were previously used to fund an unpopular war, put a military dictator into power, and then quickly laundered into property in my hometown in hopes that no one would find out. But you knew! You knew from the beginning! And I only know now because the F-B-I,” she spelled out slowly for empathies, “had a few questions about the matter. I don’t want the bar under that pretence, Edmund. I’m a lawyer. I’m a law-abiding citizen. I don’t want any of this! I’ll wed you because I don’t want anyone else to suffer the effects of your crimes as I have, as DS Yilmaz and Colonel Tarleton and Benedict Arnold certainly have, as-”

Edmund threw his arms into the air. “Arnold? Arnold -”

“Don’t worry,” Anna closed her eyes. “I haven’t given away your position. When I said I loved you, I meant it. The FBI thinks to use our wedding to confront those profiting from the senator’s disappeared,” she swallowed, “but who, Edmund, has gambled and won more that you? You have a bar now, you have a flat in John’s building and who knows how much on your available account balance. Buy yourself permanent residency status if you want, buy all of the trappings of the life you seek and buy another bride to display in that guided cage you’ve built yourself. I love you. But
I don’t love you enough to wind up like Philomena Freud or Mary Grant – well, Woodhull … for now at least.”

Edmund moved as though he meant to kneel before her, as though their problems could be helped by yet more posturing. “Anna, I swear I will make this right.”

“Not with me, Edmund. Not with me,” she assured him, standing from her perch on the corner of the couch to escort him to the door. “I want you to leave. We will see each other on Thursday, and afterwards, I honestly hope our paths will never cross again in this lifetime.”

She cried when the door closed behind him, carried what remained of the heart-shaped box up to her borrowed bedchamber and when she no longer had chocolate to keep her company as she switched between Fox Soccer and CNN, she went back down into the kitchen to replace it with what little was left of the crisps and ice cream she had bought herself the day before. The wedding would move forward in accordance with federal interests; afterwards, life would continue, not quite in the way Anna Strong would have planned it, but such was rarely the case regardless of specific circumstance. She would spend more time in Albany than originally anticipated, time that extended the settlement. When she finally returned the keys to the owners of the house and closed the door for good, the last words she had ever spoken to Edmund within those walls would continue to linger, last and haunt.

Fear trickled through her as the old tomcat, purring, brushed its head up against her leg. Years before she had christened him Sergio Ramouse thinking herself clever when she awoke to find a series of smaller animals laid out evenly before the doorway separating her apartments from the house proper. But she and Sergei (as a few of the nurses with limited English and even less knowledge of Spanish football had taken to calling him) had had little to do with one another since. Susan Bertie was not required to feed him or change his litter; the maids did that as they did most other chores a few of her friends would occasionally complain about having to do for themselves. Susan never said anything in response, her problems - animal and otherwise - were often too comparatively damning to put into words. Since reading an article in The Guardian about cats at clinics being able to predict which patient would be the next to die, whenever she saw Sergei lurking around her grandmother’s bedside, she had taken it upon herself to chase him away and their relationship had suffered for it. She was surprised to find herself the object of his sudden affection, and then, she wasn’t.

Susan Bertie had felt the fear of death looming since her phone had woken her up with its ring. It was now seven o’clock in the evening and the words on her computer screen in her otherwise darkened bedchamber began to blur with her tears. She lifted the cat from the floor and began to weep into its soft fur – for Marie, for herself, for the envy she was beginning to recognise had always defined their friendship. “Don’t go,” she whispered to her pet. “Don’t go to Nan. She doesn’t know me but she’s the only family I really have. I don’t know what would happen if I lost her. Marie is gone and no one can find her. If I disappeared, no one would think to look.” she choked on resentment she knew to be wasted. She was worried, more so that she had been since Christmas when her grandmother’s health had taken a turn for the worse and her closest friend had first begun talking about leaving London for Liverpool, leaving London forever. Susan had never quite connected the two biggest strains constantly on her mind into the same stress – a fear of abandonment and isolation - until life had left her with no one to talk to, no one to assault with consideration and blame. She clicked through a few tabs she had open on her browser, settling on
Facebook which no one used save for the supposed middle-aged American swing-voter and the Macedonia teenagers being paid by Moscow to write fake news stories about Hillary Clinton. Thus, feeling safe in her relative anonymity (though she had the maximal five-thousand ‘friends’ the server allowed) Susan began to type her thoughts as they came:

Marie, you are such a selfish cunt!!! Stop fucking complaining about your mum and dad all the time – you have parents who love you. You have parents. I don’t. How very dare you to speak to me about what is fair and what isn’t! What is not fair if for you to have left without a word! You can be such a bitch. Do you know how many people miss you? How much I miss you? For the love of Christ just come home!!!!

She stopped, closing the page without hitting post, which she had never in fact intended to do. Marie did not have parents anymore in the plural, and Susan’s heart had hurt desperately for her since she had first heard the news. Now, days later, she felt ill with concern that despite all of her best efforts, she would never hear anything from her closest friend again. No one would. She picked up her phone to dial the inspector in Edinburgh who had called her midday, but he did not answer, so she left everything she knew about the half-sister Marie had living in the same city in a confused message, apologising that she had forgotten to say as much earlier. She considered ringing Mrs Robinson again, but Marie’s mother had always alternated between treating her like a little nuance and a woman grown, and Susan felt deserving of neither reaction. Her friend was officially a missing person and Susan resented her for it. By this point, she reasoned, Marie was probably dead somewhere and part of her resented her for that as well as she began imagining the double-funeral, wondering if Marie would get a volley like the papers were saying her dad would, thinking that it would be impolite and the service would simply be uneven if she did not.

Rubbing her eyes dry, Susan set Sergei back down on the floor and returned to Twitter, seeing if there were any new articles or alerts for her to share. She pulled up YouTube and ignored her alerts while she searched for a playlist to listen to, hoping to tune out the noise the reporters outside her window were again making as she scrolled through the messages she had been receiving on all platforms for the better half of the day, mostly from mothers of other children who had disappeared without a trace. Her phone buzzed and not recognising the number, she hit ignore, unwilling to talk to the London police again – the police who had not cared until it seemed all too late.

Susan had woken up that morning earlier than her alarm would have otherwise been set, Mrs Robinson having rung up to ask if she had seen or heard anything from her daughter. She had not. What she found she did, however have when she and her best friend’s mum met up at the Chelsea police station only to be told that children normally turned up within twenty-four hours, that no claim would be taken and no case would be opened until such time had passed, was individual initiative and untapped ire.

‘Are you fucking stupid?’ Susan had demanded of the middle-aged woman behind a glass panel who could not be bothered to print out a form for Mrs Robinson to complete or to use her exceedingly long, brightly painted nails to put a basic set of information into the computer she sat behind. ‘This is Britain, there are like five things on television: news that no one watches because all the noise around the Brexit vote is so bloody boring, quiz shows for the elderly and the enthusiast, eighteenth century melodramas which I guess we will just keep getting until the BBC finally gets a return on the elaborate costumes they keep having to reuse, NCIS reruns, and then, then there are the overwhelming majority of programs that make it on air – with all due respect, Ma’am - something like seventy percent of our shows are crime drama and every. single. one. of them has a line like ‘if we don’t find so-and-so within twenty-four hours there is no hope for their rescue’ and you’ve somehow never seen that shit? Look we’ve all of us learned – with the whole Arnold thing in the US – that this is fact rather than fiction. But you are telling me that you can’t open a case for my missing friend? That is bullocks! That is -’
‘That is television,’ the woman replied, unmoved. ‘Children statistically turn up.’

‘And what of the ones that don’t? Do you want that on your conscious? Look, my best friend is what you would call ‘at risk’. She has been depressed for months, her mum’s ill, her dad died overseas a few days ago and -’

‘I’m sorry for your friend’s loss but there is nothing I can do. The system won’t allow it until she has been missing for a full day. There isn’t the funding to look for every would-be runaway in London.’

‘What if I paid?’ Susan offered, reaching for her purse. ‘Do you have any idea who my father is? Do you have any idea who Marie’s parents are? Shit she could have been kidnapped and held for ransom -’

‘And if you receive a demand that is another conversation, a different form.’

‘Just fucking give us that one then, yea?’

‘Susan, that is enough,’ Mrs Robinson cautioned. ‘I … I don’t think she has been kidnapped. Come on. We’ll go another route. Come up with a list of places she might be.’ The woman behind the glass panel Susan had to imagine was bullet-proof gave a dismissive shrug and had Susan not been equally unsettled by her best friend’s famous mother’s sudden lack of beauty, she would have continued to stand at the reception desk in a full-out verbal assault. Mary Robinson, however, looked broken in ways that extended past her heart. Susan had known she was sick for as long as she had known Marie, but she had never seen Mary bare faced, her bare scalp covered with a silk scarf rather than a wig made from the long hair she had once had. She had a pallor mien that met with eyes bloodshot from the tears she must have shed in a ghostlike manner. Her eyelashes, Susan saw, were not unusually pale the way Marie’s were, they were non-existent, likely haven fallen out with the rest of her hair. Susan swallowed and consciously tried not to stare as she followed this woman whom she had known for half her life without knowing at all, confused by all that which she was being confronted.

At Marie’s favourite corner coffeeshop, the two drew up a list of places the girl might turn up in the next day or so, Mrs Robinson admitting that she might well have driven her daughter to run away when Susan, shyly, told that Marie sometimes mentioned wanting to move to Liverpool and stay with her former surrogate-father. ‘I know I should have said something sooner,’ she stammered, ‘but I never thought … people don’t just leave London. They just don’t. And why would she go now that -’

Mrs Robinson shook her head and Susan stopped, secretly happy that the thought had not been allowed to leave her lips. She felt like an intruder, however welcomed, into that darker world adults seemed to occupy. Though she was often a guest in these sorts of conversations, she was far too young to feel herself at home. Susan Bertie had had the terrible luck of hitting puberty slightly before all of the rest of her friends and having a relatively easy run of it by comparison. Marie and Rachel had acne and A-cups. Susan had proper cleavage, perfect skin, and sex with boys in the sixth form who thought she was sixteen. She had doctors who dealt with her as though she were her absent aunt and spoke in terms she nodded and pretended she understood. When she told the other girls in her year that she was having just as hard of a time with the whole process of growing, they dismissed her – they could do so because they still enjoyed physical attributes that allowed them to behave like children. Susan, in turn, was expected to act like an adult by adults and so she gave them her best imitation. Most of the time, they wanted to talk about money, and so Susan was not surprised at all when Mrs Robinson continued. ‘It is not your fault, Susan, its mine. I’ve been … fighting with Ban’s siblings for,’ she sighed, ‘more than a decade if we really want to get into it,
but … specifically since his death. It isn’t something to bother you with but he left a sizeable amount of debt in his name of which they hold me responsible and I came on the idea to use his current status as a national hero to try and auction the pieces of his wardrobe still at my address. I had a photographer friend over and we were taking pictures using a model he brought. I’m sure Marie has already told you all of this but when she came home training that … I mean I think it is safe to say she only went to to get away from me -'

Susan shook her head. She had not seen or heard anything from Marie since the weekend. ‘I saw her after fencing, well, she and Olivia came to watch the last few minutes of my Sunday-league fixture -’ she began to explain.

‘You play football now?’ Mrs Robinson interrupted in a tone Susan could not place beyond that it reminded her of the one Marie had used in posing the same question.

‘I sit on the bench and swear at the other side. Anyway, a few of us came here to this café afterwards and Marie … she didn’t say anything about you or Liverpool or wanting to run away or anything like that. She was still hella-pissed about The Mail’s cover story on Saturday, but like, not that she was going to do anything about it. She was just sad. I think it just made her miss her dad more, reading about what he was like when he was younger. I’m sorry, not her actual dad I guess, but you know … Mr Tarleton. It was getting dark and I told her to text you that you knew she was alright -'

Mrs Robinson nodded. ‘She did and … I, maybe I just thought she would be out with you girls for a while longer. Maybe I should have said something to her beforehand and really … really money was the last thing that ought to have been among my considerations, but when Marie came home and saw what was going on, she made an absolute scene, screaming the house down. How dare I – he isn’t even in the ground yet, she slapped the model and began crying that those were her father’s things and how dare any of us touch them, grabbing a box at random and locking herself in her room. It is … not entirely unlike Marie, not lately, to have such episodes,’ Mrs Robinson admitted to that which Susan already knew about her friend without knowing the specifics. ‘When I went to talk to her, she yelled at me for apologising for her behaviour because she wasn’t sorry – but I’d ought to be. So, I let it rest. I didn’t see her yesterday at all until supper last night, and then only because I tricked her out of her room with her favourite film and some shawarma from a takeaway that I know you kids like.’

Susan had not heard anything from Marie since they two had parted ways after the café had closed its doors at six on Sunday evening. ‘Was Das Boot Mr Tarleton’s favourite film, too?’ she tried, feeling that she had ought to contribute something.

Mrs Robinson snorted back something that was probably in fact too sad to be called a laugh as she rolled her eyes, ‘Ban’s favourite movie was unironically Spice World to which he would attribute the self-supposing moral that we are all so much more than the single adjectives the world is want to assign.’

‘I’ve never seen it.’

‘It’s not really worth your time, and that is coming from someone who had a cameo appearance. But no … Marie and I just watched long, drawn out, foreign war-movies of the sort she likes – God only knows why or where she gets it from - on Netflix all night … all of her regular go-tos for forgetting her problems. I fell asleep before she did and she woke me up before she went to bed. In the morning – today - I got up to take Mou for a walk and could not find him. He is normally not allowed to sleep in bed, still, I thought maybe Marie had wanted him to cuddle beside her which she sometimes does even though her father also doesn’t approve, but when I went to her room to
check, neither were there. Mou’s leash was gone and I looked around for a note letting me know that she had taken the dog out and would be right back when he had done his business. Finding none, I sent her a text but then saw that she had left her phone in her room. I waited a few minutes, made myself a cuppa – one for Marie, too, and was about to start us breakfast when I saw that a fair bit of the fruit that I had bought for the week was already gone. I noticed Mou’s dry-food was also missing from the cupboard and I began looking around: she had taken the cash from my wallet, her rucksack, one of Ban’s service jackets but nothing from her own wardrobe save for a few pairs of knickers and the clothing she had on the night before, and that is when I called you, thinking if anyone knew something you would,’ she buried her eyes in her palms. ‘I’m an idiot. She woke me up so I would go to bed that she would not wake me when she was leaving, which must have been sometime between midnight and five in the morning. I thought she had forgiven me but I … Christ I’m such and idiot, I’m so, so sorry.’

Maybe, Susan considered, the constable at the local station’s reception desk truly had somehow missed out on the plethora of detective fiction that served as the country’s primary export, but she herself had not. ‘We will find her,’ Susan told her friend’s mum, then assured of her own untried sleuthing skills. ‘We know the window of when she left home, we have a fairly good idea as to what she was wearing, and there are only so many places that allow dogs entry. If she left town in the middle of the night it will be easy for police to pin point her on any train station’s CCTV … and if they are not going to get a warrant for the footage until tomorrow, I’ll just make a YouTube video and tag every means of public transport on every social media platform asking them to have a check.’

On its own, even with 2,000 or so hits within the first hour, the twelve-minute video Susan had made lead to little. She had explained the situation as fully as she could without putting Marie at added risk, in other words, she did not give Marie’s last name or identify her celebrity mother in any way. By noon, Susan had begun wondering if this was a mistake and had gone over to the Robinson residence to see if Mary would consent to her offering financial incentive from her own bank account for any information that led to her best friend being found and brought home safely. Mrs Robinson had been on the phone with one of Marie’s Tarleton uncles when she arrived. Susan coming on the idea that celebrity in itself was not such a bad thing to exploit, had asked to speak to the sport agent, telling him, after Mrs Robinson had handed over the phone in surprised confusion, to call anyone under his management and any other high-profile contacts he might have to put the word out. Mary Robinson did the same with those she knew in the entertainment industry. Within an hour, #FindMarie was trending and the video Susan had made had been viewed ten million times. She spent most of the rest of the day going through photographs and footage that had been sent to her as her film instructed, surprised at how many doppelgangers her best friend had and how many of them had taken public transportation since the midnight before.

Still, twelve hours in, the police had been unwilling to open their own investigation and social media was not providing to be the resource that it promised. Susan began tweeting additional information as it occurred to her to the tens of thousands of new followers whom she suddenly found herself having, inviting Marie’s other friends to do the same.

If Marie has in fact altered her appearance, it is unlikely that she would have cut her hair, which reaches her lower back and of which she is quite proud. #FindMarie

- She probably has it pulled back in braids. #FindMarie

- She had longish bangs she sometimes pinned back, but wears in a way that covers as much of her face as possible when she is breaking out, which she probably is now from stress. #FindMarie
Marie has really bad skin, Susan wrote, first fearing that her best friend would be furious with her for speaking so candidly, then, as the hours passed, increasingly worried that Marie was not alive to be angry at all.

She has a small tattoo of a sabre crossed with a foil on her right hipbone that her mum doesn’t know is real, Harriet tweeted sometime later. Susan had not known as much, either.

She is fluent in French, Rachel added.

She speaks and understands German as well and she is functionally illiterate in Arabic, Olivia gave.

Marie can perfectly imitate any accent on the island, Susan wrote. Her feed continued to fill with pictures of girls who might have matched the description, girls who were not, however, Marie.

Hesitantly, afraid to offend any of the athletes who had been so good as to share the original homemade Amber Alert, Susan began to share more secrets about her best friend that might make her father turn in his grave, if he were ever to be buried. Marie is a low-key #ManCity fan, adding, The current management rumours are not why her dog is named after José Mourinho though. #FindMarie

As soon as this posted, Susan’s phone rang as she suspected it might without solid reasoning. The man on the line introduced himself as Inspector Ferguson of Edinburgh and explained patiently that the internal operating system currently in use legitimately would not allow a case to be opened prior to the twenty-four-hour mark for anything short of extraordinary circumstance. This had to do with budget cuts and other acts of the British bureaucracy which Susan had learnt over the course of her day were not only an impairment to her cause but to many others, having since used her growing celebrity to call attention to a number of cases of missing children that were not being taken into any professional consideration. She told him this, practically in tears as she recalled a recorded response which she had gotten to her original video from some mum out in the West Country whose seven-year old son had never been found, who had been petitioning police to change policy since. Susan had wept, imagining Mrs Robinson put into the same situation despite her many triumphs over anonymity. It was around this time that Susan half began to wonder if anyone would care even half so much had it been she herself who had left without a word.

“We can cheat the system though,” Ferguson informed her. “I could have local police at your home in a matter of minutes and all of the Home Nations’ available resources poured into finding your friend, I have a mate who owes me a mighty favour,” he began to explain but seemed to think better on it, “but your life will undoubtably be hell until Marie is found.”

“It is hell with her gone,” Susan countered. “I just keep imagining her in some below-earth holding cell with a psychopath. Everyone else is on the lookout, how could no one have spotted her yet?”

“I’ll make a call.”

Ten minutes later ISIS had shared Susan’s video. Fifteen and the police had come to her house as DI Ferguson had promised they would to conduct and official interview. The story that had already gotten the attention of The Daily Mail was now the top headline of every online news source, reputable or not. “Was Colonel Tarleton’s Ward Kidnapped by a Terrorist Cell in Retaliation?” they each asked, with variations on which words appeared in all caps.

In total, the police had since come three times to talk to her. Susan was offered a uniformed officer for her protection but she declined, saying that they could surely be put to better use elsewhere. “Every station in Britain is on the lookout,” one of the detectives told her. “We’re working with
Interpol,” another said. “It was very good of you to not give Marie’s surname out online,” the first seemed to scold, “but why did you not mention to the police that her father worked in counter terrorism?”

“Because her dad died in an FBI interrogation room over a week ago and no one cared then?” Susan squinted her disgust and disbelief. “Because I didn’t think it mattered since nothing else seemed to? Ban Tarleton isn’t Marie’s real dad anyway, just some bloke her mum shacked up with because of a bet – honestly, don’t you read The Mail? This isn’t my fault, it’s yours, or it is society’s or whatever, but you shouldn’t have to wait for a kid to be gone long enough that they are not likely to come back to start a search and you shouldn’t care any more or any less because of who their parents are or aren’t! What about all of those children who went missing today but don’t have famous families to spread the word that the police just won’t because of some block up in the system? What about all those kids we hear about on the news who disappear and then wind up in Syria against their will and their horrified parents who can’t believe it half so well as your lot can because of any number of socioeconomic determinants? What questions would you be asking my friends Farhad or Ismael just disappeared from their rooms? I don’t think you would have to wait for social media to start saying ISIS -”

“Colonel Banastre Tarleton was an alleged war criminal,” one of the stone-faced detectives told her.

“And Marie is a thirteen-year-old girl. Go find her! Go away!”

Clandestinely, Susan had long envied Marie and the so-said problems she had with her parents. When her own father’s assistant called to check if she was alright rather than the Lord troubling himself to lift the landline at his country estate, the marked difference in the lives of her best friend and herself was made all the more clear. Susan had been told her father was playing a round of golf, but that would be happy to hear that she was well and decided that she absolutely was not well at all and that she never would be. She took to bed, crying that she didn’t have a mother to fight with, that no war-cripple had taken up residence in her house and told her bedtime stories when she was small. At eight in the evening, emotionally exhausted and feeling she had done all she could, she turned off her monitor and tried to sleep. At eleven, she was still awake from the sound of reporters outside her window.

“Go away!” Susan shouted down at them, leaning out of the second story to flashing cameras and cries of questions. “If you want a real job to do, wait.” She went to her computer, printed out all of the pictures and information she had been sent by people wondering why Marie’s story was getting the attention that their loved-ones were not and began folding them into paper aeroplanes, firing them one by one at the people there to take her picture. “Fine! You know where I am! You have enough pictures now to prove it! Go and find everyone else! Leave! Go away!” she screamed until her throat was sore before slamming the window hard enough to cause the paint on the inner frame to crack. Susan pulled the drapes closed and began crying once more, for Marie and her family, for herself, for what felt a wasted effort.

The following morning, The Guardian would print all of the pictures she had let rain on the reporters as public attention fully turned to how under-funded the nanny-state truly was. They would follow up on Marie, as would many others, having little to say beyond the fact that the search was on-going, yet taking roughly 800 words to do so.

Curiously, Farhad would phone her in the morning from his work-placement at Siemens to tell her about the cover of the German tabloid ‘Bild.’ Susan would know what it said before the upperclassman could give her a translation. She would have by that point heard as much from another boy in year ten some time the night before when, groggy eyed, she answered her mobile
phone when it rang rather than simply buzzed with another empty notification.

>>>Susan! I’ve been trying to get you attention all afternoon. I figure you are getting tons of random messages from a lot of people but I really need you to post the pictures I just sent you on WhatsApp everywhere you can. I only have like five followers on all platforms and - <<

‘Who … is this?’ she yawned, unable to place the accent.

>>>Arthur … Wellesley, from school. Listen, Ban Tarleton – Marie’s fake-dad? He is very much alive, I’m with him now … so to speak.<<

‘How?’

>>>My work experience, ‘innit?’<< he seemed to mock. >>>Look, I’ll text you the details … just try to get the word out to Marie and her mum. I don’t have a number for her otherwise I would - <<

‘Marie let her phone in her room. She … ran away, we think.’

>>>Or some terror cell got to her. That is what they are saying in the papers.<<

‘Or that,’ Susan frowned. ‘Can I talk to Mr Tarleton?’

>>>I don’t think that is really such a good idea … Just post the pictures. We can text each other with updates.<< he said. She heard a toilet flush.

‘Where are you?’

>>>A McDonald’s. It’s complicated and I can’t risk Tarleton overhearing any of this. Post the pictures and I’ll text you soon, I swear it.<<

Chapter End Notes

So before you, oh beloved reader, go into the comment field to wish me a happy birthday and hit me up with your wonderful stories of animals interrupting your transit (wasn’t even kidding. That shit is real and I am here for it.) I have a few notes for you.

Geography

Because it has been a while, lets take another look at institutions of the European Union: Frankfurt is the location of the European Central Bank (ECB), Brussels is where you can find the European Parliament, and (this is actually UN but we will stick it here anyway) The Hague is home to the International Court of Justice, where countries can go to sue one another.

Name Dropping

Not going to bore you with lengthy biographies of players so minor to this story that they likely won’t get more than one mention – but Charles O’Hara and Benjamin Lincoln were referenced in Washington’s POV and here is why their names might be ringing a bell: at the Surrender of Yorktown Cornwallis decided he didn’t feel like
getting up out of bed to deal with it (no judgement, I’m sure we’ve all been there) so he sent his deputy (O’Hara) to surrender his sword, which Washington refused to accept seeing such as a slight. He ended up sending his second (Lincoln) out to take the sword, completing the humiliation.

Other Historical Appropriations/Adaptations

The Tarleton family blamed Mary Robinson for Banastre’s spending habits though they predated the relationship. Neither, it should be said, was particularly skilled at personal finance.

I’m certain I’ve mentioned this before but shortly prior to his split with Mary Robinson, Ban Tarleton was called out in the broadsheets for lusting after her daughter (who was by then twenty-two, not thirteen), which served as the loose basis for André’s diagnosis of the whole Marie-Ban dynamic.

Speaking of fathers and daughters, Robert Bertie was well past dead by the time his natural daughter was a teenager, and long before that, too. Had he lived though, I can easily imagine he would have remained something of a lad.

Arthur Wellesley legitimately did prefer to text. He didn’t like speaking to his servants and valets (roles in which he cast most people) so he wrote out messages to them on little slips of paper when he needed to communicate something. National hero right there. #iconic #StillWaitingOnThatArthur/KittyFic

Sport

Das Boot is a Sky Original Production (available now on Sky Cinema and Sky on Demand) about the mission of a German submarine during the Second World War, or so Sky Sports reminds us fifty-six times during the coverage of a ninety-minute game every weekend. It is based on a movie that came out well before either you or I were born which was probably good before it became another one of those things conspiring to ruin football. Marie and her mum would have been watching the 1981 film back in 2016.

Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos has picked up more cards - be it yellow or red - than any other player in the history of La Liga, the Champions League, and the Spain national team, which begs a legacy question in our shared theatre of interest - Who do you guys think would have had the most bookings if the American Revolution handed them out? Let me know that in the comments as well. I want some weird answers. It is my birthday. :)

And that is it for me, if you’ve time, do also tell me what you thought of the chapter. I always love hearing from you. <3

Up Next: A funeral … and a wake.
The Irish

Chapter Summary

Arthur fakes a domestic to halt escalations, Caleb comforts Ben after the funeral before giving a game-changing confession, Ferguson exploits a personal tragedy and finds himself back in familiar territory, Simcoe joins the ranks of those ready to confront Hewlett on his bad dealings, Abe makes an unlikely friend.

Chapter Notes

You know that recurring, one-sided conversation we (well … I) keep having in the end notes about my inexplicable need for an Arthur Wellesley / Kitty Pakenham teen-rom-com-gone-wrong?

Well!

I normally write an opener, but this is something of a special occasion. Ladies and Gents, without further ado – it is my absolute pleasure to present you with a mysterious dick pic that has nothing to do with Benedict Arnold.

As always, I hope you enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Time was not linear in itself.

Its passage was a narrative agreed to by historians and as such events tended to fall into an order that was agreed to simply because it was not argued. But time, Arthur Wellesley would later consider, did not work in the same way for any two individuals. He would be in his mid-forties when he first engaged himself in a conversation which he had, until such point, all but forgotten initiating under ulterior motives at fifteen.

As a child, he had sat in the back seat of a diplomat's Jaguar, declining to take the wheel under the pretence that he and the girl he would one day wed were having a domestic, when in reality he had just learnt that a female classmate he did not at that time think he cared for one way or the other had disappeared without a trace. He would be in Paris on a diplomatic mission of his own, in bed with a rival's beautiful mistress - his wife asleep under cold covers a room over, when it fully hit him that he would never see Marie Robinson again in this life, causing Arthur to rob himself of his lover's embrace without offering explanation, quietly return to his marital chamber to retrieve his notebook; the sound would wake Kitty for which he would offer a half-hearted apology before continuing a conversation he had not known himself to be paying quite so much mind to when it might have made a difference.

She would respond with kindness, empathy and understanding and it would fill him with resentment he neither understood nor would have been able to express. Instead of responding to her directly, Arthur expected and mentally engaged the reactions of a man whom he'd commented on
several occasions was more arrogant than his actions had ever justified. He would take his computer into the drawing room and write up an email in the manner of all of the other standard condolences his rank required him to send, here with a sudden confidence the recipient would know what he meant but could not find the personal sentiment to express outside of standard measure.

Perhaps one day, Arthur would think after hitting send, he would find an approach that did not seem a reproach and life would bear a nearer resemblance to that which he intended.

But time, he would soon again find, was not as linear as one wanted to believe.

Kitty would file for separation and in this long latent expression of ego he would remember the way he thought and almost felt about her at fifteen, sitting in the back of a car, half conversing with not-yet-Sir-Banastre over such matters back when the Minister’s cherished ward might yet be saved.

“About a week ago, give or take,” he murmured in response, adding for clarification, “I was trying to avoid an argument.”

Insofar as he knew, he was not in fact having one.

Nor, was he in fact, communicating with Kitty Pakenham whatsoever on the afternoon in question.

Instead, he scanned through the hundreds of photos of girls who might have been Marie Robinson appearing on social media in rapid fire, looking for someone else entirely; Arthur Wellesley was seeking Anna Strong.

There was a logic to his scope, and to that logic his girlfriend had a loose connection. Now however, she had simply become a convenient cover. The morning had met him with the news that a girl from school he did not otherwise think about outside of honours French had gone missing somewhere in the small hours, that police procedure disallowed a missing person’s case to be opened and that social media was once again failing to live up to its promised potential of connecting people in a digital age. He had climbed into the passenger seat of Cornwallis’ Jaguar and pretended to listen as the ambassador spoke at length at what seemed erroneous details about the vehicle’s engine with a note of pride which Arthur sought to trace back to its source until it occurred to him that such was as redundant as the conversation itself. Cornwallis either found his ownership august or took particular accomplishment in evidently having memorized the owner’s manual in its entirety. For his part, Arthur was quick to realise that he could just as easily produce small sounds that mimicked awe while staring at his phone as he could while staring broadly out of the window. The ambassador told him he would let him take the wheel after they had made it through the Jersey Turnpike, which Arthur had imagined must have been something of a motorway equivalent to the Bermuda Triangle of which his understanding was equally poor. Not to call attention to this, he offered a weak expression of enthusiasm, same as the last several: ‘Cool, yea.’ - ‘Oh, jolly good, that.’ - ‘Spiffing.’

By the time they had crossed into Delaware, neither he nor the ambassador made much of an attempt at each other’s company. Arthur forgot that he was even in a car until it stopped at a petrol station and, after pissing and paying, Cornwallis attempted to make good on his word by handing over the keys.
Arthur blinked, recalling where he was and what was expected of him, suddenly finding himself enraged at how empty it all felt. ‘My friend is missing … she disappeared sometime, somewhere in the night,’ he explained, exaggerated. Marie Robinson was not, strictly speaking, a friend. Arthur in fact considered her one of the meanest girls at school, but saying so under such circumstance seemed uncouth. She was gone and for the moment that was all she was – that, and a symbol of the stark contradictions inherent in any matter of public interest or concern. ‘The police in London wouldn’t open a case because of some operating statistic that says she is likely to return, but now they are less sure. The papers are pointing fingers at organised terror – maybe to generate more clicks but … I don’t, I don’t quite see anything good coming from it, being that … well if I have learned anything in my time in America, Sir, acronymed organizations are given to treating any threat as credible, and now I am concerned that if something horrendous hasn’t happened to her already, it soon will.’

Cornwallis did not inquire for further context, perhaps hoping to spare them both the embarrassment of accusation. ‘I’m sure the police are involved and that your friend will soon be brought to safety.’

Arthur felt offended by the dismissal. ‘I wish I could share your confidence, Sir. When I first read the news in my feed this morning, I assumed it was her … just reacting to a recent family tragedy. Her father recently passed away. But I’ve been thinking on it and if I’m not mistaken … she and I have both spoken to him since. Apologies, I might have phrased that differently. Marie’s father, or the man she acknowledged as such, was Banastre Tarleton. Being that he died in FBI custody, I think this who charade with ISIS might just be a cover to allow the Americans to move in or excuse their already having done so. Is there … do you know anything about this?’ he stopped, rephrasing to make his inquiry seem less of the indictment it was. ‘Can you do anything to help this from escalating into an international incident?’

Cornwallis’ response was uncommitted and he retracted the offer of the keys, which Arthur sheepishly refused, returning his attention to his smart phone. An hour passed in silence before the ambassador asked him if there were any updates.

‘I don’t think there will be at this point,’ the young man shook his head. ‘Not on social media. My girlfriend shared the ‘Find Marie’ video about ten minutes ago and then turned around and made a Snapchat Story about her and her friends getting ‘hashtag-royal-wedding-ready’ which apparently involves Bulmers and wearing one’s hair in intentionally messy buns. It is … with Marie, it isn’t solidarity any more, it is status quo. Kitty only shared Susan’s post because everyone else is. It is sick. I kind of feel bad about every time I’ve ever signalled my quote-unquote sorrow about some other nation’s tragedy with a transparent flag over my profile picture on whatever stupid site -’

‘Are you hungry?’ Cornwallis interrupted, indicating that his question and interest in its answer were as empty as the support Marie was receiving on social media.

‘What?’ Arthur snapped.

‘Let’s stretch our legs. Walk around New York, get a hotdog, a picture with the liberty statue. Buy a souvenir for your girlfriend -’

‘My legs are fine, I don’t eat lunch – I don’t eat street meat full stop - I know what the Statue of Liberty looks like. As far as souvenirs go, I promised Kitty I would find a way of getting her Lady Anna’s garter from the wedding as it seemed the easiest way to quiet her when I told her that I’d not be coming home for spring break, something, I’m sure, I won’t find at a street seller’s, and I’m … fairly certain you can’t park in a fire lane.’
At this Cornwallis smiled for the first time in a long stretch. ‘It occurs to me there is something about this vehicle I forgot to tell you – the blue number plate with the ‘D’ on it? I means I can park anywhere I please.’

‘Can we go to Setauket?’ Arthur suggested quickly, adding with forced humility, ‘You’re right, I need to get my mind off of … girls. Girls … the ones I know, anyway, I know would be far more impressed if I were to send them a picture from the world’s most famous crime scene than from the Statue of Liberty … plus Setauket is small town, there are probably some quiet streets I could practice driving on. To be honest … I’ve never driven on the right side of the road, or an automatic. I’m a little nervous to …’ he trailed off, hoping he sold the fib with enough truth. He was nervous that Cornwallis planned to bring him to a police station, certain from the ambassador’s general posture and tone that he ought not to have mentioned Tarleton. Susan, he recalled, had been clear not to and likely had reason for being so coy, obstructed to him by a distance of five-thousand miles.

Within a half-hour of the ambassador jovially agreeing to his request and merging back in with traffic, the tension was clear and close though it remained undefined.

Cornwallis had decided that he in fact wanted to grab lunch before the driving lesson he seemed to look forward to giving, causing Arthur to wonder if the embassy actually did anything or if it in fact did so terribly much that such a chore felt like a holiday. They stopped at a McDonalds before the on-ramp that would lead them out of town and Arthur was again asked if he was hungry, to which he again responded he was not. He was being told that the menu was slightly different than the one he knew in Britain as most things, Arthur countered, were, but having little experience with fast food, he insisted would not appreciate the subtlety. In the midst of what ought not to have been an argument, someone asked in an accent similar to his own, ‘is that offer open?’

Ignoring Arthur completely, the boy brushed passed, ‘Lord Cornwallis, fancy meeting you here of all places. I just spent all of my change in an effort I ought to have foreseen as being wasted in that pay-phone, trying to get my brothers to wire me some cash through Western Union – but no matter. As it works out, I’d have needed a photo ID to have collected anyway, which I can only obtain from an embassy or consulate, so yes, yes, I’d say something about this meeting feels rather serendipitous. Are you buying? You must – I’m positively famished and tragically low on funds.’

The ambassador went white. ‘Banastre, I’d heard you’d returned to England,’ he lied. Arthur stayed silent, fighting to assess the situation neither seemed interested in explaining in clear context.

‘Oh, believe me, I’d like nothing more than to go back home, but my meeting ran well past take-off and being that I was made to surrender my passport at The Pentagon I’ve no means of boarding a plane even if I weren’t half-positive that in my present predicament international travel would prove an impossibility. As I was saying, I had the most interesting conversation just now,’ he stopped as the restaurant doors opened, a couple interrupting by their mere presence for the time it took them to brush past. ‘O’rite, I’ll be having a salad then. Evidently, I’ve a heart condition I’d do better to be more mindful of. You pay. I’ll find us a table,’ Tarleton smiled.

‘Say nothing,’ Cornwallis cautioned Arthur as they waited at the counter for service. ‘I’ll sort this.’

Regardless of how he had intended the statement, it seemed a threat. Arthur glanced over his shoulder at the man who may have been his schoolmate’s surrogate-father, wondering how much he was being told to keep to himself.

With Tarleton, he decided in short order, it was difficult to tell.
‘So that is two hours of filing applications for visa extensions and six of driving practice then?’ the colonel asked of Arthur’s work-experience twenty minutes later upon finishing his salad, a cola, and more than the half of Cornwallis’ chips.

‘I also planned the Hewlett wedding,’ Arthur gave.

‘What do you mean?’

‘Music, flowers, seating arrangements, that sort of thing,’ he lied. Marie and Susan had done those things.

‘He has been a lifesaver,’ Cornwallis offered. Tarleton did not seem to accredit the statement with the worth Arthur thought it was due, for he was, truly, trying to save someone’s life and had been for the whole of the day.

‘Nice hat,’ he squinted, hoping to make something purposeful out of the small talk sounding of half-truths and veiled threats.

‘Isn’t it though?’ Tarleton grinned. ‘I saw it at a petrol station in ... Virginia, must have been – that is where they have all of the colonial-themed amusement parks, is it not? The one’s where you can fire a musket but can’t smoke – apropos,’ he addressed the ambassador directly, ‘after a few days spent touring the American South, I’ve found I’m no longer strictly object to – which Amendment is it? Five?’

‘Two,’ Cornwallis said. ‘The Fifth protects individuals from being compelled to be witnesses against themselves in criminal cases.’

‘Oh, that may well prove useful as well – but really?’ Tarleton criticised, ‘That is less important to the population than the right to bear arms? Curious. I’m guessing the First has to do with God in some fashion – half the reason if I’m to be honest that I’d not mind opening hellfire and can more than empathise with the colonists’ wish to shoot one another in the street making it into their sacred Bill of Rights. But, yes, yes, to the hat – ‘Make America Great Britain Again’ – brilliant, ‘innit? I do enjoy a proper parody.’

‘Can I wear it?’ Arthur asked. ‘Just for a selfie – here, let’s make on together,’ he said, taking the hat and snapping a few photographs against protest. The nature of Tarleton’s complaints caught Cornwallis off-guard enough that Arthur, again, was all but forgotten as he texted the pictures to Susan Bertie, unable to find Marie’s number in his phone.

‘I’m lucky to have it,’ the colonel confessed of the cap he was quick to readjust. ‘My physical deficits don’t escape me but I’m fortunate enough to have had reason to obscure them long before it became evident that I’d never reach full height – I’ve the hair of the devil or David Luiz - pretending there is a difference- that I’ve always had reason to hide to a certain extent. A proper hat, as it works out, adds around two inches to the optic and paired with combat boots that almost brings me up to average.’

‘You’re sitting down, the look affords you little,’ Arthur mumbled.

‘It let’s me look like a proper tourist.’

‘Only if one reads it carefully. Otherwise you look like the Forgotten Man, whatever that means.’

‘Regardless,’ Tarleton dismissed. ‘I feel more assured in my struggle.’

‘I … can’t relate,’ Arthur shrugged.
'No and you can also probably buy beer without anyone carding you which must feel like – might we test this?’ he shifted. ‘I’m parched, parched I tell you, and I’m fairly certain –’

‘The drinking age is twenty-one here,’ Arthur sighed. He could pass himself off as sixteen. Twenty-one would prove a struggle, even at nearly six foot. He had borrowed his brother’s old ID for exactly this reason, but did not want to announce as much before the man he needed to sign off on several school forms saying that he had been a model-intern.

‘So you are saying -’

‘Not that I can’t just that … I, I have to drive, soon. To Setauket. Or Albany. Say, what time is it?’ Arthur parried. It had perhaps been the wrong manoeuvre.

‘I don’t know. They took my watch when they placed me in handcuffs. O’rite, that brings us to it, doesn’t it?’ he grinned, again, intentionally, at Cornwallis. ‘You are due an explanation and I’d hazard to instigate that I do as well.’

Banastre Tarleton’s ordeal began when it had just recently ended – a chain restaurant of the kind he was quick to inform dotted every corner on the east coast and which Cornwallis claimed had a slightly different menu to its British counterpart. It was around eleven in the morning, as the colonel recalled, having ordered but not eaten numerous items from the both the breakfast and day menu on Uncle Sam’s dime. ‘Uncle Sam the anthropomorphism of the American Government – not, never mind.’

Arthur had to google the term, which annoyed him as he had thus far assessed Marie’s supposedly dead father to be something of an idiot. As Tarleton continued, the boy considered ‘savant’ might serve as a closer denotation – he clearly possessed a certain aptitude for field strategy.

'I spent days handcuffed in the back of an unmarked police vehicle awaiting my end. When I saw a number of federal agents take position in the restaurant – having followed in behind Daniel Morgan and myself, I knew my hour had come, that this was to be my last meal. I had something of a laugh about it, saying I wished I had super-sized my order – which of course is bullocks,’ he explained without there being any narrative necessity for it, ‘there are few things my service injury prevents me from enjoying but as I have found recently, American-sized cups are impossible to lift with seven fingers, alas. I made a point of asking if the hand restraints might be removed and when I was refused, I complained that I had to make use of the lavatory – having had more than a respectable amount of petrol-station filter coffee in the past … however much time had passed,’ he paused. ‘It is the hours, I don’t know how they work. Pounds are not the same either – I think ours might be more, but I’m really not certain -’

‘It is the same thing. The same weight. The only difference is the Americans don’t use stones,’ Arthur informed him, growing impatient.

‘Why the hell not?’ Tarleton squinted.

‘How did you get into Oxford?’

‘My dad was the Lord Mayor of Liverpool.’

‘Right.’

‘At least I’m willing to own it, but that raises the question of how … you knew that I attended an elite university. Even pretending that you’re attentive – which you’re not – having stared at your phone for the entirety of this discussion … I can’t quite imagine such being the impression anyone
would have of me, at least initially, at least within the scope of the conversation we’ve been having.’

He could see that he was being called out, but fearing what the ambassador’s reaction to any possible admission might mean for Tarleton, Marie, and most importantly the ‘A’ which Arthur hoped to take home, he elected to continue the ruse. ‘I don’t know,’ the intern taunted, ‘you’re arrogant. You are obnoxious. You are in a position of authority which you just used to ask me to pop into a convenience store and see if I couldn’t buy you beer,’ he challenged, not wanting to admit that he had read as much in a lengthy obituary that spanned three pages of a paper he would not otherwise have purchased.

Neither Tarleton nor Cornwallis had openly acknowledged the former was believed to be dead and Arthur had thought it best to gather evidence rather than point out elephants. He had continued to play with his phone since learning that an anthropomorphism was the attribution of human traits and behaviours to a non-human entity or abstract, with the express purpose of taking pictures of present company. Without a flash, they were not of the best quality but he needed Marie and her mother to see them, thinking if anything would bring her home, it was likely to be this. Unfortunately, Marie had ignored him when he had asked her to put her digits in, which stung at his heart that he had not previously noticed the blatant rejection of his conversation and company. He had Susan Bertie’s however and had begun sending the shots as he took them, though she, too, was irresponsive.

Tarleton, who accused him of being inattentive, was none the wiser.

Arthur smiled to and in spite of himself.

‘O’rite, yea, I’ll give you that. Forgive my offence, it has been a long week. Yesterday though – that is where this beings for our purposes. I sat before my cornucopia of regular-sized sandwiches – every flavour of bird or beast soy protein can imitate, having just expressed my desperate need to use the toilet.’

Arthur turned to Cornwallis, sitting stone-faced, seemingly angry with his burger upon hearing it so described. ‘This is why I don’t eat fast food,’ he told him, determined to take the chance to deliver a final blow in an earlier argument, regardless of personal costs.

‘Good man,’ Tarleton commented. ‘If you are going to consume something that is eighty-percent meat-substitute at least let it be under circumstances where you can be needlessly self-righteous about the act of eating. It is why I ordered a salad, to be frank. That and … something I was informed of on the phone, but again I find I am getting ahead of myself.’

‘Please, by all means,’ the ambassador invited. Tarleton gave him the sort of smile that was somehow anything but. ‘Morgan consented, but denied my additional request to have the handcuffs removed, which I’d been counting on all along. You see – they are fairly useless as a form of detention,’ he demonstrated by decreasing what remained of his right hand to a diameter sizably slimmer than that of his wrist.

Arthur again found himself blinking.

Seeing this, Tarleton excused him, ‘People forget when one isn’t intentionally drawing attention towards it – fuck, my younger sister is developmentally disabled, I wouldn’t be conscious of it were it not for the fact that she doesn’t have to shell out for the city bus like us mere mortals. But yea, it was brilliant, I could have freed myself at any point – but what would that have served? It works out that I learned a great deal about the Arnold investigation during my stint in captivity, distracting, as I did from the obvious with empty conversation and gestures – holding the coffee it
felt I was constantly being given in this way,’ he took a cup to his lips, his wrists together. ‘It is uncomfortable after a relatively short while but in the end it paid off – I was followed into the loo by one of Morgan’s subordinates as I well knew I would be, explained my predicament once more and when again I was refused, simply slipped myself free and used his surprise to hit him with the hand less easily freed, the metal handcuff acting as a counted weight that likely afforded the man a concussion when it followed my fist into his skull. He fell instantly, I did my business, washed my hands, used the soap as a lubricant to carry my chain to about, here,’ Tarleton pointed to a place in the middle of his hand where a mark had been left, ‘then, feeling I was short on time, took his keys, ran out the back, made a few notes of my surroundings, went around to the car park and pressed the button to unlock the doors of his vehicle – several times until I was able to locate the right one. Then I sped down the street making as much of a commotion as I could while doubtless the Americans, confused, hastened to follow. I was gone before the most had gotten into their cars. Redoubling around a back road, I pulled up behind the restaurant’s dumpster and simply waited for them to all embark on their fruitless chase. Then, I used the inbound GPS to look for Chinese restaurants in the area – finding but one with a single location.’

‘Why Chinese?’ Arthur asked, genuinely perplexed.

‘Transportation,’ Tarleton grinned. ‘Take note young Wellesley, if you are ever alone without your papers or ever need to travel on the cheap to a major city centre – follow the scent of rice fried in MSG. World-over there are but three business models, or so I’ve found – the first is a small franchise – two or three locations in the same area, and these are of no interest – they are making the sort of money on which taxes are paid. Same with restaurants with large dining areas and a price tag to match the real estate. But, if you happen upon an inexpensive restaurant with but a single location – chances are that they drive a bus midweek to places that tourists seek to go -’

‘Is that true in England as well?’ he interrupted.

‘Did I not just say ‘world-over’?’

‘If I wanted to get from London to … Liverpool – say,’ the boy proposed.

‘Forty quid from a joint out in Tottenham.’

‘And to Scotland?’

‘From London?’ Tarleton pondered. ‘Glasgow or Edinburgh?’

‘Why do you ask?’ Cornwallis interjected, suddenly aware that he had reason to worry about where this conversation might be headed. Arthur, however, shared his unstated concerns. The colonel was stressed, slightly shell-shocked and barely stable. It would serve no one’s immediate interest to announce to him that he had, in fact, died in the eyes of the world and that his daughter had disappeared without a trace in the short scope of his absence. ‘My girlfriend,’ he offered.

‘I thought she lived in Dublin,’ Cornwallis attempted to clarify, counter-productive though this seemed.

‘Maybe I’ve someone else on the side,’ Arthur challenged, annoyed at the intrusion.

The colonel snorted back a laugh.

‘Something amusing?’

‘No, no, I feel that – believe me I do – it is only … if you are going to assert claims to your own bravado, look around locally. No one is going to believe your ‘Girl in Ireland’ and ‘Girl in
Scotland’ otherwise – and unless you are indisputably seeing someone of renown it doesn’t really work as a line. I can go into any club in the UK and enjoy myself a gaggle of ingénues,’ Tarleton bragged, ‘not, mind you, because even being what they are my charms are so effective that women want me in particular. No. They want Mary Robinson’s wardrobe or connections or fame or anything else about her lifestyle that I might substitute. But sex is sex and I have to shell out far less for it than blokes relying on their overestimated conversation and wit. But… to the point, saying you have a girlfriend semi-abroad even in the age of Skype just makes you sound like a desperate virgin, which if I remember anything from fifteen is the last way you want to look.’

‘Thank you?’ Arthur squinted. He had underestimated Cornwallis’ willingness to engage and began to adapt the ambassador’s strategy of distraction as his own, making note insofar as he was capable of Tarleton’s weaknesses and self-assessments and assurances when it came to women. He had not realised he had left himself exposed.

‘No trouble,’ Tarleton told him with a measure of mirth, ‘but yea. Yea. So, I found this Chinese restaurant, left the car behind the dumpster where I parked it fearing it might have some tracking device and walked the two-point-six miles to my destination, staying off the roadways insofar as it was possible. Walked in, looked at the nine items on the menu and when the man asked me what I wanted I told him ‘DC’. - ‘New York’ he answered. ‘Fifty dollars.’ Having no wallet, I offered him my ring in exchange for the fare but he was more interested in my helmet, so we bartered and as I was traveling without luggage, I got lunch thrown into the trade – Beef and Broccoli – which was delicious and a small tea which was give-or-take but the cup was imperative to my future plans. Since I had time to kill, I spent the rest of the day and most of the night freeing my hand from its constraint, got on the bus at midnight, fell asleep and woke up in Manhattan early in the morning. I walked until I saw a 24-hour-20-Quid-Per-Month gym with smaller hotels in its surrounding – made a note of where it was and walked on to a church, sat on the sidewalk with my hot-beverage cup, my bloodied hand, soiled uniform and the beard I’d grown over the course of the past few days, counting on the generosity of my fellow man to take a very particular note – of throwing change as they quickly pass, hesitant to make eye contact, certain that they will go to heaven for the alms they happened to have in their coat pocket.

‘Within two hours the cup was full and I’d thought I’d made out great until I realised that American coinage only comes in small denominations – all the pounds I thought myself to have collected were quarters, meaning I didn’t have half enough to buy myself a burner and an international calling card. No matter, I could improvise. I bought a five-dollar ‘I-heart-New-York’ shirt from a street seller, returned to where I remembered the gym being and went to four hotels before I found one with day passes laid out at reception, stole one and took advantage of the fact that the good people of this city were all in for a midday work out. I took a towel from a weight bench, filled my hand with soap from the bathroom dispenser and took the best shower I’ve ever in my life had with a five-minute timer attached to the waterflow. I broke someone else’s electric razor while shaving and, changed into a fresh shirt, hair hidden by the MAGA parody I’d managed to retain throughout the journey, I went back out onto the street – now, looking a proper tourist – and began to ask around for a pay phone, which lead me here, to McDonalds. And then,’ he taunted, shifting back towards attack, ‘the reality of my predicament hit me. I don’t know my ex’s number by heart – in fact, I don’t know anyone’s save for my own and that of the Office of the Mayor of Liverpool, which my father once held. So, I tried my luck with Joe Anderson and to my relief he answered. We chatted for a while – Everton lost to Arsenal but Leicester won at Palace so – though broken-hearted I’d broke even in my bets, and this knowledge assured me I’d have available funds to reimburse my little brother for the money I was readying to ask him to wire, but when I asked his Worship if he’d not mind transferring my call to a member of his staff, he told me something most interesting, something, Sir – that I feel we may need to discuss -’

‘Are you serious?’ Arthur was quick to interrupt. ‘You escaped certain death and the first thing
you did once assured or your relative safety was ask a public servant on a long distance call about weekend results?"

Banastre Tarleton acknowledged the statement without its implied sentiment. 'Brilliant, 'innit? Leicester, I mean.'

'I saw that match – Leicester was anything but brilliant. Palace killed them on possession, passes, shorts on goal -'

‘That is the brilliant thing about it!’ he grinned. ‘I’ll be a bloody millionaire if they manage to take the league. It is one-in-five-thousand odds -’

‘And those are the kind of bets you are making?’

‘No, no. I take my entire paycheque each August and split it evenly between all sixteen clubs in the Prem -'

‘There are eighteen clubs in the league,’ Arthur felt the need to correct.

‘I know but I don’t count Liverpool or Chelsea. I've been a Toffee all my life and I … I just really hate John Terry for personal reasons.’

With that statement, Arthur considered the full of what he had encountered the day-over. ‘Oh my God,’ he swallowed though he felt he might rather sing, 'Anna, Anna Strong is a Chelsea fan, isn’t she? I – can you both excuse me for a moment?'

The idea was crazy but not entirely inconceivable. Arthur, remembering Kitty’s Snapchat story and the various others he has seen throughout the day continued to search through footage. As he saw it, now one had found Marie Robinson because they were looking for her, her specifically, on a day when Brittan was otherwise amassed with women putting on their best imitation of Lady Anna, who many expected to soon be crowned. It was the perfect disguise, not only because so many were following this sudden trend, but because no one would have expected Marie to given her known dislike of the would-be duchess.

Giving the English desire to anglice every idea to which they made contact, Anna had been assigned some likely erroneous allegiance in the national game that was known widely enough that Arthur had noted to his disgust a recent uptick in the amount of club paraphernalia in and around the Chelsea area, where it was ordinarily fashionable to support anyone but. He continued to search for a tall, too-thin girl with her bad home-dye job pulled back into a messy bun, with shirt or scarf pretending a personal affiliation for a team which he reasoned his friend had more reason to hate than her surrogate-father did –

And then he found her.

Marie (as yet another Anna-alike) had gone out of her building’s kitchen exit shortly before midnight. He saved the picture and sent it to the two Twitter accounts whose popularity had exploded since she had gone missing.

To @PrissyQueenB he wrote the sum of his suspicions in one-hundred-eighty keystrokes.

To @Eggshell he reasoned he had to be more creative in curating cooperation. >>I know this to be
antithesis to your recent argument, but judging on past posts you have an anti-Hewlett bend to your pro-Scotland rhetoric. I think this is Marie. Please share.<<

He did not expect an immediate response, which found him all the more surprised when it came – not from either party he had tagged but from Police Scotland and, minutes later, Scotland Yard.

Arthur nervously bit his lower lip, half-wondering if Marie was better off without his interference. The police were clearly monitoring the affair, and the way the colonel spoke of his children – a topic both Arthur and the ambassador were eager to avoid – it was not difficult to imagine that the FBI, rather than ISIS, might be after Marie and her half-sister in some awful attempt at retaliation.

Banastre Tarleton, delighted at having gotten the hang of a left-sided vehicle, continued to prattle on jovially on a variety of topics, offering advice that Arthur wouldn’t see as such until decades had passed and he had come on more than a handful of reasons to dislike the man in both personal and professional spheres.

“No, I’m not sharing anything with Kitty about the trip,” he told the other parties, “I’ll bring her back Anna’s garter because I promised I would – but nothing more, not a word.” Arthur gave, suddenly annoyed with his girlfriend though he recognised had absolutely no reason to be. “Look, it is complicated – either you wouldn’t understand or I wouldn’t be able to explain,” he said, realising he was going to have to half-invent a scenario for his self-frustration. He thought for a moment, and continued with more of a show of pride than might have served him, certain he had come on something that would throw Tarleton completely. “I’ve been asking her to send nudes for just – forever and she finally did, but … not to me, and not know it, even though she ought to have done. There is this girl Susan who goes to my school and thought she would amuse herself last week when she was meant to be in English lit. I thought ‘what is the worst that could come from it?’ never expecting that she would be successful – but she was, and how she was leaves something to be desired. You see, Susan is herself especially pretty and as such receives, well …”

“A lot of dick in her phone?” Tarleton suggested.

“How in God’s name is this a situation that is familiar to you?” Arthur exploded in frustration.

“It is reciprocation. Kitty got something she assumed to be from you and felt obligated to return the favour. Were I her father, I would sit her down and have a long conversation about it, but since I am here, talking to you, an oddly entitled intern wanting to take more than he is willing to give – trust me when I say, you and Kitty – it is just not working out and it never will. Here is the adult version of what your working through, the two of you want an expect different things in life and no matter how much you love one another and wish it was otherwise, it isn’t. You are jealous because she has seen some other bloke’s nob expecting it to be yours, it never occurred to you that she would want the same sort of attention from you that you demand from her. You don’t want an equal relationship – she does, which means that you are always going to be off balance in some way.”

Arthur had barely heard him. “I’m going to marry her someday.”

“No, you won’t, and if you do, you’ll regret it.”

“Yea, well you’ve never seen this girl naked,” he retorted. Cornwallis gave a small cough to signal his sensibilities. If Tarleton heard the warning, he failed to heed it.

“How many girls have you honestly seen naked, Arthur?” he posed. “I should doubt that her charms, whatever they may be, are anything that defines a standard. You don’t even know her – that, or you do, and choose to see past it. This isn’t coming from a place of bitterness or anything
like that, understand, but my ex and I wanted different things out of life, a reality we were both clear on initially but tried to forget in one another’s embrace. Learn yourself before making any kind of claims around being true to someone else. You are a child, she is a child and neither of you should be thinking about marriage when your problems are otherwise defined by some mysterious dick pic from a bloke you probably know but can’t identify. Is that why you didn’t want to tell her you were coming to America for the holiday?”

“I was worried she would make a scene,” Arthur replied blandly.

“No. You were worried that she wouldn’t care, which she doesn’t, as is evident by this whole royal-wedding pre-party you keep complaining about her and her friends having fun with.”

“You honestly don’t know anything.”

“What about this Susan?”

Arthur shook his head. “No, she’s back in London, not Dublin and her only passing interest in Lady Anna involves signing up for Sunday league.”

“You called her pretty.”

“Yea … she is, but she is also thirteen. I had a wank to the thought of her before I knew, and then again when I found it just having grown hard with her in my head – but I felt right ill afterwards. I’m not one of the lads sending her texts and pictures that would seem shocking if they hadn’t become so standard in the two semesters since she has had tits.”

“She is thirteen?” Tarleton shifted. “Wait a minute – where did you say it was that you went to school?”

Arthur realised he had already said too much.

When Caleb Brewster returned midday from his postal route with a bouquet of roses in hand, the last thing he expected was to find the man he had purchased them for had already arrived. Ben Tallmadge sat out on the stern taking up two plastic stools, still in his mourning blacks, his fine shoes removed despite the light chill – likely, Caleb assumed, the result of having the sort of parents who concerned themselves over dirt being dragged into the household and onto the furniture. Ben tossed sunflower seeds faster than he could possibly be eating them as far as he could out into the water where the sun met the sound. Caleb bit at his bottom limp as he observed his new boyfriend in a moment of frustration. He had had a premonition that morning that the funeral would not go well and had again offered to call in that he might stand at Ben’s side in support.

‘People will talk,’ Ben had told him with a small kiss. ‘I don’t care that they do, I don’t – but not today. I don’t want anything to distract from Yilmaz, from saying goodbye.’

Clearly, Caleb thought as he watched his boyfriend from a distance, something had.

“Hey, Benny Boy! Didn’t expect ya’,” he greeted cheerfully all the same.

Ben was not smiling though his almost-relaxed posture might have suggested some measure of
comfort taken were he any other man. He did not offer a return greeting before he began, “I can’t do this again. I didn’t attend the wake, I just drove back here after the service had ended,” he said, sounding defeated. “I can’t – I can’t … they offered me my job back. Rather I was encouraged, implored to reconsider my resignation. I think that is the phrasing she used.” He continued to stare past Caleb out into the fading ripples he had created on the water’s stale surface. His brow was furrowed though his gaze was bare.

“And are you?” Caleb asked.

“I got home, found my original letter in my outbox and forwarded it to Washington directly,” Ben said flatly. “Hatice Yilmaz gave her life in the line of duty. She lived and died serving her country. And Dr Dandridge - Martha Dandridge who worked with André on the research he was doing for Arnold - came to her funeral at Washington’s request to ask me to return.” Ben shook his head bitterly. “Had I never left, the funeral would have been for me, you understand – and I told her this. She told me they had a new lead in an old case – that Rogers might well have been responsible for my brother’s death which we, well, you, I, Abe of course, Anna, and Rob Townsend already knew. I didn’t react. I watched Hatice’s mother wail over a closed coffin. It … it was horrible. You’ve met her. I’ve always struggled to understand her because of her,” he gestured to his lips but meant tongue, “and the one time I truly did … I wanted to join her. In just screaming incoherently. And then it hit me that I would not only be screaming over my former sergeant anymore, that once again I was being denied the right to mourn by other people’s self-interested bullshit, so I simply left.

“When Nate died … I couldn’t carry that openly. When Sam died, my mother was so depressed for so long and my father was so concerned about her that I didn’t feel entitled to my own sorrow. She got to lock herself in a darkened room for a decade, and I … sometimes I hate her for it. I hate my father for allowing it. I hate myself for not first having come on this splendid idea of curling up with my grief because that somehow feels so preferable to quietly carrying it around. I just wanted a morning. A morning of mourning and the job - my former job - would not even let me have that. Now I am back to thinking about the case and I hate myself for that, too.”

With each menacing word Ben himself grew more morose and Caleb’s heart broke for the man. He imagined Ben, younger in his childhood home, sitting with his father before a meal his mother had not made and likely would not eat, afraid to admit to his own hurt lest it put more of a strain on the goodly Reverend who after burying his first born was forced by his wife’s expression of grief to bury her under the same covers they once shared. Ben had spent half of his life suffering from a survivor’s guilt that stopped him from truly living – buried in his work, burying comrades in arms fallen to a shot with the former inspector the interned aim. The hint that his resignation might have been rejected must have been hell in the hour he had gone to make his peace with the latest casualty of his life’s war. Caleb open his mouth the speak but the words would not come; Ben supplemented a ‘sorry’ and removed his feet from the stool, inviting Caleb to sit at his side.

Caleb shook his head. “I know what it is like to have no one to talk to about the horrible things we are made to suffer, the suffering we are disallowed,” he tried, confessing, “I can’t come to terms with my own illness, and as a result I never … I never brought anyone home, I never had anything serious, I thought I never had my heart broken but really it was breaking constantly by my own design and I thought I could live with that until … until I met you. Ben, if you want to cry – cry, if you want to scream – scream, if you want to spend an extra hour or two in bed tomorrow morning – fine, but don’t for a second think you’re alone in this or that I’d ever allow you to be. Ben I … I love you.”

“I don’t know that there is enough of me left to love,” Ben responded, unmoved.

“Don’t say that – don’t even think it!”
He continued to stare out into the sound, his tone as flat and calm as the water’s surface though his words continued to rage. “I can’t. Caleb, I don’t know that I’ve ever wanted anyone more than I want you, and I want it – I want all of it, just not … not today. I can’t go back to the case. I can’t dig up my brother and I can’t forgive Washington for trying to entice me to that shovel when the only thing any of us should have been focused on was DI Yilmaz. We’ve forgotten people. Ourselves, each other – and in the investigation itself the victim we were originally tasked to find. And maybe it is to be expected – maybe we don’t know how to connect. Don’t mistake me. I want to tell you that I love you, too. But I want to tell you tomorrow. Today, I want to miss my former friend and colleague absent of everything else.”

“But you can’t,” Caleb concluded.

“No. I can’t,” Ben agreed. “It does help knowing that I’m not alone, poor of a job as I am doing of expressing it.”

Caleb patted Ben’s shoulder before turning to unlock the door to his home. The former inspector sat outside until the light disappeared and then for some time after. After the sky had grown dark enough to count the stars Caleb brought him a blanket to cover his shoulders and a pot of tea that turned to two, welcoming warmer stories as the light wind brought a northern chill. Some were about Hatice herself, some simply about the work environment they two had shared, the weak coffee, the usual suspects. It was a proper wake, Ben assessed after some time. In the morning, he promised, they would wake up beside one another, the sun would be shining and he would thank him for this, he would tell him he loved him in just as many words.

But the night, as they would soon discover, was destined to be long.

“You think you know someone,” she half-greeted, opening the door with a spare key to find Inspector Ferguson with his eyes and fingers shifting between a smart-phone and a tablet, a small smirk informing her that he was still on Twitter. Her daughter was asleep on a cot-bed that had replaced his couch, snuggled up with a stuffed animal someone had bought for her when they had gone to visit Lady Eleanor in hospital. Kolina had her suspicions as to who and in the moment the consideration crossed her mind, she forced her heavily-lined eyes shut and inhaled deeply, fighting the urge to simply snatch it away. Ferguson made an empty comment about Georgie having been on her best behaviour, which was pleasing to hear though hard to believe. She had probably wandered into places she had been told not to go, made a fuss about her food when she tired of sitting at the table after taking a few bites of whatever was put before her, and put up a proper pout when it was time for her to be tucked in. Kolina had not wanted to leave her here for the entire afternoon and felt some guilt for doing so but her regular sitter was sick, her few friends were all either home for the holiday or at the tattoo toasting to tomorrows nuptials (either ‘ironically’ or in an expression of ‘Scottish patriotism’ – concepts that pretended to be in separate camps but found themselves closer the more the whiskey flowed), and the Fergusons’ flat was just a few blocks away from her own.

For now.

“We need to have a chat,” she said, as she took a seat at the table across from him as she continued hurriedly, “I just got back from the solicitor -”

Ferguson shook his head. “Kolina, I promise, you’re not going to be charged for this. If anything,
you’re more likely to be offered a job if they find your hand.”

They wouldn’t.

That much she knew, or, at least, had every reason to assume prior to ringing his doorbell earlier in the day. She had not expected to find him at home, rather, she had hoped his mother would be. Instead Kolina had been greeted by the inspector with two sentence fragments that require a fair few minutes of clarification before she could connect them – ‘Marie Robinson is missing’ and ‘can you hack the web server of an Islamic insurgent group?’ Little conversation followed the base facts, and it was better so. Kolina never asked questions when she could help it and as such, she had conditioned a general disinterest in entrenchment. She herself was in too deep to ever get out, consoling herself to the reality that favours were rarely asked, generously rewarded and never required that she knew why her patroness wanted the information she requested. It was not the same for everyone in Lady Eleanor’s loose employ. Kolina knew that much. She knew also that Ferguson was being questioned in connection to the murder of an American police officer and did her best not to have an opinion on whether he had actually had a hand in the young woman’s demise or not. The inspector kept the same air of reasonable doubt for himself that he usually extended to others. Kolina had little choice but to accept that which she was given on its surface alone. She did not like asking questions.

Still, his statement and the sentiment behind it made her uncomfortable.

It was no good. There was enough corruption in law enforcement as it currently stood without her submitting a resumé of what may well have amounted to regret if allowed the chance to linger.

“No … not, for that. Anyway,” she said scanning the room, suddenly nervous to make eye contact, “I should doubt working for the police will provide the kind of salary to pay the bills I’ve apparently been gifted.”

“There is … extenuating circumstance to explain the state of my present dwellings,” he seemed to apologise.

“I know. I know and we need to talk about that specifically,” she paused, glancing at Georgie. “Thank you, again. You’ve been kinder to me than I’m sure I deserve.”

“No trouble. What is wrong?”

She took a deep breath. “I’m about to graduate from the University of Edinburgh with a Masters in IT – meaning I’ll soon be without housing, having to vacate my townhouse at the end of the semester. I’ve been looking for a place, but as I know you are aware my petty theft charge and conviction has limited my options and provided an obstacle to my job search.”

Ferguson gave a slight frown, likely sharing in her sentiment. Kolina MacDougall was likely guilty of far more than she ever hoped to be aware, but to date the only offence that had been met with state punishment was the product of innocence and absent thought. She had been trying on cheap sunglasses a summer past when her daughter, distracted from a task she named every few minutes as being ‘boring’ (namely, following Kolina about a discount department store on a crowded Saturday as she fought armies of slightly younger women who had come from the countryside to exchange their allowance for two-quid tee-shirts) had seen a dog on the side-street through Primark’s glass-panel walls and decided it looked sad and needed a pat. Georgie had asked if she could go to him and was already making her way to the door before Kolina could answer ‘no’; frantic, the young mother had raced out after her toddler, setting off the store’s alarm system with a pair of plastic shades she had forgotten in her panic.
For this crime, she had been given a fine that far exceeded the price tag, a store ban, and two hundred hours of community service. If Lady Eleanor had had a mind to, she might have interceded, but Kolina did not always consent to the favours the princess asked of her and therefore could not always expect her grace. Kolina considered it likely that her patroness was happy to have her learn a lesson: there was no way out, as Ferguson was evident, reward was considerable but wrath knew no constraints.

If one was involved with the Hewletts, they always would be. It was all one every would be. For her own sake and that of her child, Kolina was better off submitting herself to the whims of court favour. But though she found herself bound to Lady Eleanor, the other waiting-women had put her under too much of a strain.

Ferguson understood the rules of engagement. If anyone could come to her rescue, it was he. But that which she had to propose was not ideal. He was not half so pliant as he presented and she had seen herself as being anything but benignant following Tarleton’s fall.

He rubbed at his temples but quickly returned his eyes to the screens before him. “I’ll see what I can do … but I don’t know how much longer I myself will be with the metropolitan police -”

“Maybe get off of Twitter,” Kolina said, blunter than she had intended.

“I can’t be fined for exercising my right to free speech and should I be fired, it will likely have more to do with my abusing our limited resources in trying to locate little Marie.”

“I’m sorry,” Kolina blurted out. Ferguson dismissed her.

“I asked for your help, and, as I’ve sworn, I’ll not let you accept blame should there be any.”

Kolina shook her head. “I’ve … it is my fault, with Marie,” she admitted to him. “She’s called a lot in the past few days, wanting to speak to her ‘sister’ – but they aren’t sisters, she and Georgie. Not really. Marie is a highly … fanciful young woman,” Kolina tried diplomatically, “victim to an unconventional upbringing and while I don’t blame her for it – I don’t want … I didn’t want her to have much contact with my daughter. Ban was her father and had that right, but I’ve reason to associate the Robinson women with the sort of emotional instability I simply don’t want Georgie exposed to. I don’t know Mary. I don’t need to. My own mother was … of similar character, shall we say. Marie I’ve met and … I’m glad that I have primary custody, rather than having her grow up with Ban being the most reliable adult in our child’s life, risking that Georgie turn out, well – like that.

“Children need structure and … it isn’t fair, I know it isn’t fair but I’ve always seen that girl as a threat to Georgie’s own and I … I’ve been ignoring her calls. Since Ban died. That’s not true,” she self-corrected after a slight pause. “I answered once to ask that she stop contacting us. And now she is gone.”

Ferguson seemed to refuse her any guilt. “I understand your position if only because my ex takes the same in my regard. I don’t think your instincts wrong, it is natural for a mother to want to protect her children -”

“Yea, I’m not right though. Neither is your ex. No one is ultimately better off for having less love in their lives. I doubt Marie would have said anything that,” she stopped, searched, “… do you think Georgie is even going to remember her father? At all? I don’t have many stories about him I can tell. We met at a party – I was single, he wasn’t. When I told him I was pregnant I wasn’t expecting anything in way of support but he always found a way of coming through, finding a way to be part of her life as much as his would allow when not more – but he and I? We just happened
to have hooked up once and haven’t had much of a relationship since as it might have extended outside our daughter. We had nothing else in common and maybe that is my fault, too. When he’d visit I’d take the time to work on school assignments, and if we three suppered together as we sometimes did when he was in town, I never … asked about his life outside of this weekend-family constellation, feeling that I already knew enough from the papers, always sort of half expecting him to miss a weekend visit or a child-support payment, maybe even wanting a reason, an excuse to limit his contact – I want my daughter to have the normal life I didn’t. And I shamefully saw her father as an eventual threat to that and now … I felt just in judging his other daughter in accordance to the same alleged sins. It is not fair to anyone. It is just … it is ironic. Georgie will surely reach an age when she will ask about Ban and if anyone could have told her who her father was in his private life or would have been in hers, it was Marie and I wouldn’t even let the two speak on the phone and now – you haven’t heard anything have you?” She did not want to know. ISIS had been a fiction but Kolina knew too well that the facts were often worse than those lies one created for convenience of any kind.

“I’m sorry.”

“So am I.”

“Can I make you a tea or anything?” he offered.

Kolina blinked. “That’s … yea, that’s lovely.”

Ferguson rose from his stool as his phone began to ring. “Speaking of … hitting ignore,” he murmured, mostly to himself.

“Ellie?” Kolina inquired.

“No. My Tinder date. The one I was meant to be on. It’s twice now I’ve had to cancel -”

She felt her jaw drop so instantly he took it as grounds to smirk. “You are on Tinder now, too?” she gaped, censoring herself slight with, “I didn’t mean it like that – like to imply anything or cast judgement or … Honestly you just seem more like … the sort of person whose only – like if you were going to use social media the only platform which you’d be on would be Facebook -”

“And then only to ignore people I barely know who poke me asking if I can stand in at a cricket match at the weekend so they might field a full team? Like that?”

“No its …” Kolina considered uncomfortably, “you are so self-righteous in a way I know you’re intelligent enough to recognise is underserved … but you persist in this act of behaving as though you were the only honest man in policing, and this while taking bribes from the Hewletts – which I mean, I understand. Sometimes it literally is impossible to say no. But like. I don’t know. Twitter is just as bad as Facebook but at least they are honest about their content and don’t act as though its existence betters the world in any way. And you are so fucking popular online, I wouldn’t have had any idea. I’ve been following you for years!”

“Isn’t that the point of anonymity?” Ferguson posed.

“Can I ask you something … speaking of screen names and stuff like that - why does Ellie call you ‘Richard’ when your first name is ‘Patrick’?”

He shook his head, laughing though his answer seemed earnest. “I don’t know the answer to that. I have few suspicions, but hearing one confirmed would itself deny the other, and I want to believe both are true, so I never asked. That and … the discrepancy helps me separate work from my
private life to what limited extent such is possible. She’ll call me Richard and I’ll think – okay, this is a professional matter, or I’m not as close to this woman as I sometimes want to believe.”

“Did you meet her undercover?”

“No … that is the bloody weird thing about it. I must have introduced myself at some point, but no … my mother called me that once in front of her, her memory is fading as you know … and Ells is either trying to be cruel or she legitimately does not care what it is I’m called. Both are comforting, in their respects. Since we are on the topic - why ’Kolina’, Caroline?”

“Because I was a ‘Caro’ as a girl and then I got to Uni and three of the ten girls in my orientation group had the same nick-name. I tried to become a ‘Lina’, which lasted for about two months until I was out at some rave, slurred the two from old habit and attempted correction and then just went with it. Nothing quite so romantic and mysterious.”

“No one has ever accused me of being either.”

“I somehow doubt that,” she winked.

“And yet you can’t believe I’d use an app to its intended purpose.”

“No, I can’t believe you’d bring a woman back to this dump.”

“Hotels … exist, you realize?” he squinted. “Ah – it wouldn’t have done. With everyone flocking to Edinburgh for wedding parties and the like I’d not have been able to get a room anyway, even if I were not caught up with babysitting and taking on a piece of foreign legislation – via Twitter, not Facebook. I’m not quite as old as you seem to name me.”

“Do you and your mum want to move in with me?” Kolina blurted out as quickly as her voice could manage. It is what she had come to ask and a more comfortable opportunity to do so had only just opened but was already under threat.

“Into your two-bedroom townhouse with a lease that is about to expire, or are you attempting to ask me to co-sign a lease because I should imagine that you’ve the better credit between us -”

“I have a house now, a little bit north of the city. Well, my three-year-old has a house. Effie bought it for her in a completely misguided attempt to provide for her goddaughter,” she shook her head. “Because the ultra-rich have no experience with and as such no way of anticipating practical concerns, Georgie – a toddler – owns a mansion that once belonged to your parents, that needs repairs and sits about a mile and a half outside of the nearest bus-line, meaning I need to save up for a car to take my daughter to school each morning – which will be difficult, being that heating and power cost for a property of that size will take the larger part of my starting salary wherever I wind up. I can’t sell it because it isn’t mine and Georgie can’t sell it until she becomes of age,” Kolina complained. “I played with the idea or renting it out – an Air B and B sort of thing, but again that would require and investment I simply don’t have at this time. So, what do you think? Your mum can live with Georgie and I simply because we like her – you can stay with us for whatever you are paying here plus help with utilities.”

Ferguson stuttered as he tried to take in what he had just been told. “You … went to meet with your lawyer because … my house -”

“I didn’t know, honestly about any of it until it was already done. I’m not trying to be cruel, I just – we all but live together anyway - you’d have a respectable address to bring a girl for a night she is sure to regret and a familiar place for your boys to visit you at the weekend. I need help. I’m not
sure what Mary Anne means with Georgie receiving stock-dividends as she doesn’t own any and insofar as I know. I don’t have a stock-portfolio and Ban had nothing for her to inherit, and now I’m out seven-hundred-fifty pounds of child-support each month plus school fees every semester and I … I feel like I know you well enough now to not have to pay for a background check, Eggshell.”

“Wait … that is the account you follow and you’ve still come to the assessment that I’d make for a decent enough housemate?” he smiled.

“You are making me tea.”

“Well, there is that.”

He placed the mug in front of her, offering milk, sugar and a spoon. Kolina stirred her potion and was about to take a sip but was halted by the sound of her own phone ringing in her purse. She looked at the clock in the kitchen, seeing that it was well past late. She struggled awkwardly for the device. The number was American.

“That is … probably for me,” Ferguson acknowledged, taking it from her hand.

Nightmares borrowed from film flashed through her mind. “You think it is the FBI? … Shit, shit, shit – Wanker, I knew this was a bad idea -” he held up a finger to silence her. “You saw what they did to Eugene,” Kolina continued quickly, unmoved by his order, “And he was an innocent party in this. Did you … did you kill her? DI Yilmaz – no, no I don’t want this – I have a child. How could I even consider if I am considering -”

“Inspector Ferguson, Police Scotland – how may I be of assistance?”

>>You’ve got to be fucking kidding me << a familiar voice came from a world away. >> I swear in the name of all that you hold sacred if any ill has befallen my child or her mother that you, Sir, shall live to see suffer all that you hold dear and that the blood of these promised crimes shall be on your hands.<<

“Ban?” Kolina asked, reaching for the mobile.

“Colonel Tarleton,” Ferguson continued in shared surprise. “Never one for subtly, I see. Banina and Caroline are both fine - sit down and see that you are. I’m going to hand the phone over, but stay on the line. We have much to discuss.”

“I never got this show,” Simcoe commented of whichever sequel to Star-Trek Edmund Hewlett had streaming in the background as he packed his belongings into various cardboard boxes bearing the logo of a home improvement store nowhere in the vicinity. Hewlett had told him that he had stopped on his drive back from Albany, intent on leaving Whitehall after the wedding to take up residence in the building Simcoe himself was readying to vacate. Hewlett had sent him a text likely around the same time as the purchase, employing him to sell a few stocks in order that he might pay a year’s lease, allowing Anna to reside at this Setauket address as had been stipulated in the original marriage agreement – the one, as he was still in the process of telling Simcoe bluntly, which his beloved no longer wished to uphold.

Hewlett looked up at him, his rant touching on their shared hatred of Whitehall’s resident weasel
interrupted. Unsure of how to respond, he simply continued, “Clearly Anna likes living with Abe. He is staying with her in Albany now – did I tell you? She swore up and down that they two have not reignited an old flame but the only argument I can find to speak to their being any truth in this is young Woodhull’s questionable hygiene-habits. When he enters the room, one has to open a window – regardless of wind or weather, that -”

“It is not that I don’t get this show, it is that the people who attentively watch it don’t,” Simcoe readjusted.

“Turn it off then,” Hewlett shrugged.

“No – it is interesting to me. Fans want to ascribe philosophical attributes to the programme, most to do with the good of mankind, but in this utopian future with no need for currency as all questions of resource have been answered and everyone’s needs are being met, everyone is still shooting at one another – and why?” he asked, his voice growing ever-higher “They are bored! They are bored and you are bored and as such you are seeking to create conflict without ground or reason. If anything can be said about the paramount of human psychology as displayed in popular science-fiction, it is that.”

For all of his effort, Hewlett could respond with little more than a blank stare. “You’ve never seen this show before, have you?”

“No full episode, no,” Simcoe admitted.

“In that case I wish I had a better counter-argument, but alas – why not complete my defeat in surrendering the whole of science fiction to the spoils,” he stopped. “How did it ever end up this way, John? How did you and I arrive here, me moving to Manhattan shortly before you plan to leave? I’d ought to have taken you up on your prior offer – years ago, I should have moved in with you avoided this backwater and all of its temptations, which I might have done, had you not made your quarters impossible to heat in the winter without accruing astronomical costs -”

“My offer was in jest,” Simcoe snorted, slightly peeved at his sometimes-friend’s inability to drop old arguments in which he had not been allowed the last words. Heating costs! That the man could still critique him on his choice of a power-company giving all that had befallen them since last the topic had been approached. He was fuming, formulating an argument on the cost efficiency when Hewlett continued in a different vain that found him completely off-guard.

“No, it wasn’t. I can’t stand this. The thought that … I’ll never see you again, will I? And it’s all my fault. You lost your job because -”

Simcoe swallowed, hesitant to admit that he would miss Hewlett as well. “I wasn’t careful enough in programming the algorithm, police got suspicious, Barclay’s decided the risk was not worth taking and employment laws in the United States do not favour the worker. It is not the worst time to get out,” he considered, “should Brexit pass, the bank will surely take a disproportionate hit and I’ll not be made to suffer the stain. I’m going back to London because I’ve nothing keeping me in New York. I’ve wanted to go for a while … since you started talking about it, to be honest. I feel it’s time to set aside our swords in favour of the plough or however you would choose to phrase it.”

“Make up with Effie Gwillim?” Hewlett suggested.

Simcoe shook his head sadly. “Make amends,” he said. It was the most he could hope for.

“She’ll be at the wedding. Less certain about Anna being there, but -”
“No … won’t serve at all to apologise there. She’s bringing George Hanger as part of her staff.”

“Who?”

“He wrote that piece a few years back about why there are so many Schalke fans in South America that has been in the news again recently as he discovered a former NS-member in his reporting – the guy they drug back to Germany who is currently being tried in a juvenile court in his nineties for war crimes he allegedly committed as a teenager.”

Hewlett’s face twisted upon itself. “That affords me little ease.”

“Worry not, Edmund. “Law – Order – Authority doesn’t apply to those who have house words,” Simcoe taunted out of old habit. Hewlett’s frown-lines deepened.

“Can you not accept that it is you I’m worried for? After that offensive in Mali, many in Paris are calling for Bouchard to face court martial. What happens then – John! Stay in New York! Stay and -”

“Face charges of assaulting Arnold? Obstructing evidence?” he offered. “Mary … she confessed to everything. I’ve yet to enter a plea.”

“The John Graves Simcoe I know wouldn’t run away from his problems,” Hewlett accused.

Were only that things were still as simple as they long had been.

“Mary told me to go,” he said. Though he had spoken the words, he was not able to hear them, his device not able to pick up on his pitch. Embarrassed, Simcoe pressed his lips together, making them as small as he might. Hewlett seemed neither bothered nor surprised by the sound, which only increased his hurt. What, he wondered, had he ever imagined Mary Woodhull had seen in him? His speech was poor, he could not hear, and as his friends had no trouble asserting, did not listen.

“What compels you to assume she meant it?” Hewlett countered. “She’s seeking a divorce settlement, she -”

“We made love. Last night. In your bed. There was little conversation, I think everything that might have been said already has.”

“Help me change the sheets,” Hewlett said with exaggerated sick. Simcoe was ready to protest, to point out that Anna and Edmund had soiled his sheets without him insisting that they be replaced, but he was ready to rid the room and himself of the evidence, and so he followed suit.

“Would you stay had she asked?” Hewlett pried as they together struggled to stretch a fitted sheet over the mattress.

“Would you be asking me if you were not such a coward yourself?” Simcoe sneered at the shorter man’s hypocrisy.

“How dare -”

“How can you run from rather than towards a girl who copied your highly specific manner of condescension in citing *Plato* in her complaints,” he barked. “Answer her, tell her that if she wants honesty you are the sort of person to not think twice about misdirecting police resources and attention towards an innocent bystander without considering larger moral consequence, focusing, rather, on helping your friends out of a horrible situation and hoping to come out on top. Tell her that you are riddled with remorse but have no understanding of how to express it giving your social
background. Tell her that you vastly over-estimate your own abilities and that in the few incidences where such might prove to your value you lack the personal and political ambition to put this to use. Tell her that you once struggled just as much as she must be with public interest in your person – that your being here is evidence of this.

“Tell her that you are small, weak and cowardly. You stutter when you speak – when you speak as you can barely bring yourself to engage in conversation and are more used to engaging the long-dead in debate than making any sort of comment that pertains to the world beyond the pages of whichever book you’ve last read unless it is in complaint – something at which you’ve proven time and again that you excel. And Edmund,” he scoffed, “make no mistake of it. This is how I see you, how I’ve always known you, how you’ve always been. But you want to be more for Anna. You want it so badly that you have been willing to enter shaky alliances and take your chances against standing, multi-nation armies in hopes of making her every dream come true. You’ve no bloody idea what it is your doing – but you know why – you want to be someone worthy of her. And you are bound to muck it up – but you keep trying, if she would consent to letting you, you’d try for the rest of your life. If she is looking for honesty, tell her that.”

Hewlett’s surprise found its way into a smile. “You should write my vows.”

“I should,” Simcoe agreed, ever-cocking, “if only for the fact that your spelling is atrocious.”

Hewlett considered this for longer than Simcoe thought the insult worth. “You … might also refrain from making a mockery of my marriage, the monarchy, and oh, um … Mary Woodhull by bringing a call-girl as your plus one,” he retorted with a shifting grimace.

Simcoe shook his head in genuine disbelief. “We just went over the fact that Ban’s BFF who happens to possess an uncanny knack for going dangerously off-topic in filler-pieces will be in attendance. Lola is strategy, nothing more.”

“You are going to pay him off with a hooker?” Hewlett gaped.

“With a ‘sex worker’” Simcoe corrected. “Oyster, it is the year of our Lord twenty-sixteen. Go make yourself a Tumblr and follow two or three self-righteous liberally minded pre-teens for a week before hazarding to speak. It would do you better in this day and age to engage with politically correct nomenclature than fucking … Plato’s definition of whatever word you too are misusing.”

Hewlett shook his head. “You are never going to let this go, are you?”

“No,” Simcoe agreed, “but I truly hope you will by the time you are standing with the love of your life at the altar.”

Hewlett replaced both pillow-covers and a duvet before responding, this time with some measure of considered thought. “You ought to use your best-man speech to tell Mary how you feel. With a poem – something that will seem general to the room but will feel very specific to her, letting you know how much you have come to love and admire -”

“That statement is evidence of how very little you, Oyster, know about ‘how I feel’,” he spat, “Do you think for a moment that I am going to pass up this opportunity to embarrass you in front of half of the world’s leaders as well as Britain’s favourite tabloid?”

“Are we good then?” Hewlett returned the grin Simcoe realised he wore.

Some ‘I love you’-s were easily said.
“Never,” Simcoe returned, “But we are better than everyone else.”

Some, however, were impossible. He and Mary had never come on a common language. Perhaps there had not been time. Perhaps, too, this was for the best as she had stated in English plain.

Abe Woodhull sat at the edge of the bar, alternating between small talk with the man behind it and watching over his shoulders as a series of far more pressing conversations unfolded between the man to whom he had lent his phone and whomever found themselves victim to his petrified jeremiad. He pitied Banastre Tarleton but felt a shameful gratitude that the man’s presence created the personal distraction that it did. Prior to the colonel’s arrival, Abe Woodhull had found far too much consideration at the bottom of a whiskey tumbler he had emptied in an attempt to obscure his troubles. The bartender, who had done everything right insofar as Abe understood the profession, had not helped him in the slightest.

There was a rumour making the rounds in Setauket that his wife Mary was preparing to serve him with divorce papers – whispers Abe took to be true based on the manner in which they had found their way to his ear. He had spent the better part of his day pacing the halls of the home his father’s friends had lent Anna, occasionally coming to a window where he could see his family’s Albany residence, both wanting to seek his father’s council and fearing his reaction to the reasons he had taken up quarter across the street. Since confessing his role in and reasons for aiding Rogers in Arnold’s abduction, he had not heard anything from Robert Townsend, Caleb Brewster or Benjamin Tallmadge. Anna, with whom he was staying and with whom contact was being kept, had her own concerns with which to struggle. She seemed to avoid him even when they were in the same room, pressing her lips together and lifting them into a quick, uncommitted smile of the kind given to complete strangers on public transit when one’s eyes accidented the other’s.

Abe did not like the man who had given her reason to weep and with every forced smile to cross her lips he liked him all the less, but saying as much served neither of them – Anna had to get through the charade of an ‘I do’ in order to help their friends confront those whose personal interests had prevented the course of justice at the expense of human rights. Telling her that which she already knew would only cause her more pain. She loved Edmund Hewlett. She wished life had not taken him down a path she could not follow, that the promises they made to one another before God were of any personal consequence.

There would be a wedding but no marriage. Anna did not know how fortunate she was.

Abe amused himself with the idea that Mary had two weeks ago accused him of fancying his old flame. Part of him wished that were true, that Anna herself was the reason he was here drinking Irish Whiskey at a reduced price in some alternate version of reality in which Arnold was only a name in the news and the problems he had with his wife involved realised desires towards another member of her fairer sex. He had not told Mary the reason behind his most recent extended absence but knew the full extent of his secrets to have somehow been exposed when the barman put another drink before him and commented, “I know, it isn’t fair – he is easily the most beautiful man I’ve ever seen. You know what they say though - all the cute ones are either straight, taken, or imbedded in an international conspiracy beyond their making.”

“I’m,” Abe swallowed, “I’m going through a divorce. I – I just lent him my phone because the battery of the one that kid whom he was with was about to die. I’m not – not interested, not like that.”
He took another quick glance over his shoulder before returning his gaze to the barman with a cheeky, boyish smile that threatened to make him blush. Joseph Sturridge had full cheeks, foppish hair and a certain charm that was hard for most to establish in such situations in which they had little idea what they were doing. He had started here about three months ago, he had told Abe shortly after he had come in when the pub opened its doors at five in the evening. Joseph was still at university, a sub-par student who had recently been cut off from that which he hinted would have amounted to a substantial trust-fund when certain aspects of his lifestyle had found his father’s ears. He needed the job to pay his bills and being that this was his first he had little qualification beyond the fact that he still lived in a frat house, a fact he followed with a series of Greek letters that meant nothing to Abe, who countered that he did not ordinarily drink, he was here to get the lay of the land, being that he was part of the band that would play the wedding reception the pub would be hosting the following evening. Joseph laughed and told him that Irish Whiskey was on sale for a dollar a shot. The Hewletts evidently did not want the beverage served at the reception or stored on premises, so all open bottles had to be emptied that evening. ‘It is ridiculous – this place is literally called The Irish Pub. Those words illuminate in neon on the sign outside. Our walls are furnished by Guinness and Jameson – I don’t think the happy couple will be fooling anyone.’

‘Are you working tomorrow?’ Abe laughed. ‘Edmund Hewlett is the sort of man who can openly, blatantly engage in fraud of any kind and still have a broad audience believing that he is innocent, honest and pure. You’ll probably be taken with him, too.’

‘I think I’d need to be a teenage girl with a plastic tiara to quite feel the magic of the moment. I’m going to spend the whole night hoping no one asks me to make a cocktail. Not my problem tonight though – tonight, the college crowd will come in and keep it on the cheap which for me means – at most – mixing cola and one of the twelve of so liquors we’re getting rid of at less than a third of the price.’

‘I won’t put you out like that,’ Abe found himself joking. ‘Just on the rocks.’

‘One lump or two, my good Sir?’ Joseph indulged him in a mock-English accent.

‘To stick with the Scottish theme, it would be more along the lines of ‘a body sugar ur tois ye cunt?’’

‘I have no idea what you just said but dear God I hope the entire wedding party sounds like Sean Connery.’

Joseph was funny, flirty and for what felt a long while Abe had forgotten the world outside of the walls decorated with random objects and antique signs advertising Irish drinks. Few would arrive before eight in the evening, or so he had been told until a car pulled into the parking lot, a door slammed and an argument of the sort that found Joseph’s hand on the landline – presumably to ring for the police – continued out into the car park. A minute later, a teenage boy who towed above both Abe and landlord ran in, a boy who they had just been informed by a voice they had yet to identify was “fifteen” and therefore “far too young to make any decisions” around the speaker’s daughter. He asked if either of the had a pen – his phone was about to die and this was an emergency, he needed someone to scribble out the number a contact had just sent him. Joseph began to write, Abe simply dialled as he spoke. He handed the boy his phone who then, in turn, handed it to the man who had followed him inside, shaking with fury and taken by shock. ‘Mary?’ he asked into the received. ‘Mary – dear God what is going on? I’m fine – I’m not fine I just found out – Please, my love, what on earth has happened to Marie?’

The boy connected the conversation as it happened to a story Abe and Joseph had both watched
unfold on social media over the course of the past few days – his colleague was the father of the London girl who had gone missing, and the man had missed all of this as it played out on social media throughout the day thanks to a hastily coordinated effort by the British Embassy to keep the news from him. This man, he soon learned, had been on a diplomatic mission which saw him erroneously arrested in connection with Arnold’s disappearance. He had evidently narrowly escaped summary execution and was in a prolonged state of shock.

Hearing all of this, Abe had found his sympathies split between both Ambassador Cornwallis - having kept the threat they faced from his wife in a time a crisis; and the attaché, Abe knowing that he personally would want to be informed immediately about anything pertaining to his son Thomas, regardless the circumstances that otherwise defended his capacity to affect the outcome.

He felt his heart rise to his through as he spent the next few minutes watching the prodigal colonel, imaging his wife Mary in the man’s place, himself standing where the ambassador and intern watched on in regret. Tarleton approached the bar after a quarter hour spent alternating between crying and calming the woman on the other end and requested a series of numbers be written out. Abe obliged, telling him that he could continue using his phone when he told that he needed to speak to his other child and make sure that she was safe and then ring his mother to tell her that he was. Cornwallis attempted to place a hand on his subordinate’s shoulder in solace, but Tarleton turned his sharp tongue on him and the boy in their company like a sword, causing the two to leave him alone in the bar to enervate on an international call.

Over two hours had since passed. The pub had filled with the college crowd as promised, the boy had returned to give Tarleton a key-card to the hotel where their delegation would be quartering for the next few nights, and, perhaps upon seeing or sensing that the colonel was not ready to return, ordered a wine with an ID Joseph did not take too close of a look at and went about the task of finding himself a young woman to take back to the hotel as he seemed to have every reason to assume that he would otherwise have the bed to himself for at least the next few hours. Between pouring beer and discounted shots, Joseph observed the situation and offered Abe amusing commentary. ‘The hilarious thing is every bloke in here is trying to fake his best Prince Edmund for a hundred would-be Anna Strongs tonight – our lad is having little luck where he would otherwise do fine on accent alone.’

‘I live in a town with a sizable foreign population,’ Abe replied. ‘I think he is Irish, Wellesley. The hilarious thing is that his attempt at an English accent sounds every bit as fake as the ones we Americans put on, or that of Edmund Hewlett – formally of Edinburgh - for that matter.’

‘What accent would get your trousers off?’ Joseph then posed.

‘Real or fake?’

‘Let’s have a bit of both.’

‘For real I’m going Polish, fake … then Ghanaian if done well,’ Abe considered.

‘That sounds like there is a story behind it.’

‘Not really – I’m friends with this guy whose dad is from there and sometimes when he is telling a story he will imitate his old man struggling with American slang and it is just – you’d have to hear it. What about you?’

‘I’m staying a little more local with my picks – Boston for real and exaggerated Scotsman for fake,’ Joseph winked at him.
Most of the other guests had left by the time Joseph made a concrete comment on Abe’s sexual preference, the earlier exchange returning to him as he stubble through a few comments about Mary in hopes of continuing to hide himself behind a marriage effectively over, here from a man he was desperate to embrace. He glanced over his shoulder again to find Tarleton defeated. “Oh no,” Joseph commented upon seeing the same.

“Give me a double and a glass of ice, I’m going to go over and -”

“Yeah,” Joseph agreed.

“Hey,” Abe greeted as he awkwardly tried to hand the man the drink which he had bought him, finding himself surprised at his own earlier inattention, placing both tumblers on the table to avoid further acknowledgement of what he could assume was a service injury.

“I’m sorry, it truly isn’t my intention to create any discomfort,” Tarleton said as though by reflex, his voice empty as he continued that his brother would see Abe reimbursed for the cost of the call when his next billing statement arrived.

“I’m not worried about it,” Abe said. “My father is the Chief Justice on the New York Court of Appeals – I’m the family disappointment still on his family plan in my early thirties.”

“Then you are in good company. Mine was Lord Mayor of the proud City of Liverpool and I’m well … I’m here.” Abe took a seat in the booth. Tarleton stared at this drink, eventually adding an ice cube but not bringing it to his lips, electing to take the small napkin serving as a coaster instead. “Apologies, I truly am more grateful for your hospitality than I’m certain I’m indicating. Marie … my daughter, you see, she isn’t mine, not in the biological sense at least or by any legal construction. Her mother and I were never married and the child was the result of a prior affair. She was married, Mary, she is married rather, it is all convoluted. But Marie … she was still quite small when I returned from the front due to injury. Do you know what it is,” he asked, sounding rhetoric until he continued, “have you ever been over there?”

“No, I’ve never served my country in such a capacity,” Abe answered, embarrassed by what he perceived as an inability to relate to honour.

“When you are on deployment that is all you are – on deployment,” Tarleton told, sounding removed and unmoved by his own experiences. “You can sleep through the things that would otherwise keep you up at night knowing that tomorrow will bring more of the same. There is no escape and there is a comfort in it I find I can’t describe.”

“I’m sorry,” Abe said, coming on nothing else.

“Civilian life is by comparison … it is a fucking nightmare. You are constantly being confronted by unknowns that can’t be anticipated or quantified on some form or another,” Tarleton informed with a bit more animation. “I remember if only because I’ll never forget – I think I frightened Marie when I first took up quarter in her mother’s home. My nights were filled with horrors I could no longer suppress through their relative normalization and my days were plagued with dread that I’d never return to battle. I’m not qualified to do much beyond kill under a splendid foreign sun or beneath the cover a desert’s darkness, colder than anything you could anticipate.” He looked down at his glass. “The whiskey it … it just reminds me of a particular sleepless night that might have otherwise been spent in the company of ghosts. I … I was nineteen when I’d gotten my first commission. My father had passed away unexpectedly a little over a year prior to my first deployment and I spent a substantial portion of my downtime playing football – what you’d call
soccer – with a few of my fellow officers and a number of local children who had no where else to
go. They had been orphaned by us, or by the Taliban or simply by the fucking crossfire and we
were trying to build a schoolhouse as though that could make amends. They liked me, kids mostly
did back then – now and probably eight-hundred years from these times when all other details of
the conflict have been forgotten and England scarcely remembers my name, I’m half-sure that I
will still exist as a sort of boogie-man in bedtime stories within the Islamic world, something
between King Richard and the Djinn my dormmate at boarding school used to relate me to in his
highly uninspired attempts at poetry. But for a while I was … I felt myself to be in good company.
I was either ignorant or vain enough to think I could relate in some way to what these children were
going through. I’d lost my father and with him whatever restraint had served me prior – within a
year I’d lost nearly the whole of my inheritance to nights on the town and the rest to the card tables
I’d let myself be led to by gin and the gorgeous women for whose company I’d paid. I found it
again – restraint, I mean, at camp – the worst place I possibly could.

“I was on duty when it happened, one of the boys I regularly played a bit of five-a-side with came
to the cinderblocks that might have otherwise one day constituted a proper schoolhouse where the
children had their lessons with an explosive vest, killing all of his classmates, a stationary and two
civilian aid workers. I could have stopped it,” he lamented, “I had him in my crosshairs, my finger
on the trigger, but I froze, unable to fire and what would have been one death became twenty more.
I was told that I would get used to it – and I did, Quickly. I never again questioned orders or
showed any restraint in executing them and in the manner, I proved myself deserving of my own
command and received further field promotions in quick succession. I think they say fortune
favours the bold but long after the fact I see it all as an extended act of cowardice – I just wanted to
be away from the base, away from Britain, from all the fault I could no more face than I could
stand no one else ascribing. Part of me hoped to die in an act history would misname glory as it
tends to – and then, part of me did. I came home with a crippled hand and this odd idea that I didn’t
miss the fingers I’d lost. I would try to close my eyes and wake up, remembering it broken and
bleeding against the handle of a shove I used to dig a grave for those I watched die as the result of
humanitarian efforts and sentiment.

“Mary and I were not sharing a room at the time;” he continued without pause, strangely sociable
despite that which over he spoke, “my other injuries disallowed it – so alone, I left my room, went
to the liquor cabinet and struggled to open a bottle of whiskey after struggling far longer in the
metaphoric sense not to, poured myself a glass and as I continued to debate with myself over
whether or not I truly wanted to take a sip two small hands reached out for the tumbler and
instinctively I snatched it away.

“I could see instantly that I had frightened my girlfriend’s daughter, and maybe I’d intended to –
the last thing I would have wanted was for her to come to harm due to my inability to conduct
myself appropriately. She stared at me, startled, with these big blue eyes – for a moment I thought
she was going to cry but instead she told me that she was thirsty and asked if I could help her get
some juice from the refrigerator because it was on the top shelf and she was too small to reach it,
even with a stepping-stool. So, I did and then I brought her back to bed and read her a story to help
her sleep. The next evening, she surprised both her mother and I when she asked if I could read to
her at bedtime instead and after a while it became routine. I was on sick leave and as part of this I
had physical therapy which included lessons in life-skills of which I had never previously partaken,
so when she would come home from kindergarten, we would show each other what we had each
learned,” he smiled, “partially because she was at an age where motoric skills I needed to remaster
are first being developed, we had a lot of the same ‘hobbies’ to that time – colouring, tea parties,
things like that. Then one night while I was reading to her, she interrupted and asked me if I was
her father. I told her no and she asked if she could call me ‘Daddy’ anyway. I think I cried. At least,
I cry whenever I think about it. I’m sorry – I tend to go on,” Tarleton shook himself of sentiment.
“No, it is fine,” Abe assured him, uneasy for reason that had nothing to do with the colonel or his missing ward.

“It’s – do you have kids?” Tarleton asked him.

“A son.”

“I swear it was the same feeling as the first time I held my biological daughter years later, when Marie asked if I would be her dad. Of course. Of course! Nothing could ever prove a greater honour. There is absolutely nothing in this world I wouldn’t do for her and nothing I wouldn’t trade to have her back safely. I rather unexpectedly ended up speaking to a detective inspector up in Edinburgh at some length who assured me the situation isn’t nearly as bad as social media is making it – which makes it worse in that I’ve no one to barter with or blame save for a God in whom I’m not entirely sure I believe. ISIS was … Ferguson’s invention, well, his and a mate of mine who I would have expected more from. The FBI who kept me captive for days and made claims alleging my death had nothing to do with the disappearance and being that even their resources haven’t much aided in the recovery, such was used in the public argument against the police state promised by Senator Arnold’s measures. Which is all well and good – but it doesn’t bring my little girl back. And I don’t know what to do,” he rambled. “I don’t -”

Abe reached out for his hand. “I would like to think where there is love there is hope,” he tried, finding himself at a loss as he confessed, “I wish I had that sort of relationship with my son. I killed my brother … when I was a teenager, by which I mean I accidently texted him the wrong address to where he was meant to pick me up from a track meet … and he. I didn’t even have a chance to say goodbye. It was an accident it was - I felt responsible... responsible for his life, so I took it. I applied to Columbia where he had been a student. I joined his fraternity. I took his inheritance. I took his good name, but it wasn't me. It was never me, and ... I’m still trying to hide or hide from that fact. If you ask who I am, I don't know. I buried that man along with my brother. I thought that maybe one day I'd meet him again in the soul of the son that I named after him. But I didn’t. I’ve left everyone down, including myself.

“I lied to try and make things right, but it didn’t work. It didn't work. But I can't lie anymore,” he swallowed. “My wife … rumour is that she is preparing to sue me for a divorce despite – despite all of these empty threats I made in the past about taking Thomas from her. I would never, I don’t even know why I … I do. I ruined Mary’s life. I knew I was gay when I proposed, but I thought, if I could just – if I could live the life my brother might have, I would learn to love her as she should be loved. And I do. I do love her – I love her so much that when it came out in the course of this investigation that she was having an affair though I detest the man she’s chosen I couldn’t be happier for her. I can’t explain it, it is as though I’m simply an impartial outside observer for the most of what I am made to experience that my initial emotional response to Jordan expressing his remorse and Anna evading the conversation entirely was to be happy – happy for Mary for finding the strength to leave and lead her own life. It was only … I suppose I came here to toast to her, but then – do you see that barman? I felt like he – like we were flirting and I can’t, I can’t be true to myself in that way.”

The colonel seemed taken aback by this admission and was quick to tell Abe that he should be ashamed by giving language to that which Abe knew to be beyond the scope of his own character and circumstance. “Life is made to be enjoyed,” Tarleton seemed to scold, “go to him – it is nearly closing, take him into a storage room and take him hot, fast and hard. Take him back to my hotel if you want – I’ll find an alternative, I can’t see Cornwallis again tonight for if I do, I’m certain to secure myself a dishonourable discharge if I haven’t already -”

“Um. You are actually sharing a room with that kid Wellesley you were with earlier and uh … a
drunk college student if my eyes aren’t failing me. At the Holiday Inn. Cornwallis is at the Hilton. I think your safe,” he tried to excuse his own cowardice.

“Oh, then defiantly go and interrupt his spot of fun,” Tarleton spat, adding “… at least if she is in college as you say, she probably isn’t thirteen – something else I’ve to figure out a way of dealing with when I get back,” he murmured without further clarification. “But you? What do you have to lose?”

“Despite what she’s been accusing me of for the past four years or so, I’ve never cheated on my wife,” Abe told him. “Never. I’m not about to start just because we are at the end.”

“Why the hell not?”

“Excuse me?”

“If she’s been unfaithful – I’d take it as all the excuse you need. I loved Mary – my Mary – more than the greatest poet could put to words, and she’s up there with them – the greatest English poets - she’s tried in the past and I don’t doubt for a second that she loved me with the same mad passion as I did her. But was I faithful to her?” he asked rhetorically before stopping to genuinely ponder the implications of his own empty question. “Maybe,” Tarleton eventually decided. “I lived up to her expectations of what she wanted out of the relationship. Not my own. That was the problem. Its your problem and Arthur-fucking-Wellesley’s problem and to that end it may in fact be universal though my friends in statistics and the sciences would scold that the sample size I’m citing is far too small to make any definite claims.

“Mary wanted the whole tragic teen romance in her twenties and thirties – she didn’t have a normal life, she was never normal, she took her A Levels at 14 and was on the cover of every magazine scarcely two years later, working, recording, filming, attending events and, taking pictures – some for pay, some simply for publicity. So, she missed out on the whole tumultuous, hormonal misery that defines dating at that age. Me?” he broke into a grin in spite of himself and his subject, “I slept with most of the girls at boarding school – excepting only my sisters and the three other women with whom I still have a relationship as an adult, which I suppose says enough on its own. But I … I come from an enormous family and I always expected that I’d marry and father many children and that they would all – but it is a fallacy, ‘innit?’ he asked, this time answering himself instantly.

“I tell people anecdotally that my brothers and I were all named after Everton players from some hundred years ago, which works out in that our first names filled their last names on the team rosters, but its … not quite coincidental, it is expected. There were Williams and Claytons and Banastres in Merseyside to that time – like the Tarletons they were of the oldest and proudest families in Liverpool. Not anymore. My father saw to it over the course of his life that all domestic threats house’s power-hold were defeated and undone, and then gave my brothers and I their names to remind us that we weren’t as important as individuals as we were as Tarletons,” he shook his head. “And then my youngest brother he named after himself – maybe in the acknowledgment that power is ever-fleeting. You think though that it would have fostered some love between us all the same, but no. I’m pretty sure my entire family detests me and I’ve no idea what to do with that. But Mary – I think she liked it that way. The drama. So, she would cheat on me and I would retaliate and eventually, well … I was on a bender one night with some mates of mine and it came out … just so casually that my friend Francis had been fucking this girl I’d fancied at Oxford. Mary had to that time rejected my proposal of marriage for a second time and I think just to punish me for again trying to push my ideals on her or push her into them, took up with an MP in loud and lush fashion. And Francis was having a laugh about having fucked my first crush as though it didn’t even occur to him that I’d feel injured by it – they are both titled, you see – at least I know they see it that way, and I long felt that if I was, too then … it doesn’t matter. I sought out one of Ellie’s common-born
friends at the next party I attended, took her in a coat closet and woke up the next morning wondering when sex became a weapon and why we were all so eager to wield it as such. Mary and I made up and life continued as expected for around two months until I found out that Kolina was pregnant -”

“And you had to do the right thing?” Abe asked, identifying the act with his own experiences.

“Define ‘right thing’,” Tarleton challenged. “I had to provide for my child. Her mother and I would have never made one another happy. Hell, we would have never even made one another miserable. There was nothing there romantically.”

Abe spent a short while considering this statement in the construct of the last six years of his life. “I wish I had your sensibilities,” he said. His misery had nothing to do with his wife, and that was at least half the problem. How much heartache had he, however, afforded Mary over the same span of time? He was happy that she was leaving. He wondered if she was happy to go. He looked at his phone across the table, knowing that he owed his wife more than time that could not be taken back and inconsiderate avoidance.

“You do share my sensibilities; you just don’t act on them. Go on,” Tarleton nodded towards Joseph. “Ask him out.”

Perhaps he was right about this was well, or would have been were the scope of Abe’s situation not such that it was. He shook his head. “My father is a conservative justice who hopes to be seated on the Supreme Court,” he told him dismissively.

Tarleton squinted as he searched for understanding. “O’rite, so um – I’m not part of this scene at all, but I’d … maybe start with something else,” he suggested lightly. “He is wearing a lacrosse shirt so you could go up to him like ‘Do you play’ - ‘What?’,” the colonel paraphrased a conversation, shifting his head and shoulders slightly from side to side as he spoke the lines for both parts. Turning and tracing his fingers down Abe’s chest, he continued flirtatiously, “‘Maybe I mean lacrosse … and maybe I just mean men’s hearts … why don’t we go back to yours and you can pull out your stick, show me a few moves.’”

Abe found himself laughing. “That’s brilliant.”

“I try my best,” Tarleton returned, gesturing a bow with the remains of his right hand.

“I can’t though – what I meant, my dad is on a short list of suggestive Supreme Court nominees. Assuming Merrick Garland doesn’t get a Senate hearing to fill Scalia's seat – which would be completely hypocritical in and of itself if he did giving that Obama blocked my father eight years ago with the argument of it being too close to an election for the legislative body to function – should the Republicans take the presidency, my dad could finally get his place on the Court, and I would never do anything to jeopardize that for him. Even the divorce, coming at this point, could put his Christian values into question and I -”

“What the actual fuck is wrong with Americans?” Tarleton interrupted with an anger Abe had not anticipated. “Your country was founded on Enlightenment ideals of equality, the separation or church and state, gun violence, I don’t know … but because you and the missus are finally recognizing that you may just be incompatible, you have reason to think that a bunch of old men won’t sit down with your dad and inquire into his past rulings because your sexuality serves as some kind of indicator as to whether or not he attends church? Isn’t same-sex marriage legal? To that end -isn’t the judicial body meant to be non-partisan? Your argument makes no sense,” he concluded, surrendering himself to frustration.
“No,” Abe gave, “we just don’t embody the ideals we espouse.”

“Yea. You shouldn’t let that bring you to personal ruin though.”

“I still want to be my brother,” Abe realised aloud. “I still think he would have been a better role-model for my son and if I can’t -”

“No, you’re right, he probably would,” Tarleton agreed. “You said something earlier about not having the same closeness to your son that I enjoy with my girls, and if there is any truth to that – if I may, it is because he doesn’t really know you, because you are too afraid to know yourself.”

Abe was taken aback.

“And it is terrifying, believe me, I know. But that is where you make mistakes. We all do and don’t see it until after the fact. My greatest fear before any of this happened was that Marie would turn out to be anything like me. Her mum is sick – terminally and I’ve had her in therapy since we found out, thinking it would make some kind of positive difference. Its just shut her down, to her mum, I think, denying them both the same closeness I have with her and which I got to enjoy with my dad. And then it was believed that I was dead and she acted out worse than I ever did despite every precaution – if only in that there was never any question of where I was when I was off coping with loss. I think I should have been more up front with her about it, about things I learned too late. It is always too late, ‘innit? Wisdom only comes to you when it serves little purpose.”

“She probably is like you though, brave and self-assured and outgoing -”

“I think she is just scared. I think I am just scared and I’ve gotten … so good at pretending that is not the case that it is completely natural for me to sit here with a guy whose name I don’t know talking about sex and politics because the alternative is just screaming and none of it will help bring my daughter back. I’m sorry, I … I’m lost and I’m at a loss and I’m telling you things I’ve never shared with anyone as though I can’t bare my own burden and I can, it’s -”

“I’m Abraham Woodhull, Abe’s fine, and … for the record I’ve never told anyone that I’m gay before either, so you are in good/bad company.”

Tarleton stared with something he was afraid to voice until he finding his own silence as offsetting as whatever it was in Abe’s introduction that made him mute.

“It seems weird but I get that a lot. Sorry!” he continued quickly with forced mirth. “That sounds quite vain and I honestly didn’t mean it like that – uh, I’m Banastre Tarleton, everyone calls me Ban because my first name doesn’t exactly lend itself to easy spelling. I’d shake your hand, but -”

“You lost yours somewhere in the Middle East?”

“Iraq,” he answered in a way that sounded like an invitation.

Abe considered the possible sentiment before speaking. “Sorry, I don’t … you would have served with Benedict Arnold then, or at least you might be familiar with his tactics …” he thought aloud addressing implication.

“Know him? He’s the only reason I’m alive today. And I mean that outside of well,” he lifted his hand. “The only operation we ever together engaged it, ironic though that might sound. I studied Arnold before – he was always a man action, to the point of outright insubordination – which I don’t mean as a criticism, no, quite the contrary. He was an inspiring leader, he could rouse men to action and routinely would even if it went outside of his given orders. He wasn’t one of these armchair generals, he joined in the fray … actually to that end I was surprised to find that he had been
elected senator. Arnold was too abrasive by nature, he had no use and frankly no mind for politics. If he wanted something, he simply took it. As a civilian that is all but impossible."

“I think it is for those reasons that he got himself a seat,” Abe explained. “Our government routinely votes to make itself redundant – to literally shut itself down when a budget can’t be compromised for partisan reasons. Not Arnold. He is not part of and pact or block. You can see by how well Trump is faring in the primaries that the American people are ready for men of hard action, men who don’t care how what they say sounds, who want to get work done. Arnold is a product and prototype of that mentality. That is,” he struggled for excuse, “I’m unemployed. I spend a lot of time watching C-SPAN. You are saying, in a combat situation, he was the same way?”

Abe had a mind to have Tarleton tell him where Arnold might have gone after knocking him out to find himself Roger’s prisoner once more. Arnold still saw himself as staging a war, something perhaps brought on or brought out by prescription narcotics. Though injured and driven half-mad, if the senator possessed any of the strategy a soldier who had previously served as his second suggested, it might be worth asking into. Without, of course, asking directly. Abe liked Ban enough that he did not want to cause him to come to more harm. He was already in a situation worse than Abe would have wished on an enemy.

“I can’t say at all, I’m afraid,” Tarleton concluded. “When you are on deployment, that is all you are, as I’ve said. Life is made easier by the fact that everyone around you is facing the same risks, there is a comradery that doesn’t exist in most aspects of the day-to-day. Do you play team sport? It is as though every day is Sunday. I don’t know to what extent it has been in the news but Arnold was … involved with this researcher named Dr John André who used an association football team as a test ground for some psychotherapy measures which he hoped to employ in military practice, and I disagree with it, with everything that was done entirely, but I understand the temptation. It is easier to fight with a shared objective. André wanted to get rid of the rest of the week, in other words – when we forget the thrill of battle because we’re all busy running spread sheets and picking up our kids from orchestra practice and hoping to God our missus doesn’t want to watch Versailles or Poldark or Downton fucking Abbey that evening even if there is nothing else on the telly. But if it was always there? No – in the Army you have leave, you get post and miss home and it is good so because why else would anyone go to war? I mean,” he readjusted his statement slightly, “certainly there are economic incentives but a vague concept of the minuscule effect these serve average individuals in wealthy western nations isn’t going to bring anyone to risk life and limb. It is the things André would rob them of, and sadly, I think – things Arnold never himself had and grew frustrated when he couldn’t create. But that is it. You and I, Abe, we are likely connected in a thousand small ways we don’t recognise though we would seem to have little in common – but need we? I know myself to be better off here, influenced by your quiet caution then I’d otherwise be tonight. Arnold … probably lost himself because he never left the front and evidently developed the opinion that no one else ought to either.”

Abe considered what he had been told with relation to his conversations with the senator in moments of clarity that Rogers’ medicine cabinet severely restricted, realising that Arnold seemed to see himself and the world, even in his hallucinatory dreams, much in the way Tarleton assessed.

He took a deep breath, consoling himself that the colonel did lament never having returned to active duty as he began, “There is something I have to tell you. Something I need your help with if you are willing to lend it. You have experience I never will with strategy and tactics and understanding the men who employ them. He called you Scaevola, Arnold – didn’t he?”

“Once … how on earth would you possibly know that?” Tarleton squinted though his tone was oddly stoic.
“I was forced to keep Arnold prisoner until my plan to help him escape put everyone, everything at even greater risk. I know who is holding him, so do the feds, but I no longer know where. Rogers … my former boss who is now a missing person himself - though no one seems to be looking - had it in his head to blackmail the Hewletts, Edmund being a suspect in the investigation. It did not work and as a result they put New York City on military lockdown, having ignited gang warfare as a means of distraction, playing the five families off of one another and helping the authorities to shut down drug supply chains. Tomorrow, Edmund Hewlett is marrying one of my best friends and everyone in attendance has in some way benefited and in more ways suffered from the senator’s absence. I am worried that they are going to kill everyone at the feast unless Arnold is found and charges are dropped.”

Tarleton nodded, lifted his glass, shuttered slightly and wiped his lips after taking a sip.

“No … not everyone,” he answered, looking past Abe as he spoke. “One man … and I think I know who. I’d offer to intervene but if your wife is Mary Woodhull then, I don’t know that you would want me to. Shit,” he swallowed before repeating the situation as he understood it. “O’rite. So, Arnold is being held hostage by this Rogers and now that his bill has basically been vetoed thanks to Hanger and Ferguson via a hashtag, there is little chance of anyone acting to retrieve him on their own initiative, and if he is found, it could be that the problems he and André have created will only continue on a much larger scale. If he isn’t, America loses a national hero and there are enough agendas convening at the wedding that a shooting war could come from it, making it possible that Arnold’s measures will become procedural without a vote,” he sighed slowly with an air of theatrics as he leaned back into the booth.

Tarleton looked content with himself, if for no other reason than he had been invited into something that lessened his sense of helplessness at an hour in which there was nothing he could do for his missing child. Abe questioned if he was right to exploit the personal tragedy of a man he had only just met.

“My guy … meaning no offence, how the fuck did you not open with this? Give me your phone and go order a bottle, we’ve going to be here all night.” Taking Abe’s phone from the table before he could question or object, he scrolled through the contacts and lifted the device to his ear. “You are lucky I like you,” he mouthed before greeting, “Inspector Tallmadge – hello, this is Colonel Tarleton, formally of the UK’s diplomatic mission to Washington, you might not remember me but we’ve spoken once before – I know it is late but I need you to arrest John Graves Simcoe and Edmund Hewlett and … oh, hell, why not bring Mrs Woodhull and that chic writing a Revolutionary War serial that they were talking about last week on all the pods and meet us at – what is this place called?”

“The Irish Pub,” Abe answered him.

“It doesn’t have a name?”

“That is its name, The Irish Pub.”

“With the definite article? Jesus-fucking – I’ve had it about up to here with American grammar,” Tarleton began. Whatever Ben said gave him cause to let it go. “O’rite, The Irish Pub in Albany, New York. I think that is – what you are no longer with the NYPD? Perfect, then there is no conflict of interest. Arrest them anyway and get yourself upstate, it seems we’re ourselves a little war council to convene.”
Chapter End Notes

If you made it to the end of this chapter, you deserve some applause. Come, pat yourself on the back. Long as it was, I can’t possibly include everything – but here are a few footnotes:

**Nomenclature**

Kitty didn’t get it wrong, **Bulmers** is called **Magners** outside of its native Ireland.

**Egg-Shell** was one of Ferguson’s pseudonyms under which he published satirical articles in Rivington’s Royal Gazette. I mean, I am rarely one to find fault but … TURN could have EASILY included this if only just in passing. (I’m guessing the reason that they didn’t lies somewhere in one of the show-runners mistakenly naming him Richard in a Tweet that only I seem to remember, so there you have it, the punch-line to a long running layered joke that references far too much to be funny.)

We’ve touched before on the Tarleton family’s roots in the Merseyside region dating back to the Norman Conquest – **William[s]**, **Clayton and Banastre** are other seriously old surnames of the area. (Guess who has been digging around Liverpool’s achieves as of late … that is right, my younger brother with the cooler postcode. ;)

**Appropriations**

While football/soccer (and sometimes rugby) are often used as an ersatz for any number of political/social themes, **automobiles** are (fairly obviously) a twenty-first century stand-in for horses. Arthur Wellesley was a poor horseman as a teenager, which I’ve equated here to a lack of driving experience, whereas at the same time Banastre Tarleton was commanding one of the world’s great cavalry units – so he would have little trouble picking up an LHD automatic though presumably prior experience would have only lent itself to RHD shifts. There were a few nods to the biographies of both men in the text and I am only noting this in particular because it makes me sound like I vaguely understand car-talk, which I don’t.

**Merrick Garland** was President Obama’s nomination to the USSC. He never got a hearing. Mitch McConnell announced within a few hours of Scalia’s unexpected death that he would be opposed to replacing him prior to the election. Since a good 90% of what constitutes the US-based news that gets covered in Europe is court-related, Garland would be the pilot episode of everyone’s fourth-favourite show.

**Sport**
In 1980 Crystal Palace FC rebranded from The Glaziers to The Eagles (inspired by the Portuguese club Benfica) when (also in following their history of being late to the game and ripping everyone off once they got there) they could (and ought to) have gone with The Sparrow-Hawks because I can’t really see young Arthur supporting any other club side. Some history did work out in my favour here though; when Palace played Leicester on 19.03.16, they completed 428 passes to The Foxes 346, had 56% possession at 13 shorts on target to 8, which doesn’t feel like stats the Iron Duke would have been mistaken about.

David Luiz is a Brazilian centre-back/defensive midfielder who has played at Benfica, Chelsea, and PSG. There were probably some worthy contenders back in the 1970s if we were to fill a pageant of footballers with terrible hair, but being as to that time professionals were all running about in hot-pants I’ve never once been able to look at faces while watching old footage, so, it might be by default, but put a Google on the guy – Luiz wins the cup if bad-hair-days were a contested sport.

Five-a-side is a style football using five, rather than eleven, players to field a team. The rules vary slightly in practice and include such calls as “but it’s my ball” and “next goal wins”. Kids play it in streets and schoolyards, adults usually involve an app that will just text you an alert if someone is trying to set up a game in the general area.

It is apparently impossible to find eleven players willing and ready to play a game of cricket in the British Isles.

I have absolutely no idea why Schalke 04 has such a large South and Central American fanbase and have tried to research the topic for the purposes of these notes, but giving that support for the club is all-consuming in a way that (without intending offence to the club’s storied history) is weird to outsiders, I couldn’t find much in the way of marketing strategy or statistics, just people gushing about their love for the team, which, is kind of exactly what I expected. The follow-up to the purely fictional article Hanger is cited as having written on the subject is a reference to Johann Rehbogen, a 94 year old currently standing trial in Germany for crimes committed as a juvenile under the NS-regime.

I have an Arnold/André X-Mas fic to finish in the coming days so H+S will be taking a short hiatus, but when I return (after the holidays but hopefully before the end of the year) – we have a wedding to attend. <3 I hope you’ll be back!
The House (Pt. 1)

Chapter Summary

Mary, Hewlett, Simcoe and Abigail accompany Ben and Caleb to Albany for a secret midnight conference, leaving Aberdeen and the boys alone at Whitehall to contend with an unwelcome intruder. Mary tries to manoeuvre around Ban, hoping that his bravado won’t come between her and a plea deal when she begins to suspect Caleb of leaking information to the FBI. Abigail tries to comfort Hewlett when he is given devastating news. Elsewhere, “Eggshell” has a spot of fun satirizing the day’s main event.

Chapter Notes

This double-chapter references a recurring joke about literature and travel delays, so here is an opener for you that I couldn’t have planned: right now on my way to-, from- (and sometimes simply at) work I’m re-reading *Lotte in Weimar* and yesterday a colleague, having noticed, engaged me in an excited conversation about Thomas Mann (having herself picked up *Buddenbrooks* at an airport over the winter holiday, amazed at how much she was able to get through before boarding ...)

Before I risk seeming lofty, I thought I might share something that had really ought to be as universal to air travel as books we haven’t read since high school or uni: on a recent trip to the UK, I stopped at a takeaway on the way to the airport and was rushing to finish my meal before going through security when a friendly officer told me that if I wanted, I could just put my piece-chicken on the conveyer with the rest of my carry on and eat it comfortably at the gate. Granted, this was at a small terminal with two coffeeshops and a kiosk but exactly nowhere to purchase hot food (which might explain the relaxed attitude) but still – Lad in Chief. The Hero We All Need. A round of applause (or drinks, should we ever chance meet in a pub setting.)

So what about you, ladies and gents? Did your holiday travel give you reason to stay in the twenty-first century or did you retreat into the pages of some classic (and if so – which?) Put it in the comment section since this week you’ve two to choose from. :

As always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

At first, she thought the sound to be the beating of her unsettled heart. Aberdeen Declesias shifted in her sheets, adjusting her head and neck that she not be made to hear the echo of her pulse, that she might yet find rest in this otherwise turbulent night.

Three hours prior, Aberdeen had been able to find a bit of comfort in her twin bed, at least, insofar as it came to position. Half-reclined against the headboard, her laptop open, she alternated between educating herself on New York’s own policy regarding missing children (a search that soon
restricted itself to Nassau Country, incidences involving machetes, and her texting Peggy Shippen to inform her that she might have finally found a policy matter on which they could agree) and staring at the promotional poster on the back of her door as she waited for her new friend to write back, wondering if it was not time to take it down.

She looked at the lipstick stains she had placed around Robert Townsend and felt her stomach turn, remembering her fear when the Uber the part-time musician had ordered brought her to an FBI interrogation room, how certain she had been that she was marked for death. She remembered Cicero’s arrest leading to Peggy’s and with this thought returned to Twitter, both to check if Theodosia Burr had replied to her DM (she had not) and to see if Marie Robinson’s corpse had yet been uncovered, certain the girl would be found in that state, giving that Police Scotland (who could not by the nature of their profession be any better than Police Anywhere Else) were the ones to have broadened the “search” to include tall, thin teenagers with bad dye-jobs and worse skin wearing Chelsea FC jerseys with their short skirts of ‘Hewlett’ Tartan. There was some irony, the au pair considered, in the fact that the real Anna Strong did not own anything of the like (Aberdeen knew – she had looked through all of her former housemate’s things before Anna had moved out just as abruptly as she had entered) which, she considered, was really a shame, for Aberdeen was of the mind that long legs out to be shown off, even if they were, as in Anna’s case, a tad too-toned from years of blood sport and presumably bruised from soccer besides.

The thought annoyed her the instant she could relate her quick criticism to the expectations of men. Deciding in the same moment that Anna was lovely as she was rather than when reduced to the two or three ‘facts’ about her person that appeared in nearly every article of late (where did anyone come on the idea that she drank Magners and how did social media justify its elevation of a single post about a blue-clad London club as being a cornerstone of her personality?) the Haitian decided to make a more realistic #RoyalWeddingReady photograph insofar as she was able in her present state – that was, whilst wearing a pore-cleansing face-mask that took fifteen-minutes to work, something Anna would not (and would not need to) bother herself with. Aberdeen pulled her long, thin braids into a bun as best she could, threw an oversized hoodie with a Columbia Law logo over her night-dress and found an empty can that had once contained pre-mixed Hugo at the bottom of her rubbish bin with which to toast the camera on her phone. Satisfied with the truer-to-life result and the chastisement she had written about women being re-written reduced to things easily sexualized and the effect this had on young girls who might better admire Miss Strong for her education and business savvy, Aberdeen was about to hit post when she noticed the Culper Ring poster showed in the corner, lipstick stains and all. A filter sorted the issue on the internet (much as Aberdeen worried it defeated the underlining message she was trying to make), but social media was not real life as she was suddenly all-too-aware.

Aberdeen Declesias released her built-up anger in a single lunge, ripping the promotional poster that happened to have an undercover FBI informant from the back of her door, and, finding herself still unsatisfied, began tearing it into smaller and smaller shreds and stamping on the confetti she had made when her fingers were of no further use.

She felt she had been betrayed. She felt she might have expected as much. She felt foolish in having held any expectations at all, as, looking back, Robert Townsend had never given her any indication that her feelings were shared or ever would be, regardless of whose name the labels of the clothing she’s borrowed and stole bore.

Stomping hard on the wooden floorboard in a fit of self-and sexual frustration, she nearly had not heard the door when the knock came.

Had it not been Abigail greeting the most unwanted of guests in a tone at once both cautious and
cautionary, Aberdeen may not have even considered going downstairs at all. But she had every reason not to trust the police, though, for the moment, the least of her complaints felt the most compelling.

Paying her night-dress and borrowed hoodie no mind, she pulled the cleansing mask from her face, spent a few minutes amazed at the sheer amount of dirt that had been lifted from her pores, forgetting the wider world for a moment while she marvelled at what hid beneath her otherwise smooth skin until she had realised that silence had at some point set in and around Whitehall’s front door. Aberdeen, slightly embarrassed at her own (seldom recognised) self-obsession and the distraction it had proven, rushed from her bathroom down the long stairwell, hearing voices again once in the foyer that she quickly determined were coming from the kitchen.

The hour was late – too late to be hosting on a weeknight regardless of what the following day held – and far, far past the bedtime of Cicero Ingram whom she saw standing behind the door where eyes would not find him, listening in. Aberdeen shot him a sharp look which he returned with one of his own. ‘You belong in bed,’ she mouthed. ‘I’m not leaving my mom with that man,’ Cicero whispered, louder perhaps than he would have liked.

‘Cicero!’ Abigail called out. ‘You best not be out of bed at– ‘

‘Mom,’ the boy charged in, Aberdeen hastening to follow, ‘You can’t honestly think – ‘

‘Listen to your mother;’ Mr. Simcoe (whom the au pair was surprised to find had not yet driven back into the city) warned without inflection, not lifting his eyes from where they lay when he spoke. ‘Go back to bed. This isn’t,’ he swallowed, readjusted, running his fingers through his long, loose auburn curls. ‘You know the friend I told you about, the one who met an untimely end? It turns out he didn’t. We um … your mother, Mrs. Woodhull, Mr. Hewlett, Mr. Brewster, Mr. Tallmadge and I now have to go meet with him. Aberdeen,’ he turned to address her, ‘you’ll watch the boys – won’t you? Meet us in Albany in the morning?’

She nodded and Mr. Simcoe made a gesture of apology for putting her out. Cicero, however, demanded further clarification. ‘If he is alive, then why are you crying?’

In the dim light, Mr. Simcoe was not as far as Aberdeen could tell, but Mr. Hewlett was all but despondent. The Scot sat at the table, uncharacteristically slouched, his eyes buried in his hands, his shoulders heaving with ever hard sob. Mr. Simcoe stood over him, rubbing at his back. Beside him stood no-longer-Inspector Tallmadge who looked as confused as Cicero, to whom he responded of the man he only knew from across a table in an interrogation room, ‘Mr. Hewlett is happy, that’s all. Sometimes that happens. People cry when they are happy.’

‘That is fucking bullshit, what did you do?!’ Cicero shouted. Aberdeen looked to Abigail, who - either exhausted or in agreeance - did not correct her child’s speech. Abigail sat at the unset breakfast table between Mary and Caleb, whose unexpected presence at Whitehall felt like another betrayal. He must have come with Tallmadge, Aberdeen realised. (Was he a plain-clothes copper too?) She gave the drummer a hard glare before returning her gaze to Cicero and telling him with a forced girlish charm she borrowed from Peggy’s annoyingly peppy example to go wait for her in her room, she would do her best to explain when she came up after him in a moment.

There were two chairs left at the table, she noted, but these were not meant for them. This pained Aberdeen, who thought herself to have transcended any social distinctions between herself, her employers and the friends and enemies the Woodhulls engaged in these past several weeks, but as with most matters personal, Aberdeen did not voice her frustration. Such was left better for social justice and social media. In real life, she realised, she was still just a servant, a part-time student on
a work-visa whose council was not being sought. She was not wanted or needed in this extended company. It was better to leave before being asked; she was bitter enough without inviting escalation. Aberdeen swallowed her discontent and with it every word of resentment she might have done better to speak.

After reassuring Mary and Abigail that their sons were in safe hands, that she would bring them to Albany dressed for the wedding first thing after giving them both a balanced breakfast, that she would make sure Cicero returned to sleep soon; after running her fingers through the hair that had gone from peppered-grey to white on Mr. Hewlett’s head over the past few weeks, that had begun to curl around his ears (making a mental note to text Peggy at a more Christian hour to tell her to tell Freddy to schedule more time for this one) saying ‘there, there’ to the broken man; after hugging Mr Simcoe tightly, trying to lighten the mood (‘Did you hit him again?’); after saying exactly nothing to Caleb and no-longer-Inspector Tallmadge before turning on her heel, Aberdeen found Cicero where she had told him to wait, picking up the small pieces of paper she had created in a rage and putting them into her rubbish bin.

‘I’m really worried about Mr. Hewlett,’ he confessed. ‘About everyone. I don’t think they should go … not just because …’ Cicero could not finish, but Aberdeen understood and agreed with both assessments.

She invited him to sit with her at on the side of her bed and did her best to phrase all of what she knew of the situation in a way a twelve-year-old would understand. ‘Sometimes,’ she told him, slowly as she looked for the words, worried that her pace seemed patronising as she gauged his expression, ‘When you get to be an adult, stupid as this sounds, you just kind of loose track of people -’

‘Like … Senator Arnold?’ Cicero pried.

‘Not exactly … more like … you are going to go off to college one day, and if you and Pip wind up at separate schools, you might text ‘ere and there, but you’ll be busy, and ee’ll be busy, and you won’t realise that you’ve drifted apart until your both ‘ome for Thanksgiving in the fall of your sophomore year and realise that it has been a month since you’ve spoken. That ‘ee has broken up with the girlfriend ‘ee once couldn’t stop going on about, that you in turn forgot to tell ‘im that you switched majors, whatever. And that is normal. You’ll still be friends, but things change when you don’t see each other every day. With Mr. ‘Ewlett, ee ‘as been ‘ere, an ocean away from all of his friends for so long, and last week ‘ee learned something bad ‘appened to one of them. But when bad things ‘appen to people with whom one was close - this is ‘ard to explain and I ‘ope you’ll never ‘ave to learn it for yourself - but it ‘as a way of elapsing time. ‘Ewlett says that time is linier and this always, but it isn’t, not when you are sad, because your mind will try to shield you by reminding you of ‘appy things. Do you understand?’

Cicero nodded though his crossed brows contradicted the gesture.

‘So, when Mr. ‘Ewlett ‘ad learnt that Mr. Tarleton ‘ad died, then, and for the last week or so, ‘ee is with ‘im in ‘is mind … back when things were ‘appy, wondering why they did not stay that way, not realising that - actually - they did. Just … apart. ‘Ee thinks - because everyone thinks that they could ‘ave done more ‘ad they done things a bit differently - that ‘ee might ‘ave made more of an effort to keep in touch. ‘Ee missed Mr. Tarleton more than ‘ee realised and, really I think so, more than ‘ee would ‘ave if nothing bad ‘ad ‘appened; if ‘ee could leave Mr. Tarleton to more natural memories, bad ones as well as good ones.

‘But it is not just the Lord who forgives someone’s sins when they die, we all do this, and then we think ‘why did this ‘appen’ as though we ourselves ‘ave somehow been discriminated against,
passed over. And then, in grief, people are given to think of all the things the might say if only they had the chance. Mr. ‘Ewlett now ‘as that chance, and it is just as unexpected, and this ‘urts, too, because now that all of the forgiveness that comes so naturally when the only words left to one are those of ‘goodbye’ is gone … one ‘as to contend with a real, flawed person once more, and, in that way, ‘ello’ can be just as ‘ard. If it is making any sense,’ she wondered herself. In truth, none of it did, not in the way she wished. Everyone thought to ascribe a certain meaning to life where as death was defined by its absence, and it all too was easy to think of these two extremes of existence as being opposing abstracts. As Aberdeen had witnessed downstairs, this approach served no one, at least not in front of the situation they faced. Mr. Hewlett had previously ascribed himself with the guilt and blame of Colonel Tarleton’s untimely demise, which served a sad purpose, but a significant one nonetheless. It had allowed him to think of himself as being as hard as all that which was being asked of him, to close his heart to questions of loss and love. It was what had allowed his scars to scab if not heal; how he was coping with his various crimes and covers, how he planned to say goodbye to Mr. Simcoe, how he had let Anna end things. The news of his innocence had left him bleeding, had led him back to the front lines of battle and left him as lost as he had ever been. But this was something Cicero would not and should not understand. Aberdeen wished that she shared in the ignorance others allowed themselves. ‘I think so … Mr Tallmadge probably didn’t mean any ‘arm ‘ere, Mr ‘Ewlett is just overwhelmed by it all.’

‘Would you want to talk to your family and friends who died in the earthquake if you suddenly found out they were alive?’ Cicero asked, sounding somewhat conformed by the explanation she had offered, - one that did not begin to touch on the full complexity of the guilt or the impossibility of innocence. Aberdeen considered the question he had placed to her directly and wondered if she should be as open with the child as the name Rochambeau had forced her to be with herself in these past few days, if there was a way of putting her feelings into words at all or if she had been left with little more than old paper torn into shards that had become too small to hold.

‘I wish I could say ‘yes’ with ease,’ Aberdeen answered after a while. ‘But tomorrow at the wedding, there comes a man, the father of someone who did terrible things to my island and its people and I am afraid to meet ‘im on ‘is surname alone. Sometimes I become afraid of the dark and I can imagine my mum, and she is … she is not ‘appy with this. She would tell me that big girls don’t cry and I would be embarrassed, worried that I am an embarrassment to ‘er memory. So, I think … ‘yes’, I would want to talk to those I lost again if I could, even as I am, because I want to be something of the strong woman my mother was raising me to me, and also ‘yes’, because in a way I ‘ave never actually stopped talking to ‘er, but it isn’t easy. It never is. In a way, I can relate to Mr. ‘Ewlett’s discomfort in the construct of this ‘aypothetical.’

With this fully honest admission, Cicero put his arm around her and told her that he used to be afraid of the dark, too, and that if she wanted, he would go find a night light in one of the boxes in the garage because his mother never threw anything out and he was sure he must still have it somewhere. Aberdeen smiled, knowing it to be in the wall in his room, but rather than call him on his fib, told him that she would rather he got himself to bed, that she was sure Mr. Hewlett would feel better in the morning and they both would as well, but only if they got a few hours of sleep in.

Half an hour later, she heard the stairwell creek as people climbed it as quietly as they could, packing their necessaries and toiletries for the following day into Caleb’s postal truck and Mr. Simcoe’s Range Rover, Abigail helping Mary up the stairs (though her things had already been gathered for her) so that both mothers might kiss their sons good night once more.

By the time the party was on the road, Aberdeen had assumed Cicero to be sleeping, but with no one else around to make noise, the floor continued to creak. Maybe he wanted a drink of water or needed to use the lavatory.
The sound continued longer than it ought by either estimation.

Old homes are like this, she told herself, shifting until she could no longer be sure.

Aberdeen got out of bed, and, using her mobile phone as a makeshift torch, made her way to her door and wondered at her pension for the dramatic when the screens pale glow fell upon a light switch, which she was then quick to flip, shaking her head. She turned on the hall light as well, went to check on Cicero and Thomas to find them both soundly asleep in their beds and, satisfied, was about to return to hers when from the corner of her eye she saw a shadow that seemed out of place.

“‘Ello?” Aberdeen called out to no answer as she descended the stairs. No answer came. The commotion, however, continued.

But the house was old.

The house was old and sometimes creaked of its own regard.

She said over and over in her mind until she was mouthing the same words, increasingly worried that she was not alone. Turning on all the lights where the sounds lead her, Aberdeen soon found herself in front of the door to the garage which went largely unused - even prior to it becoming a storage centre of sorts. She found herself confronted with a curious, unpleasant, irony scent of blood and bile which hastened her hand to the door handle.

She opened it slowly, quietly and with a heavy measure of caution.

But then, for all of her better effort, Aberdeen Declesias - otherwise as brave as her mother had raised her to be - began to scream as she never had before without affording the satisfaction one might find in her shrieks a single thought.

She tripped and fell as she turned to flee, silenced by a hand on her shoulder that hoisted her up from the floor onto her tip-toes in a single strong pull. Held from behind with a knife to her throat, she heard a familiar voice and began to cry as quietly as she could, hoping she had not woken Thomas and Cicero, hoping the boys who had been left to her care would stay in their rooms where they would not be noticed, wishing she herself had the same better sense she wished for the children. Aberdeen wondered if her life had held any other meaning, if she could have ever been more than a servant and thief, than a silly, superficial girl who feared for the dark and for her own darkness, masking her want for worth with the borrowed rhetoric of braver men. She wondered who among her acquaintances would charge themselves unjustly with her death and if there would be any immediate benefit to said blame.

Mary Woodhull was grateful for the lull in what had become a circular conversation. She sat with the others in the corner booth, laughing lightly to herself that without context, this was exactly how she long envisioned what ‘going out with adults her age’ was meant to be like. Three weeks before, her experience with late nights in public houses restricted itself to uncomfortable dinners with her father-in-law Richard, with watching the way he slowly chewed a piece of steak in the corner of his mouth, observing how even when he was not speaking, he managed to grumble. Abe would show up an hour late if he showed up at all, and, if he should, Mary, rather than watch how her husband was to fare in the same verbal fight she had been having in his place since handing the
menu back to the server, would let her eyes wander around the dining area, to people whose lives she wished she was instead leading – young professionals, most of the staring at their phones between sharing a few laughs.

In groups of this size, or so she had observed in envy, there were certain roles that people naturally gravitated towards, regardless of who they might be without a pint: instigators, isolationists, heretics, barstool philosophers, too-affectionate couples and those to whom love had been lost. She glanced up and shared a smile with Caleb Brewster when she caught his eye, knowing that he was holding Inspector Tallmadge’s hand under the table whilst the two both stared at their respective screens, presumably working out the same puzzle most of their company was presently occupied with. Her soon to be ex-husband Abe was predisposed to the physical – after reading through the no-fault divorce agreement and affixing his signature to each section, he had returned to the maps Caleb had luckily had in the postal truck that had served to ferry most of their party up to Albany, making small notes with a pencil as to the places he had been, the places Rogers knew well, noting whatever other yet-unshared ideas were on his mind.

‘No Fault’ Mary mused to herself, must equate to ‘Shared but Separate Guilt’ in a language only lawyers understood.

No one would be at this table, at this hour, had her and Abe’s relationship been defined by love rather than unwarranted fear. He was happy to split custody of their son Thomas with her, or so he had told her in tears an hour earlier. ‘Having grown up without a mother, I’d never want to same for my son. But a chance to raise him myself … under circumstance, it is more than I had expected you to extend.’

‘I can’t imagine why,’ Mary had responded, ‘I did everything for the sake of our marriage.’

‘As did I,’ Abe had answered. She had realised that from his perspective, this was true. He had hidden his forced involvement in Rogers’ scheme to profit of Arnold disappeared by holding him hostage, same as Mary had not said an honest word about her initial involvement in the matter until her lies had become truths.

John Graves Simcoe sat at the far end of the table, sulking until he announced suddenly and in the highest of spirits, “Found her!”

Until this moment, Mary had not realised that it had been a competition.

“Where?” Abigail demanded.

“Centre, far left,” Simcoe answered, leaning over to show Abigail on her own phone. “I wasn’t looking for Marie, but rather for Mou, whom I knew to be with her from the image Police Scotland shared some hours ago. Mostly, I was surprised that the old boy was still getting on. I knew him when he was a pup, you see. The story in itself is not one worth telling, but suffice it to say that the institution that is the British Tabloid industry absolutely fell over itself a decade of so back when a Portuguese football trainer brought a small dog of the same breed into the country illegally, then punched the arresting officer, allowing the animal to escape custody. It was on the run for months if I recall correctly, and in such time Banastre over there decided that it would be grand to buy a Yorkshire Terrier and name it after José Mourinho – without any regard for the fact that animals were not allowed at school and that we shared eight square metres which quickly took the thing’s scent. I’m not better than the rest of you at spotting one would-be Lady Anna out of a thousand, but I know that dog well. I trained him,” he smiled. He always did when offering a vague slight.

“Oh, yes. Yes, I see her, too,” Abigail said with a sardonic smile of her own. Mary wondered if this sudden, almost aggressive drive towards competition was attributed to Abigail’s standing as a
soccer-mom on the team Simcoe now coached, until she realised where the look was directed. Ben Tallmadge, however, did not lift his eyes to meet it.

Abigail had been asked to come for the insight she might be able to offer into John André’s person and psyche, having painted a rather complimentary portrait of him within her prose, a story which Mary, admittedly, had yet to read. As was her nature, Abigail had been hesitant whenever she was addressed, but she was altogether unresponsive when the former inspector who had packed her injured son into the back of a police vehicle and processed his arrest put the matter to her.

As a mother, Mary could understand Abigail’s reaction to this company as well as she could understand Abe’s under the ultimatum he had been given by Robert Rogers; as much as she could understand Banastre Tarleton’s entire demeanour giving the calculation that his eldest had gone missing shortly after he had made his escape, that he had gone on at length about his children to an FBI hitman, perhaps in a plea for his own life, perhaps simply because it was impossible not to think of one’s own offspring first and foremost in any crisis, regardless of how immediate the threat to them might be.

In groups of a certain size, individuals were given to type-cast and Tarleton was by far the loudest and most lively of their number and likely would have been the embarrassment to ring his ex-girlfriend mid-session regardless if they were here to stop a series of international incidents from escalating or if they had come to the same table under circumstance of lower-stakes - a sporting fixture, a birthday celebration, a shared want for discounted Irish whiskey – which, Mary noted as she glanced how much still remained in Edmund Hewlett’s tumbler, likely would never have been the case in present company.

Shortly after the Setauket delegation had first arrived, after tearful, heartfelt greetings had given over to observations on American literature (‘How fitting to find myself at Tom Sawyer’s funeral after the adventure I’ve had.’), accusations of disbelief (‘Did you actually read the book?’) and commentary and criticism of the average airport kiosk (‘You have no idea how little there is to do when subject to constant flight delays.’), after the put-out bar boy brought drinks to the table but before business could begin, Hewlett asked all parties present with strong words and stuttered speech to please leave the knowledge of his partaking in a whiskey that was not, strictly speaking, Scotch within these walls. ‘In a gesture of good relations, I’ve obtained permission to have a single glass of something from … Tennessee,’ he either cringed or struggled to remember, ‘tomorrow night. There are certain standards and obligations to which I am held. My family collects far too much revenue from a number of distilleries for me to approach any social event where drink will be served without acting the part of an ambassador, even within the confines of my private life.’

‘Permission?’ Caleb gaped before jesting, ‘You’re thirty-five, buddy. You can do better than a single sip on a special occasion. Hell, steal the keys to Daddy’s liquor cabinet and invite a few friends over next time you have the house to yourself.’

‘You do realise this is a missing person inquiry, that everyone at this table has information to share and, I’m sure, countless reasons why they hesitated in coming forward sooner. That we are all bound to much bigger secrets than that with which we toast,’ former DI Tallmadge reminded Hewlett in a nod to a shared sense of protocol and procedure that here served little purpose.

‘You clearly don’t know the Hewletts,’ Tarleton had rolled his eyes. ‘The crap they deem warranting of special care.’

‘Let’s just leave it there, shall we?’ Simcoe seemed to warn.

‘Aye, cheers mate.’
Everyone had lifted their glass in response to the only word that they could all agree on. To look at Hewlett’s, it seemed to have been neglected since.

For the first two hours, their work was fairly productive and uninterrupted, largely because Abe, contrary to any expectation anyone would have ever had of him, had accidented into his true calling of espionage at which he excelled. By relaying that which had been said to him by various individuals both present and missing, he afforded context to events that seemed independent, bringing everyone to the same page now that they were at the same table.

Almost.

Mary learned something knew about herself as she listened on without offering the same comments and corrections others were want to give (Tarleton’s interjections at appropriate moments with regard to Arnold’s possible strategy were helpful as was Tallmadge’s insight into the inner workings of various acronymed organisations - the personal dynamics of the people in power, the possible motivations for problems to have arisen out of negligence; less, however, could be said of Simcoe’s clever quips or the blame Abigail thought to put on the former inspector, and, equally, on Caleb, who as far as Mary could tell had not done anything unethical until this evening – not that anyone noticed but her.) As conversation continued to flow, Caleb sent texts to the missing member of Culper Ring, the only of their number who still had direct ties to the inside. Occasionally, Caleb would look up and offer insight unbefitting of his station - insight that was not questioned, everyone to nervous of one another to take notice.

Mary Woodhull herself had very little to fear at this point. She had already given Hamilton and his team a confession outlining her role in Arnold’s initial disappearance, in the cover up that had not quite worked out as the victim had not proven quite as dead as they had initially assessed. The only matter of immediate concern had been caused by an offhand comment Aberdeen had made with regard to Colonel Tarleton (based off her language-learner understanding of Mary Robinson’s lyrics.) But Banastre was not present enough for Mary’s initial worries to warrant any merit; unabashed braggart as he otherwise truly seemed to be, his attention had been interrupted all evening by news from across the Atlantic - a situation that time and again saw him called away from the table as he did his best to sort out his teenage ward in the capacity he was given with Abe’s mobile.

Mary, still unable to find one Anna in particular in a sea of others despite her former lover’s direction to look for a dog in the centre left of the picture social media was presently taken with, looked up at the man pacing at the far side of the room, arguing with his ex over an appropriate punishment for the girl who, though found, still had the rest of the world looking for her. A Twitter account everyone else seemed to already have been following posted a surveillance photo taken outside the main train station in Scotland’s capitol (‘curiously,’ Ben Tallmadge had commented, ‘merely seconds after news of the girl’s safe recovery was made public.’)

@Eggshell had captioned the picture (in what Mary had been informed was often a darkly satirical bend):

>>My new favourite ‘Where’s Wally?’ Poster. It took all of Britain upwards of 30hrs. Can you top that? Mass surveillance is no solution. Call your representative regardless of where you find yourself. #FindMarie #RoyalWeddingReady<<

“If only Senator Arnold happened to have a dog,” Mary commented under her breath, tired of the search, “we might well be done with this.”

Sixteen days ago, Senator Arnold had gone to meet someone he had expected to be Peggy Shippen at DeJong’s Tavern. John André, intending to meet the man funding his research with tax-payer
money, had forgotten the prior engagement upon meeting the girl he had for months been pretending to be, both completely by chance, and in a way, by his own design. André had arranged the union between Anna Strong and Edmund Hewlett to further his own ends, to force a behaviour in John Graves Simcoe that Hewlett’s failed suicide – surprisingly - had not. André met Peggy when they had both show up to help the happy couple move in together. Unfortunately, Arnold had met Simcoe in his place as a joint result; had met – more specifically – with Simcoe’s fist and with the bumper of Anna’s car, which Mary herself had been driving, slightly inebriated on Richard’s wine, Hewlett’s Xanax, and Jane Austen’s prose which she had tried to escape into upon learning that her husband’s former lover interest would now be boarding under the same roof.

She and Simcoe had hidden the body in the basement, a reality, according to Abe, that had been Arnold’s fate since. Tarleton had guessed that injured and disoriented, Arnold had tried to find a main road, which, in fact, had been the case. He nearly ran into Robert Rogers, or, more concisely, Robert Rogers had nearly run into him with his work truck, but instead by luck had swerved and hit a tree, packed the senator into the passenger seat with the intention of bringing him to the appropriate authorities in the morning when he had sobered up enough to understand that Rogers had saved him, perhaps with the hopes of a financial form of thanks.

In the morning, however, Rogers saw on the news that the man was in fact a person of public and political interest, and that the team handling the investigation into his disappearance was being led by none other than Inspector Benjamin Tallmadge, the brother of the boy Rogers had slain a decade prior on the same stretch of road, leading him to quickly revaluate his priorities where they involved Arnold, who went from being a guest at one of the beds in his halfway house to a hostage held in the property’s basement. The senator had since been moved several times, and this, with the help of Abe Woodhull, whom Rogers held in duress, having made threats against the safety of his family.

Meanwhile, Tallmadge had made an arrest in the course of the investigation that had played into the Scotsman’s hands, or so he seemed to think. Edmund Hewlett, in hopes of challenging the interest of other potential buyers of the property his fiancée Anna Strong had told him the night before she hoped to one day own, sent a picture of the crime scene to a tabloid publication, asking the paper’s editor – a woman who had been a roommate to her younger sister for most of their young lives – for a favour. This led to the NYPD’s heightened interest in him as a suspect, which, consequently, had been Hewlett’s intention. While Anna, who managed the bar where Arnold had last been seen was being interrogated by DI Tallmadge and ADIC Hamilton earlier that morning in her new home, Hewlett overheard a telephone conversation between a French foreign agent and the director of the Mossad, which he asked Aberdeen Declesias, the Woodhull’s au pair, to translate. It turned out to be a list of businesses expected to profit from the effect Arnold’s absence was having on the US Dollar -as such events always lead to mild market uncertainty – but in this case in particular, if certain investments were made, it could be used to strengthen the negotiating value of the Euro, still fighting for stability in the wake of Greece, Spain and a series of bailout packages that in part had led to a referendum proposal in Great Britain that threatened to throw the whole continent off course. Regardless of the fate of a fellow founding member, the French and Germans had a special interest in manipulating the economy slightly in their favour for the time being, to bring the Americans to the negotiating table and finish a trade package that had been in the works since the second Bush Administration. It had to be done before the fall election in the uncertainly around the likely Republican candidate, and preferably, before the referendum, persuading Britain to stay in the Union. Lafayette had freely admitted as much to Simcoe, whom Hewlett, upon his release, had brought this information to, involving his sometimes-friend in a scheme that would further the interests of the woman who, at that time, they both thought themselves to be in love with.

Hewlett did everything within his sphere of influence to remain a suspect in hopes of staying in
close contact with Lafayette, who he had little idea had played off of his known weakness for such scandals by indirectly feeding him information that Rochambeau, the French Ambassador to Washington and those he worked with both domestically and abroad, had wanted put into his hands. However, it served international interests very little to have their unknowing actor at the centre of suspicion, and the British Embassy began working to actively undermine the investigation, or, in the case of Tarleton, to exploit it to his own ends.

Hewlett, ignorant to his puppet strings and those who were pulling them, had made a few calculations of his own, calculations of the kind that had nothing to do with finance. He was beginning to suspect that Simcoe had something to do with Arnold’s disappearance, a reality he blamed on himself thanks to something in their shared past that neither could share with the table, having signed a sworn statement on the other side of the world to keep the matter silent. Regardless of what it contained, Hewlett saw Arnold as an opportunity to make amends, and, in a meeting with Anna’s mother who doubled as New York’s leading prosecutor, confessed to a completely separate corporate crime, knowing that his admission was being recorded. He did so both to keep suspicion from Simcoe, and, should their scheme be discovered, to use his own personal history in the other man’s defence, making Simcoe seem as much as a victim as a perpetrator, which, as Tallmadge pointed out - giving that Hewlett was also hoping that in such event Anna would continue to benefit from the fanatical gains the two had made - Simcoe, in fact, truly was in this instance.

At this point, Hewlett had sunken in his seat if not in his shot and had yet to raise his hanging head (though his back and shoulders remain uncomfortably straight.) Tarleton took over the narrative. The recent reduction in his security clearance had been overlooked somewhere in the secret chain of emails sent around the confession Hewlett had given his bride’s mother. Unlike the case’s main suspect, however, the man who had spent most of his adult life in armed service and intelligence could see immediately that he was being played as a pawn and saw how he might change the gameboard in doing just that which was expected of him. Tarleton had given Edmund Hewlett’s confession to his sister Eleanor prior to getting on a plane, telling her that once in the United States, he planned to plant the crime on a Major in the US Army with an Arabic surname who had recently secured herself a dishonourable discharge from service on the offence that she had slept with a subordinate officer.

This, to Tarleton’s mind, solved whatever problems existed personally between ‘Ells’ and ‘Fergs’ (by which names he referred to the younger princess and the inspector whom local police had sent to investigate the Hewlett family’s financial history) as the two would have to find some way of working together in hopes of stopping him from condemning an innocent civilian to whatever fate left-leaning individuals imagined between themselves. (‘Innocent!’ Tarleton coughed, ‘Come to find out that Major Abboud now works at Blackwater for six-times that which she was making in the armed service. But then moral indigestion has its price.’) Before he left for ‘the colonies’ as he never seemed to tire of referring to The United States of America (‘Land of the Free, Home of the Brave’ and ‘Greatest Country on Earth’ did not – in spite of what at first glance looked to be a MAGA cap - seem to feature in Tarleton’s vocabulary any more than it did those of Simcoe, Hewlett or any of their compatriots whom Mary knew from a soccer pitch and police station) the colonel had warned his once-friend to make any money she could not easily explain disappear immediately, knowing there would be money to wash without knowing its source. Knowing also that this would be a delegated task, Tarleton banked and betted on Lady Eleanor turning to her brother (who enjoyed no curtsey title of his own giving that the privy council was less lenient at his taking a Papist for a bride than they now were when it came to Anna Strong in the wake of the political unrest her mere presence promised to solve.) As expected, she took the bait.

Eugene, not afforded proper time to make anything but a quick job of it, was promptly arrested in Copenhagen before he could sign a deal with the Danes, then transferred to a hospital for
emergency surgery while still in custody. (‘He’s been coughing up blood for some time,’ Tarleton informed the group for the sake of his defence, ‘but seeking out proper medical care would confess to a surgical procedure his parents forced upon him when he was far too young to undergo such without high risk, to a drug problem resulting out of the same criticism of his mother’s around his childhood weight and with a boy of his own on the way under scandalous circumstance his fear of repercussion was too great. He needed a push.’) When this was said, Simcoe joined Hewlett in expressing shame by expressing gratitude, to which Tarleton admitted that he had only opportunity and motive over the two others for whom the situation was of concern did not. The company’s board had since been convinced to renew a contract in Liverpool, keeping a few thousand jobs open that would have otherwise moved.

It was at this point in the conversation that Mary began to worry anew. Tarleton had committed crimes of equal consequence, and Mary had used these to her own ends and to John’s. She looked at her erstwhile lover when his name again entered the narrative, this time, from the perspective of Ben Tallmadge, who might well have been the cleverest man Mary had ever met (in addition to being among the most handsome.) Because Eugene, ignorant of the business in which Simcoe was engaged with his elder brother, saw few other options, he called upon his former school-friend and fellow banker for investment opportunities overseas and Simcoe thus initiated a sale, another favour to a Hewlett which served John Graves little.

This action, the former inspector told, had brought Simcoe back into the focus of his team, who did not entirely believe the alibi he and Mary had given for the night in question. When a warrant for Whitehall was granted, its residents did everything they could think of to throw him off-course, everything, it seemed, but hiding love-letters and lingerie among Mary’s things.

‘So, then we got a warrant for your cell phone records and I was struck by the fact that the two of you had no communication until the night Arnold disappeared. Of course, you could have been using burners, but then why begin using your normal phones when you knew we would be looking into the matter, and then why not make more of a show of this affair you were trying to sell, a la, say, the efforts taken in building an algorithm to trick any onlookers into thinking you and Mr Hewlett were discussing soccer predictions rather than trading stocks with insider information?’ he both pondered and accused. ‘There was nothing in the course of your texts with Mrs Woodhull that would suggest to me any validity to your statement. Of course, I wasn’t alone in my suspicions, isn’t that right, Mr Woodhull?’

Abe gave that his own primary suspect had initially been Edmund Hewlett, who from the beginning had not been entirely honest about his identity. ‘Do we have to call you Lord or Sir or anything?’ Abe insulted by way of simply asking.

‘No,’ Hewlett answered without making eye contact.

‘Not yet at least give it a few days,’ Tarleton added cheekily. Mary closed her eyes and begged the Lord God to silence the idiot before he could confess and found her prayers answered by the most unlikely of sources when her husband continued that Arnold had at that point been kept in a drugged state which he fought to reduce by pocketing pain-pills, hoping to know who had done this to him, suspecting the involvement of one, if not all, of the law enforcement agencies after his father’s study had been searched and the judge’s name had been brought up in an interview the FBI conducted with his au pair.

In delirium, Arnold had spoken of the war on terror, on his assailant being of Middle Eastern origin but feigning a British accent as a cover. Knowing very few people in general who might have fit this description and no one with ties to Setauket, Abe had done some digging and found that the Hewletts had made a fortune in the opium trade in the nineteenth century which began a short-lived
obsession with the family’s prodigal son. The two had met by chance in a roadside carpark between New York and Albany, whereby Hewlett told him of the plan he, Simcoe and Whitehall’s other residents had come upon to find Arnold on their own, having worked out mathematically that the senator must still be within the city limits.

At this point, it was decided that he should be moved, and, having a key to Jordan’s new home, Abe suggested it as an alternative to the basement of the house he and his wife had purchased at the far end of town or Rogers’ own home. Rogers declined initially until both Lewis Brewster and John Robeson discovered that the aging Scotsman was holding Arnold hostage. Then, he consented to reason.

Abe had planned to make use of the new location to help the senator escape, but Arnold had wanted to go it alone (out of what Tallmadge suggested was a loyalty to John André who, through the amount of secrecy around his research, had also become a person of interest by such point.)

debate began between all parties present around hows and whys that had little bearing on the end result – Arnold had wound up back in Rogers’ direct custody.

Now, neither man could be found.

Abe himself had fled when Rogers sought to blame him for the inconvenience of recapturing an injured man, promising to issue the same wounds upon Abe’s person that kept the senator prisoner when next they met. Though he had his doubts about the validity of his wife’s affair (the box of condoms he had found in a bag with Simcoe’s credit card receipt in Anna’s car that day when he’d chanced upon Hewlett at the rest area remained unopened until he intervened, in hopes of furthering his wife’s alibi should the police think to look) he trusted that John Graves Simcoe, who was suddenly around Whitehall quite a bit, (something Abe suspect mostly owed itself to driving Cicero home from soccer practice and Mary’s nagging inability to let anyone come and go without a proper homecooked meal) would protect his wife and child if Rogers tried to make good on his earlier, less specific threats.

‘Naturally, I would do anything for Mrs Woodhull,’ Simcoe said, surprised at the faith that had been placed in him.

‘We were having an affair,’ Mary clarified, suddenly wanting to stake some undisputed claim to this man she had very nearly loved. ‘It just began after we had both become suspects.’

Caleb gave her a look of disgust to which she responded by side-eyeing the man to his side, challenging his ethics. She knew Caleb had hooked up with Ben in an effort towards ‘espionage’, as he had put it, wanting to know what the police thought about the alibi she had offered. Mary wondered what the rest of the force thought about the inspector bringing a person of interest to bed, if this broke with protocol in a way the mistreatment of Cicero and his friends somehow did not. Abigail, she noticed, was indicating the same non-verbal mistrust, perhaps having also guessed at who it was that Caleb continued to text. Mary had a mind to call him out on it, but found herself halted by Simcoe’s blank statement -

‘We all suspected one another while all being guilty in some fashion. In our individual efforts to protect our friends from consequence, to cover their crimes and connections, we wound up losing tract of the victim in all of this,’ he said almost solemnly, adding, ‘But I’ve been playing with Rogers for years, I know how he thinks when he has something to win. He’s a keeper both on and off the pitch, he wouldn’t have travelled far.’

It was true. They already had too many divisions for Mary to make another known. Perhaps it was known. Perhaps she was not the only one who saw the obvious. Caleb continue to type. Everyone else he knew and was social with was here or would be soon. Mary bit her lip and prepare herself
‘Simcoe is right,’ Abe acknowledged. ‘Rogers is probably still in Setauket. He knows the area well and thinks it gives him the upper hand. But I can’t imagine where they would be hiding, the police have eyes everywhere.’

‘Maybe it is somewhere he knows we have already checked,’ Tallmadge suggested, frowning.

‘He would risk it,’ Abe agreed. Eyeing Hewlett, he added, ‘he would risk most anything if he thought there was a buck to be made.’

‘Stop,’ Mary warned. The table was already too divided to expose another fracture, to risk her own exposure with the enemy potentially listening in.

Having lived with Edmund and conspired with both him and his sister, Mary Woodhull could reasonably conclude that most of what was said about House Hewlett was speculation or pure fabrication. Awkward Edmund likely never hosted wild parties with Prince William when they were both at St. Andrews and elegant Eleanor likely had no romantic intentions towards Ban Tarleton who was clumsy and uncouth with his words. One not need any particular interest in sport to work out that the bastard Fabienne had recently born was unlikely to have been fathered by a French footballer on a bench in Bavaria, but lies were pretty and the truth, Mary knew, never was.

Eleanor had not met with Ban for empty sex and sweet nothings, she had asked him to murder her uncle as there had been no feasible way for either her or her sister to accomplish the task themselves and no one else cared about the grounds that formed and fortified their convictions, so long as The Duke of Richmond continued to influence policy in a way that was to everyone’s liking. It would be too great of an embarrassment to bring the matter before a court, and a loss of prestige would outweigh any personal gains or satisfaction that might otherwise be granted by the legal system that refused to hear the cries of the otherwise privileged. Among other matters, the market could not survive the hit the Hewletts stood to take should their investors be given reason not to do business with them. A number of prominent politicians would lose their seats over their participation in a wide-spread paedophilia ring when the climate was already chaotic with the approaching referendum. The timing, Mary thought (until she first remembered that Lady Edna had a young daughter) could not have been worse, but in a way, the hitman would have been perfect -

had he only died as Mary was sure had been intended.

Ban Tarleton was himself too close to the two young English heirs for his crime – if discovered – to be made public. After Diana, the Windsors would not risk even the appearance that the call came from them, and Ban would certainly use their prior knowledge of what the duke had done to countless children within his defence, damning their reputation. If his silence could be assured, he would probably have gotten away with the crime, but owing to character, Tarleton had become another mess to clean up -

One, Mary feared, she had been too sloppy in sorting.

She looked at Caleb, wondering at what was being said over text, wondering at how she might be charged if found covering another heinous crime.

When Simcoe had come to her with his dilemma, with Ban’s offer to be the direction they then thought they would need if only John could find a way to spare the City of Liverpool from any consequence of his own crimes, Mary had found the solution rather simple. But knowledge was a burden and her immediate response had been to ask John to leave, slightly grateful for the cover
this new challenge presented, hoping that he would not see how devastated she was that he had
taken another woman when she had offered herself.

They two had not spoken of either matter since, and this, Mary reasoned, was for the best.

She had rung up Lady Eleanor from a secured line, telling her that she had killed the wrong man
(‘Genovese?’ the little drug lord laughed initially, ‘Worry not, they will all get what is coming to
them for their complete breach of contract, Tallmadge will be distracted and you’ll have time to tie
up any lose ends. You’re quite welcome, but woe be it to you if you mean to go about finding my
hand in this … rather messy business.’) the only way Mary saw of making the conversation less
threatening in tone was to try to make a deal out of it, and so she asked for eighty orphans for a
school that UNICEF had never built. That lives had been saved by this exchange proved a problem.
Mary had been promised a promotion and, having so profited, soon thereafter after had found
herself too acquainted with the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The duke would die within the next few days. And he would not. Ferguson would probably work it
out if afforded the opportunity, but he would either find himself in an impossible position to hold or
he would accept stability in consolation for his silence. No one would risk making another move
on Tarleton directly in the immediate, since the news had broken that the Pentagon falsely reported
his death to the British Embassy, he had acquired, re-acquired perhaps, something of a hero’s
status within the UK in a war that had too few to speak of.

His daughter, however –

With this thought, Mary closed her eyes, considering the extent of her responsibility in this other
disappearance, hating herself that part of her thought it for the best that for the girl had vanished
without a trace, when suddenly, it worked out, that she had not. Abe’s phone rang with a Scottish
number and he passed the line to Tarleton who left the table to take the call, then, to make a series
of others.

Mary and Abe shared a smile at the observation that Richard Woodhull was going to be billed for
this and Mary’s mind found its way back to the old judge’s downturned mouth, the ugly way in
which he chewed meat and, in this image, felt justified in all she had done over the past several
weeks.

The other men spoke amongst themselves spoke about places searched and places left to hide and
when they came to Whitehall, Mary re-joined the conversation, having become annoyed that her
husband did not seem to know that his father’s stately house had not had a basement in years, the
space having since it had been converted into a laundry-room. ‘Would it have killed you to have
done a load?’ she quipped.

‘Apparently, it would not have saved Senator Arnold,’ Ben dismissed. Caleb then laughed and Ben
blushed slightly, leading Mary to believe the man might have something of a latent sense of
humour after all until it became obvious that the joke Caleb was laughing at was not one Ben had
not intended to make.

A Scottish satirist who Hewlett described as being pro-devolution and anti-everything-that-went-
along-with-it (‘By this he means the man will echo every incarnation of ‘It’s Scotland’s oil’ but
sees no gains in trading one constitutional monarchy for another,’ Simcoe snipped.) had added an
anti-Hewlett spin to the find Marie hashtag moments after her successful recovery had been made
public knowledge (‘But how did he find and screencap CCTV footage so fast?’ Ben bothered
himself.)

Tarleton continued to talk to his not-quite-daughter, then again to Inspector Ferguson, then to his
lawyer, to his ex, to the ambassador. Simcoe had switched strategies in this new parlour game that had engaged the rest, won, and shared his victory with Abigail at her insistence whilst everyone else the table continued the stare at the same pictures on their phones, excepting Abe, who, his otherwise occupied returned to Caleb’s road map, guessing blindly at where Rogers and Arnold might be; Ben, who appeared to be preoccupied with Eggshell’s other posts; and Mary, who was presently in the process of reassessing her co-conspirators, relieved that Caleb’s screen might not contain the betrayal she initially sought from him giving his history of covering for her husband and reporting on her.

“Found her!” Caleb announced triumphantly.

Hewlett met the announcement with a sad expression. “But where is the real Anna?” he asked.

He had rung her on his way to Albany upon recovering his senses, telling their number that his former fiancée had ended things over his refusal to keep her informed. It was too little, too late as he acknowledged, but still, he felt it was owed. Ben had no objections to Anna’s inclusion and Mary and Abigail both felt better at the idea of having another friend with them. Simcoe had very little to say on the matter, having evidently had some rendition of this same conversation with his sometimes-friend prior to Ben and Caleb’s unexpected arrival at Whitehall.

It had been hours since Anna had promised that she was on her way to meet them at The Irish Pub (of the same name.) Realising this, everyone in the booth suddenly shared in Edmund Hewlett’s defeat.

“Do you want me to call her?” Abigail offered.

“Nope, no, I think Eddie might better do that himself,” Tarleton offered as he retook his seat, looking at Hewlett expectantly. “I’m being made to attend this charade tomorrow so you’d do well to make it worth my while, marry the woman you love, keep a bottle of Jameson behind the bar for the banquet, no reason the rest of us should suffer for your Sturm und Drang.”

“Layover in Frankfurt?” Simcoe mocked.

“If only!” Tarleton complained. “Such would put me closer to Edinburgh at any rate which is where I need to be, right now, not whenever Cornwallis thinks it convenient to issue leave on a mission that insofar as every other party is concern has already been concluded. By which I mean no offence, Edmund, everyone … I did my best to put a stop to this joint André / Arnold action.”

“You were successful,” Abe told him. “McConnel isn’t going to bring the bill up for a vote giving the controversy around it, which means it will be scrapped or they will have to start from scratch, the process could take years.” He looked around at the rest of the table, explaining sheepishly, “I watch a lot of C-SPAN.”

“Well … you have a lot of time on your hands,” Mary commented beneath her breath.

“If the bill is about to lose its political significance,” Ben interjected before Abe could respond to the slight, “Arnold’s value as a hostage is about to plummet.”

“Rogers won’t see it that way,” Abe informed him. “He has put too much in this to surrender. He wants enough money to retire to Alaska – to fund his search for the Northwest Passage because of something he saw on The History Channel and won’t give up until he gets it.”

“What if we were to make an offer ourselves?” Simcoe suggested. “I’d happily fund any ransom asked from my pocket own pocket to be done with this if the US Government refuses to put up a
reward.”

“Same,” Hewlett consented of himself. “It might be better if it is coming from me, giving his … confused evaluation that he poses any sort of a threat to my family name.”

“No,” Caleb counted. “That won’t work. No one has seen Rogers in a week because he knows he has us all involved at some level, unless the offer is coming from somewhere that won’t be traced back to us, he will rightly see it as a trap.”

“I’m of the same mind,” Tallmadge agreed, thinking aloud. “We need … we need a way of exploiting this, cooperate sponsorship of the delude, self-aggrandising sort.”

“Facebook?” Abigail suggested.

“FIFA,” the former inspector offered. “Here, this is what I’ve been looking at for the past half-hour or so.” He began to read aloud from his phone. “@FIFAcom: the beautiful game found Marie! Thank you to players and fans for coming together to spread the word,” adding of his own accord, “the backlash has been a thing of beauty. The girl whose post started the hashtag to begin with retweeted the kid who first came on the idea that Marie might have disguised herself as Anna - as everyone else in that age group has apparently done - again when he or she asked ‘@FIFAcom Is football going to support measures to allow for funding to be appropriated into finding other missing children as well?’ But here is the amazing thing, within a half hour Chelsea FC owner Roman Abramowitsch committed an undisclosed amount to the citizen’s initiative Marie’s school friends look to have stated for lobbying purposes.”

“So, you are saying we need to find a Russian oligarch on social media and convince him that pulling his chequebook out for some erroneous Arnold fund is a good PR move?” Simcoe asked sceptically.

“Anyone know what the Trump Campaign’s stance on the senator is?” Abigail snorted.

“I’m saying we need outside endorsement from whatever source we can find it,” Tallmadge said simply. “Preferably for a significant sum that doesn’t quite cut Rogers’ estimated cost of living. Regardless if he sees legislative inaction as a direct hindrance to his plans, he has to know that the clock is ticking – above all,” he speculated, “how long can Rogers expect to keep Arnold in a semi-drugged state from his own medicine cabinet when the NYPD has his property on constant surveillance – at least limiting his access? And thanks to the strange bedfellow we found in the cartel boss known only as Enyo, it is not as though he has much in the way of a street supply. He knows he has to act fast, and he will.”

“John, I assume you still have Effie’s number?” Tarleton asked, chipper, alert and at once all too present for Mary’s liking.

“Rogers knows our history, he will tie anything involving The Daily Mail back to me.”

“Not only that,” Tallmadge said, “Miss Gwillim has involved herself every step of the way.”

“Oh, I’m well aware,” Tarleton told, half-laughing. “I was the one who gave the go ahead to start those protests when John beat the shit out of your man, the one who broke Mrs Woodhull’s ankle in a foul. But it is not her I want to talk to. Being as I’m without my phone, I just need a number I know she’ll have. That is all. I promise, Effie will be left out of this one.”

“Here,” Ben said, having already dialled from his own device. “Leave it on speaker.”
Effie Gwillim, Mary decided in the two minutes it took the editor to transfer the call, was probably one of those rare women who managed to look pretty when she cried. George Hanger, by contrast, wasted little time on sentiment. She learned quickly that he had taken the news of his friend’s death as an excuse for debauchery, something Ban Tarleton met with rowdy approval until a throat was cleared, bringing him back to task. (‘Wasn’t Uli Hoeneß release from jail last week? I need you ring him up under whatever pretence you can come on – entice him to a more worthwhile investment opportunity than hiding a few million in some Swiss account.’) This statement came at the cost of a lengthy explanation on their end, with Hanger eventually agreeing to call around and see what he could do by means of finding someone in the sporting world who might prove an easy sell for Ben Tallmadge’s scheme to save the senator by luring his captor out into the public eye.

“Rogers doesn’t understand social media,” Simcoe frowned.

“Television will pick up a story like this,” Abe assured the critic and perhaps himself.

Mary Woodhull remained silent throughout the exchange but did not count her chickens before they hatched. She would have not afforded the interaction between a fugitive and a freelance journalist much of her mind had it not ended with Hanger warning Tarleton to keep a low profile.

>>Oi, lad, this is all going to have a wait a wee small while. I’m at this seedy-ass place out in Brooklyn – Holy Ground, it is called. I’m here with a number of German diplomats, having attached myself to their party as a translator – any road, this might seem counter-intuitive being that the brothel is frequented by ambassadors, foreign ministers, local politicians and the like but it works out that prostitution is illegal in America so you could be reasonably certain no one would ‘remember’ that they saw you here. Plus – oh my days! – there is this blonde who can hold a split while one - <<

“George, there are ladies present,” Tarleton cut him off with an uneasy nod towards Mary and Abigail. “Tell me all about how far you could get a shilling to stretch, if you will, tomorrow when you are able to report back, but … tell me now, why exactly am I need of a hide out?”

>>The Pentagon was meant to take care of you on a Crown request, couldn’t carry out the operation as planned because New York’s ADIC wanted you interrogated into Arnold’s disappearance – something that evidently involved Wayne Rooney to which I can only express a profound lack of surprise – and being that I learned all of this in the company of the German Defence Minister I’d say for the moment you have more enemies than you have friends.<<

“But you do have friends!” Mary Woodhull exclaimed, leaning over the table and ending the call by sliding the digital receiver.

Suddenly, and for the first time that evening, all attention was on her. Mary Woodhull felt her face grow white.

“You don’t seem to be among them. Rude,” Tarleton stated plain.

“What have you done to the Crown?” Hewlett asked, his suspicions raised.

“Nothing … strictly speaking. Except … Edmund, we probably have to have a little talk,” Tarleton shifted. “Thing is, Abe here might have to mockingly refer to you using a title a lot sooner than you might think. But there is a bit of a narrative to it. John … you want to take this one, or should I?”
“Edmund, look … you shouldn’t blame Ban for what he’s no doubt about to tell you he has done. If anything, you might blame me for not handling the matter when I was first made conscious of it as a boy.”

“Well, come out with it, Man!” Hewlett exclaimed.

Mary Woodhull buried her face in her hands. Whatever her former lover was about to offer, Townsend and his superiors likely already knew as well, independent if Caleb Brewster had been texting his bandmate or not. She heard the ticking of her wristwatch as her own minutes winding down. Ban Tarleton might yet be able to spin this into his favour, but she had no such laurels on which to rest. Edmund Hewlett’s white-collar crimes paled in comparison to that with which Mary had engaged. Now, as she feared, a white flag of surrender was being waved simply to see it flapped about in the wind when she was otherwise prepared for a lengthy siege.

Edmund Hewlett felt a hand on his shoulder and with it the chill of the night air on his cheeks. He closed his eyes, not wanting to face friend or foe when he could not find enough magnanimity within his soul to lend itself to the lifting speech which he knew he was now meant to give. His stomach turned over the sick that had not escaped him when he had come out int the darkness from where he wished light had not been shed and he grew all the more ill at the taste of tossed up Irish whiskey, coffee that had been on the burner for half a day, beer nuts and the two Clif Bars that had substituted his breakfast and lunch in an afternoon that felt like it belonged to another man’s life. Perhaps it had.

Edmund Hewlett, who could not bring himself to face those who unbeknownst to him enlisted to fight battles which he should have been leading, banner and sword, swore in the self-same moment of his hesitation to turn around that he would return to Scotland as soon as he was given the news through an official channel. He was not the leader his people hoped for, nor was he the one his family would need him to be, but if being a man of science and reason condemned those far more innocent to act in ways in conflict with their humanity, he could no longer afford himself the luxury of cowardice, of an ignorance that a better man might have named bliss. He swallowed, burned by his own stomach acid as he forced in back down with what he could of his reservations and glanced behind him, expecting Simcoe to be standing far too close, stumbling his way through something else he had waited far too long to say, intention obscured by a pitch that might feel more kindly than cruel were he physically better matched to his sound; expecting Tarleton in his attempt to translate his actions into further justification, an ersatz for the apology he neither could nor should put to offer; expecting Tallmadge and an interrogation in which all of the questions felt rhetoric, having come on an answer he wanted to hear repeated; expecting any and every face save for the one he met.

“A – Abigail?” he stuttered. She raised her eyebrows in acknowledgment of her name and handing him a shot glass filled with something red.

“Here – it is Fireball. It tastes like cinnamon.”

“Th- thank you. That, that is very kind.”

“Well, it is for me too,” she told him with a half-smile, pinching at the end of her nose. “I think we have to have words, you and I. Drink up.”
Words? She had nothing to do with this. He did his best to obey.

“I know … I know I have to go back in there, to be the man I am supposed to be in this moment.”

“And who is that exactly?” Abigail asked.

“I’m afraid I have yet to make his acquaintance,” Hewlett admitted.

“I think you probably know him better than you’d assume. Listen, Edmund, we haven’t always
gotten on, you and I – and there are reasons for that specific to you, me, reasons that have nothing
to do with either of us, but I’ve been wrong about a lot of specifics lately as it seems I’ve proven by
way of prose -”

“The British Army was never ‘occupying’ New York when she remained a colony, the Maasai, if
I’m not mistaken are an East African people whereas the name Akinbode belongs to the West, but
given the American aversion to geography, political and otherwise, I can hardly fault -” he stopped.
“Ah, that is, I suppose what I am saying in too many words is that I … even when I mean to give a
compliment, can’t help but coming off every bit the conceited, condescending commander you’d
cast me as rather than the gentleman I might aspire to be. That is – I’m current. I know you have
Anna or ‘Anne’ abandon me at the alter and the why of which is more than clear to me, but in the
narrative function and the – that is, I’ve made time to read your work during the most emotionally
exhausting weeks shared by the whole of our company, not, specifically, because I wanted to, but
because I could not let it alone. You are an excellent author and I find I can’t hold any of your
criticisms against you – rather, I might have let them better inform my decision making before …
before,” he paused, thinking of Anna and her dismissal, of the impossibility of closing his heart to
her when met with the reality that for her own sake he must. “It doesn’t really matter now, does it?
It never fucking did.”

Abigail pressed her full lips together, making a clicking sound that could not be described as a kiss
as she did, reminding Hewlett of something he could not quite identify but which afforded him a
certain unease all the same. “I was lookin’ to clear the air, not have my ego stroked but that you
and I … I could have been kinder, made more of an effort before exploiting you for my own gain.
We are all guilty of something, Edmund,” she told him. “We all have things we regret.”

“I don’t think I can agree. The lives of so many would have been so much better if the rest of us
could have managed to be a little more direct.” As he spoke the words, he questioned to what
extent Abigail was deserving of his admiration. Certainly, she had said more and had spoken to a
far broader audience than anyone else involved in the events that lead to Arnold’s disappearance,
but she had done so under an alias for reasons of ego she did not identify herself with. Still, she had
provided a working profile of John André for those who only knew him on reputation, wittingly or
not. Hewlett knew at least part of his evaluation was coloured by his friendship with Akinbode
whose heart this woman had both broken and kept for herself on some metaphoric shelf with other
objects of little interest, but of those who made their present party she had been the least
forthcoming, giving obfuscatory answers around her involvement with her former boss, excuses
around his problems with alcohol, and then offering a shot to take away the taste and stink of sick.
Maybe she was kind. Maybe, this too, was another learned coping mechanism. Maybe all of his
present responses found their way in to André’s hypothesis and Hewlett took some comfort in the
idea of the devastation that might follow were that to prove the case.

“I think John and Ban were direct as they come, in their own opposite ways,” Abigail considered,
“and I think kids all do stupid things for noble reasons. Cicero and his friends should have handed
that phone right over to the police but wanted to protect Peggy’s honour and reputation. Marie
shouldn’t have run away but feared that with the death of their shared father she would lose her
little sister was well if I understand things correctly. Look … look at us. I got pregnant at fifteen and stared in a state-wide pro-life ad-campaign when I otherwise found myself out on my ass. You found yourself engaged in an act of corporate fraud your father orchestrated to save thousands of jobs and the full of your family’s wealth. Anna and Abe evidently dated one another as unbelievable as that prospect seems now,” she tried to joke, “so if John -”

“I don’t blame him,” Hewlett said, more sharply than he intended. “I don’t blame either of them for the ways in which they met it. I wish I was magnanimous enough to go back inside convey as much. I’m not the leader my people need, and thus, my siblings are forced to be in my stead, but to what end?” he mourned. “I’ll return. I must. And I’m glad … glad that Ban acted as he did for if he hadn’t prior to my finding out I’d have … I would have behaved in ways that I would not have had the convenience of blaming on your former boss. It will be painful,” he thought aloud. “Thank God. Thank God it will be painful.” He felt his pulse in the advent of anger and elation as he imagined the days to come, his uncle’s death, his father’s demise, his mother’s cries for her erstwhile lover silenced by the evidence that had otherwise been collected against her, tying her to Thomas Gwillim, himself, the corpse and the coverup.

To say that it was ‘better’ this way was an injustice to all of the scars unspoken, to the dread and anger and isolation he and his siblings knew as love. ‘Better’ would be if title, influence and interest had not long served to exonerate, but in lieu of a law evenly administered, there was some dark gratification in the agony the Duke of Richmond was certain to experience in his prolonged annihilation, in that his parents would be reminded of the more terrible of their crimes as they watched on, helpless in their recognition, knowing they had been found out in the self-same moments they were forced to recognise that they did not stand alone in their position above the law.

Hewlett turned away to conceal his expression, remembering the email he had been shown in an interrogation room in which John Tarleton had warned his father that one day his children would grow up. Thank God. Thank God, he thought with a smile, the Lord Mayor’s had as well. As had Effie Gwillim and Mary Anne Burges and John Graves Simcoe, against all odds. And they would win. Time was linear and history pointed in but one direction.

“I’m … I’m sorry. I’m so sorry – About André -” Abigail gave in little more than a whisper.

“Why should you be?” Hewlett demanded from her, speaking in earnest and admiration as he continued quickly but not in the dismissive manner to which many had too long been made accustom. “Everything you did, you did for your son and if more people in this world had such convictions, situations like the ones which we seem continually stuck in couldn’t exist in such a way.”

Abigail seemed to take this to heart. Not particularly worried about his own, Hewlett fished a pack of Marlborough Reds he had bought that morning from the pocket of his dark-wash jeans and offered one to his company, who, taking the fag he held between his fingers rather than one from the box, told him in exchange. “None of this is your fault.”

Regardless of what was meant, she was mistaken. Hewlett watched the end of his cigarette burn against the blackened backdrop of a pub car park, not entirely unlike the place the story he shared with everyone he was meant to be behaving like a little kind before had begun and might have ended. He did not belong here.

“But I’ve profited from it all the same and failed to even be grateful when I ought to have been,” he said after what seemed a long while. “That was what kills me. Ban’s expression when negating that which I’ve long held – that my family could not care less for me. They do, they clearly do and I’ve
let bitterness make me into the most undeserving wretch."

The taste of the nicotine caused him to again feel ill. Tossing it to the ground he bent against the wall behind him and broke into heaving that quickly found its way to tears. Abigail rubbed his shoulders, itself not an entirely unwelcome sensation but one he felt shy of all the same. The Irish Pub’s back door swung open at haste and Abigail ceased. Hewlett, for his part, continued to simply sob.

“Edmund?”

“Anna,” he answered. He would know her voice anywhere. Even hoarse, it sounded so sweet to his ears.

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Chapter End Notes

… that is a mean place for a cut-off. Give me like a hour, I got you, boo. But first, I have some notes.

Sport:
The José Mourinho **dog saga** which Simcoe relayed was thoroughly fact-checked in the online archives of a number of British tabloids as years after the fact I had worried I had dreamed the whole thing. Another charming detail of this beloved childhood story of mine that Disney/Pixar needs to get their animation team on*? Mou named the dog made famous by his ridiculous antics after former Chelsea player **Ruud Gullit**.

*Obviously, Mou would be voiced by George Clooney, who he once claimed should play him in a bio-pic (what?), but Gullit (the dog) would be the star of the film. Make this happen.

**Roman Abramowitsch** is a Russian oligarch who at one point financed a number of Chelsea FC league victories by just pouring money into the club. That is it. That is how sport works.

**Uli Hoeneß** figured that much out faster than anyone else in the German Bundesliga. I used to have very strong, positive feelings about this. When I was a girl in what I remember as being a history class (but it could have been Latin or literature or whatever else), we were asked to name Great Men of History and Hoeneß was my pick. And then I went into this long thing about team finances in comparison to other clubs to a bunch of blank stares … anyway. That was then. More recently he went to prison for tax fraud as was stated in the text, was released at the end of February 2016 after serving half of his sentence, and then FC Bayern changed their club charter so he could come back and serve as president again and I was sooo happy oh my gosh. At last, my prince had come (back) - Then he started giving press conferences. Tja. (That said, being a Bayern fan and adhering to a certain set of stereotypes, maybe I would hate him less if we were
winning. Probably. If only our January spending would open that hypothetical to testing …)

Other news form nearly three years ago:

**Blackwater** (now called Academi) is an American private military company that provides security services to the United States federal government on a contractual basis.

When Aberdeen is up reading articles about “incidences involving machetes in Nassau Country”, this was around the gang **MS-13** (the same that would later be cited by President Trump in defence of his family separation policy.) MS-13 targets adolescents and, in New York, a number of cases involving missing children who were later found to have been brutally murdered by gang members were originally treated by police as runaway cases and not sufficiently dealt with.
Chapter Summary

Edmund Hewlett opens his heart and history to Anna Strong.

Chapter Notes

Wait! Stop! Did you read the previous chapter? If you’re keeping up with when I post and just used the drag and drop menu to bring you to the last of the list, go back – this is a double-update. :)

If, however, you are only here for Annlett (or if you ahahaha … read lengthy tomes told from multiple perspectives the way (let’s be honest) most of us do (myself included) with a certain prejudice and just don’t care about what is going on with Aberdeen, Mary, Ben, Caleb, Abe, Ban, Abigail, Simcoe, Cicero and [X] 1) I feel you. Its been like eight years and I still have no idea about anything to have happened to Daenerys in ‘A Dance with Dragons’ because uhh … and 2) well! Look at that – you are in the right place after all. My bad.)

This actually begs the question – are there any Annlett fans left among your number? Any Tallster fans? Any Juventus Turin fans? Even if you don’t normally comment, indulge my curiosity with a single-word-answer, won’t you?

Any road, before we begin, a quick warning, this chapter touches on statutory rape, the abortion debate, eating disorders, cosmetic drug use and a host of other issues that may be disturbing so some audiences. Also, a quick shout out to the ever-lovely Reinette de la Saintonge, who read a draft of this chapter to ease my nerves around writing romance. Thank you, darling!

Without further ado, ladies and gents – the bride and groom. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He had called her on his way up to Albany, letting her know of the meeting between Abe and Ban, between John, Mary, Ben Caleb, Abigail and himself. She had not been their when they arrived as she had promised. For a time, he had worried she would not come. Now, he hated the idea of being ‘done with the colonies,’ without a more skilful wordsmith standing watch to guide his words. ‘I do not understand them and perhaps never will. But I do know that I have nothing left to stay for. I… had hoped to embrace this new world, but it seems the romance, as always, was one-sided.’ He remembered from a passage he had read on his phone over his lunch break as Abigail offered to go in to get them a round whilst she and Anna had an entirely different conversation with their shared mimic in which far more was said, leaving Hewlett with the vaguest translations that he was to be alone in love in every sense when Anna’s would-have-been Maid of Honour shut the door behind her.
Edmund Hewlett took a deep breath and did his best to meet the task he had been left with.

Anna watched him, expecting, with her doe-eyes that betrayed nothing of fright. He tried to match her stance. That much, he reasoned, she was owed and due.

“You wanted me to keep you informed,” he told he plainly. “I’ll soon be returning to Scotland. I won’t ask you to follow. I can’t … ask that of you. I should have done more to protect you from the press, by which I suppose I mean I should have done anything – I … I can’t promise that the next few months of your life will be pleasant as the result of my refusal to accept your concerns as legitimate, but I can accept the blame for that and I … Anna, I would give anything to make it up to you. I wish I had words of wisdom beyond my refrain of ‘it will pass’ but I … well, such has never been my strength. You’ll have your bar and your choice of residence, and I’m certain we can work out some kind of compensation for the rest of it, but -” he stopped abruptly. She thought she wanted honesty. Some truths, he reasoned, were too easily betrayed, and these were typically the ones better left unspoken.

“But? Edmund, what has happened?” Anna seemed to beg.

If she wanted honesty, he could not refuse her. “But … I want you to know from the bottom of my heart that - though we will never again meet in this life - when I told you I love you it was not a lie. Anna, for whatever it is worth to you, I always shall. What happened … it is a long story, some of which you already know. You know,” he shook his head, “a couple of years back your friend Abe Woodhull called me a ‘little king’ – without significant implication but I took it harshly for reasons I am now only beginning to understand and, well it is neither here nor there but I’ve made to attempts at interaction since. But I am a little king, … not, not with reference to titles held within my family but in my blind willingness to lead others to battles that are only mine to fight -”

“Edmund, of anyone I know you are the most likely to fall upon your own sword,” Anna negated, taking a further step towards him. Unable to recreate a comfortable distance on the back stoop without stepping into splashes of stomach acid that had not found their way to the pavement and gravel he made no effort to retreat. She forced a smile the spoke to a hope they two had once shared, to expectations he felt forced to shatter further.

“That is just it. I’m not,” Hewlett confessed. “I’ve always found a way to stand up again without regard to any of the other casualties and carnage created by my will, my whims. You were there when this started. Sort of. You were working the night it came out over beers that John had slept with my younger sister when she herself was but a girl. I stabbed him. I cut him deep with a dull blade -”

“That was André. That was his work. Edmund, everyone who knows you knows that you would never -”

“That was … not the ending the story deserved. Anna, you want to know what is going on?” he began to ramble. “My father is a twin as well, born four minutes from the throne. His brother, my uncle, the Duke of Richmond upon their father’s early death, betrothed himself to my mother, Edith of Sutherland, when she was quite young – something it works out, he rather fancied. When he was twenty-one and she herself thirteen, he got her pregnant and immediately lost interest, if you’ll take my meaning. She spent the next three years locked away in the far north until my father in an effort to make good on his brother’s wrongs secured permission to wed her instead, fabricating a story for the press and the public … one that, to complicate things further, relied on a certain amount of participation from outside parties. And people, Anna, people in the world I come from, always have their price.”

Anna looked at him. Confused. Choking on words she fought to choose. All the same, Hewlett felt
her sentiment. As Tolstoy had stated in a novel where the heroine shared the same first name – ‘Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.’ – and Anna’s certainly, had its own source of shame. Her father had kept a mistress in Washington for decades before her unsuspecting mother’s discovery of the affair led to the couple’s separation and eventual divorce. In an effort to preserve the idea her two teenage children had of their father, Nancy had lied and told them that they were separating in the interest of financial aid for university, leading Anna who was revising for her SATs at the time to hold herself responsible for a misery her mother could not entirely conceal, much, as Hewlett imagined, she had certainly tried. When the truth finally came out in Anna’s mid-twenties, the damage that had been done to her self-image by the lie transferred in full to her relationship with her mother. Every unhappy family was unhappy in its own way, but seerets, as he had come to learn, were often at the source. With this thought, words escaped him in a flood.

“I think it is possible for a time – and for a long time at that – despite or perhaps because of their differing politics, my father and John Tarleton, whom he met at university, truly were friends. That is, ah – perhaps I should preference this differently. If it can be said that I am the – quote ‘little king’ of Setauket – the same might be said of the Tarletons of Liverpool in the eighties and nineties, for centuries, really … but by the time I was growing up the family had all but eliminated any pretenders to their crown – um, figuratively,” he felt the need to explain. “Liverpool’s charter – propagated, witnessed and signed, mind you – by bearers of the same name – set it up as a free city, and this during the reign of King John – the actual king. But all of this,” Hewlett considered, “I suppose was by design. It is considered ‘ungentlemanly’ to engage in commerce. We all do it now – we noble houses to have survived into the twenty-first century – but the free-city patrician class had centuries of a head start. My family – the Hewletts, were among the first to openly engage with the market, this in spite of the lands we held and titles we continue to collect. Britain conquered the world – we benefited. Britain lost a war – America, Afghanistan – for us it was the same. My ancestors have financed Westminster and Buckingham palace with money made in the opium trade since the middle of the nineteenth century – now, naturally, under the guise of charitable pursuits that might seem counterproductive to our bottom line from the outside. My involvement in this was of course, very brief, but … I digress. To return to John Tarleton, he saw an opportunity to rescue his city from abject poverty when he assumed the office of Lord Mayor through doing business with my father, turning a blind eye to the various acts of trafficking he invited upon his ports in exchange for the cover of legitimate enterprise. And my family profited. It almost shames me to say that we always do. Ah – this was all during the age of Margaret Thatcher, which I don’t know if that says anything to you directly -”

“I have a law degree, Edmund. I’m no stranger to political science. I can more than understand the appeal of the reduction of central planning from an otherwise staunch-conservative who built his campaign for the top-spot in local government on traditional family values -”

Platonic, he thought with the same cringe at his own unintended condensation he had carried since their first date. Platonic, he thought as she lectured, might have been better defined as the limits of his person. How he had been failed by philosophy, by politics, by poetry! Tennyson had erred in his Memoriam -‘Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.’ Nothing, Hewlett decided, was worse.

“I didn’t intend any offence -” he stammered as he had before.

“You did not afford me any,” Anna told him in a tone that contradicted.

He had so much to apologise for. Edmund Hewlett longed for the convenience of excuse. He missed the mythos of John André, the idea he had been afforded and had been quick to cash that the most of his anxiety and the devastation to which it often led could be traced to his unwitting
participation in psychological research, but his problems far extended any hour-long session over
the course of the last years. He longed for the villains of his childhood, those old bedfellows with
their own designs at power and gain working with and against his family, sometimes
simultaneously, always as it suited the immediate. He missed Thatcher and Tarleton, Margaret
Graves and The Daily Mail, the family Windsor, the other Scottish clans and the idea of blame
being external. But instead of saying any of this aloud, Hewlett continued, stumbling through the
story Anna had many times asked to hear.

“It bothered me, I mean, simply from a tactical standpoint whenever I considered throughout the
course of my youth, that John Tarleton never made his many children part of his pro-life platform,
a way of displaying his personal dedication to principle in the manner of other political figures of
that ilk, von der Leyen, Huckabee, hell, Edward Shippen of Pennsylavnia – which I don’t mean as
an attack on Peggy,” he adjusted quickly when he saw Anna’s face fall into a frown.

“Well,” she squinted, “John McCain also refuses to discuss his children as part of that debate.”

“But even so, I’ve seen pictures of his children in the press. With the exception of Charlotte, none
of the Tarleton children were ever pictured, ever mentioned until after their father’s death, and in
her case the familial connection was never made, she just happened to get capped for the woman’s
national team in her late teens, and even then, no one cared because sport might be the only area as
uniformly sexist as the pro-life platform.”

Anna covered her lips as she let out a light laugh. “And here I thought we shared so little.” Hewlett
tried to match the smile she hid, ironic though hers may well have been.

“I’m a scientist, Anna, I’m more interested in empirical evidence than dated so-said ‘moral
standard’,” he sighed. “But you are not. You are a lawyer and a liberal who will assign and then
argue against that which you believe me to old in heart and mind without asking or, for that matter,
any amount of critical consideration.” It was more observation than accusation. They had spent the
whole of their too-short shared life avoiding like conversation of such grounds, where even
agreement would inevitably lead to an exchange of hurtful words and the definitions that they each
thought to ascribe. But ‘over’, Hewlett realised contained as much benefit as it could blame. She
wanted honesty and he no longer had a reason to self-censor. “I’m ‘old fashioned’ because I’ve an
accent that recalls for you a world you relate to a Jane Austen novel -”

“No, Edmund. If you’ve proven anything it is that men taking criticism into account is pure
fiction.”

“Don’t use my example as one that proves a rule,” he cautioned, continuing with far more
sentiment that he would have liked to put on display, “You’ll find someone, someone deserving. Of
that I’m sure. Anna – what I truly mean to say is this: We have a plan to capture Robert Rogers and
deliver him directly into police custody where everyone with a steak in this will be present. Where
the press will be present to act as a counter to whatever personal ambitions continue to see Arnold
imprisoned. There is no escape … but you and I,

We needn’t go

ahead with the ceremony, that is. It is enough that we, my friends and yours, will have everyone
together in the same room.”

Silence settled between them but certainly not within their hearts and minds. Hewlett sat down on
the lower on the two steps and lit another cigarette; Anna joined him without comment of concern
for the lungs he blackened. He stared at the small embers as they turned to ash and fell, at the night
and the extent of its nothingness – the street lamps did not omit enough light to create a sense of
safety but obscured the stars all the same. The heavens were black and blank and there was some
comfort in all that was stolen by setting. Whether he ascended or abdicated, his future would
contain few nights spent sat staring at the sky though his telescope, of that he felt certain. He had
already taken that privilege too far and too many had been forced to pay a price for it. The sky was
black and blank and he sought to remember the constellations he knew it to otherwise contain. It
was all he could do not to stare at the beautiful woman at his side.

“How you know why It took me so long to get here?” Anna said after a while. “I had my final dress
fitting today after work. I … I was trying it on again when you rang. It is beautiful,” she sighed,
almost wistfully. “As much as I wanted to hate it, I didn’t want to take it off and then it worked out
that I couldn’t on my own, the zipper, it is – you wouldn’t understand. Women’s clothes are a
nightmare.”

“The law requires that I wear a kilt tomorrow. Dresses are to me an unknown quantity but I could
sympathise if you wish to speak of skirts.”

“I think that alone would be worth it,” she snorted back a laugh. “Edmund … it doesn’t escape me
that I’ve played my part in the problems to have arisen between us. The way I reacted to the press
…”

“Was normal. Anna, I understand, I just, for reasons I only now appreciate I wasn’t positioned to
address to any party’s satisfaction, most especially, most importantly, yours. I hate it, too. I always
have.”

“I can tell. I ask you what is going on and you bemoan that twenty years ago the tabloids left
Mayor Tarleton’s offspring literally out of the picture.”

That had not fallen into his active consideration. “Maybe you are right. Maybe I am jealous on
some level. But that isn’t where I was going with that narrative.”

“Then where?”

“People forget this giving all that has happened since but around the same time Charlotte was
making a name for herself in the WPS, Clayton was scoring goals in the Championship but
somehow never found himself pictured in print—”

“Well as I am living evidence, no one likes to talk about pure nepotism. Just as no one seems
willing to say they are unsurprised that my very first court case is before the highest bench in the
state given who my mother is and grandparents were, I’m sure no one wanted to come out and say
that the only reason Clayton Tarleton ever found himself at Finch Farm in the first place had to do
with the fact that his maternal grandfather was the first team’s caretaker-manager at the time of his
recruitment. I mean … no one aside from Clayton himself and then only because of a spat he was
in with Martin Waldron years after his game had ended. He was no more impressive when he
transferred to Oxford … stop … stop looking at me like that,” she laughed.

“Like what?” he smiled, impressed by her sharp memory, her expansive knowledge of small things.

“Like you are about to kiss me.” He knew what she meant and felt the same way, still, he could not
help but wonder if she had intended to say as much out loud.

“To my absolute detriment I’d never be so terribly open about it,” he answered. They each forced a
chuckle that made the air tense.

“But what were you saying about Clayton’s less-than-illustrious playing career prior to my again
derailing you with common sense?” Anna asked quickly.

“The reason he was never in pictures, in any sense, why most of his siblings were kept from the
cameras, is because as a baby he was posed as my sister Edna, and both my father and his feared anyone making that connection. My sister, you see, is three years older than her birth certificate indicates, which, I suppose, attributes to her having had so much difficulty in getting pregnant, but again I digress. Until he was at such an age that gender begins to present itself, Clayton was used as a decoy princess, a double of the sort kept by dictators the world over, though usually not at such a young age. A few years back this came out at a dinner party, casually, you know – but Ban had reasons even then not to take this information on its face. You see, my Dear … my father and his, years later, had something of a break up over the course of their individual moral compasses, but I … there is yet another party at play in this drama I might do well to introduce before we reach that point. Elizabeth Gwillim, Effie, John Graves Simcoe’s former fiancée, owns a significant share in my father’s business, something she inherited prior to her birth when her father met an untimely end – the result of a stroke of … questionable causes, same as that which I suffered a decade or so after his. To this day I am not sure how the rumour started, though I would not entirely put it past Margaret Graves, Effie’s aunt, to have planted the idea into my little brother’s mind, but when I … grew ill,” he rambled, “whispers began around Thomas Gwillim’s untimely death. That is was of an unnatural nature. That having previously been paid off by the Hewletts in exchange for his not publishing an article that could undo the house and others with it, the economy to the extent we contribute –both direct and indirect - they, well, my mother specifically, murdered Mr Gwillim when he had a mind to ask for more to keep his silence, or … having found out that his wife was about to give birth to a baby girl, could not live with the moral implications of the deal he had made and was planning to renege on his part of the agreement that had been reached.

“This was all owing to the fact that both my mother and Effie’s father were in Kassel at the time of his death, and for my part I was satisfied that was all there was to it. Not my brother. Not Eugene. And that created problems of its own for all of us, but there was not sufficient evidence, that we knew of, save for a rumoured article that if made public would create a recession destroying the personal wealth of a few powerful families – my own, the ‘Tarletons’, the Gwillims’ and Graves’ and, if we had the interest to expand this, thousands of names I’ll never know who this news had the power to make redundant based on estimated job loss should such a statement reach the ears of other investors and business partners, especially given my father’s own recent history of nearly allowing his ambition to bankrupt the firm.”

“Which you stopped from happening.”

“To my eminent regret.”

“Edmund,” she said, taking his hand.

“You know what the worst of it is? I allowed myself to pretend I my actions were moral, even in the form they took. At fourteen I was coerced into corporate fraud which cost me my trust fund, and made up at twenty that all of my money was eaten by medical costs – which is bullocks, and part of me resented my siblings for accepting as much, which in the end, it turns out that they didn’t – not the slightest bit, rather, they were simply shielding me from the fact that we all shared the same hell. They I had effectively made theirs worse in buying my way out of the pressure of inheritance. And I could have known, I could have prevented so many of the people I’m meant to love from so much pain were only I not so self-centred, so concerned with my own bottom line that … I’ve lost more than I could ever have hoped to gain. And still I have the arrogance to pity myself for it as I sit here next to the woman I love, the woman who might once have been my bride, looking for someone else to blame under the guise of keeping you in the loop whilst inside and abroad friends I don’t deserve to have are still busy fighting battles in my name.”

“You are being unfair to yourself.”
“You don’t know what was in the article.”

“Neither do – did? – you?”

“Ah, but I might have asked. Bloody Ban Tarleton had a mind to inquire after it upon learning in passing that his brother was used as Edna’s decoy to give off the illusion that … that my mother had been on consenting age when she was conceived. It was known … in our circles at least, that my mother never loved my father, laughed at in the aristocracy and the industrial elite alike that the entire story of their affair was a fiction of The Daily Mail – ‘so terribly middle class’,” he mocked those he had grown up around, “though to my mind such stories always involve a crown. Any road, no one ever spoke of my uncle in any of this, happy to overlook the fact that he had lost his bride to his untitled twin brother, that he had never taken another … because I think - though it was kept from the public - they all knew why, and such doesn’t make for polite conversation.”

“He was a paedophile,” Anna swallowed, likely informed enough in her own way to see where this was headed; where Edmund had been happy not to look.

“Is. It isn’t something that is aged out of, for example, when one’s betrothed reaches child-bearing age.”

“Edmund, I’m so sorry, I can’t imagine what that would do to your family -”

“The article was about an unsolved murder on one of his estates. A child. A victim of rape, statutory or otherwise. Gwillim already knew my parents were a lie and the baby baptised in my sister’s dress was none other than one of the dark-haired and eyed Tarleton children … and there had been others, others in between and too many people more interested in profit than in the sanctity of these little girl’s lives. Again – maybe because he was about to have a daughter himself, Gwillim decided he no longer wanted to play along and may have lost his life for it. His daughter however, she inherited the paper upon her eighteenth birthday and found the article hidden within the desk her father once occupied – read it, decided that it was a ‘pack of nonsense’ as she was like to have phrased it, and in an effort to convince her former school-friend of the same, shared it upon request, asking that its contents never be repeated.” He shifted, “Lest this get lost in the whole of my explanation, regardless what Effie Gwillim personally held about her father’s work, about whether or not it might have contributed to his demise or if the Hewletts were capable of killing their own, she knew – even at that young age - more about public perception and stock prices than I fear most of us will ever understand and a significant amount of her estimated wealth is tied up in my family’s green energy expenditures.

“I think Ban is – contrary to public perception – smart enough to have more than just a working grasp on such themes himself and kept his word of silence … but then something happened to him, personally, professionally, psychologically - maybe. Something I … giving what I know him to have experienced in war can’t entirely blame him for, same as I can’t entirely blame Ben Tallmadge for his arresting Cicero though the action angers me to no end. But I’m a civilian. The military can judge such actions and in Ban’s case, he was excused of any wrong doing. My sister Eleanor, who ended up having to testify at his court-martial, was herself less forgiving. They two had a conversation afterwards in which she asked an eye for an eye. She wanted my uncle dead and when he asked her when she learned it was true, meaning what Thomas Gwillim had meant to say about the man, she told him that she had always known. Evidently, she had long been victim to the same – when she was small she looked quite like our mother, you see, and she had gone to Father to beg that she not be sent to stay with our uncle when he was in court up in Scotland only … that is, my father - somewhere between saving my mother from the shame brought upon her and sending his own daughter to suffer the same fate at the hands of the same man - had traded all of his idealism for realpolitik without the world having noticed.
“He told her he needed my uncle and the caucus under his control to continue voting for measures that made his work – be it in human and drug trafficking or in above board business – easier done. I’m told his language had grown less progressive in this exchange – saying it was the price she had to pay for her pretty dresses. And I don’t know … you would have to know Eleanor. She believes in duty with a fanaticism that borders religion and saw this as hers, at least, she came to see it as such after Eugene began to believe that my stroke was, well – what it was, an attempted murder in the interest of our family name. She worried that if she didn’t submit herself to our uncle’s sexuality, to the touches of various other men of Wealth and Consequence to whom he would trade her for a long weekend, that I’d … die … somehow. She didn’t know about what had happened to John and myself in Glasgow a few years prior and thought that if Eugene was right, my sudden illness was the result of her retaliation. So, she just swallowed it. She told Ban it was easier when she kept eye contact and did not try to shut them out at all – a way of wordlessly saying something to the effect of ‘I’m a person and this what you do isn’t that which defines me’ – which for whatever reason acted upon their conscious and, at least, shortened the act itself. I’m sorry, I’m going to be ill again if this conversation continues in this vain. I should have been the one to save her when there was still hope of doing so. I shouldn’t have let her, or Eugene, or anyone for that matter feel that I was somehow served by the agony to which they were exposed, or fear that confined as I was to my sickbed, I’d make an easier target if-”

“Edmund, none of this is your fault,” Anna interrupted.

“If I’d not drug poor John Graves to Glasgow -”

“You could not have known what was going to happen there.”

“I … I don’t deserve your sympathy, much though my soul longs to welcome it. I’m guilty Anna, guilty as anyone else in this story if not the sole source of blame. I’d contacted Admiral Graves and was, with his assistance, trying to bring my father to court on John’s behalf when I fell ill … and then I, I abandoned my good intentions and sought to isolate myself even more that I had always to some extent been. With the pictures – you, Jesus! Anna if anyone should have had reason to sympathise -”

“Forget the pictures, the press! I don’t care!” she exclaimed, “I shouldn’t have made such a big deal -”

“No! You absolutely should have! You should always, always stand up and fight,” Hewlett countered, his own fight fading as he admitted aloud, “And I should have done more to defend you in turn.”

Anna shook her head and said slowly and with some tempered measure of sympathy as she placed her small hand atop his fist, “I know you are going through a lot, so much of which I can’t even imagine much less appreciate.” It was diplomatic, Hewlett decided. Somehow rehearsed. The irony in all of this was that the woman would have made a better princess than half of those born into the blood had only he been a better partner. Her generosity, from wherever it came, caused him to loath himself and the world of which he was a product all the more.

“Because it is erroneous,” he snorted. “I broke down, weeping for joy when I learned that Ban had escaped execution – harder, I think, when I was first able to admit within the confines of my own mind that I’d never intended for it to come to this. When did I grow so cold, Anna?” he asked, though not for the sake of rhetoric. “When did I reach a point in my life where I’d knowingly risk the life of someone I knew in the interest of buying freedom for a friend in the hopes that he would continue to invest my money and invest it well, that maybe, just maybe, I’d have enough that the woman I love would continue to feel the same way about me -”
“I loved you, Edmund. You loved *money*. Don’t build your defence here around an unfair projection -”

“I think I’ve become my father.”

“I don’t think you’d let your son be poisoned or your daughter raped or -”

“When is the line when one is playing with life as it is? I hate what I’ve become, what I’ve always been -”

“I don’t see it that way,” Anna insisted, digging her newly-manicured nails into the back of his hand as she fought to hold it. “I see you as having been a boy with very little real-word experience, and that which you enjoyed focused solely in the corporate sector, trying to right past wrongs. You didn’t know what the repercussions were until tonight -”

“That is the thing. I did. I just did not give it much thought,” he paused. “There was a scandal involving my sister when she was around thirteen. She went on holiday with Effie Gwillim and her aunt somewhere in the south and east … Prague, Budapest, Istanbul – I’m not certain, one of the European destinations for medical tourism, coming back with implants to make her look more a woman grown in Margaret Graves’ stated hopes that the abuse would end. I heard part of the fight. My father was … furious, nervous though – that is, for bearers of our name the line is thin as it is. He threatened to sue for what had been done to his daughter while under her care, she countered that he should, such was the sort of story she was certain would enthral her readers. Ellie herself didn’t say anything. She had long since stopped talking to father. But then school started. She wrote me, I never answered. I still don’t really know why.”

Anna nodded, biting slightly at her bottom lip.

“Naturally Ellie was at an age where … well, I suppose there is no age a woman can be in which such an enhancement isn’t unfairly interpreted as a nod to promiscuity, and at school, my little sister began getting loads of attention from the lads, which caused her friends to grow jealous as girls tend to do. An upperclassman made a move on her – ah, in the physical sense, that is, to feel if her tits were real. Simcoe, acting ever in the interest of the damsel in distress, stepped to her defence and in reward for his effort, Effie Gwillim, whom he was seeing at the time, broke up with him and told everyone that Ellie had in fact had implants rather than a convenient summer growth spurt as most already suspected. Even I thought of her a stupid little slut to that time … though, from a distance. That winter holiday, for fear or shame or anger or whatever it is that occupies the troubled psyche all young women seem to share, Eleanor decided to stay at school. As did John – though his reasons were more straight-forward; his uncle and Effie’s aunt had begun seeing one another and he did not want to spend Christmas with his ex and two people past their prime speaking in euphemisms at dinner as though word-games were altogether lost on well-read teenagers. And you know this part of the story already – Ellie took John’s virginity in the couch in the common room and when he interrogated her over it some years after the fact, she told him she wanted to experience sex with someone whom she knew did not care for her and didn’t even have the curtesy to pretend. And then she told him why and he, maybe … maybe thinking it would help her to know what he and I had gotten up to in Glasgow, that she would feel somehow less bound to our name and house words, maybe just as a way of saying I was not worth the suffering, countered with just that. And in adherence to the theme of unforeseen results, a few years later she found herself too deeply buried in the inner workings of a drug cartel to ever emerge.

“And then Ellie told all of this to Ban … when, at the suggestion that my half-sister Edna’s eight-year-old was now being subjected to the same, she decided, or rather, Edna decided alone upon learning what Ellie had suffered, that enough was enough. With Ellie and Ban … I’m sure
punishment played a part in her requesting this particular favour of him – punishment either for what he allegedly did to those children, which … after seeing him with his own I can’t entirely believe - but then we all act in response to circumstance much as we might like to pretend otherwise - or punishment for insulting her honour with a proposal years earlier which he likely knew her to be too duty-bound to ever consider, for destroying their friendship in the process. Then again, maybe … maybe she had just seen first-hand that he could get away with murder. Any road, she asked, he acted, and within a few days Scotland will need a new Duke of Gordon and England a Duke of Richmond and I … can’t continue to allow my siblings to take all of this responsibility upon themselves. If Edna wants a title that is by all measures and now law hers by right, I’ll abdicate or however it is determined that such things best be done, otherwise I’ll lead to the best of my potential, beginning with annulling Ellie’s engagement to Argyll and granting Inverness to Eugene and Fabienne – for why should my sisters be forced to wed into the same aristocracy into which they were born and why should my brother be denounced and disinherited for his French wife’s confession when -based largely on birth order- my engagement to an American Catholic comes to the delight of the home nations?” he demanded, though Anna was unlikely to have any more insight into such matters than he himself.

“And, for that matter, why should I be allowed to escape my fate, to come here, to live an absolute fairy-tale of normalcy when - in order to make that happen - business had to be done behind my back with unsavoury characters, all of whom, it seems, Ellie has set to war against one another for their failure to keep me safe from suspicion in the whole of this Arnold mess, not … not asking to what extent I truly am at blame.”

Anna shifted where she sat, no longer meeting his gaze.

“You know what I … what I discovered in an interview with DS Yilmaz that I tried to offer as some form of consolation?” Hewlett continued, looking back at the night for his own comfort. “For all of his many ills, John Tarleton truly did try to get my younger siblings out of their living situation when they were just children. I remember now I … in negotiations of any sort,” he explained, “you always start too high before coming to what you are really after. When it seemed I wouldn’t recover, Eugene, who was chubby as a child, was given weight loss supplements – speed, essentially - and was forced to undergo a stomach reduction, both of which have caused him health problems ever since. He lives in Paris now, in part, he confessed to me a few years back, in hopes of keeping our sisters ignorant to his illness and addiction. I … tried to talk to him in my own fully ineffective manner, I ought to have asked for Edna’s consolation, Ellie’s even, but instead I kept his secrets and pretended his condition was not worsening. It got to the point where he was coughing up blood after every meal, where Ban – whose charity never lacks an element of personal ambition – invented a scenario that delayed negotiations that would see business moved out of his city, having Eugene arrested by the FBI before any hands could be shook or papers signed, knowing that anything my brother displayed in an interrogation was certain to force him into a hospital bed. It should never have come to this. I think … I mean, whatever can be said of my illness aside, my body, at least, has always been my own. The twins never had such a luxury … I think that is why … why it doesn’t seem to register with either of them that if they continue in their own cycles of self-destruction, neither of them is long for this world. Life, death – how could there seem a difference?” he wondered aloud.

“But when this was all beginning, Mayor Tarleton asked if I might be interested in courting one of his daughters, to which my father laughed and Charlotte, who considered that she was meant over her two sisters, screamed the house down and called me names – something she’d likely not have done if she had any idea what her father was actually after and why, bitch though she otherwise is – trust me,” he shifted, matching Anna’s undo expression, “you only met her twice, once you were giving her money, and once she was high on pain-killers. You don’t … know what this woman is like by nature. Regardless, her scene disrupted to conversation enough that it did not restart until
Eugene had to be taken from school in ambulance, and then, he came to – ‘forget marriage, send the twins to live with my family in the summer months.’ But it never panned out. It ended up with Tarleton eventually threatening my father that someday we Hewlett children would grow up – maybe, not yet considering that his own would be just as deadly when they themselves did.

“But no normal parent likes to imagine their children continuing their wars, do they?

“If anything, that more than projected attitudes towards commerce, separates the common and aristocratic. Then maybe not, maybe we are all in this same hell, and maybe it is the fault of my presence. Thea and Pip and Cicero with New York’s finest, little Marie - whom I honestly considered the FBI to have targeted as soon as the euphoria from learning her father was still alive had passed; shit, even de Bourbon and Lafayette children who will likely need to be in therapy for the rest of their lives after the hostage situation in Paris, my newborn nephew, who will ever be defined by the circumstances of his birth … had I not, had I not played Simcoe, Tallmadge, everyone, hindering this investigation from the very beginning simply because I saw it as an opportunity for profit, none of them -” Hewlett choked, his cheeks wet with his own tears.

“Ah, Anna! Look at me now! I’ve become everything I’ve always hated – John and Ban and everyone to have ever intimately dealt with members of my family have always hated about our station. And for what? I forced so much suffering upon so many and could not even muster the confidence to appear grateful for all the sacrifices made that I might live a life of my choosing. I’m going back to Scotland to finish this,” he announced again with greater resolve. “I don’t expect or want you to follow. Had I known, had I even anticipated … Anna, I wish I could promise that come tomorrow your life would be simple once more, but the fact of the matter is I have no reason to believe that your person won’t continue to be exploited as a cover for the next few weeks. I think … I think I was the last to know about what Ellie asked Ban to do, the way this has all played out. The Windsors wish to see me crowned and seated in Gordon and Richmond, thinking me a less ambitious alternative to Edna, what with her drive towards Scottish independence, likely, too, why they and everyone at the embassy was so keen on my returning to Britain immediately upon my attempt to defend my thesis, regardless if successful or not.

“Meanwhile my own family is using the wedding to conceal the fact that I’m still a suspect in Arnold’s disappearance, same as they are using the shooting war they started on the streets of New York as means of distracting the police. They will use the fact of us not making promises at the alter in the same fashion, somehow, some way. But I promise, I’ll make amends insofar as I might. The bar is yours, the flat, name a sum and I’ll find a way to pay it. I love you, Anna. I never wanted any of this, however I may seem to have asked for it.”

“Hell is other people,” Anna quoted Sartre. “We are all of trapped with the apprehensions of the other, whatever we ascribe that to be.”

She touched his cheek and his tears turned to laughter, though the sentiment with which he spoke was unshifted. “The irony of my daring to introduce philosophy to the only person I’ve ever met to understand No Exit.”

“You don’t give my ills due credit, Edmund,” Anna said, pulling him into an embrace. “That was … that was quite the soliloquy, series of, rather. I don’t know that I’ve ever heard you say quite so much,” she seemed to tease.

“I don’t know that I ever have,” Hewlett admitted. “But Anna, you mustn’t assign yourself any fault in this -”

“Tell me, is such a noble privilege a commoner such as myself can neither appreciate nor enjoy? You think you are alone in the pursuit of a life different from the one laid out for you. I … I
pretended to everyone that I hadn’t yet passed the New York bar exam because I was so happy working at DeJong’s for slightly above minimum wage that I … I lied to my mom and she pretended to believe me in the hopes of not pushing me away, that I would just come out and tell her as much as I admire her, I didn’t want to be her, not anymore, maybe not ever. And then … then I met the most perfectly imperfect man I could have ever asked to find and rather than simply enjoying the relationship for the potential I saw in it, I banked on your lack of emotional confidence to secure myself the deed to the tavern. And was it worth it? DeJong’s has been closed for two weeks. If I reopen, who can say if my regulars will ever return? Charles Joyce is in the ICU, John Robeson in a padded cell, Robert Rogers is on the run, Lewis Brewster in Witness Protection. John Wakefield is under police surveillance. Philomena Cheer is being held without bail. Jordan and Abigail ended things – as did Abe and Mary. Ben Tallmadge lost his job and his former sergeant lost her life. My mom is … she is being subject to an internal investigation because of the data we conspired to take from her computer. She could be disbarred and even if she is not, it seems unlikely that she will survive re-election. John Appleby is now on the terrorist watch list for the part he played in a protest and now has to worry about deportation. Peggy Shippen was expelled from Penn State shortly before graduation, disowned by her sorority, her family, Fox News … and along with Aberdeen, Abigail, Mary and your good self will now have to appear in civil court for exercising her civil liberty to protest - and protest police brutality against underaged minorities at that!

“I should doubt Aaron Burr or Eliza and Alex Hamilton will ever come ‘round for a pint after what their children were put though over the course of this investigation,” she continued, “which, lest we forget, I had my own interest in keeping open – not, mind, at any cost to myself, rather at the expense of everyone I know and love. You, who I manipulated into helping me financially achieve my dream, Simcoe, who lost his job because of the role he selflessly helped play in the whole matter, adding his market expertise to ever-increasing scrupulousness I went out of my way to encourage in you. Now he will return to London and you to Edinburgh and for what? What good will having DeJong’s Tavern do me when I have no one left in my life to serve drinks to?

“Maybe it is for the best that Jordan offered me this job, that we have yet to resort to words to accurately define the offer: his ‘I’m offering you a way out’ and my ‘I’m shamefully too much of a coward to stick around and watch the results of my convictions.’ All of my closest friends have had their lives interrupted, how, how can I be happy with my gains or ask anything more of you than what you’ve tried to give – what I ignored in pursuit of my own ambitions? Edmund, all I ever wanted was for you to be more honest with me, and you have, and now … I have to be honest with you,” she swallowed. “Do you want to know what my takeaway from the whole of your family history is? You nearly died. Twice now, you nearly died and your response is to worry about how other people are getting on with it, how you can lessen their suffering – Edmund, you are a kind and decent man with a past I wouldn’t wish on anyone, certainly not those who have shared it. I hate that in the interest of ideals I myself hold sacred you and your siblings were each made to suffer and sacrifice so much. But none of it, absolutely none of it is your fault! You were brought down in your attempt to avenge John when you were both younger but certainly without intending consequences for other innocents which frankly it would occur to no one to anticipate. And you have grown from it, and you haven’t let it go – you confessed to a history of corporate crimes, doubtlessly calculating that those damned jobs in Liverpool I keep hearing about were lost anyway – what with the expiring contract and the deal your brother was being pressured to make with the Danes – all to protect John Graves Simcoe from conviction, both from your crimes and from his own, from those you were already paying for though initially you had nothing to do with.

“Having learned what happened to your siblings, to others in your circles back home, you are willing to abandon everything you worked for to make a charge, a final stand to set things as right as they may ever hope to be and whatever feelings are occurring in your heart over the matter, do
yourself a favour and pay them no mind. Yes, maybe you and John did sell Ban Tarleton out on an assumption you should at such point not have logically made, that the legal system would function as it should, that upon providing a few days distraction he would be released without charge - for what interest would the FBI have in holding an innocent bystander? But you know … you saved his life. You should consider that if making any kind of assessment. If Hamilton didn’t have reason to question him in Arnold’s disappearance, Tarleton would have faced summary execution for his other so-called crimes and deep down I think you know it.

“And I think … Edmund, I think like you do, in most matters … which is why I can say with confidence and conviction that old Queen Liz has severely miscalculated the capabilities of the whole Hewlett family, a distinction I might still hope will be used to define me, if not tomorrow – then some fine day.”

“Anna -” he began. She brought her index finger to his lips.

“I don’t want to be the Duchess of Richmond, Gordon, Huntly and Enzie, Inverness, Strathaven, Balmore, Auchindoun, Garthie and Kincardine, but I very, very much want to wed the man I love, and Edmund, I’d move to Scotland with you. I’d start a life there, title or without, and not on the basis that the life I had here is lost to me – no!” she challenged herself aloud, “No! Precisely on that ground. Because I’ve wept for nearly two days and realised that a life without you would not be one with living. I love you, Edmund Hewlett, and whatever it is you feel you have to do, I want to be at your side. We have gotten this far, have we not? Come, let’s go, arm in arm, back into that room and help our friends, rivals and outright enemies conspire to put this case to rest.” With that she rose, offered her hand to help him to his feet and then pulled herself up further to meet his lips.

“Edmund, say ‘yes’ and then don’t speak,” she instructed, not allowing ample time for him to obey before their tongues met once more. It was for the best, there was so much he still wanted to express to her but words, even if he could find them, would have failed to do her any credit. She had given him hope in the worst hour of his life. She alone could. Anna remained him in every way of the goddesses and nymphs who lend their names to the stars in the sky long after most of their stories had been forgotten. She was smarter and stronger than any mortal man or woman he had ever met, a seductress in every sense. He could spend hours hearing her speak on any subject, hours more simply staring at this exquisite work of art, wondering that he could touch her dark hair, her soft curves, her pale and perfect skin, that she wasn’t an illusion of oil on canvas, stuck in a painting, in a phantasy, wondering that of all of the worlds to which she might belong she had chosen his time and again.

“I’ll make a lover of you yet,” she winked when a need for breath broke their embrace. Hewlett felt himself blush. “You fail to realise what you invite upon yourself. With such an offer I should never like to get out of bed.”

“Nor I,” she said, sliding her hand into his trousers just enough to tease the end of his stiffened cock with the tips of her long fingers. “We can’t re-join our little court in this condition,” she whispered as she continued to stroke him, leaning her face up and biting softly at his lower lip, locking him into a kiss before pulling away with a laugh. “So catch me up, what is the plan for finding Arnold?”

“That is not where I thought you were -”

“I should hate to be predictable,” she smiled.
“I can think of worse things.”

“Like?” Anna asked slowly, sounding as flirtatious as her rich vice always did, deep, dark and terribly tempting, independent of what was actually being said. Almost.

“Like?” Hewlett laughed at her. “Like paraphrasing Julian Fellows when we’re … when you had me half hard up against -”

“As long as we’re confessing our innermost, my knowledge of your culture restricts itself to Downton Abbey and Top Gear.”

“That’s really more than you’ll ever need.”

“Yeah?”

“No,” he smiled.

“And here I thought we would confine ourselves to some palace until we’d managed to fill all of its rooms with heirs and spares so soon as we’ve discovered which dungeon the powers separating us from eternity have Senator Arnold locked away in.”

“You are such a tease,” he said, tracing along the shoulder seams of the fitted hoodie she wore and he longed to remove, remembering the same garment had been looser when he had last seen it, recalling the arousal at the sight of her plump yet pert breasts as they fought to escape a bra that had likewise become slightly too small to contain her full femininity. The night was not enough of an escape when she was so near, not, at least, when his physical desire for her grew so much with each day. His fingers followed the garments zipper from the cleavage he slowly exposed to the effect of his own wonder to the no-less beautiful belly she tried to hide him from as it became increasingly harder to hide in and of itself, though why she had such a want to fell into the mysteries of the fairer sex Hewlett knew he may never understand. “You have no idea how gorgeous you are,” he told her as she tried to take a step back.

“It is our wedding day, Edmund … you’re not even supposed to see me, much less -”

“To hell with propriety, Anna. For just a moment more, can the rest of the world not simply be made to wait?”

“The thing is, I don’t know how much time we have left. If you are return to Scotland in an emergency circumstance, with Mitch McConnel not wanting to bring Arnold’s bill to vote tomorrow before the session dissolves, our hours are limited as it is and Arnold -”

He nodded, as admiring of the honour her convictions as he was her sharp wit and soft features. All the same, he held her while he explained everything else that had been discussed in her absence. “We went through everything that had already been done in hopes of smoking out Arnold’s captor whom we now know to be none other than Robert Rogers. Abe is of the mind that Rogers won’t surrender Arnold without compensation, and as the US Government is not offering a reward, we’ve agreed amongst ourselves that the best route is to exploit the other recent media frenzy to find someone who will. Namely, FIFA issued a statement over Twitter crediting football with Marie Robinson’s safe recovery, being that so many players spread the word, something that has already received a backlash both from the self-same professionals and their fans. The idea is to have a club side - one not relying on a scheduled summer tour in the US for publicity should this go south - offer a reward, but not so much that one could live from it, say, retire to Alaska with it, which will put Rogers back into action, assuming he can get more out of the offer. As you rightly bring up, the longer Arnold remains missing, the less valuable his life becomes.”
“But why involve an independent business?”

“Just that. Independence. John offered a reward from his own pocket, as did I. Caleb worries - correctly I think - that giving all that has happened, Rogers won’t bite if he sees any of our hands in this. So, to that end, Ban has a sport journalist friend whom I’m sure you’ve never heard of … he mostly covers the Bundesliga but he has the kind of personal connections that -”

“George Hanger?” Anna squinted.

“I’m impressed,” Edmund admitted, slightly dumbfounded – though the idea that she was more knowledgeable than he himself with respect to sport came as little surprise upon a moment’s consideration, as such, he found, proved true in most matters. “You’re impossibly cool, Anna. Honestly, how -”

Anna stuck out her tongue. “Well, I follow Rihanna on all social media and she ‘@’-ed him recently … him and Frau Merkel, both of whom she dined with recently in Hamburg. Apparently to her delight, neither see Özil as Arsenal’s problem, which really makes me wonder how much of an ‘expert’ Hanger is outside of the German game,” she rolled her eyes dramatically and he began to laugh at her antics. “But,” she continued quickly, “that is neither here nor there. So, what is the plan – find a rich club with an obnoxious president ready to make a press statement? Can’t be hard. Wasn’t Uli Hoeneß released from prison on suspension a few weeks back?”

“That was everyone’s initial reaction, but Bayern, Madrid and both Milan teams are holding summer training fixtures in the US and being that the government itself publicly refuses to do just that which - according to Abe’s expert testimony - would put this investigation to rest, they are worried that their players wouldn’t be able to make it through homeland security should they be the one to act.”

“But that would generate even more publicity,” Anna argued.

“Still, we’ll probably end up resorting to the nuclear option if we haven’t already,” Hewlett answered with some disease as he eyed the back door, suddenly questioning that no one had yet emerged with an update.

“PSG?”

“Good heavens, no! John and I, at least, are as done with Paris in its entirety as any two people who have ever been there in transit. I meant Juventus, which only trends a line in that Ban’s eldest brother married into the Agnelli but I have reason to think Roger’s is ignorant of his name and, being that the wife did not change hers and giving that Agnelli interest is mainly industrial, that Arnold’s continued disappearance is now proving itself a threat to the US-EU trade arrangement from which FCA expected to benefit …” he trailed off. Anna nodded her understanding.

“Yeah. You know … that both makes business sense and puts things in perspective for me. How can I stay at a dive bar with a sports package when I’ll have to fear Juve fans talking about how Turin saved the world as we know it until the end of time?”

“Don’t pretend you won’t miss it,” Hewlett said as he held her tighter, fully aware of everything she was willing to abandon for the names of those she did not yet know, for a life he had let himself flee. How glad he was, absent of the staggering circumstances that dictated the venue of their nuptials, that he would wed her in her own land, in a country he had begun to feel at home in when she had first taken his hand. He would work to match her worth, to return Anna to her family and friends as often as he could, to keep DeJong’s open for her to return to have a pint with all the rest of Setauket to have seen their lives interrupted in the wake of Arnold’s absence. But rather than
make declarations when they would only ring empty, Edmund Hewlett held his tongue as he held his brilliant, beautiful bride, this remarkable woman who could at once reassure him of his unspoken intentions whilst reminding him in the same words that despite all of the effort within him, he could never hope to be such a joy as Anna Strong.

“Maybe I will,” she whispered into his ear, her voice seeming to wink. “Maybe I’ll follow one or two of George Hanger’s suggestions on what I might do in Britain after the wedding and open a chain of cheap bars to rival Wetherspoon or make Mike Ashley an offer on Newcastle.”

“When did you … when did the two of you become acquainted?”

“He is covering the wedding for The Daily Mail by way of making a mockery out of all other tabloid articles. Haven’t you been keeping up?”

“Honestly, I ignore most of what is printed about me,” he told her plainly.

“He made a good point though in the same piece – since I’m no longer allowed my own account on all social media I won’t need to worry about faking engagement photos for INS, or since the Queen is in support, whatever the UK equivalent is.”

Maybe Anna’s worries were more warranted than he had previously wanted to accredit. “Christ,” Hewlett sighed. “I’ll have words with him tomorrow. And did you? Delete you accounts? I thought you just had me blocked.”

“Nope, they are gone. Now I just use the Vince Offer parody account I made but haven’t updated in years to follow celebrities and that.”

“Who is Vince Offer?”

“The ShamWow Guy.”

“Ah,” he said, still having no idea who was meant.

“You don’t watch much TV either, do you?” she squinted.

“Just Netflix and boxsets. When, then I might as well make an all-day event of it.”

Anna stuck the tip of her tongue out between her teeth. “A have a bad feeling it may be a while before we can ‘Netflix and Chill’.”

“Ah, there is always time for that, Love,” Hewlett posed, pinching her posterior.

“Perv!” she exclaimed with a playful push that hurt more than it ought.

“You -”

“Come on,” Anna said, zipping herself back into the hoodie though they were ready to go step into a warm tavern. “Let’s make this capture Rogers plan as fool-proof as possible. Something occurs to me … I owe Ban Tarleton an apology myself giving that Marie made her escape dressed like me of all people who shouldn’t be fashion icons.” She looked down at the clothes she had thrown on and frowned disapprovingly.

“Anna, you cannot blame yourself for that. I will not allow it. And you’re, by Jove you are stunning and the fact that you don’t see yourself the way I, the way all of the girls who style themselves in imitation do -”
“I don’t … blame myself that is. But I do owe Marie and every other girl in both your country and mine an example actually worthy aspiring to. So, come,” she now insisted, opening the door and leading the way in. “Let’s be our best-worst selves and help our friends save this world from itself.”

The world, Hewlett smiled to himself, hardly stood a chance.

Chapter End Notes

Quotes:

The italicised lines in the beginning were taken from show episode 3.4 – “Hearts and Minds”

“Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” was borrowed from Leo Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina.

“Tis better to have loved and lost, / Than never to have loved at all” is from a Tennyson poem called In Memoriam A.H.H. and is actually about the poet’s best friend who died unexpectedly, rather than a romantic heartbreak. (But it would not be Edmund if he did not misunderstand!)

People:

Interesting coincidence (and one I half went looking for) almost all of the politicians (past and present) mentioned in the text had 7 children each (including King John, apparently) but excepting Huckabee, who has 3, and Thatcher, who had 2.

Sport:

Finch Farm is Everton’s youth academy.

Martin Waldron is Everton’s head of academy recruitment, currently suspended under allegations of sexual misconduct with a youth player.

Here is a conundrum, the French Ligue 1 is somehow considered under the so-said “Europe’s Top Five” (the others being England, Spain, Italy, and Germany) … but after a lifetime of following footy, I don’t know how they made the cut. Check it - Ligue 1 by and large has the same quality of gameplay you’ll witness at your local Sunday-league side (only with a higher percentage of violent protest breaking out) and then … well they have Paris Saint-Germain, and PSG have oil money and players like Neymar and Mbappé. They win everything. I told you about how sport works.

Every year in January and August, Newcastle United owner Mike Ashley makes claims that he is going to sell the club to avoid spending money in the transfer
window, but these never pan out. The fans hate him and attach an insane amount of hope to every prospective buyer.

I am sure I am missing one or two things (some by design – we will talk about FCA at some point, I promise!) but for now, I think that does it for me. I feel really super bad that I didn’t quite make it to the vows as I had hoped to in this chapter, but some scenes, man … some scene just got so long.
I should see you again in about a month (I have some super-late birthday gifts to finish in the meantime, plus the Schleswig-Holstein question to answer in another fic, plus with Valentine’s Day coming up I feel that odd drive to write an entire YA novel around my favourite failed couple from history … (Kitty and Arthur are everything, yea? Normal, down to earth girl meets brooding, sarcastic guy with hair that has never seen a comb but for some reason all the ladies fancy? And the best – it ends badly.
Why do teenagers like this exact formula? Like how did this become a thing? I just …)) I digress - what I am trying to say is that I have a lot of little projects in the immediate future, but Hide and Seek will be back, and I promise the wait won’t be as long as it for these last two chapters. XOXO
The Bystanders

Chapter Summary

Aberdeen wakes up in the arms of the man she once loved; Senator Arnold finds himself in John André’s bed; Ben questions Caleb’s commitment; Hanger and Tarleton discuss sex-workers and one-night stands and young Arthur tries his luck with an adult actress. Finally, (FINALLY) Anna and Edmund tie the knot in a chapter that would be oh-so-romantic … … but for the politics, colluding, sport-finance and bent policing. Welcome back to “Hide and Seek.” It is exactly what you remember it as being. ♥

Chapter Notes

I know, it has been a while, but I am back with a lot. You all been good? Fill out your tax forms? Eat your vegetables? Break any laws? Bones? New Year’s resolutions? – Ay! Good on you! I’m glad. Proud even. Keep at it. ;)

And me? Well, I’m just going to get to it – as always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Aberdeen Declesias blinked. Heaven, as she understood it, was a tool of political rhetoric, an unfulfillable promise made to those naïve enough to grasp onto other such empty statements as ‘We have an exit strategy in place for Iraq’ or ‘I’m going to build a great wall and Mexico is going to pay for it.’ Yet here she was breathless before a white light, confused and questioning if there was also any truth to tax breaks, something she asked of Saint Peter or one of his angles - whomever so happened to hold her as she felt herself ferried her to her final judgement.

“What?” a voice returned. Aberdeen, still blinded by the light of country songs and mega-churches who purchased an hour of broadcast time on public access or home shopping television channels every Sunday morning, completely disoriented by its glow as she began tallying her sins against what she knew of the American God who organized floods, earthquakes and mass shootings at LGBTQ night clubs in His want for vengeance – usually over progressive legislation. “I’m sorry for ‘aving practiced voodoo,” she said, increasingly uncertain that she wanted to pass through the pearly gates at all. “I didn’t … in Ayiti. I didn’t really in New York either, I was just astounded at how panicked white people get around spice, even when it is not being used in food. There is nothing to do in Setauket – Sir,” Sir? Was that the proper form of address? “Sir,” she tried again, “might I be appointed a solicitor?”

The angle gave an uncomfortable chuckle and the light faded to reveal the man who held her to be none other that Robert Townsend. Aberdeen smiled. Maybe this was heaven. Maybe (and more likely) burning sage truly had caused him to fall in love with her and she would owe Maman Jacquelyn an apology next time she saw her at the hair shop. As soon as these ideas entered her mind, however, they were undone with the words no woman ever wanted to hear in the arms of any would-be-lover:
“What is your name?” Robert asked. Aberdeen narrowed her eyes, filled with the same frustration that had led her to rip this man’s image from her wall hours before.

“You know what? You can go fuck yourself, Sir. ‘Ow long have I been working for your closest friends, living in their ‘ome, going to your shows and you,” she spat as the whole of the past few weeks came flooding to her mind’s forefront, “you arrested me! You broke my car and you mean to say that you don’t know my name?”

Robert knitted his brow. “Aberdeen, please, I’m only trying to ascertain –”

“I think she is fine,” a woman’s voice said. Aberdeen tried to turn her head in search of the sound. Finding that she was not able, she shifted herself into a sitting position and realized that she was in the back of a parked ambulance, wearing a neck brace, being asked a series of simple questions by an under-cover agent while a nurse took her vitals and her friend and fellow bridesmaid took the initiative to tell them that this was all ridiculous. What had happened? Aberdeen squinted as she tried to look past Sally to find the further setting. It was almost dark or almost light, the sun just beyond the horizon. People in blue paper jumpsuits crawled over Whitehall’s front lawn with flashlights and tape. Aberdeen, growing alarmed, grabbed at her neck brace and offered what was asked of her.

“Aberdeen Declesias,” she answered.

“When is your birthday?” Robert continued.

“First January.”

“What year?”

“Every year.”

“How old are you?” He frowned. Aberdeen could not tell if this was in critique or concern and thus answered, “Twenty-two,” with an articulation that might be taken as annoyance or earnest, in truth, fully succumb to both.

“Do you know what today is?”

“It is Thursday, Twenty-Forth March, Twenty-Sixteen,” Aberdeen guessed. The sun, she realized, was rising for it had set the night before and she was still in the hoodie she had ‘borrowed’ from Anna’s closet. Anna, she thought, repeating the date once more. “It is Anna’s Wedding! What time is it? I ‘ave to go, please -” Aberdeen demanded as she struggled against Robert and a nurse to get up off of the cot, pulling at the tape, tubes and wires against warnings, which, however light, informed her that whichever job these were meant to do, they were surely not up to task -

She felt fine.

She felt dizzy.

She hoped this did not show.

“Do you know who the president of the United States is?” Robert asked, putting his hand on Aberdeen’s back to brace her as she sat on the edge of the bed, the emergency responder continuing to voice his complaints with her conduct.

“Barack Obama,” Aberdeen answered, increasingly impatient as she looked at information about her, information she could not read, flash across several screens.
“Okay,” Robert nodded. “And who is the President of Kazakhstan?”

“Nursultan Nazarbayev,” Aberdeen answered.

“Who the heck knows that off the top of their head?” he smiled. Aberdeen wondered if this was somehow meant to be reassuring.

“Everyone?” she answered, almost scolding. “The man ‘as been in office since 1990 and is the only person to ‘ave ever ’eld that title.”

“I told you,” Sally said. “Rob she is fine. Aberdeen, it is five in the morning, we haven’t missed the wedding, we don’t even have to leave for another hour but as soon as you get the go-ahead, I want to get Cicero out of her before Hamilton gets his whole team out, giving ... well, everything.”

“Can you follow my finger?” the EMT asked.

Aberdeen humoured him while asking the Townsends where the boys were.

“Upstairs,” Robert answered. “My dad is with them. Aberdeen, we have to talk about what happened last night. There is blood in the garage.”

Aberdeen again felt at the brace around her neck, wanting to remove it as she remembered the sensation of being strangled.

“I saw Benedict Arnold!” she exclaimed in a frantic grasp of air, half-convinced she could not breathe. Robert grabbed at her hands, fidgeting for the devices release, holding them softly in his own as the sensation had passed as quickly as it came. Feeling their warmth, remembering the chill of the unfinished cement floor, Aberdeen began to cry.

“I figured as much,” Robert nodded. “Last night, Caleb went up to Albany when … his new boyfriend received a call from a man whom the public believed to be dead -”

“Banastre Tarleton, I know. I was there. No,” she clarified, “they were ‘ere before they left -”

“Not trusting that this meeting would … fearing an ambush, Caleb, having learned from Abe - or yourself - the realities of my employment, opened a line of communication, texting me updates as the conference progressed.”

“Did you kill ’im?” Aberdeen asked of Tarleton. “Was that the plan? Was that why Mr. ‘Ewlett was crying in the kitchen?”

“No, no, no – the talks were legitimate,” Robert answered. “Having most parties together at the same table, we – well, they pieced together what had happened. On the night Senator Arnold disappeared, Abe sent a text to Mary before our regular set ended, asking her if she would pick him up from DeJong’s. Not realizing this, I invited him back to mine for a round of chess, which he neglected to inform his wife about when she did not write him back to let him know she was on her way. Arnold was sitting at the far corner of the bar that night – if I saw him, if any of us did, no one recognized him, not yet knowing to look. He evidently spent the evening talking to John Graves Simcoe about … topics that eventually lead them to literal blows. The two were rather drunk and took their fight into the car park before it became physical. Right as Mary pulled up, John hit Arnold -”

“I know.”

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Robert asked.
“To Inspector Tallmadge?” Aberdeen snorted, pulling her hands back from his. “Tell me, is Caleb a plain-clothes copper too?”

“No,” Robert answered. “He is just a concerned citizen.”

“Oh, so that is what this is about – because I am not a US citizen I cannot ‘ave concerns? I was and am concerned for my friends, my real friends who ‘ave all this time been ‘onest about who they are and what they ‘ave done and what can be done to fix it, not lying police who draw a distinction between residency and citizenship, who over-police little children and minorities and most especially minority little children, who-”

“Aberdeen, please,” Robert sighed. “Perhaps my phrasing was unfortunate but that is not … Caleb is just trying to protect his friends, too. Same as you and me. Arnold was taken in by Robert Rogers, then held captive by the same man and those he forced to keep this secret with a threat of violence against their families should they not comply. Abe, all the while, was trying to help the senator escape whilst keeping Mary at a distance, and he was nearly successful, but Arnold is injured and Rogers is craftier than we might have otherwise credited him as being, as compared against his previous convictions anyway.

“At some point last night,” he continued, “Hewlett, or Simcoe, or the pair of them, told Tallmadge that mathematically, on the night of Arnold’s disappearance and the days that followed, it would have been impossible for him to be moved out of Setauket – which is where they focused their own search. Caleb added to this that Rogers was likely still keeping Arnold in familiar terrain, a worksite, his home, Akinbode’s though it has since become a crime scene … but Ben, against every better effort on part of those who would wish to see this investigation drag out for political purposes, has gotten warrants to search all of these possible places. Then, he came on the idea that Rogers might well have backtracked, bring Arnold somewhere that had fallen from consideration. While everyone was distracted by the news that Marie Robinson – the missing girl – had been found in Edinburgh, costumed as Anna Strong as many today are -”

“Oh, no, is she -”

“She is fine. She was taken into police custody and has since been released to the care of her paternal aunt, who brought her back to the Scottish residence of a London solicitor where they plan to watch the wedding along with Marie’s half-sister and the girl’s mother whilst they wait for hers to arrive. She is fine,” he repeated.

Aberdeen nodded. “While they were distracted …” she nudged.

“While they were distracted,” Robert continued, “Caleb sent me a text, asking me if I could swing by Whitehall and check up on the place, worried for you, worried about alarming Mary and Abigail over the safety of their sons. I was getting dressed to go when Sally burst into my room with the same wish – Cicero was woken by the sounds of a struggle, you see. He went to your room and, seeing that you were not there, went to Thomas’ nursery, thinking someone had better stay with the baby in the event of a break in.”

“Good lad,” Aberdeen whispered to herself. “Good, good lad.”

Robert nodded. “Afraid to call the police, afraid not to, he called my sister who has babysat him a few times in the past, knowing that I’m FBI – wanting to know what was happening. When the two of us arrived, we saw a vehicle speeding away but didn’t give chase. We came into the house through the open garage, found you lying unconscious in the adjacent room leading into the home proper. I put in a call to local and then to Hamilton, and Sally called our father to help her calm the children. Cicero, I mean. Thomas slept through the whole affair. Children that age mostly do, it is
a reaction to shock.”

“I ‘eard something,” Aberdeen explained, “I opened the door and I saw ‘im, I went to run but ee caught me and I – you ‘ave to believe, none of us knew, if we ‘ad we would ‘ave … we ‘ave been looking for ‘im, too. We all want this to be over, our names to be cleared, things to go back to normal. ‘Ow is Cicero, I ‘ave to -”

“Miss, please remain seated.”

“He is fine,” Sally assured her, climbing into the ambulance and taking a seat beside her brother. “Kids bounce back. I went upstairs about half an hour, hoping to get everyone ready, hoping that the promise of a McDonald’s breakfast would get them in the shower, but Cicero is too busy telling my dad just everything he knows about Juventus -”

“Juventus?” Aberdeen frowned.

“It is an Italian soccer team,” Robert told her with a measure of unease.


“They won … America as a fan base, essentially. This morning, or last night FIFA said something stupid on social media about Marie Robinson being found thanks to the involvement of professional footballers in the search – in actuality, it was the efforts of her classmates; one of them is famous on YouTube for telling other teenagers ‘how to fake high culture at high street prices’ which – from the videos I’ve seen is just her tongue-in-cheek reading of every article she sees about people generally regarded as being posh before putting on heirs at Primark. Basically ‘Keeping up Appearances’ for an audience too young to remember the series, but fairly refined for a thirteen-year-old,” he gave. “Anyway, she is the one who made the video asking the public to help in the search when police wouldn’t get involved right away. The boy who found her … both her and her father, actually, is far less quote-unquote famous, or was less famous, I suppose, until this morning when Eggshell retweeted him a second time,” he paused, “I have to confess, I really don’t entirely understand the site, its appeal or the population whom it entertains, but for better or for worse, Ben Tallmadge thinks himself to have a fairly good grasp - perhaps the result of having often found himself ‘trending’ due to some bias article or another.

“Ben, seeing FIFA attacked for claiming football found Marie, thought it might be within the interest of the congress in which he was taking part to convince a club side to put up a small reward from which to ransom Senator Arnold after the owner of Chelsea gave to a citizen’s initiative to change police policy where it comes to allocating limited resources to locate children who have recently gone missing. After several discussion and failed attempts, Juventus Turin made an offer – which could have ramifications for today’s vote -”

“What?” Aberdeen blinked.

“Fiat-Chrysler – FCA – owns the team and are looking at avoiding certain trade tariffs which is causing concern in the American steel industry, which doesn’t even address how private business is more and more taking on roles our governing officials hesitate towards, fearing repercussions in the ballot box. The FBI was instructed by Washington, who was instructed by the Executive, to hinder the Arnold Investigation until his defence bill came up for a vote, hoping his disappeared would lead to more widespread support for a number of its -”

“Human rights infringements?” Aberdeen suggested meanly.
“Infringements which Europe had hoped the US would set a precedent for, giving that they currently have many of the problems fear mongering has the population convinced are threats to American safety, though, they, unlike us, are very cautious to publicize acts of terror as being ‘acts of terror’. In America, when a white man shoots up a church, he is ‘emotionally disturbed’ whereas a man of middle-eastern decent is ‘an Islamic terrorist’. In Europe, everyone is ‘emotionally disturbed’ – and maybe they are, the politicians at any rate,” Robert told her flatly. Aberdeen liked him a bit better upon hearing this comparison and critique, though her dream of ‘them’ had ended in a community college carpark and there was no room in her heart for forgiveness giving this morning’s conversation as a whole; Aberdeen was decided that she could in no way even entertain the idea of a man who did not spend a fair portion of his spare time contemplating voter suppression in post-soviet regimes, who did not spend enough time on Twitter for such to chance being an active concern. She deserved better – someone in their thirties still sleeping on his father’s couch should at least be ‘woke,’ or so she maintained.

“I tend to agree with this Twitter that mass surveillance isn’t going to solve the problem of fear any more than it is going to solve the issues a nation encounters with mass-integration over a short timeline, but these are not the sort of measures the public is asked to give their voice for or against in any meaningful way,” he said, perhaps to address her frown.

“That is why it backfired,” she told him.

“It did and it didn’t,” Robert argued, “Mitch McConnell is refusing to move forward with the vote, wanting to protect his majority now that public opinion has been turned back on itself – but the bigger issue is this trade agreement, which given the normal means of currency manipulation, would not have been possible to come to the table over had the dollar not taken a dip due to the uncertainty that rose over Arnold’s continued absence.”

“So instead of trying to save ‘im, you let -”

“I’m trying to save our country,” he defended, adjusting, “I was. Now I am just trying to save my friends.”

“You don’t sound too certain.”

“A lot of things that you see in the news aren’t true, at least, the truth within them beknown to those at the heart of the issue, at the time of publication … Mr. Hewlett is worried about Juventus on the grounds that his father once did business with the father of a sports agent who just so happens to have been married to someone on the club’s board of executives, thinking that Rogers will make the connection and see this a ruse. But what from what Abe told me, Rogers has been trying to find a way to blackmail the Hewletts since Edmund was made a suspect in this investigation … he has familiarized himself enough with tabloid talk that his connecting the Agnellis to the Tarletons to the Hewletts might well prove beneficial and I … I think it is likely he will show up in Albany this afternoon, demanding the ransom a third party has promised. I think he will be arrested as planned … but I think it is possible he might then have a great deal more to say than something about Edmund having shot a horse back when he should have been in a sick bed or Banastre Tarleton having once proposed to Eleanor Hewlett by way of trying to up the price before, and there are too many world leaders with too many own interests in attendance that whatever he says won’t have consequence.”

“Play as loud as you usually do, ee won’t get a word in edge-wise,” Aberdeen winked. “I will keep my eyes open, we all will -”

“Aberdeen,” Robert stopped her, “will you save me a dance between sets?”
“Do Quakes dance?” she squinted.

“I’ll make an exception.”

“Maybe. I’ll consider it.”

Chiara Agnelli smiled as her husband kissed her softly, thinking (as she often did when they two shared a bed) of another man entirely. She was five years her husband’s senior although cosmetics, being what they were, did not let show or even allow for the suggestion of her forty-plus. William Tarleton, by contrast, was greying and had a face lined like unsigned contracts, faint creases becoming full-fledged wrinkles when he wore one of his famous frowns; a standard he again met, sighing and speaking a light curse as his phone rang, pulling himself from the back of her neck as he moved to answer.

“Leave it,” Chiara instructed. William gave her a look that spoke to intent, affection even. The auto-heiress rolled her eyes, unwilling to be victim to his renewed want for physical attention now that there was business to be sorted. “I’m about to drive out to Melwood,” she said. “Don’t give anything to the Glazers until I’ve misled them once more over outside interest, given them every last incentive to commit to our asking price.”

“I don’t like the precedent,” William complained, “I don’t like any of this.”

“We’re not playing with real money,” Chiara dismissed him. “Ninety-five million sounds good and nice, but giving that the transfer fee won’t go through until after the referendum, I have my doubts as to how the Brexit Pound will trade against the Euro come August.”

“Even if Brexit happens, which you seem to be doing everything in your power to prevent – the market will have had time to stabilize. The sale will be worth your while, or it won’t. You got Pogba on a free and are now selling him for a price only a handful of clubs can afford to pay. What happens if things don’t work out for him at Old Trafford? If he isn’t happy there, if -”

“What do you care if he is happy or not?” Chiara spat. She hated discussing business when her husband considered he had any excuse towards sentimentality. For a top agent such was intolerable, and for a husband it was as well when the crisis causing this inner conflict had come to an end. Chiara shifted herself away from his touch, rose from the bed and made her way to the wardrobe they shared – the one that had been his in childhood. Black, she assessed of the clothing she had packed. Black, black, black. It was fitted for a funeral and fine for finalising negotiations, for commemorating the Crucifixion on Good Friday, but altogether unsuitable for Easter Sunday, even one she was now being forced to celebrate in drab and dreary Liverpool due to this same overblown show of brotherly sentiment that had passed its time and place. She wished she had pack something else. She most certainly did not want to give the impression she was grieving. No. That would not do. It never did.

When she had first been given the news, Chiara herself had locked her office door, collapsing behind it as she cried into her knees. She managed to collect herself shortly before the knocks came, doubtlessly in response to what Inter had beaten them to announcing on social media – heartfelt condolences, hashtags substituting true sentiment. All the same, better a hashtag than a hug. Working in a male-dominated field, Chiara had an image to maintain and had spent the past twenty years so mentally crippled by the impossible expectations she had herself set that the ideals
she strove towards remained ever-and omnipresent, absent of extenuating circumstance. In truth, she was envious of her husband’s ease with sorrow, that sadness in men was excused as a show of emotional strength, where such versatility in women was always dismissed as hysterics.

When she had first been given the news, Chiara had gotten herself up, splashed water on her face in her private WC, rubbed the black circles of mascara stained saline from under her eyes, opened the door the chairman, swallowed, pulled her shoulders back and said plainly, ‘As I’m certain you’ve heard, I’ve to fly up to Liverpool after my two-o’clock conference with Allegri and his coaching staff. I should doubt that I’ll be back before the end of next week, but in the interest of making good use of the occasion, I’m sure I can get United to agree to the terms we discussed last week.’

‘Chiara, your brother-in-law just died unexpectedly,’ she was told with a concern that her boss may have felt fit the situation but most certainly did not fit the setting. ‘Manchester is half an hour from Lime Street Station,’ she answered. There was a time for heartbreak, and it most certainly was not whilst working. Her wardrobe felt too grim and its mood became her as she removed her lace negligee in exchange for a fitted suit, forgoing a blouse less in the interest of runway fashion than it was an unwillingness to seem in mourning. At present, she was only annoyed.

“In the immediate you’ll earn a pretty little kick-back on advertising and when the time comes where he’s inevitably fighting with his coaches and missing out in the starting eleven, looking for a transfer, you are right, United won’t be able to sell him and there won’t be a market. He might drop you as his agent if you can’t get a deal no amount of pouting will manifest into existence, but again, in this scenario that you suggest – representing him would only cost you at that point, so again, why do you care?” she asked her husband.

“What are you going to do at Melwood?” he returned.

“Just have a look around, yea? It is enough that they see my car drive up to the gate. United always have eyes on their rivals, everyone with a payroll has a spy ring these days. Half the reason the board is so eager to talk is because it has been quote-unquote ‘reported’ that you’ve been on the phone with Fenway over the course of this past week. Which you have, only … best to keep giving them the wrong impression. Just an hour more.”

“Fenway,” William shifted. “You are right, I know you’re right, which is why I don’t trust this. It is as though Tallmadge has had a hand in this all along.”

“Tallmadge isn’t police anymore.”

“Are you certain?” he pressed.

Her phone rang. It was Ed Westwood this time. Chiara took it and swiped to ignore, sticking out her tongue at the undeserving device and smiling at her reflection.

“As I can be from a press release,” Chiara shrugged, continually hurriedly, “which reminds me, can you tie up your line for a few minutes with Effie Gwillim? Mail is covering the wedding and McConnell has the vote scheduled for two in the afternoon Eastern Standard, i.e. precisely when Edmund and Anna will be exchanging their vows. I want to know which senators will be abstaining though their absence before we go another round - aside from Arnold and everyone too busy campaigning to actually govern, obviously. Cornwallis had a poor meeting with Obama last week and I know that The White House issued a statement saying the US won’t be willing to negotiate a separate trade deal with the UK should they pull out of the EU – that, paired with the gross display of Scottish Nationalism we have coinciding with the other Hewlett’s nuptials will cause enough of a flux in your nation’s currency that even with the fifty-thousand that the cooperation I represent has put forward for information leading to Arnold’s safe return and the
slight inflation it has since had on the Euro, we are back on as even of a footing as is needed for the US Senate to see this done. But now they talking about the American Steel Industry and it is as though … I swear on my life, Wills, can no one in politics do basic maths?” she complained, “They want to provision a tariff to preserve jobs seemingly without realising that doing so would only hurt American auto-workers relying on cost-effective imports to keep up operations. Our sixteen-year-old gets this shit and his notes at school aren’t anything I’d brag to my friends about. Alas.”

“Out of curiosity, is that how Hanger sold you on this? The fucking trade agreement?” William spat.

“Why are you so nervous?” she inquired. She knew the reporter in a professional capacity and knew him as a bit rowdy, perhaps, but professional all the same. Sometimes, she rang with a rumour about a rival. Sometimes, he gave her a heads up when a story was about to hit in a way that PR should ready itself to respond to. It was far more seldom that she found herself scrolling his social media accounts, searching for signs of her brother in law, signs that said she might want to transfer money from the joint personal account she and her husband shared before it disappeared into clothes, casinos, cocktails and the cleavage of road-stop sex workers. By William’s posture, she discerned that this was the only connection in drew up in reference to the young man, but then this was how coming from a political dynasty had led him to view the press in a more generalized sense.

Her husband began to pace in short, stiff steps as predicted. “I think George has been a bad influence on Banastre in the past. What’s more, I think Tallmadge’s record speaks for itself. I think he has been playing us for some time now – think on it, Kiki. My little brother is reported dead, Tallmadge comes up with some now-grown child of one of my mother’s former maids, who just so happened to have lived in a property now owned by the parent company of the people who bought out Liverpool a few years back. I’m on the phone with them half the week, giving United reason to think that we are also in negotiation with their standing rivals – which is ridiculous on every level,” he digressed, “Klopp’s not been given that kind of a budget and it isn’t exactly like either club-side is any good .”

“That doesn’t matter, it is all about marketing.”

“Fine. But they are keeping tabs on us, and if anything comes out about you and Edna as a result of this, if -”

Chiara put her hands on her hips and inhaled slowly. “I’ve changed my mind, you can answer the next time they ring. I want to be able to give Hanger the Pogba thing before he comes to whatever ridiculous conclusion you have about ex-Inspector Tallmadge pulling the levers to save US trade, creating a conspiracy around sport when the missing senator has failed to serve him. Honestly, what the fuck do you care if he is? We are, too! Christ in Heaven, someone has to. But I think when it comes to Tallmadge … I think you can take him at his word that he wants to see this case solved.”

“That is what I am worried about,” William admitted. “I think Simcoe did it. I think Hewlett was likely an accomplice … and I think my brother’s disappearance was their trying to pin him with some of the guilt. He served under Arnold in Iraq, you know -”

“Oh, Christ - here we go. You know what I think?” she challenged, “I think Ban faked his own death to get you to again pay off his debts. When you look at the extent – the continuity - of his childlike irresponsibility, why is it that you are always so keen to find someone else to take the fall, hm? To excuse the fact that it is you and Clayton enabling this behaviour? Mary Robinson isn’t good with money, that I will allow. George Hanger isn’t good with money either – but that, they
and anyone else outside of this family have nothing to do with that fact that your baby brother lives well beyond his means. That is on you. And it is on you for falling for it. Again."

William grabbed the finger Chiara waved in his face and squeezed it until she winced. “Ban wouldn’t do that,” he said, adjusting, “he wouldn’t be able to get the consulate to play along.”

“Didn’t he? Cornwallis seemed fairly hapless to me, like he himself had no idea what had happened or what he was meant to do without a corpse to mail home.”

Her husband considered this for a long while and Chiara left him to his silence. When she returned from the guest bathroom, face made, he asked, “Have you heard anything yet?”

“About what precisely? McConnell is refusing to bring Arnold’s defence bill to a vote, but he’s going ahead with trade when he is sure it will pass. Meanwhile, the media making a fuss about blood royals that no one gives a damn about what their elected representatives are getting into. Everyone in England is underestimating the threat Anna adds to the independence movement – thanks to Gwillim and her colleagues, the people adore her, but Edna … what you mistake in her, in all of the Hewletts, their principle aim is stability. Edna doesn’t care who wears the proverbial crown, so long as it isn’t an Englishman. She wouldn’t stand in Edmund’s way of inheritance. But we will leave the Windsors and the world to figure that out tomorrow.

“Today,” she smiled, “we have a senator to save and if a promise made on Juventus’ Twitter account can help make that happen, I’m game. It’s opened a direct line of communication between the FIAT umbrella and the US Government and my family needs this deal to happen, nearly as much as I need a transfer to the Netherlands because I swear, I swear on my life, Wills, I hate sport so much,” she complained as he pulled her into a hug. “By tomorrow, attention at the club is going to be turned to negotiations around Pogba’s record transfer, which I am going to leak to Hanger on my way back from Melwood as a little ‘thank you’ for letting me play. He has to get a lead out of this or he will find one of his own. I think that is he deal. It usually is with him.”

“What time is it there?” William frowned. “Ten? He is probably in a strip club, probably dragged Ban along with him and I’ll probably need to wire more money tonight.”

“Or I could give him something in the interim. Hanger I mean” she said as she reached for her phone. “Put my favourite Hewlett back into the news cycle whilst earning him a few quid to blow on wine and women, enough that Ban won’t feel obliged towards fronting every round -”

“You wouldn’t,” her husband warned. Chiara gave him a teasing smile. “Try and stop me then.”

He kissed her with some measured degree of hatred and passion and pushed her back onto the bed. She unbuttoned her blazer, revealing the lacy bra underneath – black, like everything else the week had brought in terms of news and numbers.

Alexander Hamilton leaned up against the side of his wife’s van, annoyed that his heavy inhale of the damp, dewy morning air created enough sound to break the silence for which he felt so desperate. He had been on the road for little more than an hour with in the company of his immediate family, the neighbours from next door, the day’s news and everyone’s stated opinions over such matters.

The worst of it was, he was of the same mind.
“I hate that everyone’s initial assumption when Marie Robinson went missing was that the organization which I represent had some hand in it,” he confessed to Aaron Burr, himself preoccupied with pacing the length of the vehicle, stretching his legs as he stared at his tablet, doubtlessly at the same photograph that had with a single share defeated the purpose of mass surveillance. Hamilton had no interest in committing himself to its study. As with most items in the news, the caption was all that warranted consideration:

>>@Eggshell: My new favourite ‘Where’s Wally?’ Poster. It took all of Britain upwards of 30hrs. Can you top that? Mass surveillance is no solution. Call your representative regardless of where you find yourself. #FindMarie #RoyalWeddingReady <<

“She is barely older than Pip and Thea,” he continued, “I hate - I hate that even I have reason enough to believe we would cross that line at this point. And for what? I don’t think McConnell was ever going to bring Arnold’s bill to a vote. Despite it containing nearly everything Republican leadership is looking for, its passage would be seen as a late victory for the Obama Administration when it enjoyed public support in the wake of the senator’s disappearance … now it … they will bench it until after the election when not permanently, and how many friends have we made into enemies on its behalf.”

“Maybe less than you think,” Burr suggested. “@FIFAcom: the beautiful game found Marie! Thank you to players and fans for coming together to spread the word. – To which @Eggshell responded: You Swiss twat! @PoliceScotland found Marie thanks to the extraordinary efforts of her friends and family to force the search upon them. – To which @juventusfc added: Vediamo cosa può fare il calcio … €50K per chiunque abbia informazioni sulla sorte di #SenatorArnold … something the parent company FCA offered up in English -”

“I don’t need a translation. We are already aware of and monitoring the situation. Chiara Agnelli is married to one of the Tarletons … though I wouldn’t put it past them for this offer to be born purely of trade-based interest from that end.”

“I wonder if the culprit feels the same way,” Burr suggested. “It doesn’t buy the FBI much in the way of better press, but it could lead to Arnold’s safe return which seems to be the stated objective of this venture.”

“Can you expand?” Hamilton shifted.

“I’m not sure what there is to explain,” Burr shrugged. “There is absolutely no reason to think that Arnold’s disappearance is linked to organised terror of any sort, Islamic, Long-Island teens with manchettes, whatever Fox is throwing around this morning – it doesn’t fit that pattern. I think you are looking for a single actor, and I think you wise to negotiate a fee through a third party, and to negotiate now when the culprit can surely see that the value of his captive is declining in value, especially when seen against the accrued cost he must be facing to keep Arnold in a drugged state post-crackdown.”

“This was Tallmadge, not me,” the ADIC admitted.

“Did your office take him on after he resigned his commission with Clinton?” Burr quite nearly laughed.

“No, no – he is acting on his own,” Hamilton said, wishing emotion had not gotten in the way of what would have been a good decision. “I think the case has gotten to him. Or maybe it was the grounds on which he was set to be dismissed, of the package DI Yilmaz opened in his place. Whatever his reasons, last night he went up to Albany and in a meeting with several of the suspects identified a construction worker named Robert Rogers as the kidnapper, something that fits with
what we have come to know of John André’s social network -”

“You mean his test subjects.”

“I suppose I do,” Hamilton considered. “Anyway, they came on this plan to make a public ransom offer, the same you cite - both embarrassing the government that has manipulated the investigation to fit its own ends and ensuring that those be fulfilled. But I only know about this because of a mole – Caleb Brewster who plays in a band with an agent I had undercover at a forgery operation for some time, sent a clandestine text to the man mid-meeting, asking him to have a check of the Woodhull residence, concerned as he was for the children and the au pair left to guard them. It now seems there was a confrontation and the identity of the kidnapper can in fact be confirmed, but he is on the run once more – my agent not able to give chance, back up not arriving in sufficient time to yet find a trail.”

“Then he must be desperate. Rogers. How many of New York’s Finest do you want me to ask the commissioner to assign to this?” Burr offered, reaching for his phone. Hamilton gave a slight shake of his head.

“I’m wondering if I should not let this play out on its own. Only …”

“Only?”

“This might be our last best shot if the defence bill is to be scrapped. I want to call her directly, Agnelli, see what we might sort out.” He pressed to open the boot of his wife’s SUV and pulled out a package from the zippered pocket of his monogrammed luggage, “as it works out, I can do just that without Washington getting word.”

“I think you best do,” Burr agreed, sighing when he took in his friend’s expression. “I’ll go in, buy something sugary for the kids, argue with Eliza and then waste another ten minutes finding a game in the gift shop, something to distract them all from the drive. Half an hour?”

“Should do,” Hamilton smiled. He felt like screaming.

The cannister did little to keep the coffee warm; that, or Ben Tallmadge had simply been sitting at the breakfast table longer than he might have otherwise anticipated. Before he could bring the lukewarm liquid to his lips, he let out a yawn loud enough to interrupt the latest incarnation of a scene he had watched unfold multiple time over the course of the past ten hours.

“I know, right?” Ban Tarleton snorted in response to this uncontrolled reflex, freeing himself as much as he might from the tear-filled embrace of a small woman who could well have passed for the colonel’s sister were it not for the fact that Ben otherwise recognised her voice. “Effs, you know who I didn’t get the whole Tom Sawyer reception from?” Tarleton posed. “Our own fucking government, which is ironic in the sense that I’d not have encountered the works of Mark Twain without the structured incompetence they mistake as strategy. Least that Cornwallis could have done, one would figure, would be to force a few wild lamentations such as your own -”

“I’m legitimately happy that you are alive and well!” Elizabeth Gwillim insisted, sounding annoyed all the same. She had arrived with a small entourage of staff and bodyguards a quarter hour earlier, interrupting a far more important discussion by virtue of her presence and profession. Ben returned his eyes to his phone, checking to see what was trending on search engines and social
media. The Royal Wedding lead traffic’s procession by a wide margin, followed by FiveThirtyEight, Marie Robinson, Republican Primary, Scottish Independence referendum, Juventus FC, a breakup between minor celebrities from a reality show he had never seen, and a number of other conflicts of which he was not part. Senator Arnold, he noted, was not on any where’s list or anyone’s mind, nor was the US/EU trade agreement that the senate was preparing to vote on at the same time the wedding began - as he could reasonably assume had been by McConnell’s design. He needed to keep things this way, rather, he needed Ms Gwillim who had frustratingly been granted a monopoly on coverage to continue making as much of a distraction as she could herself manage without falling into distractions of her own. Ben had sent John Graves Simcoe away with the excuse that he needed him arranging wedding-related logistics at the court house in the early hours for this very reason. Effie, he noted, surrounded herself with men would could have been his physical double, with men who might have been twin souls of Tarleton, whom Ben reasoned he might have also done better to dismiss.

“Speaking of forced lamentations, I thought you went to public school, mentioned it in my eulogy anyway,” George Hanger, who, by comparison, had made an even more elaborate show of his sympathies an hour or so earlier inquired with genuine interest. “I didn’t think you had a curriculum dictated by the government’s whims -”

“No, no – that is I couldn’t tell you a damn thing about what we were meant to read at school,” Tarleton laughed, dismissing the notion with a waving gesture of his un-scared hand. There was something hallow in the sound and Ben wondered if it was mere exhaustion or something more. The colonel had complained to him upon arrival that he had barely hit the pillow before being awakened by the teenager intern with who he shared a room, informed that they would soon need to return to the pub Tarleton had himself only just left in order to decorate it for the reception. At present the two were in something a stand-off, the boy was sitting at a far table with a bowl of unsweetened breakfast cereal he made a bitter show of eating, having been told to do so by a man for whom he had no affection or respect; Tarleton, meanwhile, holding up his end of the bargain by gathering reinforcements – Caleb, Abe, and Ben himself. Though he could not state his intentions to those skilled in the art of inquiry, Ben hoped his strange ally would not extend the request to his friends with press passes. He needed them constantly putting out empty content about the event they had come to cover. He needed to make sure the outside parties all got the agreement they were after, knowing it would be in his favour, and Arnold’s, if his hand remained hidden until backroom offers could be given a chance to lead to arrests.

“We had to read Huckleberry Finn,” Miss Gwillim interjected.

Colonel Tarleton rolled his eyes. “Well, maybe you did, Love, I had to captain the football and polo teams to victory and thought the best use of my spare time was to manage the expectations of the entire female portion of the student body when it came to sex-”

“How can you be any more vulgar?” Gwillim accused. “Honestly, how did the world fall apart with the simple construct of your being absent from it?”

“Good man,” Hanger winked.

“As I was saying, I’m victim to extended layovers in boring airports. I now have time enough to read.”

“They always get you in the end,” Caleb nodded with a feigned solemnity, snorting back a laugh when the chorus of foreign correspondents created an echo.

“Death and taxes and the so-called classics,” Tarleton smiled. “Speaking of anticipated layovers though,” he shifted, “George, I would quite like to read this obituary you wrote for me, if you
wouldn’t mind securing me a copy.”

“It is mostly about a goat,” Caleb gave.

Ben had read it as well, dismissing it initially as boyhood phantasy; however, upon meeting Hanger, he could reasonably concede that there might well be some truth to the tale told in memorial of how he and Tarleton first met – bets, beer gardens, excessive yet excused insubordination and pinning the blame for a crime on officials who had all but made it impossible to safely return a mascot they had inadvertently nicked somewhere along their warpath. “To annoy you with literary undertones,” he said, “it reminds me a bit of the end to Hunchback, where Phoebus decides to save the goat that he finds amusing over his gypsy bride Esmerelda.”

“But life is more tragic still – my gypsy wife left me for a tinker and the goat Hennes, who I’ll freely admit I found quite a bit more interesting, was euthanised two years later by the very people we were trying to return him to. Arthritis. Ten years later and I’m still technically married, too, according to the Standesamt in Göttingen” Hanger lamented, “though … it does save me in taxes. Lord bless German bureaucracy at the local level, may it ever fail to function.” He raised his cup as though it were filled with libations rather than white-tea, “To marriage, and Hennes, and Ban not being dead, I guess.”

Tarleton’s eyes lit up and he leaned in with more enthusiasm for his reported exploits than could be said to befit the reasonable line of questioning that followed. “Oi, you didn’t! Not really, no? You told the world about what we did at that cup? Is that all passed the statute of limitations, then?”

“I think you’d do better to worry about Gladbach fans and might want to avoid Glasgow at the start of next season in what seems the inevitable event that they wind up in a Champions League group with Celtic. It seems you’ve since committed far more interesting crimes than kid-napping a local hero with a few of your mates and bringing him down the Rhine with you whilst you were on the run from gambling debts and a woman you seduced on a separate bet.”

“I think … in light of all that has happened, that is, my being dead and all, the FA might do the right thing and drop the ban they’ve against me, meaning I’ll not need to waste my time feigning interest in the Scottish league. Still, quality way to go down in history, that.”

“Well, one can hope,” Hanger smiled.

“I’m a bit lost,” Abe admitted.

“Yea … in translation, this is one of the few incidences where footy isn’t an ersatz for a large societal conflict which we’ve yet to agree on politically correct nomenclature for the sake of discussion. The history in short – I broke into a stadium as a teenager when I couldn’t secure tickets to the derby, got caught, received a lifetime ban for my efforts and am now forced to travel outside of England for the full sporting experience – bad airports and all. To be honest, sometimes I’m even a bit confused by it – Effs, take a seat,” he bade. To Ben’s private annoyance, the editor complied. “Why does Mary Anne hate me so much outside of my complaint about half the league being relegated?” he pouted. “Now that George has me on sport in Scotland.”

“Ban … have you ever … just in general, do you listen to yourself when you speak?” Gwillim squinted.

“Fade in and out,” Tarleton admitted.

“There you have it,” she snorted, softening. “But … Mary Anne doesn’t hate you. She cried with Ellie when we learned the news. Ellie-”
“Spare me,” Ban shook his head. “It is like this,” he said, making eye contact with Ben, “do any of you remember having a friend in high school and having a load of other friends besides making a constant running commentary of ‘oh my gosh, you two would make such a cute couple, you should totes be going out’ and how annoying that was?” he asked in a bad imitation of a female voice. “Imagine still having to hear the same in your thirties,” Tarleton sighed, shifting his attention to Gwillim. “It is fucking bollocks and always was. Ells and I are never going to be an item, never were - the attraction just isn’t there. Let it go.”

“Yeah not having gone to school with you lot, I still beg to differ. You are constantly letting this attraction you deny be the cause of your ruin,” Hanger said. “Have you and Francis even spoken since Brazil?”

Ben straightened, suddenly afraid of how widely what he thought himself to have been told in relative confidence was known and how far it might yet travel. Hanger had proven his value in creating conditions that might convince Rogers to surrender Arnold, and Ben had presumed he had done so as a favour to an old friend. As he truly studied the two men together, however, he wondered if they could even be said to share the same humour. George Hanger was a lanky blonde with a prominent nose and a fixed gaze that contradicted his crooked, easy smile; Ban Tarleton, by contrast, wore a smile that seemed genuine but his dark eyes confessed that he was never entirely in the same moment as those whose company he shared (though he otherwise posed constantly and seemingly consciously for his audience, trying to make his small frame both more attractive and more intimidating.) They each laughed as though life were easy, and maybe they saw their shared parody for what it was. All the same, however good the act, it could not entirely conceal an underlying tension. Like most everyone else, they both wanted more out of this than a clean sheet. Hanger, Ben worried, likely wanted a cover rather than a column to come out of his involvement.

“Yea … why not? I saw him some two months back?” Tarleton blinked.

“Oh because of the affair?” Gwillim injected. He realised she had been staring at him, perhaps understanding an unspoken concern in his expression. He wondered how much she knew and questioned if there might be some wisdom in inviting her into the plot before she pieced it together herself.

Hanger shook his head in disapproval. “You were so incensed that -”

“I’m not deserving of this!” Tarleton complained. “The conflicts that ensued during and after have nothing to do with any - Effie, chaps, here is how it went down: Two years ago, George here had a good thing going covering the World Cup in Brazil, and on occasion snuck Francis and I, whom he invited along, extra press passes so we could go to a few of the games.

“He got pulled last minute to do television when the scheduled pundit fell ill, meaning for once we’d have to secure our own cards, which should have been a simple fete giving my own connections but instead proved a test of endurance. One of my elder brothers is an agent – tried to ring him, his line was busy. O’rite. To be expected, I suppose. Tried another brother who was at that time an assistant scouting director at a large Italian outfit - which wouldn’t ordinarily lend itself to observing internationals, but it so works out that he’s also wed to a Brazilian model with a Victoria’s Secret contract, and I figured she would be in the stands so I rang up, she said fine, we could join her entourage – made it to the stadium to find she had changed her mind, which I might have anticipated given our history, but whatever. As luck – and this was truly luck – would have it though, my on again, off again girlfriend has a load of personal relationships within the music industry and she called up after I’d posted my frustrations to Facebook and told Francis and I that Jay and B had something come up and wouldn’t be in attendance as a result, so in short we would up with better seats to Germany v Brazil than fucking Clayton and Marisol had themselves-“
"You know Jay-Z and Beyoncé?" Caleb interrupted.

"No. Well. Loosely," Tarleton squinted. "I may have over-sold that. We’ve never spoken but we’ve been in the same room. My sister is a professional equestrian and knows Thomas Müller through his wife and Jay-Z manages Jérôme Boateng, so I once ended up in Bavaria at a house party with the rapper but I couldn’t get within five feet of him. Beyoncé and Mary collaborated on a song together and I was allowed on set when they were shooting the video with a similar security apparatus. Brilliant through – I was told not to make eye contact which was all but permission to stare at her tits the whole time and Mary’d no reason to thus go on one of her jealous fits of artistic exaggeration."

"I swear to God, Banastre -" Gwillim fumed.

"What E-liz-ah-bet?" Tarleton grinned.

"You are truly to hero we deserve," Hanger laughed.

"Yea, yea – so I don’t really know the Carters, but I did wind up in their seats during the World Cup back in twenty-fourteen, whereby I misused my mistaken celebrity as the cameras found me while searching for those more significant, focusing in on us right while Francis and I were in the middle teaching a load of Germans - or maybe just Germany supporters - the ‘It's just like watching Brazil!’ chant – used ironically, of course - you can throw that to ol’ Johnny Sims. But oi! The score was mad! Any road, after the match we met back up with George, couldn’t find a restaurant to seat us, wound up in a proper dive bar where I listened to a voice mail from my sister-in-law in which - after teaching me each and every Portuguese word for ‘wanker’ - told me she never wanted to speak to me or see my face again … and to the credit of her resolve, she evidently didn’t even accompany Clayton and the kids to Liverpool for what would have been my funeral as a curtesy, so there you are. Stereotype confirmed.

"To what George was referring to with Francis and Ellie though, that same night, after we’d had more than enough to drink, he offered up a riveting tale about how they two had recently hooked up at a yacht party. I’d thought they had been a one-off back at uni, but nope – this was an ongoing, uncommitted thing. Being drunk, I went on about needing a yacht myself, as such seemed a good idea at the time. I went home with the bartender but was far too gone to make it worth her while. And that was that. We were never had a row about it, even when we might have done. Why would we be fighting? I remember that evening being a right good time for everyone who wasn’t Brazilian. It’s altogether pointless to talk to Francis nowadays as he is just entering politics and has thus adapted a manner of speech where he speaks at length without actually betraying his position on anything, even within the scope of his private life, but my light annoyance and animosity will pass and, any road, has nothing whatsoever to do with Ellie Hew."

"Well, good, because if you ask me Lady Eleanor is so fucking thin the sex tape would look like one of those World Food Programme ads that run each Yuletide. There is quite literally nothing there to fight over -"

"You’ve made your point," Tarleton snapped.

"I’ve not though?" Hanger argued, his small eyes narrowed. "Every time the bird gets mentioned you work yourself into a right foul mood and it makes no bloody sense. It costs too much to touch her and while you’re wasting time and working connections to get into those kinds of private clubs with five-thousand-quid cocktails, far more fulfilment can be found on any street corner for a fraction of the cost. That much I can promise you. I had bloody average sex with one of the most famous women in the world a few nights back, and the worst of it was I was in St Pauli and could have had a proper professional whose name I would have never had to bother myself to know and
who I’d never have to have an awkward one-way encounter with over the radio or whatnot. But with you I get the distinct feeling at times that it’s never about sex, it’s about status, and the fuck would you even do with an honorific? I’m technically in the right to use ‘Lord’ myself, but I see no purpose in it, at least … I think I’ve a better sex life than Francis Lord Rawdon and whichever -”

“That is quite enough.”

“Suit yourself.”

“Think I will, thanks,” Tarleton replied, falling back into a grin as he commented out of hand, “still fancy having a yacht though.”

“A boat is a good thing to have, only reason Benny Boy hooked up with me,” Caleb winked.

“Tis,” Ben smiled. Abe laughed and for a moment is truly seemed that everything was alright. Ben looked around the table again, at old friends having ordinary arguments, cursing himself for falling into suspicions that served nothing. Everyone was exhausted, no one wanted anything more than to help one another out of the horrible reality they all faced, that they had all seen their lives disrupted by Arnold’s disappearance, hindered by the body politic that stood to profit. The only way to win was giving the government exactly what they were after, and Ben had found a way to do so whist smoking out the real culprit.

He took another sip of bad coffee, remembering his old office, the machine who had been made redundant shortly before him, the officers he had worked with, the ones he had lost and found a certain peace he hoped Nate and Hatice also knew. There would be no paperwork. He might be asked for a statement, and afterwards, he would return with Caleb to his houseboat and make love until the world had been forgotten.

“Innit just?” Tarleton laughed. “I don’t know fuck about sailing though, so it would be a waste.”

Caleb shot Ben a smile before he began explaining the basics of something in which he had considerable experience and skill to a captivated audience, showing pictures on his phone of his floating home as well as the small fishing vessel he actually took out, letting Ben imagine they two were together on the high seas or, rather, in the quiet sound, picnicking in the sunset on those SPAM-and cheese sandwiches Caleb liked to make when the fish were not biting, imagining that life could really be as simple as others made it seem. He looked again at what was tending, and, seeing little change was ready to put the device away with the worry that all others had seemingly forgotten.

It rang before he could put it into his pocket.

A. Ham, FBI ADIC – NY his touch-screen illuminated. Ben did not answer and he did not speak until he realised all other conversation has ceased. “I … I better get this,” he swallowed. “If you would please excuse me.”

For a while, he did not speak, being preoccupied with the act of listening. Thereafter, in what felt to him a rather long time, Ben could not get the words out over the betrayal that chocked and threatened to cripple him as he struggled for his balance in the glass atrium separating the hotel’s foyer from the street.
“We have having breakfast together,” he answered when Hamilton twice repeated his surname with a hint of concern. Ben tried to swallow but was met by a sting as his throat contracted upon itself to capture what little phlegm clogged at the base of his tongue, causing betrayal’s burn to charge through him as he continued. “Nearly all of us, all of us, anyway, who are not part of the wedding party itself. What are you asking me to do?”

Alexander Hamilton should not have had a reason at this hour to ask anything of him, and would not, but for Caleb Brewster having spent the full of last night texting everything that was said in the confidence of their congress to Robert Townsend, whom he knew from Abe’s narrative to be working either for or with the FBI. Ben did not know why this surprised him, why he had ever allowed himself the pleasant phantasy of trust. They had, after all, first found themselves in each other’s arms in an attempt to obtain information. So seen, Ben had no grounds on which he could fault Caleb for furthering his efforts towards espionage, especially giving Hamilton’s explanation over what may have been prevented as a result.

While listening to Ben as he discussed and debated Hewlett and Simcoe over the possible places Roger’s might be holding Arnold in the Setauket area, working out the mathematical probability of each, Caleb had been communicating with his friend Robert about a hideout the rest of them had been quick to dismiss. He had undertaken this action clandestinely as to not alarm Mary and Abigail over the present safety of their sons, writing that while Arnold seemed to have been largely confined to cellars and basements - that Whitehall’s doubled as a laundry room and was in constant use - the property did have a garage that no longer was. Several weeks before, when Abigail and Cicero had taken up residence, Richard Woodhull had invited these new tenants to use his garage as a storage, primary so that Culper Ring could no longer practice there and Edmund Hewlett would no longer have a spot to park his fancy white sportscar away from the late-winter elements. As the judge often proved himself petty, no one had thought much of this at the time, but Caleb, who worked amongst boxes and knew what damp cardboard could do to sound, asked his friend to have a check.

By the time Robert Townsend had made it out to the far side of town, Robert Rogers was gone if only just, because there were signs of a struggle, Townsend did not give chase, instead putting in a call to his superiors, to forensics, to the paramedics, to his father and sister to come and comfort the children while he waited with Aberdeen, passed out on a cement floor stained with someone else’s blood. When she revived her senses, upset but unharmed, she spoke of having seen the senator when she had followed sounds and shadows throughout the house. Perhaps Rogers, assuming that everyone had left the property had walked inside to gather more provisions for himself and his prisoner. Aberdeen had wondered to Robert and Sally on the way up to Albany if he might well have been camping there for quite a while, food had been disappearing from the refrigerator as of late, but she had, again, thought little of it as she had a fair few more housemates than she once did: Cicero was going through a growth-spurt, Anna and Abigail were both given to stress-eating and Mary to stress-baking and stress-banquet-throwing for anyone who happened to knock – Simcoe, the lads on his soccer team, the kids he coached and the parents who then came around after work to pick them up.

Ben identified with the frustration, perhaps in greater share that Aberdeen, Caleb, Townsend or Hamilton. He hated having been in the same home as both captured and culprit, hated that he was learning all of this from a man who had offered himself as an ally in the initial stages of the investigation but had become an enemy to the search itself as it struggled to progress.

Ben Tallmadge wanted to scream.

Alexander Hamilton, however, wished to negotiate.
That won’t do, he said of breakfast. Your plan won’t work unless Rogers truly believes you broken, that he has the upper hand.

“I’m not sure that we aren’t,” Ben said, staring at Caleb as he continued to laugh with the hotel’s other guests, telling a story with Abe - doubtlessly about the sort of experience to which Ben would not be able to relate for he had too long not taken part in a private existence of any kind. It occurred to him with sadness that such was still not an option for him. What he now knew, Caleb had known all morning – Caleb, who kissed him, who laughed with his friend without any indication of that which he knew to have been happening in the man’s home. The trust he had felt, the calm that came with it had vanished with any suggestion of hope. Ben would always be a cop. Caleb, it seemed, would always be a spy.

You are better off with the support I can provide, Hamilton cautioned him.

“I would have been better off if your support had come three weeks ago when promised,” he spat, resuming the posture and tone of a detective, lonely for the limitations which profession place upon his personal life.

I just rang up Chiara Agnelli, having found her private number in the phone we confiscated from Banastre Tarleton, asking if her division was making an offer of its own independent initiative, finding, as I’d imagined, that while the action is primarily motivated by trade interests owing to her own family’s primary concern, she credits you with the idea – and it worries me that Rogers might as well. This, however, can be avoided for the self-same reasons I think your objective will find you out.

Ben nodded to himself. Hewlett had echoed the same concern the evening prior. “What do you propose?” he asked.

I’ve never met Colonel Tarleton … tell me, how does he seem to you? Hamilton asked after a considered pause.

“What do you mean, ‘how does he seem?’ He’s normal, relatively chipper giving what he’s endured with his child having disappeared without a trace, at least to compare him to Lafayette, to Ingram, Burr, your good wife and yourself – I think, in terms of Tarleton, in part it might be an act … but insofar as his friends are reacting to him, such seems his standard.”

It won’t do, Hamilton sighed. Tell me, Tallmadge, you speak of acts and I know you to have participated in theatre during your undergraduate at Yale – how sold are you in this piece of performance?

“My judgement is clouded by my time as a criminal investigator, Sir. Giving what I otherwise know of the man, I think he may have once genuinely been that which he plays at, I think he is playing up his more laddish tendencies a bit more in the company and for the benefit of his best friend … but last night I saw something … a daresay almost evil in him when confronted, but it was brief. I think he is far too self-aware to let that side of himself show in company, polite or otherwise.”

Do you think you could break him?

“I don’t know that I have cause to, Sir,” Ben frowned.

You do, Hamilton said. I made an arrangement of my own with Agnelli. Seeing as Rogers is likely going to draw upon the same connection, I think it best that he speaks to Tarleton while negotiating this hostage situation, but Rogers has to believe that the FBI is not involved – that the
colonel has no allegiance, however loose <<

“To be fair, he doesn’t.”

>>True, but by every account I’ve heard, Rogers isn’t the social sort who would pick up on a slight hint at repressed anger over the telephone when his contact is otherwise laughing. As I’ve said, I have his phone, and thanks to a series of failed and miscommunications, I have a file on it that … I mean to use to this advantage, but I need something from you. Tarleton was using Abe Woodhull’s phone last night; does he still have it?<<

“No, Abe -”

>>Good. I need you to make excuses for your friends, say you have to drive back to the city to pick up some equipment, a suit from a dry-cleaner – whatever you think is feasible and leave him without easy means of communication.<<

“He is going to help an intern set up for the wedding reception, a teenager, you know they are never far from their phones -”

>>Good. That should keep him distracted,<< Hamilton lowered his voice. The raspy whisper caused chills to crawl through Ben’s spine. >>I’m about an hour outside of Albany right now. I’ve already called for back-up to come disguised as well-wishers with waving flags and I’ll coordinate their position after communicating with Tarleton directly, privately, convince him to over-react to a perceived isolation … enough so to sell Rogers on the idea that he is operating on his own, which means … in the meantime there is something else I need you to do. Marie Robinson -<<

“I really don’t like where this is heading, Sir,” Ben said sharply. “With all due respect -”

>>Tallmadge, nearly everyone you are relying on for this plan to work is not directly aware of their role in it. The press, industry, the senate -<<

“You’ve made your point.”

>>The girl will be none the wiser. She is without her phone and I don’t want her posting on social media this morning via someone else’s computer, not when Tarleton will otherwise be in the company of a teenager who might chance across whatever she can think to write. I understand that you have something of a repertoire with Inspector Ferguson from Edinburgh where the child happens to be staying with a friend of her aunt’s – Mary Anne Burges? My department has reason to believe the two may know one another quite well -<<

“Sir, I am nearly positive they do,” Ben gave. “Ferguson might … I think there may be reason not to trust him, reason that extends beyond the fact that his fingerprints were found on documents linking Big Pharma to organised crime. When I’ve spoken to him, he hinted at and perhaps unwittingly used an alias, small things, insignificant to the conversation but perhaps suggestive of a larger pattern. I think he has manged to slip his way into his suspects’ lives, independent and outside of any course of investigation, and I think he is using these connections to his own ends.”

>>Well, you would be an expert on that, wouldn’t you ‘Benny-Boy’?<< Hamilton asked in Caleb’s language.

Ben felt the slight but chose not to address it. “I think he is Eggshell - Ferguson, on Twitter. I spent a goodly amount of my time on that page last night -”

>>As did I, as did many, many others. I think Ferguson is Memento Mori and John Bull on Twitter as well. I think he’s probably had sex with the younger Hewlett sister at some point. I think he once
shot and killed a man in cold blood during a union rugby match, and I think he resents the job his is bound to, based on whatever he witnessed that French authorities don't wish to be part of the public record, without his exactly realising that in essence, he has been acting as an agent for the other side for years … if you are looking to have your suspicions confirmed. All that said, I need you to ask him to find a way to keep Tarleton’s ward from posting a selfie of her dressed like Anna Strong, or attacking FIFA, or using her sudden celebrity towards advocacy, just until Rogers is in cuffs. He might be looking for her status updates as well.

“Alright. Alright. I’ll make the call. Please don’t cause me to regret it.”

>>She will be none the wiser. It just serves everyone’s immediate interest to bring Tarleton to his absolute worst tendencies.<<

“I can count a thousand ways this could go south,” Ben cautioned.

>>It is sometimes better to trust in the way things are than hold out hope for how we would want them to be,<< Hamilton answered.

Ben looked back inside. He wondered where this constant treachery left Caleb and himself.

“You’re popular,” Colonel Tarleton commented when Arthur again turned his attention his phone.

“I’m … not, that is the thing,” the intern answered, frowning that his phone was blinking with yet another friend request. It was not that he regretted involving himself in the search for a schoolmate, for he still maintained that he had been in the right to do so, it was that no one whom he had cause to care for the day before was paying him any mind. His worries around Marie had shifted from ‘for her safety’ to ‘for his own’ and these only increased with every curse Tarleton had for the task at hand.

He bit his lower lip, entirely too conscious of his mind’s cruel wording when the colonel barked, “You want to maybe help me with this?” in a tone Arthur already knew too well from Advanced French. Marie, he reasoned, would likely be livid when she learned that he had been the one to defeat her escape strategy. In the best possible scenario, she would vow to never speak to him again and he would only have to deal with the occasional snide comment from one of her friends – nothing so unlike that which he already faced, worsened only by his overtures towards friendship, by his intention of bringing her back to safety.

But this, he reasoned, taking note of the argument Tarleton’s presence gave in favour of nurture over nature, would likely be too much to hope for.

Marie, should she hold him in any way accountable for the personal consequences of her own actions (which, to here her father-figure speak, Arthur imagined might well prove severe) was likely holding all of her emotional ammunition until she had him at point blank range. If she had been given access to the internet, she likely would not waste her words where they might well go unread. She would instead chastise him in the court yard before everyone who mattered more and mattered most; their classmates, rather than the strangers he had unwittingly impressed by the simple virtue of having done something with the free Wi-Fi at a fast food chain beyond looking at the pictures his girlfriend had posted to Instagram – hashtag: no filter, hashtag: woke up like this – wanting to believe her, wanting to believe in the existence of harmless honesty.
“Wellesley!” Tarleton yelled at him again. “Hold this steady that it doesn’t fall and break something while I unscrew it … You know,” he continued after Arthur placed the whole of his weight against yet another metal recreation of a Guinness advertisement predating the First World War, “You don’t get to cry about Kitty after the shit you pulled at breakfast.”

“It isn’t that,” Arthur answered. Tarleton muted his negation with the sound of an electric screwdriver set to reverse. It annoyed him, though he had no great want of making conversation with the man otherwise.

“What then?”

Finding Marie’s name painful when it neared his lips, Arthur instead answered with a vague, “This.”

Tarleton shook his head. “The Americans are all in a band together and when George said ‘I’ll come with and help’ he misused a conjunction - that was not a connected thought. He’s helping, just not us – you – in your assigned task. I’m sure he’ll be back in a moment.”

“I meant Irish Pubs, conceptually,” Arthur explained. “I don’t understand why everywhere one goes to holiday outside of Ireland, you run into a place like this, usually packed with other tourists – who, rather than appreciate the local culture are content to sit in a darkened room filled with stereotypes in a fashion so fully disproportionate -”

“This is local culture,” Tarleton interrupted, “it is America, it is cheap imitation of something most won’t otherwise experience, you can’t well fault them for wanting to. Anyway, Guinness tastes better outside of your native Dublin – not owing exclusively to various food and drug laws to which all exported consumables are subject and the small altercations hence made - apropos, why Coke tastes different everywhere and you’d be hard pressed to find an IRN-BRU outside of the British Isles – it is the nostalgia. It is stronger, I’d imagine, the longer one has been away.”

“Stronger when one’s family has been living on the other side of the ocean for two, three generations?” Arthur snorted.

“That too.”

“I mean … I guess that makes sense. I just don’t get why anyone would want to pretend to be in Ireland when they have the privilege of being literally anywhere else,” he complained as he carried the sign to the pile they made of the others.

“Same reasons I’d imagine they go to any other sort of pub, forgetting one’s troubles, finding them anew.”

“I reckon he is too young to remember The Troubles, Ban,” Hanger said, re-emerging from the side – door, smelling of a half-smoked cigarette, damp air and cold sweat, his hair slightly wind-blown and tee-shirt a tad dishevelled from the way he rubbed at his bare arms, hoping them to recollect their warmth. His jacket remained on the back of a barstool. Maybe, Arthur thought, he had not expected whatever conversation he had been having to take quite as long as it had. He doubted, however, that anything the reporter had heard or said was of any great significance. “I’d take this dressed up version of Ireland any day – why are we undressing it?” he asked, “What is this?”

“It has to do with advertising rights and revenue,” Arthur explained. “We can’t keep the Guinness signs up as The Daily Mail will be taking pictures here and they could not negotiate a fee with the brewery in the time allotted.”
“No, no, that makes sense. Do you want -” Hanger began to offer before thinking better on it.

“Is that why you don’t like Anna?” Arthur asked as the sports writer turned societal columnist for the day began to walk away, back in the direction of his laptop at the bar with a half-drunk bottle of some German beer he had not paid for beside it. “Because of her confession?”

At this, Tarleton laughed. “Yes, George, why not enthral us all with a tale of what the bombings were like in fucking Gloucestershire.”

“Scared me for life, it did.”

“He is from the South West – this, to your point about Ireland - any land - having a sort of romance when seen from a comfortable diaspora. He didn’t grow up in Belfast as he’d have you believe.”

“I was bequeathed a house there, woe that the structure still stands if simply to accrue property tax – alas, no. I don’t resent Anna for being Catholic, I resent that I’m being made to pen a lifestyle piece about her wedding gown when I’ve otherwise something that will put me on salary. When I’ve – I’ve something so much better. Ban, that reminds me, Chiara says hi.”

“Bloody hell she does,” Tarleton snorted, resuming his task. Arthur considered that the colonel was more hindrance than help and wondered if this was by design. He reasoned that with his two fully-functioning hands he could get this work done far fast that Tarleton managed with his one and a half (if one was forced to be generous), but the man insisted that the power-tool was unsafe for a minor to be playing with. He sighed in frustration as he held the tacky advertisement steady.

“Jaein,” Hanger said slowly as he tried to force a frown, “she had some interesting tips though on how one might economise a lap dance for you but made no exact effort towards being cordial.”

“Did you lead her to believe that we were in a strip club at eleven in the morning?” Tarleton asked, turning away from the wall, leaving his work half-unfished but not releasing the tool that ‘was not a toy’.

“When she first rang, she misinterpreted the music from my laptop and I made the strategic decision not to correct her assumptions,” Hanger explained.

“Strategic? How is that then?”

“I’ve bought your way back into your family’s good graces, mate. Think on it, yea – your sister-in-law is expecting you to phone in the wee hours begging Wills to wire you more money, not realising that yet that she needn't worry - the reception is open bar and being attended by the same porn star whom John evidently hired for Edmund’s bachelor party … which incidentally doubled as your wake. Mate, she'll think you've gone and imporved yourself!”

“I ought instead to have died. That is a truly glorious way to be remembered,” Tarleton smiled of his own ill-repute.

“I was on the Reeperbahn when I got the news, the kind of debauched party your Mary would think to arrange but did not manage to attend. I took, or rather followed Rihanna back to her hotel – half in honour of your memory, half to save me from shelling out for my own – never again!”

“I can’t imagine the sex was bad,” Arthur mumbled to himself.

“It was when one factors in the effort one has to then put forward by way of conversation. No, young man, you’re better off paying a professional than subjecting yourself to the memories and musings of some woman who wants to ‘get to know you’ in exchange for something subpar, more
economic long-term, too.”

“How much does it cost to do it with … a professional?” the boy asked. Hanger seemed something of an authority on these matters, he also seemed to lack the language most adults used when discussing such matters within earshot of anyone school-aged, that, or maybe he had never learnt them in English and could not be bothered to censor a translation when he spoke. Over the course of the morning, between various absent minded utterances of ‘oder’, ‘aber’, and ‘also … gegenseitig zu’ (none of which, Arthur had been disappointed to learn, were swear-words) he had learnt that Hanger had gone to the prestigious University of Göttingen over Reading, than Eton, that he had there earned some degree in psychology and sports science (which he hoped to never need to ‘fall back on’) but since sophomore year had been sporadically employed by various papers and journals, having accidentally fallen into sport journalism which, he reasoned, was a respectable way of tramping through life. Arthur wondered if a nine-to-five would truly prove more of a torture than interviewing self-absorbed (and presumably stupid) athletes, but had no great cause to ask. Hangers chosen company, however, proved itself of far greater interest.

“As with any profession that is delegated by a variety of factors, experience, age, specialization – depends,” he explained. “Lola probably comes around two-fifty per trick, so roughly a thousand an hour. Depends on what it is you are looking for. Always does. Honestly, in your situation, I’d recommend you instead follow Ban’s example -”

“Why is that?” Arthur wondered.

“Because you are a virgin and I’m sure someone of Lola’s skillset would have a handsome surcharge if she did not refuse you outright.”

“He is also fifteen,” Tarleton said sharply.

“Really?” Hanger blinked, taking a closer look that caused Arthur to feel all the more self-conscious. He was tall and too thin, spot-ridden, still in braces, and trying desperately to hold himself above the emptiness he saw in his own age-demographic. He could pass himself off as older, but only by a bit, which was almost enough to seem impressive in his ability to buy alcohol in establishments were IDs were not strictly monitored before those whom he told himself constantly he had no cause to impress. He was lonely in at school in England, lonelier still when he looked through the socials to see how much fun his friends back home were having without him, how little he was missed, how little they could still have been said to have had in common. That morning he had spent more time with his reflection that he ordinarily afforded it, with his crooked nose, unbuild frame and the messy hair his mother cut, hearing the rejection of the college girls from the night before echo in the fan the light switched on, made all the worse when he went back into the hotel room he was being made to share, a shirtless Tarleton now sprawled on in the middle of the bed, looking like a statue from antiquity as he slept. Arthur turned on the news which roused his company from slumber, barely awake and still able to mock (‘Good morning, beautiful!’) and remind that he, much unlike Arthur, had laurels on which to rest (‘The pub? No – you don’t understand, I’ve only just left the bloody pub and now you want me to go back?’) He hated him. He hated everything that the man was by relation of everything he himself was not – and this, before the condescending lecture about Artur needing a balanced breakfast and the embarrassing incident that then took place in the adjacent lobby.

“I know, I asked him if he could buy me beer, too, yesterday when we first met,” Tarleton laughed, entirely unhinged. He gestured to Arthur’s height between slapping his thigh, undaunted by his own comparative shortness; then, he was old enough to purchase wine and practiced enough with women that self-consciousness and critique were altogether elusive.
“I’m not – I was doing fine until you showed up and spoiled everything!” Arthur protested, embarrassed when this caused Hanger to join in the cachinnation. After forcing his way through a pre-portioned package of cold breakfast cereal, realising that he had forgotten the sketches Susan had made about how the reception was meant to look (same, he thought, as she had forgotten to organise an outsource for this task the way she had given over the court house to professional florists) he had been surprised to find a face he had become quite accustom to seeing on screens as of late. Mistaking the ways in which he spent his spare time as a shared interaction, he called out in greeting, ‘Lady Lola!’ to which the porn-star smiled, ‘Lord …?’

‘Wellesley,’ Arthur gave. ‘Can I buy you a drink?’

‘Can you?’ she asked coquettishly, sashaying the three steps it took her to reach the unmanned hotel bar. Arthur hastened to follow, arriving moments before the receptionist manning both stations. Arthur pulled out the wine-card, pretending to study the three available options with the eye of a sommelier, when in fact the only description that interested him was the price and he immediately decided on the five-dollar bottle over those costing three-twenty-nine and three-ninety-nine, respectively, sure that this selection would impress the woman he had every intent of impressing upon. ‘We’ll take the merlot,’ he told the receptionist, confident in his selection.

‘I need to see some ID,’ the woman said flatly. Arthur produced his elder brother's from his wallet along with a fiver, accurately verifying all of the information he was asked. The receptionist shook her head.

‘He’s fifteen,’ Tarleton said, yanking him from his barstool and offering an apology to Lady Lola, who laughed, leaned over, gave him a kiss on the cheek and whispered, ‘Valiant effort. Call me when you are a tad bit older.’

Tarleton, in such time, had re-confiscated the ID the bartender had meant to bring back to the front desk and began to chastise, ‘No one knows their fucking licence number, you need to acquire a fair bit more finesse if you mean to so misbehave’ – making a point of illustrating just how inexperienced Arthur truly was in all things since.

“So what is it that you ‘do’?” Arthur now demanded of him.

“Ban? Basic, basic!” Hanger laughed. “Watch, tonight he’ll work his way into a conversation with a woman laughably out of his league but not quite worldly enough to yet realise it – two drinks, three dances and then somewhere ‘private’ that vaguely threatens exhibition, creating an excitement that excuses the act’s two -, three-minute duration?”

“It is economic,” Tarleton said through a clenched-tooth smile.

“If you use a condom, sure. Atty – real advice from the adult world: Ban earns more than the double what I do, but I’ve nothing saving me from squandering the whole of what I bring in. It is better so. This girlfriend you keep looking at to see if she’s called – stop, delete her number, block it,” he instructed. “Have your pick of bridesmaid in a corner or coat closet before establishing an impossible point of comparison for such things and then when you come of age, have your adult fun with women who actually know what they are doing and are willing to indulge you.

“Now gents, my work here being done, if you’d be so kind to excuse me, I have to go write around five articles about dresses themselves as opposed to the thrill of watching them fall to the floor so I can actually get back to work doing research for the piece I actually want to pen. Oh! Oh! But Ban, what I meant to tell you - if you are also bored with this whole wedding business, I did get something not worth a fact check if you need a dog in this fight.”
Arthur edged forward with interest.

“While Edna, Duchess of Hamilton isn’t herself in attendance – there is a wardrobe update for er all the same,” he coughed and cleared his throat. “Evidently, her highness routinely dons a mascot costume and animates crowds at live sporting events, having taken years of interpretive dance her title disallows her to otherwise do anything with. That is what Chiara rang with. That and … something about Pogba which Juve is going to throw out as a distraction come the morrow or … maybe she’ll give the go-ahead later today, whenever we are done here, I suppose. You’ve me confused over how time actually works, that I’ve a think on it, why-”

“You can’t print that,” Tarleton told him without humour.

“Have you the right to censor?” Hanger smiled – not for the first time, Arthur noted, the man’s hard gaze not quite matching his grin.

“In a security concern, it just so happens. You know football attracts nationalist-types and someone is bound to read that and take a shot at whoever happens to wear a costume in official capacity, hoping to hinder or further the cause of Scottish independence, depending, I guess, on which side of the wall they are on. I’m serious,” Tarleton warned. “That is not the sort of atmosphere we want to invite, nor do you want innocent blood on your hands.”

“Aye,” Hanger rolled his eyes. “God are you ever fucking dull when casting yourself in this fiction of responsibility and reason.”

“I concur, but in all fairness George, I hate being made to ‘adult’ in response to the absence of virtue you feel constantly obliged to represent.”

“Yea?” Hanger snorted, “get off it then.”

“He is fifteen,” Tarleton stressed. Arthur wanted to die. Hanger only shrugged.

“He had the good sense to try his luck with Lady Lola. How many schoolgirls had you had your way with by that age? You have kids and therefore to my mind anyway, absolutely no critical distance about how they get on,” the reported challenged.

“Quite the contrary, I think people are given to the assumption that children mature at different rates based on a number of unquantifiable factors of upbringing and environment – but that is simply not the case. They all suffer from being exposed to a world without an appropriate sense of judgement and we’ve therefore to pretend that we have to assume some type of -”

“You told me yesterday to sleep with as many girls as possible,” Arthur interrupted.

“Advice I stand by. But use a condom.”

“Yea,” Hanger agreed, “always do that. Right, cheers.”

“What are you writing?” Arthur asked. “Your big piece?”

A dark smile crossed Hanger’s lips. “An association football team was the subject of phycological testing, funded in part by one of the committees Arnold sits on in the senate, which, ironically, lead to his disappearance,” he told. “Politics invented a way to profit from this development and hindered that investigation which ensued, causing said Sunday-leaguers to suspect one another as having committed this crime, leading – for this research was intended for military application, to ultra-violent incidences, raising the debate over responsibility that I’m well certain it will take some court years to settle.
“But avoiding speculation, the project had a ripple effect throughout the sporting world – the Everton jersey, the kids of the ADA assigned to said case and ADIC of New York FBI field office being subject to police violence because of additional evidence found on the pitch where they were having a practice, the series of texts exchanged between the two leading suspects seemingly about matches rather than the stock market they were unknowingly used to manipulate, and then – to top it off, when politics and diplomacy have failed everyone, when murders have been attempted, committed, covered in the interest of protecting a clause in a piece of legislation that the senate is no longer willing to consider -some of the best minds from all sides sit down at a table together: from the original research project, a high powered stock broker who may or may not have made the man he has been hunting disappear in the first place and a prince who quite nearly has an academic title in astrophysics; then there is ex-Inspector Tallmadge, scandal aside generally regarded to be among the best in policing; you’ve got the UNICEF lady who took a tackle after scoring a header on her debut – not speaking metaphorically, this is still about sport – any road, she happens to be the same to have saved a number of orphans from a military offensive; we’ve Britain’s most successful officer in the field right here – framed and then implemented in the disappeared of a former ally; an indie rock-star who has been helping a small town crime load hold the senator hostage and his band mate who has been acting as a spy for various factions; a woman who enjoyed quite a few caps for her national side; and the bitch who has low-key been keeping the public informed all along through historical fiction of all mediums … and between them, all they can come up with to save Arnold - this national hero - from the events he more or less willed into existence through a partnership with now-discredited Dr John André, is to have a professional, hugely successful football club offer a small sum towards the man’s ransom, which they are only willing to do because of the cover it creates for both their larger intent:

"This again, being the same as that of politics, seeing a trade deal through before the referendum in the UK and coming election in the US, and a transfer of a player to an English side for such an astronomical rate that one can imagine it ushering in another bubble burst – and this, nearly directly after the Americans have secured a victory over the sport’s governing body on corruption charges.

"And United is only considering the hundred-million or whatever Ban’s brother has it up to by this point because one of the players on John and Edmund’s Sunday-side happened to once live on an estate Fenway purchased along with Anfield, leading spies to misinterpret a series of phone calls as rival interest. Christ! The Stars and Stripes will never win a cup but through non-professional espionage, nationalistic paranoia and general incompetence, watch if they don’t upturn the whole world order. Sounds like a cover, or?” he grinned.

“Like a feature,” Arthur told him. “Not intending offence, just based on what one sees in newsstands.”

“Fair,” Hanger gave. “I’ll get back to it all the same. Hurry up with whatever you need to finish here, yea? I think it might well be in our interests to interview a few of these bridesmaids – apropos, Ban, come look at Peggy Shippen with me. Just your thing – pretty blonde, famous name, has reportedly had sex with those who will never let you forget they outrank you in every capacity, and is very likely smarter than you besides.”

“Sounds charming,” Tarleton answered with excitement.

“Plus, she is a card-carrying Republican, which one can reasonably take to mean ‘conceal-carry’, and I think her tits are bought.”

“Two more signs and I’m there!”
“We still have to decorate,” Arthur objected, half-offended that no bridesmaid had been found for him. “You could help, maybe – seeing as this small army you said Simcoe promised us will seeming never show.”

“Not feeling it, if I’m to be honest,” Hanger admitted.

“Frankly, I don’t see that you’ve any great basis of concern here, either,” Tarleton added. “This is your work experience, or? Since you’ve been here, you learned how to file things alphabetically, make a pot of coffee, pretend to your superiors that you’re not wasting time on social media, plus … you saved my life in a way and saved my kid from poor judgement – her own, her mum’s, and fucking Inspector Ferguson’s evoking ISIS in this - what more can you do here? We’ll more the tables, hang some flags and flowers, but with regard everything else in your planning you should more or less learn to accept that - owing to the faults of poor administration – a total victory isn’t always feasible. And that is your essay.”

Arthur blinked and asked Tarleton what he had been hoping for the chance to say to the man’s ward all morning. “Why are you being so unkind to me if you are not blind to the fact that I’m only trying to help?”

“Unkind?” Tarleton chuckled. “If I were being mean, trust me, you would know it. You’d never forget it. To that end, if tonight doesn’t work out for you despite the morning’s lesson in how to use a fake ID if found in a check-point situation … find me outside settling old scores. Since Simcoe let you down as well, it might be worth your while.”

“I don’t think -” Arthur began, but he was cut off by a series of hellos and hurried footsteps.

“What is this?” Hanger smiled. “When John spoke of a small army, he was not being facetious. Are you all here to help?” he asked the children who seemed to Arthur to be around Marie’s age. He nodded at them, asking the girl if she was familiar with ‘Twilight’ as he made his way to the bar to collect for her the plans his schoolmate had helped draw up.

“Almost all of us,” a voice came in response to Hanger’s question. “Colonel Tarleton?” he addressed before offering an introduction, “Alexander Hamilton, FBI. I believe you were having a conversation with one of my colleagues that you never quite got to finish. Rather,” he shifted, holding up a phone that must have belonged to the military officer, “There is someone I need you to have a conversation with on behalf of the organization I represent. I’ve been informed over the deals you took it upon yourself to work out last night and mean to facilitate them further with the resources I currently hold.”

Hamilton pressed play on what looked at a distance to be a voice-message as he approached.

>Dad, I am so, so sorry,<n
<< Marie’s voice came over the device. She was crying, sounding frightened and in considerable pain. Tarleton went pale and whispered something to Hanger before following Hamilton from the premises with haste.

When the door closed behind them, Hanger sat down at his laptop, finished what remained of his beer in a single gulp and beckoned for Arthur to join him. “I’m not what you would call a responsible adult,” he admitted, quiet enough that the boys carrying Guinness paraphernalia into the backroom and the girl who oversaw them in this could not hear. “I’ll take over here though in Ban’s absence … but for that to happen, I need a favour form you. Ban give you back your fake ID?” he asked, pulling out his own wallet.

“Yes,” Arthur confirmed shakily, unsure if he ought to accept the cash that he was being handed in a larger amount than Hanger looked capable of carrying.
“Good. I need you to drive out to Walmart and use it to purchase a firearm. I’d do so myself but there is a warrant out for my arrest. Hey, you wanted the whole American experience, or?” he asked, commenting lightly, “You might say this is why people like the phantasy Ireland of foreign pubs.”

Arthur, not knowing what to say, gave a nod. This, too, felt in error.

“I may never be this free again in my life,” Edmund Hewlett commented as he watched the guests entered the court house from a window in Judge Woodhull’s third storey office which their party had commandeered and occupied for the occasion.

“I sincerely hope you are speaking of the institution of marriage as opposed to your nob – no, no allow me to revise,” Simcoe winced, thinking better on it, “I never want to witness you in a kilt again, you look absolutely ridiculous, here,” he said, offering a pair of borrowed shorts. His own legs were chaffing against the itchy wool, and this despite the full kit he had meant to spare his skin from a Scottish pride that only presented itself during state events – shorts, knee-length underarmour, and the cup he wore on Sundays (half-certain as he was that someone would take a swing at him in this get-up.) He even wore the knee-high socks belonging to his uniform, albeit without the shin-guards (which Akinbode alone had elected to wear – worrying that his legs looked otherwise too thin.) If Edmund Hewlett had a thought of asserting his newly reclaimed regal authority in this changing chamber, he had not been successful – the lads had spent much of the morning sharing light-hearted mockery while they passed a bottle of madeira around the room, having a laugh at Hewlett and the circus that sprang up around this surname – a chorus of clowns who collectively decided to punctuate the joke of it all by wearing the socks they wore to soccer rather than the wool sent over from Scotland. For this, even the groom had been game – perhaps happy to himself signal that for all of the tribulations shoved up the side he managed and played for, it was his guests who would find themselves on trial in this same court house before the days end. It was better, he had said to Simcoe in a whisper, than winning a cup. ‘But still I would trade all the glory of titles for the honour and privilege of standing next the woman I mean to give mine to,’ Hewlett then mused. – ‘You ought to have let me write your vows,’ Simcoe had replied, ‘if you stand before God and Government, attempting to give yourself to Anna though a series of poorly delivered puns, my friend, you risk exposing you house for the cracks in its foundation.’ – ‘Ah, yes, yes, I fully expect her to beat me with her bouquet before the entire parish.’ – ‘Provided I don’t beat her to it,’ Simcoe warned.

In truth, he felt like weeping on this day – not for sorrow, not for happiness, but rather for everything that overwhelmed him past the point of words. Edmund Hewlett, whom he had spent more than half a lifetime loathing and begrudgingly admiring, had been a true friend to him all along, had risked death, imprisonment and exile with the intent of righting the wrongs of his youth – wrongs that it had only just occurred to Simcoe the night prior he had long not held him accountable for. In January, Hewlett had nearly taken his own life – would his beloved foe have been led so far from reason had he himself had a better grasp? Now, Edmund Hewlett was about to get married before nearly everyone who ever thought they had cause to see him undone – everyone, save perhaps for John André, who would never be welcomed in society again which felt a more acute punishment. Simcoe wanted to hug his friend and tell him how proud he was; he wanted to return to the razor-edged joviality of the early hours, of the continental
breakfast they had been enjoying before Tallmadge had seen them dismissed – he wanted to smile, but actively, his mind was occupied by the unwelcome image of Hewlett ‘commando’ and yet fully comfortable in his kilt. He was too poised, too practiced. It was terrifying. Simcoe again tried to shove the shorts into the groom’s hands.

“Would you come off it?” Hewlett spat, averting his attention from the procession of guests and gawkers as he turned form the window to meet his gaze.

“Most of the lads either brought a pair or panicked and dug through the sports bags in the boots of their cars to avoid a draft,” Simcoe explained uncomfortably, “these aren’t mine. They are Pip’s.”

“Would you stop try to lend out the clothing articles of preteens?” Hewlett sneered. “You remember what happened last time -”

“I don’t like the idea of you being exposed in my general vicinity. Cover your pompous little arse and commit to spending enough time in the gym that one needn’t step into the junior section of a department store to find you something that will fit.”

“Hard pass,” Hewlett replied, “I’ve, ah … only recently gotten past that horrid spell of athlete’s foot.”

“I’ll get you a pair of flip flops. A belated wedding gift.”

“You needn’t.”

“No,” Simcoe agreed. “I already bought you a thousand-odd dollar mixer – a KitchenAid, Mrs Woodhull having been so courteous to inform me that this is the only reason women marry. To have that object on their kitchen counter.”

“Anna doesn’t cook,” Hewlett said. Simcoe smiled to himself, happier with the pink colour Mary had picked out than he had been when he had taken it home to wrap as he imagined Hewlett returning from work, frowning in the way only he physically could as his beautiful wife forced him through his own lack of personal interests to purée and prepare whichever exotic food item the latest trend diet centre itself around in the pretty pink machine. Of course, it was only a phantasy. Hewlett would likely have a professional chef and entire kitchen staff before the months end – every gift, or so Simcoe had gathered, was a gag – empty objects of a prideful middle-class marriage the bride and groom likely hoped for – for all of the same reasons but from an opposite angle. Maybe Mary would take some of these things back to the flat he himself planned to vacate by the month’s end. Maybe she would even think of him whenever she used it. He thought of this feeling both happy and hopeless – as all of his ideas around the lovely, lethal Mary Woodhull always were.

“Then I really needn’t buy you the bath shoes seeing as you’ll be the one to use it,” he scoffed, realising that Hewlett was staring at him with some measure of expectation he felt obliged to fulfil. “Still, put these on.”

The Scot smiled, sounding almost taunting as he spoke, “There is a certain protocol -”

“Which you are already breaking by donning unearned military insignia,” Simcoe dismissed.

“Again, I’ve little choice in the matter – and technically, I hold the rank of ‘Major’ in Her Majesty’s Armed Force.”

“They still sell commissions?”
“No, as a member of the nobility I’ve been required in the past to serve Britain in that capacity.”

“Able bodied solider that you are,” Simcoe snorted.

“Bodied, no – I was sickly throughout my youth and all but bed ridden as a young adult, but the technology I helped develop for the space programme has its earthly applications. The unfortunate fate of science – we discover and create only to see our efforts in end effect implemented by the armed force. I could almost emphasise with André – but I created an engine that charges itself on the power in releases in its run and he … well, he is the reason you keep insisting that I wear replica kits for clubs I can’t stand. Real Madrid? Put those back where you found them.”

“I’m glad we have you to put everything in perspective for us,” Simcoe answered, accepting his defeat. He folded the shorts over the back of a chair, hoping he would remember to bring them to Pip at the pub after pictures had been taken and the wedding party went to the reception. He wondered if the boys were grateful to him for the fait accompli which he had arranged in offering their assistance to Tarleton. Weddings, Simcoe reasoned, were a way of saying ‘I love this person – but at the same time, I hate everyone else in this room’- this might be true of the Hewletts more than most as they had not gotten full control over the guest list, but if Simcoe could do something to spare the kids he coached the two hours of drawn out declarations, he reasoned that he had finally done something good in these colonies.

Eliza Hamilton, whose small daughter had been crying for half the ride, thanked him for the excuse it gave her to skip the event to supervise – not wanting to have to shuffle through a row of dignitaries if it happened that her child decided to throw another tantrum – likely, not wanting to be seated there in the first place for she seemed a woman of sense.

Thea, however, had not been so fortunate.

He had found her downstairs with a spot-faced kid she introduced as her date, the boy looking deeply uncomfortable with the arrangement. ‘Have you seen Colonel Tarleton?’ he had asked in an accent that identified him as belonging to the embassy. Simcoe had not, but after speaking to Hamilton had a fairly good idea of where he was, information he did not share.

There had been something shifty, shady about the lad. Simcoe did not like it.

“How are you holding up?” Hewlett asked when he rejoiced him at the window.

“Me?” Simcoe clarified needlessly. “Shit – if I’m made to be honest. Mary and I … we are staying at the same hotel, she came to my room fairly early this morning, I hadn’t even gone to bed yet – wanting to talk. It took me back to when we met, to everything that has since transpired, I had so much I wanted to say, so much I felt ready to and then – then she got a call from Townsend, whom that maggot Brewster betrayed us all to when we were at the pub – all of us, including the man he is seeing, including his oldest friends – and it is with bitter irony that I am forced to praise him for this, giving that if he did not, Aberdeen might have … but I’ve seen her,” he stopped when Hewlett again winced, “she is okay. So are Cicero and Thomas.”

“I’m glad about that, at least … let it go with Brewster, we knew last night this plan could not factor out in accordance with everyone’s best intentions.”

He would not, he felt ill and angry and not at all in the condition to be magnanimous with his forgiveness. “Any road,” Simcoe cleared his throat, “Mary got the call right as she was sitting down beside me in bed … I adjusted my hearing aid in hopes of overhearing what was being said on the other end and … I needn’t have. We shared a look.”
“A look?” Hewlett asked sceptically.

“It is over,” Simcoe told him plain. “Listen I … I talked to Hamilton. He’s been using Tarleton’s confiscated mobile to communicate with Turin – I don’t know how that flaw in logistical preparation escaped us all -”

“We are not seasoned criminals, John,” Hewlett tried to comfort, “Well, not in this respect at least.”

“He’s had Tarleton talk to Rogers, who seems to be taking the bait. That is what he told me, at least. Hamilton has plainclothes around the parameter of the court house and a number of law enforcement officials are, of course, inside. Maybe Rogers will bring Arnold along when he comes to collect, make things interesting. But its not … that is it, isn’t it? We all but won. What did we win?” he asked himself aloud. “There is nothing left and we’ve been left with nothing to say.”

“Do you really think that is all you have to offer?” Hewlett demanded, “A few gestures of bravado in a bad situation? John you’re -”

John. Hewlett could not use first names without letting them sound like vehement aspersions. “What else is there?” Simcoe asked unwillingly.

“Love,” Hewlett replied as though such things were simple. He returned his attention to the window as Anna and her ladies arrived in a horse drawn carriage to waving flags and flashing cameras, to the cheers of school-aged girls for their patriot princess as she was and might well always be, her perfect coiffure slightly undone in the light wind and her haphazard attempts at correction that took the form of twisting loosened strands around the tips of her fingers until they again found something of their curl. She was lovey, a vision in the white and red of that which would become her house, and Simcoe found himself smiling in spite of everything else the day would surely bring as he watched a blush cross her groom’s checks. “You are pathetic,” he told him. “Always have been. Come, we better get a move on it before the orchestra starts playing.”

With that, John Graves Simcoe turned away from the window, relishing his long strides as the shorter man whose ‘best’ he served scampered to keep pace. He could not stand at the windowsill indefinitely, watching as the bridesmaids helped Anna with her train. Mary Woodhull had been fine before him and would be fine without him.

In the end, she had been his salvation.

As he saw it, as the look they had shared that morning had said, the only hope he had of replaying her would be to stay away.

Anna Strong watched the streetlamps, the powerlines and the smoke from chimneys as her horse drawn carriage carried her and her closest friends to the building that she ordinarily approached in an Uber, waving constantly with practiced constraint as she was now required, looking for a semblance of familiarity in the sights she knew to keep her settled. When she had been presented with her wedding gown, adjusted with her in mind, she had been pleased to find it had been tailored to her body rather than towards a societal ideal few women met and she would never embody, but breathing - in this moment - felt altogether wrong. Anna felt as though she might well fly away on the wings of the butterflies that danced inside of her, unconstrained by the corset she had rather expected.
“You are a princess, Anna!” Peggy Shippen, whose posture she copied, whispered with the excitement Aberdeen Declesias, in spite of her neck brace, expressed in gestures less restrained, waving wildly as though she was part of a Mardi-Gras Procession.

“Soon,” Abigail Ingram, her voice of reason and maid-of-honour replied, knowing Anna well enough to recognise that she had no words for the moment she was in. Perhaps soon had no synonym. Soon, the bride blushed.

“I’m marrying him,” she said wistfully, smiling as she turned back from the streetlights and the people who gathered before them to get a glimpse of her to face her friends, “oh my God, you guys! It is really happening!”

“It is,” Abigail said, squeezing her hand once more as Anna’s smile faltered, failing to find the face of the sixth bridesmaid who would have made them a lucky seven, wondering, it only for a moment, how many of these other smiles in the carriage were forced.

“Have faith,” Mary said in strong tones before returning her attention to the crowds, no doubt searching for the crafty Scotsman who had hidden the missing senator - the cause for all of this - in the home the most of them now shared. Sally did the same after offering her own words of comfort: “Look how many people love you, Anna. Nothing is going to happen.”

“I’m going to get married,” Anna corrected. “You are my bridesmaids, not my bodyguards,” she smiled, half-knowing that she could not convince them. She turned back to the street as the carriage turned the corner, a gust of damp spring wind serving to undo at least some of which had taken Freddy Morgan the better part of the morning. Anna let out a laugh as she fought to seem ladylike while her ladies attempts to amend her locks discreetly as the could with a thousand onlookers lead Mary to start humming Alanis Morrissette as the others with champagne-scented giggles parodied the ‘Ironic’ lyrics to mirror their own recent experiences – both poorly and in poor taste, but bringing each other to tears of laughter by the time they reached the court house all the same.

Anna knew the difference between the demure smile she was meant to don and her own jejune expression as her friends helped her out of the carriage, lifting her skirt and then carrying her train up the stone steps, Peggy adjusting the word ‘princess’ form girlish phantasy to strict reprimand when she once again used it, but in the moment, it made no difference to Anna. She was about the wed the love of her life and they would have a lifetime to figure out the rest.

The bride took no real note of the fabled guests as they rose to greet her as the chapel doors opened to her and her bridesmaids, looking only at Edmund, again, fighting the urge to laugh as she first saw him in the ‘skirt’ she had been cautioned to anticipate.

At first, he did not turn to meet her, bound by the protocol of the position he may soon hold, until John leaned over to whisper something in his ear, breaking his resolve, forcing him to face her with the same smile and soft blush Anna knew herself to be wearing. She looked away only briefly to share her excitement with her parents – for though he father was present, Anna walked alone down the aisle, determined to enter this union on the precedent that she was not being given away by anyone but rather reuniting herself with her own heart and forming a union with the man to whom it had long belonged.

“You were not supposed to turn around,” she jested in greeting when she reached her groom.

“I’m a scientist, Anna, you can’t fault my curiosity,” he returned with the same whisper. “Darling, you are captivating.”
“You look …”

“Ridiculous?” he suggested. “Or so I have been told by all of my closest friends.”

“You wearing anything under that kilt?” she winked.

“Boxers, but don’t let the lads know, I’ve found a certain enjoyment in seeing how squeamish
grown men get over baseless rumours. Let them think all evening, all their lives that I’ve let my
boys loose in itchy wool.” She looked passed him and saw a number of her friends and former
clients looking less than comfortable while her husband to be wore a brazen grin.

“Edmund!” Anna hissed, “I swear if you make me laugh, here, now …”

“Oh, now you tell me. Here I was, up all night coming up with clever puns and punchlines as one does.”

“You wrote your own vows then?”

“And practiced them on John. I’d otherwise stutter, I might yet still,” he admitted.

“Good, I like you when you are a little awkward.”

“I’ll remember to wear a kilt more often for you then.”

“Shove it -” she hissed, pushing him lightly to the groomsmen’s great amusement.

“Shall we begin?” Samuel Townsend asked them after giving a greeting to the congregation.

“Gladly,” Anna answered. “Uncanny though it seems, I can’t wait to start the rest of my life with
this man.”

“Likewise,” Edmund consented, resuming a practiced poise that seemed to only serve the purpose
of again allowing Anna a bust of light laughter to quiet inside of her before it could part her lips.

Robert Rogers, for the first time in his life, willing switched the television form History over to C-
SPAN when he knew the measure that he was monitoring was coming to a vote. Getting a majority
to agree or dissent was in practice as dull and difficult as the negotiating process promised, but
here, he personally would benefit should the measure pass though he never intended to again
partake in trade, picturing himself leading a self-sustaining existence on a far-off frontier he knew
from the telly, from ‘prime time’ when History spoke to something existing outside of the Nazi-
Regime.

Modern politics, he decided, was every bit as boring as the last twenty Hitler documentaries he had
been disappointed to learn in the past weeks played when he was ordinarily at work. He rubbed his
eyes, trying to pay more careful attention.

He considered calling again as another senator rose to raise an objection for the record.

It was bad television, but Rogers did not mind anymore.

It seemed as though European automakers would benefit from the trade agreement in the ways they
had hoped, but the longer the process lasted, the more confident he became in his own strengthened negotiating power. He could get the boy up to a half-million, at least.

When Rogers had heard the rumour of a promised ransom, he assumed it a trap and, in the early afternoon, continued to hold to his initial convictions, but as he switched the channel around the twenty-four hour news networks, looking at footage borrowed from the Mail Online website (doubtlessly at a heavy fee) of Anna Strong entering the court house, walking down the aisle, and exchanging awkward smiles with a corporate criminal in regal attire, he could not help but to grin himself as he watched nervous legislators themselves absent due to this event try not be obvious about checking their phones for updates; as he watched on-edge law enforcement officers glance around in anticipation of an attack which Rogers was happy to let them all imagine.

He was nowhere in the vicinity. Instead, Robert Rogers sat comfortably on his old friend’s couch, watching his television, his muddy shoes propped up on a coffee table beside some pretentious book – happy, but for the fact that André did truly seem to have made an effort against his alcoholism before leaving for Belview, leaving Rogers without a drop to which to toast himself and his strange luck. He had settled instead for a cigar – the Cuban kind that had likely been a Christmas gift from someone whose friendship André had tried to court in his wasted efforts to be everyone’s darling, someone who did not have enough interest in this venture to actually consider then man in their shopping. The box had been unopened. Rogers did not give a second thought to lighting up. The flat smelt of smoke as it was.

He took a long puff as he watched the wedding from afar, feeling fully in the role of a cartel boss to whom governments in the global south caved.

Hamilton, he noted, was not among the spectators, nor was Tarleton, and this played to his benefit.

Robert Rogers had woken up that morning knowing very little about Serie A, but upon hearing the rumour and doing a bit of preliminary research into the side offering the ransom the Senate had refused, he was not surprised to learn that the club was owned by a massive cooperation with invested interest in seeing this deal get done; nor was he surprised to learn that a member of the board happened to be married to one of the Liverpudlian slave traders who enjoyed an air of legality and legitimacy to this modern incarnation of an old family business through the guise of sport.

No, he was not surprised at all that the name Tarleton came up - it was a symptom or synonym in any major crime involving a Hewlett, or so the tabloids had long led him to believe in both what they said and what they seemed to silence.

It was a clever way around, but Rogers could still see their footprints and smiled as he imagined them all scrambling.

He could see almost immediately that he could get more from this than the fifty grand that was put on offer if in fact it was legitimate.

To check, Rogers had gone to an internet café – the sort that sold coffee and international calling calls but not the sort of hard candy that ordinarily signalled bad business being conducted in the back, set up his own Twitter account with the help of a Nigerian teenager whose parents must have owned the shop, whom he laughingly referred to as “my prince”, who, in turn, laughed as though he had not heard that particular pejorative a hundred times before, turning it into something of a sales line; ‘Yes! We’ve e-mailed before! You are Scottish? Like Edmund Hewlett? Here, here – I make you best deal,’ he said as he thrust a calling card into his hand, Rogers ignoring what he said about the price, relying it to be the cost of doing business. After exchanging a few messages with a faceless someone over the platform he did not understand or have any further use of, he was given
a number to call in which he and the other party authenticated themselves through thinly veiled threats and promises that Rogers could reasonably assume they both knew to be empty. Women, he thought, ordinarily outsourced the messy bits.

An hour passed before his phone rang again, this time with a foreign number for a local contact. He told Agnelli that he wanted the amount tripled, something she said she could consent to providing her organisation first got what it sought from a government that seemed willing to give so little. While Rogers could not affect the outcome, the embarrassment at having industry act where elected office failed to should, by her calculation, be enough to push a few pens.

He was told to wait an hour before calling the number he had been given, and when he did, he found an enraged Englishman on the other line, himself too volatile for Rogers to give any real credence to the idea that he was acting as an FBI operative. He wanted revenge for a child whom they threatened. Rogers told him he could help him get it if he, in turn, could get his sister-in-law and whomever controlled her purse strings to throw in a hundred thousand more into the pot.

>>Have you ever actually killed a man, Rogers?<< Tarleton - Banastre, he supposed, then poised.
>>Because I have, and I’ve taken great pleasure in doing so. I’ll not pay you to rob me of the joy and privilege of the blood I want shed, but if a hundred thousand is all you ask, I’ll let you in on where they intend to hide André out once Arnold has been found.<<

It was at this point he lit a cigar. He smoked the half as he watched the vote swing in his direction and pass by a slim majority before returning his screen to Anna, Edmund and the promises they made. He stretched his legs, kicking the coffee table, the book existing for the sole purpose of covering it, and the tumbler he was using as an ashtray to the ground, wondering if he should pick up after himself before leaving this quartered off crime scene – the last he ever hoped to see.

He would collect the cash in Albany with the promise of tying up loose ends. He would cross the border into Toronto before law enforcement arrived at André’s flat, disappearing into Upper Canada and its wilderness before the police knew to miss him.

He heard the senator groan from the master bedroom, knowing he would grow all the more miserable as the last of the morphine left his system, as he regained consciousness and discovered what Rogers had laid open on the pillow beside him – a photo album stacked upon several others, items of André his good wife had forgotten to purge with the rest of the belongings which the Scot had intended to work like bars in a cage.

The pictures, he decided, would do.

Sometimes in his delirium, Arnold spoke of and to André, whom he would awake to find ten years younger, arm-in-arm with Rogers himself, sitting in the self-same bar in which the senator had been attacked, albeit from the time when Philomena, rather than Anna, had been its main beer-wench. Most of the pictures were like this – happy times tended to show in happy faces and Rogers and André had once been quite close. Arnold would be trapped by his wrong conclusions, perhaps indefinitely. Rogers never intended to find out. He would not go to Vermont as requested. He would never see John André again, save, perhaps, in the sort on manifestation the came after a few too many swigs of Scotch in the same sitting, same as Samuel Tallmadge whom he had slain in a hit and run tended to appear - usually, wanting to talk about sport.

Feeling sentimental, he returned to the bedroom, bid the senator farewell and took a few pictures of his former friend for the sake of old times -

He might well be the only man alive who would miss him at all.
Chapter End Notes

I’m going to do some notes, but first, I am going to give some thanks. ♥
To everyone (but most especially the lovely Mimi who deserves so much more that I
can possibly hope to give) thank you so much for being patient with me and with this
story whilst I was off concluding smaller projects. To Reinette, thank you so much for
being so helpful and encouraging with the wedding scene. You are the reason I enjoy
reading romance, and I hope that you enjoyed my humble attempts towards the genre.

People:
In April 2015, Nursultan Nazarbayev was re-elected for like the bajillionth time with
almost 98% of the vote. By comparison, Putin was re-elected with 76% in the last
cycle and Erdogan with a mere 52%. Kazakhstan doesn’t even really give democratic
process a courtesy nod.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has appeared in passing on a number of
previous occasions, we’ve talked about him before but I feel it is worth noting for the
sake of this update that though the specifics as presented here are a work of fiction, he
commonly won’t move on legislation as a tactical measure.

Francis, Lord Rawdon has also been mentioned or alluded to several times before
going way back, to memory, I’ve never put him in the notes because he has not played
that significant of a role, but since the chapter talked about him talking about a
recurring hook-up, might as well mention that he was indeed a real bloke - went to
Oxford with Tarleton, served with the British forces during the American
Revolutionary War, lent the Prince Regent stupid amounts of cash, served in the
House of Lords for decades, and at one point it was speculated that he replace the PM,
under the idea that he could get peace terms with France. That didn’t pan out, but he
went on the serve as Governor-General of India and did some good work throughout
his career in diplomacy and advocating in favour of Irish issues.

Memento Mori and John Bull were both pen names Patrick Ferguson used in
publishing satire.

The story about George Hanger having married a gypsy and her having left him in
his wild youth were adapted from an unverifiable account in his autobiography, as
was much of what he had to say about the sex trade. Romantic that I am though, in a
chapter that featured a couple tying the knot in what began as a visa-scam, I thought it
worth mentioning that there are other, equally practical reasons one might wed, tax
status and expensive kitchen electronics among them. He attended University of
Göttingen, in the 18th century the King of Great Britain doubled as the Elector of
Hanover.

Sport:
Melwood is Liverpool FC’s training ground.

The Glazer family sits on Manchester United’s board of directors, as does Ed Westwood. Old Trafford is United’s stadium.

This sounds like something that should be fiction, but Jay-Z really does manage Bayern and – as of this week former Germany NT star Jérôme Boateng who has had a disappointing season but you should throw a Google on anyway for he might well be the most attractive man to have ever walked this earth.

The Tarletons are fun, but in reality Paul Pogba manged by Mino Raiola and the GM at Juve at the time was Giuseppe Marotta, who has since gone to Inter. The thing about deals being in the works for ages before the transfer window, is, disappointing, true however. I really like the phantasy of “Deadline Day” but it is just a thing to get us all anxious when sport isn’t actually happening. Pity.

Lisa Müller is an equestrian, but if you have heard of her it is probably because of the Tweets she made last fall about Bayern’s trainer, leading the club to reprimand her which resulted in her un-following her own husband on social media (ouch!)

We don’t need to do a note about Gladbach v Celtic having become a semi-regular fixture as of recent as we’ve done this before – BUT, I have a Brenden Rogers update: After his signing a 5m deal with Leicester City this past week, Celtic fans unveiled this enormous banner reading: You traded immortality for mediocrity. Never a Celt, always a fraud. Can we just applaud that wording?

Soundtrack:
It’s just like watching Brazil is a football chant, sung when a team is scoring. Brazil lost 1-7 against Germany in the semi-finals of the 2014 World Cup.

Ironic is a song by Alanis Morrissette that you claim to hate but are probably singing in your head right now: It’s like raaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaain on your wedding day …

Translations:
Ayiti is Haitian for Haiti.

All of the German Arthur can’t translate are prepositions.

Okay! That is it for me - Bis bald!
The Bedfellows (Pt. 1)

Chapter Summary

Whilst Tallmadge grows increasingly mistrustful of his allies, Arnold is discovered and brought to safety by an unlikely detective.

Chapter Notes

I want to first share a response from the lovely and in this case far more politically engaged Reinette de la Saintonge to my Announcement with everyone who read the news (like I did) kind of in passing and mostly in a series of WhatsApp group chat messages between talk of this week’s big topic of Brexit:

Allow me to jump in on this: don't worry (well, please do for our freedom of speech and expression) the law is passed now but it needs to be ratified by the Council of the European Union (which technically means it could still be blocked, but the Council's approval is basically certain), which will happen most likely on 9th April. From then on, each country in the EU has two years to incorporate what was decided on the EU stage into national law, which still allows for some freedom of interpretation. This is going to be interesting, because in our case (Germany) the governing parties have positioned themselves expressly against upload filters in their coalition agreement. Although in German it's called a Vertrag (treaty), it only outlines what they want to do as a government and if they violate it, it won't have any immediate (legal) effect to my understanding of the matter. However, it might have an effect on voters' decisions come the next Bundestag election in two years.

In this period until the national law is drawn up and passed into legislation, everything stays the same. I am very, very against this (I wrote emails, was among the 250,000 taking to the streets and the 5,000,000 who signed the petition). It is only a tiny drop of consolation in the messy wildfire of current events that AO3 will not be subject to upload filters as it is non-profit and thus exempt from installing them, as the latest statement from A03 from shortly before the controversial vote details.

Creating fannish content of the kind we do itself is NOT illegal and we should still be able to write and post our stories.

...At least that's something, I suppose.

BUT, on 26th May WE get to filter! Let's filter the European Parliament. Whoever else is reading this and is eligible to vote in the European elections, GO VOTE. If you can't go, apply for a postal vote. Look at the list how each MEP voted, actually read up on the party/parties you consider voting for and their candidates and show your anger and outrage by casting the ballot.

Now the damage has been done, we need to try and at least ensure no further legislation laying its hands on our freedom can be passed again.

[…]
We all need to go vote, guys.
I could not agree more.

Since my mind is here on censorship and since the only thing I love more than a sport analogy is a history one, I want to tell you my favourite thing about the worst epoch in European history by way of introducing this update:
German-born Austrian Chancellor Klemens von Metternich (whose name is synonymous with hard censorship here on the continent) evidently let texts that exceeded 320 pages pass unchecked, not thinking that anyone would willing read anything that long. XD
Hide and Seek (which actually runs the risk of being politically critical at times) would defiantly have gotten through the hyper-control of an absolute system. Geil, oder?

Anyway, here are twenty-five pages more for you. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

>>You are relieved,<< Inspector Ferguson observed in the silence.

He was right.

Benjamin Tallmadge, formally of the NYPD, did not want to live in a world in which he was asked to supress what he considered to be fundamental freedoms; in which he served to threaten the preservation of innocence in a child who had already endured the trauma of loosing a parental figure in an unjustified act of war. He spoke to Ferguson of Tarleton’s ward but thought of Cicero, of the protocol of a system that had let the boy down and ultimately led Ben to leave the force. He thought of the wedding that would take place in a few hours, wishing it to instead be celebrated in a church of either conviction, wondering if the Lord God in all of His might would hear his silent prayers and pleas in a Court House, in the heart of an institution that in practice denied His Word.

“I would not be so quick to refuse,” Ben cautioned, not hoping to contradict or ultimately wishing the other man to change his mind. “Hamilton has a set of suspicions surrounding your person -”

>>Suspicious which I suppose you share. Tallmadge,<< Ferguson paused, >>if you want to believe in a better world than strive to be a part of it. No threat you mean to mask as an accusation is going to change my mind. I have a distinct feeling that Hamilton isn’t as professionally invested in the colonel himself as he is in his former ward. Anyway … Miss Robinson, as it is, will soon have to live under a strict set of restrictions and I will not be ordered to limit – <<

“Is she being sent to a juvenile detention facility?” Ben asked, angered as he continued to relive an arrest he had regretted before putting the boy in the back of a squad car. “This isn’t my case or my country, but Sir, with every respect -”

>>They really didn’t tell you, did they?>> Ferguson seemed to smile. >>Exercise caution, Tallmadge. This exchange you think yourself to have had with the feds seems to me to have been rather one-sided and I think you to be smart enough to know the difference. Then … perhaps I’m the one who has erred in that particular judgement … Hamilton mentioned Mary Anne Burges by name, did he? <<

“I would not have otherwise come on it,” Ben admitted.

>>And the context?>> Ferguson pried.
Ben did not have much to supply. “That he thought you might know her,” he said, “that Marie and her paternal aunt are staying in her Edinburgh home.”

>>Well then, I’m certain the financial division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation already has eyes on this. I’m headed over,<< he readjusted continuing in a critique amplified rather than masked by a lighter tone, >>I’ll head over … in about an hour. It is a bank holiday here you see, and I’m being made to cook myself for the first time in Christ-only-knows. I suppose I could hop into a pub, but they are all packed with tourists and serving over-priced, event-themed menus and as I wish to retain at least some limited measure of faith in the country I call home, I’ve avowed to avoid finding any confirmation for my assumption that a number of otherwise respectable establishments have gone vegan for the day in some kind of nod to the Hewletts’ value-signalling.

>>It bothers me, << he continued merrily but without mirth, >>I was at Tesco last night along with half the bloody town - was not shopping for it, no, but I couldn’t help to notice all the same that their fresh and frozen produce had been all but stripped bare. I’m making Scotch Eggs. Have you ever had a Scotch Egg, Tallmadge?>> Ferguson inquired. Ben’s inclination that this might be code for something he should have noticed partially confirmed when the man with many (seemingly unnecessary) aliases continued, >>Misleading name – the dish is from Yorkshire, but I’d at least, be content to take the credit … provided I manage to pull this off. It is a boiled egg wrapped in sausage … I think it will be good however close to the pub-original I manage to come, << he clarified >>For the wee lass Marie anyway. The arresting office wrote in his report than she was more than a little hung over. I’m not surprised, the girls and women dressed up like Anna Strong have been drinking cider for celebration or show and she probably had more than her share in an effort to blend in. Ah! She is likely sleeping it off, you’ve nothing to fear. When she wakes, I’ll be there with saturated fats provided I’m up to task … some things Tallmadge are just so much simpler in theory than in practice.<<

“And what have you to fear, Richard? Patrick?” Ben asked.

>>Also nothing, as it works out,<< Ferguson laughed, >>I have leave. Which, I suppose, leaves me time to impart some professional advice … although, from what I’ve heard … you are no longer with the NYPD, are you?>>

“And from what I’ve heard,” Ben returned, “you ought to have long been out of a job when not on the locked side of a cell.”

>>I had nothing to do with the death of DS Yilmaz, if that is what you think,<< Ferguson answered him slowly.

“You know what I think?” Ben snorted, “It has been bothering me now … for some time, since reading those case notes your … friends were so kind to send my former sergeant. I think you are right, that Lady Eleanor of Richmond beat a small-time people-trafficker within an inch of his life, and I think she did this because someone very, very powerful was not taking the threat of blackmail as seriously as he ought to have done. But then … ‘why wouldn’t the French pull the plug on his life support?’ I asked myself.

“Maybe, and this is just a theory, the conspiracy extended him and they were hoping he would wake up, offer names in exchange for some kind of amnesty … though, recent events have lessened the value of the information he might one day give. I think General Bouchard will face Court Martial for his actions in Mali, in fact I’m nearly certain of it, and tell me – where exactly does that leave you? You haven’t been dismissed because of the information your investigation uncovered. You haven’t been promoted because of your conduct within the scope of your personal life … a personal life that seems to involve those you openly profess to opposing. I’m told you didn’t leave
Lady Eleanor’s side the entire time she was in hospital, something I would argue must extend any sense of guilt you had for putting her there in the first place -”

>>I’ve been acquitted of any suspicion of wrong-doing in that instance.<<

“Have you now?” Ben shook his head as he began to pace the short length of the carpet with the hotel’s logo thrown over the pavement directly outside, his movements directing the automated doors open and shut- “I have to say, Patrick, I’m not surprised. What I think is this - your standard and status were taken from you as a young man on comparatively mundane grounds – your father falling into debt after shorting a stock that turned itself around, thanks – I’ll say, for I’m certain you will, to the illicit when not strictly illegal behind-doors involvement of the younger Edmund Hewlett, of the Mayor of Liverpool to that time … Tarleton, wasn’t it? Because your parents didn’t have a prenup, because you didn’t either, what wasn’t taken of your mother’s estate by the banks after your father’s passing disappeared in your own divorce settlement.

“I bet you enjoyed arresting the Hewlett children. I bet you loved breaking them with the unspecific observations Banastre Tarleton offered and I bet you loved watching him throw his life away while spending himself into the same financial ruin in which you found yourself. I bet it felt ‘just’. And … I bet that to that time you truly believed in justice,” Ben accused, wondering when idealism had become the harshest of criticisms. Alone in front of the hotel, in the silence of the morning light and the static more present on the line that the man to whom he spoke, Benjamin Tallmadge may just as well have been conversing with himself.

“But … I don’t think it was that, or them who broke your faith. I think it was the full of the system, of society, of anything else you are now so keen to criticise on social media, ‘Eggshell’. I think you hate being a part it, and I think that not entirely unlike myself, you’ve seen enough on the job to want to hedge your own bets. I don’t think you are corrupt per se,” he gave him, “I think that if you could have, you’d have quit long ago, but you can’t … you can’t because of a crime of which you cannot speak, because a man in a coma might know something that by now has all but lost its meaning. To that end, I’d be willing to venture Lady Eleanor had a decent pulse of the situation in Mali, I think her failure to send any kind of intervention in the process against Caroline MacDougall and the young woman’s subsequent sentencing that brought her into your home, her hacking of your files – it came as a relief, didn’t it?” he asked, answering before Ferguson could,

“This, Patrick, this was your plan all along,” Ben accused with some admitted measure of admiration, “You are far too clever to be made victim to circumstance or a series thereof. I think your only problem is that you genuinely care for the people you employed to help you achieve it. Because this is all about to burst, is it not? If Bouchard loses his command you cannot count on his secrets keeping your job safe. But I think you have a plan for that too, no, that isn’t what concerns you. So, tell me, what does?” he demanded. “Why does it worry you that Hamilton asked – specifically – about Ms. Burges?”

>>I’m not worried.<< Ferguson repeated with a practiced patience. >>I’m thinking … I’m thinking that this tirade of yours is more about what you fault in yourself than it is about whatever idea you’ve formed of me.<<

Ben stopped. Again, the man was not mistaken.
I think you are jealous that I know who my friends are while you feel you’ve been left to guess. And, though I think my reasoning to be sound, I feel yours is rather flawed given the construct. Think of it this way, Tallmadge – whoever betrayed your congress last night did so under duress and with great reason: Aberdeen Declesias could well be dead without their intervention and you’d be no closer to catching Arnold than you are now. It wasn’t … by the way, Tarleton, when we two spoke, it was purely over his children -

“I know,” Ben stumbled, “and I know who it was, I just -”

Of course, Ferguson said as though he had been given grounds to agree, you can’t be betrayed by an enemy, can you? It took surprisingly long for me to see as much. Sure … fine, we hurt the ones we love most and often for the most selfish, thoughtless reasons … but I think you are mistaken to assign intent -malicious or otherwise - especially in a case like this. I think you are over a barrel. I think you to be under the impression that you don’t command adequate resources. And I think you are mistaken, certainly … you’re mistaken if you think I’ll have a hand in keeping a child in a very precarious position from her sense of stability … do you have children? I have, he stopped. I don’t know that I can claim that. They are better off this way. Stable, you know? I know Hamilton has a son, at least, that his wife works for children’s protective services. As such, I don’t see this as a tactic he’d employ – I think you’ve been had, so there is something that I’ll have you know: a few hours before she went missing, Marie Robinson became one of the richest heiresses in all of Britain thanks in part to Ban’s reported death, I think that is what Hamilton is going to want to talk to him about.

“What?” Ben blinked.

I don’t think Hamilton is planning on making threats against Marie or Banina – apropos, now equally wealthy beyond reason. I think that he is going to make a case to Tarleton that wouldn’t stand up in court – and I think he might then offer a deal, or have his friend the ADA do so, involving the colonel reaching out to Rogers when they have him in a bad way. You have to understand – Marie, whom he calls his daughter, isn’t his by any right of blood or any right of law; but she has no other living family and, though in treatment, her mother Mary is terminally ill. No one expects her to live to see the child come of age.

“I had no idea,” Ben said, feeling even worst about the support he had been ordered to request.

Whatever Tarleton is told, however it is said, he won’t initially weight his worry against reality and … Hanger – George Hanger, the sportswriter, he is among your company, is he not?

“I don’t wish to continue this conversation in hypotheticals. Tell me how you knew,” Ben swallowed.

He’s covering the wedding. Ferguson told him blandly. His name is below three of the tip five articles on the Mail’s website. It is not as conspicuous or clandestine as you seem to imagine. But … I’ve reason to think all the same that Hanger’ll be up for this what I propose to see this operation out without furthering your own crisis on conscious. Call him aside and -

“I was right, wasn’t I?” Ben interrupted. “You truly are a son of a bitch, aren’t you?”

The inspector laughed. In so far as we are being honest and open, isn’t that in part why you asked my help?
George Hanger could not help to wonder if this was a power tactic Ben Tallmadge consciously employed or if he was somehow unaware at how little his trousers left to the imagination, how much self-doubt they invited upon any man to whom he spoke. The breakfast buffet was slowly being removed from the dining area, most of the hotel’s guests having come and gone, and the adjacent public lavatory where the former inspector had called a clandestine conference had an equally elapsed allure. Since the time they had entered separately, strategically – Tallmadge pointing in the direction of the Gent’s from the lobby where he had gone to take a telephone call, Hanger heading the cue he alone was positioned to see – no one had entered to interrupt them.

The reporter had wished ever since for some straggler’s bowels to deliver a distraction of any sort.

After five minutes of trying desperately to maintain eye contact with the slightly taller man, Hanger had begun to pace, his head sometimes buried in his palms as he spoke, recognising that the former inspector was likely interpreting his seemingly nervous behaviour as an admission of guilt rather than a want to be polite, to avoid a conversation that a close friend had ought to initiate rather than letting such fall to him.

“I really would not know anything about that,” he answered, assuming his claims could not help against whatever impression the stone-faced inspector had formed of him and his level of involvement, regardless of however much his honest answers might assist in seeing their shared objectives achieved. “I can but promise Ban is ignorant as well. Ellie Hew really divided the whole of her family inheritance between his girls?” he repeated, still unable to believe it himself. “That’s not … it is shit, if I’m to be frank – not ‘shit’ in that I think you have bad intel if this is coming from Ferguson,” he clarified quickly, “but … it does make me think -”

“What exactly?” Tallmadge pressed. He crossed his arms over his chest which, whatever his intent in taking such a stance, served to further highlight his desperate need of a tailor’s services. Hanger, fighting his eyes for control, elected to look away, earnest though he assessed the wider threat, eager though he was for the former inspector’s assistance in meeting it.

“It makes me think that the news around Ban’s death was expected – I’d even go so far to say ‘intended’. I’m sorry. I’m not going to keep this from him. I can’t wait around, willingly contribute to making that a reality,” he said, moving towards the door Tallmadge positioned himself to stop him from reaching.

“I know Colonel Tarleton to have seen André’s research,” Tallmadge said, “I know that he had changed his position on it and was planning to address Congress -”

“Yea that is … that is effect, rather than cause,” Hanger interrupted, “that is not my concern here. I had the luck of conversing with the German Defence Minister on my flight – an opportunity I went to great lengths to create … you see, I’ve see the files you speak of as well, Ban sent them to Effie in distress who then, for her part, mentioned them to me,” he paused, “don’t think this nefarious, I thought my friend dead and joined this little wedding expedition to find out why and during my layover, I got myself into his system – I’m not a hacker, not really … Her Majesty’s Firewalls are unsurprisingly insufficient and Ban is systematic about setting his passwords.”

“I’m not police anymore, you needn’t think me a threat -”

“Yea, Ben,” Hanger shook his head, “how can I not worry? I check Ban’s email and saw that in addition to André’s files he’d come in contact with a number of other documents that surpass his security clearance. There was a situation a couple of months back – I don’t know much about, which … leads me to suspect that whatever happened truly did and it was truly awful – such is
British High Society,” he tried to explain to the outsider, “gossip is ordinarily inescapable but some matters are too raw for polite tongues -.” Hanger stopped, realising where his gaze had again accidently landed.

“Christ man!” he exclaimed at long last. “On a not dissimilar topic, would you take a seat – cross your legs, maybe? I can’t … I don’t mean to be strictly vulgar and I’m well certain that you don’t either, but as it seems no one in New York’s upper echelons has had the strength to tell you, it appears it falls to me … you have an impressive physique, maybe one that isn’t exactly made for off-the-rack sizing.”

Tallmadge, wide eyed and fighting with a blush did as instructed to Hanger’s relief.

“I understand you are between employment and such can prove expensive,” he continued, following him into the stall, “but make an appointment with a tailor, mate! Commission five pairs of trousers – two black, one navy, one either kaki or grey, depending on your preference of course, and then a pair of jeans -”

“You seem to know a lot about this,” Tallmadge observed, nodding as though he was taking careful notes. Hanger looked down at his own clothes, uncertain if the man meant to be ironic or if in relaxed American eyes he might truly pass for a dandy.

“Ban would know more,” he said, putting blame for his smart jacket where it was due before self-correcting with the concern that the colonel would be even more direct and indiscreet than Hanger had himself been should Tallmadge later think to bring up wardrobe selection. “Everyone faults him for dressing flash, but I suppose he would have to,” he defended against the charge he himself had brought, “not owing to the fact that he comes from the kind of money that likes to show itself – but due to his service injury, I’m sure it took him upwards of half an hour to get into those jeans your friend Woodhull lent. Any road … thanks,” he said as Tallmadge crossed his legs.

“Thank you?” the ex-detective tried.

“Please, I … I come from a background that’s brought me into contact with … we will suffice it to say that I was born into politer company than that which I seek for myself,” Hanger explained by way of offering an excuse not pertaining to Tallmadge’s person or the superiority-complex his trousers served to suggest. “I’m not made for it, I – all the same, it truly wasn’t my intention to cause you discomfort.”

“Nor was it mine,” Tallmadge returned the awkward hint of apology.

“Right … yea,” Hanger nodded, happy to be done with this secondary order of business.

“Yeah.”

“Some things are … too devastating for people of … of that milieu, and with Ban,” he took a deep breath, wondering if he’d not made in error in positioning the inspector so that he could easily meet his gaze, “you know he was recently court martialled, I’m supposing?”

“I do,” Tallmadge confirmed.

“Do you know the details?”

“Yes.”

“See, I don’t,” Hanger confessed, “and to be perfectly honest, I’m not sure that I want to. I knew he would survive the ordeal, I would hazard to say he is the only modern officer who routinely finds
himself in that pro-Royal tabloid ‘Tattler’ among other such publications. He’s friends with the Hewlett twins as you know - with Harry of Wales, Eugenie and Beatrix of York, and a number of other figureheads for whom the connection could prove an embarrassment if he were to … if his actions were of the kind that I am forced to assume, and forced to assume are true, based on how very little has been said. Then … Ban’s not enjoyed many invitations as of late -”

“Out of curiosity, is this why you found a roundabout way of asking him about Lord Rawdon and Eleanor of Richmond?” Tallmadge broke in.

“You are sharp,” Hanger gave him.

“He seemed nervous.”

“I’m nervous for him. On one hand its easily excused – he and Mary had a bad break up fairly recently, he has kids in both capitals and spends his weekends alternating between them, and he’s about to be unemployed besides. He’s at a point in his life where the light shift towards introversion is understandable, but the exclusion isn’t, and I find it extremely curious that in all the time since he’s been back in Liverpool, he’s not once taken the ferry to Ireland, that he’s been alternating his weekends to avoid Ells in both London and Edinburgh … you have to understand, this isn’t like him in the least. And you have to understand, please – Ban isn’t a bad person, far from it in fact – but I don’t know that he is able to see himself in that light anymore, and I think there are internal and external reasons playing into it.

“Whatever happened, he lost his security clearance as a result, the nobles are making an organised effort of making sure he maintains his distance, and the moment the military finds reason to forget some unspeakable sin, he finds himself in a vehicle with Eleanor and then suddenly Edmund is marrying and American, and suddenly both of the twins are in hospital and won’t be in attendance and the media is falling over itself to prop up Anna Strong, without word or whisper that she, along with everyone I’ve met in these colonies and everyone they know besides is implemented in Senator Arnold’s disappearance. And then Ban died. And then … well, then I had a conversation with von Steuben over why a military might ignore such protocol.

“In short, his expert analysis led me to believe that my friend was led to act in accordance with our government’s interests, that he likely already knew too much and the gaps in protocol and procedure leading to this could be excused if it was not intended that he survive the stated mission. Now it is too late for any of that. Now the media has made a national hero of him – but then the Americans have loose ends of their own to tie up in this.”

“Banastre Tarleton faced discipline for torturing underaged drug runners to their deaths with an electric cattle prod,” Tallmadge told him flatly. “It’s gruesome, but as the matter has already been addressed and found without warrant, Hamilton would have no reason to act outside of his jurisdiction –”

Hanger wondered if this was meant to come as a comfort.

“A lot of people in Parliament have their lots tied to the drug trade … and it’s not – such matters would need to be outsourced, to happen outside of the country, to keep hands looking clean,” he tried to continue before stopping on what he had just been told, “ That could be casual here, but I … no, no I don’t believe it – children?” he demanded. Tallmadge neither budged nor blinked. Hanger shook his head. “No, Ban’s reputation isn’t unwarranted but that is not a line he’d cross. You … you can’t think – maybe you’d have to hear how annoying he gets gushing about his own damn kids.”

“Personality is a myth, who we are, how we act is largely contingent on stimulus and setting,” the
detective told him with a strange calm indignance.

“I mean you’d have to believe that if you didn’t have one, I guess, but unlike yourself Ben, Ban does and believe me he can be a dick when it suits him, but no. You are wrong. You are wrong on all counts.”

“Yet you agree that there is something the Crown wishes to silence.”

“It is probably some shit he got himself into with one of the princes. I know Kate can’t fucking stand him but between you and I, the duchess’ tolerance towards most people only presents itself when cameras are in the room. Its not … it is just not what you think. That is what you want me to tell you, isn’t it?” he guessed, “Or would it bring some comfort to your sick soul if I told you my friend was a monster? That whatever Hamilton has planned for him is good and just because of some rumour you happened upon paints him in a bad light? Because his girls found an unlikely patron in one of the Hewletts?”

Tallmadge did not answer.

“No, it is something else the government wants silenced – it has to be - unless you and Ferguson are mistaken and your homeboy Hamilton really does intend harm to Marie in some fashion and then … well, best of luck to him. I don’t think Ban the sort to torture children to death but I don’t think he’d hesitate to cross that line with anyone threatening his own. And he’d win. Trust that if you can’t believe in anything else,” he threatened. “There would be more blood than I’d imagine ‘the great’ Washington would want to risk. But that is your problem,” Hanger assed vaguely, narrowing his gaze, “your national one, you act without considering consequence, and I suppose you can do so seeing how much you invest in military spending -”

Tallmadge took a deep breath and briefly buried his forehead in his palm. “George … I’ve reason to think that the Duke of Richmond has long been part of a ring that causes harm to children -”

Hanger blinked, having expected another baseless charge. “Oh no, he is a paedophile, for sure,” he said quickly of the man to whom the detective’s attention had shifted. “I know … half the reason I harbour such a distaste for that entire class. Charges can’t be brought against him or even suggested for show -”

“Did he …” Tallmadge began, tapering off after two words gave him pause to consider the question. He looked up at him with something approaching sympathy, something that served to turn Hanger’s stomach.

“Trust me, I turned out alright,” he returned dismissively, not one to dwell on matters that could be better downed in beer or smothered with halfway-decent sex. Excessive memory morphed into exaggerated sorrow was something for those who had no means of making the present moment more interesting – the elderly who had not entirely worked out the internet for themselves, middle aged women in contending with their fading looks, their younger counterparts whose only other response to outside stimulus was to binge American television on some streaming service or another. George Hanger had a life of his own and a full calendar of strange people and places. He was not keen on returning to a single short episode in his past for whatever hint of justification Tallmadge’s softened tone suggested.

“Not everyone did,” the former inspector said.

Hanger shook his head. “The fuck do you get off? You are not suggesting that Ban of all people -”

“No,” Tallmadge interrupted. “I think he did something about it though. In fact … I know he did.”
Perhaps seeing in his expression that his code was fairly easy to crack, Tallmadge continued in plain English, “I think Crown and Country would be more grateful for the murder if they trusted he could get away with it.”

“Murder?” Hanger returned in a ridiculing tone. “No one can even get close to Richmond -”

“How I think Ban could have done,” Tallmadge spoke over him, perhaps deafening himself to doubt, “could he have kept himself quiet – something, as it works out, he might curiously have a shot at doing - even if you are right, even if this meeting Hamilton means to arrange is part of a larger conspiracy than we are presently able to fully assess. Then,” the American continued to speculate, “then again, this is too big and there it seems we are stuck. This plan … Hamilton’s adjustment on the one you helped me and my suspects execute, relies on your friend thinking himself out of options -”

“How?” Hanger demanded. It was not beyond his understanding that his mate was easily worked up into action, but Tarleton was easily excited in a more general sense and wouldn’t have silenced such a deed. If he had done any of that which Tallmadge accused, he would have acted openly. Tarleton was too vain to be societally polite; he would be looking for credit or compensation for such a deed -

The latter of which, he seemed he had obtained.

How he hated the Hewletts to the last. George Hanger was certain of it now, his best friend’s ‘death’ had been part of a larger design.

He grew angrier at Tallmadge, at the insinuation in itself - much as he might have otherwise hoped there were some measure of truth to it – this was not the first time, not even the first time this week that his friend was being asked to answer for someone else’s sins. “How do you suggest he … no. No, he couldn’t have done. He’s a hopeless braggart and he hasn’t said shit to me about any of this, about -”

“How he killed him, you mean?” Tallmadge tried to clarify. If he was bluffing, he did not let it show, but then, Tallmadge seemed the sort to fully believe in his own righteousness with the added risk of throwing decent into doubt. He didn’t give a shit about helping Inspector Ferguson keep Ban from falling back into the hands of an organisation set on his assassination; he was a preacher’s son who thought himself to process might and mercy on par with the Lord, whose judgement widely extended his jurisdiction. He believed everything he said because he saw himself as infallible. He was dangerous – to himself, to the rescue operation and to everyone who had had a hand in helping him design it.

“Richmond is alive,” Hanger responded.

“Richmond is about to be replaced.”

The reporter bit his lower lip, unable to believe Tallmadge as a source but equally incapable of failing to consider a number of small, curious factors that had caused him pause over the past few weeks, one in particular that might stand as evidence for Tallmadge’s odd theory. “Hence the hoopla around this wedding that the Queen herself seems to be doing everything to encourage,” he said to himself before extending his assumption to possible ‘divine’ criticism, “A measure of distraction?”

“We are of one mind,” Tallmadge claimed. “From what my source tells me, Richmond will die this weekend.”
“Those traitors!” Hanger exclaimed with theatrics fitting the narrative Tallmadge seemed to wish him to believe, “They get Ban involved to do their dirty work and then force him to interact with the whole André debacle, that the Americans would then have cause to silence him without – fuck! Fuck! We can’t … they can’t! For all we know Senator Arnold might be dead and you are asking…”

“You to help me make sure there are no further casualties,” Tallmadge raised his voice though his words were clearly intended to console. “Thanks to you, we are going to get the trade deal ratified, which seems to be the only matter my nation had any interest in assuring. Your friend has put himself in a position where he truly won’t be able to add any detail to the Duke’s death. If questioned, Tarleton is bound to be acquitted, but as it will look natural – and, where not, the Crown will be in no position to pursue charges against the prime suspects.”

Hanger threw up his hands. Was this the tactic that Hamilton was intending to employ in whatever empty interrogation he meant to drag Ban into? “I’m not following,” he admitted, exhausted from the attempt.

“What do you want to?” Tallmadge asked. “I don’t think Tarleton will give a damn one way or another if I repeat what he told me last night by way of telling Simcoe and Hewlett.”

“Wait? Ban himself was your source?” It all sounded more plausible in such terms. “I don’t think I have a choice at this point,” Hanger sighed. “Hit me.”

“Curiously, I believe you were there when it happened. I believe a lot of names I’ve recently become well acquainted with were on the guest list to this little salon and none of you are any the wiser for it. Last fall, Mary Anne Burges threw a match viewing party when Scotland played the United States in the Rugby World Cup – have you any recollection of this?” Tallmadge asked.

Hanger blinked. Again, he found the explanation to fail his expectations. “Sure, it was like any of her … ‘salons’, as you are correct to phrase them,” he gave, wondering if it was entirely wise to humour the man. “Mary Anne isn’t interested in sport unless it allows her the opportunity to suggest her true political leanings in a fashion that could be misconstrued as mere enthusiasm for some game or another. Scotland was bound to beat the US and -”

“And Ban was at this event?”

“Might have been. To her credit, Mary Anne gets the best catering,” Hanger shrugged. “She’s a former fat kid who never misses an opportunity to demonstrate how very skilled she now is at self-restriction. I don’t know if I should give her credit for that. The only thing worse than a girl who sets a whole stage for her show of delicate restraint is one who constantly apologises for eating or makes excuses around missed meals as though these are necessary. Now that I have a think on it, I feel off about criticising Ban’s recent privacy. I don’t like being around all of those people for the sake of it, for the whole false sense of self-importance - I mean, catering options aside. But yea, Mary Anne throws parties and a lot of people come by to say that they were there. Most events are like that, I fear, especially with the nouveau riches involved or otherwise invited.”

“It was about a week after his court martial.”

“The match? I don’t have the date in my head.”

“It was,” Tallmadge confirmed. “He had some kind of eye-for-an-eye understanding with Lady Eleanor that he would commit murder if she testified to get him off these charges – maybe a ‘test match’ to borrow form your preferred nomenclature to see if he truly could get away with such a crime,” the detective paused, “I should say in defence of your friend, there was evidence at the time
to suggest that the duke had begun abusing his grand-niece, that the family was powerless to act, both in the court for obvious reasons and by their own accord - the now-adult children having long been made victim to circumstance.

“In the early eighties,” he continued to explain, “it seems that the editor of The Daily Mail was paid for his silence during an investigation he was conducting on a child’s death at one of the family’s estates. A few years later he changed his mind and was readying to publish when he died unexpectedly of a stroke, leaving everything to his unborn daughter who subsequently also lost her mother in childbirth. When Effie Gwillim came of age, she read the piece upon inheriting the publication, decided it was nonsense, but years later, seems to have shared it with Ban to settle a debate that arose at a separate dinner. It had the affect of feeding his suspicions.”

“It would.” He had heard this story before.

“Lady Edith and Edward of Richmond were betrothed when she was still a young minor. She bore him a child -Edna- at fourteen and he lost interest in her after that. Edmund the elder reportedly married Edith to hid his brother’s crime and eventually integrated the child into his family using a friend’s new baby as a decoy at press events to adjust for age discrepancies. Many years later, Edmund – that is, the couple’s first son, also suffered a stroke while trying to take a stand against his own family – but was otherwise young and healthy enough to have survived what some believed to have been a poisoning.

“But back to this party, it so works out that Mary Anne Burges is close friends with a famed Swiss botanist, and between drinks and scattered conversation over a sporting fixture none were interested in on its own merits, Ban brought the man into a conversation about local flora and came away knowing that the root of a common plant could be distilled to such an effect, that, or if administered routinely over the course of many months. A few weeks later, according to Tarleton’s own narrative, he found himself in the possession of enough gambling winnings to buy a two-thousand -pound plate at a charity event Richmond was throwing, snuck upstairs with catering staff to the man’s own bedchamber between courses, had his way with her and after, when he had gone into the bathroom to take a piss, unscrewed and put some amount of organic material in the faucet, knowing it would dissolve and disintegrate slowly with the running water, that the mint of toothpaste would mask the bitter taste, that no evidence would be left and that his date could provide him with an alibi should she speak of the encounter which he has reason to believe she wouldn’t – the job is apparently well-paying and such would surely see her made redundant.

“Otherwise, no one would have any reason to investigate him should the death be investigated as suspicious at all, which the Crown would have no great interest in pursuing as the prime suspect would naturally be one of its own. Ban doesn’t have the educational background to support a case for his being the actor, say, the way Lady Edith does, and no one else involved is involved to such an extent that questions could even be raised.”

“He’s brilliant,” Hanger acknowledged.

“He’s fucked,” Tallmadge contradicted. “Buckingham Palace is building up this marriage in the press, turning a blind eye to Richmond and turning those of the press and public towards Anna and Edmund, right when it seems certain his Lord uncle will take his last breath. But Edmund implemented himself in Arnold’s disappearance – rather, the French Embassy did after blackmailing the British, and if someone is needed to take the fall in the incident with the senator … well, why not the man who I’m more than certain the circus must somehow be aware committed a crime of high treason? But now the feds can’t do away with him after this first failed attempt as you’ve stated and we have to give the M16 as little incentive as possible to try. I don’t know what is going to happen in your country tomorrow, but I believe Hamilton when he says he is
acting as a lone actor today, though I understand and even share your hesitations."

“Understand, perhaps, but not fully appreciate,” Hanger argued. “Ferguson is almost uniquely positioned to have a pulse on this – for the sake of argument we will just say he is right: Hamilton is going to start a dialogue over the inheritance Mary Anne and Ells seem to have set up for his girls while waiting on the post-mortem – it won’t help Ban later on if he isn’t caught off guard by this development. It will look like a pay-out – I mean, it will look like a pay-out regardless.”

“Not necessarily,” Tallmadge said. “Neither will see the money until her twenty-fifth birthday, until such time their interests on the board will be managed by Effie Gwillim, who, in the event that Edmund Senior should step down, will hold a majority share.”

“Oh, those sly bastards,” Hanger murmured to himself. “He has to know, then.”

“Care to expand?” Talmadge frowned.

“I know Effie, however loosely. She isn’t going to do anything risky with money that isn’t hers, especially when it is children’s welfare that is concerned, which makes it extremely unlikely that she will be moving jobs overseas – i.e., out of Liverpool. Ban’s ‘death’ really accomplished all that he had hope to in life yet he doesn’t benefit enough personally, at least in the immediate, to necessarily serve the cause for alarm.”

“If he is ignorant to it,” Tallmadge nodded to himself.

Hanger only sighed. “You know what gets me? For all of the conspiracy and collusion, your man Hamilton would have just as much success working Ban into whatever state he feels appropriate for negotiation this hostage situation by simply mentioning in passing how poor Everton FC is at spending. Trust me, mate. Just tell your boss – is he your boss? – any road, just tell Hams to ask him about the return value on buying up all the available midfielders and we can all get out of this without anyone saying anything potentially incriminating or otherwise threatening to the Crown. Shit, let me go back out there and do it now – by the time the ADIC gets here, Ban will be foaming at the mouth.”

The former detective, giving no sign of approval or even acknowledgment of this softer alternative, again caused Hanger to question his true intent. “That is,” he tested, “if you really trust that Hamilton only intends to make use of him as an arbitrator between himself and the enemy whom we all now share in this Rogers fellow.”

“It is not a general animosity he wants to evoke,” Tallmadge explained. “Hamilton says that Tarleton needs to hate the FBI with everything he is for Rogers to accept him as not having ties.”

“Let’s be clear,” Hanger countered, “The Federal Bureau of Investigation drug my mate through the Deep South and then tried to kill him at a Maccas. I’d hardly call it a stretch to say he is none too keen.”

“But he laughs when he relays the exploits of his escape,” Tallmadge replied. “We can’t let him in on the punchline. Ban Tarleton fits a certain profile … he will run with it. He can’t help it. Subconsciously he thinks he has to, for his sake, for yours, Ms Gwillim’s – we need to break him of this cycle of situational contradiction but we can’t let him admit to anything that could later be held against him in court in the process.”

Hanger left the door frame of the bathroom stall and began to pace as he thought aloud. Tallmadge was right, but he was fully mistaken if he imagined there would be a bloodless answer to an act of war. “I have an idea … I’ll go to the pub in your place to serve as some force of distraction as
planned. I assume Hamilton is going to equivocally exchange hostages in an act of good faith – Simcoe, after all, was able to secure a promise of his son’s help for the decorating committee. I’ll come on something to get rid of the intern who might well insist upon an unobtainable perfection in spite of the locale and I’ll then appeal to young Hamilton’s ambition – shoot a video of him and his friends playing, say that I could maybe get him a trial at an unfashionable side before mentioning that Ban’s relatives have far more clout and connection in that world than I do myself as a mere journalist, have them lead me to the phone, and Ban, hopefully before he passes his anger phase and goes on to congratulate himself on his own perceived brilliance and success to someone empowered to do something about it. I’m up for it. Why not?” he laughed, “I bloody hate weddings anyway.”

“Alright,” Tallmadge answered. “I suppose that could work out in everyone’s favour.”

“The cornerstone of compromise is that neither party is completely satisfied,” Hanger said as he pulled his phone to make sure the pay that he was scheduled to receive for his weekly column had hit his account despite the bank holiday. It had. It should cover the cost of a firearm. “Out of curiosity mate,” he asked Tallmadge when he rose, again revealing what might well be a gun in his pocket, “how the fuck are you not frisked every time you fly?”

Slowly and with a shaking hand, she put the spare key into its lock, hesitating before turning it open, nervous to walk through this particular door.

Bihin Yılmaz, until this point an upstanding, law abiding and God-fearing woman, knew that which she planned to personally undertake to be far from ethical.

She knew, however, this particular address from her daughter’s case notes – notes she had mistakenly taken when afforded the unfortunate and in ways ironic task of cleaning out what was left of Hatice’s desk after she had been killed in the line of duty. Bihin stood before the open door, wondering if she was half as brave as her eldest child had been. She bit her lip. She had to be. Never again would she cook for Hatice or sneak into the room she had shared with her sisters to put an extra blanket over her while she slept for fear she would catch a cold from the open window, never again would she hold her in debate or hold her while she cried. This home was all that she had been left with by way of honouring her daughter. Tasting the blood that she had accidently drawn from her lower lip when the warm liquid reached what little remained of her tongue, she closed her eyes and stepped inside.

Bihin’s colleague Rosa Gutiérrez had forced a smile meant to convey sympathy earlier that same morning and had told Bihin in light tones that she had not expected her to be back quite so soon without going so far as to verbally acknowledge the paid bereavement most would have taken. Rosa, not unlike Bihin herself, was an immigrant in her mid-fifties, a mother of many and to many more who spent a back-breaking twelve hours each day cleaning the kinds of homes she had every reason to hope her children and those she had taken in from the street would one day occupy. But hopes and verities were separate principles - one of Rosa’s sons, or so rumour told, was serving time upstate for petty theft, something that had likely felt to honest housekeeper the worst thing that could happen to a parent until she had attended Hatice’s funeral in a show of friendship and support, until she heard the sounds her mute colleague could in fact make in agony and anguish.

But Rosa was wrong. The worst of what Bihin suffered as a mother was the idea that would be for Hatice’s death to have been for nothing when in life she had given so very much.
‘Yes,’ Bihin had scribbled on the same Post-It she had given to her work-friend of thirty years in asking if she was willing to switch out one penthouse for another. This was fairly common practice in the firm. Bihin herself already had an assignment in the same building; Rosa was likely equally annoyed that poor logistics so often saw her carting her bleach and buckets on the subway, at least when swaps could not be easily negotiated. The housekeepers knew the city better than the man who paid them to clean up its messes and made the plans (however poorly) to see this dirty work done. It was not uncommon for keys to trade hands, and Hatice, given her seniority and difficulties with speech did not often find herself in any arguments over the matter of the sort that sometimes erupted between the younger girls, especially if they shared a mother tongue. Rosa, she knew, was only being kind and did not deserve the frankness of her partially falsified reply:

‘Yes, I have to work today – bereavement is only at 70 percent salary. I can’t take two weeks. I can’t take one. I have two daughters still, one is still in nursing school and the other is about to begin college in the fall, out of state – Hatice was helping to pay for this, for rent, for food, and now our family is without that income.’

Rosa gave her a hug immediately and said things meant to comfort and console, things that might have held more meaning were Bihin not so nervous.

Bihin Yilmaz cleaned five separate homes before arriving at John André’s former flat and spent ten minutes in which a cigarette might have served her better staring at the tape on the entrance, signalling the site at a crime scene, discovering that she had not been the first to break it and thereby break in. She did not know what exactly she was expecting to find, but seeing that the Notice of No Entry came from the FBI, Bihin was relatively certain that whatever such secrets this crime scene might reveal were being withheld from the unit her daughter briefly headed.

Donning a new pair of latex gloves and arming herself with a spray bottle filled with bleach she intended to weaponize should there be need, she unlocked the door, entering with shut eyes and as much speed as she had caution. Technically, she thought to herself, she could not speak English. Should she be discovered, it was doubtful that anyone would assume her fully literate in her third language if framed with such phrasing.

Bihin pulled out her phone an began taking pictures of things that felt out of place: muddy footprints in the entrance way, on the couch and collapsed coffee table, the half-smoked Cuban cigar unceremoniously discarded with its ashes on the rug. Had there been a struggle? Was this evidence left by André or rather an FBI Agent? Was it evidence at all? Was she obliged by profession to clean it or would she instead get in trouble with the law for disturbing evidence?

In order to make her alibi of not understanding ‘CRIME SCENE – KEEP OUT’ seem more plausible, Bihin began about her regular work, finding the mud had not fully dried into dirt and that the cigar had only very recently been extinguished. Perhaps someone else was here, someone who had heard her enter and was now in hiding. She removed her shoes in hopes of silencing her steps as she moved to follow, to corner and question. Tracing signs left by someone else’s feet, Bihin crept her way down the adjacent hall, spray bottle readied at eye-level should anyone spring.

She had not gotten very far before she broke with caution and broke into a charge upon hearing some stranger cry out, smelling blood though the stale smoke that permeated the entire premises.

Bihin Yilmaz screamed when she opened the door to the master bedroom before her tears began to flow, at once from happiness and from frustration -

She had found Senator benedict Arnold but could not call the police; she was in the middle of typing a text to Hatice’s former partner DS Russo about her find before it occurred to her that she should not do so – she was, after all, at a sealed off crime scene with an alibi that relied
on a poor understanding of English and a badly injured American Senator who stared at her as though she were someone he had expected and said things that she did not understand (“Min ‘anat?”) or that simply made no sense (“Enyo speaks Arabic though, I think … I want her to come back, but not her, and not him – and certainly not Peggy, just something to take me away from the pain, enough to make me see and for it not to matter. They were together in this, André, Rogers … why?”)

Bihin instead sent a text to Ben Tallmadge, then another and another still, growing increasingly anxious with each non-answer that he already knew everything she was telling him and had chosen not to act, or, perhaps, to be a willing participant in whatever it was holding Arnold to this bed beyond his injury and what she could reasonably gather was a want for opioids. Bihin Yilmaz had found a hostage but could not inform the police either physically or procedurally. Instead, she sent her husband a text, explaining only that he needed to come with a medical bag.

Then, she sent another text to the imam at her mosque, explaining the entire situation, asking for him to arrange legal rather than spiritual help for her -

Whatever was happening, whatever she had missed or misinterpreted, Bihin Yilmaz was quite sure she was not the one who needed to get good with God in the situation she had invited upon herself.

Caleb Brewster laughed hardily as he lifted himself to his tip toes, putting his arm around his boyfriend’s shoulder for a photograph, smiling whole-heartedly for the same shot that Ben Tallmadge met with a scowl. As soon as he heard the camera’s click, the former inspector freed himself from Caleb’s embrace, ignoring the request that he stand another few frames, ignoring (though not entirely ignorant to) what the world might make of the editor’s quick, snippy negation of her photographer on artistic and political grounds.

“No, no – this one is perfect. Nice for our readers to know that American opinion is as split of this union as our own.”

It would be a headline.

That would be enough.

Ben paused in the thought and stopped in his tracks, wondering when he had begun to see the world in this light, suddenly hoping to escape into its shadows. As a younger man, he would have been furious that the legislative branch of government was using a public distraction as an excuse to function, he would have been furious that a royal wedding was taking place on American soil, that he had become reliant on confessed criminals and corporate sharks to out-con his own country that he might yet to save a senator on American soil after his significance to a thinly defined clause in a bit of legislation had all but expired.

Now, Ben Tallmadge was angry to the point of numbness over the simple fact that there was little he could do to protect those he might otherwise have reason to prosecute from his own trusted allies. Hamilton had never shown himself at the wedding, not did his lady wife or their children, perhaps in an effort to make the ADIC’s absence less apparent. Ben wondered if there were any news-nerds left out there following the case with an intensity that would have let them notice this, if he would have done so as a student, as a cop or casual spectator. Ferguson, alias Eggshell, would surely notice and might well point as much out to his followers were he not already involved and/or
implemented. He might yet still. Ben wondered if he ought to call and ask the man to do so. The ceremony had ended an hour ago and he still neither seen nor heard from the federal agent who had invited himself onto this plan of attack, from Tarleton, from Hanger or from the target they all shared. Ben pulled his phone from his pocket, ignoring the news ticker and serval misses texts (his mother had seen him on television, so had many of her friends from church, so too, apparently, had Mrs. Yilmaz, making Ben feel all the more uncomfortable at the outpour of middle-age women essentially pinching his cheeks by using contemptuous language complementarily – did no one realise he was thirty? That ‘cute’ had passed from fashion when his early teens had made him taller than most of their number?) He nearly rolled his eyes before realising he was fighting back tears.

Yilmaz, he thought.

Ferguson.

Ben returned to the morning Genovese had broken his sacred Omertà and all but ended a decades-long drug war in a final escalation of hostilities, to the explosion that has been the don’s thanks, to the horror that this had happened on the steps to a police station - that his former sergeant had then suffered the same fate in the office she had assumed from a package meant for him. Ferguson’s fingerprints had been found on the documents Ben could reasonably infer Genovese to have been killed for and as he stared at the bridal party on the courthouse steps, wondering if he should again call and call on this Scotch wolf in sheep’s clothing, Benjamin Tallmadge wanted nothing more than to scream.

In the world he now found himself, the one, that perhaps had always existed outside his sphere of consciousness, every crime was a cover. Justice was not blind but rather mute. Loyalty and betrayal felt synonymous and Ben felt invalid in his inability to see the same boundaries that lent definiton to everyone else. He could not protect Tarleton from Hamilton. He had known as much in the morning and should have thus afforded him more information that Hanger advised.

But then –

Banastre Tarleton was bathed in fire and baptised in sin. He was a demon who laughed as chaos and destruction were wrought by his hand, whose crimes were forgiven for fear of the greater ones he claimed to correct with his own from who his actions might implement, actively or passively.

But then –

Maybe they all truly were on the same side.

“Maybe we are all in the wrong,” Ben acknowledged aloud to Caleb, answering a question he had not heard, placing his mobile back into the back pocket of his trousers before looking down at his hands, half-expecting to see blood. “But I can’t … if you can’t be honest with me, I can’t do any of this – any of it! Not just with us, with some hypothetical idea of commitment that can’t possibly measure against scrutiny, but this – all of this, I can’t solve a case, I can’t even work it with you working against me. I can’t smile in pictures as though nothing were -”

“Oh no is!” Caleb hissed. “Jesus H. Christ, Benny Boy, you’ve gotta pull it together, man. If you are still upset about my involving Rob in this, Rob,” he stressed, “who already knew about Abe and Rogers -”

“Knew without telling me,” Ben spat, “or evidently his bosses, or -”

“Don’t we all try to protect those we love?” Caleb posed.
“You’d think,” Ben answered, frowning. “Or maybe … maybe we are all in this mess for ourselves, by ourselves … maybe one can only truly be lonely in company.” With that, he turned to walk away but again felt the same touch he had longed for a day before grace his shoulders with a light shove.

“Maybe you have to realise that you aren’t the only fucking person in the world,” Caleb accused. “I was worried about Aberdeen and the kids, the fact that Rogers was indeed holding Arnold hostage in the same house is evidence that my fears were in fact warranted. Rob only passed the information on because he couldn’t pursue. Are you angry that I figured that much out without you or somethin’?”

“I’m angry that you didn’t tell me until it was done.”

“How could I without alarming Mary, Abe and Abigail who were sitting right there, already on edge – what with Ban already pretending not to be half-panicked about his own babies the whole damn time, I didn’t want to throw a match into a powder-keg. Look man, I don’t know … I’m not police and never was but I think we are better off having Hamilton’s support, having FBI agents in the crowd to help cover all that could go wrong and I think you … no Ben, with you I can’t decide; is it that you can’t accept you are not alone in this world or that you won’t accept that you are not alone in your wants?”

“It is that it should be so much simpler to decipher who I can trust from who I can’t,” Ben returned. “I was given information from a mob boss that lead me to arrest the man responsible for ordering my former partner’s death only to watch him murdered for his efforts in the very place he should have been protected. A foreign colleague’s prints were found on the document Genovese hand delivered and I can’t … quite work out if he is himself in with an opioid cartel or just using his position on the force as leverage against them and I hate,” he swallowed, confessing, “I hate that I’ve spent the better half of this morning wishing against logic that I personally had more in common with the man for the simple fact that he refused to betray … if not an ally per se, then a man seemingly innocent of the crimes of which he’s now being made to answer … maybe with his life. I hate that it is my fault, same as it was with Nate, same as Genovese and Yilmaz, and hell – Theodosia and Cicero and Phillip and everyone else I would have ever been in a position to protect were it not for protocol.

“And the joke of it is so many people have paid such a price as ransom for a man who never had the quote-unquote ‘value’ as a hostage his colleagues in the US Senate were unwilling to set, perhaps knowing that Arnold’s controversial bill was never going to be brought to a vote in an election year. Everything that went into this case – it was all for nought. This isn’t about me, Caleb. It isn’t even about Arnold. It is about all of the sacrifices we’ve made as individuals, as a nation for gains that look so negligible against the human cost. It is that I’ve found myself in so many situations that have been beyond my control and the one time – the one single time - in all of this in which I might have done something differently I again chose objective over ally,” he paused, “And I don’t think … bad as I feel over it, I don’t think I’ve made the wrong choice if Hamilton is right, if we can barter for Arnold’s release. But is the senator’s life worth all of those lost? Is it worth those lives he financed André to disrupt, regardless of whatever militaristic benefit might have been?”

“Would it really help you if those questions could be answered?” Caleb demanded. “You are trying to apply math to morality, to unquantifiable constructs instead of just letting yourself be comforted by the fact that there are apparently forces more destructive than fear. John André was wrong. If you need to give yourself a win, take that – take the fact that you came out to your parents, that you made friends of suspects and stated enemies,” he stopped. Lowering his voice, he continued, “that however briefly, you felt something strongly enough to call it ‘love.’”
Ben Tallmadge rarely found himself in situations he could not separate. His work-life had long overwhelmed any semblance of balance, and perhaps for this reason, he was slow to see where and how he had crossed a line. His high-school friend Jordan had, on occasion, represented a suspect in court of questioning which was as close as he had come to keeping up the pretence of friendship with anyone in these past years, their interactions often ending in a promise of grabbing a beer that rarely manifested into actual plans. Looking at Caleb, Ben worried that he did not know how to exist in a world absent of crime and chaos, that the doubts that circled and surrounded his final days on the force were all he could trust in. He had done his job and still there had been casualties. He could not trust in his ability to protect people, in the ability of any acronymed organization to do so; he could not trust that anything good could come from good intentions. He envied Caleb’s ease with such concepts. He envied that Caleb had never been in a position to compartmentalize. He hated him for it.

“I can love you whilst feeling the weight of conscious. I can’t protect anyone much as I want to and I think I am probably jealous of the fact that you still think you can -” he began.

But Caleb Brewster broke him off, shaking his head as he spoke, “Forget it. I’m not going to apologise to you for doing what I thought to be the right thing. Furthermore, I don’t think you should be berating yourself for wanting to believe in the good in others. Fuck Ben, I think – I think you should just be trying to have a good time here. Rogers will show and if not, well … now there are more than enough people who know exactly who they are looking for. C’mon, Benny Boy. Chin up. You got the guy, you’ll get the bad guy eventually, nothing to do now but get a drink.”

“I hate the time between weddings and receptions,” Ben forced himself to return his boyfriend’s smile as he watched it expand. Was love really so simple as Caleb could suggest? Was life?

“Nah, nah,” Caleb laughed, “far worse is when you actually get to the bar, when you can small the food but have to wait for a few more tacky declarations of love before the banquet actually begins.”

“It is good that we had that continental breakfast.”

“So many skirts but so few purses that could fit a stolen piece of fruit of half-eaten scone,” Caleb observed of the wedding party and the guests who remained with them on the court steps, “I’m almost angry this isn’t a church, that we can’t even go back inside and steal communion wafers.”

“Are you saying you want to go grab something to eat?” Ben tried.

“Finally putting those deductive skills to good use, I see! If I phrase it as ‘I’ve known Robert Rogers for most of my life and I think there a good chance that he’d ignore all of this hoopla in favour of a burger and fires’ would you care to give me back up?” Caleb winked.

“You’re amazing, so amazing,” Ben whispered into Caleb’s hairline as he pulled him back into an embrace.

“Hungry, too.”

“Yeah,” Ben gave, “you are right. it isn’t like Rogers is going to show himself with cameras everywhere, let’s run away together in search of a dollar menu.”

“Let me just tell Abe to tell Anna I’ve had to check out for a bit – oh!” Caleb exclaimed suddenly, sliding his body from Ben’s arms as his smile faded. “Two o’clock.”

“It is four,” Ben replied, slightly confused.
“No, turn -”

“No, turn -” his reverend father shouted as he approached, more urgent than angry. Ben shoved his hands in his pockets as though he hoped to hide their sin.

“Dad,” he stammered, “Caleb and I were just about to take a break, go get something to eat, do you want -”

“Arnold has been found, why haven’t you been answering your phone?” his father continued without pausing in greeting or to find his breath.

“What?” Ben gasped. “How do you know? How does no one else?” he reached for his phone. There were no missed calls. “Is this fake news? No one called or texted me, just mom and some of the other ladies from your congregation just saying that they saw me on television,” he explained, “that I was cute, adorable or some other degrading diminutive -”

“I did not raise you to be so vain, Benjamin,” his father said, making him feel smaller than he had reading these pixeled equivalents of having his cheeks pinched. He felt his cheeks redden.

“Dad I’m not being vain, I -”

“Mrs Yilmaz texted you quite a few times, but you,” his father accused as those he stood behind a pulpit, “satisfied with yourself and your charms you chose to ignore her cries for help based on a fragile conceit? She found Arnold in John André’s flat – she physically can’t call the cops and Arnold refused from what I’m guessing is Stockholm Syndrome.”

Ben’s jaw fell in shock with the full force of gravity as though it no longer held any allegiance to his face. Perhaps he was blinded both to and by his own vanities. As his father continued, he looked at his WhatsApp and saw that his former sergeant’s mother had turned to him in her panic, that he had been so focused on his own plan that all other noise had felt irrelevant.

“Seeing he needed medical care, she sent her husband a text, and he, realising that Arnold needed care that could not be administer at home called for an ambulance while his wife texted their imam – my friend and colleague, looking for legal assistance as technically the Yilmaz’ walked past police tape in order to save this man. Bihin’s hysterical, you need to call. You need to get yourself down to the hospital – she thinks the feds have been holding him this whole time because of something you said that Hatice repeated at home and that as such they will revoke her residency status -”

Ben felt sick. He had to find a way of fixing this. “That … that actually isn’t true … that the feds had him. Hamilton is actually … Yeah, I’ll go - I just, Caleb,” he shifted, “can you discreetly go and tell Jordan what has happened and ask him to take a trip back to New York with us. I know he isn’t civil rights per se but this is bound to piss him right off and he’ll have connections and I don’t want,” he shut his eyes, “the Yilmaz family doesn’t deserve -”

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll do,” Caleb hastened. If anyone could pull a member of the bridal party away before flashing cameras without anyone being the wiser, Ben knew it to be his boyfriend. He looked at the groomsmen, laughing as they recreated a scene from Braveheart by exposing their rears to Effie Gwillim’s circus, insulting the editor’s sensibilities and sense of self, loosing track of the man he loved as he disappeared into the masses.

“She really saved him then?” Ben shared in the unrelated joviality of the late afternoon. “Hatice would have – I’m sure she would have been so proud.”
“Mrs Yilmaz saw André’s address in rotation at the firm she works for as a maid, making excuses to trade that she could get access to someone your DS was looking into in connection with the case, trying to help her little girl even as she is grieving for her. You mom she’s … well she is baking her a pie. Ben Ali called the house-phone first, looking for me, looking for you … I don’t know how the pie is going to help but, no,” he decided, “Maybe it will help Mrs. Yilmaz to know she has friends.”

“I’m sure it will,” Ben agreed. It helped him to know that his mother could still be one. His father smiled, indicating the sentiment was mutual and opened his moth to speak, but his unspoken words were interrupted by a sudden cry.

“Tallmadge!”

Both men turned.

Ben expected Jordan but found himself faced with Hamilton instead. “I have news -” the ADIC began, keeping to what he seemed to consider quiet tones.

“I know,” Ben excused him of explanation, “I just found out.”

“Are you going to New York?” Hamilton asked.

“To check up on the woman who found him first and foremost,” Ben confirmed, “I’m worried about what the media – mainstream, social and otherwise - will make of a Muslim immigrant finding Senator Arnold at a sealed off crime scene -”

“Nothing,” Hamilton said sharply, “because they are never going to find out that Arnold was being hidden at any property your former department or mine had already searched high and low. She and her daughter – your former DS - will be awarded with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, both with Distinction, but Washington needs eyes on her until she can be debriefed. I would go myself but it seems you – or your family - have stronger ties and my talents are better served keeping this from the press for as long as possible. If Rogers discovers he no longer has a hostage to hand over, he might instead flee and Washington has now personally ordered his arrest – we can’t -”

“Where is Tarleton?” Ben interrupted. “What did you -”

Hamilton gripped his shoulder and turned him around as he whispered into his ear, “He’s right over there, hugging that kid from the British Embassy who helped set up the banquet … pretending for the boy’s sake and I suppose our own that it isn’t obvious that he is being handed a gun.”

“A gun? What have you -”

Hamilton sighed. “We had a little conversation about how his daughters seem to have inherited his natural ability of convincing otherwise responsible individuals and institutions to entrust them with ridiculous sums of cash - with which I then handed over, empowering him to negotiate on our shared behalf. Damn him. Morgan was right in every assessment. And here I thought I could talk!

“To the gun,” he continued, “Tarleton has arranged to meet Rogers in the pub, alone, prior to the banquet. I knew when I asked you to call Ferguson that he would instruct you to talk to Hanger, and that he’d then position himself to protect his friend at the cost of whatever story he’s thinking will become his next big payday. The boy, Arthur, is a schoolmate of Marie – the one who found her, or rather, redirected the search,” Hamilton clarified. “He’s clever, I think, and probably scared shitless being throw into a conflict that isn’t his own. Anyway, he was able to purchase a firearm which I have enough reason to doubt will be fired in itself; what he has really done is give Tarleton
ammunition for his anti-gun rhetoric, which - if you’ve not yet been exposed - is exactly the kind of decent you’d expect of a European with no understanding of the world that lead to us having the Second Amendment.”

“Envy masquerading as righteousness?” Ben clarified.

“Perhaps,” Hamilton nodded to himself, “The point was - from Hanger’s perspective at least - to get the boy from the pub so he could do a quick job of decorating with the kids Simcoe volunteered from the team he coaches – my son included - shoot a video saying he could get them a trial at Bayer Leverkusen – which is some soccer team in Germany, and then name-drop - saying, for example, that William Tarleton could get them opportunities at any academy, that he knew him but didn’t have his private number, but that his brother surely would.

“Then the boys brought Hanger to the hotel where I was running my interrogation as I suspected them to, and, being as by that time we were all but finished, I concluded our talks with my handing Colonel Tarleton a briefcase filled with numbered, marked currency. We managed to keep Hanger from his keyboard during the entire planning phase. Now we just have to keep the wider press distracted from the senator until Rogers takes the bait. Someone has to pay for this mess -”

“Sir, I appreciate your precautions, and I understand why I was not fully briefed, but André – John André, if he knew about Arnold’s whereabouts or not - is the man you should be after if it is justice you seek.”

“Tallmadge,” Hamilton grimaced, “I don’t like this, but there is something I have to tell you about John André – and something that I need you, in turn, to relay.”

It was almost fitting that the bed in which he had found himself had smelt of smoke for he had been all but certain the fires of hell could not be far from where he lay.

He thought of the girl, of the terrified screams she had tried to silence and worried that he had killed her before meeting the fist of the man who had long held him captive one final time. The pain he felt when he awoke might have indicated that he yet lived – that Robert Rogers had been awoken by the poor girl’s cries in time to stop him from escape once more, had once more moved him to another cellar, basement or cell – but the room had been too brightly lit.

Benedict Arnold, who had spent weeks in relative darkness, now had to squint in the quiet daylight, his eyes burning from its glow, from stagnant smoke and the scent of a cigar, and from that which he rose to find beside him – the key to his dungeon, or rather, its lock.

Dr John André, who had seduced him openly with his questions of the mind and in private with promises made of another’s flesh, who Arnold had come to believe in his captivity was the only man who had ever truly understood him, who had offered him sympathy, salvation and all that remained, had left him broken.

In this bed.

In his bed.

One he seemed to share with another.
It was not the pictures of the doctor with his beautiful wife, however, that caused Arnold to weep. It was the others: John and Rogers, arm-in-arm; John and that ginger-haired Paki with a high voice whom Arnold recalled arguing with in a pub, who had broken his leg and put him in a basement; John and Rogers and the Ginge and one of the bloody Hewletts laughing at the same table as Robeson and the young couple Arnold vaguely recognised from a photograph in the Brooklyn home he had tried to flee; John André smiling as though he knew the punchline to the joke he had been telling had finally hit:

The entirely of Arnold’s ordeal had been by his design, perhaps as part of his research, perhaps a mere expression of boredom or whimsy –

Perhaps the predicament even gave the good doctor pleasure.

Benedict Arnold grinded his teeth as he continued to flip through od photographs, most of the man whom his new consciousness had made into a stranger, trying to place faces to the voices he had heard, realising, as he did, that nearly every other face his saw was that of a fellow victim.

He thought of the brave Americans and their foreign allies who had rallied to his cause – among them subjects from André’s test group, one of whom had nearly lost his life in the course of treatment.

He thought of John Robeson who had helped bandage his wounds at the risk of his own life. Arnold had not seen him since, perhaps Rogers had made good on his threats in the end.

He thought of Private Woodhull and his wife, how for both of them he had become a secret that threatened their marriage, fearing for one another’s safety, for the safety of their son.

This was André’s work on a wider scale.

This was hell, a hell Arnold had invited onto himself and the institution he had long served.

It was fitting that John André’s sheets smelt vaguely of smoke.

Benedict Arnold screamed for the doctor to show himself.

He screamed for Rogers.

He screamed for the sake of the sound.

He was alone.

He could leave, except -

He could not.

Senator Arnold knew himself to be every bit as much the cause of his condition as anyone else he could blame. He had followed a false prophet to promised glory and found himself faced with defeat on all fronts. The love he had thought he had know had been a mirage, Peggy Shippen had never been real in the ways he had come to know he and the caricature of her André had created for the purpose of private correspondence had never been a secret manifestation of the doctor himself. André’s theory, Arnold realised, had been wrong on its premise – fear was not the only emotion that was at once an instinct, love also held that distinction, and love lost was as destructive as any weapon man might create.

“Is it still a love story if the ending’s a sad one?” he asked broadly to an absent audience in
language borrowed from a fallen soldier. He would see him soon, or he would not. There were no
drugs to be had to alleviate pain and its perfect synonym loneliness, he was neither dead nor was
life worth living.

Benedict Arnold laid himself back down, wanting to fall back into the restful part of this elaborate
dream, this expression of his subconscious onto a situation over which he has no control. But no
sooner had he closed his eyes than screams again found him, again those of a woman, again, a
mirage of a nightmare long since passed without the numb that morphine normally allowed for.

He attempted to ask her who she was in a language he assumed her to speak, but the woman at his
bedside who observed the hijab did not speak Arabic. She could not speak at all but the sounds she
did make Arnold could almost place as being pleas.

She could not call the police.

But then, neither could he.

At some point she grew frustrated and left him to his familiar pain and misery, returning after a
while with a cup of water and yellow legal pad on which she had written to him that she was the
mother of a police inspector who had died investigating his disappearance, that she had been
punished in her youth for speaking a language her country of birth forbade, that this was a crime
scene, that no one could know her to speak English either. That he had to call the cops. That he had
to call for help. She could not. Moreover, she had to disappear the instant he did.

She had to disappear, she wrote.

Arnold thought of André and Peggy, of Scaevola and Enyo and everyone else he had dreamt,
wondering if he had met this woman at Incirlik, wondering why she came to him in this delirium.
He asked to see André. She reached for her phone and typed out an address. She wrote André and
then something in what Arnold assumed from her story was either Turkish or Kurdish. His heart
filled with hope and hatred. He asked about the photographs again, knowing she could not answer
him. Knowing he was talking to himself -

Until he could no longer be so sure.

Rather than André, an old man came and an ambulance followed shortly thereafter. The tongueless
woman who shameless and selfless had given the old man her headscarf as a bandage for his
wound gave into her fears and began to cry as sirens spread them through the city streets. Arnold
reached out for her hand and tried to tell her ‘thank you’ but was betrayed by the demons he carried
in his heart.

“Is it still a love story if the ending’s a sad one?” he asked.

He did not know when he had fallen asleep, when he had let go of the hand that had held his or
how long his rest had lasted, but when he awoke, he found on a small piece of notebook paper in
her neat script the answer that had long evaded him:

If there is love in the end, the story isn’t sad.

Certainly, Arnold saw as he turned his head towards the voices that he heard, there was love in this
room.

“Your excellency -” a handsome young man addressed him as he rose. – “You’re awake!” a
teenage girl in a headscarf beamed, sharing the smile of the older woman beside her, to whom Arnold held up the note and said, “You’re right. It is not sad. Not at all.”

The man who had been with him in the ambulance now wore surgical scrubs, explained in accented English what had transpired in medical terms that caused Arnold to blink in confusion as he began to place himself in a hospital room, his body bandaged, his condition monitored by wires and screens. He would get a doctor. He would get his middle daughter and Arnold’s own youngest son who had gone to the cafeteria together to get more coffee, he would tell them bring up a cup for him as well.

“Henry’s here?” Arnold smiled. He had not seen his children since Thanksgiving, all three of his boys having gone to his ex and her current for Christmas the winter past.

“Your other two are on their way. Boston is just closer than Berkeley,” a man whose clothing signalled him as a priest then said. “They should land a little after ten tonight.”

“Am I dying?” Arnold asked him, or rather, his collar.

“No, no,” the nurse who had first treated his wounds back at the flat assured him. “You just need around two weeks bedrest, eight in a cast, and a heavy round of antibiotics. You’ll be fine. Reverend Tallmadge is the father of Benjamin here, the now-former police inspector who has been working on your case. My daughter, our daughter,” he indicated to the woman beside him, “was an officer as well -” he stopped. The girl Arnold assumed to be the couple’s youngest reached for her father’s hand and the younger Tallmadge continued for him, “she gave her life in the search, Sir. She gave her life serving this beautiful country of ours.”

“I’ll do everything within me to insure it her sacrifice was not in vain,” Arnold promised them all, promised himself.

“Sir, when you are up to it, I need to ask you some questions -” the younger Tallmadge continued only to be interrupted by a second woman of a certain age.

“Benjamin! I understand you have a job to do but I know I taught you better manners than that! Senator Arnold,” she shifted. “Do you want some apple pie? It is home-made.”

“You very much want some apple pie, man,” an urban cowboy who sat at her side smiled, patting his stomach.

“Mrs Tallmadge’s baking has always been the best,” a voice came from the other side of the room. Arnold looked over and rubbed his eyes, finding a snooty Englishman in a smart blazer, a pudgy imam in robes indicating that he had made his hajj and the speaker - an African-American who paired a blazer with a Scottish kilt and shin guards. “There is a story behind this,” the man said of his comical outfit.

“There is, Jordan, and it starts with pie,” Mrs Tallmadge continued, putting a slice before the senator.

He took a bite and looked at the strange collection of individuals surrounding him. “I think this is the Dream of America,” Arnold said with his mouth full.

“Oh, you!” the preacher’s wife seemed to tease as footsteps hastened though the door.

“Dad!” Henry exclaimed, setting the coffee he carried atop that of the girl who came in with him so that he could offer a salute before taking the two cardboard carriers from her and distributing them with packages of cream and sugar as he asked the same questions the former inspector had
been banned from by his mother and her ideas on manners. Arnold noticed the look of indignance Benjamin Tallmadge shot at Henry’s back and met it with a laugh.

“What? Dad I just want to know exactly what happened -”

“Not now,” the girl who had helped him carry ten cups of coffee from the hospital’s cafeteria told him. “I actually work at this hospital in the ER – I’ve had to fight off my big sister and her colleagues from coming in and talking to our patients – their victims, witnesses, suspects before the attending physician has given a go-ahead. There is possible a risk to the patient if -”

“Are you a Yilmaz sister?” Arnold asked her. Unlike the women whose features she shared, her hair was not covered nor could her tank top, though far from being low cut, be called ‘conservative’. She seemed to grieve in a different way, that, or her black clothing and heavy eyeliner was indicative of a life choice she had made prior to tragedy. “Is that … does Culper Ring have fans?” he squinted, recognising the name of Private Woodhull’s band.

“Emine, and yes, Sir,” she affirmed.

Arnold nodded and nearly smiled when he noticed the way his boy looked at the young nurse who might have been pretty if she did not have a nose ring.

“Woody’s alright, by the way,” the urban cowboy broke in with a hint of accusation.

Woody.

Private Woodhull?

Arnold returned to the cut Abe had made on his own forehead, trying to stage the scene of a struggle that had never occurred in an attempt to aide his escape.

“I didn’t touch him … I told him,” Arnold stopped. “I told him,” he repeated, hearing André’s explanations in his own excuse. He looked away from his accuser back to Benjamin Tallmadge. “I have a lot to tell.”

“Dad – maybe Emine is right, maybe you shouldn’t, not yet,” Henry tried to cut in. Arnold silenced him with a sharp wave of his hand.

“The feds have been notified of your condition, I’m sure they have already sent someone to take an official statement … it is only, we are running an operation in Albany at the moment to catch the man we believe to have kidnapped you and held you captive.”


“I want a solicitor. I don’t wish to speak to Washington who echoed my support for a fool’s plan and fell silent when my absence served to realise all that I’ve have seen to be wrong. What do you think would be my fate if my misguided countrymen should take me prisoner? I can’t go back. I can’t stay here when I know John André -”

“John André is dead, Sir. He was killed at Belview by one of his former patients while seeking asylum from crimes for which a prosecution was being built.”

“Benjamin, you didn’t actually send John Robeson -” the reverend looked at his son with dismay.

“He didn’t,” the younger Yilmaz daughter affirmed. “Hatice did. What?” she demanded of her parents and sister, “He was trying to kill himself, it is where he needed to be, his later actions
shouldn’t cause you to speculate about my sister’s motive in the move, or Ben’s or -”

“John André is dead,” Arnold repeated, returning to what had been the man’s room when he said, “I wonder what it is like in his hell.”

Chapter End Notes

Sport:

Scotland beat the USA 39:16 in the Group Stages 2015 Rugby World Cup on 23 September at Elland Road, Leeds. They went on to finish second in their group before being shown out by Australia in the knock-outs. US finished last in the group and did not proceed further.

Everton FC has the fourth largest spend in the Premiership. They are currently in eleventh place. The best they could possibly (ever) hope for is a seventh-place finish.

Bayer Leverkusen have won one DFB-Pokal and one UEFA-cup, which is hand over heart two titles more than I really thought them to have processed. (There is this joke where someone take the clear wrapper from a newly opened pack of cigarettes, sticks in on the table so that it is standing up and says “It is the trophy case from Bayer Leverkusen!” and it never gets old.) Of all the unfashionable sides in German footy, I went with them because of the pharmaceutical company that lends its name to the club. (Bayer gets to do so in a league that otherwise bans such as the team was grounded in 1904 by employees of the company. By comparison, RB Leipzig, whom British pundits mistakenly refer to as “Red Bull” are actually ”RasenBallsport” Leipzig, the sponsor coming up with a funny but stupid way of getting their initials in there against league rules. Let’s go play some grass-ball-sport, guys!)

Personages:

The historical Mary Anne Burges was interested in botany, creating and contributing numerous sketches of botanical descriptions over her lifetime. The very loosely referenced Jean-André Deluc was a geologist rather than a botanist … which I’m mentioning now because it will come up again. ;)

Quotes:

Benedict Arnold reportedly asked a captured captain from the Colonial Army, “What do you think would be my fate if my misguided counymen should take me prisoner?” who is said to have replied, "They would cut off the leg that was wounded at Saratoga and bury it with the honours of war, and the rest of you they would hang on a gibbet." Round of applause right there.
Translations:

“Min 'anat?” just means “Who are you?” in Arabic.

Geography:

İncirlik is an Air Base in Adana, Turkey

I have no other notes this round, but to close this out, here is a joke from nearly two hundred years ago that (sadly!) still works. Don’t worry if you can’t read German, you’ll still get it: https://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/reisebilder-393/29 (Heinrich Heine on censorship - AO3 does not like direct links, sorry guys.)

Up next: to quote another literary great, "One must never place a loaded rifle on the stage if it isn't going to go off. It's wrong to make promises you don't mean to keep."- Anton Chekhov
(or, in other words: Bang! Boom! Bang!)

Till then, should tomorrow come – XOXO Tav.
“John Anderson” considers leaving Witness Protection as he watches the day’s events play out on the evening news. Benedict Arnold’s rescue is made public prior to the exchange and Rogers finds himself a new hostage with whom to negotiate for his fee. Peggy Shippen finds Ban Tarleton with his pants down and robs him of his arsenal; her attempts to repay a personal favour result in bloodshed.

Happy Easter!

So, I had a story to tell you guys about this strange re-enactment of The Wars of the Roses that truly exceeded my expectations of pub-conversation but alas – it is going to have to wait because this chapter is so long and has so many end notes that I just don’t have room for them all without putting some of them up here as well. Sorry fans of dynastic schisms. Next time, I promise. ;-*

To the notes, then -

Persons:

John Anderson was name Benedict Arnold gave John André in a fake passport to aid his escape through American lines. John Paulding, Isaac Van Wart, and David Williams were the militia men who caught him en route.

Update! I mentioned Nursultan Nazarbayev again in this chapter because he recently stepped down from power after thirty years, openly transitioning from figure-head to puppet master which The Guardian praised in reporting on this, suggesting that other post-soviet dictators might do the same. I, too, wonder why I even bother with the news sometimes.

Nancy Pelosi (D – California) is the highest-ranking elected woman in United States history. In 2016, she served as the House Minority Leader. Being a woman and a democrat, she is often used as a punching bag or punchline in right-wing media publications.

Boris Johnson is the former Mayor of London and a prominent Brexiter. He’s also a noted poet in his own right (see the insulting limerick he wrote about Erdogan whilst serving as Foreign Secretary.)

We’ve talked about Dele Alli already but if anyone is down to chat about his club Tottenham dismissing Pep’s City from the CL – I am SO down for this. Hit me up in the comments.

Sergio Agüero was Man City’s top scorer in the 15/16 season.
You know the Cristiano Ronaldo print ads for Armani already – if not, you need to throw a Google on them. The thing of which I am most proud is sneaking one of these images into a paper I wrote at uni – just to see if I could get away with it. I did. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The noun “café” proved a contranym when used as a description for his new haunt.

To John Anderson, it felt too generous a term; to the population into which he was attempting to integrate himself, it might well be read as an insult.

It sufficed to say that the establishment, a roadside diner that catered more to the Thursday evening local bingo crowd than it did to the unfortunate truckers and tourists who happened through its doors (likely in search of a public lavatory as opposed to an assortment of foodstuffs that parodied diet and nutrition.) The town itself did not like outsiders and the “café” as his case worker had mistakenly texted that stood on the far broader where the wilderness met the road acted as a garrison, protecting the locals from unwanted intruders.

All the same, there was no where else the two could safely meet. His room was rented from Good Christians of the kind who compensated their Fear of God by investing heavily in firearms which displayed on the fireplace mantel beside the Cross and beneath the head of a deer whose death signalled the sin of Vanity rather than Absolution from the Original – which insofar as André interpreted the Bible, was a “curiosity” that went unnamed and of which his elderly landlady was just as guilty as Eve. On the single occasion his case worker had happened upon this property, not an hour had passed after the man’s departure before the lady of the house, horrified and enraged and knocked to let him know in no uncertain terms that homosexuality was a sin and she would not tolerate such practices under her roof.

Tolerate, perhaps not.

But talk? Certainly.

Thereafter, the few residents who did not refer to Anderson by a string of dated terms of intolerance suddenly did. Originally, his crime had been asking the diner’s waitress if she could make him a latte, to which the answer had been ‘no.’ Then, when he had requested soy milk instead of the fifteen plastic packets of heavy creamer with which to render a small town substitution, he had been told ‘Go back to London, faggot.’

He wished he could.

Someday, perhaps he would.

Here was hell.

John Anderson had not expected to return to the “café” speak about his case so soon after he had gotten settled. He had been sitting in his room, sketching the man he had been until quite recently, cross legged and contemplative, the long hair he had recently cut, without the glasses that had come to replace his contact lenses, wondering as he stared at the image of someone who had been marked for execution if he – John André – had ever been happy.

He wondered if he – John Anderson – ever would be.
On another page he began to sketch Peggy only to find himself again looking at Philomena, wishing there had been a way to say goodbye before departing under the cloak of night and the cover of Witness Protection which he had begged his former research partner Martha Dandridge to negotiate.

He was a coward.

He had been when he fled.

He had been when he allowed himself to disappear into drink.

He had been years before his behaviour and his study of that of others had become problematic.

He returned to his wedding, to the hope he had held onto like a secret, wondering if he had ever spoken to his wife of his wants, of the love he had for her and the life he desired for them and fought to design, if this hope would have then manifested into the shared happiness of which he still dreamed, still sought his actress’ understudy in young women who resembled the girl he had first been unable to capture on canvas to any degree of satisfaction.

Anderson drew on memory, for it was all he might ever again experience.

For all the lives he had been willing to sacrifice to his study, he never suspected that the only one lost to science would be his own.

When he returned to the agreed upon meeting spot in the café on the edge of town, John Anderson was surprised to find his former Sunday bartender celebrated on the cover of the local paper, which he asked to take to his booth after ordering his coffee, answered with a disinterested shrug he interpreted as affirmative. What followed in the text was a list of names he had known – of people he knew to be better off for having partaken in his study.

Edmund Hewlett (or Edmund of Richmond, giving the politics of the paper) was again a prince as opposed to an anonymous doctoral candidate. Today he was marrying a beautiful woman with whom he had been too shy to speak mere moths prior.

John Graves Simcoe, who had felt himself alone and friendless in this new world was serving as his best man and many of the other men on their Sunday side had been forced into action as well, advancing their careers, their lives, and those of the people whom they loved.

Akinbode had made partner at his firm. Peggy and Aberdeen would be attending an ivy-league law school in the fall. Abigail was writing what would surely prove a best-seller – and this, Anderson afforded himself, was all thanks to him.

Surely, he reasoned as he flipped to the next page, Dandridge would see this as well and she would surely convince Washington of the same. He would be able to return to the world as Dr John André, his honour and reputation restored, his –

His heart stopped. The article was about arrests made in a New York-based Opium War thanks to another anonymous tipoff.

Anderson looked around the small restaurant, at the unfriendly waitress who constantly itched at her skin from an addiction that was not being met.

However the press and public might one day come to understand his brilliance, the Hewletts surely
never would.

Anderson knew things about the family though Edmund’s time on his couch that lead him to believe they had played some role in halting prescription opioid trade in America, that they had figured out how to turn fear into abrupt action long before the idea had ever occurred to him. He thought about the connections, strategy and logistics and overseas operation might involve and considered how comparatively close his mother and siblings were to their seat of power, hoping that his “death” would soon be made public, hoping that it would satisfy the industrious nobles who traded in extremes.

He looked at the clock on the wall, wondering if he had time to sober up from the shot which he was eager to take before discussing more concrete questions of life and death with a man who held his in the balance. He was two hours early. He could have a drink to steady his shaking hands. He could read the slim paper and invent reasons for five more and still have time to create an air of sobriety before anyone arrived who might call him on it.

“Can I get some Irish in my coffee?” he asked.

“This is America, Free Country,” she answered as she brought a half-emptied bottle of Bourbon to the table. “Same thing,” she shrugged, turning his borrowed paper back to page one, “Lady Anna’s apparently requested that Tennessee Whiskey’s served at her reception alongside Scotch from the distilleries on land that I guess she now owns. Tell me when to stop,” she said as she began to pour.

“Just leave the bottle,” Anderson answered bitterly.

John Graves Simcoe was half-certain he had misheard, shifting where he stood in the court-house car park rather than offer a response.

“Don’t make me beg,” Banastre Tarleton bade him all the same, continuing without the inflection the statement might otherwise warrant or the dramatic flair he so often imposed on his own conversation to mask the fact that he was not nearly as clever as those of his chosen company, “I’ve been pleading with a God to whom I don’t pray, with officers and officials whom I neither respect nor trust, with hope in its very essence for the better part of the past several days: I’m done. I’ve no humility left to spend on you. Do that which I ask of you simply for and from your own greater sense of self, the one you seem otherwise so keen to assert. I’m tired,” Tarleton admitted to what his flat tone confessed of its own accord. “It is late - quite late in the UK - and I want to go back to the pub, to borrow George’s computer and wish my girls goodnight before …” he trailed off.

The details, Simcoe reasoned, were likely both confidential and inconsequential. He had never seen a man of his former friend’s vice and ambition look quite so miserable holding a suitcase filled with more cash than he likely brought in in a fiscal year. It was difficult not to pity him, but this, he reasoned was neither the time nor the place for hesitant sentiment and it was hardly appropriate for Tarleton to look to him once more for the fulfilment of another dying wish – even, and perhaps especially - one as banal as the colonel’s latest had been.

Simcoe pressed his thin lips together as he studied the man, still wondering if he was speaking in earnest or if this be another of his misplaced attempts at creating some amusement; but Tarleton, he
noted, met his unbreaking gaze without betraying any hint of humour or intent. It occurred to him with something approaching sadness that this was the last time he might ever see the man that endless war had made of the boy who by an accident of the alphabet had share his bedchamber back at school -

How cruel it seemed to run from fate, to escape only to be found once more with the sad knowledge of how much one would be missed.

Simcoe glanced from Tarleton back to the group he had been pulled from, to the friends he had perhaps failed to cherish, to Edmund Hewlett and his gorgeous new wife, to her equally exquisite bridesmaids. To Mary. To her cast and crutches. To the way the light wind held the red fabric of her dress all the tighter to her small frame and the memories it evoked of the nights they had shared in another’s company, to the dream born in a nightmare and buried in the light of day.

He wondered if she would miss him in the coming months. He wondered if he was so vain as to hope for a tragic ending of the kind that life so often delivered that such sentiment as he was certain would follow him back to the City was unworthy of song.

Too brief to be a ballad, too simple for a stanza, he and the divine Mary Woodhull were void of rhyme.

Neither couple nor couplet, Simcoe still found himself wishing that what had been could still be shared even if what remained could not be remembered without the sting of desire and undefined regret.

It felt selfish, this want to be mutually missed, nearly as selfish as it would have been to stay where he was no longer needed, where he would have never otherwise been welcomed.

“Don’t go back to England,” Tarleton sighed, following his gaze. “Honestly, don’t. You can find employment anywhere. You can’t find this.”

Simcoe was certain he would not understand an explanation that barely made sense to he himself. “She is better off without me … we’re not … we belonged to a time and place, to a particular conflict, to -”

“She?” the colonel smiled. “I was not speaking in particulars. Don’t go back. Don’t go looking for opportunities to convenience your fear of familiarity. Arnold will be found and you’ll be acquitted of any wrong-doing,” he said as though the matter were simple and straight-forward. “As the French and British Embassies were using you through Edmund Hewlett to manipulate the market that it prove favourable to trade in connect to and conjunction with the senator’s sudden disappearance, charges can’t be brought without incriminating those of far more consequence. But shit, mate – I don’t need to tell you you’ve nothing to fear, just look around. Look at your friends, at their smiles – none of this broke you. You rose to it. All of you did. Why would you leave to go looking for the love that already found you in what could have been your darkest hour?”

“At what point, Colonel, dose corruption cease to reek of sin?” Simcoe asked, not intending mockery or for his words to imply a judgement that was not his to pass.

Tarleton sighed again as he brushed passed, proceeding in the direction of Simcoe’s Range Rover. “After a while you just get used to the smell, I suppose,” he answered. “Maybe. Then again, maybe I’ve just had the benefit of being born into it,” he shifted. “You speak of conflict as though it is something you’ve lost, but it is here, you are here, you are still in it. Be the warrior you want to convince yourself you are. Stand up! Fight for things worth fighting for rather than against that which has been forced upon you by men with power.”
“By playing five-a-side with your intern, a few of the kids I coach and a couple of my mates to make up the numbers?” Simcoe clarified, squinting as he opened the boot of his vehicle to retrieve the ball he had been asked for.

“Isn’t that a concept that in and of itself is worth going to war over? Christ! What else is there?” Tarleton demanded. “What is the wealth of a nation when not the people who call it home?”

Once more, Simcoe found his eyes return to the woman he imagined occupying his flat after he had vacated it, cluttering his bathroom counter with her cherry-flavoured lip gloss, cooking with the appliance she had told him to buy for Anna at some point after Edmund’s presumed and now-approaching ascension, eventually finding another and offering her mouth as a sweet dessert, or, rather, de gestion taken as the lips between her legs grew moist with desire. Their eyes met at a distance and he wondered if this was how she imagined her immediate future as well. He wondered how and if she imagined his own.

America had not felt like home at all until he had met her, until the housefire that would yet serve as an excuse to flee. Nothing, Simcoe realised, would be like it had been for the past few weeks should he stay. The man whom he could only begrudgingly admit was his best friend would soon be brought back to Scotland, his goodwife would leave behind the bar that had been a set piece in so many of their memories and misadventures and what remained of the roster of his association football side would return to midtable obscurity next season, if any of his teammates continued at all. John Robeson had mutilated the only man he had ever loved and would likely spend the rest of his life in prison whereas John André – whom no one disputed was the true guilty party, had been granted witness protection if not amnesty and would live as comfortably as he could in obscurity until such time as the feds could concoct a permeant solution to the problem he posed. Hamilton had told Tarleton this in confidence; he had told Tallmadge that André had already met his end – presumably to encourage the boy scout not to seek justice where it could not be served. Charles Joyce was still in hospital where he would likely remain for the whole of the summer. Robert Rogers would be moving “upstate” to federal prison and “his boys” (as he called them) were as unlikely to return to training as Jordan Akinbode without the Scot’s pressure and whatever André offered his oldest (and only) friend as incentive to unknowingly further his cruel experiment. John Wakefield would not visit Setauket without the promise of Louis Brewster and the orchard in his attic. John Easton would not be able to stay in the states at all should Uber force him to file for bankruptcy. Alone, John Appleton would find another club, or he would find a girlfriend, or a show on Netflix to get sucked into. Life went on.

Maybe Tarleton was right, the home was people rather than place. Maybe the housefire that was Senator Arnold had come at far greater cost and human casualties than the colonel could calculate when met with the smiles of old friends toasting to their club’s manager and his bride. But Edmund and Anna would soon be leaving and the others, too, would have to make their own way.

Simcoe did not know if he was capable of rebuilding all that might yet be lost.

“Home,” the colonel continued to muse, sadder than he was wistful, “I spent my life admiring my father, aspiring to the life he led, only to … never mind. You are lucky to be an orphan, John.”

“Excuse me?” Simcoe blinked, returned from conjectures by the rather rude statement.

“To have been raised, to be loved by people who chose and would continue to choose you over circumstance,” Tarleton clarified and complained. “I’ve been thinking back to times we are wont to call ‘better’ if only for the fact that they feel so distant and it occurs to me that of all the adults to have any influence over who we became, the Admiral and Mrs Graves were the only people whose personal attributes were worthy of any admiration. My parent knew – they knew
what the Duke of Richmond was doing to hoards innocent children -”

“They tried to step in -”

“They stepped away whenever a deal could be struck that favoured Liverpool,” Tarleton spat. “As though in some sick nod back to feudalism they saw people as existing for the benefit of the state rather than the state for the betterment of the entire population.”

It was not a point Simcoe could argue, though he wished for Tarleton’s sake he might find the words with which to try.

“Your godfather could have been promoted sooner, further, had he not taken leave for your care,” the colonel continued. “He lost in the end, but at least he tried to take the Hewletts to court. Effie’s Aunt Mags basically put her career on hold that she could better provide for the future of her niece, of you yourself upon her marriage to your guardian and caregiver. And having exhausted every other option to protect the twins – kids she neither had nor needed any great personal cause to protect, mind – she took Ellie and helped her to … mature that she’d no longer be a target for such unwelcome advances. Mrs G fucking challenged Lord Edmund and Lady Edith to take her to court over the matter when confronted with their fury and this – this knowing what happened to her brother-in-law, to the younger Edmund … what has happened to everyone who has ever refused to bend the knee in times past. She even went on to help Gene out financially when he finally said fuck it and tried to escape to France. And it is like … she and the admiral, they had nothing to gain from this fight. The could literally only lose and yet they thought it worth having for its own sake.

“I thought I … I thought I was helping Edna’s daughter Elise in the same vain but … God, it is same bloody municipal chauvinism regardless of whatever other justifications we try to assign, ‘innit?’” Tarleton laughed bitterly. “In what might have proven my plaidoyer, I bid you to keep industry from leaving my precious city and you … you instead acted on and in my daughters’ interest, what I should have done. What should have been my last and only concern and … here,” he said, holding up his archaic Blackberry with its ball and keypad. “Marie left me upwards of twenty voice messages when she and her mother were given word of my erroneous departure from this world, saying, asking all kinds of things, shattered, you know … I just want to go home, to people rather than place, to hold her and her sister as tightly as I can and to spend the rest of my life helping them find answers to all that they might seek out in their lives. She thought – somehow, I’d given her reason to believe that I could ever be disappointed in her. I’m not. My God, I’m so proud: She ran away to see Georgie when their mothers in ignorance, anger and the selfish ways these things manifest decided that my daughters were not sisters anymore without me. I believe her when she says she would have one back to Mary after she had gotten her way, found a solution to remain in contact with the other half of my heart – she chose our family and I … Christ John, I put them all at risk with everything I do. But business in Liverpool is booming,” he laughed bitterly, “and because of you, it is because my daughters’ futures are secured and provided for rather than whichever crime I might try to cover with conscious.”

None of this, Simcoe knew, was his doing. He had asked for Mary’s help in a problem he could not solve and she saved a city in England, a hundred displaced widows and orphans in French Sudan, the reputation of the global charity by whom she was employed and the daughters of a hapless gambler form ever themselves going into debt.

Only Mary Woodhull could have come up with such a plan. She was a mother with a mind as bright, brave and daring as her heart.

Tarleton looked up at him with an admiration that only made Simcoe share the self-critique of the man’s tone – he was not deserving of the undue comparison, of the respect his silence stole from
the beautiful woman with a broken ankle fussing with her petticoats to hide this particular battle scar as she continued to pose with the friends she had made and those she had been reunited with in these past several weeks.

Mary had found her ‘normal’ Simcoe realised before the correction could leave his lips. Would the pedestal on which he knew the world should put her prove a contradiction to this?

“Maybe I don’t have a right to ask you to be a better person on my behalf once more,” Tarleton admitted, adjusting, “I’m not, not really, it’s only – that kid, Arthur Wellesley. He is fifteen. He just passed me a gun George thought might come useful in my coming confrontation … but he – shit. I could kill bloody him for such misjudgement,” he shook his head. “Atty is a child as badly as he wants to pretend otherwise. He’s had so much thrown at and upon him if only by-proxy. His hands were shaking. I don’t think he has ever held a firearm before and Christ, I rather hope he hasn’t. Clever as he has proven himself when conditions allow, much as I wish we had more of that in our armed forces, I hope it is years before he’ll ever encounter anything of the kind again. Ever have an opportunity for it.

“This isn’t his conflict. He doesn’t need to be braver than he possibly can be right now in his life. He needs to be fifteen. He needs to play with kids his age and yours” Tarleton phrased oddly, “… Philip, Cicero, I think – they need it just as badly and they love you. They fucking love you, John. Look up to you and that. That isn’t nothing. I need you to take their minds from everything that’s happened, everything that is happening. I need you to keep them from The Irish Pub as long as possible. And I need … can I have a cigarette?” he asked awkwardly.

“You don’t smoke,” Simcoe replied as he reached for his box of Gauloises all the same.

“You only live once, right?”

“No Ban, not you. I swear you are immortal,” he said as he produced two, handing one to Tarleton before being annoyed by the request -“Can you light it?” – until being found off-guard by an injury otherwise easily forgotten. Simcoe blew a ring of smoke, relaxing in its form, releasing the tension in his frown.

“Yea. Yea Ban, I’ll get a game going. You are probably right. It will be good for the kids. It will be good for us all.”

Tarleton coughed on the tobacco to which he was unaccustomed. “There is something else. Something that I just … that I think you might be better able to facilitate than I. A talk, I,” he explained quickly, “you know I can’t just ring up Ellie. Not now, at least. Not … Look. What I need to say, I can’t. I just grow angry however I approach it and…”

“You know she is in love with you,” Simcoe interrupted, worried that the colonel considered he needed to say goodbye, worried that he lacked the words and knowing the man enough to anticipate fatal consequence when vocabulary lapsed him.

“Yea … yea, maybe I do know that,” Tarleton returned, somewhat considered and finding Simcoe completely unprepared. “Maybe it is the fact that it has always been mutual if not romantic that makes it so impossible to ask the princess to engage with – listen: Something not entirely dissimilar from that which Ells went through as a girl is happening to this little girl Susan. Marie’s best friend. I just found out about it. Kids I mean … there is no blueprint, they all develop and mature differently but Susan, I know her. I have for a long time. She just turned thirteen this year, she is not mature enough yet to submit to all of the sexual advances she gets from upperclassmen, from older men in general. She doesn’t yet have a strong enough sense of self for that not to ultimately be scaring, scary for a girl her age who doesn’t yet know how to say ‘no’ to attention or understand
that it needn’t always be reciprocated. Ellie does … that is, she’s rejected me at least in every possible way, and being that Susan is Robert Bertie’s natural daughter - nobility at least in the manner in which she is being brought up - all of her emotions are supressed by necessity and she needs someone to talk to, someone who understands and can take authority for herself, who can then help Susan to do the same. But even if there were no strategical downside to calling up the one person who I can think of who could do this with grace, I mean - fuck - how would I even say ‘Ells, you mind drawing on some of your worst childhood experiences to talk to a kid you’ve only met once or twice about consent?’"

It was the furthest from what Simcoe had expected of him. He did not know how to respond.

“I don’t know that there is a way to be delicate with something so well … delicate,” he tried.

Tarleton coughed again and surrendered the half that remained of his cigarette to the pavement and sole of his shoe. “You’ll find one. Unsociable as I might otherwise accuse you of being, you saved my family, our historical home, and here, all of the people you are lucky enough to count as your friends in the face of great adversity. I’m in awe.”

“Except that I didn’t,” Simcoe admitted. “I spent the last weeks all but lost to what was happening as I searched for Senator Arnold and that plan to put Hewlett stock in your daughters’ names and empower Effie to make decisions on their behalf until they come of age thereby keeping jobs in your hometown … that was all Mary. My Mary,” he clarified, “Woodhull. I’m by no means a better person than you think yourself to be, Ban. If anything,” he stopped, observing his unlikely admirer anew, “you are terrified. You shouldn’t be. I know Rogers personally; he is no match -”

“It is not that, it is that if this gets screwed up by anything -”

“You are a better man than you’ve been given reason to think: you are not afraid of dying, you are afraid of not getting to watch and help your children grow. You worry about how their friends and classmates are getting on, fighting battles on their behalf – battles that aren’t your own by any stretch - whilst inspiring others to do the same -”

“Innit just though? Everyone’s battle, I mean, that these kids will get to have better lives than the ones in which we found for ourselves? Look just … the children you coach, they really look up to you. And from what I’ve heard, from what George has told me, they are actually pretty good. Just … I have to go do this thing. And I need you to do yours. They don’t need any more pictures of your ugly ass for the papers or prosperity. Get a game going, try to get Atty social in an age-appropriate way, just help all them forget the wars their parents fight. And then … I mean, don’t leave them, o’rite? Stay. Help them win some cup or whatever. Help them win ten. Help your own Sunday side do the same. And Mrs Woodhull, this ‘time and ‘place’ you’re quick to cite in your self-deprecating bullshit excuses in the question of you and her? She hasn’t taken her pretty eyes from you, mate. You sure the time isn’t ‘now’ and the place isn’t just ‘Setauket’?”

“Not ‘here’?” Simcoe tried to joke.

“Nae,” Tarleton dismissed with a brush of what had once been his right hand, “‘here’ you’ve got to teach kids that they don’t need to be adults and hope that they will teach you the same. And ‘now’ – the present is a more general state; how often do we actually get so many members of the band back together? Whatever declarations of love may come – and I hope they do, sincerely – you know you’re taking shots with George and me at some point tonight.”

“Cheers to that,” Simcoe found himself returning the obnoxious grin he was given, retreating if only momentarily from his thoughts of Mary and of walking away from all that might yet remain.
“And this is a ‘G’,” Georgie clarified as she struggled to position her small hand around the guitar’s neck, press the strings and strum – something she did twice to Marie’s mild annoyance, their shared father’s undisguised delight and an amusement that bordered on schadenfreude on behalf of her sister’s godfather and namesake.

“Don’t encourage this,” Marie warned, seeing that her dad would have clapped if he could. Her head was still pounding from the day before. For the purposes of facilitating her escape, Marie had positioned herself in a group of slightly older girls costumed and posed as a public figure who had brought a host of libations along for the journey. She had had alcohol before – a sip of champagne on New Year’s Eve – enough to caution her to the taste but not to serve as a comparison for consequence. Inspector Ferguson told her the pain would pass, that she would again succumb to the pressures of her peers and that this would happen frequently enough at university that eventually she would decide that such was in fact ‘fun.’ But then, the music in pubs was probably better than that being played in Ms Burges’ guest bedroom by a little girl who, for all of her concentration, was not quite hitting the chord.

>>Bravo! Pommesgabel!<< George Hanger exclaimed loudly – too much so for Marie’s state and sanity – as he moved to adjust his friend’s full hand into a sign it was not accustom to taking, the thumb pressed down against the middle and ring finger with the pinkie and pointer extended to some lesser God of bad weather, worse music, and canned beer and ravioli consumed in small towns no one alive would have been able to place if they were not transformed into tent cities for three days each summer.

“Dad,” Marie said flatly, “seriously don’t. You’re not pulling of that look at all as is.” Her father was clad in a grey beanie, brown leather jacket, tight jeans and a dark shirt with an illegible logo of some band she doubted he could even name. Marie winced at the sight. “I know you’ve hit an all-time-low and I guess you are trying to own that … okay – whatev, but the maloik just outs you as a total poser. By the way – Pommes-Gabel?” she asked, shifting her attention back to Hanger who despite his light smile and smart dress could truly pass for someone with a foot in the scene. “Chips-Fork?” she tried to translate.

>>It is what it looks like, or?>> Hanger grinned. >>You know my dear, this is the problem I have with your whole generation – you take everything far too seriously. Life is meant to be enjoyed. Embrace irony the way your dad and I did when we were teenagers -<<

“Chips Fork?” Georgie repeated, trying to copy the gesture for herself.

“Dad was never ironic. He just gets a pass because old people can’t accept the reality they are presented and have to rewrite it to meet their expectations: oh, Ban knows every One Direction song and sings them to make fun of his kid. In the shower where no one can otherwise hear him, mind,” she emphasized. “Where he also probably went to cry when Zayn quit.”

>>I did, too,<< he father confirmed. >>But it’s not … if I’ve managed to trick anyone into thinking I’m cool at all, George, it is because I don’t use this popular understanding of irony as a fucking crutch the way most people of our generation - ahem – are wont to. Yea. I’ll stand to it. I like generic, kitschy pop-music and wouldn’t be wearing a Culper Ring shirt had I not spent the whole of last night hanging out with the band’s singer after borrowing his phone when I found out that my daughter had disappeared and Cornwallis and his intern thought it best to keep that from me,<< he siad quickly and in harsher tones than those which were his custom. >>Also, in the event
that spending a few hours with Kolina has reset not only your taste in music but in boys as well, I hate to disappoint you, Marie, it works out that Abe’s a short shite like me which is why he was able to lend from his suitcase. Also, he’s uh … Christ is there a politically correct euphemism for ‘bent’?<<

“Ew,” Marie frowned.

>>Hey,<< her dad warned. >>I taught you to be a tad more accepting of other’s sexual preferences than single-syllable interjections.<<

“No … not, Abe Woodhull can thirst after whomever he wishes. When and if than Caleb Brewster. But the music is not really to my taste, either. Bad dye-job aside and all,” she said miserably, playing with the end of her long braid, hoping that her mother’s promise of ‘never leaving your room again’ extended to school – at least for the two weeks the package said it would take for the colour to wash out.

>>Caleb has a boyfriend.<< Hanger informed them.

>>And a boat!<< her dad expanded.

>>You are still on this yacht thing, aren’t you?<< his friend laughed.

“What is a ‘ya-t’?” Georgie asked.

“A boat.”

“In German?”

“No, I don’t follow, either,” Marie gave, not entirely certain that she wanted to.

>>Girls, I have something to do in about an hour or so, but provided this works out as I’ve planned it money-wise, I’ll buy a boat- a big one - hire someone who can pilot it out of the estuary where no one can judge me on my musical taste or lack thereof and you can both come stay with me for the summer on the high seas. Low seas. Maybe we’ll go to Dublin for a weekend, get George and Francis off my back.<<

It was a nice concept, but one Maire dismissed immediately on its caveat. She imagined instead that the closest they would come was the eight hour ferry-ride as Arthur from school described it – getting board of walking around the ship after forty-five minutes, playing ‘Connect Four’ (the only boardgame evidently carried in the on-board shop) with her dad and sister until this too, grew dull, then suggesting a game a hide and seek but not herself looking, instead going up to the top deck and mimicking the accents of other tourists, trying to convince random passengers that she was from Dallas or Christchurch or Plymouth because elsewhere was always more interesting than the immediate departure or approaching destination.

Still, it was a nice idea insofar as it inspired another. “I’m not in trouble then?” Marie smiled.

Her father’s expression turned serious though his tone remained chipper. >>It depends on the definition you want to use. Would you learn anything from the experience of being locked in your room ad infinitum? I doubt it. Frankly I think most siblings -and mine especially- would do well to take a lesson from your exploits, as I’m certain I have. No. Fuck the yacht. I’ve to give this money I’ve been entrusted back to Juventus and pay my brothers back besides. Fix things insofar as I can at this point. And uh … you really might strive to do the same.<<

It sounded like a straight lie rather than a sudden hope that would never be fulfilled regardless of
intention. It also sounded like something her father might make a show and spectacle of to prove a point that did not need to be made. Marie sighed.

“I know,” she tried to assure him. “I said I was sorry to my Mum about a hundred times, which didn’t really stop her from screaming. And to Kolina, who said it was not necessary. And Aunt Emma and Ms Burges and Inspector Ferguson and his Lady mother, too. Ellie isn’t taking my calls, so I guess I really let her down.”

>>> You have your phone back then? << her father knitted his brow.

“Yea. And before you ask, I called Susan right away and Harriet, Olivia, Rachel – everyone who left me voice messages. Even Dele Alli.”

>>> How and why do you have Dele’s number? << Hanger asked, suddenly interested.

“We live in the same building. I walk his dog sometimes and he gives me pocket money and sometimes tickets to home games for it. He shared Susan’s video and Tweets before my Uncle William made everyone he manages do so.”

>>> Have you called Arthur Wellesley? << her dad asked as though he was insisting upon it.

“No, I should,” she agreed for the sake of avoiding argument. “I don’t have his number.”

>>> I’ll drop dial you at the reception from his device. But Marie, its actions people are looking for right now, not words. <<

“I know that, I said – I’ll do better, by you and by everyone.”

>>> Forget everyone, << he dad dismissed. >>> Succeed for yourself – the rest of us already believe in you. Listen ... when I, when I had to take a meeting with the head of some FBI field office or another to help them out with a few things, I heard the messages you left me when I - << he stopped.

>>> Marie you are so beautiful and so terribly clever, why hide these things from the world?

>>> You like school, if not school exactly, you like learning, you like embarrassing your teachers with how much more worldly and knowable you can prove yourself in comparison to their expectations and, frankly, themselves – there is no reason that you shouldn’t have all As, but not for me – I mean, I am going to brag about you no matter what. Do something that will make you proud of yourself and it will probably help your skin. Also, if the acne wash you are using isn’t helping after a week or so, stop using it even if it works for your friends and find something with a different pH balance – and let your skin breathe. I understand that at your age, in your circles you feeling that wearing make-up at school is necessary and there is no point in debating that with you – but at fencing? Your face is covered anyway, wash it off beforehand and then don’t put cream on it until you get home for that will only clog your pores more.”

“Oh my God, Dad stop, you are embarrassing me.”

>>> You are embarrassing yourself, mate. << Mr Hanger agreed.

>>> This requires care, << her father told his friend, gesturing to his features. >>> So, Marie, it works out that I’m at an event with a bunch of maths nerds and I asked around about the zero. Turns out both of your friends are right, but the Arabs were there first in terms of geometry and the Persians in algebra. Your mates are probably fighting about politics they don’t understand half as well as they think themselves to. Tell them, maybe ... to over-invest in rival sport franchises if they want to have fully meaningless, banal arguments to fill their day? Or any kind of fandom, I guess.”
“That sounds like it comes from experience,” Marie snorted. Georgie, upon hearing the word costume, set her new guitar aside for a blessed moment to take the alternate crown she and her mother had made for her to wear from the parade that morning back from the sleeping Mou, again making herself look like the Statue of Liberty (whom Georgie had proudly informed her when they met was the ‘original patriot princess, before Lady Anna even,’ adding, ‘but you are my favourite princess, Marie! Before it was Cinderella, but Lady El’nor told Nora that actually ever girl is a princess and Nora is my favourite princess, too, because she brought cake to school with pink icing and sprinkles’ – all of which seemed sounder than any other argument Marie had heard about separatist politics from either side of the reinvigorated debate.) She let her father and his friend continue theirs as she helped her sister adjust the crown, careful that the camera on Kolina’s laptop didn’t catch the small dog she knew they would get in trouble for letting into the bed they were sharing for the night.

“I’m really of the mind that ITV should have cancelled Downton after its third series and not killed Mathew off, but it was popular in America and you know they always get precisely what they want and what they want is blood and gore and bad acting. Any road … I’m not exactly welcomed in some corners of the internet.”

Have you ever actually subjected yourself to that show – have you done so to an extent that would allow on to form and voice an opinion? her father squinted, shifting back slightly in dismay and disgust.

“No, of course not – but I really had you going, ay? Like you with all your fucking beauty tips,” Hanger laughed.

“You guys are just so,” Marie began to roll her eyes, “Georgie, can you stop that?” she nearly shouted as her sister tried to resume her strumming. If she doesn’t practice she will never improve.

“You can turn the volume down, Dad,” Marie reminded him, “I can’t. Watch, in a week if this keeps up, Mum and Kolina’s new-found friendship will be shot.”

If she doesn’t practice she will never improve.

“Oh. Mum was being herself when she arrived and Kolina was not exactly being warm either, and she made some off-hand comment about one of Mum’s singles from like … two years ago because culture takes its dear sweet time traveling north, I guess, and Mum looked at her shirt and told her ‘name three songs.’ Kolina just blinked at her like ‘what’ and then Mum said some stuff in what I guess is Norwegian and then they started talking excitedly about music so Mum got her guitar out of the boot and brought it up –”

Mum drove? That is troubling.

“It is Easter weekend,” Marie defended her mother’s judgement if not her ability behind a wheel, “there are no flights. Anyway, Georgie danced for us and then Mum gave her a little music lesson and just to show that she knows everything that has ever been recorded and forced upon us, taught her the chord to ‘Best of Both Worlds’. That is what this is meant to be. You can tell, can’t you?” she rolled her eyes. Georgie hit her hard enough that it hurt.

“Daddy she is being mean again!”
“Shh!” Marie warned. “Your mum thinks we are asleep; you shouldn’t be making so much noise at all.”

>>I have my phone back, too, Marie,<< their father answered, >>I can tell everyone you know that the only reason I know about Hannah Montana fully stop is that you used to borrow your mother’s wigs and run around the house pretending to be an American pop star … hey, now that you are yourself a brunette, that would make more logical sense,<< he smiled. >>Anyway, stop being mean to your sister or I’ll break out the family album, show your mate Atty even more embarrassing photos of you than the ones circulating of you dressed up as Anna Strong or – Hewlett, now, I guess.<<

“Oh my God! First, we’re not mates. In no world would he ever roll with my crew – he’s gross to begin with and a womanizer besides.”

>>Now that you bring me on it, this thing that you and Susan did with sending random d-i-c-k << he spelt, presumably for the benefit of Georgie’s innocence, >>to his girlfriend and pretending it was his is something we are going to have to have a talk about face-to-face, young lady.<<

“Okay … for starters,” Marie defended, “no one thinks Kitty is real.”

>>Regardless of what you think of the girl or don’t, you can’t engage in the same behaviour you are quick to point out and criticise in others.<<

“What not?” Marie challenged, “I want a career in politics.” Her father fought his urge to laugh which suggested to her that he was crosser with her for her role in contributing to Arthur’s teenage misogyny than wider circumstance and his resulting sentiment led him to express. She felt her heart sink with guilt over laughing at the texts she had watched Susan write in Arthur’s name.

It was not right of either of them, even though their motivation of freeing him of this concern that he might help find her father certainly was. She knew it was not acceptable to use people, to play with the emotions of third parties as a means to an end and tasted her own sick as she recalled what she had overheard the adults downstairs say about an American psychologist who had treated His Highness as well as Mr Simcoe, the friendly man Marie had vague childhood memories of having once lived with Miss Gwillim in her penthouse upstairs, who had been as a tall as a giant and as such had let her be small when he babysat, when everyone else had begun expecting to both behave as a ‘young lady’ and to be ‘good at sport’ as she herself had always been rather tall for her age, too. She wondered if on a smaller scale she had committed the same kind of crime as Dr André, if she should apologise to Kitty, if she should even let her know. She wondered why manners dictated that she personally let Arthur know she was alright when he, too, did dreadful things to undeserving people and was about to ask her father as much when she heard a crash over the chord her sister was trying to play.

“Georgie, please can you stop!” she hissed. Her sister, tired of being told what to do by someone who was not a grown up stuck out her tongue in response though she thankfully otherwise did as she was told.

>>Marie! What did I just <<

“I heard something … give me a sec, okay? I’ll be right back,” she said, climbing out of bed, rousing Mou from the comfortable position he had found at her feet in the process.

The night itself carried the songs of Scottish nationalists through the streets, hopeful that the jubilation surrounding “their” branch of the Royal Family would split the monarchy if only symbolically, that the Hewletts would trade their English titles and processions in exchange for the
decolonization of their Scottish ones, for the full liberty and autonomy they had been after since the Stewarts had taken the throne. It was unlikely, at least according to the YouTube channels that covered such topics, for Anna had not converted and any children she should bear would be illegitimate heirs. The Hewlett line was as good as dead and should Lady Eleanor fail to provide her betrothed with a son, Richmond and all of the other English titles would revert back to the Crown upon Edmund’s death.

But such concepts did not fit into the world-views of royal-watchers and the activists hoping to channel the widespread enthusiasm for the ‘Patriot Princess’ into another independence referendum. Marie heard them on the street. She heard the ladies laughing it up in the parlour downstairs, sipping their appletinis (for cider was too pedestrian) over the soundtrack they had made for the reception – exactly what one would expect of four middle-aged women who considered they had no use for the institution of marriage whatsoever and one elderly one who was said to have dementia but was present enough to know rap music in and of itself and to lovingly inform Marie’s mother that she was no Missy Elliot when she had chocked on her attempts to talk backwards during the chorus.

Marie smiled, both because she agreed with the sentiment and because she was happy to hear her mother getting on with her father’s former mistress, with a childhood friend of his towards whom Marie suspected he had sexual desires that may or may not have been fulfilled since last her parents split, with one of her Tarleton aunts who had made no secret of the family’s disapproval of her mum in the past, and with the Fergusons who drew a strong distinction between their professional and personal lives – the kind, Mary reasoned, it might do her parents well to adapt.

The night was loud, the house was lively, but it was to locality of the sound that troubled Marie that raised her suspicion and concern. In an attempt to protect she and her sister from the commotion that they might get some sleep, they had been sent to bed at shortly after ten (far past their respective bedtimes) in a converted attic loft. There was nothing on this floor save for a guest bed and the bathroom down the hall. But what Marie heard, what muted all of the night’s music in this vicinity, sounded an awful lot like paper shuffling, perhaps after being scanned by unseen eyes. She flipped on the light switch to confirm the hallway’s dimensions had been as she remembered. There was no creepy portrait of a long-dead ancestor that might have served to single entrance into a secret passageway – no pictures, in fact, were on any of the walls, which struck Marie as odd for Mary Anne Burges was something of an artist and her botanical depictions were to be found in frames most everywhere else in the home.

Marie knocked on the wall and received a hallow sound in return. A pace further, she knocked again to the same result. There was something up here worth hiding, hiding, at least, behind walls too thin to support the weight of a picture frame. Perhaps the fortress had been built in haste. Marie thought about breaking it down, but when she knocked once more, she met resistance, and so she pushed against what proved a perfectly hidden door.

She saw Inspector Ferguson standing over a pile of books – not, Marie saw, the ones to have collapsed on the bookshelf without their support, causing her initial alarm and attention. The shelf, she realised, must be against the wall the formed the boundary to the bedroom. She listened for Georgie but heard nothing but the sound of her racing heart.

“I thought your practice restricted itself to family law, Ms Burges,” Ferguson said in greeting, not removing his eyes from the page on which they seemed stuck.

“What are you doing in here?” Marie answered his accusation with one more direct.

“Marie,” he blinked, “I thought you’d gone to bed -”
“Yea? Well I’m certain you need a warrant to -”

“He’s helping me with something,” Mary Anne said, turning Marie from the hidden office space when she placed a hand on her shoulder. Marie had not heard her approach. Maybe she had been upstairs all along and she simply had not noticed the attorney’s voice was absent from the chorus downstairs, those of her mother and aunt being so dominant as they were. “I’ll explain when you are older. Go to sleep, get some rest. Tell your dad that time still works in Scotland the way he remembers it having done and say goodnight.”

“What are you doing?” Marie frowned, “I am old enough to -”

“Not quite. It is like the cider, you might well be able to disgust it, but this – the answer would only give you a headache come the morrow,” Ferguson told her.

Knowing she would not get any further, Marie grabbed Mou from her feet, tiptoed back into her room, put on a performance for her father of being yelled at by the adults and telling him and Mr. Hanger that they had to go to bed or they would be grounded and not get to go to the dinosaur park tomorrow, which endlessly made Georgie be quiet after she promised she’s draw both her dad and godfather pictures of long-dead animals named in a long-dead language which she could barely speak and which was, to Marie’s mind, barely legible with even the most learned of Scottish tongues.

“Where are you going?” her sister asked her after she had thought her to have gone to sleep.

“Water,” Marie answered.

“You already have some.”

“Okay … I’m going to play a little spy game, you can come, if you are really super quiet – okay?”

It was not fair that she was being kept from a secret on the basis of age, and she reasoned that telling her small sister to stay in bed would just be another iteration of repeating the same behaviour that formed the basis of her critique.

Freddy Morgan’s interest in sport only extended so far as those athletes who modelled boxer briefs for luxury brands. A wedding, especially one of such interest and esteem was the very last venue in which he anticipated finding himself sitting on the side-lines, scraping his brain for what little knowledge he had of soccer past the photo of Cristiano Ronaldo in Armani that he had saved in his phone for the joint purpose of abs-piration and masturbation (something he shared with bridesmaids with whom he sat, attaching far less language to the image than that which exist in his mind’s reference.)

"Pass," Abigail said after looking quickly at the photograph and setting the device aside. Freddy took a certain measure of personal offence. Abigail otherwise trusted – and therefore shared – his tastes.

“What do you mean, he is gorgeous,” he argued the sudden lack of aesthetic appreciation from this women he had known since boyhood, who ordinarily put her faith him when it came to questions of beauty and style to the point of meeting him that same morning, her hair shamefully covered
with a silk scarf (albeit one from Dolce & Gabbana) and her embarrassment excused with the explanation that no one knew how to do a weave like he did, which had appealed to the same sense of self she now sought to insult. He frowned, wondering why women were so difficult to please, wondering if he might be more direct in his attempts to cheer her up.

From the hair-studio he had built in his room at the local Holiday Inn, Freddy had learnt over the course of the morning that Anna’s ladies were through with waiting, as it were, for their own Prince Charmings to arrive on white horses in shining armour or the kinds of tailored suits that spoke to the fairy-tale their bride was living. Sally and Mary were in a silent stand-off, both having ended a short-lived relationship with the Best Man within the course of the past several months. Aberdeen had discovered that week that the one who had long held her fancy, who had used this fact to press her for information relating to an ongoing investigation, was not only not exactly who he portrayed himself as being but was also not politically astute enough to be of any interest whatsoever. Peggy had been publicly distorted, emotionally abused and physically taken advantage of by the only man she had deemed as possibly being a worthy match for her mind. And Abigail, darling Abigail, had finally ended things with her jealous, controlling boyfriend of far-too-long.

Could none of them see the favour he was doing them by way of example?

Men were just as easily objectified as women often said they felt.

As such, it was fine to engage in such entertainment.

It was fine to fantasise, to have meaningless sex with handsome strangers, to leave before breakfast, to leave well before one’s partner had had his fill.

Freddy Morgen puckered his lips in silent protest of the stands to which these women held themselves. What had been the point of the feminist movement if not to create equality by teaching girls to grab power where it could be easily gained and gotten? No woman alive should ever feel hung up – especially not after having her hair done.

“No … I meant -Pip! What the hell!” Abigail screamed at her son’s friend. Looking at the phone again briefly before handing it back, she gave, “He’s not really my type.”

“Then who is pray tell?” Freddy inquired.

“From the world of sport?” Abigail returned.

“No only,” he said, not wanting to humiliate himself. When he was a boy realising that his tastes extended to others of the same sex, he had rented ‘Bend it like Beckham’ knowing that ‘bent’ was slag for queer in Britain, hoping to see something sex-related rather than soccer based. Decades after this disappointment, he still had no idea, for example, what ‘Messy’ meant in the context of soccer and even less of a clue why that adjective always came up when he mentioned that he fancied Ronaldo but reasoned that he would be as let-down as he had been to learn that he’d spent two whole dollars from his allowance on ninety-minutes dedicated to the delicate sort of friendships that existed between girls.

As many of his relationships as an adult took on the same tone, he tried to keep his conversation to themes over which it was difficult for the women in his life to ridicule and judge him the way only those of the so-said fairer sex could.

They were ‘fair’ only insofar as he had done their hair and make-up, he frowned to himself, his attention returning to the bride who had traded her haute couture gown for a fitted tee-shirt (as all of hers seemed to be) and a pair of gym shorts he had been horrified to learn that she owned. Lady
Anna was better than most of the men against whom she was playing, insofar, at least, as Freddy could judge from his standpoint of having no particular stake in the sport itself.)

“Ah! She learned that from me!” Mary Woodhull exclaimed when the ball hit her friend’s head. “It is the hair-spray,” she told Freddy and the other bridesmaids. “It makes the ball extra-bouncy.”

“Is she hurt?” Peggy asked.

Mary looked down at her bandaged ankle. “No, I think she will be alright,” adding bitterly, “The police are all otherwise motivated today.”

“What are the police?” Aberdeen asked.

“What do you mean?” Abigail wondered.

“Before … before there were tons of men in non-descript clothes, not smiling, occasionally making eye-contact with one another. I don’t see them anymore. It just feels … suspicious, unless they weren’t here to provide a security detail at all,” Aberdeen answered. Freddy looked around. He had not noticed and was surprised that anyone had.

“Maybe they are all busy stopping the press from snapping pictures of the future duchess with her hair undone,” Freddy answered, finding his fingers that were still tired from six identical updos now trembled anticipating additional work before the reception. “How long is this going to last? I have a hair-pocritic oath to fulfil before the reception,” he stated in the language Peggy had used when they had been in high-school together and he had set himself the stress-inducing but ultimately rewarding task of improving the ponytail of his best friend and every other girl on the cheer squad which they two had co-captained by senior year. Peggy laughed.

“I’m going to go find out,” Aberdeen announced, ignoring Sally’s answer of “ninety minutes” as she walked -nay, marched - across to the other side of the field, interrupting play and caused at least one foul.

Freddy watched on as the au pair seemed to ask for water. A boy, the Pip at whom Abigail had yelled, ran off the pitch specifically to offer her his. Aberdeen took only the smallest, most unnatural of sips (this for someone criticising the spy craft of professionals) before bending down to talk to him for what seemed a long time. She gave him a kiss on the cheek and his brown skin grew red. The lad’s smile confessed the peck to have been his first as he returned triumphantly to the field, said something to Cicero and another boy who Freddy assumed to be Dutch of German from his poorly-styled friseur, receiving a shove from the former and a pat on the back from the latter. Were that women could be so direct in their approach to their own emotions and those of others, Freddy thought as he watched on.

In contrast, Aberdeen returned with a smile and said something to Peggy in French which only they two were fluent which instantly caused tears. Freddy rose before hearing the scream that followed, knowing which brand of mascara he had used for the event and knowing Peggy’s reaction to it.

Without first offering him a translation of what she had been told, Peggy cursed, “Why the hell would you use Lancôme at a wedding?”

She continued to rub at her ever-reddening eyes, expanding the black circles around them.

Freddy cringed. “Because I wanted all of my bitches to have long, dark, feathering lashes and Hypnôse Drama bends glue and fakes besides. I didn’t think you’d cry, Doll.”

“What about Anna? She might ‘ave cried – it is ‘er wedding,” Aberdeen spat, rubbing at her own
eyes to see if it truly hurt as much as Peggy was making out.

“Oh, her eyes don’t need any help, Honey,” Freddy dismissed, not wanting to embarrass their shared friend by acknowledging the temper tantrum she was throwing at this minor discomfort.

“Freddy!” Peggy shouted.

“Relax, Babe. I’ve cotton swaps, eye-makeup remove, eye-drops and Maybelline in my bag if you plan on carrying on and don’t care about looking … basic. Come on let’s – not you,” he said to Aberdeen. “I don’t know what you said that upset her so much but you’re not -”

“She’s coming.” Peggy insisted, pulling the other girl’s arm as she dragged her, ahead of Freddy himself back to the court house. “It’s not … she just. It’s André,” she explained in hushed tones when they three had gotten inside, away from curious glances. “He’s dead. Aberdeen found out from ADIC Hamilton’s son, he overheard him and ADA Burr talking about it in the car this morning. He’s dead and the man … the man who killed him can’t possibly go to trial for it. I mean he can but he can’t. It isn’t fair! It isn’t fair!” she began to sob anew.

“Oh Babe, I am so, so sorry,” Freddy said as he sat her down in a chair in the chamber that had been used for the ceremony, underneath which he had hidden his emergency aid kid.

“Sorry?” Peggy gaped. “I’m only sorry that in his last moments he destroyed the lives of one of his patients even further. What he did to those men was even worse than what he did to me … and he did it, he found the funding with my face. I didn’t know but I feel so responsible … so responsible especially as I fell for his charms. I agreed to spy for him against the good people he hurt and when I couldn’t tell him that which he hoped to hear, he, I-”

“It is my fault,” Aberdeen broke in as her own careful composure shattered. “Mine, not yours. I was the one who told Robeson about André and his research when I visited him at Belview for you. I’m sorry,” she cried as though for absolution, “I didn’t think ee’d act on the information even though I threatened André with ‘is presence there. I thought André would take measures to avoid ‘im – ee ‘ad already confined ‘imself to ‘is room and I really, really thought that knowing might ‘elp Robeson not to ‘urt ‘imself further over what ee ‘ad done to ‘is boyfriend, over what ee ‘ad no choice not to … being trapped by Rogers in such a situation, being trapped by André in ‘is own mind.”

“It is André’s fault!” Peggy yelled. “No one else’s. And now he can’t answer for it and we shouldn’t have to. But I will, I swear I will. Somehow, I will get someone on a bench – we can’t just surrender or idly bide our time waiting for the powers that be to dispose of us the way they seem to have done with Mr Brewster, with Philomena and Robeson – and did I understand you correctly – there is a rumour going around that Arnold was found in André’s own flat? Where will the put the blame for his imprisonment? Surely it is too easy to – someone knew! Someone had to have known! How long has it been now that Philomena has been in detention without bond? He wasn’t … when I was there, Arnold wasn’t, and I know I only met her under the worst of circumstances but I swear she didn’t know, for if she had surely it would have come out in the fight that I witnessed. And I was there! He made love to me on the sheets that André and/or Rogers might have later been used to dress Senator Arnold’s deathbed!”

“Peggy!” Freddy shouted, grabbing her shoulders and encouraging her to retake her seat, at least until her could clean up the smudges she had made on her cheeks. “We have been over this. Starting with nomenclature - John André did not ‘make love’ to you – he had sex with you and said otherwise. Since we are already speaking ill of the dead, he raped you as far as I’m concerned and I wish I could punish him myself for this crime. But you are alive, Peggy – despite every loss you are alive and he isn’t and you’ll survive this,” he insisted, feeling inspired himself. “You’ll come
out the other side better for it, same as Edmund of Richmond -”

“It is Hewlett,” Peggy corrected. Freddy smiled to himself that even upset, his best friend could be needlessly pedantic. “In England, nobles don’t use surnames, but in Scotland they do and seeing as though Hewlett seems to take Her Majesty’s sanction as a personal offence, it is best to use his northern distinction. Just if it comes up at the reception.”

“It is why he is wearing that kilt instead of full formal uniform and why the embroidery on Anna’s gown only depicts the family’s Scottish holdings,” Freddy said. “I know babe, I’ve read every article in the Mail this morning, too, even did Effie Gwillim’s hair when I finished with you lot,” he said, fixing her eyes.

“Trader,” Peggy stuck out her tongue.

“Do we hate her?” Freddy chirped. “Oh, Honey, do tell. We have time as I have work to do if you still mean to attend tonight’s ball in the wake of all this.”

“It is because she threatened to publish André’s research if Tarleton’s body was not returned to Britain, but then she didn’t and everyone is remaining in the dark as a result,” Aberdeen answered. “The bill was not brought to a vote but it could be in a later session, especially in the Republicans keep the Senate and ‘Ouse and get one of their own as the Chief Executive. I think McConnell, ee wants this -”

“I think Pelosi does too,” Peggy interrupted, “but no one wants that the other party should get this ‘win’ even if the rest of us – especially our servicemen and women ultimately loose.”

Aberdeen nodded. Freddy focused on his task at hand, again feeling out of his element in the conversation.

“Not with you two to contend with,” he said. “You’ll get in to Columbia, help Jordan and that gorgeous specimen of the male species he ran off with build that case you mention -”

“It is not enough,” Peggy said. “Not when the personal liberties of innocent people are under serious threat, not when I myself helped put them in peril, when -”

He put his finger to her lips. After applying another thin line of liquid liners, Freddy repeated in hopes of keeping his friend from hysterics after all of this hard work, “None of this is your fault, Peggy. You know what I think you would be better served doing right now?” he asked, settling on a more direct approach though experience told him that logic rarely worked on the partisan-minded and almost always escaped the fairer sex as a whole.

“What?” Peggy did her best to smile.

“Someone. Literally anyone who isn’t André so you can replace the experience of him with one of your choosing – though,” he frowned, “I’ll give you; the choices are pretty limited at this event. Honestly the only bloke worth a bang already left and the ones that are waiting around are either old or married or both. And the women are all straight,” he added, remembering what André had jealously implied about her sexuality, something Freddy could easily subscribe to were it not said by an enemy with the intention to offended.

“Freddy, I’d never!”

“We could try out look elsewhere,” Aberdeen suggested. “We’ve still some time before the reception.”
“Tinder?” Freddy tried. “I think Baby-Cakes here is about as done with online anything as someone with no real social media experience of her own to speak of possibly can be.”

Aberdeen shook her head. “I’m thinking old-school. Bar. I know of at least one we can get into, probably crawling with bored coppers looking to kill time. They couldn’t have sent them all back to the city.”

“You’d fuck a cop?” Peggy gasped at the suggesting, raising her hand to her chest in faux-alarm.

“What are you on about, bitch?” Aberdeen snored in laughter. “I scream ‘Fuck the police’ every chance I get and ‘appen to be the most altruistic of all people. I would take one for the team, should Rob be around, still extending ‘is invitation for a dance. It wouldn’t go further than this, I’ve decided. Ee did not even know who ee was, Nazarbayev.”

“The President of Kazakhstan, seriously?”

“It is sex, not substance, girls,” Freddy felt the need to instruct. “Oh my fucking God, do as I do - objectify men for once. Focus on your physical pleasure and stop trying to make everything else perfect. Seriously, any man would be better than the one you had, or who had you – lead the way, M’lady,” he told Aberdeen, "but wait, let me get rid of that smudge first. Despite everything I just said, some things have to be perfect.”

“I think its best I just cut my losses,” Ban Tarleton said of his emptied Toxteth flat upon finding it listed on the internet with a fifty-quid price increase, “Make up with Mary, move back to London -”

“Mary whose name you just spent the past quarter hour cursing?” George Hanger frowned. They had had this conversation before more times than he cared to count, Hanger always finding that his mate was socially or psychologically predisposed to creating new incarnations of problems that had already been solved several times over than sorting the ones he presently faced. He hoped his friend would not create a world construct with words like ‘love’ that invited a structure into the argument both likely anticipated would ensue which they could not share on its premise, thereby voiding debate.

“Yea … it is just that ‘innit?” Tarleton surprised him by admitting. “We’ve been ‘off again’ for a few months now and we remain unsettled in the same arguments that drove her to kick me out – for all of my effort and trouble I should at least be having hate-sex.”

The case, Hanger reasoned, was flawed but its concept sound.

“Something wrong with Sheil Road?” he countered, hoping that Tarleton would not respond with something about ‘commitment’ of the kind both knew to be a façade. He continued to watch the timer on Hanger’s screen, refreshing a few sites that gave estimations of local traffic conditions, trying to determine within a reasonable margin of error when his man would arrive and end the hostage situation that he had been forced to negotiate for reasons of the desperation he took such care to hide. This, too, Hanger assumed, was a cover. Mary Robinson often was.

For a moment, he let himself consider that their most recent break up had been as well, if Ban had made a show of leaving to create an excuse to avoid the company they shared as a couple, that everything Tallmadge told him about Tarleton’s perfect murder had been true and he and taken
additional steps to avoid connection and detection – he might not have known which common
plants could kill, Mary Anne Burges quite likely did and, giving what Hanger knew of her political
leanings and personal loyalties, she might have had more than a helping hand in this act of justice
the law might yet call high treason. He wondered who else might have been involved on some
level, if Mary knew and was playing a role – she had invited Mary Anne to a party she in the end
did not herself attend, she had invited Effie Gwillim and her aunt Maggie Graves and ultimately he
himself for drinking and debauchery in St Pauli with public figures beyond reproach, and he had
gone along, ignorant to anything being amiss aside from that fact that it seemed Ban had
surrendered everything and everyone in a personal battle between him and his ex that no one had
any interest in waging. Mary had sent him a few texts over the past several months in relation to
the breakup that were surprisingly neither angry or accusatory in tone as was he custom and what
Hanger had been accustomed to, rather just wondering if he knew if Ban had settled in (he did not),
if he might ask his friend to take a few more of his boxes from her foyer when next they spoke (if
he did not forget – which he often did.) Mary, for her part, never pushed the matter, making
Hanger all the more suspicious that this had all been for show. He wondered who else had been
given a part, who was playing along knowingly and who else was, like himself, a mere member of
the chorus, repeating the same lines they had for the past decade, unknowing giving structure to
the narrative the public read in publications such as the one Effie Gwillim owned and edited, that
the police might later be sold in the same fashion.

As Hanger bothered his mind over the only question that was truly worth asking – if this was
Tarleton’s lie, or Tallmadge’s – his friend clicked through several search windows filled with
figures that numerically supported his counter-argument.

“Aye, logistics,” Tarleton complained. “I’d need a car, objecting as I do to the surcharge cabbies
add-on for that kind of fun – but that means petrol, maintenance, insurance, oil changes – not to
mention, where I would park the thing when not letting it operate as a brothel and what kind of
premium would I then pay downtown? I’ve given this some measure of thought. Weighing the
estimated benefit against actual cost, I’m better off going back to the same old same.”

“Mine is under an overpass in Frankfurt. Has been since the fall. I’d all but forgotten about it,”
Hanger offered, reaching out his phone and checking to see if his insurance payment was still being
automatically deducted from his account. “It is like a fucking gym membership – it is! Things you
forget you even have until you’re wondering why it is your broke by mid-month,” he cursed.

“I don’t know, I go four, five times a week.”

“There are better ways to burn calories and build muscle,” Hanger laughed as he watched his friend
flex.

“That how your ride wound up under a bridge?” Tarleton smarted.

“‘Tis, old friend.”

“You think it is still there?” he raised an eyebrow.

Hanger was not certain. “It is a Prius,” he shrugged, “who the fuck would take it?”

“Automatic?”

“Aye.”

Tarleton bit his lower lip as he turned another calculation into a gamble. “I mean … if you aren’t
using it, I’ll buy it off you … provided you can find it again, that is.”
“Provided you plan to use the thing to its true and intended purpose of having a quick shag in a car park, I’ll bloody give you the thing. Bild financed me a DB-50 card, so it is more economic to just take the train. Since all major metro stations are situated in the worst parts of town, I never have to look long for a girl, a hotel with hourly rates or a back-alley blow job.”

“Oy! Good on you!”

“It is what they call ‘German Efficiency’.”

“We were it only that Britain had a sordid history of fascism that forced our rails and motorways into the twentieth century, never mind the twenty-first,” Tarleton mused.

“Nay, even in Britain the car is cost-effective, at least in the realm of the illicit sex trade; nothing is quite as unsexy as a mid-priced hybrid,” Hanger laughed. “You’d never be pulled over.”

“I’ll stick a ‘go vegan’ sticker on the bumper and hold myself and orgy inside whist parked outside a police station, they would never be the wiser. The Left can get away with everything the Right can’t.”

Including murder? Hanger wondered. Tarleton stared at him with wide eyes as though he had just asked as much aloud.

“I’d honestly rather you quite literally go vegan with all of the conversational restraints such a diet binds one to than entertain the notion – or expect that I should by virtue of your stating it – that you and Mary ‘should try it again’ with the whole ‘emotional compatibility’. Think … think of your kids,” he tried to stick to the agreed upon script.

He winced as the words left his lips, imaging that as much of a dull edged knife every conversation about the inapproachable Mrs Robinson had been to his ears, it must have been far worse for young Marie hearing her parents kiss and make up as it were, just to go to war again the next day, often over matters far too domestic for George Hanger to have personally ever considered outside of the highly specific context of the complaints that found their way into a WhatsApp Group: ‘Mary’s insisting we watch Downton Abbey. How can they make so many episodes of a show where nothing happens?’ or ‘My DP forgot to pay the fees for Marie’s violin lessons and I’ve only a hundred fifty quid to get me through to the end of the month. She shouldn’t risk losing her chair over her mum’s inability to manage her finances,’ before Ban practically contradicted himself with a question like, ‘what is your best bet for QPR v Cardiff this afternoon?’

Under any normal construct, Tarleton’s ‘best bet’ would simply be to stay away, to leave as quickly as he could before being given a mundane reason to return. Hanger sometimes had nightmares about the wife who had left him long ago, about living with her – perhaps in the house that had been bequeathed to him in Ireland – with her asking him the kinds of questions that would drive any man to madness: ‘Do you really love me?’, ‘Does this make me look fat?’, ‘Can you pick up a pint of milk on your way home?’ – things Ban willing heard and answered by his continued presence in this relationship which Hanger increasingly suspected had never really ended and never really would. He almost preferred the idea that his friend had been bribed or blackmail by one of the Hewletts to regicide, at least, it was a story that he could personally understand and empathise with and which made Mary was more worthwhile in Hanger's own construct of her helping the clique to conspire.

Commitment, on the other hand, at least insofar as Ban and Mary understood and exemplified it, was, to his mind, a special sort of sadomasochism, one encouraged by culture and custom world over. For his part, George Hanger was happy when he woke up from these bad dreams in or near a brothel, where he could experience love as it was meant to be shared – namely, with as many
women as he had coins in his purse.

“Think of my kids?” Tarleton spat, his shocked expression growing earnest. “You sent a fifteen-year-old to purchase a firearm and brought two preteens into a covert FBI operation,” he continued, eyes narrowed and face grown red with the blood Hanger could taste on his breath. Tarleton would run out of steam eventually, inhale and return to more mutually interesting themes. Hanger pulled out his mobile phone electing to play ‘Angry Birds’ while awaiting the eye of the storm. “You don’t get to lecture me by any means about what constitutes appropriate conduct where it comes to the welfare of children ... Apropos, you'll never again run the risk of my asking you to baby-sit again,” the cornel spat.

“Really?” Hanger pouted, “You’d do this to me now – now that I’ve just learned that Marie occasionally scores tickets to Spurs home games? I’d quite like to go to The Lane again before they tear it down.”

“Stop this.”

“It makes me feel old, too,” Hanger laughed. “Tell me, does it bother you more that a big-six starter is so much younger than you that he could feasibly take your daughter to a school dance, or that your kid could be given WAG-status by the English press before actually reaching the age of consent?” He shifted slightly, “How much do you trust Effie Gwillim?”

“No … Marie’s not into boys yet in any real way. Or maybe she is and has figured out a way to keep me and her mother fully ignorant of this development.”

“Probably the latter,” Hanger shrugged, disappointed that Ban had not taken his bait. He wanted to hear something definitive about Effie, or Ellie, or Mary Anne or Patrick or John or Edmund or anyone else Tallmadge had dropped into an accusation over which he had promised not to act. Hanger realised he needed at least some aspect of what he had been told in the gent’s that morning to be true, for otherwise he would have helped to deliver his friend to ADIC Hamilton and whatever torture he had concocted and construed to force Ban into battle under a false banner. Hanger did not know much about this Robert Rogers, but with every minute that passed he grew more suspicious of the man with whom his friend had been ordered to negotiate. He had either not left when he said he had, had stopped or been stopped along the way, or was simply not coming at all. For all George Hanger knew, Senator Arnold, rather than the Duke of Richmond may well have been the one to die, and that he, in a panicked effort to protect his friend had all but delivered him to his fate, to take some fall for a crime he had no cause to commit.

“You know,” Tarleton smirked, ignorant to his fiend’s worries and the reality they suggested, “I slept with nearly every girl at school by the time I was sixteen, but the summer before sixth form, on my birthday, my old man drove me out to a right proper brothel, handed me a thousand pounds and told me he did not want to see me until morning,” he laughed. “He told me – I suppose because of the way I dress, as is often the case – that he could not stand the idea of his son being gay, that I needed to experience sex with a woman and that I needed to cut my hair before returning to school for the fall semester. Now that I have a kid around that age and a few of her friends to contend with, I look back wondering if I had the worst parents or the absolute best. Either way, they had no idea between them when it came to my numbers. Maybe it is or will be the same way with Marie.”

“The best, to be sure,” Hanger said with an envy he did not try to disguise, “and for your sake I hope it is with your kid, that you aren’t and needn’t be involved, as long as she’s happy and executing every precaution ... but in all seriousness it just isn’t good for her to hear mummy and daddy fighting all the time … I think it offsets the standard for what constitutes a normal relationship of any sort, which may speak to why she is getting into so many altercations of the
other physical sort at school.”

“Would you of all people stop telling me how to parent?” Tarleton frowned. It was a gamble, but if Hanger wanted to gain any ground here, it seemed his best bet to stick to subjects over which the colonel could not disguise his sensitivities with humour however much he tried. He wondered if he had done anything personally to cause their divide, if Tallmadge was right and Tarleton put his and everyone else’s protection above his own, if it had instead all been a lie and, as such, his friend could not open up about something he was entirely ignorant of in every aspect. If they were simply at different stages of their lives and if this signalled some kind of end all unto itself.

“I mean – look at John, Effie even. The fashion editor and the admiral get on purely on slights and a shared occupational illness of always needing to get the last word in – and neither of their wards can handle life as an adult. You don’t want that for Marie. Come on. Effie’s found herself a bodyguard who looks exactly like her ex and from everything I’ve heard the closest John has come to a committed relationship is this argument he’s been in with Edmund Hewlett of all people for some stretch of time over if statistics are maths or not. By comparison I’m far better adjusted. Just stating for the record.”

“No,” Tarleton considered if not exactly countering, “John … he’s um … he’s got a thing going with one of the bridesmaids, the married one with a toddler. The one with her ankle in a cast.”

“Christ, fuck me if I’ve not heard this exact song before,” Hanger sighed. “Ein neues Lied, ein besseres Lied, O Freunde, will ich euch dichten!”

“No,” Tarleton considered if not exactly countering, “John … he’s um … he’s got a thing going with one of the bridesmaids, the married one with a toddler. The one with her ankle in a cast.”

“Do well to get over that, yea?”

“It’s Heine you uncultured swain.”

“Schwein,” Tarleton tried. “George, how do you say ‘fuck you’ in German?”


“Which means?”

“I’ll discuss this matter with my solicitor.”

“How quaint,” Tarleton smirked.

“How quaint,” Tarleton smirked.

“Its gross, I know. Here, I’ve this for you,” Hanger said as he hoped behind the bar, and helped himself to the tap.

„Vivat, Bacchus, Bacchus lebe, Bacchus lebe!
Bacchus war ein braver Mann,
Der zuerst der gold’nen Rebe
Süßen Nektar abgewann,“ he sang as he poured.

Aside from Marie and Georgie whom Ban had Skyped with immediately upon his return, they two had been alone in a bar for the past two hours and it had only just occurred to him to take some enjoyment from this fact. Perhaps he was getting older, too, at least insofar as he had reached a stage in his life and career where he was not drinking whilst technically at work. He had not had a beer at the two matches he had covered for the DFB Pokal last week either and wonderer briefly if he had grown serious about his job after becoming good at it, if he had it backwards, if there was
no correlation whatsoever, if there was something tragic to success and if anyone could really say. He felt like toasting to the good old days, to a time when Tarleton had no need for secrets and he had been given no ground for suspicion. He wondered if he, too, had somehow grown needlessly sentimental over small things, if that which he missed had truly gone away at all or if he had fallen too easily into a false construct and was reading too much into that which he had not been given.

“I know that one,” Tarleton laughed, continuing the tune. “Es leben die Mädchen, Die Blonden, die Braunen …”

“You have a chance to check out Miss Shippen yet?” Hanger inquired.

“Only insofar as I know that of the women in identical dresses, she’s the one who Cicero thought it worth taking on the NYPD to protect, because of the nude photos of her on Arnold’s phone which they found.”

Hanger’s eyes went wide. “Did you see said pictures?”

“No – they were photoshopped anyway - not that I didn’t enquire, I might add, lest you continue this act of disappointment and disapproval.”

“Who is Cicero then, assuming he has -”

“Unbelievable,” Tarleton shook his head, leaning back in his barstool as though he intended to make ever physical indication of his disbelief without putting any particular effort or planning in. Part of Hanger hoped to see his friend fall to the floor for the comedic effect the morning had missed, before remembering that he was carrying a firearm in his trousers the way American low-lifes did on the telly. Carrying the drinks he had just poured, he walked back around, pushing Ban’s chair back on all four of its legs as he asked for more clarification.

“What?” he demanded in a jest marked by inserting the amount of drama the colonel clearly thought ‘who is Cicero?’ worthy of into his tone.

“He’s one of the boys you were meant to watch.”

“Is he?” Hanger blinked. “I thought all Americans were names after founding fathers. I was just calling them Washington and Lincoln.”

Tarleton bit his lower lip as he tried to recall a detail just out of reach. “Lincoln was later. Maybe. He is the one who fought vampires, I think.”

“When were vampires a thing?” Hanger asked, meaning which epoch of American history.

“I don’t know … when Marie was eight, nine she got into it for a bit. Then One Direction happened and now its Agüero only she thinks I don’t know. Or maybe that is just her act of teenage rebellion and she’ll grow up and go back to supporting and showing love for the disappointment that is … well I guess whoever is playing for Everton in five, ten years time. Better then it being Arthur, or someone else of his ilk, I guess – but that will come in short order, I’m sure.”

“So, I just googled it, Lincoln freed the slaves,” Hanger said, stopped. “I’m worried I said something that can be construed as racist now.”

“You would be amazed at what is allowed when one has a British accent,” Tarleton dismissed. “Boris Johnson is widely respected on this side of the pond.”

“That can’t possibly be true.”
“Aye, and they think he is smart because he’s quoted Chaucer and Shakespeare. I swear it! If you keep dropping Heine and Mozart into your dialogue when our friends arrive, I’m well certain they will collectively decide you a genius.”

“That is terrifying.”


“Who is Arthur then?” he then wondered. “The other one you keep mentioning?”

“That is the intern you sent to Walmart.”

“Ah.”

“I’ve him - I’ve all of them playing five-a-side with Simcoe and a bunch of other blokes named John. Let them be kids again. Keep them all from this reception until my business is through.”

“It will do good for that lad to be taken down a notch,” Hanger nodded.

“I think so,” Tarleton said. “Do good for Johnny Sims’ to wear himself out trying to keep pace with your Lincoln, Washington -”

“I called the girl Ruth Bader Ginsburg,” Hanger gave. “She responded to it.”

“She is a current justice on the United States Supreme Court,” Tarleton squinted.

“With thirteen?”

“No – the girl’s name is Theodosia … you are really not near fluent in American are you?”

“I’m not even conversational, methinks,” Hanger admitted. “The young Irishman is hereby dubbed Wellington, by the way.”

“What you have for points of reference!” Tarleton exclaimed with some merriment.

“Passt zum Thema. Ay! Speaking of! Es leben die Mädchen … “ he began to sing quietly as the door opened. Tarleton shut the computer on which he had been monitoring traffic, trying to re-estimate an arrival time for the trade-off. Instinctively and either fully ignorant of the (already limited) first-semester German vocabulary he had once processed or simply intent on making an opera of his own sorry existence, he reach the gun from the back of his borrowed jeans, spun his shoulders to face the intruder and said upon seeing his error, “you can’t be here,” with more caution to his tone than he might have used had it been Rogers entering with Arnold in chains.

“But you can?” Aberdeen Declesias challenged. Ban Tarleton simply stared, lost for context and for what he might offer by way of clarification without exciting too much interest.

George Hanger, for his part, knew the young woman’s name because his present assignment required it. He knew she was born in Haiti and that she had met her employer, fellow bridesmaid Mary Woodhull, when the later went to the island to do charity after the earthquake. It annoyed him that such details sprung to memory, for, while it saved him from what might have well been an excruciating experience of two drinks, three dances, a few curtesy laughs at her banal observations and personal narratives before taking things back to his hotel, he found Aberdeen rather pretty but already knew too much about her person to feign interest in the parodies that were culture and courting. She gave him a smile and said something in greeting that he missed entirely as he fought
for words of his own with which to respond.

“Je ne parle pas francais. Parlez-vous anglais ou allemand?”

“Prada,” she repeated. “Your blazer, no?”

George blinked, removed his jacket and checked the label for verification. “Sure?” he said, handing it to her for inspection. Aberdeen wrapped it around her shoulders and smiled at him again, winking the way girls did when their fake lashes were too heavy for their eyelids, doubtlessly thinking this action alluring when in truth he had all but lost interest. George thought back to the girls he normal saw wearing so much make up – actresses and sex-workers mostly, recalling that the terms were once synonymous which made him smile in spite of his will not to. “You have exquisite taste, Mr Hanger,” then man who had casually walked in with the two bridesmaids told him. Peggy Shippen, for her part, had been quick to approach Ban and induced him into having the kind of whispered conversation that drowned out all other distractions, leaving George to entertain her friends while she did her best to entertain his. She touched his arm and stood in an unnatural posture, extending her chest invitingly in the colonel’s direction, he responded with a bemused smirk and comment that likely seemed witty to American ears. Oh! What stood to be conquered in this new world of endless possibilities! For a moment, George began scripting a proposal to send to his regular editor, asking for an assignment state-side that would take him from sea to shining sea, to countless beds in between by beautiful women who did not expect much more from him in terms of feigning conversation than a few casual quotes borrowed from literary greats and spoken in the accent of the landed gentry which they thought standard thanks to public television and the way British actors liked to over-enunciate in the period drama on which these women had evidently been raised. Ban, he saw, dropped his scouse when speaking to the colonists – more effort on his part than George would personally need to employ to the same ends.

As he considered a topic that might interest the tabloid-reading public back in Europe where women were not half so open and generous, the man had taken to staring at the unremarkable trousers he so happened to be wearing as though he had a figure like Ben Tallmadge that might inspire such lack of digression and decorum. Feeling embarrassed, Hanger glanced down, worried that he had grown stiff concocting a scheme that would see him paid to deflower virgins an ocean away from anywhere he had a reputation. He had not. He glanced back at the man who might have just introduced himself as Tommy Hilfiger (a name George knew but was slow to place) and Aberdeen Declesias who stood beside him with the same lustful look. “Honestly,” Tommy smiled, “You are dressed better than half of Anna and Edmund’s guests.”

“Oh, I can’t claim it,” he freely admitted, “if some element of my outfit is particular in any way whatsoever, a friend must have picked it out. Ban, probably, thinking himself the pinnacle of taste,” he said as he gestured in his mate’s direction.

“Do you and your friends go shopping a lot?” he was asked. Hanger hardly understood the question.

“For clothes? Ay, sure, why not. We make a bloody day of it, coffee and crumpets inclusive. Lovely old time.” In truth Ban had probably bought it while visiting one of his more successful siblings in an enviable post-code and had not gotten around to having it tailored before the article fell from fashion, which was how George wound up with most of his ‘smart’ clothing in strange colour schemes. He suddenly felt naked as he watched the two size up his trousers and tee-shirt, trying to determine whose name was on the tag.

“If this is a game of ‘Gay or European’ I assure you, we are of the latter,” he said awkwardly, half
wondering if Aberdeen wanted to rob him of all of his clothes and if it would be in his personal interests to allow for this.

“Speak for yourself,” Tarleton said unhelpfully, “I’m English.”

There was nothing less sexy than a Brexit debate, and so Hanger let the comment drop without reaction, immediately wondering if Boris Johnson enjoyed the same esteem from Haitians and if he might have done better to respond with a comment both fully uninformed and altogether ignorant of basic syntax.

“Well I am a huge fan,” Tommy said, shoving Aberdeen aside as he moved to shake his hand. “I would love to go shopping with a true fashion expert such as yourself. Honey, I have been reading The Mail all morning and I did not know that anyone could be half so funny in describing taffeta – you have managed to turn tragedy into comedy.”

“That is not hard when such is so purely executed,” Hanger tried to excuse himself by confessing to his attempt at parody. He otherwise knew nothing about the dresses worn by Lady Anna and her bridesmaids and had simply tried to translate the designer’s descriptions into what he had seen, borrowing her language, often word-for-word in quotations and citations to bring substance to his mockery. These articles had gotten more shares than the serious pieces he had penned to relative acclaim, perhaps because more women read the news or used social media than men, perhaps because royal weddings made everyone stupid and their interests singular.

“I – know!” the man said as though George had uttered something profound, just as Ban had promised. “What on earth was Antoinette thinking with that train?”

Marie Antoinette had lined the train of Lady Anna’s dress using material taken from her university and law school graduation gowns as a means of acknowledging and celebrating the bride’s own background and accomplishment at a wedding that otherwise threw so much symbolism into reminding the public of how many had been massacred by Hewlett armies over the past eleven centuries. He hated that he knew this off the top of his head and that he had formed an opinion of the matter besides. “I mean – I’m a sports journalist,” Hanger shrugged.

“So … want to get Messi with me?” Tommy winked.

“What?” Hanger frowned, legitimately confused by the construct of the question he had just been asked though fairly certain why the former Mayor of London played so well to such an audience.

“I’m – at the wedding I’m only lending my talents insofar as,” his phone rang before he could finish the thought, “can you – it is my editor, can you pardon me for just a moment?”

“Effie,” he hissed when he had answered the call before allowing the women on the other end any opportunity to speak. “I am going to murder you for making me do this – writing about fashion. It has given me a notoriety I neither want nor need. I think I had my blazer stolen by a bridesmaid and not in the scenario you would be quick to accuse. At the same time, I’m trying to not be rude to a man who obviously want more from me than I will ever be able to give. Ban is laughing a proper laugh over it but I can’t just blow this guy off because – we can agree than our mutual friend desperately needs to have sex – right? He is chatting up a leggy blonde and.”

>>George, I have a lead.<< Effie Gwillim interrupted. >>You need to get yourself down to Mount Saini – Senator Arnold was found and is receiving care. I want to be the first to have a man on the scene.<<

“I’m there,” he promised too fast. “Effie, listen – you can’t break this, not yet. We – well, Ban - is in the midst of an operation that could turn ugly if -”
Arnold has been rescued. It is over. Run tell that.<< she told him with a click.

Hanger stared at the lack screen for a few seconds. Barely saying any goodbye beyond clapping Ban on the shoulder as he went back to the bar to collect his laptop, knowing he would never have such a good chance to get on salary, he took his blazer back from the bridesmaid on his way out the door and left without a word.

John Anderson had learnt to fear small towns.

He listened to the three men sat at the bar of an otherwise empty dinner in the late afternoon as their mundane discussion shifted briefly from that over which they had some measure of authority (namely petty theft that excluded itself to glove boxes and the naked women in the promotional calendar from a tire company that hung in the garage next door that employed them) to topics Anderson shared, or rather, might have shared in had his been the side to enjoy the spoils of war.

He had been living just outside of town for the past five days under this assumed name with new papers and an identity that approached the life he had left insofar as it lent itself to isolation.

“Anderson,” John Paulding called out to him as he gestured at old television on the wall, fixed (as most he had encountered in the sticks seemed to be) to Fox News, “git back to New York with the rest ah yer kind. Yer readers ain’t gun give two shits about – what he called us?” he laughed to his two colleagues, “How them liberals say ‘redneck’ in their fancy five-dollar newspapers? ‘Political hegemony in an American backwater’,” he repeated in a poor imitation of an English accent before slapping his knee at a joke the others found especially funny. Whatever their assessment of ‘The Atlantic’ by whom he said he was employed by way of cover, John Anderson doubted either Isaac Van Wart or David Williams could so much as read. “Ain’t no one here want to talk to you, man. Ain’t nothin’ worth saying.”

“You’ll note that I’m not the one who initiated this conversation,” Anderson replied.

“I’m not the one who initiated this conversation,” Paulding repeated before returning to his chosen company, unable to come on anything original. Curiously, the accent Paulding put on in his mockery was a closer approximation to the one Anderson himself had adapted for airs than that which came to him naturally, that with which he now was relearning how to speak. He wondered if all British dialects sounded the same to American ears. He wondered if he had sounded half as ridiculous as the man made him out to speaking in a similar fashion when he had been John André.

“I’d offer you one as well but ye say ye dun drank,” Paulding continued, indicating to the bourbon the elderly waitress had poured out in four shot-glasses – three for her preferred clientele, one, presumably, for her. “But maybe ye’ll make an exception – finally we’ve somethin’ to celebrate.”

“I’m not Scottish,” Anderson said of the prince’s marriage to an American bride. It was too late to have another shot. His case worker would be here for their meeting any moment.

“Yeah, yeah – not American either, clearly,” Williams joined in. “To Arnold!”

“To Arnold!” the others echoed.

“Ardon?” Anderson asked. “They have found him?”
The waitress turned the volume up on the old, flickering television set and the room went quiet. Anderson watched the news as it broke and broke into further speculation between the locals. Hurried to leave, he thanked the woman for her care and hospitality and left twenty dollars for the coffee and bourbon he had been drinking while waiting for his handler to show.

Someone was in custody, the news speaker said.

Anderson knew he could not wait around where Washington knew where to find him.

Without direction, he began to run.

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He should have left sooner.

He should not have left Arnold alone.

The police were out in full force, but surely the senator would not have been spotted in the tinted windows of his borrowed vehicle - a car, it occurred to him as he pulled into the car park shortly after six in the evening, which may have been a mistake to drive.

He had taken it for its cover.

He had taken it as it was at this point of no use to Philomena Cheer.

But his Pet was in prison, her home a quartered off crime scene even prior to his arrival. He might have suspected that Tallmadge or Yilmaz or whomever the case had since been passed would send someone down. Now, thanks to his thievery she would never see the light of day.

And neither would he.

Robert Rogers was in the vicinity of his retirement without a hostage with whose life to negotiate.

If Tarleton had been listening to the same radio station on which he had just heard the breaking news, if he thus refused to pay up, it occurred to Rogers that he would simply need to take another prisoner.

A Hewlett princess, he smiled to himself as he climbed out of the car, might fetch a prettier purse than a senator it seemed no one had any great interest in saving.

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This was not love; not, at least, in the ways Peggy Shippen had pieced her concept of the emotional state, of the physical sensation, by picturing herself as the witty yet neurotic heroine of the popular literature and films she tended to favour. This was not a coming together of two beautiful souls after a series of comic misunderstandings, after lengthy conversations led to an intellectual connection as flawless as she and her sexual partner were physically. This was not made to last.

This, Peggy decided as she felt his fingers slide into her femininity, was so much better than any of that.
This was not about him; he could have been quite nearly anyone. This was about her and her alone.

“Oh,” Peggy gasped as what remained of the colonel’s thumb circled her clitoris with a clearly practiced pressure, making her moan in raw pleasure as own warmth extended its stick to her upper thighs.

“I know, right,” he said softly, flashing her a cocky smile before asking almost hopefully, “Do you want to taste?”

“Myself?” Peggy returned as he removed his crippled hand from its place beneath her petticoat. She opened her mouth as his fingers then encouraged, licking them bare if not dry, for her own sweet waters caused her to salivate. Peggy closed her eyes, smiling to herself that the man she had been so ready to give her preciously guarded heart to had not been able to give her a shred of the pleasure her tongue now processed. She was delightful, delicious and desirable – she was everything and anything but an extension of Dr André and the disappointment he had voiced.

“My turn,” Tarleton whispered. Peggy pushed him back before his soft lips could steal what hers had given. “No?” he pouted.

“Not like that,” Peggy answered. “Let’s see if you are truly as strong as they say.”

She pulled her long legs around his muscular torso, feeling his abdomen tense but not tremble as she used her hands to press up on his shoulders while he balanced hers against the back of the storeroom door, her knees lifted to his ears, sliding her long legs down his back, his face buried where she most longed to be kissed.

“I did cheer in high school,” Peggy told of her gymnastic abilities, jealous of the tongue that got to enjoy her water from its well as she felt increasingly connected to the girl whom she had been rather than the woman André had told her she was. She felt lively and alive. She felt herself once more. She felt like screaming in jubilant celebration and so she did, something that seemed to encourage the passions the colonel was so willing to share.

She rather liked that his head was covered by the hem of her dress. He could have been anyone. The point was that he was not John André who had stolen her virginity without feel or feeling, who had injured her esteem after stealing her image and subjecting it to slander. He was not Benedict Arnold who had fallen into André’s trap believing himself to ensnared the heart of a woman half his age to whom he had hardly ever spoken. He was not Benjamin Tallmadge who had sought to make her young godson pay for the sins of these other men’s egos. He was not a Fox News pundit or any other member of the press who had put blame on her and her friends for the senator’s strategic disappearance. He was not the Penn State dean who had seen her dismissed or a girl from the sorority who had thrown her out as chapter head, who had abandoned and disowned her as their sister when she had most needed them, after her family had done the same.

Tarleton was military moved into MI6 when he was deemed unfit for a field command. Technically, Peggy supposed, that made him police - which was regrettable - but then he had no jurisdiction here.

Here, he had been a suspect, no more or less than she herself.

Here, in the underground storeroom of The Irish Pub in Albany, her skirts had rendered him all but anonymous.

He could have been anyone.
But she? She was Peggy Shippen. She had nothing to apologise for or to afford her shame.

She closed her eyes again as her thighs began to tremble, offsetting her balance slightly and forcing creativity upon the colonel as he helped her to regain it, squeezing her buttocks as her feet found his.

“Is that a gun in your pocket?” she joked. He jolted.

“It ... it’s both,” he murmured awkwardly as lifted her away from him, gasping for breath when Peggy, returned to the floorboards, bent herself slightly to meet his lips, licking her sweet stick from them.

She wondered whom he imagined when he closed his eyes as he did, if he enjoyed her for her individual attributes or if he superimposed those of another, if it mattered or if it should matter to her.

‘I’m going to be honest with you,’ he had said when she first prepositioned him. ‘I’ve not had a full-night’s sleep in weeks, my mind is in Scotland with my daughters, the elder of whom ran away to be there. I’m fighting with my ex whom you rather resemble and I’ll probably think of her in the act which is bound to be hard, hot and all too fast in itself. I haven’t had sex in two, three months and I’ve been half-hard since a girl I’ve loved since I was a boy but whom I’m bound to neither talk to or touch pulled a pistol out of her Birkin in the back of a limo and held it against my skull whilst misquoting Shakespeare – I doubt, truly, that when we get down to it I’ll be able to last more than five minutes inside of you, much as I’d like mine to be the cock that sets or resets whatever problems you seem to think you have in your sexual preference. If anything, I’ll disappoint you, and Peggy – if you are lucky, you are going to have so much disappointing sex in your life with more partners than would be worth counting – but if what you need now is closure, I don’t know that I’m the man to provide it, and maybe you should not be looking for a man at all.’

‘I was a virgin last week,’ she had countered, ‘when I lost that – I lost everything. You could never equal or amount to that experience whatever you condition, your prowess, your position or state of mind. You don’t matter to me, but the fact is, that I do – I matter to myself and I can’t stand being around so much love feeling that all of mine has been spent. I want to take back all that John André stole, but as I’ll never be able to resurrect the innocence with which I met the world, my reputation, social status … I’ll never be able to undo the effects of the research my face was used to help fund but my friends have found ways to move on with their live and any step away from the memory of André’s touch is exactly where I want to flee.

‘I’m not asking you to be my partner in crime, I’m asking you to be my getaway car. I don’t care how fast you go or what or who you need to imagine me as being to put your foot on the gas. This isn’t about you and I; it is about me and half a hundred things I wish it was not. The thing is … Mary, Taylor, Ari, Miley and Amy -RIP- have all written lyrics about you and I think you might just be the kind of slut to make me sing.’

‘O’rite,’ he answered with a wicked grin. ‘Let’s take this conversation downstairs then.’

“I don’t mind,” Peggy mused as she took the gun from the back of his trousers, making her lover tremble as she slid its cold metal frame up his spine, “If you are thinking of me as your Mrs Robinson – oh,” she smiled as she felt his member stiffen against her as she removed the safety, mimicking the weapon’s click simultaneously with her tongue. “Well coo-coo-ca-choo.”

“I hope you know what you are doing with that thing,” Tarleton whispered.

“I’m an American,” she smiled.
“Right,” he returned.

Peggy lifted herself onto her tip toes and placed the firearm on the top shelf with an assortment of liquors that one could assume from relative location rarely needed to be replaced, teasing the colonel by keeping his sense of security right out of his reach. “You don’t need to over-compensate, Mister.”

“I’m not,” he assured her as she removed his borrowed jeans, finding that Abe Woodhull hadn’t had a pair of boxers to lend. “I may well have to use it later.”

“Oh?”

Without giving her an answer, Tarleton grabbed her by the hair and pulled her to his lips, kissing her with fury and passion as he lifted her up against the door, struggling for a moment to slide his sizable weapon inside of her. Every inch of him made her cry out in pain and pleasure. It was exactly what he had promised and exactly what she had wanted, hot, fast and filled with an impersonal hatred and undirected anger that if only for a few thrusts made Peggy feel every bit the heroine - if not of a traditional romance - then of her own heart. She did not mind being Mary Robinson, an outspoken feminist who did not need to forsake her femininity for her words to hold power. She did not mind being the fantasy of Eleanor of Richmond if Tarleton’s matched her own of someone too proud to rest on the laurels on which she had been born, who wove her own crown of poppy flowers and thorns. She liked equally the idea of being Anna, Abigail, Aberdeen, Mary, Sally, even the absent Philomena, of simply being counted in the company of those women who never needed to apologise for their existence the way too many had been taught to in ways subtle and direct since girlhood. She didn’t scream his name. When she heard it said, she answered with her own -

Until she realised that she had not.

The cries of ‘Ban!’ and ‘Peggy!’ had come from upstairs.

Peggy, held up against he back of the door, felt for its handle, opening herself to softer sounds of threat, panic and hysteria as it opened in full upon Tarleton’s next and last thrust – him stopping abruptly as their eyes met with a shared concern for the movement they were missing.

He pulled himself from her and she moved to grab the gun from the storage shelf, nearly tripping over her hem as she ran up the cold concrete steps without her shoes, ignoring the colonel’s orders to wait, not trusting him to dress with a speed that met the urgency of the distress she could hear her friends were in, not trusting that whatever was contained in that suitcase of his was as equipped to contend with the situation as a the daughter of a politician in part financed by the NRA, now armed with a pistol which she had been taught to shoot before she had been old enough for her parents to enrol her in elementary school. Whatever her lover’s military credentials might have been, she was Peggy Shippen. Her experience was at least on par and she had far more to fight for – the friends who had fought for her even after her fall from public grace. Her feet carried her quicker than her thoughts, she did not know what she expected, only that she was prepared to meet any challenge one might be fool enough to pose to the people she cared for most.

Upstairs, Peggy found Aberdeen and Freddy sitting back to back on barstools in a room otherwise blackened by closed window drapes. Her friends were held in position not by ropes or any other form of physical constraint but by fear for themselves, for each other, for her.

‘Run,’ Aberdeen, who faced her, mouthed with tears in her eyes.

Peggy Shippen, angrier than she had ever in her life been at the sight, shouted “No!” in response,
winning her the attention of the old man and his archaic weapon – a musket that looked like it had been lifted from Whitehall’s drawing room and had not been fired since the American Revolution and a bayonet that might still be able to do some damage.

“You are the one who Arnold prisoner, then?” she challenged him, holding her aim as she stepped closer. She could not understand the man when he began to answer and so she spoke over him. “Drop you weapon and back the fuck away from my friends.”

He must have not understood her either, that, or he had underestimated the threat she posed to him, a treat that only grew when he grabbed Aberdeen, kicking Freddy from his stool to the floor in the process, demanding that the boy be still. Rogers pulled Aberdeen back towards the wall behind them, his bayonet piercing at her neck brace, long enough to impale despite the fortune of padding if inserted with any force.

“Drap th’ gin,” the serial hostage taker advised. Peggy saw tears stream from Aberdeen’s dark eyes – Aberdeen, who had befriended her when she had nothing and no one, who had been honest with her where others shied away, who fought with tooth and nail against every perceived injustice, who could otherwise smile through her pain, who - brave as she was - was terrified of dark places.

Peggy took aim at the window fixture and pulled the trigger, causing the drape to fall and the light of the setting sun to illuminate the bar, causing the startled Scot to tighten his hold on his hostage. Help, Peggy saw, was on its way.

She heard Tarleton behind her and saw a few skirts from the bridal party approaching from afar in the exposed glass frames, but she knew she could not wait for their support, not with Aberdeen’s life in the balance. “Let her go,” she ordered, “Or the next shot goes into your head.”

“Dae ye troost yerself tae tak’ ‘at chance, Pet?” he challenged, pulling Aberdeen in front of him as much as he might.

“Do you?” Peggy asked, not surrendering her posture or position to his threat. “Let her go or I swear I’ll shoot.”

“Peggy don’t -” Freddy began to beg.

Before he could get the words out Peggy Shippen had again pulled the trigger as she had promised. She pulled it twice before Robert Rogers hit the floor. The first shot hit the hand that had held Aberdeen captive, robbing him of both his weapon and his hostage. The second hit his ribs and had seen him fall.

Peggy Shippen was in shock. She did not notice the embrace of her two friends at first, she did not notice when the door opened and could not say who of her friends and those enemies who pretend to that role first asked for the gun. She did not surrender it - She was not finished.

“Who are you? Where is he?” She demanded of every pair of eyes that fell upon her, pulling at he end of her hair as she searched the faces around her for those she though deserving of joining André and Rogers in their graves.
“Where is who?” Hamilton, who had arrived with the bridal party, perhaps before moments before
upon hearing the first shot fired, inquired.

“Senator Arnold. He's gone. Gone!” Peggy cried.

“Yes, we know, madam,” the ADIC told her in a voice meant to inspire calm.

“He's gone forever. He's there. He's there. The spirits have taken him up there. They have... oh,
they have put hot irons in his head.”

“Miss Shippen, just...” Hewlett began.

“Oh, they've... oh, they've... they've... they have put them on me. Oh, they have put... oh, they have
put them on me!” Peggy screamed, fully certain that everyone was buying her act.

“Madam! Madam!”

“They have put them on me!” she repeated, wide eyed and half wild.

“It's all right, madam. It's all right. Sit down. Sit down,” Hamilton encouraged. His goodly wife
joined him, trusting herself to place a hand on Peggy’s shoulder, telling her to take deep breaths as
she tried to lead her to a chair.

“Only Washington can take them away,” Peggy told her in response.

“Shh,” Mrs Hamilton said.

“Only Washington!” Peggy screamed.

“I'm here,” his excellency announced. The room fell silent.

Peggy Shippen lifted her stolen pistol once more, pointing it at Washington before using it to
gesture to the chair to which she had herself been led. “Call your mistress to your side. Call
Cornwallis. Call Rochambeau. And take a seat,” she bade him. “This might take a while.”

Chapter End Notes

Continued -
Film and Television:

**Bend it like Beckham** is a 2002 film around a girl’s football team that if memory
serves was so full of oestrogen that having seen it right before puberty, I’ve just never
needed birth control. Most sport film is this way, I find.

**Downton Abbey** is a show about the running of a stately house some hundred years
ago. I am guessing you know far more about it that I ever will.
Literature:

**Abraham Lincoln, Vampire Hunter** is a 2010 historical thriller by American novelist Seth Grahame-Smith (which I was actually told at the time to read by a history teacher but, uh … didn’t.)

Quotes:

**Heinrich Heine** was a German poet, journalist, essayist and critic in the early nineteenth century. A number of his works were banned in under the Metternich system of censorship which only increased his popularity. The line: “Ein neues Lied, ein besseres Lied, O Freunde, will ich euch dichten!” (“A new song, a better song, O friends, I speak to thee!”) is from his satirical work of epic poetry *Germany, A Winter’s Tale* and belongs to those constantly quoted out of context in the modern era.

The **dialogue at the very end of the chapter** was taken from the series directly.

Soundtrack:

Ronnie James Dio (Black Sabbath among others) was known for popularizing the sign of the horns in heavy metal. He claimed his Italian grandmother used it to ward off the evil eye (which is known in Southern Italy as “malocchio”). ... The sign would later be appropriated by heavy metal fans under the name *maloik*, a corruption of the original malocchio. In Germany (where everything is given a descriptive noun) this gesture is called “**Pommesgabel**” after the small plastic fork we wastefully use where every other people of the world find they have fingers. Does anyone know if the EU targeted these in the fairly recent legislation making plastic straws illegal? Like am I going to have to invest in a pretty glass one to carry around in my purse lest I run the risk of getting mayo on my manicure? #firstworldproblems

If you were wondering, the chords to **Best of Both Worlds**, the theme song to **Hannah Montana** (which was a Disney product centred around a premise that a teenage pop star lives a split life because no one recognised her without a wig*) are: D - A – Em – G.

*To be fair though to fictional characters and constructs in children’s entertainment, like if I saw a picture of Miley’s godmother Dolly Parton (seriously) without her signature ‘tweeze it to Jesus’ coiffure, I’d have no freaking idea who I was looking at so … I mean … maybe I’m too critical on how much disbelief one would need to suspend? Maybe I’m no more the target audience for this franchise than I am for AMC’s TURN?

The line “Ti esrever dna ti pilf nwod gnaha ym tup l” in Missy Elliot’s 2002 hit “Work It” is the reverse of the line that proceeds it “I put my thang down, flip it and reverse it.”

**Vivat Bacchus, Bacchus lebe!** is from Mozart’s 1782 comedic opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* which was one of the first operas in the German language. Praise is given to the god of wine, to drink itself, and to girls (both blondes and brunettes.)

Tourism:
Sheil Road in Kensington is a big prostitution hotspot in Liverpool, and according to some brilliant reporting of the kind of trash local news of which I am admittedly a connoisseur, 140 quid will get you a ride from the club to the “orange light district” and then back home. I looked up some numbers so let’s do a cost comparison – a Prius gets 7l in city traffic, and with the 4mi round trip distance between Toxteth and Kensington (Liverpool) Tarleton is looking at a price tag of £0.76. Estimating he’d be paying standard street pricing for these sorts of services, he could twice get his jollies AND fill up his tank in full (assuming he’d drive it elsewhere as well) for the cost of a single cab ride. You know … if you were ever sitting in a math class wondering how you were ever going to use this stuff in real life.

White Heart Lane was the Spurs’ home ground until 2017. The club recently moved into their yet-to-be-named new stadium following an extended stint at Wembley.

As always, thanks so much for reading! I hope you enjoyed and that you are having a lovely holiday!
Chapter Summary

Aberdeen has reason to fear a conspiracy charge; Peggy has a number of demands; as such Anna and Akinbode find themselves required to act in a professional capacity at what should have been a wedding reception. Effie gives her weekend bodyguard something of a dressing down while confiding in him certain truths about family and outlining the extent of Ferguson’s lies and treachery. Arthur opens up to Simcoe about the kids at school. Marie realises she has made a terrible mistake and has an uncomfortable discussion with her mum over her almost-father’s alleged war crimes only to demand the very next morning that she and her sister be given into his care after again falling into the small-scale spy game. Washington announces to his aid de camp’s horror that the war is not yet lost. Hamilton examines past evidence and interviews, concluding that Tarleton gave a false confession in a fashion that cannot see him charged with obstruction of justice.

Whilst answered questions raise new ones, a high-profile public figure dies most unexpectedly. DI Ferguson, however, thinks there is evidence to suggest that Mary Woodhull might well have seen this coming …

Chapter Notes

It is a long chapter that has taken a long time to pen, so I’ll spare the casual reader the unusual opener I’m well certain you’ve come to expect: my opinions and observations about the end to the 18/19 season, the ‘Very English’ European finales* and/or this absolutely mad story about getting up early to vote last weekend and then traveling half the length of the Rhein with a British tourist I’d only just met at a pub the night prior, you know, as one does** and just get on with it.

(*, ** - see end notes)

As always, it is great to have you back, thank you so much for reading and I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She smiled at him with the kind of warmth he still equated with home and hearth, her dark eyes made small by cheeks flushed and full. She was about to laugh, or she was determined not to – he did not remember any more and thought in this moment that this was probably for the best. The sound that followed her image to his touch screen was the standard ringtone of his service provider. He swiped to ignore.

“My ex,” Akinbode clarified to his company from the perch he had half-taken on the window-sill in Benedict Arnold’s private hospital suite. One of the senator’s sons gave him a nod of
understanding, the sort of familiarity that existed between perfect strangers in a business setting—a hint of a personal life, a similar if not shared experience, a slight acknowledgement of a story not itself worthy of being told.

Akinbode studied the young man when the lad returned his attention to his father, rather, to the monitors that said as much as the man himself, at times frowning slightly before the senator did as though some number told that the question Hanger or Tallmadge had asked had upset the senator’s blood pressure, heart rate, or some other matter of immediate concern before the man could respond or react in a manner clear to everyone else in the room.

The boy looked tired from his flight, or his finals, or simply from talking constantly about his father since the disappearance. His ex had probably rung him up recently as well; he had probably taken calls over the past few weeks from people from high school he had long stopped considering as friends or considering at all.

They all had.

Jordan Akinbode looked at Ben Tallmadge from his AP Euro, US and World History classes, from Debate Club, Model UN, JV and Varsity Basketball, from the church his parents attended, from the police station where most of their interactions as adults had taken place. They had planned to catch up before any of this had re-forged a sense of unity and understanding—at least, they both had long made overtures of desire if not directly intent to do so.

However, in the recent construct in which these unspecific plans came finally into fruition, everything else had fallen apart for both of them. “Do you think it ever helps—talking about it?” Akinbode asked broadly.

“You mean André?” Ben or, rather, DI Tallmadge asked, forgetting once more his resignation, the events that lead to and followed the boxes he packed in 1PP. Perhaps it was for the best, feigning distance over forcing familiarity in the circumstances that had come to define them.

Arnold’s three sons had clearly found little comfort in the support of individuals whom time had otherwise made strangers; more than likely, they had read their DMs in the voices of the former DI and the other officers on his team, feeling interrogated by these inconsiderate efforts at understanding from people who thought themselves to have any right to their pain, confusion, fear and uncertainty.

“Maybe,” Akinbode shrugged.

Maybe it was, in fact, far easier to talk to a stranger, to someone with no reason to pretend to be partial. He watched Hanger as he conducted his interview under supervision, marveling at how willing the senator was to speak to a man whose name he had just learnt, how he at the same time hesitated from those lines inquiry that he suspected might influence the way his children view him, or, perhaps, themselves.

“I think you misunderstand,” Arnold interrupted the reporter with narrowed eyes that made the whole of his small face feel all the more compact with comparison to his massive cheeks and chin. “John André saved my life. That is … if he hadn’t … if we hadn’t spoken privately, if he had not pretending to be Miss Shippen to get me to open myself up, I don’t know that I would have made it through my ordeal. I think it would be irresponsible to move forward with the proposal without further testing but—I knew, didn’t I?” he seemed to second-guess himself. “Somewhere in my subconscious I knew that it had been John, not Miss Shippen … not that it matters now.” His tone betrayed a certain, acute pain he seemed reluctant to otherwise give voice to.
“Can you expand, Sir?” Hanger asked with a calm that conformed to his learnt profession. Akinbode felt his jaw clench, he knew the tone and knew after ten minutes and three pages of Google search results that the man had a degree in sport science rather than journalism. He wondered about the overlap between that which Hanger had evidently seen himself doing at seventeen and other soft sciences - with psychology, with mere suggestion.

Both Akinbode and Tallmadge had come to solve a case and build another, and as such had advised the victim and primary witness against speaking to the press.

Arnold had been content to ignore these misgivings.

Part of it, Akinbode knew, was due to the fact that the senator had spent a considerable stretch of time in Whitehall’s garage, underneath Hewlett’s flat where the girls had doubtless gone to gossip amongst themselves. At the moment, he considered, Arnold probably knew Abigail better than he did; the senator likely had built up an image of him based on things said in anger, in evidence that might have supported her accusations of obsession and control with the photographs he realised he would have done better to throw out rather than box up and bring to the house that Arnold had spent some portion of his captivity in.

Frowning, Akinbode opened the album on his smart phone, suddenly wanting to reset his background and lock screen images with anything that did not remind him of all that he had lost since that day the news broke that Senator Arnold could not be found.

He and Abigail were over.

He had seen close friends on both sides of the lines at their very worst.

He had left his Sunday side and felt betrayed by the professional outfit he had supported since his semester abroad as an undergraduate, La Vecchia Signora who half-filled their roster with black players, who won countless trophies in a country where the colour he himself shared had won Akinbode far more racist remarks than he had ever been subjected to in his own, which was openly struggling with a history of slavery and segregation while continuing to suffer from the same willing ignorance as its forefathers.

Finding no other options on the fly, he replaced his ex with Juventus’ crest all the same, half-wondering what would happen to the money Tallmadge and Brewster had spoken of on the way down from Albany.

He replace the background image of a happy family he had long been fool enough to think himself part of with a picture Aberdeen had recently sent him of selfie-seekers in front of his house over WhatsApp in her tongue-in-cheek fashion when he had made the mistake of complaining that the value of his property was in a market free fall given publicity of what had transpired inside those walls. Evidently, it had since become a tourist destination for activists and Instagrammers, all wanting a picture of themselves in front of some random place that they had seen on the news. He could no longer live there and he could not sell, even at a loss, for who would want strangers setting off the motion-censor lights all hours?

Maybe he would buy dark drapes. Maybe he would turn the place into an Air B+B and hope that Aberdeen would argue with Peggy rather than complain to him that tourism eroded culture and community without providing enough of a benefit to commerce -

Not that it mattered much to Akinbode either way anymore.

‘Community’ had effectively ended for him when he had stopped being able to recognise the
relationships which he had long cherished.

Abigail was now his ‘ex’.

Simcoe was easily persuaded from his righteous path.

Hewlett lied about everything of consequence -

and Tallmadge had arrested and detained children who had been brutalised and abused by men under his command.

Arnold likely knew all of this as well.

The senator likely only knew the worst of everyone who had watched their lives unravel as they did everything that they possibly could to ensure his rescue.

Akinbode wondered if he expected Arnold to be more grateful that he was with ‘John André saved my life.’ He wondered if he had any right to this absent gratitude at all.

Hanger, he suspected, knew exactly how to manipulate the man. He had nothing to fight for and yet his impartiality had won out. He would get a cover regardless of what was said in or spun from this interview; Arnold, meanwhile, sought something approaching closure from the reporter that no one else in the private hospital suite was quite so well positioned to provide.

George Hanger was far from handsome, but he was tall, blonde, smartly dressed and spoke with an accent that befit a title of which he did not acknowledge in so many words but suggested constantly in the slights he seemed fully unconscious of making towards friends and acquaintances with money but without name. He was as close to John André as Benedict Arnold might ever again find himself and enjoyed therefore an esteem neither he or the good doctor were due.

“They don’t tell you this, it doesn’t fit into anyone’s propaganda model but no one is brave in battel, is simply in battel, nothing else,” Arnold explained in André’s defence. “You fight because you have an enemy, you have orders, you have no time to think. It is only after it is over that bravery is asked: When the fighting is done and you are talking to a wounded soldier, both of you knowing that these are to be his last words, that memory will continue to repeat them still when all other details of the day have since been forgotten. When you return to problems that did not exist while you were deployed, knowing yourself, your mere presence to be their cause.”

“Dad -” one of his sons – not the one with the ex – started, half whine, half broken-apology.

“When you are a room away from people being punished for trying to save you because your only value is in your absence, when you can hear them but cannot cry out,” Arnold continued, jaw clenched but clearly not upset with anyone in the room of which he spoke nor he presently occupied, save, perhaps, for himself. “When … when you find that love realised is a lie. It is misery. That is when you are brave, when you have to be. To suffer bravely.”

Reverend Tallmadge looked at Arnold as though meant to counter him with Corinthians.

“Suffer bravely,” Hanger repeated with some weight before anything of ‘patience’ and ‘kindness’ could be preached.

“Did you ever serve?” Arnold asked.

“Mate of mine,” Hanger dismissed, “horribly crippled by it though he remains active in some capacity. It is neither here nor there but I get nightmares sometimes, hearing the shit he subjects
himself to now in civilian life, partner, kids – the works. To be honest it is my greatest fear, a domestic existence; not only is one in a constant struggle but they are duller for it, ay!

“All the same,” the reporter continued as though they two were simply having a conversation, “I think he’d have died if he didn’t have those kids to keep him somewhat centred after coming back from war. I don’t know that you would have either. Speaking purely from second-hand experience – almost – I have to divulge I put myself through an absolute ringer when the eldest ran off recently … not having ever previously concluded that I’d come to care for the lass myself absent her, well, surrogate father, yea – no,” he seemed to second-guess, “Love comes with suffering and that is the only truth to it … but it isn’t, I mean, I wouldn’t say they were synonyms, love and misery,”

Hanger shifted, “Did André?”

“André only spoke of fear,” Arnold answered. “as André. As Peggy he spoke of love.”

“I think André was terrified of anyone calling him out on how much of his life was a constructed illusion,” Caleb Brewster said, voicing the frustration no one else trusted themselves to. “Maybe he wanted the same for us – to get us to look at ourselves and say that it is all bullshit, for better or for worse or for something in between. I’m better off, probably, that his field study was carried out on a soccer field near a place I sometimes moonlight, that I was questioned by New York’s Finest and uh, New York’s finest,” he added with a wink towards a now-blushing Ben Tallmadge, “because I can look at the world without only seeing my genetic illness. I can live in the moment without fretting over a further that for a long time felt more real than the present moment. But can or should I be grateful to John André in any way? No! No fucking way! Not when the rest of the town I grew up in has come to suffer so much for it.

“Forgive me, but I think you and I are giving André far too much credit, Senator. Maybe in the end all he wanted was notoriety and so he tried to kill Eddie Hew and then when that didn’t work out went and arranged your abduction with Rogers and -”

“No,” Arnold said abruptly. “Robert Rogers is an opportunist, a mercenary and André, his research … the original proposal said nothing about convincing a patient to take his own life. It would have never gotten funding if it had. With Edmund Hewlett, having heard what I did at Whitehall, I suspect André had an external motive if he in fact carried out that which he is being accused of. Are we off the record?” he asked Hanger.

“We can be.”

“But we are not,” he said to Tallmadge.

“I’m no longer with the force, Sir. I’m only here insofar as I want to understand what happened, to help with the case I’m sure will be made against Robeson, to gather evidence for a class action,” he looked at Akinbode who answered with a nod.

“I’m happy to help John Robeson in any way I might … but Hewlett,” Arnold said, his tone increasingly assertive, “Understand, please, that he needs to be left out of any charges you mean to bring -”

“Even with a Catholic bride, he is too close to the Crown to sue,” Hanger said, “You must understand in the upper echelons of the nobility it simply is not done.”

Akinbode felt his hand form itself into a fist around the passing thought that with Mr Yilmaz having gone home with his wife, younger daughter and religious leader and with Emine in scrubs assisting with emergency surgery in a separate wing, there were no medical professionals on hand and in the thirty seconds it would take between Arnold pressing the distress button on the wall
behind him and reactors to take to the scene, he could easily bring an end to George Hanger, his pretentious mannerisms and old-world ideas about who was subject to the rule of law with either his bare hands or any object that was not nailed down.

“With respect, this is America -” Tallmadge began to echo Akinbode’s yet-unspoken battle cry.

“A few moths before the prince took his life, our intelligence services abroad discovered a plot to assassinate the Duke of Richmond,” Arnold interrupted. “I’m on the Senate Intelligence Committee and as such privy to such reports and principle in the back-room discussions that follow. I know your land; I know its customs and I suspect that the existence of a plot was something of an open secret in the circles to which you allude, Mr Hanger.”

“So, it is true then – Ban actually went and -”

“No. What happened exactly I cannot say, primarily because it has not yet happened, but what I can inform is that though our secret services often coordinate, here, Washington was given an Executive Order not to intervene further based on a request Cornwallis presented the President in the name of Her Majesty. Whatever happened, whatever did not, it was reported to British Intelligence, monitored from Washington’s end, perhaps, but to the extent of my knowledge not taken further, at least not through any official channels.

“I found out about Hewlett’s alleged attempt at a time I was otherwise distracted with André’s efforts to infatuate under the guise of being Miss Shippen,” Arnold told. “I rang him several times as the man was a test subject, not getting a reply until weeks later when Washington told me that he wanted the project candled, that the latest report deviated from expectation in the manner in which I’ve already addressed. After everything that has happened since, I can’t claim that I know André exactly, know what was going through his mind, but following the chain of events that then transpired, it seems to me that he acted under threat. My guess, given a history I learned over the course of the past decade from a host of sources, is that Lady Edith who has a history of attempting to silence her children to protect the family seat colluded with her son’s psychologist with the hopes of evading the threat she surely saw as being posed to her brother-in-law -”

“Motive?” Tallmadge interjected.

“Power?” Arnold suggested. “From André … fear. Definitely fear. They like that, the Hewletts as a whole, to force friends and enemies alike to use their own weapons against themselves sometimes with seemingly no incentive save for personal amusement. I know he was in communication with the woman and that Lady Edith has enough connections in the North West of England to make problems for André back home. Check police records in Merseyside and Greater Manchester going back to fall of last year, I’m almost certain you’ll find more than a few almost-incidences around John’s mother and siblings.”

“I will,” Hanger said, pulling out his phone to send a text. “Mate of mine is a DI up in Edinburgh, he can … unless he too is involved at some level. God knows the best way to get Ells to abort a mission is to threaten her siblings. Hewlett tactics,” he spat, “so Lady Edith might’ve threatened the Andrés to scare up a suicide with the good doctor’s help, guaranteed a coverup in that the Embassy must’ve been involved in some capacity the research scheme in with Eddie and a bunch of British subjects were taking part, unbeknownst to them personally, of course.”

“Unless it was never meant to succeed.” Tallmadge speculated. “Maybe … maybe it was not just John André. Simcoe remains in loose contact with the Hewletts, with Tarleton … in the months that followed the attempt he never once mentioned the attempt in any of his communication and correspondence. Maybe … André never intended to let Hewlett die but had to make it look as though he did,” he tried, “I’ll have to look at the report, specifically, at the part that was long kept
from us, well, from the NYPD, to see if there is some discrepancy to support this all being orchestrated on a whim.”

“Like he did with Edmund’s engagement to Anna?” Akinbode asked. “She is a Catholic -though barely - their future children won’t be eligible to inherit Richmond. Maybe he tried to do whatever he had been asked from another route, having either failed at the first or -”

“She had to marry him in a Green Card scheme, in part because Cornwallis would not sign a special extension to his visa, or later release records of help in any way with our search. Meanwhile, the feds would not issue a warrant,” Tallmadge frowned.

“Sorry,” Brewster interjected. “Sorry I don’t see why any of this should matter. Say André was being blackmailed in this incident – that doesn’t excuse what he did to Robeson, or Joyce by extension, or any of the other lads, or yourself, Senator -”

“It matters because a jury might dismiss the whole case on a single charge if the defence can prove grounds for doubt,” Akinbode sighed though he wanted to scream. “But where the hell does this leave Anna, because I know I did not just watch my friends tie the knot only to -”

His phone rang. “Speak of the devil,” he murmured.

“Your ex?” one of the interchangeable Arnolds asked.

“No, our Liege Lord. Lady,” he shook his head, answering on the last ring. “Anna, this Isn’t the best time -”

>> Peggy Shippen shot Robert Rogers and tried to hold George Washington as well as a number of diplomats hostage. You’ll make time.<<

Akinbode swallowed. His colleague and friend from collage was rarely so authoritative in tone but the circumstance truly seemed extraordinary. “Wow, okay,” was all he could answer as he plugged his other ear with his forefinger that he might hear her more clearly, already half certain that that he had misunderstood.

>> I’m at a police station in Albany serving as console on a number of depositions. Where the fuck did you run off to? And please can you come back? << Anna begged before scolding, >> Everyone has been calling you like crazy – Peggy’s refusing to give a statement without legal representation and is requesting your, specifically, though the rest of us – including Hamilton - have all offered. <<

“I’m in New York with Caleb and Ben -” Akinbode answered as he removed himself from the room.

>> City? Shit, look. Then there is something else you can do to help then. Philomena has been released on police bail but she has no one to call and no where to go. Can you pick her up at the station and - <<

“Yeah. Yeah, I’ll do. Remind Miss Shippen of her right to silence and I’ll see you both in about two hours.”
Effie Gwillim plucked a flowering weed from where it had grown through a crack in the pavement and puckered her lips, intending to make a wish by blowing the daffodil’s dried petals into the evening sky.

“Push back,” she whispered to herself, “push harder.” She inhaled deeply, but before she could further lose her worries to whimsy, the man whom she had all but forgotten stood behind her asked that these orders be clarified.

“Push who?”

“I wish I knew … right now. I wish -” she began, forgetting in the explanation all that she had intended to wish for moments prior.

“When I was a little girl a friend and I got into something of a row,” she explained though she felt she owed a borrowed bodyguard nothing of the sort. “He’d taken my fine chalk and used it on the pavement to make a playing field. Dreadfully upset I demanded it back, only to find myself shoved on my own backside. Sniffling, I went to explain to my aunt and his mum what had transpired just then between us, looking for a sympathy that was not exactly forthcoming in the manner I’d expected. Mrs Tarleton immediacy looked cross and my aunt made a snide comment about how some children were simply uncultured and ill-behaved and that I would be better served by refusing my company until obtaining an acceptable apology and went back to stirring what I’m now sure was a cocktail though I remember it as being tea. If it were tea, I would have been expected to join and this entire episode would have never transpired,” she said quickly. “At any rate, I began to sob then and there to my aunt’s undisguised embarrassment, her friend – our host – raised an eyebrow and called me over to her, wiping my tears away as she asked me to explain why precisely I was so troubled. I told her again that her son William had stolen my chalk and had pushed me when I asked for it back and she in turn interrupted me and said that I simply needed to push him back, push him harder than he’d pushed me. I argued that he was bigger than me and she asked if I truly thought that I was smaller in character than a petty thief, continuing that I’d simply have to find a way and that as a woman I’d find myself fighting constantly against men mistaking their comparative size and society’s cruelly gendered expectations for merit. My aunt nodded her shared sentiment and told me to go wash my face, which I did.

“Then, I waited by the front door and when William went to open it – I could see him through the glass panels – though he couldn’t see me, I was always petit, I opened it first and shoved it as hard as I could, finding his nose and shattering the cartilage. It is still a bit crooked,” Effie commented with some measure of pride she would have never confessed to like-company. “He didn’t return until after dinner and when he did it was with a larger, nicer set than the one he had stolen from and a new sketchbook besides, unused save for the apology he had written inside. I asked his forgiveness as well, as such is expected in otherwise polite circles. “Then he went to complain to the adults, who told him to tell the driver to take him to hospital, but - since the NHS took an eternity in those days - to first stop off at an art store before the shops closed to replace the pieces of chalk he had broken or damaged by using them for an unintended purpose for that was a very mean thing of him to do.

“I’m not certain my presence here is needed,” Percy Nantaba, the bodyguard the Hewletts sent for the express purpose of her individual protection gave jovially, if hesitant.

He was new, Effie knew, both to the Hewletts and to the profession itself.
Her own regular guard would have never addressed her directly and Percy, she had every reason to suspect, was unaccustomed to the specific task of behaving like a shadow. He had been annoying her for days.

“I’m not certain that the Tarletons aren’t all mafiosos,” she shrugged in response. “But what can you do? It was good advice.”

“I bet you beat all of them at hop-scotch at least,” Percy offered with a shy smile.

“Hardly,” Effie shook her head. “Part of ‘the cruel expectations placed on us by virtue of gender’. I couldn’t mess up my pretty dress, my aunt, otherwise at the forefront of feminism would have never permitted it. That,” she considered, “and on the occasions I joined in children’s games behind her back, my efforts were moot: whenever Ban doesn’t win, he changes the rules – still, till this day,” she shifted, keeping her voice airy though she was attempting to shift the octane of their conversation to closer match the one she had been for days dreading. “Needless to say, I always thought him his father’s clear favourite though the siblings all seem unanimous in assigning Charlotte with that distinction. I don’t know. When I was little, I always wished I had siblings; now that I’m older I’m glad to only have close friends to keep my secrets and use them against me. Less … obligation,” Effie paused, trying to figure out how to come on what she meant truly meant to say without issuing offence. “You don’t have brothers or sisters,” she said.

“I do, its -”

“No, you don’t,” the editor interrupted. “Whatever you think, you simply don’t. And I’m sure in time you’ll find you are better off for it.”

“Miss Gwillim, I’m not sure -”

“Percy, come, let’s sit for a moment here in the shade. Tell me, how dose one go from finding Richard the Third in a carpark to … in what precise capacity do you work for the Hewletts?” she asked, pouting her lips slightly in a way that usually got her what she wanted. The enormous man who sat beside her simply blinked, seemingly uncertain of exactly what that was in this moment.

He had majored in archaeology at the university in his home town of Leicester and had only made Lady Eleanor’s acquaintance six months prior, or so he had told her on the flight after getting her mobile phone back from the incredibly rude American TSA Agent who had taken it away before take-off when Effie had refused to turn it off. ‘You still can’t use it,’ he tried to caution when she had warned him not to speak to his betters in language less direct. ‘I’m sorry to have over-stepped, I just thought you could use someone to talk to in the meantime.’

“I’m a bodyguard,” he answered.

“No, you are not,” she countered.

“It is what my pay stub states.”

“What does you work actually entail?”

“Day to day?” Percy frowned, “It varies. My mum is Desi and I’m fluent in Urdu, but I also have some Arabic, some Turkish and my boss – not Lady Eleanor, my direct boss, Mr Patel - is having me learn Dari as well -”

“So, you are a translator,” Effie expanded.

“Well, no … mostly she has me teaching in the mornings – English literacy to immigrant
housewives while their children are in kindergarten or at school, it is part of a nation-wide educational initiative so that mothers for whom English is not a first-language can help their children with homework – my mum used to do the same thing,” he paused, “from the other side than I’m sure you are assuming, by which I don’t mean - I mean, she was involved in teaching, like myself, she was born in Britain,” he explained awkwardly. “I had to get a certification and pass a number of background checks, but now that I have, sometimes I’m sent, rather lent to the police … it is a lot of sitting in vans, listening to conversations and explaining what is being said, or transcribing it, and then translating – so I mean, maybe. In a practical sense. Just not for Lady Eleanor in any direct way.”

“I’m not surprised.”

“Because I talk too much?” he blushed.

“No,” Effie sighed, “because it is a smart way to integrate you yourself into otherwise closed societies. Ellie needs to make nice with the police, she also needs her agents – your immigrant mothers – to trust you, and she needs you to trust that she has everyone’s best interest in mind, but she doesn’t Percy. She doesn’t,” she warned. “The fact that you are here now is proof enough of that. You should resign. You should return and resign and you should do so immediately -”

Percy shook his head. “She isn’t a bad person; I know what some people think but -”

“‘Bad’ is too vague of an adjective for someone even half as pragmatic as your employer,” Effie agreed. “‘Cruel’ might serve our purposes better.”

“You have the wrong impression .-” he began.

“You are willingly naïve,” she interrupted.

“A few weeks ago, she sent me to go sort out a detective inspector,” he said as though he intended this fact to disprove those Effie did not entirely trust herself to share. “When this was explained in such language I, too, was given to suspect malicious intent, but instead Lady Eleanor … um, I went with Patel, her right hand. He had a gun on him - he always does but I … he carried it that I could see it and we spent a long while in the car that morning.

“He told me he had to make a quick stop before our destination and I felt in that moment that I was not comfortable with continuing whatever the cost to me personally. We stopped and I got out, ready to go home as we were not far from a train station. Patel told me I could wait in the car, I didn’t need to come with him, but if I was keen on a soft drink or something, he would be happy to oblige, he might need an extra set of hands. He had seen me looking at the station, so I just followed, realising I couldn’t hope to make a run for it. Any road, we went to a Tesco and bought normal, household things. He commented that he imagined this was not what I was expecting and I laughed, joking that it looked like we were about to clean house and he said we were. And we did. Well, I did, most of the afternoon actually. He sat at the table with Richard -”

“His name is Patrick,” Effie corrected, “Ellie calls him Richard because my aunt mis-printed it back when she ran the Daily Mail after being asked to do so by the department who transferred him thereafter to Edinburgh where there were already several other Patrick Fergusons on the same rank. Common name in that area.

“To this day I’m not entirely sure I know the reason behind the events surrounding this light disguise but I know it has to do with John … and Ellie, and Edmund as well all of whom he accused of a crime that in the end worked out had actually been committed by a horse. The affair was looked into by officers on both sides of the channel, as the man who wound up on life support
had in the same general time-frame made some threat against the French Foreign Legion, perhaps he had once served, again, I’m unsure. What I however do know is that Police Scotland had a certain perceived need to feed their colleagues in France slightly falsified information. This particular DI Patrick Ferguson hails from a secondary line of a once-great family, and as it happens, he has a cousin living in exile in Angers - her escape from prison where she’d been sentenced after pleading guilty to charges of high treason said to be aided by a sympathetic local police force, loyal to the same ideas of Scottish Independence the woman was evidently willing to go to war over.

“I imagine it was thought that the French might decide to endlessly agree to extradite Lady Ogilvy should Patrick’s name come up in any proceedings or paperwork, but Richard Ferguson has no such known relations. He calls himself that, too, when I’ve spoken to him as I’m a member of the press,” she snorted. “I’ve toyed with the idea of telling him that I know that much even though I don’t know the rest, but I’ll wait until I’ve something concert to leverage this knowledge against being that I’m all but certain he’ll have something to counter with, another almost plausible story to excuse him from intent.

“You know,” she considered, “on our flight over, Hanger told me a mad story about him having shot a man in a union rugby match, but I’ve since done a bit of digging on my own. It works out that the Scottish Rugby Union, the sport’s governing body up there, has an easy to use online interface with easy to access and otherwise needlessly pedantic records of ever fixture at every level, so I can definitively say that around the time as I was informed such incident occurred - cross-referencing of course with the date on a statement Ferguson obtained from Tarleton – Ban, that is – after the fact, Ferguson couldn’t have possibly have played in any such pub-fixture and still been on the starting team with his club-side, suggesting to me that his injuries must have occurred elsewhere, under-cover, perhaps, though I can’t find any record or rather way in to police files to support this assumption. Either way, he is a convincing liar. You should have killed him when you found him off guard.”

“Miss Gwillim!

“Or Patel should have,” Effie adjusted without falling into remorse. “I don’t quite like the idea of Mary Anne having such an association. I don’t like the idea of my goddaughter Banina falling under his influence, which is why I tried to drive a wedge between him and Kolina by buying her daughter the house his mother used to own, to my own undoing … and I defiantly, defiantly don’t like the idea of him working for or with the Hewletts especially as I believe him to be ingenuine with himself about whose side he is actually on. So what – you cleaned his house and Patel gave him an in-house version of ‘Talk to FRANK’? Did you find anything?”


“Did you say anything?”

“To his mum. I was instructed not to speak to the inspector. Maybe for the reasons you suggest.”

“Or for the ones you assume. You know he arrested my ex, I’m sure.”

“I do.”

“And I can reasonably assume you’ve drawn the same conclusions as everyone else at the wedding about just how very much you resemble the Best Man. Ellie probably just wanted you there to remind the inspector of a particular episode in the long history they share, to frighten him with some other unspoken truth -”
“Miss Gwillim, I -”

“Percy. Wait. Keep it to yourself. Return and resign. I’m going to tell you why I think you think you are here and then I’m going to tell you why you are actually here and I can reasonably imagine you’ll be quite cross with me which I do not want, but you must understand that giving circumstances I’d much rather than the man you expect yourself to share some genetic material with reacting to news he is not presently prepared to process. Your mother is Desi … but your surname, Nantaba … that is Uganda, right?”

“So you know Africa?” he asked.

“No,” she answered honestly, “but I know all kinds of statistics about the UK, including those involving diasporic populations in the Midlands. That is not my point. So, you have two parents, that is what I’m establishing. Two parents and no siblings but a family all the same.”

“My mum, that is, the woman who raised me, can’t have children,” he said. “Thanks to FGM she can’t even have sex, it is too painful, too dangerous. She works in Pakistan campaigning against the practice in correlation with other health and human services targeted at women and reproductive health. It was on one such trip that she found me in a lavatory – not uncommon in itself, but unheard of with male children in that area - and finding I was alive, took me to hospital. When no one came to claim me, she took me back to Britain and formalized the adoption. About ten years later, after I’d already gotten into dance – the result of taking my cousin to ballet classes after school, I found out that a ballerina I quite admired who had given up the stage when she moved to join her husband in Islamabad where he was stationed. So, I asked. Because her name was in the papers to that time, I guess. And even after I was told what I just relayed to you, I never stopped asking.”

“You should have,” Effie told him. “You already had your answer. You have two parents, plus a cousin, a whole family who doubtlessly dotted on you and -”

“Is this fair? You are an orphan, too.” It was far too forward, far too presumptive. Effie Gwillim stood to face him, wanting to be taller if only whilst issuing her retort.

“I’m not an ‘orphan’, Percy, for fuck’s sake, I’m twenty-eight. I stopped being an ‘orphan’ ten years ago and never was one before that as I had my aunts, my grandmother, eventually my uncle and his ward and an enough Graves-cousins to man a ship of the line – I’m not speaking facetiously, they are all Royal Navy now, mind. Plus, I had tons of friends and we are all still close. Well … that is not exactly true … I think Ellie, Mary Anne and I are all on the outs though I’m sure we’ll get over it and ourselves sooner than later.”

“I … I truly to hope so,” Percy stumbled.

“It is not at the top of my priorities at present,” Effie sighed sadly. “John, my uncle’s ward, and I fell in love far too young. Last year things ended between us in the worst way they possibly could and he’s barely been in any of our lives since. Family has always been more difficult for him than it has for me, even when we were young, even before he came to encounter elements that put him in the wrong. You found out about your possible biological mother’s death in a newspaper. He found the body. Think on that,” she spat. “I’m going to head down to the police station. I’m sending you back to the hotel; I don’t want you and John to come into contact. Not now, not with these extenuating circumstances at play. I’m worried it will only upset him and I know better than most what he is like when he gets upset.”

“I can’t allow you to go off on your own, ma’am, I’m under orders -”
“Did you miss my story about how I gave a crooked man a crooked nose when I was just a little girl? I can take care of myself, Mr Nantaba, and I’m more than accustom to dealing with police, politicians, princes and everyone else so positioned to manipulate the rule of law to meet their individual objectives – your employer included. Do you not see? You are under orders that place you in a proximity that would ensure or expedite John’s perpetual downfall which, I’m sorry, I simply can’t permit. When I went to visit Lady Eleanor in hospital, she told me she meant to punish everyone she personally held responsible for her brother’s predicament, naming you as her weapon.

“It took me too long to figure out the riddle in her words, that she only meant for one man to suffer. I should have seen it sooner; she loves things like this, getting her perceived enemies to defeat themselves. Even if John ‘deserved’ the kind of torment I’m certain you would invite through your friendly overtures, even if he truly were a monster underneath, it is not Ellie’s place to pass judgement, especially when she has put herself in the wrong by confessing her lack of care for the casualties I’m sure she anticipates in her own troops. You, Percy. She is only using you, your apperence, the beliefs you seem to hold about a part of your history in which you played no role, to coax John into an overblown, violent reaction in front of people wielding power over his future. I’m going to the station, you are not to follow. Is that understood?”

He looked stumped, like he never suspected his boss of using him in the same way he had in effect been using her, as a way to John. Effie expected Ellie might have gone so far as to have DNA testing done, but no – that was not needed. This man who had found his way into her court seemed to truly believe that he was related to a family friend by virtue of some story he had been told about his birth that Effie could easily understand him looking to replace in the understanding he had formed of his person and personal history.

“I can’t not at least make his acquaintance -” he seemed to beg.

In many ways she imagined that, ironically, he was who John might have been if not plunged into the heart of war at an early age by his father’s violent death and his mother’s final act of abandonment. He was probably now something of what John had wished he had been given the freedom to become, at least, Percy was brave enough to long for the kinds of connections that the man he would accuse of being his brother seemed to deny himself.

“You can’t expect it to go well, not right now at least,” Effie cautioned in a tone harsher than that to which her voice was accustom. “He was the head groomsman in a Royal Wedding that just had a bridesmaid shoot a hostage taker and try to hold the Defence Secretary and two key ambassadors hostage. He was part of a research project that severely limited his judgement in times of high stress and his best friend’s family seems to want to punish him for involving Edmund in all of this, though I personally suspect the heir presumptive’s participation of being wilful.

“Ellie additionally wants to punish him for Ban’s death though he lives and would not have ‘died’ or put himself in a situation where such could be a possible outcome had he not calculated some gain from the whole experience … Percy, none of this is your fault, but believe me when I say that your lofty expectations of this encounter would be disappointed. Let me go, for I feel I must, and when matters are smoothed over, I promise I will make an introduction. For now, you will go back to the hotel, book a flight to Edinburgh, first class for both of us - tonight. Tomorrow morning at the latest. The twins wanted me gone,” she considered, “as did Mary Anne and I’m sure Ferguson - as Patrick or Richard or whomever had reason to help them serve me and my paper some reasonable distraction.

“I want to know what my friends are keeping from me, why they would rather have me here with Edmund at a police station with everything that they know to have happened to put him in such a
position than at home in the UK and I plan to go back before they know where to find me. You owe them nothing, Percy, and I’m sure my advice means nothing to you, for such never does, but whatever ideas you have of brotherly love, if you care for John at all, you’ll do as I say. In a way, he is my brother, too,” she added, if only to sound convincing.

What hurt the most was that her mother had not warned her.

What hurt was that due to her own actions, she had not been able to.

Anna Hewlett sat stunned with her client, holding the younger woman’s hand, wanting to comfort her as a friend, wanting equally for her to continue crying as a delay tactic. Aberdeen Declesias was in no position to give an account of any sort. Anna herself had entered the interrogation room under the assumption that she was merely being asked to mitigate another sworn statement as she had been doing for the better part of the evening. Instead the au pair - who had twice in the same day been held at knifepoint – was facing charges of conspiracy to commit murder.

Anna suspected this as being a ploy to force the young woman to accept a plea deal, which Aberdeen refused to do on principle: she was not willing to surrender her right to seek appropriations in the court of law holding John André, the US Government and the British Embassy in Washington to account for actions taken against her friends and flatmates, nor was she willing to gamble with her immigration status without the possibility of this act of protest. Anna could easily empathise, but the legal assistance she wanted to be able to offer was met with a shadow of doubt cast by the same.

She had stepped out of the room after first being handed a manila folder containing the charge and gone straight to her mother to inquire as to why she had not tipped her off at any point over the course of the past several hours only to be met with the same anger, surprise and sadness that had fully consumed her soul even prior to the explanation that followed: Nancy Smith was herself under investigation for failing to comply with confidentiality laws after her now-son-in-law had become a suspect in Arnold’s disappearance. She was being questioned about the morning that Anna had surprised her with a breakfast invitation so that Edmund, disguised as a housekeeper, could sneak into her office and download the relevant case files from her computer. Nancy had no idea what had been signed off on in her absence from office and had no right to inquire her colleagues.

‘Why didn’t you tell me sooner?’ Anna had asked.

‘I thought I would wait until after the wedding,’ her mother answered. ‘Sweetheart, it is clear to me how much you must love this man, I didn’t want to ruin your special day.’

‘I didn’t want to ruin your life,’ Anna had muttered in disbelief.

‘You and your brother are my life, Anna. I know I haven’t always done the best job of acting in accordance with my priorities, but my career has always been secondary to my family, to you and Hank, at least.’

Her mother spoke as though there had been no measure of sacrifice on her part, suggesting that she was willing to accept judgement and consequence for her actions regardless of if she had knowingly committed an offence insofar as she could also name her crime ‘Anna’ after herself as
she had her daughter, absent of whatever internal affairs chose to call it on the corresponding paperwork.

Anna -daughter, lawyer, and now future duchess, as it happened, was herself facing a similar struggle with the infringement family placed on her own rights and freedoms and failed to fully relate to her mother’s stated stoicism. She had earlier cautioned John Wakefield and John Appleton both not to sign away their right sue for damages during their individual interrogations only to learn through offhand comment that she had surrendered the same by taking the Hewlett name. Anna had expected but failed to truly internalise the trade when it might have made a difference; an hour after ‘I do’, however, she was beginning to understand the choices her husband’s family was constantly being forced to make.

English Law did not apply to nobles, but nor did it protect them.

The Hewletts could not take their grievances to court, robbed by their titles of that right. Suddenly Edmund’s early insistence that she need not convert seemed clear, as did the Crown’s cause to circumvent this stipulation. His younger brother, who was no longer in the line of succession as was the result of his earlier union with a French Catholic, had accepted some kind of financial settlement that came with the caveat of effective exile; Edmund, no doubt, had hoped for the same. Where the two brothers had the freedom to marry ‘beneath’ their station, their sisters could only secure consent for a ‘sideways transfer’ as Edmund had put it, they would never know the freedom Anna had herself unwittingly signed away. Even within the US Legal System, her curtesy now title forbade her from standing up against all who had caused harm upon everyone she loved by joining her voice to the class action suit Jordan and Ben were already going to have a much harder time of bringing before judge and jury if they did not soon bring their agenda and expertise to this particular Albany police station.

She could not let Aberdeen be victim to the same injustice, even if the issuing of a plea of ‘not guilty’ was the last act Anna could ever personally take in a lawyerly capacity.

She had made far too many personal sacrifices for the name Hewlett not to do the same for Smith.

She had made up her mind to confess to espionage, to be disbarred that her mother could resume her post for some short time before running for Congress or the Senate on prior successes, knowing that she would never be re-seated in the role of District Attorney.

Maybe this was what it was to rule – a staggered succession of small surrenders. She felt like a hypocrite for insisting that her friends stand to fight where she herself could not. She felt jealous that their station afforded such an option, however desperate.

“I didn’t mean for any of this to ‘appen!” the Hattian continued to sob.

“Why don’t you first give me an account of what did,” Anna suggested with a warmth that she had to force.

“It says it! It says it there,” Aberdeen gestured at the folder. “I went to visit John André when ee was ‘ididng ‘imself at Belview, in the psych ward. I did this because of Peggy, because ee all but raped ‘er and then emotionally abused ‘er thereafter when ee decided the sex ‘ad not been to ‘is liking. Because before then this, ee ‘as interrupted ‘er life by posing as ‘er in a chat with Arnold, and because before then that ee managed to ‘urt nearly everyone else I’ve come to care about in this beautiful country of ours – well, yours … well …”

Anna bit her lower lip, pained by a sense of abandonment on top of the injustice.
“Ee was just … ee was just going to get away with it!” Aberdeen continued with more self-certainty. “I only went to talk to ‘im, but seeing that ee was beyond remorse, that ‘is ego would not allow regret even when ‘is friends ‘ad been ‘urt, been made to ‘urt each other – I thought, so long as I am ‘ere, I should alleviate at least some of that pain, so I visited John Robeson and told ‘im everything that André ‘ad done, I told ‘im, that it was not entirely ‘is fault, or alone ‘is fault, that in a moment of panic ee injured badly ‘is partner and that ee should not try to kill ‘imself anymore either because ee is not a bad man by ‘is own devices, like Joyce, ee was simply at the wrong place at the wrong time, but I didn’t, I didn’t mean for ‘im to kill André, I didn’t think it would come to that. Robeson, I mean, I only know ‘im from the pub really, but ee is such a meek person by nature. I just wanted that ee stop trying to ‘urt ‘imself over the sins of someone else.”

“Intent is hard to prove -” Anna began.

“But I ‘ave made easy work of it for the prosecution. I – I told André that I might tell Robeson what it is that ee ‘as done, but only to frighten ‘im,” Aberdeen admitted, burying her reddened, wet eyes in her palms.

“It is not as though they can prove this without a witness,” Anna assured her, reaching out to rub her shoulder.

“But I was also ‘appy when I learned that ee ‘ad died and Pip, Peggy, Freddy, really all of the other bridesmaids saw that I was quite pleased, as did Lord Coleraine and Colonel Tarleton back at the reception area and what if it should come -”

“They can’t convict you for a smile.”

“They can when you are black,” Aberdeen told her flatly.

She was terrified. Throughout the conversation and the events that proceeded it, Anna had allowed herself to believe that this was a cumulation of recent stress factors – Arnold, Rogers, André’s research, the investigation, the resulting threats on her own life and liberty – but for Aberdeen, it seemed, this fear was far more systemic. She had every reason to accuse the legal system of not working for her in the way it might for nearly everyone else at the reception and Anna suddenly felt sick for the tears she had wanted to shed over her own new privileges and restrictions. She could not fight, but Aberdeen had to constantly, not only against erroneous charges but against a legal establishment that failed to reconcile its internal racism.

“They won’t so much as try if the ultimatum is a counter-suit they can’t hope to win, alone on optics,” Anna promised. “Everything you are asked, simply answer ‘no comment’ – you’ve been subjected to enough bullshit in the past few weeks to sustain the quota for an entire lifetime and anyway, these bitches ruined my wedding, we’re not letting them leave this room with some dated understanding of race and the rule of law that our country of ‘Freedom and Justice for All’ should have abandoned in the eighteenth century when it was founded,” she spat.

“You’re really a textbook white feminist, Anna,” Aberdeen began to smile, “but … in the best way, I think so.”

“I can see that.”

What bothered her the most in the moment was the memory of a caricature that had been drawn of
her on the Charles Bridge over the Vltava from when she and her family had visited Prague last summer, highlighting the size of her forehead in relation to the rest of her face. Peggy Shippen, fearful of the way the courtroom sketches that were certain to make the nightly news nationwide might portray her, had been playing with the idea of having Freddy cut bangs before she was cuffed and taken into a holding cell to await trial, a reality that to anyone else might suggest that her problems were far bigger than her brow.

At least, the Defence Secretary seemed to want to convince her of such.

“This isn’t a negotiation, Miss Shippen,” Washington cautioned a second time.

“It isn’t officially an interrogation until my attorney arrives,” the blonde countered. “As I see it, rather, as a prosecutor will see it, every minute you spend here with me without my having the benefit of legal representation is a year off the maximum sentence that can be pursued. Assuming the time stamp on that video recorder roughly coordinates to the clock on the wall, you’ve willingly thrown out the possibility of ‘life’ or ‘twenty-five to’ in hopes of getting me to agree to a plea deal, which I understand to be relatively standard in the American justice system. I’ll play,” she shrugged, “why not? But in exchange, a guarantee of my personal freedom isn’t quite enough of an exchange for my silence.”

“You are making a mistake -”

“No, Sir,” Peggy smiled girlishly, knowing the expression would further play upon the misconceptions Washington seemed to share with most others. “You are making an assumption that the past few hours might otherwise caution you against. Benedict Arnold was imprisoned for weeks whilst you knowingly hindered the investigation, endangering, ending and altogether destroying the lives of myself, my friends, the brave men and women on the local task force, all of our extended families, not to mention that of the senator himself, all for a piece of legislation McConnel in the end wouldn’t even bring to a vote and a trade deal that I’d wager disproportionately favours shareholders in certain, select firms above the jobs various politicians will sing about having saved in the rust belt come Tuesday when the world returns to work, albeit in a changing landscape that sooner or later will indeed leave most low-skilled, manual labour behind or send those positions abroad to save on production costs.

“Understand, Sir, the legislation itself is hardly the basis of my criticism – it is a happy surprise that government managed to get anything done and though it is neither here nor there I generally support the measures on tariffs the deal means to implement; my problem is how this war was won, and, moreover, who has been invited to the banquet.

“As my lawyer, I’m certain, will be able to attest, I have evidence and documentation to support every charge I’ve raised over how the compliance of the various organisations you directly oversee has put the lives and liberties of innocent Americans into peril through wilful negligence and interference with the course of justice. Jordan Akinbode and Benjamin Tallmadge have an entire town ready and wanting to serve as witnesses to, Sir, what I’d happily call your crimes, and Jordan, my lawyer, as it happens, is of the rare breed who lives for battle on a grand scale. This would go to trial and you assume that you can convince me by sitting there with crossed arms and concerned, fatherly tone that my friends and I don’t stand a shot, but I think we both know that we very much do. I think we both also know you and the government which you represent wouldn’t like the optics of the counter-suit I suggest any more than they would ‘The United States of America vs. Margaret Shippen’ on its own – you can’t possibly expect the people to take you seriously as a victim for all the same reasons you seem to underestimate me in the first place.

“But like I said, I’ll take a plea agreement if the conditions can be re-negotiated as such; I’ll sign
whatever pre-written statement you wish, and in addition to dropping the charges of treason attached to my person for my unfortunately armed attempt to facilitate this very conversation, you’ll recommend to Obama that Rochambeau be relieved of his post, additionally giving the Quai d’Orsay the caveat that a replacement won’t be considered until such time as his son’s passport if revoked and he is made to stand trial for his crimes against the Haitian people after the earthquake.

“Miss Shippen, I’m not in the position to offer -” Washington began, still addressing her in tones suggesting they two shared a familiarity of a familial sort. Peggy wondered how much of this was part of his personal understand of himself as a southern gentleman, as the father of a nation’s security, in relation to how she knew herself to be perceived. The difference, Peggy thought, was that she was herself under no illusion that she was merely a pretty girl with a famous name and wondered if Washington truly considered that he sat with someone who had not been in fully possession of her senses when she pulled the trigger.

“No, nor do I imagine you to be, Your Excellency, but you have the ear of the Executive and I think my offer sounds a lot better than my ultimatum. Half an hour,” she announced with a small giggle, pointing to the clock. “I think we are already down to a misdemeanour, so I’ll keep it short and sweet: the second altercation I’d suggest to this agreement is that you might extend the offer of full US citizenship to Aberdeen Declesias and all of the foreign residents whom you permitted your partner Martha Dandridge and her late research partner John André. This would really be in your best interest because I have reason to think that Cornwallis’ days in the diplomatic service are numbered and I should honestly doubt that whomever is sent to replace him will be half so compliant, and, well,” she twilled the end of a stand of hair that had become loosened during her short-lived sexual encounter with Banastre Tarleton, “you’ve only had the pleasure of sitting down with me, trust me when I say that everything you may think I am, Aberdeen is exactly that and so much more. If I were you, I’d be doing everything to get her on-side.”

“Sir,” an officer said after a single knock which Washington had failed to respond to, opening the door to reveal Jordan Akinbode behind him – still comically dressed in a kilt, as well as John André’s wife Philomena who offered Peggy a small, awkward wave which the younger woman was quick to return, flashing them both a smile more genuine than the one she had been showing the Secretary of Defence for the past half-hour.

“May I have a moment alone with my client?” Jordan Akinbode asked. He looked exhausted.

“Actually, I think were done here,” Peggy announced, rising from her stool before Washington made a move to. “I understand that you’ll have to formally charge me, Your Excellency, but if it is all the same, I’d like to go wait in the lobby with my friends where it is a bit warmer while you and your bosses and attorneys consider my counter offer. We are meant to be at a wedding reception, you see, which it subsequently seems I’ve ruined. I feel I might use the meantime to make amends. You can cuff me if you feel it necessary.”

She hoped Freddy was still around. It felt a good evening for a make-over, independent of her acute fear courtroom sketches highlighting her most unflattering feature in the coming months should things come to that.

>>Now is not a good time,<< she wrote.

She continued to type without hitting send and he felt his chest grow heavy and his heart grow
bitter with and at the thought that he was owed.

Arthur Wellesley had never been in a position to give a police statement and felt even less prepared to answer to charges around the illegal purchase and possession of a firearm than he did at the thought of delivering the speech he had not anticipated so much as having to pen. He bit the inside of his lip as he reopened his in-built word processing app (something he had never pervious seen the point in having) and tried to conjure up idea around the Royal Wedding that extended the single, fully un-useful observation he had made before attempting to ask for assistance: *I've never seen so many ugly hats in my life.*

He took a deep breath, wondering what the immediate outcome would be of filing a guilty plea – he would not get a positive recommendation from the embassy, but he could not expect to receive one for the speech he would have been unprepared to deliver even if he had gotten more direction. Cornwallis had left the station with the rest of his delegation, probably bothering someone else with the mechanics of his cursed auto as though he had nothing more to concern him.

The WhatsApp icon blinked at the top of his screen and he saw that Marie, alone among his few contacts in being both awake and stone-cold sober, had not written him words of love with which he might charm the couple and their guests.

He felt badly at having asked, he felt lonely, alone, and completely abandoned in ways that exceeded his standard in that he was consciously aware and contending with the emotional spectrum that had come to define and shape him since moving to London.

Arthur did a search on wedding speeches but finding nothing helpful in terms of composition that was not behind a paywall opened his socials to look at pictures of his friends in Dublin from the night before, feeling more isolated in his present predicament for having done so. Who was he to speak of love or any like theme? He returned to Google, flirting with the idea of simply confessing, wondering if New York’s infamous gun courts applied only to the city or if this apparatus was state-wide. He had no prior record and perhaps he would get off with a probation, an ankle monitor and a placement in a determent programme rather than a juvenile detention facility. Since Cornwallis had left, he had no reason to imagine his government doing much of anything to fight the charge or have him released back to Britain, which had the benefit that he would never have to go back to a school that hated him every bit as much as he hated it.

He soon discovered that it was legal to purchase but not to possess a gun in the state outside of the city, which seemed a contradiction in itself but perhaps one that would serve him in sentencing – he had not, after all, been ‘in procession’ of the firearm when it had been shot – he had been playing five-a-side with a few kids a bit younger than him against a few members of the bridal party who struggled to keep up with their pace. Surely there were enough witnesses to collaborate –

He looked up, only to be met immediately with the unblinking gaze of a man who might help him make his case were he not otherwise so unsettling. Arthur wondered how long he had been standing there, not having heard him approach.

“Atty, right?” Simcoe asked in the kind of voice that reminded the intern of the reason why coaches at school required all of the lads to wear cups during contact sport.

“It’s Arthur,” he corrected – sharply, if only to conceal his sudden amusement and avoid an offence he did not intend to issue.

“You doing okay, Arthur?”

“I don’t … no. No, I’m really not,” he answered honestly. “I was asked to purchase a firearm,
which I did, with a fake ID, which Colonel Tarleton asked for after I gave the gun to him and now that he is in holding, I am worried they are going to find out. The police. They want to question me, I’m worried that I will be charged … the gun, it was the one Peggy Shippen fired … the ambassador left and I’m without legal representation -”

“That isn’t true,” Simcoe squeaked in response. “You’ll be appointed a defendant by the court if you ask for one and I highly doubt you’ll be requested even in the unlikely scenario that charges are brought. It is more likely that you’ll be asked to sign a pre-written statement that absolves you of any wrong doing in exchange for your silence. I have um … some experience in these matters.”

‘Pre-written’ and ‘silence’ were welcome words. “Are you a solicitor?” Arthur inquired.

“A suspect, from time to time,” Pip and Cicero’s trainer smiled. Arthur wondered if this was meant to be reassuring. “And you are an intern at the embassy?” Simcoe asked in return, taking a seat in the empty chair beside him, feeling altogether too near.

“Yeah,” Arthur gave with unease.

“What do you want to be when you grow up, Arthur? A diplomat? Think of this as training -”

“What do I want to be?” he began to laugh at the bitter irony of it all. “I kind of just thought I’d enlist like every other C-average pupil and now because of this gun thing I’m not even sure if the military would take me. All I really want to ‘be’ is done with this internship, with school, with my friends in Dublin who don’t seem to miss me at all and the friends in London that I don’t actually have. I can’t really go out or host anyone at mine because I’m not old enough to get an actual job yet and I hate spending my mum’s money because since my dad died she is putting me through school and my two brothers through university all on her own and it’s just like … she never buys herself anything nice, or even anything new, so why should I feel alright using what she earns to buy crisps for my classmates when they come over to study? To spare myself the snide comments about my hospitality? And in a weird way, maybe if I had played to their stupid expectations … I don’t know,” he looked back at his phone, at the explanation Marie had given him for why she was unable to come up with a clever toast for him. “I’m sure I shouldn’t give myself so much credit. Maybe, comparatively, my problems just aren’t that bad … I just don’t fit in, anywhere really.”

“I can relate” Simcoe said.

Arthur wondered if his expression failed to betray his frustration and straightened his shoulders in order to be taken a bit more seriously, only to let the fall into a shrug when he spoke. “No offence, but that sounds like something adults only say when they really can’t.”

“My father died when I was ten years old. Until then I had been living with him abroad - in Pakistan if you want to compare culture shocks. My mother died not long thereafter and my godfather sent me to boarding school where I was at the mercy of my classmates twenty-four-seven when he had to return to sea. I’m legal deaf, I have red hair and a high voice and I spent most of my time trying very hard to be invisible. I had it out with an upperclassman towards the end of my first year and earned an undeserved reputation as a ‘problem student’ as a result. Thanks to the order of the alphabet I wound up rooming with a kid who was easily the most sociable and … suggestible lad I ever knew and for a great while was under the impression that he absolutely loaded his popularity over me, that everyone was awful in and of themselves – and, lest this seem like a pep talk - they were, mostly, to be sure.”

"But?" Arthur smiled alone at the suggestion of acknowledgement.
"But?" Simcoe knitted his brow as though he had not expected to be contradicted, "Kids can be shit, I am not arguing that much. I only mean to illustrate that I tell you no lie when I say I can relate to your feelings of loneliness."

"You don't have that problem anymore though," the boy observed.

"That is bullshit," Simcoe returned, "everyone has those sorts of problems. In my case it may be worse, I am still friends with all of the same people whom I imagined conspiring to make my life hell when I was your age - still dealing with all of their crap and subjecting them to mine if I mean to or not. If you want some silver lining - you learn to have a sense of humour about it eventually. Oyster, come here," he beckoned the groom.

"Your Highness," Arthur rose, extending his hand out of habit before quickly bringing it to his chest and falling into a bow, hoping that he had not breeched some measure of protocol. He had played football with both men but had neither had a conversation nor been formally introduced to the future duke. Before he could fully grasp and grapple with the extent of his error in being far too forward, both Richmond and Simcoe began laughing between themselves.

"Stop that," Simcoe told him.

"Please do," Richmond agreed.

"I was just telling Mr Wellesley here the sordid history of our ‘friendship’ -" Simcoe started, making air-quotes around the most relevant word in that sentence.

His Highness waved him off. "I’m out, I don't want to hear a word of the roast until the reception."

"So, there is still defiantly going to be a reception?" Arthur tried to clarify.

"I for one need a drink," Richmond snorted.

"I will get Ban to give you back your fake," Simcoe smiled.

"That doesn’t save me from having to write a speech," Arthur complained before he could stop himself.

"Might make giving it that much easier," the ginger laughed, retaking his seat. Arthur followed when the prince did.

"John, the boy spent the morning with George Hanger and Ban Tarleton. Don’t add to the bad advice he’s likely been getting. Wellesley, listen, you don’t need to give a speech at my reception."

“But protocol demands that the Best Man and the Host give toasts, and since Cornwallis left me the most senior member of this detachment, my grade is hinging on -”

“Foreign or domestic?” Richmond interrupted with a slight frown.


“Write me when you graduate,” His Highness said almost dismissively. “I’ll issue you a recommendation with a royal seal to any officer’s unit of your choosing.”

“You would do that?” Arthur blinked.

“My uncle is granted two appointments each year to bestow as is his pleasure, and being that you stood to fight where others abandoned their posts, it would be the honour of Richmond and Clan
Hewlett to help satisfy your ambitions.”

“I don’t know what to say,” the boy admitted.

“You needn’t trouble yourself with all that, I never know myself,” Richmond shrugged.

“So, it really doesn’t ever get any easier?” Arthur asked hesitantly.

“Do you follow politics?” Simcoe chided, “No one listens either way, if that is any condolence.”

Edmund Hewlett nodded but before he could offer up anything else by way of relation, their party was approached by two men in dress uniform. Arthur straightened his shoulders again, as did Simcoe. Hewlett seemed happy to ignore their presence.

“Your Highness, a word?” one of the major’s bid him.

“Not now.”

“My Lord this can’t wait. Your presence is required.”

Richmond rolled his eyes at Simcoe but rose to follow, grumbling all the while.

“I think the formality is more of a bother for him than any of these attempts of formal charges,” his Best Man observed with a hint of mockery. “If it had been up to him, he would probably have gotten married in some field in a night with no moon and bored us all by relating poor Anna to every celestial body the eye can see, drawing upon the mythology that finds its way into that nomenclature for lack of a better metaphor. He wasn’t lying when he claimed to be a terrible public speaker,” Simcoe said, loud enough for others in the vicinity to hear. Arthur suspected this had nothing to do with the man’s own disability and liked him more for the brazen honesty and bitter sarcastms with which he brought truth to power, which felt much more worthwhile ideals to aspire towards than anything Arthur had ever heard another adult cite or actively illustrate.

He looked back at his phone.

“What you were saying earlier … how do people like Tarleton wind up being well-liked?”” Arthur asked when it seemed the lord had gone off to stare into the night sky (or alternatively, as Simcoe had commented, ‘have a fag in secret while his wife is otherwise occupied in depositions’) and would not be re-joining the little pep-talk his Best Man had tried to initiate.

“I didn't say he was ‘well liked’, I said he was ‘popular’. At school that is a huge difference,” Simcoe answered blandly.

Arthur thought about this for a moment. As his school at least, there seemed to be some truth to it.

“Better to be feared than to be loved?” he tried.

“Ban is both, if only for the fact that he learned to laugh well before the rest of us, but to Marie, who I am guessing this is about by that name your finger keeps hovering over in your list of WhatsApp contacts … knowing her since she was little, you probably should have a talk about whatever it is you are too intimidated to say. She is the type of kid where if you sit her down and talk - talk, not tell - she'll understand what she has done to hurt you and make a conscious effort to correct for it. Yelling makes no sense. Neither does keeping your silence if something is wrong.”

“Nothing is wrong exactly; I just don't know what to say. I truly never do. I am worried and I have no right or reason to be its just - I don't know,” Arthur tried to collect his thoughts. “We aren’t
friends. I go to school with her. We have an honours course and an elective together. That is it. If she was gone though, I think I would miss her even though she is mean more often than she isn't. At least, I mean, she talks to me. No one else really does. I wish I was popular even if that made me polarizing.”

“That is rough,” Simcoe acknowledged.

“And I am already in so much trouble for taking an interest in her safety; I thought really something happened, when Hamilton played that voice mail back at the pub, that they had taken her to get to her fake-dad and that is the reason I bought a gun to begin with. I thought it was over when Tarleton came back from whatever kind of talk they two had, but here I am in a police station while she is in a house with a police inspector and she has no idea if he is corrupt but her mum's lawyer friend certainly seems to be and Marie can't get her small sister to stop crying over whatever they said and I just, I mean - we just found her, but honestly? I feel like texting back to tell her she should pack a few more things and run away again … but where the fuck would she even go?

“I just … I lost my dad, too. I could relate when she thought she had lost hers and I wanted to help and now I am just worried she will wind up in a place exactly like this with people like Hamilton who clearly wish her harm and that the alternative – staying in the situation she is in - really isn’t much better. And she already hates me besides for reasons I struggle to even name. Can you relate to that?” he demanded though his quarrel was not with this man.

“More than you would ever believe,” Simcoe answered, smiling lightly, not seeming to take offence at his sudden shift in tone which cause Arthur some measure of shame.

Alexander Hamilton pressed pause on the footage he had spent the better part of the past three hours re-examining. “Permission to treat the witness as hostile, Sir?” he sighed to his boss.

“Witness?” Washington questioned his choice of vocabulary with an eyebrow raised.

“We can’t charge him; not even with obstruction of justice as he never gave a false confession to the police, he never gave a false confession at all – we just came to the same conclusions as those we were monitoring during the course of Arnold’s abduction,” Hamilton sighed in frustration.

“Here,” he clicked the ‘play’ icon for the footage to resume, “this, here, is as close as he comes to committing a crime or confessing to one:

>>You’ll see I also attached Edmund Hewlett’s medical records and those of Thomas Gwillim.<<

Colonel Tarleton said over Skype, >> Gene was right. Back when we were kids, he was right and … a few months ago I did something about it, intending that if the crime was investigated instead of merely covered up, Lady Edith would go down for mine if she cannot be brought to justice all of her many. It won’t happen now. Not with my being a suspect in this case, thanks, I guess, to you. Not with the files every intelligence agency on the planet knows that I’ve seen. I’m not sorry. Not in the least. I wish I’d known and acted sooner. Done more. You could have. But it makes no difference now. I need you to give my closing argument in the event that I, well, end up answering for what I well imagine to be your crimes in the interim. <<

“As it would work out, John Graves Simcoe has every right to the documentation he was forwarded, he’s Edmund Hewlett’s emergency contact and has had Medical Power of Attorney
since the prince signed it over this past February, weary from his suicide attempt and unable to sort through the administrative paperwork involved in securing his hospital release prior to the termination of his insurance plan,” he explained, continuing, “Thomas Gwillim had no stipulations and being that Simcoe is related to his former fiancée on a technicality – his legal guardian married hers when they were both still minors – he would have the privilege to view these records as well. Elizabeth Gwillim gave this file to Tarleton, which also puts us at a loss. But the line I find most troubling, something the colonel repeats throughout is ‘I wish I’d known and acted sooner. Done more.’ which says to me his involvement in this is minimal.

“He repeats it throughout, it underlines the rhetoric that on first, second, third listen sounds like a standard political trump-speech, the kind that highlights the problems of the opposition without offering any solutions that extend initial anger … much of which he seems to direct towards Simcoe at first glance, if simply because we have no audio of the other suspect’s rebuttal. But,” Hamilton considered aloud for the benefit of comparison, “he accepts the fact that his friends have inadvertently made him a suspect in Arnold’s disappearance with anger, yes, but with an ease that I’m tempted to describe as familiarity. He’s been in this situation before and he knows how to play it to his benefit. He didn’t kill Hewlett. With what Shippen shooting Rogers makes clear about his handicap, it would have been impossible for him to have committed the crime in the way Brewster explained to my informer, Culper Jr.

“We looked into it, he attended the Gala and seems to have disappeared at some point of the course of dinner, either with a Princess of York or a Princess of Richmond, both dukes paid him in cash at the end of the evening for his, we’ll say omitting the names of either of these noblewomen from any future narrative, a bribe he seems to have taken, so I … I’m tempted to say that Edward of Richmond himself was never a target, we let ourselves be misled by words that were never spoken on the record; words, Sir,” Hamilton reiterated, “that were never spoken at all, that we instead heard because it fit our profile. Tarleton ‘wishes he had done more’. I don’t think he is berating Simcoe in the rest of it, I think he is furious that others got to act where he himself failed to.”

“Until we have eyes on Edmund, I’ve ordered a lockdown,” Washington frowned. “No one is to leave this premises. That might give you more than another twenty-one hours to hold him. All the same, I’ve gotten word that his brother is on a plane now to serve as his solicitor -”

“Does this brother have a brother licenced to practice law in the United States?” Hamilton asked.

“As favour and fortune would have it, he has three siblings who are licenced internationally. Sports, real estate – bad sorts. We can hold him up at customs but try to find grounds for any charge and talk to your friend the acting DA about denying bail,” Washington suggested in a manner Hamilton took to be an order. “Cornwallis left as soon as the call came in; giving what Tarleton additionally knows about John André as a result of your using him as arbitrator and bait in this morning’s negotiations with our hostage taker, I don’t want to release him until André has been dealt with. Hold him on whatever grounds you can think up.”

“Is that still in the range of possibilities?” Hamilton blinked. “André being ‘dealt with’ as discussed, or have you -?”

“More so than ever,” the Secretary of Defence nodded. “Rogers came out of his operation with an expected full recovery. The hospital report we received states that he will be back on his feet in four weeks, which for a man on the run means two, three perhaps. I have his door guarded by a police escort who I will systematically stagger out to allow him the suggestion that he is slipping away. André left Witness Protection as soon as it was announced that Arnold was rescued, if anyone can track him down it is Rogers, which he will out of desperation,” Washington paused. “Your son plays soccer, does he not?”
Sir?

“How acquainted with the game are you?”

“Outside of the charges my office brought on Sepp Blatter and FIFA? It is typically my wife who is screaming on the side-lines on weekends, Your Excellency,” Hamilton admitted, felling the same tension he knew too often in the back of his neck when his wife complained to him that he worked too much, half-considering that he might have given more credence to this claim.

“Do you think it would be difficult to get Clayton Tarleton to attach himself to Inter Milan’s summer tour of the States if such became a condition of his brother’s release?” Washington wondered, or rather ordered indirectly, relying on the natural initiative of his second to spare him from any scrutiny that might later arise. Hamilton, however, could not help but question what his boss hoped to gain.

“I don’t know that it would be relevant or useful if he did,” he admitted. “The offer their sister-in-law made was with Agnelli - not Tarleton - wealth, and I know just enough about Italian football teams to have gathered that the clubs have nothing in common save a division.”

“Rogers was still able to connect Banastre to Chiara,” Washington commented, walking to the window to observe the witness, himself hidden behind panelled glass, “which I understand was something Tallmadge and his evening allies were trying to avoid. The Scot proven in the past that he’ll happily blackmail powerful families and since every scenario seems within reach in desperation, I think it feasible that he’ll still make an attempt at André’s life if he imagines he can still collect on a fee. If successful - and even if not, even if it is only an attempt - we can be but assured that the defence bill will pass once it comes to a vote.”

“You can’t be -” Hamilton began to object.

“Arnold is still pressing for it,” Washington continued, his back still turned to Hamilton though Tarleton had long since fallen asleep while waiting to give his statement, “André will become a martyr if taken down by the senator’s kidnapper and his research … we can’t risk not employing it in the armed force, now that we have seen what it can do.”

“Sir -”

“It needn’t even be universally administered throughout the armed force; the side effects alone have been shown to be monumental. Look at these people, normal residents of a small town, militiamen at best, who, despite every promised fear of personal consequence, felt empowered to fight for each other, for the objective we gave them in finding and saving Senator Arnold. I just spent a total forty minutes with Miss Shippen who had a list of high, but not altogether unreasonable demands for her silence, most of the witnesses are not putting up nearly as much of an argument. Simcoe was happy just to be acquitted, Woodhull requested as a condition that absent bridesmaid Philomena Freud be released from FBI custody, which was easily granted. They have given up their rights to sue and without opposition -”

It was not right. None of it was.

“A man died, George,” Hamilton said flatly. “He died on our watch.”

“And how many lives do you think his saved?” Washington countered. “From what I understand of nobility, such sacrifice is expected. It is the trade they all know they may eventually have to make. Go wake Tarleton up, see if you can’t get him to confess his innocence in a way that suggests who he is protecting that we have something to barter against Cornwallis or whoever London sends to
Marie Robinson knew her mother loved her and sometimes could even be bothered to remember as much.

All the same, she stood frozen before the door to Mary’s borrowed bedroom, hesitant to knock, worried the sound would reverberate throughout the entire home, worried that if she did not ask for help, everyone in residence would soon be awake as it was. She fiddled with the handle, seeking an alternative to sound but found the door had been locked from the inside, which, for reasons she could not place, broke what little resolve she had over her own restraint.

It was her heaves and heavy sobs that roused her mother rather than the tap of her hand.

“Marie, child – what … oh no, no, my darling, whatever is the matter?” Mary, groggy and half dressed asked as she opened the door and pulled her teenage daughter into a tight embrace. Marie tried to return it but her limbs felt too heavy to lift.

“Mum I’m so sorry,” she said, her voice cracking. “I brought Georgie … we heard … Mum, I can’t get her to stop crying no matter what I try and I can’t – oh my God. My God! Kolina’s going to hate me more than she already does. Dad is going to, Dad …” she choked, questioning if the man was worth crediting with the distinction, desperate for his presence here all the same.

“Alright,” Mary whispered, wiping her tears, not asking for an explanation in exchange for condolence. “It will be alright. I’ll see what I can do. Just give me a moment to … collect myself.” Mary pulled the silk kimono she had been in the process of putting on over her negligée over her shoulder, tied it like a bathrobe around her waist, and pulling Marie inside with her returned to her night stand to take her wig from the head of the Styrofoam woman who otherwise wore it in the night.

“You’re beautiful, Mum,” Marie swallowed, wondering at her mother’s vanity, privately envying that it seemed to be placed high on her list of immediate concerns.

“I don’t want to frighten the poor thing,” Mary answered, almost under her breath.

Marie swallowed. She was used to seeing her mother without cosmetics and did not consider that other people who were not well acquainted with fatal illness might not meet it with the same nonchalance Mary practiced at home and Marie had picked up second-hand. “I wasn’t -” she started, thinking of all the times she had accused her mother of pride and cowardice in the past, now wondering if it was the rest of the world she might instead seek to blame for the amount of time her mother spent with herself in the bathroom mirror as opposed to with her in any meaningful way.

“I know. Neither was I,” her mother dismissed, “Come on let’s – let me see what I can do,” she suggested, moving quickly.

“Mum,” Marie whispered as the two tiptoed together down the hall, unable to contain herself or her own hurt a moment longer, “did Dad kill a bunch of kids my age because of the colour of their skin? Did he kill -”

Mary stopped dead in her tracks. “Who said that?” she demanded, her dark blue eyes turning not to
ice but to fire.

Marie bit her lip, wishing her own eyes - otherwise identical to her mother’s - shared the same heat as tears again began to fall down her cheeks. “Miss Burges,” she gave, quickly expanding, “and then Inspector Ferguson surmised that because of this he was going to take the fall for -”

“Marie, your father is a hero; when he falls, he always finds a way to get back up again. I promise,” Mary said, reaching for her hand to squeeze it.

“I don’t think I know who he is,” Marie admitted slowly.

“I think you do better than anyone else.”

“Those kids … did he?” she asked, unable to again say the words aloud. She had black and brown friends, she had had them around the house, never suspecting her father’s prejudice of extending the basic perimeters of the average white-man over thirty who had never finished university – which in itself was embarrassing, but not altogether inexcusable. She watched her mother frown. Marie wondered if she had unwittingly put her mates in real danger, seeing Farhad and Ismael’s faces stand for those of the boys in Miss Burges’ accusation when she again relived the narrative in her mind.

“I don’t know,” Mary admitted, continuing slowly as though speed could substitute comfort, “Marie … something you’ll only begin to understand when you get a bit older, something you’ll unfortunately never truly understand in those moments where it might matter, make a difference even – there are countless factors that are simultaneously ‘true’ and ‘false’ and memory has a funny way of shifting them with time.” Marie had no idea what she meant. “Your dad was on trial last fall, a court martial, as it was a military matter, and found to not have acted in contra or contempt to any law to which he was accused of breaking.”

“But that doesn’t mean he didn’t do it,” she nodded, speaking in solemn tones.

“It means he responded to a threat in the way in which he had been trained.”

“Why are you telling me this?” Marie asked – hoping her mother would not be quite so open with Georgie should the little girl regain her words. For the past forty minutes or so, before the sobs had even started, she had reverted to single-syllable sounds to express herself: ‘Mm-mm’ meant ‘no’ and it meant ‘I’m frightened’ and it meant ‘I can’t sleep.’ Marie was at a loss beyond thinking that sometimes it seemed better just to tell a lie.

“Because you are curious and inquisitive by nature, because I think it is better that this be a dialogue between us than some whisper you overheard as the result of being somewhere you know you should not have been,” her mother answered.

“I’m sorry -”

“And Kolina doesn’t hate you, Maire.” Mary seemed as though she had something more to say to that effect, but was halted by the muffled sound of tears. “Is that … oh, poor, poor dear, Let’s -” she commented, almost to herself as she hastened towards the door.

“You are not going to -” Marie began to protest though it had been her to ask her mother’s intervention.

“Of course not,” Mary shook her head, shifting. “Georgie, Georgie – sweetheart, what’s happened? Marie tells me you had a bad dream.”
The little girl nodded, for a moment happy to accept this explanation. “Mm-” she tried. Marie felt her heart break in two, hating herself for having given her sister cause for such a fright, hating that her mother had given any merit to the claims her father’s friends had made against him, hating that she had been annoyed at her sister earlier in the evening, hoping she would see her cheerful and carefree again.

“Your daddy loves you more than anything else in this life, you must know that,” Mary said, patting the mattress for Marie to sit down beside them, an offer she took, lifting Mou from the place he had found on her pillow beside Georgie’s, sitting the small dog on her lap rather than on the floor as her father would have insisted. “But you know, everyone has bad dreams sometimes – Daddy, too. He has a really hard job and sometimes when he closes his eyes bad things return to them and sometimes it wakes him up in the middle of the night and he says bad words – the kinds of things that both he and your mummy would be very upset to hear from your mouth – and people can get the wrong ideas.

“Your daddy and Mary Anne used to go to school together when they were children, did you know that?” Mary asked sweetly. Georgie nodded. “It was the kind of school that kids live at and Mary Anne probably heard Daddy say a lot of ridiculous and rude things in his sleep, and so, his bad dreams became her bad dreams, but not yours, my darling. I promise, not yours. I’ll teach you a trick how not to ever catch them again. Do you and Marie want to sleep in my bed tonight? I’ll sing to you and chase all the monsters away. Did you know that? That singing scares all kinds of monsters away – especially the ones who live in your mind and won’t let you sleep?”

“I can’t sing,” Georgie whispered.

“Yes, you can,” Mary dismissed. “Have you ever tried?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Well, if that is a matter of fact then – well, maybe Georgie Tarleton can’t sing, but what about Hannah Montana? Here,” she said, “Don’t be frightened, okay? I wear a wig when I need to be strong, too, and I look a little bit scary without it. But let’s try -” she said, removing her wig and placing on the smaller head of her ex’s love child. Marie laughed and played along.

“Oh! Oh no! What did you do with my sister?” she asked. “She was just here, I -”

Georgie started to laugh as well. “It’s me! It’s me!”

“Do you want to see? Come,” Mary said lifting her and carrying her towards the mirror on the vanity.

“Why don’t you have any hair?” Georgie asked in the innocent but all the same hurtful way only young children could manage.

“Because I’m sick,” Mary answered, seemingly unphased. “Have you ever had a really bad cold? So bad that you had to stay home from school?”

“Mm-hmm. Once,” Georgie confirmed.

“And did your Mummy give you medicine for it to make it better, but first it made you tired and it made your tummy hurt?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“I got so sick once that I had to go to hospital, and because I was so sick the doctors had to give me
a very powerful medicine to make me better, but it makes my tummy hurt too, and I get tired, and it make my har fall out like an old grand-dad,” she said, sticking out her tongue, “but it will grow back and in the meantime, no one recognises me in the grocery line as being the same girl on a magazine cover, so I get to live a double-life and it is a lot of fun.”

It was not fun at all, Marie frowned, feeling she might cry once more.

“Are you so famous?” Georgie asked.

“I’m famous enough that it annoys your sister, we’ll put it that way,” her mother winked at her.

“It annoys my mummy, too. I heard you on the radio though,” the toddler said.

“Do you want to sing with me?”

“I don’t remember the words to your song.”

“Sing something else for me then?” Mary suggested, swaying back and forth with the small girl held tightly against her chest.

“Do you like dinosaurs?”

“I do, but more importantly, monsters don’t and neither do nightmares.”

Georgie quietly sang something she learned in kindergarten as Mary danced with her in her arms, slowly until she was rocking her to sleep. Watching them made Marie both happy and sad at once. She wondered if her mother had been so warm and goodly to her when she had been small, feeling a rush of all of the emotions around her mother that therapy had taught her to suppress when Georgie had finished and Marie picked up with a familiar song that she last recalled hearing when she had been a much younger, before her mother had gotten sick, before ‘better’ had stopped being a realistic option. “Oh, why you look so sad - the tears are in your eyes - Come on and come to me now, and don’t be ashamed to cry - Let me see you through, ’cause I’ve seen the dark side too,” Mary sang softly.

“When the night falls on you, you don’t know what to do,

Nothing you confess could make me love you less,

I’ll stand by you,

I’ll stand by you, won’t let nobody hurt you,

I’ll stand by you,” Marie joined in under her breath, looking down at Mou, feeling her mother’s hand run through her loose hair, Georgie, or Hannah, all but asleep in her other arm, feeling that this was now about her, finding herself again in the act of affection. They walked quietly back to Mary’s room, laid Georgie beneath the covers, wig and all.

“Aren’t you worried it will get damaged?” Marie asked in a whisper.

“I have others, even if I didn’t, it helps to play pretend and if your sister wants to look the part – look at you, Princess,” she said, playing with her hair again.

“I know, I hate it, too,” Marie complained.

“I don’t know, you try awfully hard to act like Lady Eleanor when you get frightened because you see her as someone who can be stronger than her situation,” her mother observed vaguely, “why not
look the part for a week or two? I saw the way you were sitting, the ‘duchess lean’, I think they call it. What is wrong with that? I’ve dressed up like her before for a farce, it was fun."

Marie felt herself choke. Her mother had a strange definition of ‘fun’. According to Miss Burges, her mother had dressed up like Lady Eleanor to gain access to an area that had been sealed to visitors of Goodwood House at a charity event – easily accomplished, the women were of the same height by nature, had the same nose by separate surgical procedures, and the same measurements made possible only by adolescent eating disorders and silicon enhancements. Mary had merely worn a darker wig and a more conservative dress than was her standard. Marie did not want to pay any mind to the rest of it.

“I’m meant to be Lady Anna like everyone else,” she dismissed, hoping the conversation to end. "You are meant to be at home in London, same as Georgie was meant to go asleep in her own bed hours ago, same as Dad was meant to spend the better part of a holiday weekend reading ‘In Search of Lost Time’ whilst riding out what ought to have been a half an hour layover at his favourite airport, but life sometimes gets in the way of all that. And you are certainly not ‘like everyone else’, my darling,” Mary paused, continuing jokingly, “though truth be told sometimes I wish you would make more of an effort towards that end.”

Marie pressed her lips together, holding her breath for as long as she could manage. “Mum, what you were saying earlier -”

Mary closed her eyes. “Look, with Kolina, its – I had you when I was young, too. Your world goes from one extreme to another overnight and you are so caught between trying to provide for your child and yourself that base anger and anxiety gets misdirected as a result of, well, exhaustion, more than anything else. Kolina doesn’t hate you, she doesn’t know you well enough for such to even exist in the realm of possibilities and if she had been given much of a chance too, I know she would have nothing but love for you and no problem expressing it. But it is my fault, too – a lot of people are at fault here, but not you and not your sister – not in any way. When I found out that your father got another woman pregnant, I was furious, I felt betrayed by him, by my body, by the baby we’d lost years earlier and for a time I couldn’t cope. Even when your dad and I patched things up I wouldn’t let the patchwork thing work and then, when I took a turn for the worse health-wise, Kolina got the impression that Dad was spending more of his time and energy on your immediate and emotional needs than he was with Georgie, and envy - however knowingly misplaced - can lead to resentment. She blames herself alone for your having run away … we talked about it earlier, if you want, we can all talk together -”

“But what about Dad?”

“He can be part of that conversation, too.”

“That isn’t what I meant.”

“Marie,” Mary yawned, “your dad is never going to have the same kind of relationship with your sister as he has with you, which isn’t to say he loves either of you more of he loves you differently .”

“I know, but -”

Her mother shook her head. “I don’t think you do. He held Georgie a few minutes after she was born. Instead, it was you who first held him which makes a far larger difference in the way that any two people can relate than biology ever could. You have to accept that there are sides to your father that you may never know, that you may well have no right to, that certainly Mary Anne and
Patrick have no right discussing when your dad himself struggles to. He spent years stationed overseas and early into his first tour of Iraq something happened that hardened him to the realities of war, something that makes it hard to return to civilian life in ways that extend simply the performative.”

“Do you mean like … when he acts like my dad, it is just an act?” Marie tried.

“I think that everyone responds to the influence of their environment in such fashion, it just works out that your dad lives in extremes that he struggles to negotiate with. It is why we broke up, if you must know – nothing to do with you, or Georgie and Kolina, or the work his job requires – he wanted to marry me, I didn’t want to be cast in another role off-stage as it were, we tried for years to make it work and at a certain point we had to admit defeat.”

“But do you think he killed anyone?” she asked, hoping for a lie or at least the same softer sort of ‘truth’ her little sister had been so privileged to hear.

“Oh, Marie, this is more uncomfortable than having the sex talk was,” her mother tried to laugh.

“Because that begins with ‘when two people love each other’ and war is just an expression of hate,” the teen muttered.

“Or it is an expression of love: for country, for human rights, for one’s fellow citizens, for any number of ideals we are wont to define as ‘God’ if only for the fact that we subconsciously recognise them as being unreachable,” Mary countered. “Your father is a high-ranking officer, he has both killed and he has ordered others to do so, there is no point in sugar-coating it exactly as you are bound to awaken to this eventually -”

“But here, in the UK?” Marie inquired.

“The thing about globalization is that it opens more fronts then we are always privileged to learning about for security reasons, to protect the public psyche. Sometimes the government, the military, the organizations we only refer to as acronyms have to keep things quite so people don’t get frightened or angry … you see that with your sister, with yourself, can’t you?”

“But you still love Dad, right? At least, you love him enough not to let him take the fall for you and a bunch of angry Scots? Even with everything you know or assume he’s done, Mum, please,” she began to beg, “he’s still my dad even if he isn’t technically my dad and I won’t -”

“Marie what else did you hear exactly?” Mary frowned.

“Inspector Ferguson thinks that Miss Burges and you and basically every other adult I know killed the Duke of Richmond and Dad is going to take the fall because it is easier for him than actually dealing with his guilt around … whatever. And Ferguson figured all of this out from her paintings of flowers because she moved some of them around while she was re-decorating,” she continued quickly, “and Dad said something to the FBI about having poisoned him but he couldn’t have carried out the crime because he hasn’t that kind of knowledge and he isn’t physically capable of unscrewing a faucet even if he had the necessary educational background and access and now he is being detained and -”

“Marie, slow down, take a deep breath and think about this logically for a moment: Richmond isn’t dead. All of Scotland wants to see Edmund and Anna crowned at this present moment because it belongs to the romance of the fairy tale that always exists in a media frenzy. Mary Anne writes love stories, did you know? Terribly gothic things set in the middle ages,” her mother seemed to critique, “she is always looking for a bête noire and your dad well, he really lends himself to type-
casting. Those two – Mary Anne and Patrick - are drunk on liquor and drunk on the kind moralistic self-aggrandisement that masks itself as patriotism. If you have a think on it for just a sec,” she squinted, “that is almost worse than whatever was said might have suggested. But no one died, no one is saying or is trying to make the case that your father killed against his conscious, it is just two people with highly systematic jobs that in turn let them believe that they are better than everyone else having no other outlet for their creativity. You want me to let you into a little secret about adult life? You are bound to encounter that in others more often than you are not. Don’t let the bitches get you down, okay?” she winked.

“O’rite.”

Marie wrapped her arms around her mother and fell asleep to the soft sound of her singing, feeling fully safe for the first time in what seemed a longer stretch than she should ever have allowed.

It was still dark when Marie awoke, assisted in this action by her litter sister’s light shoves.

“Marie, Marie,” she said. “You mum’s gone.”

Marie looked out to the stars glittering in the night sky. “Did you have another bad dream? Do you want me to sing you back to sleep?” she asked, groggy as she began to hum, “Well you must be a girl with shoes like that - She said you know me well -” only to have her attempts interrupted by her own phone.

“It keeps buzzing,” Georgie explained, seemingly frustrated.

Marie rubbed her eyes and saw that she had missed a series of texts from a three-five-three number she had not programmed in to her contacts. “Ireland?” she asked. “It must be Atty from school again. I’ll ring or write him back in the morning. Sorry about that. He’s making his work-experience in the US; I think he’s at a party and has forgotten about time difference. I’ll turn off the sound. Go back to sleep.”

“How is time different?” Georgie puzzled.

“I’ll explain in the morning. I need a map to show it to you. Go back to sleep.”

“Where is your mum? She’s left her hairs and clotheses,” the girl misspoke. “She said we could sleep with her … I’m scared.”

“Don’t be,” Marie dismissed.

“Marie!” Georgie demanded.

“Do you want me to go find her?” Marie yawned.

“Mm-hmm.” There it was again.

“O’rite, but you stay here, okay? Just stay here and be a very good girl. Sing a song to help Mou go back to sleep if you don’t want to sleep yourself, okay?” she said. She did not want Georgie to overhear any conversation to happen in the vicinity. She did not to engage in much of another herself. “I’ll come back and I’ll bring my mum, and yours too if you want, does that sound good?”
Georgie nodded. “Will you leave the light on?”

“Sure.”

No one was on the second floor, or the first. Marie, against her better judgement was about to go back up into the attic when she smelt something cooking. She crept downstairs to the kitchen where she heard Kolina announce, “I can’t get through, either,” to which her mother responded, “Any one trust themselves to try their luck with Francis? I have his number but fully no patience for that man.”

“I’m certain I’ll get an order to go up there within the hour,” Inspector Ferguson said. “There is no point in speculating until such time and I well suspect that we’ll be subjected to the same for the rest of our natural lives because the media consuming public loves nothing quite so much as a non-reigning noble who dies before their time.”

“I didn’t sign up for this,” Miss Burges said. “How the fuck did you manage to -”

“I did exactly as I was directed,” her mother hissed back. “You were the one who planted the poison, if Eugenie was uncertain of the layout you should have never -”

So it was true.

“Mum?” Marie asked as she entered, feeling it better to announce herself, to face this fight head on. Georgie can’t sleep again and she is asking for you, but I … I’m not sure I really want you … what happened? Why are you all awake and sitting around the table at this hour waiting on Mr Ferguson to be ordered into work? Who is dead? What did you do?” she demanded.

“Maire, sit down,” Miss Burges answered. “Technically this affects you as well.”

“What? How? And don’t you dare say that my dad -”

“Edmund Hewlett is dead, Marie. We are as shocked as you are. None of us had any …” Ferguson trailed off, turning his gaze back to their shared host “But I think I know where motive and cause connect. It is just a hypothesis, I have to … I have to go, respond to Hamilton, perhaps confer with Tallmadge first.”

“I don’t follow,” Miss Burgess admitted. Marie did not either. But she did not care to. Whatever field some ideological war was being fought on, no one got to speak so casually about the loss of human life. She had never felt quite so angry as she did in listening to the inspector continue as though he found himself or his thoughts inspired.

“Tarleton’s quote-unquote confession, the one that prompted Hamilton to ring me late last night, at the very end of it he asks Simcoe to intervene that Liverpool got a contract renewal, but Simcoe couldn’t have had any hand in … that is, he was made redundant the following day. His lover, Mary Woodhull, on the other hand, received promotion and seems to have called off the affair after the fact. Shit. Mary Anne, I don’t know that I can create enough of a cover if you’ve already filed with the courts -”

“Mr Simcoe’s new-ex girlfriend killed his best friend on his fucking wedding day and you all want to create a cover?” Maire interrupted. “And you want to ‘affect’ me in all of this? No! Fuck no! I’m going to wake Aunt Emma and Nan up and we’ll all go to a hotel to get away from you and when Dad comes home from work Georgie and I will go live with him in Toxteth and if you so much as dare to say ‘no’ to any of this I’ll stand testify against every single one of you in court.”

“Marie,” her mother began, “You’ve misunderstood -”
“You know what? Try me! I can’t believe I trusted you, trusted my sister to you when she was upset. I’m leaving this place and I’m taking Georgie, too, because,” she began to cry, feeling the full weight of the responsibility she was inviting upon herself, feeling betrayed by her mother with whom trust should have been far simpler than vague conceptions of situational relativity, “because without Dad here, it is my job to protect her, isn’t it? Even if it means from you, or from her mother, or from respected representatives of the fucking legal establishment. You are all damaged, deranged. I hate you! I hate you all!”

Chapter End Notes

*but like actually let’s talk about Henrikh Mkhitaryan now in the comments. Or about the end of the ‘Robbery’ era in Bayern (and Bayern ‘robbing’ BVB, the Bundesliga, whatever accusations you all want to throw … Mia san Meister :) Or about Liverpool’s kind of lacklustre win last night and if that penalty should have been given. You know I’m down.

** It has been suggested to me that my average weekend could fill a short fic of highly-niche nature, so on the super-off chance that you like the unrelatable comments I make about what life is like on the continent when one basically has no qualms but is fairly quick to offence, I posted a Hanger-centric side-fic in the 18th C. RPF tag that I won’t bother linking to because AO3 has been a bitch about hyperlinks lately and there would be too little interest to extend the effort. There is no boat in that story, just lads saying the sorts of things they would be hesitant to share in mixed company. But it is there if you want it and it is set in Germany. That is the ‘sell’, I guess.

Oh, yea, right I’m meant to be blabbering on about that chapter you just read. Let’s have it then:

**Personages**

**Margaret Johnstone, Lady Ogilvy** whom Effie alludes to in her take-down was Patrick Ferguson’s cousin, a Jacobite who was arrested and imprisoned following the Battle of Culloden in which she had been a combatant. She escaped from Edinburgh Castel where she was held awaiting execution in male drag and joined her husband in France where he entered into military service upon exile, eventually returning to Scotland after discovering she was pregnant despite clear and present danger because she evidently couldn’t bear the through of having/raising a child anywhere else.

**Quotes**

The Duchess of Richmond’s Ball is probably the most famous party in all of human history. What did the Duke of Wellington have to say about it? *I’ve never seen so many ugly hats in my life.*

F---ing. Legend.

**Sport**
La Vecchia Signora “the old lady” is one of the nick-names of Juventus Turin.

The Scottish Rugby Union really does provide super-easy access to information and statistics at all levels of the game on their official website: scottishrugby.org

Tourism
Charles Bridge in Prague is the one you have seen on every city postcard with a panorama and not just like … the Astronomical Clock or a picture of Kafka. There is actually a statistically good chance you have been here, dear reader: Prague is the fourth most visited European city by Americans and is number one among German tourists.

353 is the country calling code for Ireland.

Misc. Culture
Talk to FRANK is an addiction prevention and intervention programme in the UK. Its effectivity is widely questioned.

FGM stands for Female Genital Mutilation which is (sadly) still practiced in Africa, Asia and the Middle East as well as diasporic communities in the west as an extension of gender inequality/an attempt to control women’s sexuality. The practice is pre-Islamic and not mentioned in the Quran though many consider it to be a religious requirement. So, you guys know that I try to view everything in terms of cultural relativism but coming from a background that has brought me into contact with a lot of young women forced into such, let me be absolutely clear that this practice is INCREDIBLY DANGEROUS FOR WOMEN AND IN CONFLICT WITH INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS.

Soundtrack
The song Mary sings to Georgie to help her to go sleep (and alternatively to Marie to reassure her) is The Pretenders’ ‘I’ll Stand By You’ which you know if from your own mum singing it to you when you were small and/or from quite possibly every made-for-TV-movie to explore that particular character dynamic.

The song Marie begins to sing is The Fratellis’ ‘Chelsea Dagger’ which really checks all the H+S boxes: Scottish band, text about heroin addiction, played at Celtic Park, Stamford Bridge and inexplicably Allianz Stadium ...

I haven’t said this in a while largely because I can’t decide if it comes off as desperate or simply redundant, but comments and kudos are appreciated more than I can possibly express and I’d love to know if the chapter left you with any thoughts at all. Or we could talk sport. Whatev. <3 You know I love you. Cheers, Tav.

Up Next: Fair is foul, and foul is fair …
The Summary Execution (Pt. 1)

Chapter Summary

The City of Liverpool celebrates the fall of a tyrant as new factions form. Hewlett arrives at a plausible explanation for his father's death, all but promising an eye for an eye before making his exit. Judge Woodhull manipulates Anna and Aberdeen to his own ends. Washington privately contends with the ethical dilemma of what he is prepared to ask. Simcoe sits down with his enemies and His Excellency to discuss terms. Two lads who saw their futures destroyed by the events of the Arnold Investigation conspire to strike back.

Chapter Notes

I know what you are asking yourself: Didn’t I read this chapter? Well, yes and no – but mostly no. To judge from the comments which I received on my first (failed) attempt, I was not at all on the same page as my audience, who I had focusing solely on the first scene rather than, you know – the big huge one where all plotlines great and small came together … which itself had absolutely no effect on anyone. Hot damn.

Sooo, I went through all the stages of fanfiction-grief ( “I mean it is only two people who had anything to say … maybe someone else might … okay no.” – “I’ve completely failed as a storyteller.” – “I should delete this entire fic for the problem must be systematic and therefore too late to fix.” – “Maybe my problem was keeping this in a single POV, for my ONLY strength is saying the same damn thing over and over again in different mouths ...”) … and the final of these conclusions (i.e. the only one I could work something out of) is what I am now trying to offer in attempt at amends.

Kind of.

In truth, I may have over-corrected by bringing in some individual character plots I’d first intended to focus on after setting the whole mess we’ve made so far on the table and giving Simcoe and Abe an ultimatum -

But we don’t get that here. Maybe next time. Here, we get more from Hewlett, Judge Woodhull, Washington and Cicero plus a bit of the long-since-deleted-and-redone Simcoe scene you all hated and the Sam one at least two people loved more than I might have ever hoped for or realistically anticipated.

But first! Big shout out and thank you to Reinette and Mimi for their comments which (though sweet and kind-natured, to be sure) made clear the ways in which I failed them and the rest of the audience – it is thanks to them that I found the will to return from the profound embarrassment of that which is lost, and, additionally, thanks to them that you are now getting something “better”.

Want something truly better than my hands could ever produce though? Kay kay. Mimi’s A Million Dreams is gorgeous, glorious and sexy as hell and Reinette’s A Season at Bath may be one of the best (true!) love stories ever told! Check them out!
 … and, not to logroll, but if you were ever wondering if yours truly could write a love story if I really set my pretty little mind to it (the answer is ‘no’) or if you were just wondering why I, TURN’s foremost negative-Asian-stereotype (I’m assuming, I may well have since been bested by someone I’ve never heard of in the far-more-beloved Ben/Wash-hashtag-anal-fisting-first-time-non-con-Hamilton-reference branch of the fandom … actually that is quite likely the case given the relative unlikelihood of my being the ‘foremost’ anything ;) who anyway still randomly breaks into hives remembering points dropped on an exam back at uni was otherwise doing with myself when there were corrections that clearly needed to be made here – well! I wrote a 30k-word Arthur Wellesley / Kitty Pakenham modern romance, set at some unspecified future date along this timeline. It is called The Merry Wives of Wellington and it, well … it exists.

Anyway, begging your forgiveness for the original post and for the long delay, here is the remix. As always, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Liverpool, Friday Evening

He had been ordered to attend hours before he had been extended an invitation from the family proper through the proxy of his good wife.

As a retired officer, the admiral spent his days attending funerals for fallen servicemen, often in situations where there was no guarantee of a final salute by a firing squad. After his third closed casket, he had ceased asking after certain details. Most of these men were former members of the arm force who died well after their duty by their own hand, addiction, depression or some combination thereof. The others, the active, had made sacrifices of themselves that went understated for reasons of politics he supposed himself not to be privy to, but then, he did not ask.

Often, he found himself alone in a church for a widow, a child, a mother, his uniformed presence an indication that they were permitted to grieve, to mourn and honour the memory of who this man had been before having given himself to the military for four years and three months and having service take the remained from him, be it on the front line or the home front. Samuel Graves did not mind wearing his uniform to honour the fallen and the institution itself, as a retired officer, he volunteered to do so.

There were days, however, when he wished he had instead taken up golf or fly-fishing to fill the excess of time filling days that age instructed were numbered.

Liverpool Town Hall was -in stark contrast to quite country churchyards he frequented in a similar function- an impressive, imposing and altogether flamboyant eighteenth-century structure, a fitting place for the Tarletons to flaunt their wealth, connections and relative local autonomy, rather than and relative to the show of sorrow they had otherwise spent a week planning to stage within these walls. Samuel wondered if the atmosphere would have been sombre rather than celebratory had the family just buried their son, but looking down at his feet as his wife began to speak to their host, he could not help but to suppose the location was more definitive to the scheduled event than any of those leading up to it. One of the countless bearers of the Tarleton name to hold public office had given the city its words and arms as tiled into the vestibule floor: Deus Nobis Haec Otia Fecit,
Samuel read, *God has given to us this leisure.*

So long as one was borrowing from antiquity, God, Samuel supposed, favoured the bold, and the Tarletons were certainly an example that might prove the rule. The evening as planned was nothing more than a reminder for all present as to with whom power rested regardless of here it was currently vested. Their hostess took a second glass of champagne from the waiter who approached their party with a tray, twirling it and sharing its sparkle in her dark eyes, she made a comment that it was lucky they three had something to toast to - it had, after all, been too late to cancel on catering to say nothing of the venue.

Samuel worried that his and his wife’s presence here would indicate intent in kind - but then, he was wearing his white dress uniform and his orders had never been rescinded. He was here to express his condolences for the fallen to his family, nothing more. Margaret, it seemed, had every intention of reminding the boy’s mother how very easily she might herself fall into the pits of hell. Modern diplomacy, Samuel had always considered, was a women’s sport.

“When do you think it appropriate that you continue to don the robe and chain of your late husband’s office?” his wife asked the former first lady in sugared tones. Jane, quite like Margaret herself, was in actuality dressed as though she intended to spend the evening at the opera, something Samuel personally understood as the civilian equivalent of Kevlar. He wondered at how quickly women could shift form cordial to combatant without any apparent altercation, at how keen they all seemed to be test their arms at every occasion.

In context – both specific to theirs and that owing to general history – when a mutual enemy had been defeated, former allies tended to converse and apply themselves to that vacant seat in one another’s respective spectrums. He supposed allowing the two to immediately reignite an old, existing rivalry was preferable to the alternative of openly acknowledging the reason the party was proceeding as planned.

“Do you imagine power can, by its nature, ever truly trade hands?” the hostess returned dryly with a charming yet completely ingenuine smile all of her many children had either inherited or adapted within the course of their upbringing.

“I find philosophy is wasted on the idle, dearest Jane,” Samuel’s wife countered.

“My sweet Margaret, we are of the same mind, we needn’t waste time debating the same questions that now occupy the princes of Scotland here in the free cities. Who holds power? Simple,” she laughed, “whomever commands the largest standing army.”

There is was.

So, it would come to blows. Samuel inhaled sharply as he heard himself evoked. “My husband is an admiral with fleet just outside the harbour,” Margaret bragged.

This was not true in itself.

It returned him to a conflict he had known her to have had with the wife of another senior officer long after the ten weeks in which he waged his own war over supply logistics with her husband Gates while they were meant to be fighting the Argentines over a couple of colonists on an archipelago economically dependent on seabird droppings. Margaret often spoke in this way when he wore his uniform to his mild embarrassment. When Samuel opened his mouth to offer a correction, she returned to the present in a threat she did not bother to veil behind past achievements. “My niece now controls your ports. Your husband is in the ground and your children largely reside abroad -”
“My salary is paid by FIFA,” Jane Tarleton cut her off dismissively. “Tell me … how long do you think it would take your husband to receive sanction to open fire should I give my troops a signal – hours? Days? Don’t make threats you cannot personally see carried out.”

Samuel Graves did not himself follow sport and perhaps as such had initially understood the role the woman played as a fan liaison to be purely honorific. Perhaps, in some (when not most) sporting cities, it would have been, but Mrs Tarleton had somehow managed to transform her diplomatic post into a political appointment. He knew her to regularly take meetings with the current Lord Mayor, scenes evoked a certain nostalgia for apathetical wit of Thatcher-era television in Samuel whenever he tried to reconstruct them from his wife and godson’s approximation of how the long-acting liaison had convinced yet another bumbling but bull-headed publicly elected municipal politician to turn a blind eye to acts of semi-organised criminal activity pretending to have something to do with club support when these played so well into the city budget that his predecessor, the late John Tarleton, had established during his storied tenure.

Jane herself liked to brag that, combined with "the club across the street", Everton FC accounted for fully twelve percent of the City of Liverpool's annual income, something that Margaret was fond of chiding when and wherever this came up that such was likely demonstratively true in the same sense that the combined populations of the Duchy of Lichtenstein and the People's Republic of China boasted a fourth of the world's total population; and between them, this came up often.

The two women had first come into contact when football had brought continental fashion to the city by way of “that other team” (whose name Samuel to this day did not know or could not remember had it ever been spoken in his company), quickly adopted by the innovative and entrepreneurial Everton “firm” upon discovering that they were far less likely to be patted down for weapons in Italian wool suits than they were in the German track-sort favoured by rivals in Manchester and London. Margaret had been assigned the article by Vogue where she had beaten out thousands of other highly-driven, motivated, single-minded young women for an unpaid internship that she, as a daughter of a southern, upper-middle class family whose primary expenditure seemed to be producing daughters whom they compelled to pursue comparatively low earning qualifications that came with high regard, could afford to take.

In principle, she could not afford not to.

Her entire identity as an independent intellectual, a second-wave feminist espousing the liberal ideology of her peers and predecessors depended entirely on her ability to draw attention to inequality by proving she was better than everyone else.

With the benefit of the comparative cost of living in a post-industrial port town heavily reliant on foreign investment, football-tourism, and the esteem they owed elusively to the recent assignation of a local musician, upper-middle-class Margaret with her prestigious degree from an equally prestigious institution that came along with disproportionate student debt her family had accrued in sending her to a famous school could suddenly live like a princess without earning a cent. The extent of her privilege had likely had not occurred to her at the time, nor had it since. That she had worked hard to achieve her present heights was of no question – she was now the editor-in-chief of the fashion magazine that had given her first assignment to her, she had thousands of talented your writers vying for the unpaid work they could cite on future CVs – but she continued to have no concept of the typical struggles associated with this model. Sometimes Samuel, who had risen from the working class, resented this in her. Margaret’s biggest challenge in penning her first feature had been conducting a series of interviews with the young but already-seasoned fan liaison whose drive seemed to be in showcasing her ability to out-dress out-of-towners, perhaps in a silent indication of her hooligan ties - the “standing army” of which she now spoke.
Jane (then Parker) - a native Evertonian in ways that extended her postcode - was the daughter of a mid-century vice-captain of the team that took its name from the quarter, a club steward who upon retiring from the game had gone on to coach the second team and had twice been appointed interim manager at an end of season relegation scuffle through which he had kept the ship afloat, which combined had left his daughter, by her own account, with a limited field of employment options: she could have either tried to become a singer, gone on to work for the club in a non-sporting capacity, or have married herself to a rising star who had come through the youth academy and put out a series of fitness videos between birthing four sons (one who would hypothetically go on to wear the England shirt, and three who would get contracts at big clubs thanks to this brother’s name only to sit on the bench for half a season before being banished to the United States where the sport was called “soccer” and no one had so much as heard of the family star to begin with.)

Jane had taken the second option, though, Samuel supposed, the third had befallen her despite a marriage to a banker’s son and spectator, who, despite his enormous financial success, she seemed to have always consider beneath her station.

As it worked out that her children - excepting Banastre who had no mind for such ventures - had followed their father into business rather than hers into the beautiful game, she was likely growing anxious for one of them to in turn take his “vacant” spot in local office to ensure legislation favourable to their commercial endeavours, herself acting as an unofficial queen-regent until such time. For reasons Samuel had never quite been able to work out, this was all ‘anti-feminist’ and thus made Jane ‘an enemy of progress.’

Margaret, who by calculations she had come to by paying a fee to the Mormon-run Ancestry-dot-com believed herself to be a member or the aristocracy and, as such, officially saw politics as a game for fools, seemed to still enjoy conversations (as much as she could be said to “enjoy” anything in this life) with this woman, conversations that remained reflective of the communication that defined their initial encounter: Margaret’s rude, accusatory and excessive questions met with Jane’s chipper vitriol and extensive vocabulary, never confirming nor denying any aspect of that which was addressed but winking with words that acknowledged a certain familiarity with the subject. But then, there were some things that ought not to be said in plain English. Samuel cleared his through to remind them of that. He doubted he was heard.

“Christ, how I’ve ever missed you,” his wife said as she handed her glass to him, moving to embrace the other woman.

“Mutual, darling,” her ladyship returned as kisses were exchanged in a quick succession of turning cheeks. “And naturally yourself as well, Admiral.”

Margaret smiled at this address; Samuel did his best not to frown. “My sincerest condolences to yourself and your family, my lady,” he said, electing to clink the champagne glass she still held with the one Margaret had handed him moments before rather than take the hand Tarleton extended, palm down, expecting it to be kissed. “I myself know too well the stress of inaccurate dispatches from across the Atlantic, it pains me to know that your good family has been made to suffer such news in the past week. To your son,” he suggested, “to his safe and schnell return to our shores.”

“Banastre? Hardly! As his alleged death convinced his siblings to pool together to pay off his existing debt, I shouldn’t expect to see him for months, until such time as he imagines the matter has been forgotten. To having something to toast to tonight,” the hostess answered him. “To your niece and her coup.”

Samuel swallowed without taking a sip. He supposed these words were spoken in an attempt to
flatter Margaret which they well would have had Elizabeth’s sudden ascension failed to invite whispers of accusation. His wife retook her glass. “To Effie,” she offered unconvincingly to a smile that might have been warm if not for the sentiment behind it. “Oh, Samuel,” Margaret shifted before her sometimes-friend could again speak, making a show of glancing over Jane’s shoulder, “Is that young Captain Nelson? We simply must say hello, you’ll excuse us, won’t you, my sweet? We’ll catch up later after we’ve made the rounds.” The two exchanged empty pleasantries according to custom before taking their part.

“Hor -” Samuel started as he and his wife approached the bar, raising his arm along with his voice, allowing Margaret’s elbow the splendid target of his ribcage which she hit with deadly procession.

“Ouch! What was that for?” he winced.

“Good heavens!” Margaret scoffed. “You might know me better by this point to think that I’d willingly initiate a conversation, however banal, with another pompous young man seeking praise and approval for his military achievements when I well suspect that these next few weeks are certain to contain that sort in excess. I’m already suffering the headache,” she claimed as she continued to the bar all the same, acknowledging Nelson with little more than a nod and ordering herself a brandy to take the edge off the encounter with “her ladyship”, however prepared she herself had been to light the same funeral pyre prior to their departure earlier in the afternoon.

News had broken that same Friday morning that Lord Edmund Hewlett had died due to natural causes, surrounded by his family and peers in the home he kept in Edinburgh. For the first four hours, the media and therefore the news-consuming public had expressed disappointment and dismay that the newly-risen (American) Countess of March and Kinnara would not be traveling with her husband to his father’s funeral as she did not have a valid passport and the Crown (who had afforded Anna Hewlett her new title by bestowing the Earldom upon her husband on his wedding day in accordance to custom) could exercise no further jurisdiction that would allow for exception. Anna had not applied for British citizenship, something, once known, that immediately lent itself to a debate over Scottish sovereignty, that immediately lead to a discussion over Brexit - for the world was easier to understand in the context of buzzwords that not even “experts” understood.

Being that it was a bank holiday, market speculation did not surround His Highness’ considerable commercial assets and expenditures until midday when pundits had grown weary of debating a fully imagined inflation rate (should the referendum pass) and how (should the referendum pass) the Scottish Pound would be affected and if they, in turn, should hold another referendum of their own.

After this, the BBC announced that the late Hewlett had been under investigation for illegal speculation and while Police Scotland held a press conference to explain that the case was still ongoing, Duchess of Hamilton announced in a separate statement that in light of the accusations brought against her late father, neither she nor her siblings were seeking a leadership position on the board, rather, the principle acting shareholder would take on that responsibility.

A shortlist of options for the vacant CEO position had been drafted, something that prompted Nate Silver of FiveThirtyEight to predict that Samuel’s godson, John Graves Simcoe, was the most likely candidate for the takeover, perhaps in response to an op-ed John had written years before against the man’s famed (but faulty) statistical model. Several others were then published and widely shared in the way that news containing numbers often was – the takeaway being that John’s own side-work in statistical analysis seemed to have lead him to predict in a no-steaks-attached text exchange with the new Earl that Leicester City, whom bookies had afforded five-thousand-to-one-odds of winning the league, were certain to do just that.
John had never been a betting man. Samuel was confused both that he and the younger Edmund Hewlett exchanged in such data-driven speculation, that their conclusions were seemingly so off and that this was all for some reason accessible online.

Then, the public was informed that John’s former fiancée, Margaret’s niece Elizabeth Gwillim, owner and editor of The Daily Mail, was now the principle acting shareholder, the Chairman of the Board to whom John would be made to answer.

Then, Margaret received a call from Jane who might have found this all to be fabulous news were it not for the fact that one of her granddaughters in whose interests Effie was evidently now expected to act was so convinced that her sudden fortune had been the end of illicit means.

Samuel suspected the same.

Margaret was silent on the matter itself but grew anxious with every hour that passed in which she had been unable to reach her niece.

Then, his wife had suddenly very little to say on the subject itself save for, “all the same, I am glad he is dead.”

Samuel was too, in fewer words.

The Tarletons and the people who liked to be in the vicinity of their wealth and influence had decided to turn this loss of a public figure into an excuse for a party, seemingly unbothered by the message it might otherwise send.

Then, fortune favoured the bold.

Approaching the bar, Samuel found himself force to converse with a number of other naval officers who were not here on order, who still held commands and seemed to hold many of the late mayor’s politics and a limited concept of the means to an end in this realm. At the bar, other Liverpudlian entrepreneurs were less illusioned and far less coy about expressing their opinions as to what was truly going on at this wake that was not.

“Riggs, the point you are missing is the coup comes on the back of promises that can’t possibly be met. It doesn’t serve the city to come out on top, most of the Tarletons are satisfied with the fact that the people can see the mountain’s peak. The position Banastre’s bastards hold puts us all at the risk that he’ll try to transfer the skills that must certainly have played into negotiation into a government post. Were only that we were here to toast to his demise! If Jane is at all pragmatic, she’ll forced her daughter’s husband to divide the gains of their recent L4 landgrab between her remaining sons that at the very least one of them can stand to challenge Banastre in the coming by-elections before he is handed a bloody peerage.”

“Why precisely in the hours after the colonel’s alleged death were his siblings in sudden negotiation with FSG over the housing around Anfield?” the other of the local oligarchs inquired.

“I’m not object to the projected effects of limited gentrification so long as we are not being asked to trade our Bostonian overloads for the legitimisation of a local aristocracy, only -”

“Rumour has it that this is all to do with the disappearance of that American senator.”

“Speculation.”

“Until the report is released.”

“The report will be four hundred pages and public perception will be entirely dictated by
whichever politician is the quickest to tweet out a summary.”

“Let’s just hope that hypothetical politician isn’t Tarleton, Sir Banastre, Lord Liverpool – who knows where that man’s ambitions rest and where that would leave our taxation and public funding apparatus.”

“Well it wouldn’t be, would it?” Riggs said, making a point to further extend the ring and pinkie fingers on his right hand from the wine glass his other fingers held.

Samuel, who had no mind for politics but fully no understanding of men who would mock a sailor or soldier for wounds received in combat took the glass from the banker’s loosened hold and stated plainly, “I think you are at your limit. Call your driver. Call a taxi service. It is about time you and your friend went home.” He was a large and therefore imposing man with a voice as deep as any ocean he ever sailed. The two left without attempting to offer a word in their defence (which he apricated) or an apology (which he most surely did not.)

Seeing that Margaret had been seized upon by a number of admirers (whom she sought to alienate by speaking in French to a young man he would later find out was moving from Turin to nearby Manchester - a reality that would prove more memorable in a year’s time than the abduction of an American senator, the Royal Wedding ending in bloodshed, the death of Lord Edmund and the hostile seizure of his assets, Tarleton’s rise to power or any of the other fates that had been sealed by the manner in which American intelligence had mishandled events) Samuel felt that nothing good could come of interrupting her mid-denunciation and decided to have a drink.

He stumbled around his own order, feeling it uncouth to have requested a scotch on the rocks – suddenly, self-consciously, unable to name another sort of liquor - when he was informed that the house only stocked Irish whiskey, which he graciously accepted, offering the young man a handsome tip on a drink that had cost him nothing.

Turning to face the ballroom as he took a sip, he could not help but to smile. He and Margaret had not met in this room exactly, but they had found one another here at another uncomfortable Tarleton family function; uncomfortable, at least, for the two of them wardrobe wise. Since accepting an administrative command that kept him in England, on desk duty, whilst he prepared to take a stand in court on behalf of his godson, then-rear-admiral Samuel Graves had grown rather fat on account of all of the sitting he had been doing since. His dress uniform had not quite fit as it should when he again tried to don it to wear to a wedding. He sat down, intending only to unbutton the top of his trousers, when - by coincidence - a younger woman he had met only once before at on open day at the school his godson and her niece attended, happened upon the table, threw herself down in the chair beside him, complaining that she had chosen the wrong heels for dancing, that her feet hurt, and asking if he was he particularly object to her company.

He was not.

By the end of the evening, after exchanging mutual frustrations with one another to riotous, shared laughter, he had her sore feet behind her head and she had his snug trousers fully unzipped and laying on the bedroom floor beside his jacket and her dress. They were married within months.

“Don’t you dare seek to scold me for taking some enjoyment from the occasion,” Margaret whispered when music and the promise of other entertainment had again robbed them of the white noise of extended company, seeing his smile.

“Do you remember the last time we were in this room?” Samuel asked.

What Margaret remembered of the evening was the conversation they had had about the younger
Edmund Hewlett’s absence from the event. One of the Lord Mayor’s many children was married or married off and Samuel had been invited because his godson had something of a friendship with two of the younger Tarleton sons. He had in fact gone hoping to meet the younger Edmund Hewlett, having heard he had recovered enough to represent his family at the event, hoping he could convince him - should he in fact have made a return to health - to help him continue with the charges they two had meant to bring against the man’s father before the young Edmund’s sudden stroke had robbed the prosecution of its best witness.

Over the course of their courtship, the matter came up between he and Margaret, who had begged him not to pursue the matter – not because her orphaned niece was a primary shareholder in the family’s commercial enterprises but rather because Elizabeth was an orphan specifically because of charges Margaret’s late brother-in-law had been prepared to make against the Hewletts.

Samuel Graves had long wished he had done more, done something, at least to challenge John Tarleton’s gamble that someday their children would all grow up and the matters and murders that had come to bind them would then be addressed.

“And now he’s dead,” he said, trying not to assign either credit or blame. “Effie is in complete control of the family’s fortune, and the proud City of Liverpool is falling over itself to flatter you knowing its immediate future is so reliant on your niece’s whims.”

“Flatter me …” Margaret seemed to challenge.

“Surrender, perhaps, without showing a white flag.”

“Surrender?” she spat, “Jane’s won. I’ve won. We’ve all lived at least a day longer than a man who might be singlehandedly responsible for the opioid epidemic, who nearly ushered in a recession, who abused the children we loved as the cost of doing business with his brother,” she shifted, explaining, “This, all this here, is about how the spoils might be divided. Effie’s fifty-plus-one is only in name, specifically, in the name of Ban’s infant daughters which makes it unlikely she’ll do anything irresponsible in her role as the board’s chairman. When Effie called me, John had just asked her to publish the papers the Mail’s solicitors cautioned her against printing last week. Now she has two concerns, not to mention two young children dependent on her judgement which is caught between questions of money and morality.

“Effie believes that John – who, I’ll have you know Sam,” she said, raising her voice slightly, “is doing everything within his ability to make matters more complicated for all those involved -”

This was not an uncommon accusation. Margaret would have said the same with equal volume and velocity had he been unable to decide at a restaurant when she and the rest of their party were ready or order. “What are you accusing him of exactly?” he demanded.

Margaret rolled her eyes. “To the surprise of exactly no one who ever came into his company, he managed to get himself into another physical altercation that might have just as easily been sorted with words before everything could be allowed to so unravel.”

“With Tarleton?” Samuel guessed.

“No, weeks ago, Sam – with Senator Arnold,” Margaret said as though such should be taken as obvious, “who thank God isn’t pressing charges, though, the State Department might. John confessed. He confessed specifically in an attempt to spare the wife of one of the men who held the senator captive, who the FBI was would have let walk had he only agreed to wear a wire.”

“I don’t understand, where exactly does this leave our children?”
“With some strange bedfellows, in John’s case, in the literal sense,” she snorted. Samuel Graves looked down at his emptied glass, wondering if it was entirely wise to seek the next which he now felt was a need’s must.

Albany, Eighteen Hours Prior

“Tell her – exactly- what you just old me,” Edmund Hewlett commanded of the man in harsh tones which alone ought to have afforded him more respect than he felt he was being shown.

Charles Cornwallis had evidently fled back to the capitol when he had been handed the same dispatch and had sent two members of his delegation to deliver the news while he packed and presumably plead with the Foreign Secretary for a favourable reassignment. The man tasked with delivering the report was taller than he was by nearly a head. Hewlett assest by his stance and speech that he was likely a PSO – tasked with making sure men such as himself did not get shot, woefully mistaken that his area of expertise afforded him the ability to address his superiors with any sense of familiarity.

“Your Grace -” he began. Hewlett sneered, resenting the title his monarch had bestowed upon him by virtue of his marriage. He did not feel himself befitting of the empty prestige, but, as he saw no other option than to accept the seat, he quickly reacclimated himself to the standards to which he had been raised.

“Let me see your credentials again, Sir,” Hewlett warned, taking the badge when it was presented. “Holloway?” he read, “I am of Royal Blood and will be addressed with in accordance to my Birth Right. It is Your Highness, and you, Sir, are under no authority that relieves you of respecting a direct order from a Prince of the Realm. Again – tell her what you’ve only just told me,” he commanded.

“She is a member of the press -” Holloway began to protest. That was the point. Hewlett needed his reaction on record and had himself called Elizabeth Gwillim to his side after the initial whispers had been exchanged from where he had spotted her hiding behind a rubbish bin that she had pushed underneath a window, likely having tried to climb it to snoop out what was going on inside.

This, however, in the back lot, was the story she should be pursuing – the reason no doubt that his sisters had sold her exclusive rights to the wedding coverage, hoping to give themselves some time for a cover in case something went wrong – which clearly, it had.

Edna and Eleanor had placed their trust in the wrong man and thus nearly everyone Edmund had come to hold dear was implemented in a crime that only directly benefited a certain social climber. Edmund had some measure of experience in that regard but he had seen John André fall and would ensure the same fate for Banastre Tarleton if he had to physically push him from a ledge.

“And you are no longer a member of the United Kingdom’s delegation to the United States, effective immediately,” he spat at the first officer. “I’ll make sure your badge is returned to the embassy. Leave before you can afford me more offence. Tender your resignation to Cornwallis or I shall have your arrested for insubordination. And your associate ...”
“Rowland, Your Highness,” the other officer, the one who had pulled him from the company of his Best Man and a boy he would now have to remember to recommend in a few years’ time, introduced himself. Hewlett nodded, unsure if he had heard the name before or not, generally being bad with such practices, resenting the reputation he had as such earned as being haughtily and unpersonable back home only slightly less than he feared the possible repercussions of the learning disability that lead to such difficulties becoming public knowledge.

“Rowland,” he continued when the agent did not, “perhaps you might expand for the benefit of Miss Gwillim?”

Hewlett had two reasons for making this request; the first being that he feared his own voice might crack if forced to speak the words himself - something he simply could not have whilst still adjusting to the authority he would need to quickly convince others he was capable of; the second was a more immediate need to test the man’s loyalties, to determine if they could be conscripted to his own ends.

“His Highness’ father and namesake, Lord Edmund - industrialist, entrepreneur and brother to Edward, Duke of Richmond died of natural causes several hours ago while in the company of his extended family and additional members of the aristocracy at a private celebration of the Earl of March and Kinrara’s marriage which those present could not attend in person due to illness or other obligation. No foul play is expected at this point-"

"Officially, at least,” Hewlett cut him off. “You are dismissed.”

“Your Highness, I apologise but I need to insist -”

“I’ll make the flight,” Hewlett assured him, scoffing, “It is not as though the plane is going to leave without me. Send a car in a half an hour, but first,” he shifted, “find me John Graves Simcoe and former Inspector Tallmadge whose given name momentarily elapses me. In the meantime I need to have a short – private – conversation with Miss Gwillim.”

“And the Countess, Sir?” Rodden or Rowland or Rockwell inquired. Asking again after the name would be embarrassing and risked a press statement he was unwilling to make. Hewlett simply cleared his throat and hoped his stutter made him sound more imposing and important than it made him sound impotent.

“Ah … My wife is currently in a deposition involving a young woman who was held at knifepoint twice in the same day whom the Americans, for reasons I don’t admit to understanding, seem to want to treat as a suspect. I won’t rob this young woman of legal counsel. I’ll make sure my wife gets word of my departure. She cannot follow - as I am but certain you have already been made aware - for she has neither a passport not the British citizenship that would permit me any means of expediting the necessary paperwork. Now,” he stiffened. “You’ll allow me a few moments of privacy while I collect my private thoughts in the company and with the compassion of an old family friend whilst you give word to the two men I’ve asked to see prior to my return to Scotland. This is an order, not a suggestion or request.”

The man lowered himself slightly as though he meant to bow. “I have no need of further formalities; it wastes too much time,” Hewlett admonished him. “Only do as I have ordained, Sir.”

When the man was out of earshot he turned back to a bewildered Effie Gwillim who had evidently never seen this side to him and whispered, “There is your headline and the first two paragraphs of the article which you have my full permission to write, plus the answer - if you were giving the question of why my family sent you here -what with them knowing that I was a suspect in a crime I had no cause to commit, when risking something like that coming to light is against their every
interest – ever came to cross your mind.”

“I –” Effie began. Hewlett had neither time nor care to listen.

“And this,” he warned, “is off the record. My father was murdered but I cannot prove it without seeming complicit,” he cursed. “You, however, may have cause of your own to do so, to comply with that which I request, for as I understand, his death has made you the de facto Chairmen of the Board overseeing his various corporate expenditures.”

“Eddie, I had no -” she started anew, reaching for his arm. Hewlett had neither time nor care to listen.

Perhaps it had been an error of judgement to indicate to a new subordinate that he needed to collect himself, that he needed comfort.

In all truth, he had never been in possession of such clarity.

“Of course, you didn’t,” he spat. “Why then would you be here when it is in the immediate interest of your newspaper for you to be across the pond where you could hold my little brother and sister while they cry for their father and rewrite the conversation as ‘a source close to’? Furthermore, if this were to be investigated, you have -at least on paper - the most to gain from my father’s passing and your absence would be viewed as suspiciously as your presence. Ah … you’ll forgive me my assumptions,” he swallowed, trying to regain himself, “it is not an insult when I accuse you of ambition – ambition in a purely professional capacity, of course. No, no – I have no reason to think you had a hand in this though your name may well have been evoked as justification, which is why I am relying on you to help me set the record straight before someone we both care about gets landed with the blame.”

Effie nodded that she understood who was meant.

Hewlett continued, still speaking in hushed tones, “Last night Colonel Banastre Tarleton gave myself, my wife, John,” he emphasised, hoping to evoke the same sympathy, “Inspector Tallmadge, Mary and Abraham Woodhull, Abigail Ingram and Caleb Brewster an account of how he managed to murder my uncle. My uncle, not my father.

“Out of guilt,” he admitted, “or perhaps pity, I took him at his word. The problem is, this is not the only matter that was discussed at our roundtable and there was another witness, a bartender,” he recalled, thinking aloud, “find him, pay him for a statement, enough keep him from speaking to any other media outlet should he get the idea to do so. I’ll see that you are reimbursed. Alas,” Hewlett returned, “that isn’t our biggest problem: Absent of my knowledge, this man Brewster reported at least some of what was said to the FBI, which I am assuming is why Tarleton was already questioned once today in relation to a different crime.

“Effie,” he reiterated, “Ban didn’t kill my uncle, he killed my father. He put himself in a personal and professional situation that allowed him to disappear into the backcountry of the southern States for a few days – to fake his own death and thereby force a series of financial repercussions that directly favour him, his line, his city and therefore his family’s unofficial seat whilst throwing all of the suspicion on yourself, on my sisters, everyone who had this misfortune of listening to him last night and heaven only knows who else! He was never an ally! He was never a friend! But having heard his false confession, I cannot present my suspicions to anyone without having them reflected back upon my person and a number of innocent bystanders to all of this, your ex included.”

“Edmund … I – I know,” Effie Gwillim swallowed. “I know about the research and I know what
this must *seem* like to someone who has been put through such an experiment, but you don’t know Ban like I do, he would never -"

Did she truly mean to suggest his outrage was related to André’s blasted study? It was preposterous! His father was dead – who was she to question his natural anger around that fact, to suggest he lacked necessary perspective?

“Don’t I?” Hewlett demanded. “John André and his failed project is neither here nor there. Defend Ban to yourself all you want but come up with evidence that would force Hamilton to hold him in custody all the same. The man exploited his knowledge of a family tragedy to gain my sister’s trust and betrayed it in a way that helps *him* while implementing everyone else. Do you think this is justice?” he sneered. “HMRC was already in the process of building a case against my father and now it will be you and I and everyone we mutually care about answering for these crimes which Banastre would not have even known about had I not …” he stopped. Nearly everything Tarleton knew he had learned from his own mouth; from the confession he had given to Anna’s mother to earn her trust while raising Inspector Tallmadge’s suspicions. He brother had been arrested thanks to the same tape and his sister had once again been placed once at Inspector Ferguson’s mercy.

The fault, he realised, was shared.

He could not blame Tarleton for taking an opportunity that presented itself when he knew the younger man to have been raised to that expectation.

He could, however, see to it that his cruel ambitions came to naught.

“Effie,” he shook his head. It was better he was open with her about his own involvement lest she find out on her own and again come to the wrong conclusion.

“Edmund?” she answered.

“This is what happened, from the beginning. John … *your* John,” he stressed, though he knew his sometimes-friend’s heart belonged to someone else, “got into an argument with Senator Arnold that got out of hand. After I got off the phone with you a few weeks ago, the day after the senator’s disappearance, I was arrested and treated as a prime suspect in the original inquiry, a position I … courted, I’m ashamed to say,” he admitted, adding quickly, “both because it removed some suspicion from John and because it put me into lose contact with a man named Lafayette who, in service to his government’s foreign office, fed me insider trader information about businesses expected to benefit from the market disruption caused by the kidnapping of a high-profile government official - something I enticed John to helping me act on out of desperation.

“I was broke at the time of the disappearance, having promised what little I had left in my personal accounts to Anna in exchange for her hand and the residency status it would automatically afford me back before I knew that I had cause to question why my embassy was denying my request for an extension. All the same, you know I’m not my father’s heir. I spent my entire trust fund as a teenager trying to save my family from ruin – I don’t profit in any way from his death. Edna, Eleanor, and Eugene would have done except the twins have already signed away their rights to what was theirs and, without their support and subordinacy, Edna cannot hope to hold any direct power on the board. It is understandable, their reluctance, I mean,” he gave, “Eugene was arrested and mistreated by the feds nearly instantaneously upon my confession which lead them to find that he had in turn, purchase serval New York properties of recent … he was hospitalized, he missed the birth of his son, and given the trauma of that day and even without it I am more than sympathetic to his apparent desire to shed any ties to either his or Fabienne’s family names.

“I think Ellie is still half-in-love with Ban, that or her making his bastard daughters her heirs was
part of an agreement between the two, anyway, the result is the same: she thought him dead, signed over her stock, and, being that his children are both minors set you up to represent their interest on the board, a position you might well have found yourself taking an active role in as none of this would have gone into effect with my father alive. But he is dead. And Ban clearly knew he was going to die, despite, or, perhaps, explaining his misdirection. He intended it. Can’t you see that?” Hewlett begged.

Effie only looked upon him with pity. She tried to hug him; he pushed her back with more force than intended.

“Maybe not,” he conceded, “Probably not because that is just the way a conversation with Ban Tarleton goes, ‘innit? He has had John blaming himself for every ill ever committed by or against a member of my family since last they spoke and initially I assumed it was rooted in the idea that we … contributed to a line of inquiry into his possible involvement in Arnold’s disappearance, when he … when we …,” he stopped, for the past day had relieved there to be no blood on his hands.  “But as the record has since shown, he is nothing more than a con man like everyone else in his parasitic family except Ban crosses lines I sincerely doubt his brothers and sisters would so much as approach. His young ward went missing and he manipulated that near-tragedy into getting us all to sit down at the same table, entrust him with a ransom and agree to the righteousness of regicide – perhaps knowing that there was a mole among us and that such would make its way onto police record. He’s a monster,” Hewlett hardened, warning, “But so am I. If he ever so much as sets foot in Scotland again I’ll have him killed after making him truly suffer the loss of all that he loves. And I’ll have eyes everywhere for I have every intention of forcing my uncle to abdicate his holdings to me immediately upon my return.

Effie looked stunned. Hewlett had neither time nor care for the moral argument he expected she thought herself somehow poised to deliver.

“Work with Tallmadge,” he instructed, “find some grounds – any - to keep our would-be Lord Darnley under lock and key while I arrange to marry my sister off to a respectable nobleman and put this entire sordid affair behind us.”

“You wouldn’t dare!” Effie Gwillim challenged. Hewlett, though hardly prepared for the responsibility that had been invited upon him, felt an impulse to rise his fist to strike her for her insubordination and might well have done so had he not felt a cautious hand on his shoulder.

Hewlett was relieved when he turned around to find ex-Inspector Tallmadge, rather than John Graves Simcoe and with him an encounter he might himself not survive.

He looked down at his feet, than his shaking hands, feeling ashamed of an action he had nearly taken - an action that went against every ideal he identified with and otherwise aspired to, wondering if perhaps Effie had been right to claim he had met this news under André’s influence, wondering if perhaps the impulse had instead come from something internal he had long suppressed, something he needed and needed others to recognise through another lens.

“I’m sorry … so sorry,” he stuttered, “I don’t know what has come over me.”

“It is shock,” Effie offered. “But Edmund you can’t force -”

Tallmadge held up his hand for her to cease. “It isn’t Tarleton you should be worried about. It is Ferguson. I just got off the phone with him,” he informed them.

“Ferguson …” Hewlett repeated, “Where is Simcoe?”
“His Excellency wanted to speak to him personally,” Tallmadge answered.

“Brilliant,” Hewlett cursed.

“Jordan is with him. He will be alright.”

The statement came as some relief. Hewlett knew that Jordan Akinbode was highly regarded in his field, but without knowing what it meant to be a good lawyer any more than he knew what it meant to be called into an interrogation room with a powerful cabinet member, he took some comfort in the light suggestion that both Tallmadge and himself had long been friends with the same man – that they were, somehow, truly on the same side though their fight had different motivating factors and different ends.

When he spoke, he found his tone had softened. “Effie … all the same, you need to find a way of convincing John to stay in North America. Canada, perhaps - it is a Commonwealth country, he’ll have an easier time of it. When I get home, I have no doubt in my mind that Richard Ferguson will move to bring charges against me after the funeral and I’ll not have John answer to the same. Not after all we’ve been through – all he’s been through just by the virtue of his proximity to me.”

“Patrick,” Effie said.

“What?”

“His real name. It is Patrick. I’m a journalist. I looked into it. When Interpol took over his case from ten years back, Police Scotland made a slight adjustment to -specifically – just to that file as to spare the family from undo threat. His mother was a Murray by birth and his cousin -”

“Christ …” Hewlett followed, “why am I only now learning this? Does Ellie know?”

“I don’t think so,” Effie answered, biting at her bottom lip.

“They mean to kill us all,” Hewlett muttered, returning to Tallmadge. “What did Patrick have to say for himself then?”

“It is not what he said it is who else he said it to,” Tallmadge answered. “He doesn’t believe a word of the confession my former unit has Tarleton giving on tape – that is, he doesn’t believe it to be a confession at all but rather an enticement, arguing that no such crime – the one that no one is officially saying was committed against your father – was in the works until Simcoe reported to Mrs Woodhull the next day how his attempted negotiations went.”

“Can you hold him on those grounds?” Effie asked.

“Tarleton? He’s been cautioned. He sent his solicitor in with Abe Woodhull to assist him in his own interview, likely stalling for time.”

“And John?”

“From what I understand, Ma’am – there isn’t enough evidence.”

“Is there any against Mary?” Hewlett squinted.

Tallmadge swallowed, “It may well all prove circumstantial.” This, as Hewlett understood, was the language used by cops in press conferences, roughly translating to the English expression ‘and how!’
There was so much he needed to ask, but he heard a car pulling up, and immediately recognised it was for him. He had to leave, but he could not let this go. “Effie, please – tell my wife I love her, that I’ll ring her as soon as I land. Tell John to get himself somewhere safe as soon as he has been given liberty to travel, and for the love of God help Tallmadge find something – *anything* – to hold Tarleton, for even if Ferguson found some technicality, I cannot help but to hold him solely responsible for the events leading to my father’s death and therefore cannot ensure his safety should ever again we meet. I wish I didn’t recognise this in myself,” he confessed, adding sadly, “I wish I hadn’t cause to.”

Judge Richard Woodhull fought a smile as he entered the room. Not that the moment gave him much reason for this sudden mirth, but insofar as he was made to witness his own house go up in flames, he took some measure of joy in his temporary ability to make the accursed Smith women choke on its smoke.

Hours prior, Senator Arnold had been found in the garage of his country seat at Whitehall, his son confessing to the crime nearly all of Richard’s other tenants had been accused of at some point – namely, holding an American hero captive against his will. His home itself was likely to depreciate in value as a result, and while he had previously no intention of selling, he had busied his mind for most of the day wondering at its new worth – doing his upmost to detach the crime scene from the memories Whitehall otherwise held: his late wife, the boys he had himself raised, his grandson playing in the garden that his daughter-in-law kept in the long summer months. There would be no tomatoes this year, no cucumbers or cabbages, and if his backhanded appeal amounted to nothing – no Abraham and no Mary.

His son was now in negotiations with Washington himself and - much as Richard would have wished to serve as counsel - his time had been circumvented by a request which, though not altogether outside of his jurisdiction, was an odd ask from someone of his lauded position.

He had agreed instantly, graciously even, hoping that thee two hours in which his time might be better spent in any other room of the police station would buy him, and thereby, his relations, the same back-office understanding with Washington typically achieved with 18-holes, imported whiskey and cigars, and a comment or two expressing doubts he did not in fact hold about climate change, for this was how gentlemen’s agreements were ordinarily approached –

But then, nothing about the day had been remotely ordinary.

All the same, the request of the judge’s time came with the benefit of threatening his former friend William Smith’s ignoble yet suddenly elevated daughter with contempt of court for a final time, and as such Richard could not help but to grin as he did when he greeted her with a goodbye.

“Leave us, Mrs Hewlett,” Richard intentionally misaddressed the young countess. “You cannot be here while I conduct my interview.”

“Judge Woodhull,” Anna smiled, “I’m still licenced to practice law within the State of New York – nothing about my marital status changes that - and Miss Declesias is entitled to legal right to counsel under Article 1 Section 6 of our State Constitution, which explicitly outlines that only *she* has the power to waive council – or would, rather, were she not being held in custody for a criminal offence. As Miss Declesias is in fact a defendant, it is illegal for you to speak to her with regard to *any* offence, however unrelated, without my being present.”
Anna, he noticed, resembled her mother more and more each day, which was both to say that there was no part of her person that was not growing rather opulent, and that her eyes, which had always been quite large, were never downcast the way they were before. He remembered the day she had moved to Whitehall, her conversation limited to sentence fragments that sounded of uncertainty even when using words definitive by their very nature – ‘yes’, ‘no’ – altogether a complete contrast to the confident women who stood before him now, citing a statute he doubted the son he had always assumed would follow in his footsteps was so much as aware of.

Nancy Smith, he knew, was at the end of her career. She would be forced to resign in disgrace over her criminal negligence around former DI Tallmadge’s case files regarding the Arnold Investigation, but Richard had reason to envy the woman to whom he had once been close all the same: her daughter had grown into a woman, whereas his son still conducted himself as though he were a child –

- Abraham could benefit from Anna’s influence and Richard consciously resented her for it.

“Then it is a good thing that is not what I am here to do,” he cleared his throat. “As a favour to the President - the same man who as a freshmen senator blocked my nomination hearing to the USSC following your father’s article,” he could not help but to accuse, “I’ve come to make the witness an offer of full US Citizenship, albeit under the same admonitions of any other applicant – namely, that Miss Declesias is required to pass both a written and oral naturalisation exam which I have been given the authority to administer, which you, Mrs Hewlett, cannot legally be present for as to insure the integrity of the applicant’s answers.”

“Witness?” Aberdeen repeated. “Am I to take this as charges against me are being dropped?”

“Charges against you have been found unwarranted and will not be pursued,” Richard assured the au pair.

Aberdeen shot her lawyer a nervous look and asked, “What about the list? When I went to apply, they told me at INS that it would take between six and eight months before I was given an appointment with an agent, that I would need to bring certified copies of any additional paperwork deemed necessary for my application beyond that which I ‘ave already given, and that if I failed to make this appointment to determine if I am sufficiently qualified to sit the exam, I would need to wait another six to eight months for a next appointment. Why now – that I ‘ave maybe a criminal record, a disqualifier – am I suddenly a priority? I don’t trust this,” she turned to back to Richard. “Anything you ‘ave to ask me will be done with my attorney present.”

He wondered how many times exactly the girl had read over the guidelines and restrictions since deciding to apply.

“You are not facing criminal charges, Aberdeen,” Richard repeated, peeved that she was proving herself a distraction from his objective.

“Is that still the case if I tell you that I’m not signing your damn non-disclosure agreement?” the au pair demanded.

“Aberdeen -” Anna began.

Richard cleared his throat again. “It is,” he assured her, “because the one signed by your friend Miss Shippen was comprehensive enough for the prosecutor to agree to her demands - namely that your immigration be immediately expedited.”

“Bitch sa a bèbè! Bitch sa a bèbè!” Aberdeen began to curse in Creole under her breath. “Am I still
under caution?” she asked, looking between Anna and himself.

“No,” Richard answered her.

“Then the bitch is dumb!” she exclaimed, this time in English. “She shouldn’t ‘ave given up ‘er own rights to speech for a problem that already ‘ad a solution! It is un-American!”

Richard nodded slowly, answering Aberdeen’s concerns in a manner he hoped would equally speak to Anna. “Maybe not. Your current visa is tied to your employment status and it is entirely possible that Thomas won’t long be living with Abraham and Mary as they have both admitted to playing central roles in Senator Arnold’s abduction. Between us, I plan to seek full custody of my grandson and, while I have no complaints regarding the care you provide him - quite the opposite actually - as he’ll be in first grade next year and my day is typically finished prior to his three-PM dismissal, I’ll not have a need to take anyone on full time.”

“You can’t possibly do that to Mary,” Anna hissed as Richard had well anticipated she would, “To Abe, your own son! Or to Thomas, for that matter. The circumstances of these last weeks were outside of anyone’s control and Abe and Mary are great parents.”

“The matter is none of your concern, Mrs Hewlett – and if you find that it should be, perhaps you can go talk to my boy and his soon to be ex-wife about fully cooperating with the FBI and federal prosecutor in hopes of some degree of leniency.”

“Your Honour,” Anna began, her voice so deep and strong it no longer sounded like one belonging to a girl or a man but rather to the beast Richard had watched her hesitate towards all of her life before quite recently embracing and coming to embody altogether, “do you suggest to threaten…”

“Go!” Aberdeen interrupted, equally as fierce. “Go! I’ll make this, then I’ll come ‘elp in any capacity of which I am capable.”

Wide-eyed Anna stuck her chin out in a small show of defiance before letting it double back unto itself, nodding to her client before she fled the room in a fit of rage.

Richard Woodhull, reasonably secured that he had been able to manipulate the new countess into taking a stand for his only surviving son in his absence, returned to the test he had been tasked with.

“If you do this,” Aberdeen said, “what you threaten, someday, maybe not in time to make a difference to little Thomas, but someday - someday I will stand before your bench and force a precedent against something you ‘old so dear that despite your descent it will be the only thing your court is remembered for.”

“Everything that I hold dear is in detention at this station,” Richard gruffly informed her. “Abraham will listen to Anna. He always has. My long-held hostilities to the Smith family aside, I would rather that Anna be available to act as his solicitor than that foppish foreigner he recruited to his cause. Now – Miss Declesias,” he shifted, looking down at the first exam page, “can you tell me who the President of the United States is?”

Aberdeen, for her part, looked positively dejected. Richard frowned. This could not possibly have been so difficult for her. “This again?” Aberdeen complained. “Seriously? Every medical professional ‘as wanted to know the same all day! Barak Obama. Do you want me to name them all in order?”

“No,” Richard answered, “I want you to tell me the name of the Governor of New York.”
John André needed to disappear.

The problem was, the Defence Secretary mused to himself as his eyes struggled to stay on the evaluation that he had already read nearly a hundred times over, the good doctor seemed to have come to the same conclusion as The Pentagon, shortly before he had issued the go-ahead.

Now, hours into reviewing evidence and replaying a conversation about André’s exit that he had had the night prior with a casual lover whom he suspected of wanting something more from him than the occasional, uninhibited meet-up that women in menopause tended to favour, wanting more from him than the series of signatures freeing her from consequence which his boss had since ordered him to collect, George Washington could not remember with which piece of bad news he had first been met: John André had vanished from witness protection; Benedict Arnold had been recovered from a sealed off crime scene he had personally searched; or, events in Great Britain made it politically impossible for Hamilton’s team to hold onto Edmund Hewlett – but it sufficed to say that all of this had weighed heavily upon him when the young Miss Shippen had attempted to take him hostage at gunpoint after using the same weapon to hospitalize the only suspect in the senator’s disappearance whose wellness was at this point paramount.

Robert Rogers might well be his best chance at getting to André, Washington thought as he shifted through the paperwork he had asked for, studying the man’s criminal record – a record, rather of all the times the system had failed him before turning its back on him altogether, as it was now prepared to do.

The same might also be said of the others, the men who might have been heroes had the villain not made his escape, who might never get a chance now that they had been reduced to mere statistics.

The numbers, Dr Martha Dandridge pointed out, indicated that the project had worked precisely as Dr John André had proposed. When faced with fear, with promised defeat, the soccer team “Bye-Week” had banded together to fight the battle that had unexpectedly been brought to their streets and against impossible odds, they and those in their immediate sphere of influence had seen to it that no man was left behind. Effective soldiers had been rendered from the mentally broken – a useful weapon, his president had surmised, on every conceivable front. Should McConnell continue to refuse to bring the motion to the floor for a vote, the research would be implemented in the armed forces via Executive Order. Obama would be well out of office if and when there was any backlash, leaving his successor – Clinton, Sanders, or one of the approximately three-hundred-forty-five Republican candidates who had yet to drop out of the race - to deal with the fall out.

Such, he was told, was simply the way of the world.

Washington himself had no mind for politics. He would be happy to escape the cabinet reshuffle, to retire to his farm far away from the idea that nothing could be accomplished if men were to consult their own ethics. He could not argue with the effectivity of the results, but he questioned if he should even have these numbers in front of him for him to consider, questioning if he might be better off disobeying an order to ensure others could not raise the same questions that presently flooded his mind, if he should simply resign his post rather than continue to carry out orders and was quite ready to make that very call when his own Press Secretary came in to the interrogation room unannounced and told him that Peggy Shippen’s demands had all been met.

“That is a shame,” Washington commented to himself. “There are some people who may well have
John Graves Simcoe understood the reason he had been placed into handcuffs when he saw who else was being charged.

At last, he could not help but to smile to himself, the coward Woodhull was showing his true colours, donning a smartly cut (but ill-fit to his petit frame) dinner jacket, an item, it seemed, he had borrowed from his acting attorney having changed after the wedding back into the drudgery of his daily life, ripped jeans, band shirts, pilled knits and flannels that he likely thought an homage to the grudge scene he was too young to remember and the world would have forgotten had a suicide not made *Smells Like Teen Spirit* a high-school staple. Simcoe imagined the shotgun that might complete the look Woodhull normally went for and shared his amusement with the man in the form of a cruel, lopsided smile. The turncoat took note and straightened his posture as much as he could, his spine was already rigid enough that it did not dare make contact with the padded back of his chair, likely thanks to sharp words from his solicitor.

“O’rite, Simcoe? Fancy meet’n yous e’yer,” Clayton Tarleton commented briefly in his native language upon glancing in his direction, flashing a bright smile that caused Simcoe to question if the higher fluoride content in the waters of the north west was truly safe for human consumption.

Pulling his lips together and back as to mimic better humour and mask a top row of teeth that he was suddenly acutely aware confessed him to a childhood iron deficiency with their comparative shade of soiled linen, he gave a slight nod in greeting, only half-confident he had understood what was said in Scouse, uncertain of what might constitute a proper response.

His own lawyer Jordan Akinbode pulled out a chair for him before taking the fourth seat at the long table in the dimly lit interrogation room, across from Pentagon’s Press Secretary Billy Lee, who continued to make light conversation with the glorified scout whilst his boss, George Washington, read over a pile of paperwork – squinting, either because the reading glasses he looked to have gotten off of a CVS rack were not to his strength (or rather deficit) or because the relative darkness of the room which Simcoe gathered was meant to work as an intimidation was making the task at hand harder than it really needed to be.

Abe Woodhull was plainly terrified, perhaps in anticipation of the legal fee he knew himself to be in the process of accruing. Simcoe imagined the weasel refusing a court appointed defender out of misplaced pride, probably following a row with his esteemed judge of a father, whom young Abraham seemed set on fostering a sense of estrangement with, perhaps in hopes that the right honourable Richard Woodhull would simply forget that the boy was effectively squatting in his stately home, mistaking - based on the boy’s conduct - theirs to be a strictly birthdays-and-holidays bond between father and son.

Simcoe imagined Woodhull panicking when instructed to sign a sworn statement about his
involvement in Arnold’s disappearance rather than the shooting that had taken place at The Irish Pub.

He wondered if his once-lover’s now soon-to-be-ex was perhaps not offered the same no-fault non-disclosure agreement that Simcoe had been given and everyone in holding had been given to expect, if this turn of events had led to little Woodhull turning to a stranger he had been sitting beside in the lobby for assistance that nearly anyone else present was more qualified to lend - Abe mistakenly presuming Clayton Tarleton of all people to be in the practice of protecting individual over industry based of a very narrow and very naïve view of the legal profession.

Aside from offering the jacket from his three-piece suit and in so allowing the weasel to look at bit less like the drain on the welfare system that he was, Simcoe could not imagine that his mate’s brother had much of anything to offer by way of assistance, or much want to do so.

Clayton was likely surveying the field, delaying his wayward brother’s interrogation, knowing Ban was at his best when pressure brought out the worst in his opponents - this, because the colonel admittedly had no idea how time worked when others were watching the clock as their pulses quickened –

- Woodhull, at least, looked as though his circulation system was spinning far faster than the second-hand as he began to sense his hour was upon him.

John Graves Simcoe did not feel himself susceptible to the same strain. While Akinbode was not an attorney for a murder trial, he had, at least, the benefit of being a successful trial lawyer, and, for the moment, came comparatively cheap. Clayton, who had never once entered a court room, was likely earning an hourly rate of at least a thousand pounds - a price higher than the one he likely paid to take young players from their parents with promises of fortune and fame, to have their guardianship given over to a corporate entity that would make corpses of most at the training academy. Maybe he mistook little Abraham Woodhull for a child he could exploit in the same fashion.

Again, Simcoe found himself smiling at what he could reasonably conclude would befall the coward thanks to yet another bad appointment.

Woodhull had no allies. Rogers had revealed himself; Townsend had been undercover all along; Brewster and Tallmadge had betrayed him to the police; and the unlikely ally and confidant he had recently found in Colonel Tarleton must surely have since turned to contempt giving the lines the FBI had crossed in order moved in on what had been a well laid trap. Abraham had long ago alienated his father and the women in his life had given over to their instincts of protecting their own: Abigail having suffered Cicero’s violent arrest, Philomena long left in a cell to rot for a ring she no longer wore; Peggy and Aberdeen both only looking out for one another’s backs - both treated as suspects in a situation that should have treated them like the heroines they certainly were; Anna having married a man Abe regarded as being guilty of far lesser crimes than falling in love, and Mary -

- And Mary.

Perhaps Abe’s present detention gave her hope.

Perhaps both of theirs did.

The reality of Mr and Mrs Woodhull that was shown to still exist when shots were fired was too painful to actively contend. Simcoe tried to push it from his mind.
“I cannot believe what I am being asked, we’ve barely made one another’s acquaintance, Mr Lee, and you seek to offer judgement on my moral character? On the integrity of my fair city and its good people?” Clayton complained in a whine that sounded oddly like a war-cry.

“This is in fact an interrogation, Sir,” Billy Lee answered, stone-faced and unthreatened.

“And I fail to see how my client -”

“Mr Tarleton, I believe you misunderstand,” Washington said, turning his eyes, if not his fully attention from the papers he skimmed. “You were not asked here to offer representation for Mr Woodhull, rather, to witness on behalf of your brother as I believe we can all come to something of an arrangement without needing to wake the Colonel for the purpose of negotiations.”

“Probably for the best,” Simcoe muttered beneath his breath – not quite quietly enough to avoid a non-verbal warning from his solicitor who punched at him underneath the table. He grimaced but made no sound finding that weakness, cowardice and criminal intent were related, as Abraham Woodhull could evidence.

He did not belong in the same room as the man who had kept Senator Arnold captive for weeks while an old man whom he did odd jobs for here and there tried to blackmail one of the most powerful families in Great Britain for a ransom that the US Government refused to offer, all whilst his wife and every other individual in Setauket scrambled to find the hostage as their lives fell apart. Abe Woodhull, from vantage point he had watched this all unfold, did not get to hide behind his missus, behind a non-disclosure agreement, behind a borrowed blazer, behind the same table as he himself.

At least Washington seemed keen to rob him of whatever sense of legal representation he thought himself to have; Simcoe hoped that the invitation Clayton had been extended to negotiate for his brother would be executed with the same flare, for Banastre was the sort of person unconsciously given to crossing the street and walking rather quickly whenever he happened upon a group of black men, and where he could not speak to whether or not Billy Lee shared in Jordan Akinbode’s ideas of amusement, he’d known his friend to pursue such individuals in their flight for a few blocks as a form of punishment for their racist tendencies. Clayton was probably smart enough not to be so apparent if he held the same ideas, but Simcoe smiled all the same at the idea of the proud pretty boy breaking into a sweat in an emulation of his younger brother, thus leaving Woodhull no option but to recognise how alone he had truly left himself.

“Now, I judge that that is your jacket?” Washington continued.

“Yes,” Clayton blinked, looking at Abe as though he wanted to make sure.

“And the pin on it?” Washington inquired.

“The Liverbird belongs to all of the people of Liverpool, not to a single business interest,” came Clayton’s defiant, defensive answer.

Somehow, this made Simcoe’s heart sink.

This was not about his brother and if Washington had hoped Clayton to act in Banastre’s interests for some reason he seemed hesitant to name, he had sorely miscalculated. The Tarletons as a whole fell somewhere between the Buddenbrooks and the Bush Administration; their affection for and aversion to one another was a matter of a bottom line, they mistook power for patriotism and met any attack, real or imagined, on the symbols to which they tied their wealth and reputation as slander against the sacred. Drawn up and presented to the College of Arms by one of Clayton’s
many ancestors to hold public office, the cormorant might as well have been the Tarletons’ own crest, not that it would ever serve their ends to recognise this outright -

- ‘The evil that men do lives after them; The good is oft interred with their bones’ and in an oligarchy, Simcoe continued to muse as he listened, ‘Ambition’ was that last of which any man might admit. If Clayton were being asked to act on his brother’s behalf, it was suddenly clear to all that his only intent was to ensure the Banastre’s prideful crime against the council was punished behind closed doors as to not threaten his mother’s regency with a name or open one of the family seats to contention.

Abraham Woodhull was truly alone.

Perhaps they all were in the end and all of life was an act of willing illusion.

He looked over at Akinbode, his lawyer so fixated on the men leading a fully unproductive interrogation that he hardly took any notice of him.

“So, you are still at Inter?” Billy Lee asked. “This is what we are trying to establish.”

Simcoe wondered why the man had not just been direct until he took note of the strain in Clayton’s tone that betrayed an aggravation his posture was attempting to conceal. “Relevance?” he demanded, “I’m licenced to solicit -”

“That won’t be required if we can arrive at an agreement,” Washington said with a coolness that currently failed the foreigner.

“Maybe … we should listen to what he has to say,” Woodhull suggested nervously.

“Listen?” Clayton spat. “Heavens lad, this is a deposition. That is not what we are here for at all.”

Akinbode did his best not to laugh and in so made a chocking noise which prompted Washington to ask him if he required water. Turning back to Tarleton, he continued, “I believe in this instance it would be in your better interest to take note of what I’m offering.”

“Oh, by all means,” Clayton smiled. “Shall we begin? Want to maybe turn that recorder on, introduce yourself -”

“That won’t be necessary.”

“Oh?” the Liverpudlian asked, raising his thick (and yet probably plucked) eyebrows, “I beg to differ, under statute -”

“Benedict Arnold isn’t seeking to press charges against either Mr Woodhull of Mr Simcoe at this time,” Billy Lee informed the room.

“Then with respect, Your Excellency, why is my client wearing handcuffs?” Akinbode inquired immediately, evidently having overlooked the beforementioned ‘Mr Woodhull’, which, Simcoe could forgive, was easily done. He might have himself be less inclined to giving the weasel so much of his mind had he not seen him in the lobby, being all but cradled by the wife who had been ready to leave him, to start a life in the city, to sell the house and return to school, to the dreams she had had before meeting her husband had upset everything she had ever wanted for herself.

For all of his personal shortcomings, John Graves Simcoe had enough self-respect to step away from a situation it was plain to see was not equally shared.
He had let go of Effie Gwillim when he saw that his presence afforded her nothing save for grief.

He had let go of Anna Strong when he saw her to be in the sort of love one only knows once in life with another man.

He had let go of Jordan Akinbode when he said he wanted to be alone, not entirely confident in the moment that he would ever come back, fully certain that pushing the matter would not convince him to.

He had let go of Edmund Hewlett, of the hatred he had harboured the man who had never been anything but a true and loyal friend.

He had let go of the lovely Mary Woodhull when she told him to leave, something that hurt all the more when he saw the woman whom he still longed to hold in the arms of a man who seemed to use her and their son Thomas as a shield.

He knew Abe lacked honour, valour and courage – but must he continue to rob his wife of experiencing these traits within herself by the virtue of his continued presence?

Woodhull’s beady eyes dashed back and forth as they followed the words in the lawyerly conversation that continued around them as though he was trying to read them like a text. Simcoe hoped him to struggle with a word, at least long enough to meet his gaze from two chairs over, to see what could not so easily be said.

“Because the Pentagon has reason to suspect your client of corporate fraud, insider trading -” Lee began to list.

“One might bring the same charges against your organisation,” Akinbode interrupted.

“My intent is not to see charges brought,” Washington attempted to assure.

“Then I ask again, why is my client wearing handcuffs?”

“If I may,” Simcoe offered lightly, “might this have to do with the fact that I was subjected against my knowledge or will to a therapy aimed at weaponizing fear?”

Washington was silent.

“Go on then,” Simcoe encouraged with a lopsided smile, “try to scare me.”

Cicero Ingram hit the vending machine with the full of his weight for a second time; again, nothing came of his efforts.

He looked down at Thomas Woodhull, embarrassed and ready to accept defeat but for the fact that the little boy met his tired eyes with wide ones that spoke to the hunger which Cicero had promised to relieve. Neither of the boys had eaten since breakfast and ‘eaten’ in Thomas’ case had to be taken with the cultural relativity of a five-year old finding a new toy wrapped in plastic in with the breakfast biscuit and hash browns Miss Sally had bought them at McDonald’s. The sun had since risen and set and Thomas was beginning to echo the fears none of the adults seemed willing to voice. His father was sitting in an interrogation cell, his caregiver an exam, and his mother was
sitting with the once person most upset by Thomas’ constant questions of ‘Why are we here?’ and
‘Why won’t they let us go home?’ and so, as Mary Woodhull did her best to care for one of his
closest friends, Cicero had taken it upon himself to sort out the statements born from the same
confusion ‘I’m hungry’, ‘I’m thirsty’, ‘I’m bored.’

In a sense, he had been taking care of young Thomas since he had heard a scream in the night and
thought it best to make sure that someone was with the little boy who was likely as scared as he
himself had been. In such time he had grown quite protective of his young housemate, who look up
at him as though he imagined Cicero as being far stronger than he presently felt himself.

“We’ll figure something out,” he said, looking at the child’s slim arm, wondering if it was quite
long enough to make a reach for any of the items – the gum at the bottom, perhaps. His purse
exhausted, he tried to feel into his pockets to see if he had lost any change in them at some point,
only to find them still sewn shut. The suit was new, but then, he half-consoled himself, it was easy
to forget that they had been at a wedding that same afternoon.

In his quiet calculations and empty attempts, Cicero had failed to hear anyone approach and nearly
jumped when someone spoke to him in a voice he did not immediately recognise. “Here,” Arthur
said, holding his finger on the return button until the machine released the change Cicero had put in
when not the crisps. Without reaching for the coins that had fallen, Arthur continued, “The one at
my school is the same way – what do you want?”

“Lays, just the regular potato flavour,” Cicero answered, reaching down for his fallen coins as
Arthur pulled a wallet from his back pocket. “No let me,” he tried to insist.

“It’s okay,” Arthur muttered, smiling as though something about the interaction amused him. “God
willing, I’ll have to get rid of some of this change anyway. What code did you press?”

“A-2,” Cicero answered. Arthur hit the corresponding keys and then, just as quickly, the return
button, two bags fell along with - presumably – the spare change Arthur had only just put in. “Mate
of mine is always going on about how I never offer her crisps or anything when she comes over to
study. Might do well to try this at school to make amends.”

“I think that is stealing from the state,” Cicero smiled. “Why not hit up every tax-funded
institution?”

Arthur’s face fell, “I fear I might be fearing worse charges,” he told him, shifting slightly,
“Anyway, two dollars for a single serving is extortion. I’m sure there are enough lawyers around to
make that case.”

Though grateful for his surprise technical-know-how, Cicero did not know quite what to make of
Arthur – ‘not Atty’. He had met him briefly upon arriving at The Irish Pub, had been happy when
he left after watching with dismay as Thea, whom Cicero had long-fancied to no acknowledgement
or response, seemed to take a shine to the slightly older boy upon his asking if she had ever seen
Twilight and on the criteria of her affirmation appointing her his second. They had met again
behind a court house after the wedding where Cicero had come to like him a bit better, having
benefited from a few assists in an otherwise defensive soccer match against the adults that saw their
side to victory. From what he had overheard of Arthur’s conversation with Coach Simcoe, he rather
pitied him and from what he had overheard in scattered whispers, he rather feared he would soon
be able to relate.

“I fucking hope not,” Cicero muttered. “No, I mean – I don’t know what I mean,” he lied, “but it
wasn’t that.” He knew very well what he meant, but with Thomas looking at him in horror before
offering an “oooh!” to the “bad word” he had spoken, Cicero decided it might not be worth
discussing. He would probably curse again. He might well frighten the kid he had put all of his energy into keeping safe and calm that the boy’s mother might be able do the same for a girl who did not have one of her own.

“You want anything else?” Arthur asked after he had secured himself a Slim Jim, this time - perhaps picking up on the mild discomfort Cicero was doing his best to hide - not playing with the thing as though it were a slot machine after the fact.

“M and M?” Thomas asked, suddenly having lost any interest in the “telling!” he had just sworn himself to. Cicero could not help but smile.

“What’s the hurry?” Arthur questioned him.

Cicero only shrugged. “What his mom don’t know won’t hurt her. Can I … can I ask you something?”

“Yea? Go on with it,” Arthur answered, somewhat perplexed as he hit the code key for Thomas’ candy-covered chocolates.

“Is it really so hard to change schools?”

“Really?” Arthur blinked, looking down at his mobile in his front pocket, lit up with a new message he declined to read. “That’s not … that’s not entirely what is going on here, but -”

“Not like from middle to high school,” Cicero clarified. “Like the entire system. Like you did. Kind of. Dr André - the guy everyone is whispering about - apparently got murdered while seeking medical help. My mom says I shouldn’t be thinking about this,” he acknowledged, “especially not with everything else around it, but he paid my school fees and, I mean … I’m used to being basically the only black kid at a white school and I don’t know what I’m going to do being the only white kid at a black one. Cause that is the way they will see it.”

“At least hanging out here affords you some street cred,” Arthur shrugged.

“Is it hard to buy a gun? I just heard -”

“From whom?” he demanded, his demeanour shifting entirely.

“Overheard,” Cicero corrected, “when you were talking to my coach. I didn’t mean to listen, it is just … Peggy and Aberdeen, you met them earlier, I think - they are the girls I live with -”

“Aberdeen is the one your mate Pip has a thing for?” Arthur clarified.

“Yeah,” Cicero answered. “Yeah …. but they are always talking about what is in the news and there are apparently all kinds of things in public school that I’ve just never had to deal with and I’m not really sure how to manage. They were talking about a school shooting a few nights ago and Peggy said that if teachers were armed it would not have happened, and Aberdeen said that was bullshit because if, by Peggy’s logic, half the kids are involved in gangs, they are carrying for their protection anyway and between them they couldn’t do anything to stop the one kid who just lost it and you mentioned that you went to public school and that you had to transfer there so I thought maybe you might have some tips -” he rambled. It was strange to admit that by pure default Arthur – a European who could probably name two-hundred different kinds of soft cheeses - was the toughest kid he had ever come into contact with.

“I um, ‘public school’ means something different in the UK,” Arthur explained uncomfortably, “There it is just like … most of the kids have double-barrel surnames, trust funds and a promising
future in civil service.”

Cicero frowned. He might have reasoned out as much for himself.

This was a waste.

Arthur Something-Something, Cicero noted, adopted the tone and expression common to all white people whenever race was addressed, itself not dissimilar from the anxiety of going to the dentist’s office for a routine cleaning. Maybe it had been a mistake to begin in this way, to bring colour up to him at all. Cicero knew the script: Arthur was about to make overtures of apologising for his privilege by making a show of not acknowledging it and he would likely then expect a pat on the back for having done so because this was how children with quote ‘double-barrel surnames, trust funds and a promising future in civil service’ thought ‘progressive’.

“Not myself, of course,” he said with the weak conviction of someone at his first dress rehearsal, though he delivered his lines as they had been written by whomever decided that this was ‘etiquette’, or ‘enlightenment’, or worthy of applause. Cicero knew it was not the boy’s fault and tried not to resent him for he had seen first-hand in several of Aberdeen’s debates with Peggy that pointing out natural biases and behavioural patterns only turned discussion into defence. He should not have mentioned race and reasoned that he would not have had it not become a topic his mom and Jordan had fought over, had Aberdeen not taken pains to explain that he and his friends had only been arrested and abuse because of the colour of their skin, and had Thea not taken the same rant with such a degree of earnest that stepping foot inside a police station had sent her into shock. Nothing good every came from mentioning it, but if no one did then systematic problems would simply be allowed to persist. That is what his mom said anyway, but then she was perhaps reading from a script he would himself be handed one day. Adults did not seem to really talk for all they said. Maybe, he mused, Arthur - who was at least tall enough to pass himself off as twenty-one - was himself in fact too old to be of any real use.

“I’ve done nothing to distinguish myself at school,” Arthur continued sheepishly. “My mum thinks I should join the military which I think is her way of saying that she isn’t going to pay for college, but now that I’ve this gun charge possibly hanging over me I have my doubts as to how viable a possibility that will now prove – honestly,” he shifted, annoyed, “what do you want with a gun? I think stories like the ones your housemates exchange only make the nightly news because they are the exception, not the rule, and I doubt your mum, or Coach Simcoe, or the Earl and Countess, or Peggy and Aberdeen, or anyone else here would knowingly send you somewhere that isn’t safe.”

Cicero wished there was more truth to what Arthur said and seemed to firmly believe.

“They brought me to a police station,” he scoffed.

“I don’t think they had much of a choice,” Arthur answered.

“Nah, this isn’t legal and it sure as hell ain’t right. We are under lockdown without having formally been arrested and they can’t hold us without charge, and they fucking know it so they are getting everyone to sign non-disclosure agreements while they work to get their shit straight even though Benedict Arnold has apparently made it clear that he has no intentions of pressing charges against anyone in Setauket who was helping to look for him which includes just about everyone in Setauket, save for Robert Rogers, whom they already have in custody. And it is not even like this is going to go to court, what with Dr André dead -”

“Or that statements given in duress could be used as evidence,” Arthur suggested.

“They don’t give a shit. Trust me,” Cicero lifted up his shirt to show his recent bruising. Arthur
winced. “This is what happened when DI Tallmadge and his team found my friends and I with a cell phone. My friend Thea over there?” he pointed, “One of the arresting officers touched her in a bad way and she hasn’t been back to school since. She’s completely traumatized just being here and with Mrs Woodhull trying to calm her down, I’m just trying to do my best for Mrs Woodhull’s son Thomas, who is like five and hasn’t eaten since breakfast and it’s really not like we couldn’t have all given statements back at Irish Pub with the buffet all set up. They are being inhumane because no one has the balls to call them on it.”

Arthur seemed to consider all of this before he spoke. “I bought the gun with my brother’s expired ID … he is nine years my senior and I don’t even think we look that much alike, that is, I am surprised they even let me buy beer with it, but I don’t know that you’re having one would be the best course of action.

“This isn’t me being a European judging America’s gun laws from afar,” he explained as though he had had some version of this conversation already on these shores, “this is me being a teenager who is suddenly caught up in it, maybe, as you point out, just because of the school I happen to go to.

“I get what you mean - fee-paying it or tax-funded - about you not changing yourself but worrying that your entire identity is being re-evaluated on criteria you don’t know that you can keep up with. I was never ‘Irish’ until I moved to London and now that is my defining characteristic somehow, even though my mum is English by birth and I don’t think I’ve that heavy of an accent or that there wouldn’t be ten thousand other physical and personal attributes of myself for my new classmates to attack were they not, for the most part, so fixated on stereotypes which – when they are not flat out wrong, as they mostly are – have absolutely nothing to do with me or my experiences.

“So now I sit at lunch and in the commons with those classmates who enjoy the same undeserved lack of regard: the actual problem students, the Asians who just get labelled by teachers as problem students because of some assumption of their religious faith, same as I, supposed by the my classmates and the faculty to be Catholic, am,” he snorted, “I think in London if you have more than two siblings you are automatically assumed part of a terrorist cell, be it Islamic or Independence-minded; anyway, yeah – I do know what you mean. But like … it is not all that bad,” he shifted, seeming to think on something Coach Simcoe had said to him earlier. “You’ll have found a way to fit in without even realising it until stepping aside for some perspective, without having to change to conform with some identity ascribed to you by whatever form of prejudice is at play. I was a loser in Dublin because I have an unfortunate hair-cut, bad skin, braces and play the violin as opposed to rugby, and I’m a loser in London because I have an unfortunate hair-cut, bad skin, braces and I play the violin as opposed to football and because someone stated a rumour that my family has ties to some since-decommissioned paramilitary group. But no one actually cares at the end of the day and you get on before even realising it.”

“I’m in a gang because I’m black and you’re in the IRA because your parents didn’t want to take a ferry to Liverpool to get rid of you,” Cicero smirked.

“That is … oddly specific,” Arthur squinted, “but yeah, spot on I’d say.”

“I didn’t mean anything by it,” Cicero shrugged. “I owe my existence to the abortion policies of the religious right, too. My mom was even in a commercial for them back when she was pregnant with me at like fifteen, which … I think like, I mean it is good and all that the Shippens stepped in and took care of her the way they did but they couldn’t have possibly done that for all the unwilling teenage mothers in the state and they might have done more to make sure my father faced charges for statutory rape as she wasn’t even the age of consent yet when I was conceived. But that’s bad for politics.”
Arthur bit his lower lip. “Shit. Is that him, you dad?” he asked, nodding in Jordan’s direction.

“No. I don’t know who the fuck my father is and I don’t want to meet him. That is Jordan, my mom’s ex, he’s a solicitor, and that man beside him is the reason I want to be a lawyer myself – DI Tallmadge, who isn’t even a DI anymore but is still abusing his authority as though he still had any to claim. Seriously,” Cicero began to rant, “he is the one who made Setauket - a town where literally nothing ever happens – into an absolute hell'scape, everyone I live with was a suspect in his inquiry when they were the ones trying to actually do something to find Senator Arnold and he … he’s the reason - I think, at least - that Dr André is dead, that I’ll have to transfer schools and will never see any of my friends again though I might not have anyway since Mr Burr is probably going to have to send Thea to an all-girls school now and Pip’s decided to be a dick about it ever since being here has made her cry again.”

“You won’t see your friends,” Arthur challenged, “you are not moving and anyway don’t you play for the same football team?”

“For now. But now Miss Anna is Lady Anna, and I guess she’ll have to go to Scotland with Mr – Lord Hewlett; and Mr Simcoe, who took over for her as coach when she came to Albany for work, will probably have to move to the UK too within a few months because he lost his job and thus his work-visa as a result, again, of DI Tallmadge’s inquiry.”

“Sounds like you really hate him.”

Cicero certainly knew who he would shoot if he had an older brother with an expired ID that might enable him to do so.

“I thought my mom and Jordan were going to get back together but then Jordan chose his friend over her. Anyway, wouldn’t you? Hate him, I mean?”

“Alone for what you say happened to Thea, “Arthur admitted. “What I was saying, what I started to anyway, about changing schools is it is pretty much the same bullshit with slightly different nomenclature. I don’t have many people to talk to at school but Marie – that girl, Colonel Tarleton’s ward whom you heard on the phone back at the pub - is one of them and I’ve been trying to help her out since her dad went missing and then, since she did ... I was worried about her, that the police had her and were going to do something awful, so I agreed to go and buy the gun in case it was needed. I wouldn’t regret doing so, but -”

“It was though,” Cicero told him. “Think of it this way, you saved Aberdeen’s life in a roundabout way.”

“Peggy saved Aberdeen’s life,” Arthur corrected, wincing, “and I think they are both going to jail for it. And so am I, and so is Colonel Tarleton because the embassy just stranded both of us here and with Richmond gone everything is on lockdown and -”

Cicero shook his head. “I don’t think Mr Hewlett is the reason everything is on lockdown. I think it has something to do with the fact that not everyone is willing to sign their rights to a waver … I think they people who did have only done so because they are scared and starving and that they wouldn’t if they had even a little bit more separation from this whole Arnold/Rogers thing.”

For a short while they both fell silent, each of them glancing about the lobby until their eyes met with the same light.

“Are you thinking what I am thinking?” Arthur asked.
“I’m thinking that police stations only have CCTV in rooms open to the public and we have a toddler to entertain to whom we’ve just fed a whole bag full of sweets,” Cicero whispered. “We could find -”

“Precisely,” Arthur nodded.

“You count to twenty, I’m going to go talk to Mrs Woodhull – don’t worry, we can trust her, I’ve seen her end some pretty heated debates before and I’m sure she can get everyone holding out to climb down from their ivory towers and sign while we search – maybe I can enlist Thea’s help, too, to that end. We can’t take back what they’ve taken, but we can take something so important that we should all be imprisoned until they think themselves to have obtained it. And then when they realise it has been lost and they come around to ask again, everyone will have talked to a lawyer who will have told them to say no – at least I’m assuming, anyway, it will inconvenience the police and get us out of here a little sooner ... if not, it is not like things can get much worse.”

The future he – or rather, his mother – had long seen for him of receiving a top education at private school and receiving an academic scholarship to an elite university was already over; Arthur’s far less lofty one seemed it might be as well – and all because they both had the horrible luck of existing in the periphery of a corrupt inquiry, of trying to protect their school friends from police violence. He would lie if he got caught with the documents, whatever they entailed, and say that he had gotten lost looking for Thomas. Or he would rip them up and suffer the consequences, suspecting they would be less extreme for him than for the police and whomever they were trying to cover for, suspecting that Arthur was right on some level about there being enough people present who cared about him that they would not be so complacent if he was able to expose DI Tallmadge and everyone with whom he freely associated and collaborated for the monsters they were before their very eyes. He was willing to take the chance.

“Give me just a sec?” Arthur asked as he played around with his phone. “My sort-of friend, the one I was trying to save … I want to make sure she and her sister are not still in the care of DI Ferguson before you go off and announce your intentions to a quote-unquote ‘well-meaning’ adult. I’m in, it’s just,” he stopped, but Cicero understood the hesitation. “Okay. Okay good. She’s at some Dino Park sort-of babysitting, too, and thinks that maybe she can convince her aunt to take her down to Liverpool and she thinks she can stay with her gran after tonight’s wake’s done, at least until their dad gets back. For now, she is just trying to keep her little sister distracted. And … suggests we do the same for Thomas.”

“How do girls type so fast?” Cicero could not help but to laugh.

“I don’t bloody know.”

Cicero looked around to find his wee small housemate still busying himself with the task of pressing two sweets against one another until one or both of them cracked. “Thomas! You save me some?” he asked. The boy looked up, his eyes guilty and his mouth covered in chocolate, pouring out the remaining three pieces and offering them in consolation.

“Rude!” Cicero said. “I’m going to go talk to your mom about sharing.”

“No!” the boy begged.

“I was about to ask you if you wanted to play hide and seek with us but now Imma make you count first.”

Thomas looked like he was about to object.

“Can you count to twenty?” Arthur seemed to challenge him.
“I can count to one hundred!” Thomas claimed.

“Prove it.”

“What is base?”

“The vending machine,” Cicero announced, “last one back has to buy the next bag!”

Chapter End Notes

Go hard or go home kids … Tja. Same old same? Same old same. Let’s have at it:

**With a Liverbird Upon my Court Docket**

In 1796 Mayor **Clayton Tarleton** wrote to the College of Arms requesting approval for his design of a Coat of Arms for his city, a ‘lever’ with a sprig of ‘laver’ in its beak – which he went on to call the ‘Liverbird’ and the body tasked with approving the thing referred to as a ‘cormorant with some seaweed’ (likely to the Lord Mayor’s annoyance – he seemed rather proud of his punning and had the historical precedent to be – the design was based on the original common seal, itself punning around with symbols associated with King John who gave Liverpool its charter.)

Amazingly, this all came up in court a few years back when LFC tried to trademark the Liverbird and faced protest from Everton (who use the Liverbird on their original crest) and other local businesses (who still incorporate it). The original ruling based itself off Clayton’s proclamation that “The Liverbird belongs to all of the People of Liverpool” (and not a single business interest.) The decision went through several rounds of appeals before LFC and the City Council arrived at a compromise.

Somewhat related, **Liverpool Town Hall** was built/re-built/and underwent massive renovations under the tenures of various Mayors Tarleton (among others, of course.) The Nelson Monument which stands in front of it is a product of public funding which the City Council had figured out centuries before everyone had a GoFundMe (and actually well before the rest of the world’s governing bodies at the time.)

**The Ball is Round**

**FIFA** really is responsible for **fan liaison salaries**, a fact of which I am only aware of thanks to an incident up in Glasgow some years back. Since it is the summer break and has therefore been a while since I’ve thrown shade at Celtic FC on any platform – let me lay some history on you: back in 2015, a letter was sent to season ticket holders asking them to wash after one fan complained that the stench of his fellow supporters was ruining the match-day experience. Since John Paul Taylor, the man employed in the liaison role for that club, was in the news at the time for having penned the letter, I learned all about the payroll structure and I just have to remark on the brilliant irony of FIFA trying to wash something other than money ...  

**Wellington’s tactics** were generalized via Cicero’s remarks on his performance
during five-a-side, but lest this be a total anachronism I just want to point out for the
record that as a field marshal he was totally the type to ‘park the bus’ if one were to
discuss military history over an extended metaphor (I know, right? Who the hell would
come on that idea …) He would probably find himself a German striker though …
… anyway, segueing from that note, anyone want to talk about Luca Waldschmidt
with me? Hit me up in the comments.

Law. Order. Authority.
Everything Anna states is true in relation to the right to council as granted by the
New York State Constitution, which in this regard is far more reaching than the
Sixth Amendment.

Same with Aberdeen on the US immigration and naturalization process … so I
research a load of random to make H+S as accurate as possible, and I just want to
throw it out there that thanks to cookies and targeted advertising I may well be your
girl should you have a highly specific question around this subject.

Appearances, Allusions and Appropriations
There were a lot of historical figures who casually graced this chapter, if you can pick
them all out, or, alternatively, if you can guess at the real-life daughters of famous
footballers a young Jane Parker aspired to emulate, my prior offer of drawing you
something on a cocktail napkin still stands. I’d ideally give everyone who appeared in
passing something of an introduction, but woe be it to the AO3 character limit.

The Falklands War has come up before but to afford it some context - I don’t know
why it is so strange to me, but Britain and Argentina were at war when Maradona was
playing for Napoli. Those are things that feel like they don't belong to the same era at
all.

Spoken like a true …
All of the Latin in the first scene we (or I, or Sam, or the City of Liverpool) owes to
Virgil.

When Aberdeen says “Bitch sa a bèbè […]”, she is just repeatedly calling Peggy a
dumb bitch in her native tongue.

Simcoe quotes Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar several times, which his historical
counterpart was also keen on doing.

Okay - that is it for me!

Up Next: More of what I failed to deliver the first time, plus enough new to
(hopefully!) keep things interesting. Cheers.
The Summary Execution (Pt. 2)

Chapter Summary

Tables TURN (sorry) as Marie tries to assist Arthur from outfield; Mary confesses to Anna her role in Hewlett’s sudden absence; Townsend catches Tarleton in a lie; Tarleton finds Hamilton in contempt; and Washington provides a summary of events form the Pentagon’s perspective, attempting to bring Simcoe and Abe to his cause.

Chapter Notes

It has been a long summer for a variety of reasons that extend just my standard six-week forced holiday and with my husband on deployment, my friends all off attending to family obligations (weddings of distant cousins and the like) my own family nowhere in the vicinity, and my coaching and training both likewise on a month-long hiatus – I’ve damn near run out of ways to amuse myself … and holy ---- you guys, if I am not the world’s dullest lass when left to my own devices even with my OCD turned up to ten. In the past month I’ve reorganized my basement and office, built and refurbished furniture, painted two rooms in my flat, made new curtains, a skirt and a pair of shorts, did all of the planning and paperwork I’m actually obliged to over the break (and then did it again because of who I am as a person), tried out every home-beauty-remedy in the June edition of a German-language fashion glossy (coffee really is a great exfoliant and washing your face with fizzy mineral water each morning reduces pores to non-existent), and went on 10km runs each morning in the woods behind my house – mostly binge-listening to a podcast on the Baltic Crusades and then mostly running to excuse that habit (#TeamJogaila … sorry various Grand Masters Konrad, I guess.)

So late last night having exhausted every other possible entertainment option, I decided to look and see what else my various streaming services were good for when I’m not using them to keep up with the beautiful game everywhere it exists on this continent and, okay – this is kind of off the beaten track for me, but have you guys ever seen an American series called iZombie? The whole premise is that the assistant medical examiner in Seattle is a zombie who eats the brains of murder victims to help a human detective solve crimes, getting insight into the mind and memory she’s just consumed (and the show is HUGE on puns. So great. I’m like five years late to it, but so great.) Anyway, so I was watching an episode of this last night and Liv Moore (pun!) the titular zombie, having eaten the brain of a hooligan, gets a bigoted slur thrown at her and goes “Yeah, right on! Go Hawks!”, receiving a “Go Hawks!” in response and I just … is this not the best way in the world to deal with assholes? Like … ever? Imma have to try this move.

Any road, on that note – the 2. Bundesliga starts this weekend, the 1. next weekend (Gott sei Dank!) and maybe then I’ll have something worth saying in these introductions.

Until then, should you find that your summer has left you as bored as it has rendered me – here is another too-long chapter of Hide and Seek to help you waste an hour or
“I’m bleeding!” Marie Robinson cried out uncomfortably to her concerned aunt from behind a cabin door in a public lavatory at a tourist trap outside of Dumfries targeted at a much younger clientele. This was a lie. “I’m scared,” she added, for that, at least, was the truth –

Arthur Wellesley, whom she had orchestra and Advanced French with and therefore some loose measure of responsibility towards was in a terrible situation overseas and seemed set on making things worse for himself.

Marie, all the same, had about had it with sudden obligations.

As she saw matters, she was now officially her sister’s primary caregiver as Kolina could not be trusted any more than her own mother could. She would soon need to find work that went beyond walking Dele Alli’s dog from time to time as her saved-up allowance would not last her indefinitely and, assuming her father would not return from his business trip before the first of the month, she would need to pay the rent on his Liverpool flat in addition to sorting all of the other things she and Georgie and Mou would need to see them through – food, clothing, school, day care – the list felt endless and did not even address the other immediate crisis she faced; eventually, Georgie would tire of naming all of the dinosaurs on display to Aunt Emma and Nan Ferguson, the soft play area would likewise fail to amuse and she would ask when they were going home. Marie did not know how she might say ‘we can’t’ in a way that would not prove upsetting to the little girl. She did not know how she might in the meantime convince their Tarleton relatives of the severity of their situation.

Arthur and his sudden want to show courage under fire was all too much.

She knew, however, that she had to help him. He was rather hapless as far as lads went when left to his own devices and the British Embassy had left him all alone in Albany with a looming gun charge – and also, he had asked. Specifically, he had asked her.

Much though she feared the responsibility was too much for her to meet, Marie had to try. No. she had to succeed. Arthur Wellesley was the only person willing to put his faith in her now and ensuring his safety and safe return would simply have to substitute the understanding and approval she had looked to her extended family to provide. Maybe, she thought, if she could save him from himself, she could convince her challengers that she truly was a responsible young woman with the best intentions -

If only she were up to the task.

Marie herself had been in the toilets for the better part of the past half hour, the same sort of locale she ordinarily sought when she felt she was going to cry. Reading through Arthur’s texts, she had done so - however briefly - and had since camped out in a centre stall as she busied herself with a secret correspondence, with far greater concerns than the gestational needs of her fellow female Dumfries Dino Park guests. She heard a few mummers spread though the lines as her spinster aunt who had shoved her way past the lot of them stuttered for a response.

“Oh my gosh, o’rite … where exactly?” Emma seemed to wince. It was a stupid question.
“I … don’t want to say,” Marie answered uneasily. This was probably a misstep towards her goal of convincing her aunt that she was mature enough to take care of herself, her sister, and her dad’s teacup terrier until his return, Marie reasoned, but the fib might buy her a bit of much needed privacy. Emma had thus far proven an ineffective ally. When she had awoken her earlier that same morning, immediately after overhearing the conversation being had between her mother, Kolina, Mary Anne and Inspector Ferguson, she had begged her to drive she and her sister down to Liverpool, only to be met with a series of questions, the answers to which hardly mattered in the moment: ‘Wait – who is dead?’, ‘What makes you think that, Sweetie?’, ‘O’rite – what do you think of this as an alternative – I’ll take you and Georgie to the Dino Park as planned today, I know she is really looking forward to it – and we will just see how you feel afterwards – how does that sound?’

It had sounded as though her concerns not being taken seriously.

Suddenly, surprisingly, it seemed they finally were, simply by her feigning an inability to word them.

“O’rite – don’t, don’t panic,” her aunt continued, seemingly immune to her own advice. “It might seem scary, but what is happening to you is completely normal. You are not hurt; you are becoming a woman – it is a beautiful thing.”

It was bollocks.

>>Well?<< Arthur Wellesley wrote from across the world.

>>Sorry<< Marie responded.

>>My aunt came in and I told her that I’d gotten my period, implying it was the first time, thinking she would just leave me alone, but she’s worked the whole WC into a fucking Lilith Fair. I honestly want to die.<<

>>Oh shit. Do you have cramps?<< he asked.

Did no one want to hear her?

>>WTF – no!!!<< Marie wrote.

>>And I don’t have my period. It was just something I said and I’m only
telling you because it is kinda hard to
both conspire and play the fool. I’m
here, it just might take me a few minutes,
you needy bitch. Anyway, it would help
if I knew what you were looking for.<<

“Oh, Ah hink Ah hae somethin’!” a kind-hearted woman whose bowel movement Marie knew herself to be delaying announced with undue triumph.

“Oh my gosh, thank yous,” Emma gushed, “really thanks so much. Mari, e’yer – ellp ‘as arrived!”

“What am I meant to do with this?” Marie asked of the tampon she had been handed as though she had never seen one before, again, to a chorus of explanations and encouragements that caused accents to come out and left Marie to wonder why women tried to frame this as a milestone accomplishment rather than the mild aggravation she had personally known it to be for going on a year. She was suddenly glad her mother had been on tour when she had actually reached this part of adolescence as she grew more and more aware that her fellow members of their fairer sex were even more clueless about what was to be done in such an event than the gym teacher her school had tasked with providing an explanation of the female reproductive system without using any word related to biology or anatomy or her dad who framed the entire conversation as though it were a matter of basic first-aid, bought her a Chocolate Chip Frappuccino saying it would ease the pain (though he did not otherwise allow her coffee) and had then taken her to see Straight Outta Compton at the cinema that weekend as a kind of reward, accepting her argument that having been confronted with her own blood for a few days in a way that invited unnecessary conversation about safe sexual relations she could more than deal with gang violence and graphic intercourse as depicted, even if the film had a UK15 rating and she had been twelve at the time.

That, at least, had seemed a more logical reaction than all of this.

“What am I meant to do with this?” Marie asked after weaving far too much pseudo-feminist sentiment into her explanation of what essentially amounted unwrapping a plaster.

“No,” Marie groaned. “And I – I don’t want to come out either. I can’t. My clothes.”

It helped, of course, that she had in fact been in tears over Arthur and the uncertainty of her immediate future, but Marie could not imagine that anyone could realistically believe this act on its premise. She was thirteen and had known what a period was since she had truly been small and her parents had been excited that her mum had not gotten hers (which translated to peeing on a stick that would in one line or two if she was with child to be followed by a lengthy explanation of ‘girl parts’ and ‘boy parts’ and the parts that girls had inside of them and what happened each month when there was no baby there that needed room to grow.)

By the time the topic had entered her curriculum at school everyone in her year had already known everything the state had taken upon itself to relay to a group of ten-year-olds with no immediate need of all of the knowledge they already possessed. In fact, all Marie upon reflection remembered having learnt that day was that biology was as patriarchal and particularly unfair as every other reality she might cite, for the lads were allowed to spend the hour outside playing football whereas she and the rest of the ‘sisterhood’ got to stare at a diagram of a uterus and look at their gym
teacher blankly when asked if they had any questions.

Maybe, Marie considered as her aunt continued her attempts at comfort, such classes would prove of more practical use to adults with no concept of what constituted normal. Of course she knew what a period was and where and how she was meant to insert a tampon – which also meant that she knew there was nothing magical about it. She found herself rather hoping that sex would not turn out to be the same way – a somewhat painful experience wrapped in flowering language and uncomfortable laughter as women old enough to have forgotten what it was to be young said things like, ‘you’ll understand when you are older,’ adjusting the rest of their metaphors that they remained just beyond her grasp.

“I … I understand,” Emma claimed. She clearly did not. “And I understand why you’ve been acting so, well … emotional these past few days.”

“Really?” Marie demanded, unable to contain her anger.

It was more than she felt anyone would be able to bear. “Are you actually kidding me?” she continued, irate at the very insinuation. “Last week, Mum and I were given news that my dad was dead. Then, Kolina then wouldn’t let me telephone with my little sister. Yesterday, after finding out he had escaped, Inspector Ferguson and Miss Burges insinuated that my father should have in fact have faced a firing squad for having done unspeakable things in the course of his former field command and my mum confirmed this to me before going downstairs in the middle of the night to talk about having done essentially the same damn thing as a fucking civilian like murder is just something grown-ups do and you want to blame my reaction to all of it on hormones? That’s not – I swear to God! And now I have to take care of Georgie without really letting her know what is going on, and I have to keep Nan safe, too,” she added, “because she isn’t guilty in any of this and I can’t just leave her with Inspector Ferguson and you – you of all people can’t accuse me of being ‘too sensitive’ or ‘emotional’ or whatever when you’ve been referring to my vagina as being a ‘rose in full bloom’ for the past ten minutes.”

“Marie,” Emma swallowed, “do you maybe want me to call your mum? She would probably be better at explaining this beautiful change you are going through than I admittedly am.”

“Oh my God! Stop!” Marie realised should have just said she had diarrhoea or some other ailment that restricted her to a bathroom stall – one that did not require conversation and kumbaya. “My mum is like two hours away in Edinburgh,” she explained, calmly as she could force herself to sound. “Presumably. Or she is on her way back to London. Or Inspector Ferguson remembered that he actually has a responsibility of protecting the public and he put her in jail – I don’t know and really don’t care and really, really don’t see how adding her voice to a chorus of floral metaphors is going to help me now in any way whatsoever. Just,” she re-strategized, “can you maybe find me something else to wear to save me from announcing the physical aspect of my present predicament to everyone in the entire park?”

“Sure, yeah, um – what are you, a 0? A 2?”

“I mean it varies by brand.”

“That doesn’t really help me out, kiddo.”

Marie was truly lost for what to say. “I mean just like … when my mum buys me clothes,” she did her best to explain, “it is usually something she has picked out for herself in a moment of optimism or delayed self-deprecation where she says ‘Oh it is a little small but if it zips, it fits - right? - and if I eat nothing but raw celery for the next week I might even be able to sit down in these’,” she perfectly mimicked her mother’s voice, not as much out of mockery as it was an admission that she
truly had little other experience to go on. “So then she will go and like loose two or three pounds but somehow find a way to feel fat for whatever reason, so she’ll tell me to try on a pair of shorts or trousers or something and I will, knowing that when she asks to see me we are going to have to have another round of the conversation that goes: ‘my being thirteen does not make you fat – there is absolutely no correlation between these concepts and anyway, my bones are not fully developed,’ and then she will cry and tell me how beautiful and funny I am and then when Dad comes home she’ll accuse him of having had an affair based on her perception that there are women both younger and prettier than she is – and after about a half an hour of this he’ll have just lost the energy to finish telling me that whatever I have on is way too revealing for a girl my age … and that is basically how I wind up with most of the stuff in my closet. So just like – do that,” she suggested. “Maybe without the drama. Pick out something that almost works for you and it will probably be my size,” she instructed, adding quickly as she had no great desire to insult her petit aunt’s pride, “Which doesn’t make you fat or unattractive in any way.”

“I’ll see what I can do … just, just sit tight, kiddo. It will be o’rite, I promise. Oh bless - you poor soul,” she sighed. “Growing up should not be this hard for anyone.”

Marie was tempted to offer a bit of perspective on this assessment but instead only sighed. ‘Growing-up’ was easier from where she was seated on her borrowed throne of porcelain, plastic and lies than it seemed to be in a police station on the other side of the world. And Arthur Wellesley had asked for her help. It was enough that her aunt was leaving.

“Thanks,” She murmured as she read what her classmate had written whilst her own brilliant plan had backfired.

>>I don’t know what I am looking for, that is the problem.<<

>>Then I don’t know how you expect me to help.<<

she replied as quickly as her fingers could.

>>You are good at finding trouble.<<

Marie was not entirely certain how she was meant to take that.

>>Glass houses, bro. I’m not the one sitting in jail in the US with a gun conviction hanging over me.<<

>>No. You only broke the internet by running away and shut down the M15 and FBI for an afternoon because you
somehow even got ISIS looking for you.

Then Hamilton came to talk to your dad
and had a recording of you crying – so when
he left and Hanger panicked and put me in a
financial position to do something about it
I did. That is why I am here. But more importantly,
while I’ve been waiting around for my interview –
I think they are going alphabetically???. Maybe???
With all of the people who were not on site when
the shooting took place, anyway – while I’ve been
biding my time, you managed to solve a murder,
save yourself and your sister, escape protective custody,
and get Roman Abramovich to financially back a citizen’s
initiative.<<

>>In my defence, that was Susan – breaking
the internet. And Abramovich basically had
no choice since I made my escape in a
Chelsea shirt to give some small percentage of all the
money he’s made since Lady Anna was
outed

as a CFC fan to forcing or rather
enabling police
to change policy and prioritise youth. I only
repeated what he’s probably been hearing for
days so unless you are looking to spin something
into a publicity stunt … I mean, just find
a fire alarm, I guess. <<

>>I can’t leave unless we find these papers.<<

Arthur insisted.
What is so important about them?

Can you make this into a publicity stunt?

I mean … Daily Mail has reporters there. What is the angle?

Marie asked, giving the matter genuine consideration.

Angle?

What are you trying to accomplish with these papers you know nothing about? she asked.

Is it just punishing the police?

I think so.

That sounded to Marie a world easier to accomplish than blindly searching for a signed agreement in a packed police station whilst pretending it to be a game of hide and seek with a bored and hungry toddler.

Ok, she answered, suggesting,

I’m going to do my best Effie G and call Talbot who’s like the online editor and get him to post something about the police holding children captive without food or water. Then I’ll call Hanger, but like, as me, and tell him to do a real story about it. I’ll get Susan and she’ll get everyone else to RT and then maybe some American media outlet will pick it up and you’ll have the press outside but this
could take hours and you may still have to sit an interview
and enter a plea.<<

>>But there is something else you could look
for that would let “me” ask for your instant
release and return.<<
she wrote before he could respond.

>>If you can find me Washington’s mobile number
– it won’t be a 10-digit one, they use a different
calibration on government devices – I’ll call,
pretending to be the US Secretary of State and
say that you and my dad have to be released since
Cornwallis might not have had the authority to make
that kind of demand on the Secretary of Defence
and I’m guessing this kind of thing would go
through that minister’s office rather than the president
or something.<<

Marie Robinson did not otherwise consider herself to be particularly special.

She sat second chair in orchestra, she did not sing or dance or say charming things, which might have all been forgiven and forgotten if she had better skin or in any way had begun to warrant the training bra which she had begged her mother to buy when her period came with a promise of physical maturity that had yet to be fulfilled.

She was a rather good athlete, but her sport required a ten minute explanation that might have only amounted to ‘I’m rich, I’m white, and I have parents who plan to live vicariously through me in about five years when they can brag about all of the scholarships I’ll have received to elite universities with fencing teams mostly because only elite universities have fencing teams – but there is seriously nothing bad ass about the sport. It is just three minutes of poking another person with a blunt object,’ – which, more often than not, was how she put it when explaining the traditional skills of swordsmanship was invariably met with confusion and empty comments about a bravery that, if Marie in fact processed, she certainly had never made use of.

She considered that she was probably a bit clever but had long since stopped raising her hand in class upon noting that teachers ignored her in favour of students who did not know the answer and sometimes she was told that she was funny which she largely attributed to this wistful thinking of those with an inability to distinguish between adolescent sarcasm and actual wit.
When people described her, it was primarily in terms of her parentage, not in the elegant way of a true and proper heroine with royal lineage and a title to speak to it but rather in scandalised whispers that Marie had to wonder if she was not in fact intended to hear – ‘Mary Robinson’s daughter – the reason her husband abandoned her!’ or ‘John Terry’s rejected bastard’ or ‘Ban Tarleton’s spoilt ward.’ None of those descriptions, Marie had always noted, said anything about her personally – but then maybe there was nothing to say.

She was not particularly special and the only thing about her that might warrant any notoriety was a secret she rarely shared – she was a superb mimic of other people’s voices and after spending a few minutes on YouTube making notes of speech-patterns, she could convince nearly anyone that she was someone else entirely.

She had, however, done this in Arthur’s presence before, mostly because it difficult to draw him into conversation and it was disconcerting to spend a half an hour in silence when their project group had finished its coursework. Her mean but accurate imitations of anyone he might think to name had quite nearly made him smile on more than one occasion.

She wondered why he hesitated now - surely he did not doubt that she could impersonate the owner of the Daily Mail or the American Minister of Apologising to Countries with Oil Reserves?

The word ‘typing’ appeared next to his name with dots that came and went quicker than a heartbeat. She waited, biting at her bottom lip. She was not particularly special, but she imagined her single true skill might be of some actual assistance -

Single skill? Marie self-corrected - Hardly! According to Arthur, at least, she was particularly good at finding trouble as well and she considered that if tested she might be even better at making it for other people.

>>>I’ll look,<< he answered at long last, giving Marie pause as she poured over these words, wondering at what he had possibly deleted before hitting send.

>>>But I can’t just leave Cicero and the others. They asked for my help.<<

She understood the sentiment.

>>>I have an idea, << Marie announced with some measure of pride.

>>>Practically everyone in NY’s political class is on site, right?

Text me a list of people running for re-election, or from a scandal, or something.<<

>>>What are you planning?<<

At this, she rolled her eyes.

>>>Order pizza? Obvs.<<

>>>Just trust me.<<
“A few hours ago, our Intelligence services received word that Lord Edmund died of a massive store,” Washington said in solemn tones as though he meant to have a real go at this.

Before Simcoe had a chance to react, an officer knocked and Washington himself rose, returning with an envelope he left sealed and placed at the bottom of his stack of paperwork.

“Then something was clearly lost in communication,” Akinbode countered. “I only just saw him.”

“His father then,” Clayton interrupted. “Does Eddie know?”

“Formally?” Washington seemed to ponder. “I suspect he has been given word; certainly, Her Majesty indicated such intent earlier this afternoon in bestowing your friend with an earldom; my understanding is that the title is given as a curtesy to the heir to the Dutchy of Richmond, a position held, under the laws of succession, at least informally by his father and namesake until 19:34 yesterday evening, Greenwich Mean Time -”

“What is that?” Clayton asked. Simcoe rolled his eyes. Perhaps the whole family suffered dyschronometria.

“Seven thirty-four PM,” Abe muttered. “Two-thirty-four PM here.”

“No,” Clayton shook his head, “what I mean to say is the time is outside any realm of suspicion. John, Jordan,” he continued with an undeserved air of familiarity, “perhaps you can attest? I was forced onto a plane when the ceremony was beginning having gotten a call from George Hanger advising that my brother had been taken into police custody and that Marie seemed to again be under threat by an acronymed organization,” he said, out-of-place and accusing, “but lest I digress, I’ve watched Royal Weddings before, I have four daughters and therefore no voice therein, and these ceremonies are all at least three hours in duration. Three long, painful hours of irrational tradition,” he commented, briefly glancing at the kilts both Simcoe and Akinbode wore, “meaning that here in New York, why you would have just been getting started – two thirty you say? Edmund and Anna would not even have exchanged vows yet when the ceremony began at two. Am I mistaken?”

“No, you are not,” Washington gave.

“I’ll confess, I’m not a royalist by any stretch,” Clayton said, “but when you – an American – sit before me and insinuate that Her Majesty, Elizabeth Alexandra Mary, officially Elizabeth II, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of her other realms and territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth and Defender of the Faith acted out of accordance with the law -”

“Edmund and Anna were crowned before the prince’s death was announced to the public, suggesting prior knowledge, perhaps intent,” Washington clarified.

“As long as we are ‘off the record’, Your Excellency,” Clayton frowned, dropping any last pretence of willing cooperation, ‘no fuckin’ shit. Of course, Her Majesty the Queen would be informed on Matters of State prior to the filthy masses.”

“Is this your jurisdiction?” Akinbode suggested in lighter language and a harsher tone.

It was clear that Washington was not often in the position of having to defend his judgement. He made a show of looking at the papers again, lifted an eyebrow and continued in the kind of
condemnation only capable of manifesting within someone in a position of intimate familiarity.

Simcoe wondered what was written, half feeling it was nothing of significance to him, nor to Woodhull, nor Akinbode, and certainly not Tarleton as Washington spoke as though he were sipping the sort of tea Americans ruined with ice-cubes and Splenda on a back-porch-swing somewhere in rural Virginia. “It is when there is evidence to suggest that this murder was committed on American soil,” he countered calmly.

His nonchalance was practiced, Simcoe decided, perhaps even rehearsed. The Defence Secretary clearly felt comfortable in this role.

Simcoe leaned forward, hoping to glimpse what the man kept referring to, what he could possibly have on any of them after their individual confessions had been met with acquittal, after Arnold had attested to the police and public that nearly everyone at the wedding reception had been instrumental in securing his return to safety.

And now they were to be charged with a murder that occurred overseas?

It did not make any sense, at least, Simcoe could not himself make any sense of it.

Woodhull looked wide-eyed and petrified which defined his reaction to most all external stimuli; Simcoe was tempted to enjoy it.

Clayton looked perturbed but nonplussed.

Akinbode looked at his wristwatch. “It is scarcely three AM in London,” he said, “even with the might of the Crown presumably making demands on some poor coroner should foul-play indeed be expected, providing Lord Edmund at least seemed to have been killed by a massive stroke as you have stated, the toxicology report required to prove otherwise would not be back yet even presuming samples were taken to be tested straight away. That said, my client, Mr John Graves Simcoe, has been compliant in your agent’s request that he not cross state lines, much less leave the country -”

“That isn’t expressly true,” Billy Lee corrected, “NYPD has video evidence of Mr Simcoe having accompanied you yourself to a Walmart in New Jersey -”

“A Walmart in New Jersey isn’t a castle in Edinburgh where several international papers cited Lord Edmund and his Lady would be viewing the ceremony,” Akinbode told him plainly, “unable to travel to the first Royal Wedding to take place in a former colony as their two youngest children were only recently released from hospital and are still in recovery - a position, evidence might stand to suggest, that the FBI put the twins in to begin with, but I’ve heard too many conspiracy theories to begin adding my own to what is already a ridiculous accusation.

“There is video evidence, Sirs, of the entire wedding, that was broadcast live online and on more than a few television stations worldwide,” Akinbode continued. “Two hundred people were in attendance, most of them dignitaries, all of whom can attest that my client and I did not leave the altar for the entire duration of the ceremony. Mr Woodhull was in the audience as I am sure video footage can also evidence.”

“My client, Mr Abraham Woodhull, doesn’t have a passport,” Clayton added, doubtlessly counting on still getting paid for this extension of his time despite threats Washington had made of wanting to implement him in some action as well, “He has never left the country, Your Excellency.”

“I haven’t been home since last June,” Simcoe said with a light shrug.
“You needn’t have been,” Washington answered, “we are here to speak of collusion.”

“Then I would ask to see evidence,” Akinbode countered.

“I’ll be apply to oblige the gentleman’s request,” Washington claimed, “unfortunately, we only have one copy on hand of a conversation your client and Colonel Tarleton had that serves the basis of my complaint, but my ADIC is currently reviewing the footage with a former officer assigned to the special task force based on a tip from a colleague in Edinburgh, so let me instead put the events of the last few months into a context I fear you are all missing,” he stopped, again shuffling his paperwork.

“And that is?” Simcoe snorted, presuming that having nothing immediately on hand meant Washington had nothing on him whatsoever.

“John André was attempting to save lives, the younger Edmund Hewlett’s in particular,” the Defence Secretary said calmly, folding his fingers together over the pile of papers as though to protect them.

It was too much.

“He drove him to suicide,” Simcoe stated as he rose from his seat, learning in as he heard the chair fall backwards, trying to gauge the source of Washington’s misinformation as he attempted to continue his correction, “he drove us all to-”

“Don’t,” Akinbode cautioned sharply, pulling him back with a hard grip in his shoulder. “You’ll answer questions when asked directly, and then only when I direct you to do so. Are we understood?” he hissed into his ear, words sounding like both a scream and a rattlesnake as Simcoe’s hearing air tried to process the noise at such close proximity.

“Mr Simcoe, returning to your restraints, do you presently trust yourself to remain calm in the even that I have them removed?” Washington inquired, still with the same back-porch-swing bemusement that stank of cold and sweetened tea.

“Relevance?” Akinbode countered. Simcoe, hating him and his court-room-speak shot his lawyer a glare that the attorney was quick to match.

“His hands are jittering, he seems uncomfortable,” Washington observed, shifting, “Mr Simcoe, I’m about to explain to you that we have video evidence of you colluding with Banastre Tarleton to ensure that a crime he suggests to have committed got closure if not cover, something that has since resulted in investment pouring into the City of Liverpool, not to mention the trust funds that have been set up for his two daughters, as managed by your former fiancée.

“The suggestion of collusion is made stronger by the fact that we can prove you and the younger Edmund Hewlett were involved in a trading scheme to gain the system over the course of market uncertainty that took Wall Street when Arnold’s disappearance brought National Security into question,” he said pulling a paper from his pile. “You confessed to having hit Arnold with your fist prior to knowing who he was, having forced a bystander to help you create an alibi – apropos, a bystander who herself signed a non-disclosure agreement attesting to the same event, albeit with herself taking an elevated roll in the way things transpired initially and thereafter, which further suggests to me that you have been withholding evidence, evidence such as the fact that Mrs Woodhull may have had more reason to participate in the affair as her husband, Mr Woodhull here, turns out to have to have had a hand in keeping Senator Arnold prisoner all along. Evidence such as,” he paused, “her acting on your request to carry out a crime in exchange for Tarleton agreeing to continue acting as a distraction after the NYPD had already ruled out his participation, crimes that,
mind you, came to her financial benefit as well.

“I’m accusing you of High Treason, Sir, and as I have no reason to think that you would be in this position were it not for the ill judgement of others, I’m offering you an out, but I am doing this in the same room as a man who loves the same woman,” Washington said, shifting to Abe, “whose actions put you and all of your friends and loved ones into a precarious position, whose actions, in part, drove your wife to orchestrating a murder Colonel Tarleton could not have possibly pulled off himself. Now,” he returned to Simcoe, “you were one of André’s subjects … this weaponization of fear – tell me, Mr Simcoe, are you afraid?” he challenged. “Should I be? Can I trust you to retain your calm if I remove your handcuffs?”

“No,” Akinbode answered for him.

“Yes, Your Excellency,” Simcoe countered to his attorney’s visible displeasure.

“I’m a soldier, not a monster,” Simcoe said to his friend under his breath, “Furthermore I’m stupid enough to -”

“Oh, yes, John. You very much are,” Akinbode hissed, again causing Simcoe’s ears to ring. He wanted to be freed from his restraints just to remove the source of the sound that sent shivers of pain all throughout his body. Simcoe felt his knees buckle and his friend gave him a look to let him know he was conscious of the agony he had caused. “Your Excellency, may I have a moment alone with my client?”

“I want to hear what His Excellency thinks he has to say about Mrs Woodhull,” Simcoe shot him down before the request could be accepted or denied. Washington motioned for Lee to uncuff him. Akinbode fell back into his chair, burying his face in his palm.

“Then sit down and allow me to start from the beginning,” Washington invited. Simcoe, shaking his hands to encouraged blood flow anew, removed his chair from the floor. Rather than pulling it back to the table with the others, he let it stand back where it had fallen, lifting his long legs and crossing them on the table stacked high with trumped-up chargers, certain the question of what was traditionally worn under a kilt would cause some shared measure of discomfort if the relaxed pose he was trying to pull off failed to intimidate on its own in the same way that Washington’s understated confidence had the effect of doing.

“August of last year,” Washington began, “American Intelligence intercepted communication between Lady Edith of Richmond and Dr John André, who, at the time, was conducting research for and backed by the Department of Defence. As the British Ministry of the same function was cooperating with the scheme insofar as -”

“They had no interest in preforming their most basic function of protecting the rights and freedoms of British citizens -” Clayton surmised. Simcoe found himself nodding.

“We are speaking of defence, not diplomacy,” Washington countered, “Charles Cornwallis takes his orders from Westminster who have the same interest in seeing André’s research implemented within the armed force as most of The White House’s other NATO allies. That said, I have little reason to suspect Cornwallis of knowing much about the data we were collecting until there was reason to believe it was being corrupted. Again, this is where the wife of the brother of Britain’s largest noble landholder, the mother of Richmond’s presumed eventual successor enters our story. Lady Edith would not have known about the research of which her son was taking part –

“Not even Edmund knew,” Simcoe scoffed.
“Not even Lady Eleanor who has made herself a part of Britain’s … erm, security apparatus through her charitable ventures,” Washington said, his attempts at delicacy coming over as an indirect accusation, “seems to have heard of the test programme prior to her brother’s arrest which should have been prevented on the basis of -”

“Imma stop you right there, Sir,” Akinbode shook his head. “In America, everyone is equal under the law -”

“The law which you yourself seemed eager to help them break in at least one instance, Mr Akinbode,” Washington reminded him, holding up a finger as though he meant to wave it. Instead, he adjusted his cheap reading glasses and let his index fall to that of his files. “Don’t worry, we’ll come to your forgery in due course,” he said. “Edmund Hewlett, as I was stating, should not have been arrested because knowingly or not, he was acting as an agent of the DOD -”

“A spy?” Abe asked. It took everything with Simcoe not to hit him.

Washington gave Simcoe a rare smile as their eyes met, a smile that made him all too aware of the fingers he was tapping on his kneecap, tapping that grew quicker and ever more irregular as he realised the error that he had made in requesting his restraints be removed.

He wanted to hit Abe Woodhull – acting on this instinct now that he was free to do so would not help his case; not to do so, however, was to help André - to witness that his research put no one at risk, to prove the case the prosecution seemed to be making.

Simcoe balled his fingers into fists, digging his nails as tightly as he could into his palms, cursing himself for his folly and impatience. Akinbode was right. He had been caught. Nothing he did now would not seem a confession of some kind.

Washington continued. “But Lady Edith felt she had reason to suspect that a plot was being hatched against her liege lord, as it were, by one or both of her daughters. As a counter manoeuvre, perhaps in attempt to halt any action from being taken, she rang her eldest son’s psychologist and discussed the … “possibility” of Edmund having an “accident” with his medication. An overdose,” he clarified sharply, and sharper still, “A suicide. When André initially refused – and we are only now aware of this information thanks to a tip one George Hanger provided to DI Ferguson of Police Scotland to follow up on with the Merseyside and Greater Manchester police forces – Lady Edith made very real threats against André’s mother and siblings, first attempting to cover her hand by calling in a favour of one of the generals in an illegal paramilitary group know to operate in the Liverpool area only to be refused outright, a decision that threatened the city’s prosper when the next day the Hewletts in response – or, rather, hoping for another - cancelled contract renewal discussions in what had, until such point, been assumed a done deal.

“Ironically, this might well have sealed her … well, husband’s fate, but here I am getting ahead of myself. Lady Edith was forced to result to using her own men to do a job, and the GMP seems to have since found a suspect willing to testify to the source of his payment. More I cannot say as this is obviously going to become a matter for the United Kingdom’s Witness Protection Programme -”

“Your Excellency, with all respect, have you any experience in industry?” Clayton Tarleton interrupted. “These allegations - if I follow correctly form your vague descriptions - are completely absurd. You are stating that the wife of an aristocratic industrialist tried to cancel a contract because some invisible army refused to do her bidding? In England, to clarify, and not some third world banana republic without a functioning sewage- or waste collection system -”

“A cabinet appointment relies on information rather than experience,” Washington explained. “To answer your question, Mr Tarleton, after serving a conscription that saw me needlessly escalate
tensions in Vietnam due to a deficiency in French, I spent several decades in large-scale project management and production.

“...”

“...” Washington straightened, “gives you an air of legitimacy.”

“...” the Liverpudlian asked, clearly ready to give the matter consideration no matter what it entailed if his city and family’s status therein were under threat.

“No one in this room is being charged, son,” Washington said.

“If an arrangement can be reached,” Lee adjusted lightly.

Washington nodded. “If it can’t, the Pentagon has reason to hold Mary Woodhull solely accountable for a series of crimes committed across three continents over the course of the past several weeks.”

“How?” Simcoe demanded. Abe remained silent. He was bringing to suspect him of having said quite a lot prior to this meeting and again found himself weighing the implications of further assault charges.

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No one could enter.

No one could leave.

But no one with the authority to do so had said anything about simply opening the door.

All of the pizza boxes Mary Woodhull has watched fill the reception room had individualized messages for those holding public office written in Sharpie on their inside covers, all pertaining to unlawful imprisonment – some with the accusation of evidence of their wilful compliance with police corruption around the Arnold Investigation, some drawing parallels between the senator and the Setauket-based bystanders sitting in custody at this Albany station –

- most, however making accusations of cruelty towards children, promising that the press was on
“Someone cares,” she said to little Thea Burr, handing her a slice of peperoni on a brown napkin from a bathroom dispenser over the sound of a dozen men screaming on their phones to their lawyers, hoping to be heard over the cries of their peers.

“They only care about themselves,” Thea observed, unimpressed with the scene unfolding in front of them. “Pretty sure whichever activist set this up is the same way. I don’t want to be a cause to rally around. I don’t want to talk about what happened to someone with a microphone or anyone with a megaphone. I just want to go home. You already sat down with the police. Why can’t we leave? They let a few people go already – the diplomats, his Lordship – and they are probably guilty of loads more than anyone still here.”

Mary wished that were true.

“Aren’t you hungry?” Thea asked, picking a thin slice of the highly seasoned hard sausage from the slice, hesitantly bringing it to her lips as though she were confused by it, caught between her hunger and her higher principles. Mary could more than understand and empathise with the child’s desire to not be part of an agenda. Had the crimes she had committed against God and man by way of creating a cover not outweighed her original sin, she might have made her own stand, however small, however significant.

“It isn’t a pomegranate,” she forced herself to smile. “Taking a bite isn’t going to condemn you to this place, nor will the world suffer a long winter. Do you know that story? Hades and Persephone? It used to be one of my favourites, when I was a girl.”

“Where she eats the seed and has to spend six months in the underworld?” Thea frowned. “Why was that among your favourites?”

“Because when I heard it,” Mary answered honestly, “I always saw myself as Hades. I thought the world worked that way, or maybe I once wanted it to – that you could trick and trap someone and make them your own and then everything else would fall into place. Now … now I just want spring to come again. Sometimes that means letting go.”

“I don’t think that is right,” the girl countered. “I mean, some people want to be held – even if, and maybe especially when circumstances are bad, they just don’t know how to say it. I think you are still Hades, like, not in a bad way – ‘cause I don’t think he is the bad guy. Persephone’s mom was the one who went and turned the whole world to winter. Whatever you did – or whatever they made you say you did – you didn’t do that. Inspector Tallmadge did. Maybe … what you are looking forward to is fall, if that makes sense?”

“What about you, what are you looking forward to?”

“What season? Hm. Bundesliga, maybe – 2019/2020,” Thea said with a hint of a smirk, “George Hanger said that he could get Pip and Cicero a trial at Leverkusen and I guess he wasn’t kidding because that sport agent showed up like right after the wedding and Mr Hamilton wanted to talk to him right away. So, I figure, they will get to go to Germany and maybe, by some miracle they will have a decent season and will go on to get better contracts in Spain or England and then they will come home and I’ll still be able to embarrass them on the pitch and then maybe they will find it within their egos to apologise for essentially leaving me alone to hang all of the decorations while they left to pass a ball in front of someone’s phone.”

“I’m … actually – really, really happy to hear you say that,” Mary found herself smiling. “And I’m so, so sorry I told Cicero not to play that game of his. I am sure the last thing your friends want is
for you to feel excluded.”

“I don’t feel excluded … not really. I know they care about me; I just don’t know how to really say that I want to be held, either. I just … I don’t want to wander around with them, waiting on time to pass, knowing that me might well run into Tallmadge. I don’t want them to, either. I don’t think anyone does. But it will be over soon, won’t it?” she asked with some hope. “I’ll be able to go back to school and soccer practice without seeing police cars and everything will go back to the way it was before we ever found that stupid phone. I haven’t really even been able to touch mine since it happened and I know I’m being a stupid little girl, I just -”

“You are not,” Mary whispered encouragingly as she squeezed the girl’s hand. “There is no such thing as ‘a stupid little girl’. You are strong, Thea, and smart besides. Sometimes that looks like grabbing a sword and shield and charging into battle, but you know what? Sometimes its sitting back and focusing on yourself rather than your enemies. Maybe, if more people had their priorities in that order, there would be a lot less pain in the world.”

“Maybe,” Thea said, looking down at her slice of pizza. “Maybe you were right though – and someone out there genuinely does care, and I should, too. If it is all the same, I’m going to get Pip and then try to find Cicero and Arthur and tell them about dinner. Thank you,” she added, after taking a bite before she could bring herself to swallow. “For talking to me. For taking the time. Sorry,” she said, self-conscious, bringing her hand to her mouth to cover it as she continued to chew.

“No, please – please eat. And it is my pleasure, truly. If there is anything you need -”

“What about you though? Are you hungry? Should I get you a slice of something? I just mean, because of your ankle.”

“That – that is really lovely and kind of you. Just plain cheese if there is any left.”

“Okay.”

Mary took a deep breath.

When Thea’s back was turned, she buried her face in her hands and cursed fate and the tricks it continued to play. There would have never been a phone had she and Simcoe properly disposed of the evidence after failing to dispose of the body – had they not fled the crime scene, had there not been a crime. She looked around the room, counting the lives she had adversely affected, knowing full well the chain of events she complied together was now far longer and long reaching than she may ever chance see.

“Mary?” a voice asked. She would recognise it anywhere and wanted to bury herself deeper within her own bloodstained hands if only to hide her guilt a moment longer from the woman who might have yet to learn she should be siding with the prosecution.

“Anna,” Mary greeted, still thinking of Thea, “have you seen Aaron Burr around?”

“He’s sitting in some on deposition for the State Prosecutor,” the bride answered quickly, her mind clearly elsewhere, “where is my husband? What is all this?”

“Anna, I am so sorry. Sit down.”

Mary looked up. Anna only shook her head. “Mary? Mary, look – we really need to talk. Your father-in-law is looking to pursue custody of Thomas. I just spoke to him. For the love of God, tell me that you did not actually sign anything without a lawyer present -”
Contrary to Anna’s demeanour around the matter, Richard’s alleged threat might well have been the best news Mary had received all day.

“I didn’t have a choice,” she defended. “I had to take the non-disclosure. It isn’t just Arnold, you don’t understand -”

“Of course it isn’t just Arnold,” Anna spat, “It is André’s hand in this – in all of this – that they are trying to hide. But what … Mary, if you went on the record stating that you ran over the senator in a stolen vehicle slightly inebriated on box-wine and recreational Xanax,” she shifted, shaking her head once more, “where is Abe?”

Mary hated when Anna stood as she did – hands on her hips, jaw clenched and chin extended, nose pointed slightly upwards – it was the ultimate show of the woman’s holier-than-thou tendencies – the worst of it was, Anna seemed fully unconscious of just how she came across -

No. The worst of it was, she had every right to make this wordless accusation of wrong.

“He is in his own hearing,” Mary answered. “He has a lawyer. He wanted you but you were with Aberdeen and Jordan is with John and everyone else is working with the state in some fashion so he found a foreigner but it’s not … Anna, I didn’t have a choice. I’m so, so sorry -”

“Mary, for the love of God, what did you say?”

“Sit down.”

“Mary!”

“Edmund is gone, Anna,” Mary hissed. “I thought the two of you would have more time, that I’d have a chance to tell you before -”

“Wait – what? What do you mean ‘gone’?” Finally, she did as she was bade and took the chair that Thea had vacated.

Mary swallowed her voice falling into a whisper, “He had to return to Scotland. His father passed away a few hours ago and I’m certain there will be questions.”

“His father?” Anna squinted, correcting, “His uncle. The one Tarleton -”

“Tarleton could not have possibly committed the crime he confessed to,” Mary countered, confessing, “I see that now … but Anna, you have to understand, John and Edmund … they were willing to let him take the fall for Arnold’s disappearance and Tarleton was willing to play into their designs so long as his city didn’t suffer for his sins and he asked John - in exchange for what is now apparent was a mere encore of an act he has been performing for some time - to make sure that certain contracts were renewed and well, it just worked out that I was in a better position to ensure this eventuality than anyone else at the time this all seemed like a good idea. UNICEF needed to invent physical evidence of a programme we’ve been collecting for - for going on five years now at that - and suddenly there was a refugee crisis I could exploit to those ends.

“I rang up Edmund’s sister Eleanor who had been forced by the British Ambassador to the US to take a bad deal from the French in their hopes of funding some coup and I offered to house, feed and educate the war orphans and widows her group had done the same for. But, business being business, I had to offer her something more in exchange: What I gave was a hypothesis – if the Duke of Richmond was going to die sometime over Easter Weekend, if the confessed assassin could arrange to not be in the area at the time, he had probably arranged for the target to be poisoned, and, from what I had heard of Tarleton, he had probably not been able to accomplish this
act independently of the knowledge and expertise of other people.

“The thing is,” she continued, “Richmond’s death would not in and of itself accomplish anything, save for sparing Edmund’s niece from the same fate of his sister and who knows how many other little children, so I told Lady Eleanor to gather everyone she suspected might have been involved in the murder on some level, or alternatively – might well have had reason of their own to want to have been, using your wedding as an excuse. Then, I told her to switch the bodies before a whole host of otherwise reputable witnesses. If Edmund, rather than Edward, died the effect could be controlled, at least, the CEO and Chairman positions would open whereas if it were only a seat – Edmund, your Edmund, might yet have to fill it.

“I thought, this way … everyone wins, right? Your wedding became a much bigger to-do than I know you wanted, even absent of everything that went down before the reception, but … I never expected the civil war in Mali to get quite so bloody, which I know sounds ridiculous,” Mary chastised herself. “I guess what I mean is I had no idea that other western actors might have been involved. I had no idea my own husband was holding Arnold captive, and I,” she took a deep breath, “I really did not think Tarleton would find an escape from his initial interrogation and I know how horrible that sounds and believe me, I feel horrible for having ever thought … I mean the colonel is just trying to protect his friends and family like everyone else who accidently found themselves involved in all of this and now that he … well, having played no actual part in the crime that never officially took place, he won’t be able to collaborate any of this, which I worry means someone back in Great Britain is going to want to talk to Edmund – your Edmund – especially giving the confession he gave to Tallmadge via your mother.

“I was the one who killed Hewlett Senior, who isn’t technically dead – ironically in the same way I suppose Senator Arnold was never technically missing,” Mary tried to laugh but found herself choking, her eyes and cheeks wet. “Anna … you own me nothing. I confessed to my role in Arnold’s disappearance, hoping that that would be the end of it, hoping that they would not look at me or my family further, hoping that Thomas … but maybe it is better this way. At least his grandfather … oh Anna!” she cried, “I’ve failed my son, mine and everyone else’s. Because I went out to pick Abe up from his gig that night - Cicero and his friends were made victim to police brutality. Because I made adjustments to a conspiracy, thinking they would help John and myself escape the consequences of our own shared crime, little Marie ran away and now all of her friends are being punished for trying to find her. I can’t forgive myself for any of it.

“Maybe Mali would have happened independent of my resettling refugees – I, I don’t know. Maybe it only happened because Lafayette was using Arnold as an excuse to feed insider trading information to Edmund and his wife happened to be in a boulangerie with General Bouchard’s very-pregnant daughter at the same time someone with a cell phone posted something to Facebook from Bamako. Maybe if I had not shown up, the fight between Simcoe and Arnold would have had worse consequences for the both of them. Richmond would have died regardless and Tarleton may be punished still – its … we are adults, Anna. We can understand consequence even if it is a struggle to accept. The kids were truly innocent in all of this.

“I’m a mother myself and I can’t imagine how Abby must have felt hearing that her son had to be taken to hospital, or how Aaron must have felt when he saw his twelve-year-old daughter in handcuffs and found on her intake paperwork that a rape kit had been ordered on her behalf. I can’t imagine what must have been going through Eliza’s mind when armed police broke into her house and there was nothing that she could do to protect her children. And for that matter, I can’t imagine what Ben must have felt when he came to find that men under his command had mishandled minors.

“This woman … DI Yilmaz’s mother, she had to solve her daughter’s case. She had to bury her in a
closed coffin with a protest occurring across the street from their mosque – idiots saying that this woman who died in the line of duty had self-detonated. I saw it on the news – naturally with CNN and Fox giving conflicting reports of the incident. It’s sick – it’s just – it is absolutely sick. And Tarleton … Jesus, imagine escaping certain execution for the crime of killing the man who saved your life somewhere in the fucking desert, only to come back to find the only thing you have worth living for is gone without a trace. And all because I borrowed your keys when I knew I shouldn’t be driving.

“I don’t know, Anna. This all just feels so impossible. Abe and I don’t stand a chance against the fucking Pentagon. And yet we are the lucky ones – at least we know that Thomas is safe. It almost doesn’t seem fair that we should,” she began to sob.

Anna placed a hand on Mary’s shoulder – first a pat, then a pull. Mary could feel her friend’s nails digging into her skin, which hurt considerably. Mary swallowed and clenched her jaw, determined not to cry out. Anna loosened her grip and lifted Mary’s chin.

“Mary – fight!” she barked before again falling into a whisper. “Your plan was a good one. The Tarletons, the Hewletts – my husband included, it pains me to say – are far more competent criminals than you or I or John or Abe or Peggy or Aberdeen or even John André or Robert Rogers. They will figure it out, be it in the backroom of a court house or the back nine of a golf course. If Banastre has not said anything to incriminate anyone else by this point, there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that he will do so now – certainly not insofar as you are involved. As you said, he would have had no way of seeing your hand.

“Now, focus on the immediate,” Anna urged. “I’m going to get the anything you signed dismissed as having been executed under duress and we are going to come to an agreement that won’t see you and Thomas separated, won’t see your son separated from his father because the fault, if it should be assigned in all of this, is with André and the powers that protected him until his untimely demise made itself politically expedient. We have evidence of the internal attempts made to interrupt Tallmadge’s inquiry – we can prove it. Everything they have on us is speculation or circumstantial. And as for Edmund,” she stopped, “- he really, he just left without a goodbye?”

“Anna -”

“Was he arrested?”

“Not that I know of.”

Anna nodded, then looked away. “It’s not your fault, Mary,” she said after taking a deep breath. “I’m not going to sit around though and let the day’s events break up anyone else’s family. Who conducted your interview? I swear I’ll find grounds to see them disbarred.”

“I’m sure an agreement can be reached,” Washington assured the suspects and solicitors he had gathered before him. Simcoe felt anything but convinced of His Excellency’s intentions.

“Continuing from Jane Tarleton’s refusal to get her subjects involved in a Hewlett family squabble,” Washington said, “Lady Edith punished the whole city for what she perceived as a betrayal in hopes that the other great families of the municipality would put pressure on the one best positioned to do her bidding only to be met with unity and integrity on the matter to the point
of her Ladyship having to resort to using her own guard rather than members of the former First Lady’s firm to put the André family in a bad spot in order to get their own prodigal son to act against one of his patients - who, while he had nothing to do with his family’s in-fighting, was of some considered importance to the US Department of Defence.

“André felt he had to act,” Washington defended, “that he had to make a plausible case that his methods were harming one of the test subjects and thus asked his research partner if Hewlett could not be pulled from the collective data. Which is when my office got in touch with the MI5, were told that Her Majesty was aware of the greater plot against the Duke of Richmond which Edith was acting to put a stop to and asked not to pursue it further. As I am sure you can assess from that fact that we are having this conversation,” Washington smiled, “we didn’t listen.

“While André did his best to give the cover that he was doing a job in order to protect his family,” the Secretary of Defence again repeated as though this excuse were answer enough for the good doctor’s sins, “we dug a little deeper into the underlying problems leading up to this drastic situation. After all, it interfered with what we were trying to accomplish. The Duke of Richmond was whispered to be part of a paedophilia ring, often targeting young members of his own family and trading time with them to members of the upper and lower Houses against his ability to secure votes within his own collation and thus sway policy. The Crown could not bring one of its own to court by the time it undoubtedly knew of the illicit market for such would weaken the position of an already weakening monarchy in the shadow and suspicions that engulfed them in the wake of Princess Diana’s tragic death.”

“You are not suggesting that is related?” Simcoe pried.

“No, but as you are aware, Mr Simcoe, there is no reasonable doubt that other high-profile murders were carried out and kept quiet to keep some things in the family. My sources were able to confirm that the source of the stroke that took your former fiancée’s father from his young family were never sought, the autopsy - while seeming to contradict what his medical records until such time were able to tell us - was never completed. It seems Thomas Gwillim received a substantial pay-out for an agreement not to expose Richmond and was second guessing his decision upon discovering that his wife was pregnant with a little girl.

“It seems to me that later on the same tactic was employed against your school-mate Edmund Hewlett when he tried to stand up to his family against the ills that they had committed against you yourself as a child for having threatened part of their wider business model.

“The Hewletts are an old house, long powerful within their native Scotland as they have been within Britain proper at least since betraying Bonnie Prince Charlie in battel, being granted Richmond in addition to a host of territories won in war. Huge stretches of land are naturally expensive to maintain and this a century later the family was nearly bankrupt and began to expand into emerging markets, frowned upon in such circles as something belonging to the peasant classes. It wasn’t Industrial Revolution that lead their path ack to riches, however, but rather the Afghan War which brought them into contact with the means of production, shall we say. When opium became illegal in Britain in the early twentieth century, police were slow to action until newspapers began sensationalizing celebrity deaths from the substance, and then only took action against Chinese dealers and supply chains in following with the zeitgeist of an emerging era of paranoid nationalism and increasingly racist practices where not policies across Europe, essentially giving the Hewletts a monopoly of industry which they have maintained against threats from immigrant populations, largely from former colonies, while at the same time working with the police against competition and reinvesting a substantial portion of these earnings in drug prevention and rehabilitation programmes, which sounds like penance until one considers that they own the land that supplies pharmaceutical companies with ingredients necessary to make antidotes to their own
poisons – sometimes in the self-same fields.

“Still,” Washington consented, “without them controlling the market, the UK might fear a more violent crime culture such as that which we have in the US which they are not equipped to contend, and so, perhaps partially through the forces of inertia, the Hewletts are allowed to continue. But you knew all of this,” he observed.

Simcoe dug his fingernails into his palm in hopes of stopping them from betray him, or Anna, or Edmund. He should have done something. There had been a point, he remembered Ban accusing, in which he could have. Now all he could do was hope to conceal his cowardice if not his sin of indifference.

“I didn’t,” Abe said. “I didn’t think anyone outside of the power apparatus did for sure. Rogers mentioned that in Scotland there are whispers about their misdeeds but I am pretty sure even he thinks that it’s just an attempt to sell papers and not an actual … he was trying to exploit that, Your Excellency. He was looking for a pay-out, as I’ve said on record, trying to blackmail the Hewlett family through Edmund’s arrest, planning to keep Arnold hostage until they paid him off and he could retire to Alaska. Sir,” he argued, “none of this has anything to do with my wife.”

Simcoe swallowed. Abraham Woodhull - a lair, a turncoat, a cheat - was in the moment a better man that John Graves could pretend to himself to be.

Woodhull did not have to pretend his own innocence and ignorance to protect his wife.

Simcoe dug his shaking fingers into his palms - deeper and deeper still - until he had broken his skin.

“It might not have,” Washington agreed, “but as we were looking into the background of the subject André feared would corrupt his data set, it seems we were not alone. Banastre Tarleton, a decorated veteran who suffered a service injury that saw him reemployed in fighting counter terrorism on the home front -”

“Why don’t you people ever say MI6?” Clayton asked in a tone that asserted that unlike hearing a hooligan firm his family had ties to as a ‘paramilitary group’, such phrasing had come up before.

“Because MI6 doesn’t exist,” Billy Lee said, stone faced.

“What are you talking about? Of course it does, everyone knows it does -”

“Everyone thinks they processes a fair bit more knowledge than they truly possess,” Washington countered, “The woman I’m seeing peer reviewed a study on it which we can replicate if you desire. Do you know how a ball point pen works?”

“Yea?”

“Can you explain it?”

Clayton was silent for a long while. “I – there is ink in a shaft – it is gravity, ‘innit?”

“Exactly. Banastre Tarleton,” Washington cleared his throat before repeating himself once more in his preferred terminology, “a decorated veteran who suffered a service injury that saw him reemployed in fighting counter terrorism on the home front was suspected to have been at the centre of the Richmond conspiracy despite – or perhaps due to – a recent abstinence from public life following a court martial that found no grounds to convict.
“The Crown might have otherwise been satisfied with the operation and its projected outcome. Unable to bring the Duke to court without threatening the security of the entire apparatus, they wanted to see him … replaced by any means deemed necessary. No one likes extortion, after all, even when they are the beneficiaries.”

“But they don’t know Edmund,” Simcoe snorted. “He’s hapless, he’d -”

“Hamper by his very presence his sister Edna, Duchess of Hamilton’s ambitions of an independent Scotland,” Washington countered. “I wouldn’t accuse Her Majesty of being altogether in pursuit of incompetence. Ideally, it was told to me by Cornwallis, Lady Eleanor would be the best candidate -”

“Yea … even though birds can inherit territories north of the boarder if there are no male heirs, Ellie’s got the bloody Pepe Reina Position in the Line of Succession, so that option is out,” Clayton commented under his breath.

Simcoe did his best not to laugh but gave into pressure when Akinbode succumbed. “Spain’s third keeper,” Clayton tried to explain to the Americans among them, “it is the most useless position in international sport, he never ran the risk of being subbed in – you know what,” the scouse surrendered to blank stares, “never mind. It is like explaining colour to the blind.”

“Best jokes have to be explained,” Simcoe muttered, not having any real cause to conflict beyond his resentment that a man for whom he held no respect had caused him to laugh a little in a dire circumstance. Akinbode nudged him once more, urging him to be silent. Simcoe resented this as well.

“Be that as it may, “Lee dismissed, “Eleanor has proven an invaluable asset before and with either Edmund - your friend or his late father taking the seat - neither, presumably, would stand in her way of acting within The Crown’s interest.”

“And that is why Lady Edith wanted André to kill her own son?” Akinbode questioned, clearly not wanting to extend the good doctor any benefit of doubt.

“Edmund had a stoke when Eleanor was very young,” Lee explained, “and she believed it to be her fault when her twin brother Eugene came to accuse his mother of having poisoned their older brother. The summer prior, Edmund and Mr Simcoe’s godfather and legal guardian were ready to take his namesake to court.”

Washington looked down at his files and kept his eyes stationed there. The matter was plainly too indecent for a southern gentleman, same as it was for The Crown itself, same as it had been for him, or so Simcoe realised as he found himself quietly contemplating the marks he had made on his own palms wondering if all great Neptune’s ocean would wash this blood clean from his hand as Lee continued of another Scottish tragedy, “Eleanor had pitched and absolute fit about staying with her uncle at his estate in Summerset based on past behaviour and was told what had been done to her body on visits prior was the price she had to pay that others would not have to – meaning, of course, that without support from within the industrial branch of the Hewlett expenditure and subsidiary markets would have to lay off workers – it was a threat they often used at the time but it sounds much different to a ten year old girl than, say, the Lord Mayor of Liverpool,” Lee glanced at Clayton Tarleton who offered no suggestion of recognition.

“Evidently,” the Pentagon’s Press Secretary continued, “a few weeks into the visit she was made to take in spite of her claims of sexual assault, Eleanor was sent elsewhere for most of the rest of the summer. Officially, the Duke had taken ill, according to an informal police source, however, the young Lady Eleanor had a violent episode, stabbing her uncle in his femoral artery with a scissor or
pen-knife from his desk when he had come in to say goodnight. She stayed in the homes of a few MPs for the next few weeks and was thereafter banned from Goodwood House after she had been returned to it broken by other men who had not treated her quite as quote unquote ‘nicely’ as her uncle, who asked if she was ready to be a good girl.

“Eleanor told him instead that if he touched her again, she would simply stab him again and would not try to run away from the room until she had made sure he had bled out entirely. As a girl of ten years, she though that this had gotten back to her parents and had caused them to punish Edmund to teach her a lesson about innocent people suffering for hr sins, and - though that wasn’t the case, then at least - Edith thought to again make her daughter victim to the same logic she had seen work against her time before.”

“The police knew about all of this and did nothing?” Clayton said almost blankly. It was difficult for Simcoe to gage motive, to access if the glorified scout was horrified about the action or that there was an untapped market of exploiting those with no voice in court he had not previously recognised.

“If it makes you feel better, you parents tried and Mr Simcoe’s guardians succeeded,” Washington answered him. “The young Lady Eleanor, made more docile by what she interpreted as being her role in her brother’s fate, spent the next three summers passed about London by powerful men until thinly veiled conversation at a party convention reached your father’s ears. He abruptly refused a nomination he was given – if this was related or not it is impossible to say.”

Clayton nodded. “And then he came home and suggested to Edmund Sr a marriage contract between my older brother and Edna Hewlett to preserve joint financial interest that was completely out of the question: as a woman of noble blood, Edna’s only value is the prospect of marrying another peer and giving him a son, and being that she is a few years older than her birth certificate would otherwise indicate, she had to be sold off - and quickly! - to the heir of someone of consequence. I know,” he confessed, perhaps realising that the Pentagon likely already processed some basic information about his person. “My parents gave me to the Hewletts when I was a newborn to create a certain cover they then had to make sure was maintained. It is why there are no pictures of me or any of my siblings when we were small. Well, I mean there are – of me at least, except I’m citied as being the girl who would grow up to become the Duchess of Hamilton in them.

“I remember that Dad knew he would be refused. Then Hewlett Sr, to my father’s surprise, counted by suggesting a marriage between my prettiest sister and his son the invalid at which point Charlotte screamed the house down. None of the Hewletts never entered it again, to my knowledge.

“My father was furious at her and - when he calmed down - explained to all of us that in some negotiations you have to start the bidding far too high to get what you were really after, and what he was after had been the twins though I never really knew why, I was a teenager with fanciful ideas that were largely self-focused and shame me now knowing the wider context to have even entered my head – I could have married Ellie when we both grew up, gotten a ridiculous dowry and a castle and curtesy title that would not serve me outside of Scotland, which was fine as I saw my post-footballing career taking me to an absurdly Liverpudlian honour of coaching at one of the Glasgow clubs. A romantic notion without any real romance in it,” he seemed to muse. “I don’t know why I imagined myself at her side rather than my younger brother John, for truly I didn’t imagine her at all. But like I said: the arrogance of youth. Sorry for it now though. Maybe if I had known what was really going on, I could have smoothed things over somehow.”

“We all are,” Simcoe said. Only he had known. He had used the conversation as a contest of pain
as though his own was anything comparable –

- Eleanor had been a victim. He had helped make her into an offender.

“Why John and not Banastre?” Lee asked, raising and eyebrow.

“No comment.”

Clayton Tarleton had not misspoken, Simcoe assessed, he was trying to plant a tiny seed of doubt against whatever accusations Washington was willing to level. He likely needed little convincing of the Pentagon’s suspicions surrounding his brother.

“And then, shortly after this episode, the Lord Mayor asked a favour of an old ally,” Lee continued turning to Simcoe, “the then-editor of The Daily Mail whose niece happened to be close friends with Lady Eleanor. Margaret Graves, first asking if her husband mightn’t reopen his case against Edmund Sr, was informed with regret that this would not do for the prosecution was reliant on testimony that Edmund Jr was not able to give in his incapacitated state, and so Margaret resolved that she had to find her own means of ending the abuse cycle. Mrs Graves took the girl with her and her niece on holiday the next summer, buying the princess silicone implants in some developing democracy.”

Friendship, Simcoe considered, was so often a fallacy.

What he remembered of the aftermath was Effie - ignorant to everything beyond the fact that Ellie had been given a pair of toys most of the boys their age wanted to play with where she had not - accuse her ‘friend’ of promiscuity to anyone who would listen, leading to multiple incidences of inappropriate conduct in which Ellie was afforded blame though she had done nothing to encourage this herself.

He had broken up with her over it; only to take her back a few weeks later upon seeing that rather than learn from the consequences of her misdeeds, Effie Gwillim was employing her free time ensuing what was left of Ellie Hewlett’s reputation at school took the same hit her confidence had clearly taken.

Ellie had said nothing in her defence all the while –

- she had, after all, made the mistake of asking for help years before and had come away thinking that other people suffered unfairly for it.

Simcoe could taste his own sick.

None of this was entirely dissimilar to his behaviour towards Edmund for the past two decades and yet the now-grown Hewlett children seemed willing and eager to avenge them which felt a punishment in itself; Simcoe wondered if it even began to approach the crime.

“But that is not where this story ends,” Washington read. “Years later, the same Mrs Graves gave Eugene Hewlett a loan to follow his long-term, slightly older girlfriend back to France when she started university on the condition that he pursue a Baccalauréat as he would not be taking his A Levels. Sometime later, Eugene wrote his sister at school where she seems to have felt she had been abandoned, explaining that his girlfriend Fabienne Bouchard, the general’s daughter, was bringing blackmailed, that he himself owed too much money to the Graves’ to ask for any more, asking if she -Eleanor - could do anything to help, meaning, presumably, if she would pay this man off for them.

“Instead, Eleanor nearly murdered the blackmailer at a charity event according to Inspector
Ferguson’s initial findings and might have done so had Mr Simcoe and the younger Edmund Hewlett not intervened to stop her.

“Edmund Junior came up with a story about the man being a horse thief which the leading investigator had no cause the believe, but all three suspects and witnesses stuck to it until Ferguson drove down to Oxford to get the take of someone who could give character testimony,” Lee returned to Clayton, “your brother, whose observations that day lead Ferguson to break the case and continue to be invaluable in helping us in this one.”

“He testified against his friends?” Clayton challenged. “I’m the last person to extend him any benefit of doubt but that really and truly does not sound like Ban.”

“Against fans of a soccer team he doesn’t seem to like all that much, to be more precise.”

“Chelsea or Liverpool?” the scout with a law degree snorted.

“Liverpool,” Simcoe answered. “And not me,” he added quickly, not wishing to draw suspicion upon his moral character that was not itself earned. “Hewlett. Both of them.”


“Hearing – falsely - that she had been betrayed, Lady Eleanor gave herself up and told the inspector in tears everything about her childhood that we have now relayed to you, saying that the problem at home was not that no one believed her, it was that everyone did and no one was doing anything about it when they gave so much care to so much else. Har father’s offshore wind farm had almost single-headedly put a species of migratory bird on the endangered species list and the event was to raise money for a sanctuary, she wanted him to contend with a corpse, that of another man who threatened her siblings with bodily harm, and Ferguson, who brought all of this to his superiors, was met with an alternate professional assessment and told to sign on the condition that if he did not, their French allies would revoke his Jacobin cousin’s asylum out of a need to protect the Foreign Legion from the threat posed by the victim to its leadership, which Ferguson’s report laid out in causal detail.

“Then Lady Eleanor tried to kill herself while still in police custody, and Ferguson, who was found responsible as he had not followed procedure, was sent to a different office under another name and seems to have since spent his career in a strange limbo of trying to protect the young woman who very nearly died in his interrogation room by trying to prosecute her for offences she is believed to have committed since.”

“Including the attempted murder of her uncle?” Clayton tried to clarify.

“Including the allegations against her father which were again brought to light in a confession the younger Edmund knowing and with fully intent gave in the early stages of the NYPDs investigation into the disappearance of Benedict Arnold. Eleanor had so positioned herself early on that she’s not been in the same room as her uncle in nearly twenty years, but seems convinced all the same that were he to die, she would be the first person to fall into suspicion; and, should she lose the support of her uncle’s allies, the Hewletts, the people they employ, and those in the subsidiary industries would all suffer for it. So, her solution was to put the matter into your brother’s hands …” Washington trailed off, doubtlessly taking note of his own unfortunate phrasing.

“Really?” Clayton spat.
“John André thinks it was an act of mercy,” Washington again seemed to defend. Simcoe felt physically ill.

“Then John André has clearly never met my brother,” Clayton countered.

“He has met his girlfriend,” Washington said. “Mary Robinson told John André while staring in a Broadway production opposite his wife - famous as Philomena Cheer - that your brother had never quite gotten over an attack on base that happened shortly after he had arrived outside of Baghdad from bootcamp. I’ve seen the files,” he said, looking down as to indicate their presence. “Banastre was on patrol duty when a local boy he had thought himself to have befriended - being one of the few English officers fluent in Arabic and in the early days conversing with rather than interrogating the civilian population – had shown up to school in a suicide vest. Your brother was order to shoot, he froze, three soldiers and some eighteen civilians died, most of them minors, orphans being looked after on base until charity and the Foreign Office could come up with a more permanent housing solution. Mrs Robinson, at least, didn’t think he had ever entirely gotten over it, something that John André believes to have manifested in both the colonel’s take no prisoners / leave no witnesses approach to diplomatic relations and in the close bond he’s since built with Mary’s daughter.”

“Diplomatic relations? We say ‘war’ in England,” Clayton interrupted once more, unsettled by what seemed to him to be an act of judgement.

“It isn’t a ‘war’ here unless America has won it,” Woodhull offered of the things Washington said that did not quite translate.

“According to André’s assessment, Lady Eleanor gave Colonel Tarleton a tangible enemy, someone other than himself to fight, something other than an ideology that played well into his own perceptions,” Washington continued. “MI5 believes him to have indeed acted as we ourselves did at the time and asked if we might take care of the situation while he was in our care. We made sure he was sent a copy of Edmund’s confession over his hand in his father’s crimes so that we would have reason to question him, and the matter might have been sorted quietly without leading to any raised questions had he not become a suspect in Arnold’s disappearance, thanks to your planting an old jersey with recent gun residue that had once been in his possession, or rather, Mrs Woodhull having done so when she knew Whitehall would be raided the next morning.”

“Was Mrs Woodhull given the benefit of legal representation while issuing a sworn statement?” Akinbode asked.

“She declined,” Washington answered.

“You are not trying to convict Mary of murder based on -” Simcoe began.

“Well, not with the death of the Duke of Richmond,” Washington stated. “Tarleton seems to have confessed himself to you, but my ADIC feels his rhetoric to be misleading. It seems to me now that while he may planning the assault, he couldn’t have pulled it off without the involvement of a third party, a fourth, fifth even – in fact Hamilton is venturing that Tarleton’s puzzle has so many small parts even those who had played one would have difficulty putting the whole thing together.

“But not Mary Woodhull,” Washington smiled. “Tell me, Mr Simcoe, when you, after agreeing to help Tarleton ensure that ‘the people and City of Liverpool did not pay the price for his sins’, so long as he continued to create cover for you and your role in the Arnold inquiry, what did she say exactly?”

She had told him to leave.
“No comment,” Akinbode answered.

“No comment,” Simcoe repeated.

“What did you say then?”

“No comment,” Simcoe stated again. He wished he could think of something to say on either account that would rid her of any suspicion. He was a coward! A fool! He could not have her and he certainly could not help her. Everything he had done in attempt had only shoved her directly in harm’s way.

“We certainly have a working idea,” Washington claimed. “As soon as you left, Mary Woodhull made a phone call we have no recording or exact record, but which we can reasonably piece back together from the immediate after effects. UNICEF, Mrs Woodhull’s employer, was at the time facing what would have amounted to a Public Relations crisis had Arnold’s disappearance not essentially absolved the organization of press and public scrutiny. Donations were being funnelled into a school in West Africa that did not exist until after this phone call was made and something was negotiated that allowed Woodhull to go to her bosses and tell them that not only had she been able to locate and deliver a hundred and twenty women and children happy to pose for the cause and to pretend that their needs had been met by the organization for several years, they could sue the Times for liability claims with an air of legitimacy that would result in a settlement sure to fund a few years of hesitation on part of the wider press core. She is set for promotion.

“But these people, the ones she was able to relocate, were refugees who had previously lived, worked and gone to school on land that was until quite recently owned by the Hewletts and garrisoned by the British Armed Force before being sold to the warlord France is backing in a civil conflict, a deal that took place in a backroom at the French Embassy in Washington between Rochambeau and Cornwallis which saw the Foreign Legion and rebel forces take a massive offensive in nearby Bamako that bled into the streets of Paris.

“Rochambeau will be recalled. General Bouchard will be made to answer charges in The Hague. Cornwallis might well have resigned over the matter had he not since been given so much else to answer for. But,” he smiled, “you can let Miss Shippen continue thinking Rochambeau her victory if it pleases you - in fact I’ll need to insist upon it.”

“What makes you so certain that we are all going to sign non-disclosure agreements?” Akinbode asked.

“So, Mary is being punished for saving civilians from becoming casualties in an armed conflict?” Simcoe countered, more helpfully, he thought, than his lawyer.

“Mrs Woodhull will be charged with destruction and falsification of evidence,” Washington answered. “With UNICEF claiming the refugees as being year-long recipients of their charity, matching many of the children to descriptions on documents filed and signed off upon by the UN in September of the previous year, the international court will have little to prosecute the two men who lined their own pockets while funding a massacre. If this escalates in the coming months, the United States could find itself in another unpopular war.”

“You mean ‘conflict’ or ‘democracy building’, ” Simcoe slighted.

“Oh,” Washington remarked, “I think we would only lose this one at the ballot box. Obama plans to implement André’s findings in our three branches of service by then.”

“He can’t do that!” Akinbode shouted.
“He is the Commander and Chief, while only Congress can declare a war, Obama can roll out whatever internal policy he wants and we now have sufficient evidence that André’s methods are most effective.”

“But the vote —”

“Didn’t happen.”

“How the first black President got to put me in a place where I’m forced to sing Mitch McConnell’s praises?” Akinbode demanded.

“This has nothing to do with race, Mr Akinbode,” Billy Lee tried to assure him.

“The hell it doesn’t – and you out of everyone else here ought to be able to see that,” Akinbode accused the Pentagon’s Press Secretary. “You got the French and English in some back room in Washington fighting a proxy war in Africa with black lives and America wants to enter this conflict to try out a weapon that nearly killed one of its elected leaders? Right. Because no one is going to give a damn if they can’t put the country on a map and you all see Africa as homogenous.”

“No one want to go to war, but thanks to Mary Woodhull it may be a necessary measure.”

“Really?” Akinbode chided. “Last time I checked Mali didn’t have oil reserves.” The issue had clearly gotten under his skin and Simcoe felt himself wondering if this owed itself to his father’s immigration status, Abigail confusing the Masai as being a West African people, or the ways in which Cicero and Aberdeen, both to whom he was close, were treated by the police throughout the course of the investigation. Akinbode could not help but to sound like his Ghanaian father when he spoke of Africa in any capacity. Simcoe pressed his thin lips together. This all, he was certain, had surely come up at some point in some interview conducted by some badge – Simcoe would not be surprised if the Pentagon might try to exploit it.

Jordan Akinbode had been part and product of André’s research as well. In the moment, it showed.

Being that it was ordinarily Akinbode who talked Simcoe back from the edge, Simcoe had no experience in doing the same.

He wondered what the Secretary of Defence was after and found himself again met with an eerily calm confidence.

“I don’t make policy, Congress does. I serve at the pleasure of the Executive.”

“Congress did not pass anything,” Akinbode reminded as he stood, his hands balled into fists.

“Such falls into the Emergency Powers which the President can assume by an executive declaration with no further Congressional input,” Washington said as though he had no politics of his own.

“What constitutes an ‘emergency’ then?”

“War, certainly.”

“And ‘conflict’?” Akinbode spat “And ‘democracy building’?”

“Too.”

“Would you shut up and allow the man to speak!” Simcoe hissed at his friend, hoping he would sit.
“It might be of some interest to you what else we’ve pieced together from where the pieces fell after this fateful exchange,” Washington agreed, again looking at the enveloped he had been handed. “Mr Akinbode, I believe you might be able to offer console here as part of what follows falls into your area of expertise, you know, as you did in covering the crimes Misters Simcoe and Hewlett committed against the free market.”

“Sir, with respect, my clients were acting under duress, forced into such activities by a foreign agent as the record will show.”

“And yet you still took ten percent?” Washington challenged, again folding his hands over the pile of paperwork he had assembled. “My office made the mistake of announcing Colonel Tarleton’s death prematurely,” he continued, “prompting, for reasons we suspect to be related to the conversation Mrs Woodhull is believed to have had, the Hewlett twins to relinquish and sell their projected assets at current market value to Effie Gwillim, thereby making her the acting majority shareholder on the board, something that would not have otherwise gone into effect in time for us to notice any correlation had the untimely death of their father not afforded them stock in the company’s holding as per his last will and testament.

“As Lady Eleanor elected to divide her share between Banastre’s two daughters, Gwillim is bound to look after their financial interests until they reach the age of twenty-five, ensuring that she won’t do anything terribly risky or ambitious, keeping contracts in Liverpool where business had been running well for years until Lady Edith decided to call this into contention.

“Now the most interesting piece of this for me is it seems that none of the Hewletts received word of Edmund’s attempt and I’m curious to know what I perhaps never will, if it could have been called off had you said anything to anyone back home, Mr Simcoe.”

Simcoe swallowed. He had not suspected that the Hewletts had had a hand in the attempt, that anything had happened at all beyond his friend having succumb to academic pressures and the flaws in his character.

He had not said anything for such would have required an explanation and he did not feel that this had been his story to tell and that doing so would only again encourage the type of behaviour that he was trying to prevent by arguing with his beloved enemy day and night over issues of no significance before having something to actually fight for had put them on the same side, before he had been personally forced to contend with the reality that they two always had been.

Now it seemed his silence had ended a life rather than saved one, and that he shared even more of the blame the US Government seemed to want to place on Mrs Woodhull’s head.

“Certainly, Mrs Woodhull - had she even had cause to consider as much,” Washington speculated, “wouldn’t have thought so. Tarleton spoke of quote ‘not wanting to be in the vicinity of his crime’ when it happened but could not give an exact time and date when asked beyond ‘Easter Weekend’ which lead him to accept the assignment here, a cover invented to silence him in exchange for Britain’s silence around Edmund Hewlett’s medical records, which we were concerned at the time would contain corrupted data that would need to be removed from the final report and recommendation.

“I don’t know if you shared this phrasing with her, Mr Simcoe, or if she simply gathered that the death would not be bloody by the fact that Colonel Tarleton was prepared to remain abroad, but regardless, she seems to have fulfilled an assassin’s dying wish by ensuring that Miss Gwillim - who, mind, appears in Mrs Woodhull’s search history on all devices prior and after – would, with the control given to her in the event of Edmund Senior’s untimely passing, continue to make safe choices for these orphans as
her aunt had done for her in her childhood, thus keeping business in Liverpool, keeping the people and city from suffering any fallout.

“The matter, however, is so – prior to this conversation and the paperwork to follow, no one had any reason to suspect that Edmund Hewlett was about to die, but rather instead his brother Edward, Duke of Richmond. Now, they are twins - not identical, but quite similar in appearance and for some reason that lies beyond my immediate jurisdiction some thirty nobles all testify that it was Edmund, rather than Edward, who dropped dead following last night’s dinner. That matter of identity won’t be pursued further than this,” Washington seemed convinced, “a few of the Queen’s grandchildren were among those who spoke to Lord Edmund’s identity and neither of the brothers had enough of a fingerprint for files of such to be kept. I’m willing to bet though, that if I open this envelope, the autopsy will have shown a scar on ‘Edmund’s’ inner thigh. And there is,” he smiled, showing the front page of the report to the table upon opening the envelope he had been given.

“Edward Hewlett died sometime during the course of our afternoon,” Washington announced, “but Banastre Tarleton didn’t kill him. Neither, for that matter, did Mary Woodhull. She killed Edmund Hewlett in exchange for the orphans who gave her a promotion, for the cover from fire Tarleton promised you and by relation her, and, being that this crime was technically committed on American soil, we can prosecute when the Crown Courts won’t.

“But it needed come to that,” Washington restated, “or any of the other related charges we could level of fraud, conspiracy, interference, not to mention the incident of drunk driving that caused her to hit Senator Arnold in the first place – if you are all willing to do exactly as I’m about to lay out.”

Simcoe nodded. Everything he had said and done had brought the woman he loved and loved still to this point. It was time to place her fate and freedom in hands that water could wash.

“Mr Akinbode,” Washington addressed, “I’m looking to you to convince your childhood friend Benjamin Tallmadge to accept the job I’m almost certain ADIC Hamilton has offered him by now. You know as well as I do that the case the two of you have been trying to build won’t get off the ground without Arnold denying you backing, especially with all of the non-disclosure agreements that were signed this afternoon.”

“No,” Akinbode said flatly. “I’m going to let Ben make up his mind ‘bout what he thinks is best for his future – something I’ll state you denied everyone you forced to sign away their right to justice under duress – and meet you and any weapon you think you have in your arsenal in open court. Man, I can understand that you’ve got a job to do and people to answer to but how do you mean to one day look upon your Creator and say that you helped force into practice...”

“Even if your friend Edmund’s data - compromised, though it has been by circumstance - isn’t removed from the set -” Washington started.

“We’re not discussing Edmund Hewlett,” Akinbode told him, “but rather John Robeson, Charles Joyce. Don’t forget that André’s study near killed someone before it killed the good doctor and completely ruined the life of an innocent man. Just because Robeson was a convicted felon doesn’t give you any right to deny him justice.”

“I didn’t say you and your friends would not get justice,” Washington reminded, raising his finger again, “I said that it won’t be in the fashion you’ve imagined. Very few generals get to pick their fields of battle.”

“And even less would willingly surrender the high ground,” Akinbode retorted. “I for one won’t. I know for damn sure my all-American, holier-than-thou homeboy, the lil’ Eagle Scout Ben Tall-Boy Tallmadge sure as hell won’t either so you can take your off the record offers that take for form of blackmail and oppression along with your easy assumption that all of us would be so
inclined back to the capitol and tell ‘The Executive’ to shove it up his black ass-

“John Robeson didn’t kill John André,” Washington stated, still calm.

“No, of course he fucking didn’t,” Akinbode said, “same as Mary Woodhull sure as all fuck didn’t kill Edmund’s father and namesake. It is not my branch of law but I struggle, Sir, to imagine how you think that would hold up in court: ‘we know this suspect used the phone and having no recording of the conversation, we think she may have ordered a hit on a man she has never met because a few days later he so happened to have died of a medical condition that frankly seems genetic at this point and elsewhere in the world business returned to normal: a charity actually did its job, a company that was examining the possibility of moving jobs abroad saw the deal fall though thanks - I’ll remind you – to your lot arresting a junior CFO before he could take a scheduled meeting - and the company renegotiated terms with a municipal council with which they already had a lengthy relationship’,” Akinbode summarised what he had been told.

“You know what I think it is,” he continued to rant, “I think you are jealous. The FBI couldn’t find Senator Arnold - that fell to an immigrant housekeeper with half a tongue who couldn’t afford to take bereavement after her daughter died in the line of duty because the cost of living is too damn high in the city for anyone to taken ten days at seventy-percent, especially when they’ve tuition to pay for the kids they’ve got living.

“You all couldn’t even fully hinder Tallmadge and his team, couldn’t even hinder a fucking Sunday-side soccer team with all of the resources at your disposal and the cooperative investment of all of your fancy European allies. You think I’m scared of you, man?” he demanded. “You think any of us are? You can’t charge my client for the events of this afternoon; he wasn’t at the scene at the time the shots were fired which forty additional witnesses will attest to and has already signed a sworn statement to that effect. You can’t charge him for any role you suspect him to have played in Arnold’s disappearance as the senator himself has no interest in doing so and you really, really don’t want the optics of levelling charges against the very people who were trying to save the senator – something he himself has attested to – against the immediate interests of seeing some legislation passed that was easier accomplished without his presence. Especially with trust in government being as low as it is.”

“I understand your frustration with the way the matter was addressed, Mr Akinbode,” Washington gave, frowning. “please understand that the DOD -.”

“Yeah, the thing is I don’t think you do.”

“John Robeson didn’t kill John André,” Washington repeated.

“Then you want to tell me what the hell my colleague is doing in a room down the hall trying to keep her client – a victim of a crime – from becoming a victim of the system?”

“At this hour?” Washington smiled. “I imagine the new countess has already left. Miss Declesias is sitting the US Naturalization Interview and Exam. Miss Shippen made such a condition of her cooperation. We are happy to negotiate.”

“I’m not,” Akinbode said.

“Then you can leave,” Simcoe told him.

“And can all of you,” Akinbode answered as he moved to do just that. “They have nothing to charge you with. You’ve got nothing holding you here but your own free will. Don’t allow them to rob you of it.”
“Oi, Alex, we have to stop meeting like this, mate,” Colonel Banastre Tarleton complained as ADIC Hamilton entered the room with a frown, taking a seat beside his subordinate without offering a greeting to the suspect. “It’s not that you’re not charming – truly,” Tarleton continued in the same vain, “but I think I’ve a chance of patching things up with my ex so you and I … not prioritising it, to be frank. You deserve better,” he said, giving him a cheeky grin.

Hamilton nodded to the man seated to his right, prompting UCO Townsend to turn on the recording device.

After a deafening buzz, Townsend spoke, “Twenty-Three-Fifteen, March Twenty-Forth, Two-Thousand-Sixteen, Agent Robert Townsend of the FBI’s New York Field Office interviewing Colonel Banastre Tarleton, serving as a military attaché to UK Ambassador Charles Cornwallis’ Diplomatic Mission to the United States of America. As you have the professional curtesy, Colonel, of being interviewed by an officer at least one rank senior to your own, ADIC Alexander Hamilton is sitting in. I would like to remind you that you remain under caution, and that you have the right to legal representation which I would urge you to exercise.”

“I’ll waive,” Tarleton responded flippantly. “I believe in the State of New York there is a form I’ll need to sign?”

“Colonel Tarleton, do you understand the charges you are facing?” Hamilton inquired.

“An inability to substantiate evidence?” Tarleton guessed. “My brother will be of no help to your cause or mine on this front and frankly, I’m finding far more amusement in your disquiet over my refusal to see him … which, begs the question, Alex – why is he even here? I certainly didn’t call on him and my mother would surely have sent someone with more expertise and experience in whatever it is you seem to think yourself in a position to accuse me of - after all, it is not as though the Tarletons are lacking for friends in high places.”

“You have at least one less than you did this morning,” Hamilton informed him.

“Oh, I didn’t say we couldn’t still be friends, Alex,” Tarleton answered with a feigned air of encouragement, “only that this, what we have here, it simply has to stop. Mary’s given to bouts of jealousy; you see, and if we are ever to work things out, I can’t have her catching me sneaking around police stations with handsome strangers.”

“This isn’t a laughing matter,” the humourless Townsend interjected. “Edmund Hewlett is dead.”

Tarleton momentarily lost his practiced composure. Blank faced, he blinked several times before asking, “How on earth?”

“Massive stroke.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I think you do,” Townsend said, pulling out a file. “Do you know what I have here, Colonel?”

“I imagine you’ll either enlighten me or - alternatively, remember that as I’m under caution, and as I’ve indicated that I’ll be representing myself, I’m entitled to prior warning with regard to evidence,” Tarleton flashed him a smile.
“It is your academic record,” Hamilton said.

“No,” Tarleton made a show of gasping, lifting his crippled hand to his chest in a gesture of shock. “I’ve clearly done our intern a disservice in telling him that the supposed ‘real world’ doesn’t give a damn anymore about your notes once you leave school. For shame! I shall have to adjust this statement in light of recent evidence to the contrary. If I might be excused -”

“What exactly do you get out of it, playing the fool?” Townsend sneered. “You have a record of disobedience, interruption, unexplained absence, and a failure to complete course- and homework, but all of your test scores are in the ninety-eighth percentile and your service records indicate you to be meticulously organised and exceptionally driven.”

“Flies, ‘innit? To borrow from that honey-vinegar analogy. In contrast,” Tarleton seemed to muse, “let me pose to either or both of you, what precise benefit do you find in pretending to be smarter than everyone else in the room? It seems to me such is a confession of insecurity and a want to extend the same to one’s company without any clear objective.”

“Do you consider that you put others at ease?” Townsend countered.

“Generally speaking, I think myself to extend an invitation to any and every one I come in contact with to be as much themselves as one could possibly allow in the presence of another person. ‘Ease’, I would argue, is relative to the situation.”

“You had a conversation with one John Graves Simcoe about a week ago I would like to review -”

“I’ll save you the time,” Tarleton dismissed. “I had a conversation with John Graves Simcoe about a week ago in which he confessed to me that he had inadvertently framed me for a crime I had neither the means, opportunity, nor motive to commit after I complained to him for about half an hour about the special kind of hell that is having a teenage daughter which lead him to level an accusation at me over my not understanding Bertolt Brecht which … again just begs the question of why so many people get off on constantly and consistently making snide comments to indicate how wonderfully cultured and intelligent they happen to find themselves. But I digress. To the conversation in question as I’m sure you have already worked out for yourselves, I said nothing that should, in turn, warrant this one. Though,” he considered, “if you plan to interview him as well – do us a favour and show him my A-Level results, or my GCSEs or whichever other evidence you think yourself to be in the procession of before I’m subjected to another round of presumptive one-upmanship, will you?”

“Simcoe seems to have come away from the conversation with the idea that you planned to murder the Duke of Richmond,” Townsend answered, happy to ignore the onslaught of irrelevance. Hamilton could be happy that his was the number the mole Brewster had decided to text the night prior. With any great luck, the colonel would soon see that his attempts at distraction were ineffective and would be forced to call on his counsel before Washington had the opportunity to force Clayton Tarleton into a crime of collusion. Hamilton hated the plan himself, having cause to question what the Revolution had been for when the City on a Hill had come to rely on the same set of deceptions as The Crown they had cast off. Washington would make them all into hypocrites, which was more than Hamilton could allow –

At the moment, however, he had little option but to pretend to play into the tactics as they had been set out.

“That is a leap,” Tarleton rolled his eyes.

“It is a conclusion you seem to have consciously led him to.”
“Tell me, Townsend,” the colonel leaned in, “you play a bit of footy yourself? Some Sunday league? Given your evident paranoia, were you part of this research group into the effects of fear or are you just familiar with the literature?”

“We are the ones asking questions here, Colonel,” Hamilton interrupted.

Tarleton smiled. “Oh no, I would say this is something of a two-, three-way conversation for otherwise you have put yourselves in something of a predicament, what with your failure to present me with a 384-b after I specifically asked for one at the beginning of this interview, thereby making it illegal to address me in relation to any charge – including, I’ll presume – that of my being more intelligent than I ordinarily let on - without defence counsel present. But you know that, Hamilton,” he assessed, “so let’s drop the preface of this being a traditional police interview and return to the matter of what business Clayton seems to think he has in New York and the question of why you would risk your professional integrity for the chance to get him into this room.

“It is o’rite,” Tarleton shrugged after a few seconds of silence. “I can wait.”

“You really are a lot smarter than you let yourself seem,” Hamilton commented.

“Smugger, too – I’d venture. So come now, Alex, let’s play.”

“I assume he is going to go have a chat with Tallmadge after all,” Lee commented of Akinbode to his boss in a tone that suggested the reaction was expected, perhaps cultured. Washington nodded, all but communicating that Simcoe’s suspicion was warranted.

“John Robeson didn’t kill John André?” Simcoe repeated, having no great care to argue the rule of law with those who considered themselves above it.

“Miss Declesias was not mistaken when she assessed that knowledge might help your shared friend overcome his suicidal urges,” Washington said. “John Robeson is in recovery. He never confronted André – he would not have had a chance to. John André, upon revising his assessment for publication and practice to the Pentagon’s liking, was moved into Witness Protection. When his handler showed up to their last scheduled meeting, André was nowhere to be found. We need to locate him, to bring him to justice, but with a lack of funding and resources we haven’t the manpower -”

“I think this conversation is indeed over,” Clayton rose. “Given my brother’s harrowing escape from the southern theatre, the entire mismanaged debacle that was the Arnold Investigation and now this with André who, by your language I’m sure you want to see subjected to some measure of frontier justice - which really calls into question the faith you are willing to invest in the research that seems to have hurt so many - I think even if you could come up with a charge against Mrs Woodhull that would stick, you wouldn’t be able to find her in the lobby to read her a Miranda Warning even with the knowledge that she is the red-haired bridesmaid, the one with crutches and an ankle brace. The Tarletons don’t owe you a damn thing. No one here does.”

“On the contrary, Mr Tarleton, American victory has made you a very rich man.”

“My family has a diverse portfolio,” Clayton countered, unimpressed, “I’ve been a very rich man since the day I was born. You are not going to buy me – what with you admittedly limited budget
and manpower serving to contradict the threats you seek to pose.”

“Your mother once signed off on a school residency requirement that allowed the child of a housekeeper whom she employed to get a better education than he would have in his post code as I know you are aware,” Washington answered him, “because in trying to untie a knot between your brother Banastre and John Wakefield your sister’s husband purchased block housing from Fenway Sports Group in order to obtain previous residency records they were under no legal obligation to release. Tell me,” he posed, “in either Pounds or estimated percentiles, exactly how much of Merseyside do the Tarletons now own outright exactly? But first, let me tell you something of which you are likely already aware and something you may have yet to piece together: Your brother is hard to pin down, Morgan came incredibly close and yet Banastre still managed to slip away. The news, however, of his untimely passing has elevated him to national hero overnight and I know - though you might not - that he has thus been slated to receive a knighthood for his involvement in an operation that might have otherwise been a nail in his coffin.”

“Oh no,” Clayton frowned.

“Isn’t that good?” Abe asked.

He shook his head. “The other families on the council won’t like that at all.” His reserve and resentment, Simcoe observed, was more than simple sibling rivalry, it was a question of survival: the Tarletons may have long been the most powerful family on the council, but should the city’s other leaders began see this as too much of a threat as recent honours, actions and acquisitions would surely lead to, they may yet come respond in kind. Banastre, unfortunately for his far more politically astute family, was just the sort of fool to confess ambition within a functioning oligarchy.

Washington, clearly aware of this, twisted the blade. “Banastre could leave these United States quietly or after receiving a sword, a seal, and some decorated sash that would compel The Crown to add more acronyms to his name and field more quiet concerns among your family’s closest friends and allies that you would gamble away Liverpool’s status free city for a royal appointment. How long do you think you would be able to hold onto power without a convincing appearance of sharing it with the rest of the Merseyside bourgeoisie?” Washington pressed. “You could, however, do me a small favour and your brother could well be on the same flight taking Edmund Hewlett home to Scotland – provided, of course, that he is willing to sign an unrelated statement prior to take-off, which seems certain - I’m told your brother is anxious to see the two little girls he has waiting for him in Edinburgh.”


“Get yourself attached to Inter’s US Summer Tour.”

“That … has nothing to do with my job” Clayton squinted, “I’m an Assistant Sporting Director.”

“That isn’t a coaching position?” Lee interjected.

“It is a scouting one,” Simcoe said, adding under his breath, “It something like a modern-day slave trader.”

“It is admittedly closer to that than it is to coaching,” Clayton gave.

“What we are after is pictures of you to appear in a photo gallery on the club’s website, in America, with a few of the players, doing touristy things,” Lee tried to readjust. “Propaganda, if you will.”
“Just putting of airs then?”

“Can you manage?” Washington asked.

“I’m British,” Clayton snorted, “tis our national pastime. Let me make a few calls and -”

“We could get it on the cover of the Daily Mail if it would help,” Simcoe tried, eager to do anything that might draw eyes from Mary Woodhull.

“I don’t know that it would,” Washington frowned. “Rogers might see through the ruse.”

“Rogers?” Abe repeated, seeming certain that he had misheard. Simcoe could read lips, even those of men like Washington who moved their own very little as to not expose a row of teeth - uneven, discoloured, of perhaps sharpened into points. The name Rogers suggested the latter, but Simcoe did not care. He would have gotten into bed with the devil himself to spare Mary from the effects of a war which he had unwittingly made her a combatant in.

“Robert Rogers is expected to make a full recovery,” Billy Lee said. “He is desperate, and if he thinks there is a chance to escape holding some portion of the reward Juventus promised -”

“I’ve nothing to do with Juventus,” Clayton said, making a show out of raising his hands in surrender, “honestly I don’t know anything about what my sister-in-law arranged with your agent; I’d assumed it was done so as a cover for a trade deal she and my brother were working on Manchester.”

“Rogers discovered the relationship between the Agnellis and Tarletons and trusted that your brother Ban was not working with the FBI or any other law enforcement agency -”

“Well he wasn’t until Hamilton -” Simcoe began.

“ADIC Hamilton gave Rogers André’s relative location via Tarleton by way of offering a large reward if he was dealt with,” Washington continued. “Having nowhere else to go, I’m willing to gamble Rogers will seek out his old friend in hopes of collecting. And that – Mr Woodhull, is where you come in. Visit him in hospital a few times, put the idea in his head, you’ll be wearing a wire, of course. We’ll slowly reduce the armed guard stationed at his door, allowing him the illusion of having escaped, if anyone can find André at this point, it is Rogers, who I don’t think any of you could argue doesn’t deserve to spend the rest of his life behind bars. As it stands, we can’t bring charges against him that allow for that possibility. If, however, he brings André to justice thinking he can still collect on a reward -”

“You mean to have this Rogers fellow find and kill André and you want me to bank it?” Clayton asked.

“You don’t understand, Sir,” the weasel objected before Washington and Lee were forced into addressing ungentlemanly language, “Robert Rogers knows that I tried to help Arnold escape. He trusts me even less than he trusts anyone else at this point, the plan won’t work.”

“It has to,” Simcoe said. “If Rogers kills – um, takes care of - André for some reward that was never directly promised, as you can assume that he will attempt to do based on past behavioural patterns, his attempt to blackmail the Hewletts -” he stopped, realising that unbeknownst to His Excellency, Akinbode and Tallmadge still had their case -

If Abe Woodhull wore a wire and could get any portion of this plan on tape, it would not only prove The Pentagon’s complacency, their attempts at black mail and extortion, but Rogers’ actions alone would confess to the faults André’s study.
They had to go through with it.

“And Mrs Woodhull,” he shifted, “We have your word as a gentleman that you won’t pursue charges against her?”

“If this mess can be cleaned up quietly, there will be no need to,” Washington assured him, standing up to shake his hand. He smiled when he looked at the blood reside that must have transferred to his own in the short interaction. “Mr Woodhull, as I’ve stated, you’d be wearing a wire and my men would be listening in, if anything unexpected should happen -”

“It won’t work – you don’t understand!” the coward claimed.

“What is to be my role in this?” Simcoe asked.

“Having looked over your case files, Mr Simcoe, I felt you might be rather persuasive in such a situation.”

“There are no cameras in this room? This conversation never happened?” Simcoe asked. Washington gave him a slight nod. “I think we can do business after all,” he consented.

“As I imagined we could,” Washington agreed as he began to collect his files.

John Graves Simcoe loved Mary Woodhull.

He wanted to have her.

He wanted to help her.

He positively wanted to hurt anyone standing in the way of these two ends.

Chapter End Notes

… And thus ends the scene I’ve come to curse. Are there some end notes in order? Oh, my friends, I’m ever so glad you asked –

**Snacks and Sips**

Marie darling, your ‘dad’ isn’t quite that woke, and I’m sorry to say, neither are you: **there is no actual coffee in a Chocolate Chip Frappuccino** – just syrup, H-milk and ice. There is, however, caffeine in this beverage as the compound is naturally contained in chocolate at low levels.

One of my brothers has been working in the US for going on two years now so I actually got to test this one out: **American Takeaway** will drive to your door (or any other) and you can order and pay for it online or on mobile with a drag and drop menu
from anywhere in the world. Without wanting to make an advert for any particular chain, there is a little box at the end where you can write in additional requests, such as was done in this chapter with the messages written on the inside of the boxes. Admittedly, it doesn’t really count as a prank if you are giving someone free food, but if you are so inclined and if you ever have the chance I hardily recommend having Domino’s write the score of the match played that afternoon (morning) that your twin is still reeling over in the evening. #6-0 #MiaSanMia #FCBayernHasNoRivals #HaHaHaSV … or you know, if you are not into sport, you could just threaten local officials with another public scandal a la the young Miss Robinson. That would probably be really fun, too.)

**If it Bleeds, It Leads**

The online and print editions of *The Daily Mail* have separate editors. *Thomas Talbot* was Simcoe’s secretary during the Canada years and (to make this note itself sound like a DM story) Effie probably had the hots for him. Seriously, speaking of online editions, if you are ever bored throw a google on a historical fave ‘+’ the trashiest tabloid that comes to mind – the articles that get printed about the long-dead on a slow news day are better than most fanfiction.

**Period Drama**

*Straight Outta Compton* is a 2015 biopic about the rise and fall of N.W.A. I know (or rather, I’m assuming) your taste in costume drama is more tailored to the old naval uniforms the BBC pulls out of the storage closet once every ten years to give us yet another limited series about Horatio Nelson (whilst never naming the protagonist Horatio Nelson – they think they clever) BUT you need to check this one out if you’ve not already – I mean it has Aldis Hodge (Turn’s Akinbode) in it. You are in familiar territory even if you are not otherwise into gangsta rap. Probably not appropriate viewing for a twelve-year-old though. Just have to throw that disclaimer out there.

When *opium became illegal in Britain in the early twentieth century*, police (really!) were slow to action until newspapers began sensationalizing celebrity deaths from the substance, and then only arrested and prosecuted Chinese dealers and supply chains in following with the zeitgeist of an emerging era of paranoid nationalism and increasingly racist practices where not policies across Europe. Nothing, save for the Hewletts involvement, was fictionalized in this account.

**Take me out to the …**

The *Dino Park* outside of Dumfries is a real place and it is *pretty great* … if you are eight years old or younger. If you are from Europe, you know exactly what a dino park is; if this isn’t a thing elsewhere – picture a wooded area with to-scale hard plastic models of dinosaurs, a three or four year old who can name every single one of them, tens of other toddlers and wee small children with wide eyes, at least one older sibling complaining that there is no WiFi and mummies and nannies having a coffee, catching up, and occasionally yelling at the little ones not to mess up their clothes.

**A Rose by Another Name**

*Pepe Reina* was Spain’s third choice goal keeper who (decades ago now) wrote a couple of blog entries (before social media was all-consuming) about getting to enjoy the WM, knowing that he would never get called upon to play. “The Pepe Reina Position” is a tongue-in-cheek way of saying …well, (s)he is on the roster, whatever that is good for.
**War v Conflict** In Europe we joke about “it only being a war if America wins” but the truth behind the nomenclature is way more interesting than national pride: war is used in the US as an umbrella term, conflict to describe individual theatres – so “War on Terror”; “Iraq Conflict”

384-b is the form needed to waive one’s right to legal counsel when faced with criminal charges in the State of NY.

That is it for me – you got anything? Cheers, Tav.
The Prosecution Rests

Chapter Summary

Tarleton is subjected to interrogation. Washington has a crisis of conscious as he watches his plan begin to unfold. Though he has no designs at playing the same role within it, Ben concludes that he cannot stand by and pretend that there is no standard system of law and order in place by which justice should be administered; Caleb disagrees. The children conspire to sneak sensitive documents out of the country. Ellie and Francis find their casual, post-coup intercourse interrupted by the uncomfortable suggestion of intent.

Or, factions form between those who want to end John André and those who want to see him brought to justice.

Chapter Notes

I’d write you a proper intro, but I found this thing* while writing that might serve as a soundtrack, and seriously you guys, after my third update in as many weeks -

Big Mood.

*if the hyperlink doesn’t work in your location, it is a 24-hour loop of DJ Khalid saying “another one.” Exactly what you needed; I know. ;)

Cheers, I guess. XOXO – Tav

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Fine,” Hamilton consented, “Let’s have just have a conversation then, you and I,” he paused, smiled, shook his head and in- and exhaled rather slowly out of some foolish notion that even if he had the ability to match the dramatic flair of his target, doing so would prove a show of force rather than further demonstrate how deeply rooted his insecurities truly were. Colonel Banastre Tarleton returned the grin, correctly predicting that his interrogator would flinch. After involuntarily clearing this throat, Hamilton continued, “My wife has been hounding me for going on a week now to replace the kitchen faucet and for the life of me I can’t figure out the instructions that came with the new piece. I heard you might have some tips in that area?”

“Are we talking Swedish-flat-pack?” Tarleton asked, frowning for a moment before giving the matter a measure of consideration. “Ask your twelve-year-old, they are brilliant with hieroglyphics, little Rosetta Stones to the last – Rosetta Pebbles, if you will,” he joked, holding back a laugh as he realised his humour fell on deaf ears. “It has got to be something to do with the emoji they are accustom to communicating fairly complex ideas in. Horrible, in the general sense of how this translates to standardised testing – my daughter is brilliant but can’t spell for shit without auto correct but for that English deficiency she is perfectly fluent in IKEA, so I guess it is a wash. Sorry, truly, that I can’t be of more help without something to look at -”

“If you’ll draw your attention then to the monitor, Colonel,” Townsend interjected. “For the tape,
I’m showing Exhibit 25A-24156, a series of texts sent starting at 2:16 AM on 23rd March, 2016 between Caleb Brewster and myself, evidencing -”

“With respect - nothing, Sir,” Tarleton interrupted. “You do realise this is not admissible in court? Without wanting to sound ‘ableist’ – believe me, this isn’t what this is,” he apologised wholeheartedly, further defending, “I do a fair bit of charity for wounded veterans and disabled children at my family’s stables – Caleb Brewster suffers from palsy and is probably using a commonly prescribed benzo or baclofen to control symptoms, either of which could carry the side effect of confusion – something youthful experience instructs is increased by the consumption of alcohol, to which I and several other witnesses can attest. As a witness, or source, or however it is he is being classified, I dare suggest that a jury would likely find him unreliable.”

“Youthful experience?” Townsend raised an eyebrow.

“You have my academic records before you,” Tarleton returned, “I’m sure there is something in there about my having attended Oxford? Townsend, I’m going to take a stab in the dark and guess that you never went to college, but Hamilton, you also read law at an elite institution, am I mistaken? Beer is just better with muscle relaxers and I’m sure that is doubly the case when you are drinking the watered-down stuff you get on these shores. Ah! At least we had our fair supply of trust-fund-babies who came back from holiday with one or two of Daddy’s pre-signed prescription pads – or was that not your experience?” he asked with a slight pout. “Not to tangent but it really is quite fortunate for so many future world leaders that such drugs not only carry no risk of dependency but when taken over time have the same effect on alcohol itself. I for one have enough vices!”

“You never completed a degree,” Hamilton slighted.

“Case in point,” Tarleton shrugged.

“Colonel Tarleton, if you would stick to the topic at hand -” the UCO urged.

“Happily, but with respect, Townsend, you were the one who inadvertently asked me how I spent my nights and weekends whilst studying jurisprudence. I’m not trying to dictate this conversation … though, admittedly, I do feel I am carrying it. You don’t really get out that much do you?”

“As you’ve ventured, Sir,” Townsend smiled, “I never attended university and perhaps owing to this very reason never mixed recreational drinking with fake prescriptions. I fear we frequent in different circles.”

“Except that is not entirely the case, is it?” Tarleton challenged. “Caleb Brewster had your number programmed into his phone and knew you to work as an undercover officer. Being that he himself works for the US Postal Service which I understand he would have difficulty doing with any kind of conviction, I would be curious to know how exactly the two of you came into contact. It would seem as though you share a close personal relationship – which, do correct me if I am mistaken, but poses a conflict of interest here, does it not?”

“Caleb and I play in a band called Culper Ring together with Abraham Woodhull which was part of my undercover in regards to a separate incident in which Caleb was neither a source nor a suspect.”

“Oh – Abe then? My, my, my …”

“Colonel, if I have satisfied your curiosity, if you would not mind returning your attention to the screen?” Townsend suggested.
“Oh yes, of course, I – I don’t have my glasses,” Tarleton squinted, “but I am going to assume this is the part where you ask me to substantiate evidence that you don’t actually have in any form that might otherwise prove admissible in court – and then you are going to remind me that I never obtained an academic qualification, which is fair, I’ll give that freely,” he rolled his eyes, “and then ADIC Hamilton over here is going to again plead with me to call for my brother as counsel, which is only going to bring me back to the question of why, so would you kindly answer me that much?”

“Would you accept that I’m getting rather sick of your voice and would be more satisfied hearing nothing more than ‘no comment’ from your lips?” Townsend countered.

“No comment.”

“Colonel Tarleton, should I request that legal representation?” Hamilton asked too eagerly.

“No … no, I’m o’rite,” Tarleton assured him. “You see – I’m often on the other side of the desk, which I know that you know, so from counter-terrorism to corporate fraud – which I understand your division is ordinarily tasked with looking into - let me guide you through an inquiry with a corpse involved. You see, from where I sit … I know you are not after a confession – not directly, anyway for otherwise you might ask me to say, walk you through the actions reported by your mole rather than playing with indirect prompts – ‘do I know how to change a faucet?’ ‘how would I describe my relationship with recreational medicine?’ – you are stalling,” he observed, “trying to make me nervous, continually suggesting that my brother might be of some assistance - which I can more than promise you is not the case,” he snorted, softening, “not to me anyway.

“Now, what would possibly be your motivation in this?” he asked broadly, answering, “That is rhetorical, I can think of a few potential driving factors, but I would guess based on our brief history that you are looking for another tactical informant, a role you are trying to force my brother into by using a similar threat you employed against me after this off-the-record Brewster report caused you to insert yourself, or, rather, your organization in a scheme that was successful by all counts despite hostages being taken and the primary suspect receiving superficial injury.

“I would thus propose that you are after something from Clayton that I can’t provide directly – funds, maybe? Or maybe just his name and face – he’s better looking than I, again, I’ll allow that much. But this is a tricky one indeed: Arnold has been rescued. You have all the evidence you need to hold Rogers on charges of abduction and unlawful imprisonment, the ransom offered by the parent company of the football club my sister-in-law works for was given to you to return,” he tallied on his good hand, “which leaves but two elements that I can think of: the gun and John André.”

Hamilton, conscious that he was being mocked, crossed his arms over his chest. It was a small confession of his inadequacies within an interrogation room when not his complete lack of evidence. Either way, it was insulting.

But then, the ADIC had established a pattern, which, as someone who had spent the better part of his adult life engaging insurgents, Tarleton had little trouble identifying such behaviours and therefore exploiting to them his own designs.

“Let me clear up the first matter for you and explain how I came to be in possession of a firearm: Alex, you crossed a line when you threatened my daughter,” he said, “and Marie is my daughter – independent of any false construct of biology and the insufficiencies of common law. I’ve been a guardian and caregiver since she was a toddler, I role I continue to play in her life though her mother and I no longer live together. I’m currently and have long been in a process to legalise adoption, something that is becoming increasing urgent while remaining all but impossible for Thomas Robinson, Mary’s husband, refuses to recognise the child as his own as he is not her
biological father and the man who likely is has neglected several court orders for a paternity test. To complicate matters further, Mary long refused to grant her husband a divorce on the grounds that she did not want to pay alimony and, now that her terminal illness has become public knowledge, Thomas is refusing her petition, wanting to cash in on what a piece of paper Mary signed as a teenager wanting to escape an abusive household entitles him to upon her death in the eyes of the law. But I’ll fight it – I’ll keep fighting it because there is no way in heaven, earth or hell I’d ever separate my child from her sense of stability, but you would,” he accused, “and being a father yourself I don’t think it is much of a stretch for you to therefore believe that I don’t trust you for shit.”

Hamilton pressed his lips together and gave his subordinate a sidelong glance which Townsend did not meet. Insults and insinuations, Tarleton found, cut far deeper when a shared humanity was simultaneously acknowledged. All the same, he hardened his stare at the man now hesitant to meet his eyes. Nothing Tarleton had said was a fiction thus far – but his honesty was intended to undermine. The FBI could follow up with the courts to verify his account of the paradoxical difficulties found in the process of adopting a child no other man had want to claim. They had both witnessed for themselves in separate - organic - incidences the fatherly love he bore Marie and the more he did to invite his private realities upon them now, the more weight they would be given to unconsciously trust him at his word.

Then, they were comparatively inexperienced.

This was fortunate, Tarleton assessed, for knew he would soon need to lie through his teeth to ensure nothing happened to his daughter’s friend when he was otherwise in a position to prevent it.

“I did not trust you before our conversation this afternoon,” he continued, “I did not trust you during when you commandeered an operation that was already in the works under the authority that has been intrusted in me by your own State Department when John Kerry signed off on his approval of my appointment to the British Embassy as a military attaché, granting me by the definition of my posting ad hoc diplomatic immunity as such pertains to the duties I’m sworn to perform in service of Queen and Country, which, Sir, very much include the operation being carried out under my authority which you and the filed office you oversee relinquished over and over throughout the course of Tallmadge’s inquiry to the point of criminal neglect. You had the right to be informed, but none whatsoever to intercede when I was acting in the interest of British Subjects – and you know as much, Hamilton, so perhaps it is you who needs to be calling for your solicitor, for believe me my incident report won’t neglect that you exploited the reality that my daughter has been psychologically and emotional abused by agents of your organisation since I first stepped foot in the Pentagon and was made to hand over any portable electronics as part of standard security procedures.

“I had no direct reason to conclude what I heard in the recording you played for me to begin our dialogue was days old and therefore not an immediate threat to her safety in any sense. Hamilton, you could have simply showed your badge and I would have been obliged to inform you of the status of my operation – but you chose to commandeer it to ends that I’d suggest have nothing to do with Senator Arnold – but I’ll come back to Dr John André in a moment – first, the firearm. Here,” he said, reaching into his back pocket, producing a wad of papers. “This is the temporary ID I was issued by Ambassador Cornwallis yesterday, identifying me as a member of the United Kingdom’s Diplomatic Mission to the United States – this one entitles me to carry a firearm in adjutancy with my rank within the MI6 - issued by my Foreign Office, ratified by your State Department. Unfortunately as my passport and papers are all sitting in Washington - returned to the embassy upon my abduction and reported death and, as I am know you are aware, giving my security clearance, unable to be shipped by post – I was left without photo identification, which you are also aware of, as you have seen these temporary-issue allowances before – this afternoon in fact,” he
reminded, “when after you forced me under undo duress to provide a suspect believed to be armed and
dangerous with the promise of additional funds I was not supplied with should he act on the
suggestion to take out a man who slipped through Witness Protection, I asked to be issued a
firearm – only to be denied. By you. And I don’t blame you, Alex,” Tarleton smiled his evil grin,
“after all, you had just threatened my child.

“Which brings me to this here,” he said, presenting an EU Driving Licence to the ADIC and his
man undercover for inspection. “It is an old ID,” he explained. “Richard Wellesley was eighteen
when this was issued as the dates indicate, he is currently twenty-five and seated in Parliament –
and yes, Alex, you might take that as a threat for you currently have his younger brother in
unlawful custody: Arthur Wellesley is doing his two-week work-experience at the Embassy – it is
a position a number of British teens put in for, looks excellent on a CV, has a marginal workload
when compared against any kind of placement in the private sector, and, well, let’s be honest, gives
our youth the option of obtaining a Driving Licence years before their peers giving a - to my mind
somewhat irresponsible - equivalence our governments recognise.

“But I digress. I saw this in his wallet last night when he pulled it out to show me his Student ID,
he and my daughter Marie attend the same college which is neither here nor there for naturally,
when I saw his brother’s licence, I took possession of it, for want of eliminating the temptation of
purchasing alcohol. I don’t believe there was ever a threat of that actually transpiring,” he lied, half
worrying that he verged exaggeration by adding, “he’s a good kid who is just at an awkward age
that lends itself to a lot of dumb ideas around fitting in. Still, he’s apparently friends with my kid – I
have a responsibility to him that extends that of any other responsible adult but, admittedly, in this
case contradicts it; what I ought to have done was toss it into the first post box I saw, but fearing
that questions would be raised if an MP had to go to the DVLA to pick up an old licence posted
from the United States when his younger brother was overseas, I figured it better to simply clear up
the matter with the boy’s mother.

“Alas, as such, I found myself in possession of this ID when I was realised from our earlier …
conversation, we’ll call it for the sake of argument,” he sneered. “Having no reason to trust you or
your promise of armed backup but having every reason to consider based on professional
experience that I was being sent into a situation that could easily turn hostile, I went to Walmart
and precured myself a firearm, which again, I’m licenced to carry. Here,” he handed Townsend the
receipt as a slight to his superior, “the receipt for your consideration. I paid for the weapon with the
cash I had my brother John send me over Western Union, the receipt for which you will find back
in my hotel room. If you’ll note the time, this was fifteen minutes after my release, I got George
Hanger to drive me and I can give you his number to verify this account. Having served, I it took
no time at all for me to identify my needs,” he explained flippantly. The time stamp was a lucky
accident, Tarleton considered, if such an abstract could be attributed to a scenario where the
element of chance was easily calculated. The Honourable Arthur Wellesley was a member of the
landed aristocracy in the same sense of George Hanger, processing a curtesy title without any
accompanying wealth of which to speak. If he had handled a firearm previously, he had likely shot
at clay pigeons on some country estate as far removed from the considerable arsenal of any
American retail establishment as man was likely to find himself in the western world. Too nervous
to ask questions as any boy would be, he had likely squinted at the boxes on the shelf, second-
guessing himself time and again until he became somewhat conscious of its passage, picking the
weapon the bore the closest resemblance to ones he had seen used on the so-said crime ‘dramas’
ITV produced en masse for its spring line-up. Tarleton was surprised at how close he had come to
something he might have himself chosen, but then, he did not know how extensive the selection
was and how much he might credit it to chance. In this sense, he supposed luck had played a role,
however much the time stamp on the receipt was free of any sort of suspect.

“Of course,” he continued, “having no photo ID, I used Richard’s, which was as unlawful as it was
to possess it in the first place, but again, given the strictures of my appointment, not within your right to prosecute. But try telling that to an American! Am I right?

“Alas, gentlemen, as you have at no point provided evidence of your ability to act in accordance with either international or domestic law, I’m sure you have already had the gun dusted for prints so let me identify the individuals besides myself who I know to have handled it. When I met young Arthur outside of the court house he was frightened - he gave me a hug and felt the firearm in the back of my trousers – asked some questions, mostly pertaining to my child - his friend, who again, I’ll remind for the tape, you earlier threatened in his presence. I let him know that Marie was fine, but that I had work to do – at which point I had a conversation with my old friend John Graves Simcoe who coaches a youth side, asking him if he mightn’t get a game going for Atty’s sake, worrying that I’d inadvertently exposed him to something he by no stretch should have come into contact with, however loosely – thinking that the best thing that I could do to address this in the moment was to create an atmosphere where he felt okay just being a kid.”

This was another truth to end a lie born from the same. Arthur likely had some measure of administrative allowance, but this was something fully separate from the class of diplomatic immunity Tarleton himself enjoyed. He personally could be questioned but not charged with the unlawful purchase (if not possession) of a firearm. The intern, by contrast, could be faced with the kind of charge that would prove detrimental to his future career aspects, wherever they may lie. As much as Tarleton felt the idea that he had played an inadvertent role by virtue of his base reactions to the sound of his child sobbing in Arthur’s response to the same, he took a kind of perverse pleasure in confessing to a crime the ADIC was ill-positioned to thusly prosecute. This, too, proved a pattern, but one he felt confident he could manipulate his would-be interrogators to overlook.

“The second person was Peggy Shippen, again, due to a lapse in judgement that I take full responsibility for,” he continued, flashing the frowning men a taunting smile. “I waited for hours in The Irish Pub for Rogers to show. He hadn’t, and when the mission’s success was being reported on all media outlets, that is to say, when Senator Arnold was rescued, I believed the operation had come to an end. The thing is, I was guaranteed and armed guard, and yet Miss Shippen happily walked into the bar with two of her friends,” he said lightly, his voice mimicking the bounce of the girl’s loose blonde curls, “raising my suspicions that no one was outside from your end as I feared. But then the report came out with no mention of a suspect at large and I accepted that the match had been called.

“At this point, Miss Shippen propositioned me for sex. I informed her it would probably prove disappointing as I’ve struggled with premature ejaculation since having a vasectomy after the birth of my second daughter, but she was game, so, being the gentleman that I am, I obliged her in the downstairs supply closet.

“Without wanting to subject you to graphic detail, I fear I have to note two aspects of my physiology that played into what transpired: I lost most of my right hand in combat and struggle to dress myself for this reason. Most of my clothes are tailored to ease the process of putting them on though most would claim it vanity – I suppose it is, in a sense – but alas, the particulars of my situation required that I borrow a pair of jeans, which, luckily, Abraham Woodhull was able to provide, bringing me to the second item of note, though it pains me to call attention to it – you see, Sirs, I’m rather short. That is to note, Miss Shippen is taller – as are most of the women I’ve shared my affections with over the years, so I was not really thinking much of this fact when she took my gun from my trousers and placed it on the top shelf. Again,” he asserted honestly, “I had no idea at this point she would have any use for it and was kind of getting off at the idea of fucking a Second Amendment slut so hard I’d get her to scream ‘yippie-ei-ay!’ or ‘yee-haw!’ or ‘lock her up!’ – something seeped in American imperialism, ignorance, and entitlement.”
“That is quite enough, Colonel,” Townsend warned.

“Well it wasn’t though,” Tarleton complained, adding quickly, “that is, I didn’t get to finish which is strange in itself since I’m lucky to last five minutes and this was really hitting all of my kinks right at once – hot hate sex with someone I profoundly disagree with, mild exhibition, this girl used to be a cheerleader and just the acrobatics she had me engaged in in oral – insane!” he grinned at the fond recollection, continuing in the same offence, “And Christ the body on that bird – what can I say, I’m shallow: tall, thin, fake tits, four-oh GPA and absolutely no functional concept that she is so ridiculously out of my league it is almost laughable - what can I say, chaps?” Tarleton shrugged. “I have a type. Alas – then we heard a scream, she grabbed the gun before I could reach it and as I struggled to put my pants back on, Peggy negotiated a hostage situation in I suppose the was Republican Princesses get taught to in finishing school, that is, with a firearm -”

“I’m a registered democrat and an NRA member,” Hamilton said. “This isn’t as clear-cut partisan as your media makes out.”

Tarleton nodded slowly. “Is that so? Huh. And you?”

“I’m a Quaker,” Townsend answered.

“Is that like … some shade of independent?”

“It is a religious denomination. We don’t believe in guns.”

“It is always either guns or God with you people, isn’t it?”

“Do you have a problem with God, too?” the UCO asked.

“I work in counter-terror, what the fuck do you think?” Tarleton spat. “Forgive me, that is not a constructive response – something that I’d argue the Almighty never is as absolutism is the enemy of reason and therefore progress. It is like this, lads – we are human, most of what we encounter lends itself to conflict. There is no way around it, it is inherent in society. So say you are in a disagreement, it is always more productive to first ask ‘why does this offend me’ and if the only answer you can come up with is ‘because God wills that’ you are never going to come to the kind of understanding that lends itself to a solution.

“I talk to a lot of people who use ‘God’ as an excuse and my job more often than not, is to press, to ask what lead a suspect to this conclusion without questioning the construct on its face because if you get to the point where someone has a fucking bomb strapped to them it is too late to challenge their concepts of reality with contradiction, so it becomes about finding where their understanding intersects with yours and using that information to help develop tactics to intercept another planned attack before it can take place – in other words, to find what is meant when ‘God’ and ‘His Will’ are spoken in justification.

“To be perfectly honest, religion is usually substituting things like opportunity and affordable housing which most people blindly look to politics to sort out - which admittedly is just as useless - but it is the shared concept of reality one ought to be invested in if they want to travel with a British Passport. It is frustrating this God-construct, for people - all people - are always going to want to pursue their individual desires and ascribing this to Capital-I-Ideology hinders more than it helps.”

In a sense, Tarleton could recognise the ways in which one might be right to accuse him of acting in the advancement of his own agenda in the same vain, nomenclature notwithstanding and suspected that Hamilton’s theories loosely based themselves on this model. The problem with words, Tarleton maintained, was that they were used too loosely. The God of his Islamic insurgents
was no different than the God of the American South – a response to widespread poverty, generations of inbreeding and limited employment and educational opportunities within societies with a deeply rooted history of violence defined in vague abstracts - ‘freedom’ or ‘honour.’ He doubted Hamilton would entirely disagree with this particular assessment if he chose to voice it but suspected he may well meet a challenge if he denied any connections to the ideology the ADIC anticipated him of embodying – ‘Nazi’ or ‘nationalist’ or ‘populist’ or ‘protectionist’ or some such other term so specific as to bare the other no direct synonymous properties despite so often being spoken in the same breath. He would let him have it, for working profiles were useful in policing but fully uninformative in interrogation. So long as one saw operated in the realm of self-defined absolutes the individual was lost to anything beyond projection.

But so long as Hamilton could not prove anything he could prosecute, Tarleton remained comfortable with the adjectives he had done nothing to deserve. If anything, this played into his favour. So long as he remained an unknown, there was little chance of identifying any of his conspirators-by-proxy.

“So curiously, before being extended this hospitality, I imagined there to be some kind of equivalence between yours jobs and mine – well, yours, at least Townsend – Alex here is a politician, there is no way around it,” he continued to taunt, “but you, as a UCO, that is ... being in a job requiring a great deal of accepting that a target’s reasoning is grounded in a certain reality and conducting yourself as such – should know how to run this play without being coached through it. I believe in the rule of law, you gentlemen clearly do not, and therefore I don’t understand – purely as someone in a similar field – how you expect to obtain useful information from me. Oi,” he sighed, feigning frustration, “there must be something else we could talk about to more mutual fulfilment. You lads like sport? Nineteenth-century Russian literature? Um ... Nineties hip-hop?”

“Colonel Tarleton -”

“Right, yes, sorry. Guns. Forgot where I was for a sec – so after Peggy took mine, save her best friends and hand a mental breakdown, she pointed the weapon at Washington who in the most collected way I’ve ever personally witnessed – got to hand it to him - simply took it from her hands, accounting for the final set of prints forensics is likely to pick up. I’m sorry,” he shifted, “can I have some water? Or coffee – or maybe both? I’m parched and exhausted from carrying this conversation. Hard to believe, I know, but even I get sick of the sound of my own voice.”

“Then maybe we should call your brother in,” Hamilton suggested.

“We two sound exactly the same,” Tarleton dismissed, “no good would come of it. May I please have some water?”

“No.”

“Waiver form then?”

The ADIC declined to respond.

“So being that none of this is permissible as evidence, let’s talk about collusion as I’m sure you want to – specifically, why it is that you are failing in your attempts,” he said as though he were running a training exercise with his own men. “We’ve already established your failure to build trust, specifically with regard to your having threatened my child forcing me to act out of accordance with operations as planned as I had been placed under emotional duress, but I’ll further add for the tape your complete lack of hospitality. Then, there is the refusal to accept my beliefs as being valid which only serves to deepen them, thereby undermining any argument to the contrary you may latter attempt to offer, but here - and this is what really gets me – you continue to
obfuscate from my question of why I should call upon my solicitor, when I have clearly made you aware that I’m conscious of the fact that from a legal perspective, I actually benefit from Clayton’s absence. So, here is the conclusion I’ve drawn: What you want with Clayton has nothing to do with me whatsoever, but rather, this John André fellow.

“You are not mistaken,” Hamilton answered. Of course he was not. Tarleton had personally conducted far too many interviews for motivation to escape his notice however it was otherwise stated. There was some kind of humour to be found in the fact that the FBI had as much disdain for the MI6 as many in his paygrade had for American Intelligence as a whole and the colonel could not help but smile at the cold mutuality.

“Ah, now we are getting somewhere!” he praised himself. “You truly don’t sit in on these kinds of interviews often, do you? I’m going to try to help you out a bit more: You have nothing on me that is permissible in court. You attempt to question me about a crime that you freely admit was never committed for the Duke of Richmond is alive and his brother - who I’ll add I could not have possibly killed in the way your single, unreliable witness has insinuated for Edmund Hewlett does not … did not reside at Goodwood House – and, moreover seems to have died of natural causes. Even if foul play was expected, I’ll remind that this isn’t your jurisdiction, and if The Crown in fact had cause to investigate, the untimely death of a member of the Royal Family isn’t exactly something they would delegate to a third party.” The truth of the matter was, Tarleton himself suspected that Hamilton was either bluffing to an end he had yet to determine or the conspiracy far outreached his involvement or any control he considered himself to have executed. He raised his thick eyebrows twice in succession, staring at the ADIC with widened eyes, smiling as he began to test the waters with the truth as he thought himself to know it, awaiting a reaction.

“But we’ll pretend as a kind of an exercise that I did, in fact, sneak into the Duke’s stately residence and poison the water supply in a way that would have only affected one man. I might have indeed acted in the way you’ve proposed: Say I went to a match viewing party somewhere in Scotland, ran into an organic chemist and asked him about his profession – I can guarantee he wouldn’t remember the conversation,” he stopped to clarify, “had it, of course, ever taken place.” Hamilton returned his slight, sly grin. Townsend remained stone-faced and all too serious for a situation in which success was contingent upon building rapport. Did this methodology work when it came to white-collar crimes? Was this how the whole of the financial-sector behaved in each other’s presence? Tarleton studied the Quaker with a measure of unease, fearing, more than for his own liberty, that the professional lives of so many people he loved were so frightfully dull. Sometimes he grew annoyed with the pointless interrogations he was subjected to at holiday diners about his day to day, bothered by the near-constant request to return to work while on leave, but Robert Townsend caused the colonel to now reconsider that his brothers and uncles, cousins, former classmates and family friends had to deal with something even more warranting of mental escape than the threat of civilian casualties on British shores he was tasked to combat. They were probably all bored, and constantly at that.

“You blinked,” Townsend told him without a hint of humour.

“You o’rite then mate?” Tarleton asked, turning to Hamilton, “Is he on some kind of medication I should know about?”

“I’ll remind you again that we are the ones asking questions here, Colonel.”

“And just as a professional curtesy form someone with far more filed experience, the best intel is obtained in the course of conversation, small gestures to create the illusion that we could be allies – apropos drinking water, it is not that much to ask! Maybe you need some too,” he suggested, “down some uppers, if you will.”
Colonel -

“Fine,” Tarleton rolled his eyes, “back to another conversation that never happened: First, I would surely not have been the only person there to have broached the topic of his research. Second, if I did ask after his expertise, I would have done so in a way that made clear what I - and well, let’s be honest - what everyone else suddenly breaking out their goggles and test tubes from Year 10 was really after, namely, the nature of his relationship with our hostess which continues to be a topic of some considerable speculation,” he winked.

“I actually do wish there were more truth to this – to the notion of such a conversation having taken place – because lads, real talk - I get paid to figure out where bombs are planted and you would therefore at least think I’d have had some success figuring out if this Swiss bitch was wetting his cervelat in my mate’s fondue, but unfortunately I spent half the night arguing with Paddy Ferguson about the Scottish league system, which is all I personally remember about the night in question - and you can ask him about it if you wish and would be able to verify, but I warn you it would be a waste of several hours of your time for I maintain he would still, in fact, be wrong in his views about the ‘split’ making any bloody sense which he would seek to explain at length if afforded the opportunity. And really, anything that takes two hours to explain isn’t logical. He loses the argument by engaging it.” This was the truth or a version thereof. Banastre Tarleton - like every other Englishman - had no particular invested interest in domestic sport north of the boarder and therefore occasionally found him remarking when glancing at a league table that seventh place looked to be a relegation spot. That this was not the case was on no significance, every Scotsman to have grown up with a forty-four-match season had a strong opinion on the current set-up and an even stronger one on an Englishmen offering his thereof. Ferguson could not give a shit about football on its face, but after a few drinks the sport tended to become the same ersatz for politics left better unvoiced as every other topic the man might broach, and Tarleton had played this to his advantage, spending the better part of the evening arguing with the man on Mary-Anne’s living room sofa over a topic that neither of them had a care for with all of the tropes familiar to a shared act of exaggerated masculinity between two fanciful chaps who otherwise spent roughly as much on their personal appearances and pleasures each month as they did on rent. Ferguson would remember their conversation. Mary-Anne and half of her other party guest would as well, but what no one would recall was his momentarily jumping in on a wine-fuelled conversation with Jean-André Deluc and six others while grabbing further refreshments from the kitchen. It was all a matter of misdirection and in this, Tarleton considered himself a master.

“I doubt though that Jean Luc something-or-other,” he purposefully misnamed him, “is it weird that I want to say ‘Picard’? I’ve hand-over-heart never in my life seen an episode of Star Wars – Star Trek?” the colonel tried again as both agents opened their mouths to protest, continuing quickly, “which we’ve already established by my confession that I like sex with women, but again, that seems irrelevant. Regardless, I doubt this guy would have remembered much about the evening, or individual conversations had therein, either owing to the consumption of alcohol or rugby, which are both way harder than they frankly need to be north of Hadrian’s Wall. What I am trying to say is, Gents, even if I had in fact had the conversation you suggest, and even if it had it in public before a host of witnesses easily named, no one would have any recollection of it and nothing about the interaction would have stood out.”

“You really are a hopeless braggart, aren’t you?” Hamilton smiled.

“Verily. And you Alex, you can obfuscate rather well. Same for you, Townsend – sorry,” he said as he extended his left hand,” it is awkward, I know but I feel like if we are going to be here, I’m Ban and you are …?”

“Agent Townsend.”
“Oh Christ,” Tarleton sighed, burring his face in the palm the agent refused to meet with his own. “HospITALITY, can’t sell this one enough! Sometimes you do really need flies. Regardless. We’ll say again, for the sake of argument - being that this is off any official record given that it is impermissible and even presenting this recording as evidence could open an internal investigation against you both – that I procured said substance, how would I get it into Goodwood House? Maybe I was going anyway,” he shrugged. “Maybe I donate enough of my spare time to wounded veterans that it would not raise an eyebrow if I were to give some of my gambling wins. But, yeah, no – that isn’t really my style. I like to make a scene. A scandal,” he smiled. “And anyway, I would have needed to get into the Duke’s bedchamber and the easiest way to do that would be to have just gone there with a Hewlett. I might have called Ellie, asked her if she mightn’t get herself on the guest list only to be given some stupid excuse about her needing to be in Reykjavík the next morning for something to do with CO2 and the event thusly being a scheduling conflict – something. This conversation obviously didn’t happen and I obviously didn’t sneak into the Duke’s bedchamber with a servant and slip a dried root into his faucet knowing that over the course of a few months he would be poisoned as it dissolved with this knowledge of botany that I could not have possibly obtained in five hours whilst watching a rugby match, arguing over divisional practices and wondering if my hostess was planning to end the evening in a 2-way yodelling contest with a much older man. No judgement.

“Gents, truth of the matter is, I went to Goodwood House to help raise funds for an organization that helped me out when I returned from the front. That is it. I did kind of commit a crime on premises,” he winced, “though and after a few drinks I might have mentioned as much last night – if I did it was mostly to punctuate my question of how Abe and Rogers possibly fucked up low-key blackmailing the Hewletts because that is just about the easiest thing in the world to get away with.”

“Enlighten us,” Hamilton suggested.

“It is of no interest and isn’t in your jurisdiction.”

“All the same,” Townsend said.

Tarleton nodded. “O’rite, check it: I arrive at this thing, and to my surprise I saw Ellie Hew there which is weird because she is never in the same room as her uncle so I went up to her over a round of cocktails to see if everything was o’rite – but it wasn’t Lady Eleanor at all, it was Mary Robinson, by then my ex of exactly a month. Not a lot of people remember this but she actually used to be an actress – how she got her start, teen soaps. Shame she’s not in front of a camera anymore for she damned good at it; from across the room she had me convinced and the two of us were together for over a decade and I’ve known Ells far longer.

“But it ... it was Mary. She turned to me when I addressed her otherwise, rolled her eyes and sarcastically said ‘wow, you must really be in love with her,’ and then explained that whole scheduling conflict thing – Ellie committing to the event only to be called upon to speak at a conference had asked her to attend in her place – with royals this isn’t entirely an uncommon occurrence,” he explained, “Helen Mirren’s famously been called on to play the Queen for scheduled PR events that would have otherwise been interrupted by sudden state affairs, to offer an example, and she doesn’t even bear as strong a resemblance to the Monarch as Ells and Mary do one another. Any road, Mary-in-a-black-rather-than-blonde-wig then turned back to the very real Princess Eugenie who whispered something in her ear and they both laughed and it was super disconcerting for me because … I mean, I can’t really even explain it, but Ells has a way of laughing without smiling which seems like it would be impossible to mimic but Mary had it down and at that point I decided I was not quite drunk enough for this and tried to walk away. Mary caught up and, again, it is Mary we are talking about – so she asked me if I was interested in
joining her role play and well, I’ll be honest lads, I hadn’t had sex that I hadn’t paid for again for about a month, so yeah – I was down to fuck.

“Eugenie then lead us somewhere private which she claimed was the Duke’s private chamber, but then how should I know? I was not all that interested in location. I shut the door and soon thereafter my ex and I are really going at it, but as soon as Mary gets me out of my tux and she starts putting on her clothes like, ‘Oh, we are role-playing, Darling. I’ve always wanted the opportunity to refuse you like this.’ And if that wasn’t embarrassing enough on its own, I suddenly heard laughter from behind the door and both York Princesses and their whole girl-gang were having a lovely ol’ time at my expense.”

None of this was a fib in itself, the fabrication was that it had not been orchestrated in advance.

Six weeks after Lady Eleanor had requested his services by way of relaying her fears that her young niece was being sexually mishandled, a month after deciding upon an procuring the method of execution, Ban Tarleton had gone to pick up his daughter for the weekend and Mary Robinson asked if the mightn’t switch the visitation schedule up for a coming weekend to accommodate her appointment to attend a charity function in her neighbour’s place as the woman herself. Seeing the opportunity and determined to seize it, Tarleton explained the situation of which his ex-girlfriend already seemed to be aware, asking if he instead might tag on as her plus one of sorts. Mary called another mum from Marie’s school, sorting out sleep-over arrangements for the following Saturday. Ban, for his part, then arranged to meet his former classmate Francis Lord Rawdon at their London club, conspiring with the young aristocrat who went on to coordinate with other members of his milieu to arrange access into the home’s private quarters with someone who knew the layout.

Once inside, fixing the water faucet had been as simple as pressing against the small metal filtration grid, something Ban had expected given the natural mineral deposits present in water in that part of the country. There had been no disassembly required and he had done the whole thing with his scarred pinkie finger, planting poison inside as he flirted with his ex in shared jest, her pretend Edinburgh accent verging on parody as his mock advances grew more vulgar. They had kissed out of habit and as he had felt her hands on his increasingly naked body, he had anticipated having a high-adrenaline quickie only to have found himself the victim of a ruse. He supposed this had been planned - perhaps with Rawdon a week earlier, perhaps with the Princess over drinks downstairs – for there was no other reason he could name for anyone ostensibly on-side to gather at the door to listen in for a laugh.

Perhaps this was where he had lost the plot?

Had he been fooled by one of his cohorts into killing the wrong man, and if so, who? No one in the north had discovered the plan or his ploy to the extent of his knowledge, no one in the south had any obvious reason to break course or knew enough about the mission itself to speak to its specifics, much less intercept them to serve their own ends.

Hamilton and Townsend betrayed nothing as they listened, leading Tarleton to believe them to have misspoke, be it by intention or not.

Banastre Tarleton had intentionally made confession an impossibility for himself - a fully honest admission would not be believed if he were further questioned on it. No one saw his crippled hand of being capable and he did not have any educational backing in chemistry. He did not know the specific compound or how he was meant its molecular formula, merely where it occurred and had Mary-Anne not had some of her drawing of common fauna hanging in her kitchen, had Deluc not commented that it was ill-placed in Ban’s own presence, prompting him to ask why, he would have never come on this exact idea. If Mary-Anne did not have digital cable prompting her into yet
another redecorating project every time she fell on HGTV whilst flipping channels, he might have even hesitated from this method of execution. So much of his operation came down to improbable chance, it seemed impossible that the outcome was so very far removed from expectation.

Maybe, he considered, it had yet to work. Maybe the elder Edmund Hewlett had simply died of natural causes as the autopsy said.

“But hell, I can laugh at myself and in this instance, it really paid off because Richmond saw me exciting his room with a bunch of girls who were all out of breath - me wearing a huge smile on my face, him coming to certain conclusions about what I’d done inside with his niece and cousins. He offered me twenty-thousand pounds to leave and never speak of what transpired – which, granted, I wasn’t planning on anyway – and, long story short, next day I called Mary and Kolina, told them the girls’ school fees had been sorted and that I wanted to take them both over fall break for the full week – and all of this can be verified in my banking statements which I am certain you already have.

“If I had indeed snuck into his bathroom and snuck poison into the faucet as Mr Brewster suggests, it would have had to have been some time in this space, but again, there were too many witnesses for me to have gotten away with it and my mind was frankly elsewhere. Good drinking story though, what actually happened at least, ‘innit?’ he winked.

“Before we leave the topic though,” Tarleton continued, “I understand that there is a question of why I haven’t gone out over the past few months or so and I might explain that, aside from, you know, just the humiliation Mary’s made a point of publicly subjecting me to, I’ve the added cost of leasing a flat now and my children’s day-to-day needs don’t stop with tuition; Georgie’s mum is working on her masters so after school is filled with painting and tumbling classes in addition to just the cost of day-care and Marie is in competitive fencing which means she’s always having to travel for tournaments and I’m always having to shell out for a hotel last minute because of how qualification works, and then after school she gets private lessons in violin and tutoring for French and German because he mum thinks that four hours a week at school just is not enough to sufficiently learn a second language, much less a third – which is all to say that I probably set the wrong precedent in paying the school fees in advance this year because the costs they … they just really do not end when you’ve kids. And it is not just that. Mary’s health is in decline and she can’t work the way she used to – it is a physical impossibility, but one she can’t accept until she’s again rendered herself bed-ridden, a sadly common state; and Kolina’s currently working on her thesis and working off her debt to society, which means she’s only working-working part time as a TA which pays shit. It will get better for us all, financially at least, but I found myself on the line for a lot this year on top of the sudden expenses of being single. When I go out now it is Liverpool rather than London when at all because gents, I have a … literally crippling gambling addiction and I’m running out of billiards-halls in Merseyside where I can both start a tab and don’t owe two-hundred Pounds to a man who has about two-hundred pounds on me.

“That is it,” he sighed, half-wondering how he sometimes still managed to feel young. “That is the whole boring story. Tell me, Alex – your division handles finances, right? How many taxpayer dollars did we waste having this conversation? No – no,” he dismissed, “I wouldn’t even trust a rounded figure form your lips, and that, my friend, is the problem. You have nothing to blackmail me with and therefore no threat you can extend to my family. You hijacked my covert operation; mistakes were made and opaque don’t work as far as fostering co-operation. Either you need to be clear, as we were last night, myself, the Hewletts, the Woodhulls, Simcoe, Tallmadge, Ingram – really everyone but Brewster, or you need to keep things completely and totally clandestine, even from the other parties involved as was the case in the hypothetical I helped you lay out. You are never going to convince an enemy to cross the lines by pointing a gun at him – even as unloaded as yours has been shown to be.”
Townsend closed his evidence folder, his bluff called.

“Alex,” Tarleton found himself grinning as he threatened, “I’m going to walk out of this room and I’m going to find my brother and the embassy’s intern and we are all going to leave this station, at which point I’m going to personally ring Cornwallis up in the middle of the night and have him issue a request for John André to be extradited to Britain to await trial for his crimes against the Earl of March and several Crown Subjects lest he be murdered here by your organisation and there is nothing you can do to stop me.”

“Good,” Townsend said.

“I knew that we could come to a sort of understanding, Colonel Tarleton,” the ADIC nodded, reaching out his right hand, then his left and extending it across the table.

“What?” Tarleton squinted, fully confused by this posture.

“Clandestine motives and modus operandi, as you say,” Hamilton smiled. “This isn’t my first rodeo, kid.”

“The situation has been taken care of, John,” Washington spoke into the receiver. Frowning, he noted the light static on the line he held, causing him to wonder if the building was insufficiently structured or if the interference was on the other end.

>>>George from my vantage point, I don’t see that it has.<< John Kerry seemed to threaten.>> Turn on a TV lately? You’ve got a fully blown hostage situation on your hands and I’m pulling rank before this can escalate further. Everyone who has signed a non-disclosure and non-liable needs to be realised immediately – no further paperwork. It is done. The children need to go home. The internet is up in arms over their continued detention. Take them out the back way while the adults exit through the front doors, the last thing this administration needs are pictures getting out of the kids who have been unlawfully detained and denied food and water while you sorted the particulars of the operation! Think of the questions that would be asked! You seemed confident that this would all be handled -<<

“It has been handled, John,” Washington repeated with a bit more force.

>>>It hasn’t. Britain is threatening to close their Embassy if Colonel Banastre Tarleton and Arthur Wellesley, the little intern, are not released by sunrise. Need I remind you, George, that your department has made relations with the UK difficult enough as is without us risking an end to diplomacy altogether?<<

“I understand,” Washington said, quietly furious that he was being blamed for the very repercussions he had warned of playing out in a plan he had personally objected to. “I’ll see that it is done.”

>>>Quietly, if you will,<< Kerry snipped before ending the call.

Washington swallowed, took a deep breath and considered leaving the world to shatter under its own weight. He believed in the mission if not methods required of him personally to see it through. What he had seen in John Graves Simcoe and the side he captained confirmed that John André had been correct in his hypothesis – psychology could manipulate fear as an emotion to far overpower
fear as an instinct, men could be counted on to fight where they once would have fled and influence others in the same vain.

In the armed service, the study could prove essential if its effects could be replicated.

In the meantime, Washington could but hope that the impulse he had given two of the subjects via an armature implementation of the good doctor’s designs were as effective at winning the peace as it was hoped to be in future wars.

Perhaps he ought to have sought Martha’s council. Perhaps he might yet. Perhaps it was too much of a risk to let anyone know his present mind.

George Washington walked at a brisk pace, angry, eager, and as alone as the man he hoped to save. John André had at times behaved unethically. The test subjects ought to have been given full knowledge of the study and its objectives from the start. They should have been given the option to opt out. Giving the subsequent tragic outcomes of Charles Joyce and John Robeson, giving Rogers capture and hostage of Senator Benedict Arnold, given John Graves Simcoe’s various uncontrolled violent reactions post-treatment, it could well be that if brought to trial, a federal prosecutor would pursue the death penalty. But that was a decision that in the end out to be left to a jury of his peers rather than the political interests of a few powerful people.

He hoped Jordan Akinbode was in the process of rallying every attorney to his banner. He hoped Benjamin Tallmadge would be among those the heed the call to arms. He hoped that John Graves Simcoe and Abraham Woodhull would consent to putting pressure on Robert Rogers and he hoped that the Scot would succumb to the same sense of loyalty that saved so many of his friends and former team mates -

- He hoped that Rogers would convince André to publically turn himself over to the authorities, that the doctor would see the better sense in facing charges that he stood a chance of fighting.

He hoped that others would come of them. Edith Hewlett should be brought to justice for the crimes she committed against her children; Edmund, who now wore his brother’s name, should answer for the sins he actively enabled. The Crown had already made its stance in the conflict clear by legitimising the lies Mary Woodhull had spun and Lady Eleanor had likely spoken. Queen Elizabeth had officially entitled the astrophysicist his uncle’s heir, an honour she had never bestowed upon father, who from what Washington understood engaged too openly with industry to afford himself a seat. Perhaps it was the zeitgeist into which he had been born at play, but the US Secretary of Defence could not understand why the monarch refused to push further against the ills of her own house, to set an example that would inspire her subject towards their own humanity.

But then no man or woman should be alone endowed with the power of God’s own Wrath and Mercy, regardless of any tradition idea of Divine Ordination. A jury should decide the fate of sinners here on earth after being presented with evidence to evaluate innocence and guilt.

He did not want to be part of a world that ignored the system of justice envisioned by generations of men brave enough to admit their own individual failacy.

He certainly did not want to help build one.

He entered the viewing station intent on breaking upon the interview in accordance with Kerry’s amended request in time to witness an act of mutiny against his covert designs, his ADIC sitting casually by as a witness grew hostile. Washington could not help but to share the British colonel’s smile as he heard him announce,
“Alex, I’m going to walk out of this room and I’m going to find my brother and my intern and we are going to leave this station and I’m going to ring Cornwallis and have him issue a request for John André to be extradited to Britain to await trial for his crimes against the Earl of March and several Crown Subjects lest he be murdered here and there is nothing you can do to stop me.”

“Good.” Agent Townsend replied to Washington’s delight.

“I knew that we could come to a sort of understanding, Colonel Tarleton,” Hamilton continued. Washington told an officer to open the door.

“This isn’t my first rodeo, kid. I want to see this matter brought to justice as badly as you yourself.”

“Oh, you did not just -”

Washington cleared his throat. “You are free to go, Colonel Tarleton. I’m told there is pizza in the lobby. Grab yourself a bite on the way out. Alex, a word.”

“Yea … how is the water and/or coffee situation looking?” Tarleton asked as he rose from his stool.

“Don’t push it, son,” Washington warned.

It was the second meeting that day Ben Tallmadge had conducted in a public toilet. He stood half reclined on the door frame to one of the stalls, facing his friend from high-school Jordan Akinbode who stood with his back against the entrance as though he meant to block anyone else from entering. Anna Hewlett, whom Jordan had sought for a second professional opinion had helped the injured Mary Woodhull, whom she had been talking to when Jordan came asking for her help, onto the sink and stood beside her as the smaller woman shifted for comfort on the already cracked ceramic. There were no mirrors behind them, likely, Ben judged, the result of a violent incident. He hoped a cop had not been involved.

His boyfriend Caleb Brewster continually paced the same three steps between the sink and the stalls, hugging himself as he shook slightly, something, Ben guessed, had more to do with his medical condition than present mindset –

Then, perhaps he was mistaken.

“John André is alive,” Jordan Akinbode told them in hushed tones, “for now, at least. He was put into WPP and left his safe house sometime yesterday afternoon, apparently having taken off when news broke of Arnold’s rescue. All this shit right here, his death, half the interrogations that stemmed from it,” he explained, “Washington’s complicated cover-up. Obama and his Cabinet plan to ignore Congress and implement André’s methods in the armed forces to essentially weaponize PTSD in soldiers they have deemed as defect and test it out in Mali. André being on the loose, and well, alive is a threat to that.” Akinbode, too, he noticed, was trembling with rage. Ben felt as though her were on the verge.

“Dear God, they don’t mean to -” Anna began.

“I left before I could be implemented in another conspiracy,” Jordan interrupted. “I told Simcoe, Woodhull and the other Tarleton to get out of there, too, but Washington, well he threatened me
with the ten percent I took from the contract I wrote up for Simcoe and Hewlett – clean from my end at least, and no federal prosecutor would have any want to pursue it giving the ease with which I could file a countersuit,” he spat. “I asked a paralegal to get me the CCTV footage of Lafayette sitting down with Simcoe well after the fact, making clear that his illicit undertakings were done under orders from his embassy with the full knowledge of our government and every police department contracts professional lip readers - it is not just Simcoe who has that skill. We have it on record. We are in the clear, at least from the corporate angle. Washington went after Clayton Tarleton in a similar fashion – threats against members of his family he has no means to actualise which I’m sure my fellow solicitor will soon realise … but with Simcoe and Woodhull,” he paused, “he made a case against Mary here that, though I find the facts of it implausible -”

“It is Mali, isn’t it?” Mary asked.

Jordan blinked, then bit is bottom lip. “No. Not quite. They only care about Europe, countries with oil, and countries with nuclear capabilities. Mali is casualty. Washington argued that you created a situation in which refugees were resettled in a way that benefits UNICEF, a couple of French blokes who got rich off of the conflict they helped escalate won’t face justice. I think it is all bullshit – if Washington could even evidence these claims -”

“I’m guilty,” she answered.

Anna buried her eyes in her palms and inhaled slowly. “Mary, did you sign anything to that effect?”

“I’ve already filed a motion to have the non-disclosure agreements tossed out,” Jordan broke in.

“That won’t -” Caleb started.

“It might not be necessary,” Mary swallowed. “Cicero told me that he was going to look for them, take them and have them destroyed. I told him not to but now he has all the other kids engaging in this game. He mentioned to me that there are no CCTV cameras in the areas not open to members of the public and not enough police on premises to keep an eye out everywhere, and with people constantly being called back -”

“Game?” Jordan asked.

“They are pretending it is hide and seek. Or, that is what they are saying to everyone else, at least.”

“I’ll go talk to them,” Ben offered.

“Don’t,” Mary warned. “They are terrified of you, Ben, you are the reason they are up in arms.” He nodded, hating every action his former job had required him to take on the afternoon in question. “Listen, I doubt they will find anything – how could they? Legally speaking, I trust Anna and Jordan to work around the agreements so many of us were forced into signing that I can’t think your case is altogether lost – this Mali thing though … how could I have possibly enabled a war crime in bringing orphans and young widows to safety? I don’t, I never meant -”

“The feds are not going to pursue charges against you if your husband and Simcoe agree to whatever plan they’ve hastily come up with to find and kill John André,” Jordan interrupted. “Abe seems squeamish. John looks like he is on the attack – more fucking proof if the Pentagon is looking for it that André’s methods are in fact effective,” he balled his hands into fists.

“We have to stop this,” Ben said. “We have to bring John André before a jury of his peers. I say we go along with it, just until we know what the actual plan is so that we can stop its progress.”
“The plan involves you taking a job offer from Alexander Hamilton and abandoning the case we were working on against the US Government. You’re not doing that.”

“Would you have a case without John André?” Caleb asked. “Seems to me like yous two was moving ahead just fine when we all heard he had been killed in rehab.”

“Ignoring the fact that he could be a crucial witness.” Ben answered, “I won’t, I can’t simply sit back and watch as my nation falls further into authoritarianism. We don’t up and murder researchers we hired here on American soil once they have delivered on a government contract. That is unamerican. That is Putin-shit, that is -”

“Fucking smart is what that is,” Caleb argued. “We all get justice if the government gets to kill the man who need I remind you started this whole thing. It is not going to bring your sergeant back; it is not going to undo all of the wrong that came out of Arnold’s sudden absence, but we’ll be free -”

“That isn’t freedom,” Ben interrupted.

“Does ‘and justice for all’ mean nothing for you, man?” Jordan spat. “Freedom is equality under the law, not threatening victims of various forms of oppression to orchestrate a murder because I trail would put unethical research that will have by then been implemented into the armed force without further testing in the public eye.

“Well, maybe it will get my uncle out of witness protection and serve to finally put Simcoe behind bars if he volunteers himself as a hit man.”

Ben had never been more disgusted. “No one gets justice if we stand by and allow that to happen. John André deserves a free and fair trial – hell, I’d defend him myself, for in doing so I’d be defending the system of law and order against those who would see it dismembered for political convenience or tactical advantage. Don’t you get it? Every action sets a precedent. What is going to happen if we then get someone into government with no self-restraint?”

“Don’t you get it, Ben? You are fighting a losing battle for the very people you would otherwise want to see behind bars creating innocent casualties abound in the process -”

“I am fighting for the United States Constitution against those who would ignore it to their own ends!”

“And what makes you so sure of which side of that line you are standing? Man, I get the self-righteousness that comes with the territory of being a preacher’s son but Benny boy – come on, this could all be over. For you, for me, for everyone in Setauket. Jordan, I like you and all but take a good look at yourself, at your life. You really want to give up a promised partnership in a prestigious firm for the chance to damn your friends to the consequences of crimes they had no choice but to commit and confess to when you could let Washington take André -whom you’ve hated for years – out for you and let everyone else -everyone you love - just walk? My uncle is stuck in Witness Protection and I don’t want him to die there -”

“Don’t you understand that such is a likely outcome of us not taking a stand?” Jordan countered. “John André is a protected witness, too, for whatever that is worth. The law doesn’t exist just to protect the ones we love and if we turn our backs on it where our enemies are concerned there is no guarantee that the entire social contract has any standing. If we allow the military go through with implementing André’s methods there will be a whole heck of a lot more Setaukets in this Beautiful Country of Ours. So yeah, Caleb. I’d give up my job to work with Ben on this case. I’d happily quit, have my big and empty Brownstone that I now can’t sell foreclosed on when I can no longer pay the mortgage to protect the human rights of those who took all the dreams that I had for that
place away from me. Our laws are meant to protect people, not power -”

“I’m *talking* about people,” Caleb insisted. “About Abe and Mary and Abigail and Cicero and everyone else who just needs this to end -”

“You aren’t talking about me,” Mary interrupted. “I want justice for this, too, even if it comes at the cost of personal consequence. I just spent two hours with a little girl who was maliciously attacked for having found a fucking cell phone. I’m a mother, you think I’m just going to sit back and let the powers that be do the same thing on an enormous scale? I owe those kids out there, I owe the kids in Mali, I owe it to everyone else out in that waiting room who had their lives destroyed – you think anything is going to return to normal if we all just shut out eyes?”

“What do you think Washington is planning?” Anna asked.

Akinbode thought about it for a moment. “I assume it has to do with Rogers. All the high-ups were concerned he would not come out of surgery. Maybe he knows where André is or where he might go. They were close. Once, at least.”

Ben nodded. “Then go back in and get John and Abe and the other Tarleton to agree to it, we’ll just have to get to him first.”

“I don’t think it is going to be that simple,” Jordan frowned.

Ben smiled. “Neither do they, that is the beauty of it, but I’ll have no problem getting us in to the hospital. I have an old police uniform back at mine from when I had a beat. I’ll sell myself as an additional protective guard and sneak one of you in to talk to the guy. We will get Rogers to help us locate André as you assume is the Pentagon’s plan, promising him criminal defence if he can help us bring his friend to safety -”

“I’ll do it,” Mary volunteered. “I’ll talk to him. I understand his accent.”

“Wouldn’t Philomena be better suited?” Anna suggested, looking at Mary’s cast, another injury, it occurred to Ben, for which the responsibility was his. Why had he not resigned sooner? Why had he spent so long serving as the arm of a corrupt machine? How much had he let it corrupt him in the process? He hit his fist against the stall door, causing it to swing open behind him.

Mary’s eyes grew wide as she followed its swing. “I’m doing it,” she insisted, seemingly to him alone. “Better the hook than the bait, I say.”

“You scare the shit out of me sometimes,” Anna nodded.

“You scare the shit out of me sometimes,” Anna nodded.

“Thanks bitch,” Mary answered, puckering her lips at her friend, a gesture the bride returned.

“This man killed your brother,” Caleb said sharply. “You would defend him in a court of law? André I can understand from an idealist’s perspective, but Rogers? *Rogers*?”

“Rogers killed Sam,” Ben swallowed, “but think of how many lives he could save if we just -”

“We?” Caleb threw up his arms. “No Ben. I fuckin’ can’t. I’m out.”

“That is the single most tone-deaf, asocial and above all fully inappropriate desire I’ve ever heard
voiced so … dispassionately,” Colonel Tarleton chastised where Arthur Wellesley had anticipated a reanimation of the man’s wild youth, the officer attempting to relate by running through a quick sequence of in and of themselves meaningless expressions common to teenagers, but fully unnatural sounding in the mouths of anyone over thirty who did not happen to be a hugely successful American rapper, Brazilian DJ or Swedish app developer. This was an entirely-too-British admission of clearly not getting it. But then Arthur did not necessarily need the Countess of March and Kinrara to toss him her garter, what he needed was to obtain some kind of signed liability form for Cicero. What he needed was more time to look.

“I kind of thought it would be right in your wheelhouse,” Arthur shrugged by way of stalling. Relieved as he was that Marie’s plan had worked, he could not simply leave his new friends the suffer the sins of their fathers.

“Oh, to be sure, to be sure,” the colonel consented.

“Will you at least help me look for her then?” Arthur suggested. “Maybe we should split-up, cover more ground.”

At this, Clayton Tarleton frowned. “Neither of you is going to ask Anna Hewlett for her wedding garter. We are leaving before her countrymen change their mind.”

“Brother-heart, do you so question my ability to defend myself and young Wellesley here against unwarranted, erroneous allegations so shortly after my tactics proved themselves successful?” the colonel pouted. “If the colonist come again on the idea of keeping us on these muddy shores, I’ll simply remind them -”

“Me?” Arthur blinked. “I was told that the FBI did not even want to interview me -”

“Oh, yeah, here,” Tarleton grinned, reaching into his back pocket, producing Richard’s old Driving Licence and dangling it in front of his eyes. “I explained that I confiscated this from you far earlier, intending to return it to your brother upon my return to the UK, used it to purchase a firearm having no other photo ID on me and that your prints were only on the thing because of that hug you gave me outside of the courthouse when our paths again crossed. Here, take it,” he said. “You’ve got like what – two months until your sixteenth birthday? You’ve handled enough here for me to be fairly convinced that you can already be trusted to drink responsibly. This isn’t really my jurisdiction to police, save to say, if you ever find yourself at a party where alcohol is being served to underclassmen, do me a solid if my daughter is present and call me before you call the police.”

“I don’t really get invited to parties,” Arthur answered marveling at how adults seemed genuinely convinced that they could relate when they were categorically so far from the mark in every conceivable contest. He imagined convincing anyone in his year that he was cool enough to invite around at the weekend only to go and phone the police – or worse, someone’s parent – because of the thirty or so people sharing a six pack, hoping the 0,5 percent alcohol volume was enough to substitute atmosphere if there was not enough to excuse a lack of individual personality, maybe five or six of these would-be-bacchanals were well under the legal drinking age. Teen house parties were nothing like that which was depicted in television and film, much as Arthur would still have liked to himself warrant an invitation, but explaining as much to an adult only reinforced whatever beliefs they had surrounding the debauchery of youth culture. There is no way he would embarrass himself, Marie, or any other schoolmate that way. But he had to keep of the pretence that Tarleton was ‘a cool parent’ - whatever that should be taken to mean - by virtue of his letting him have the ID that he had only ever once produced when Mrs - rather than Mr - Kahn was working the till at the kiosk on his corner.

“Maybe because you are the kind of bloke who would go to a young woman who just had her
public spectacle of a wedding end in bloodshed and ask for her garter because your fake-girlfriend isn’t texting you back,” the colonel snorted.

“What -” his brother began, clearly as impatient as Arthur was growing with this exchange albeit for entirely different reasons.

“Clayton,” Colonel Tarleton turned to address, “he really tried the whole ‘I’ve a girlfriend in Ireland’ trope. On me. On the way up. Like we were in a poorly acted teen rom-com from the turn of the century.”

“Oh, my God: I’m. From. Dublin,” Arthur tried to explain.

“What gun Ban?” the brother demanded.

Banastre only laughed. “I took care of it, Pookie, chill,” he paused, squinted and grew more serious, “What were you here for then?”

“It is work related,” Clayton dismissed. “Not grounds for either of us to feign sentimentality or really anything to concern you with at all, save to say that I just ended a very long conference call with the head of PR who called my attention to the fact that a number of our first team players have shared an image on social media of a couple of pizza boxes originating from this station, insinuating that a number of minors were being unlawfully detained without food or water whilst several prominent officials turned a blind eye … but I’m guessing young Mr Wellesley ‘from Dublin’ would know far more about that.”

Arthur blinked. “I um … I asked Marie for her help. She had the pizzas in the lobby sent for both logistical and strategic assistance,” he paused, noting that evoking the colonel’s daughter by her Christian name did nothing to sway the sympathies of either Tarleton. Perhaps he had confessed more than he meant to? “You have to feed an army, right?” he tried to joke. Nothing. “Thea took a photo,” he continued with growing discomfort, “went in Susan’s DMs and asked her to share it. And then – I guess Eggshell follows her somehow which is weird because I always thought he was a bloke in his thirties or forties with nothing better to do than comment on the news and she only posts satirical make-up and fashion tips, so who knows - maybe someone else at our school is way cooler than I could have even logically anticipated. But yeah. Now the news is out. And so are we …” he trailed off, “I just have to take care of this one thing first, okay?” The brothers stared at him blankly for a moment. Arthur wondered if he was going to have to offer some kind of explanation of Twitter and Instagram as well.

“My kid!” Colonel Tarleton exclaimed proudly once his mind had adequate time to process what he had been told. “They say the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

Clayton rolled his eyes, “They also say ‘talent skips a generation’, so good job, Marie – though there was never any doubt. Ban,” he ordered, “we’re leaving. Atty,” he shifted, “girls are not nearly as complicated as you are making out – especially not for someone who is able to organise and execute a plan of attack with international components whilst entrenched deep behind enemy lines,” he told him encouragingly, borrowing from the same metaphor. “You’ve done enough to make yourself seem interesting to some girl in Ireland, to that whole demographic. Cut your hair, tuck in your shirt and show up on her lunch hour with the second biggest bouquet your money can buy from a proper florist -”

“Not the biggest?” Arthur asked.

“Don’t be ridiculous, that is for when you’ve had a row. You need to leave yourself room to go bigger which is another reason that this garter belt is just a bad idea. You are never going to top it.”
“But I promised,” Arthur begged.

“He promised, Clay,” the colonel echoed.

“Ban, how many times do you need the colonists to frame you for murder in a single week?”

‘Ban’ raised his hand for his brother to stop. “Just give us a sec - yea?”

“Fine! Fine!” Clayton agreed in a tone that confessed he was anything but with this delay.

“Aww, and here you were making such strong claims over your refusal to get sentimental, Habibi. Love you, too, Bro,” the colonel kissed his two fingers and raised his arm to the sky.

“Go fuck yourself,” Clayton answered without a hint of amusement.

“Atty -” ‘Ban’ began.

“It’s Arthur.”

“Atty, take a walk with me, yea?”

Arthur shrugged. They took a few steps in the direction of the lobby before the colonel looked up at him and said in a low voice. “No idea what you’re really after, but I can buy you twenty minutes, make it count, o’rite? I remember a bit of what it is like to be fifteen.”

“Sure you do,” Arthur rolled his eyes. “Taytay wrote a song about it.”

“You get me at least. Go – storm the Bastille, declare the rights of man and the citizen, roll out the guillotine, finish whatever you and Marie and Thea and Susan and Eggshell and whoever else have planned.”

“You know that is the wrong revolution to reference here in the US, right?” Arthur squinted.

“Well I’m not going to tell you to cry and not pay your taxes,” Tarleton defended. “Go, just do what needs to be done.”

Arthur Wellesley nodded, having no idea how he could manage to deliver on his promise now that he had been forced into a fighting retreat. He pulled out his mobile again, half considering that he might google the form itself, half worried that the feds would find out they had again been bested by a thirteen year old girl an ocean away armed only with a cellular phone, an uncanny talent of mimic and a lie that she knew nothing about menstruation. Clayton Tarleton was probably right; they should probably flee under the darkness of night. After glancing at a few more desks on this way to the door, seeing nothing of immediate interest to his American allies, Arthur walked defeated into the lobby in hopes of asking Thea to tell Cicero goodbye.

To his great surprise, he found the three teammates sitting in a corner, eating what was left of the pizza, Thomas Woodhull tired out and resting in the arms of a man who was presumably his father while he paced the length of the waiting area, trying to rock the little boy to sleep.

“Hey,” Arthur started, giving Cicero and his mates a timid wave.

“Pizza?” Pip asked.

“Sure,” Arthur answered as he was presented with the box the group had stolen for themselves.
“Look, I’m sorry I was not of more help,” he said after a few minutes of small talk, mouth otherwise stuffed with yet another accusation that Bill de Blasio was ultimately stoking anti-police sentiment via his policies and practices, including the unlawful detention of five innocent minors, three of whom had already been subjected to police brutality, perhaps wanting the issue to remain in public discussion for as long as possible by forcing it back into the news cycle – in other words, with cheese, sausage and red onions on a thin crust. Marie Robinson was truly brilliant, and Arthur Wellesley reasoned he truly did owe her a bag of crisps the next time she same around to his.

“Are you kidding? This is great,” Pip said after swallowing his second bite of the same. “See how they like it for one.”

“It wasn’t my idea entirely,” Arthur confessed, knowing full well it had not been his idea at all. “I just have a mate who was raised in a three-ring circus of making manipulative statements. Her mum is a diva of the highest order, she lives in the same building as the woman who owns the UK’s largest tabloids and her sort-of-step dad’s family are all involved in sport management, local politics, or more often than not, an unholy assimilation of the two. I just asked for her help on something altogether different,” he said, not sure if Pip had been clued into the exact details of Cicero’s plan, “and she suggested a publicity stunt and this is what came of it. And it wouldn’t even have been effective had Thea here not posted these to Insta and Twitter. So, I mean, really, I’ve been of little use.”

“Arthur, we got this,” Cicero smiled, throwing a side glance at his sport bag, evidently having some ends for changing back into his shorts and Neymar Jr jersey than a want for comfort. “I found what we were looking for. I think. It is just people agreeing not to speak a word about some study John André was conducting in return for charges not being brought on trumped up charges.”

“Is John André the guy who was paying for your school?”

“You think we should post those online, too?” Thea asked, again, more productively that Arthur realised he was being in trying to piece everything together.

“No,” he answered he abruptly. “None of you should, anyway. George Hanger is apparently a Bild journalist – whatever ‘journalist’ might mean when describing a broadsheet that isn’t legally allowed to call itself a newspaper – and he is already working on a story about Coach Simcoe’s other team, the one he and every adult here not in the bridal party or elected office plays for. The story will get out without any of you having to spend more time in a police station. We should just destroy them.”

“How are we going to do that here? Now? With everyone with a vested interest in protecting these papers inside and the whole of the press core waiting out front?” Pip posed.

“We could just sneak them out and take care of it when we get home,” Thea suggested.

“How?” Pip frowned. “Your dad is the ADA, mine works for the FBI and Cicero’s mum worked for Dr André. If any one of them found us out they would hand them over, they would hand us in.”

“I’d ask Jordan but he sided with Tallmadge in the past,” Cicero said with audible disappointment. “Arthur – you take them. Burn them when you get back to Britain or give them to Colonel Tarleton and have him sort it or send it to George Hanger as ‘an unnamed source’ or something.”

“That could work, except how would I take the pile without it being noticed by anyone outside or by Homeland Security at the airport?”

“How attached are you to that jacket?” Thea asked. Can I wear it? I’m cold.”
“Um, sure,” he said as he awkwardly handed it over.

“I’ve just … oh, now that I am standing up, I suddenly gotta pee,” she announced at a slightly higher volume.

“Um, the phone is in the pocket,” Arthur whispered, having just enough experience with girls to know that they only ever had to urinate when conspiring amongst themselves, lying about lines or needing to redo their makeup when they came back a half hour later as though they had nothing to do with the sudden topping of an autocracy in a developing country. “Marie’s last name is Robinson, not Tarleton but she is like the last number I texted so you won’t have any issue finding her. Prissy is Susan Bertie offline - Pricilla is her middle name, I think, but I have her as Susan in my contacts,” he told her helpfully.

Thea shook her head. “Cicero, hand me your bag.”

“What are you -”

“I will explain later,” she said slowly. Cicero handed it over without further question or argument.

“You don’t care about the lining, do you?” she asked, gesturing to the dinner jacket she now wore.

“I … I guess not?” Arthur tried.

“Cool,” Thea said, “be right back.”

“What the hell?” Pip asked.

Arthur bit his lower lip. “I think it might actually be true that girls are smarter. At my school we have a lot of sex-separated lessons and I always assumed they were sent to a windowless room to learn about reproductive health same as us and it just took them way longer as girls need approximately nine months more information than we do … but I’m kind of thinking now that they are instead being indoctrinated into the Illuminati during a double-block while our dumb assess are dismissed after being shown how to roll a condom onto a cucumber.”

“Make sense with companies now needing to make certain percentage quotas of women in top management to get certain tax benefits,” Cicero agreed.

“Do you have the same thing here?”

“What with school?” Pip clarified. “I mean, sex ed is sex separated but we don’t have condom demos due to the Pro-Life interest on the board of directors. At least where we all go. It is a laugh though because everyone knows the password to turn off the child-protection built into the school’s WiFi network is ‘1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8’ and they show condoms being put on in enough of the porn we are watching when we are otherwise meant to be doing coursework for us to kind of see how it is done.”


“Are you daft?” Pip sneered.

“Maybe,” Cicero shrugged. “I seriously didn’t know how to get around the child-protection.”

“And that is why I’ve had my first kiss whereas you are still a virgin,” Pip grinned.

“Aberdeen giving you a peck on the cheek does not count as a kiss!” Cicero hissed. “She is a
foreigner, that is just how they say ‘hello.’”

Arthur was about to laugh when felt a hand on his shoulder.

“Um, hey Coach.” – “Hey.” The lads greeted. Arthur turned around to find himself face to face with the new countess.

“I was told you wanted to talk to me?” Anna Hewlett asked with a sly smile.

Arthur looked over her shoulder to see Banastre Tarleton wearing his typical obnoxious grin and Clayton Tarleton tapping on his expensive wristwatch, shooting him a sharp look from halfway across the room.

“I … um,” Arthur stammered. The task of asking was made more difficult by having to serve as an example to two new friends who were even more hapless where it came to women than he felt himself to be. “Look,” he started, “your Ladyship, without wanting to sound too forward in my request, it has been nearly a year since I’ve seen my girlfriend. I – I’m from Dublin, too – that is, well it is where she lives, but I had to move to London when my mum got a job there and anyway, I was supposed to go home for the holiday but with the way my school scheduled our work placement schemes I wound up here instead and so I promised her I’d bring her back something special – she is a huge fan of yours, you see. Um, wait – I can prove it, actually. Let me just pull up her Instagram,” he felt for the phone he realised too late he had just given to Thea. The future Duchess of Richmond would think him a pervert! Arthur could feel the sweat on his brow.

“Do you want a selfie?” the countess smiled.

“Actually,” he started. Stopped. “I mean, of course that would be great but it would have more to do with me than with her and giving that we may well be in a fight I don’t want to make some unnecessary show of ego with my gift. I’d ask a flower from your bouquet but UK laws being what they are in terms of bring organic material into the country, I was kind of hoping you would be willing to part with your garter?” Lady Anna’s eyes widened. She pressed her rosebud lips together and pulled back slightly, either in offence or in her efforts to laugh in his face. Arthur was not sure which would be worse.

“In my country there is a tradition of the bride giving her garter to a young man in attendance,” he continued, partially to defend his desire, partially to stall for time while Thea was off committing an act of apparel-based espionage. “It is based on this superstition that such would bring him luck with his sweetheart and, well the thing is, your Ladyship, I have every intention of asking for Kitty Pakenham’s hand the moment the law decides us old enough to be wed without parental consent and her family can no longer prove an obstacle to our affections. I can easily imagine this sounding all too vulgar to the aristocracy and I don’t mean any offence or to imply that your citizenship makes you any less a member of the Royal Family than say the Duchess of Cambridge who is of common birth as well, which of course isn’t to say -” dear God! He was digging himself in deeper. “I apologise, what I said was out of line and the furthest thing possible from what I meant -”

“Arthur,” Anna said with a truly charming smile, “I’m more than happy to oblige. We do a garter toss in the US as well, so here,” she said, bending over, lifting her skirt to her knee and rolling the lacy grater over her stocking. “It is yours if you can promise me that no matter what life has in store for you, you’ll never stop believing in love.”

“I won’t,” Arthur swore. “I mean, I promise not to.”

“Best of luck to you and Kitty.”
“Thanks,” he said, retuning her smile.

“Good, are we done?” Clayton demanded as he approached. “Our flight leaves at seven which means check-in is at five and giving that my brother is flying on a temporary-issue passport I should not want to run the risk of any additional hold-ups -”

Banastre shook his head and mouthed ‘you owe me for this’ to Arthur before he spoke. “Translation: he is terrified of flying and disguises this through hyper-vigilance. It is the same thing every time we get on a plane. Always has been. That we are clear, brother mine,” he shifted. “I fully intend to put as many American resources to waste as is humanly possible prior to boarding, which I suppose means speaking loudly in Arabic at the security checkpoints and afterwards offering to buy you a coffee at Starbucks if only to laugh when a barista threatens to call security when you - inevitably - grow irrationally irate at the wee small paper cups they serve a doppio espresso in and restate your assessment that Anglican peoples should stick to tea because they have nothing that can approach or even imitate the coffee-culture of those realms where the Hapsburgs once held influence - which is fair, all things considered. At the same time, I should perhaps warn you beforehand, Americans go bat-shit over any contradiction to their Founding Myth, which paradoxically includes any assertion that they were once tea-loving British subjects. They had a big fall out with the stuff when they let it fall into some harbour …”

“Thank you,” Arthur mouthed as Colonel Tarleton continued in this vain at length, giving him a nod of acknowledgement. Arthur nodded back, willing to accept that the colonel knew something about the American Revolution after all as he started in on the occupation of New York.

“Where is Thea?” Anna asked to his surprise, whispering, “I have an idea of what you guys are up to and I want to help.” It only then occurred to him how incredibly brave the girl was forcing herself to be. She had sobbed upon arriving at the station, secluding herself in a corner out of fear that she would otherwise chance upon former-Inspector Tallmadge, whom he also had not seen in some time.

Arthur looked at Cicero who had been unsuccessful at recruiting Mary Woodhull to his cause, wordlessly asking if her Ladyship could be trusted.

“Um, she …” Cicero delayed.

“Bathroom,” Arthur blurted out, wondering if he might have to go to her rescue, wondering if Anna might offer with the access extended to her by the virtue of gender.

“I’m here – sorry!” Thea announced before Her Highness could offer any help or suggestion thereof. “Atty, are you leaving?” the girl pouted. “Thanks for letting me wear your jacket earlier – Cicero, do you mind that I borrowed yours? I saw it was in your bag and I’m still cold so -”

“No, I mean, I’m not using it,” Cicero answered, shifting. “It’s been real, Arthur. Travel safe.”

“Right, cheers lads,” he answered, shaking the hand that Cicero extended to him, before half-hugging Pip. “And ladies,” he added, taking Thea’s hand to kiss it and giving Anna and approximation of a bow as he struggled to put on his dinner jacket, itself made heavier by all of the paper shoved into the lining.

At the airport, her would buy a magazine and throw it in with his blazer, belt and shoes in hopes of disguising the documents he had been asked to smuggle when they went through the x-ray. He had no idea how he was going to hide them on a two-hour car ride though, for the garment was even less comfortable than it had been ten minutes prior.
“Okay,” he swallowed, addressing the brothers Tarleton. “I’m ready. Thanks for helping me out and giving me a chance to say my goodbyes.”

He left the station worried that he would get caught, that someone would discover Marie’s other deception before he found his way back to British soil, that even if everything went to plan, he would he would still have to face his mother and explain what he was doing home so soon.

But at least he could make Kitty happy when next they met. Presumably. He wondered if there was some truth to Clayton’s assessment that bigger gifts were meant for hostile conflicts and considered asking for more relationship advice, thinking better on it when two blocks into his Uber he removed his attention from the powerlines and lampposts in a land that never truly grew dark and found that the brothers were still engaging in an argument.

It was defiantly a Christian holiday, Arthur concluded as he began to listen, thinking about the kinds of fights that ensued when his older brothers joined the family table, wondering what banal topic polluted their shared breath before enough wine had been consumed for Brexit to mean Brexit and not … Bundesliga?

“Ban, didn’t you take a semester of this?” Clayton asked in disgust. “‘Bundes’ means ‘federal’ – Bundestag, Bundesrat, Bundesverfassungsgericht - ”

“What?” the colonel squinted. “Say that last one again for me.”

“I’m saying there is too much government in … well everything, full stop. The Germans need to work on their nomenclature, take the politics out of football.”

“Government and politics are separate beasts, Brother-dear,” Banastre countered. “Politics in football is like when a club side is called ‘Red Star’ or when a former Soviet side hasn’t yet had a commercial interest sweep in to claim naming rights and you’ve still got the ‘sized means of production’ buried in there. I mean, you can ask him if you really want to, I’ll call him right now – sure he is still up, but I’m nearly a hundred percent certain that ‘Bundes’ is like ‘national’, meaning the top clubs from across the nation compete,” he emphasised, “instead of it being a regional division. Like the Europa League is for all of Europe … mostly for Sevilla, but in theory, all of Europe.”

“‘National’ is worse,” Clayton argued. “‘National’ implies authoritarianism.”

“In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, maybe – but what else would they even call it?”

“Anything that doesn’t reflect a fascist history. No one remembers Mussolini at the weekend because we call the top-tier Serie A in Italy. Nothing political about that. Same with Franco in Spain, La Liga is just ‘the league’ – again, fully neutral. I just can’t believe that in a country economically dependent on exporting its manufactured goods no one had the basic marketing sense to stand up and say ‘this is a really dumb name.’”

“Volkswagen makes a car called ‘Golf’. I don’t think naming is their strong suit,” the colonel said dryly.

“Maybe in a totalitarian regime they were afraid they were going to get shot if they spoke out in protest,” Arthur suggested with an eyeroll.

“Exactly!” Clayton exclaimed. “See – he gets it. And that, Brother-dear, is why we need to get the fuck out of the European Union on 23rd June.” Arthur wondered how long it had been since he’d slept and what Class A drugs he had been taking since. Maybe it was just the holiday spirt. Warm
family gatherings trended to bring out the best in people and the worst in their politics.

“Well no one is arguing that much,” Banastre agreed. “I’m just struggling to follow your reasoning.”

Here we go, Arthur thought. Full Brexit debate. Happy Easter.

He felt in his pocket for Richard’s Driving Licence, wondering if he would be use it at the airport upon arrival, wondering if wine alone made idiocy easier to swallow or if a side of potatoes were also required, perhaps a rack of lamb. “I’m struggling to follow how you came on this from the American Revolution,” he snorted. It was going to be a long flight. His jacket grew less comfortable with the thought of hours to be brought in the close company of hesitant nationalists. He hoped they had at least booked him an aisle seat.

“No, don’t do that,” Ellie Hewlett pouted, looking up from her list of missed calls to her sometimes lover as he tried to make his exit from her bedchamber. In mid-morning her room remained fairly dark as the sun would take hours to migrate to the back out the house where it might prove itself useful. By then she would either be dressing herself for afternoon tea or she would be in an office, library of off premises altogether, answering to an independent police inquiry while forensics did a sweep of this room. Frankly, she hoped for the latter. It was not that she thought much would come of the effort, but she tended to get on with most at the Edinburgh station far better than she did her siblings, their spouses and the assortment of semi-local dignitaries who had gathered to raise a toast to Edmund and his bride. She supposed it was harder to sound quite so empty and pretentious asking about an alibi than making empty conversation ripe with a self-assertive sense of wit that often took the form of quoting classical philosophers in long-dead languages – there were only so many times one could quote Plato, Socrates or Aristotle before it became logical to ask if they had ever had anything resembling an individual thought or impression. She would personally take a lifetime of ‘where were you the night of …?’s before subjecting herself to another dry utterance of ‘Tí kainòn eiē tetheaménos? Géronta týrannon.’ of the sort that had been repeated ad nauseum ‘the night of’ by those who otherwise lacked the courage to respond to change.

But day had since broke though she had no faith the even the sun would dare to shed its light here in the darkness of the castle. Ellie Hewlett preferred the promise of a prison cell by comparison – a conviction was by nature temporary, whereas this House to which she had been born was eternal.

She had seen a tyrant fall but others would surely rise.

She, however, for the moment at least, had no great intention of getting out of bed or leaving herself alone in it.

“You prefer to sleep alone,” Francis Rawdon shrugged as he continued to rebutton his shirt.

“I should doubt that I will be doing much sleeping any time soon,” she countered. “Too many people expressing their heartfelt sympathies, by which I mean covering their asses – or – alternatively, they have taken to cursing my name for the self-same reason. I suspect I might make moves to alter the coming headlines from the gunpowder, treason and plot the English in particular are so terribly given to accusing,” she paused, considering how this concept might come to manifest, “no, I may have changed my mind - do leave. Leave me to weep into my pillow so my eyes will prove red and puffy before the press.”
“Would you? Cry?”

“Perhaps,” Ellie answered. “I feel rather alone. It’s curious, I always imagined I would be happier, alas, my uncle’s life ended and ended many of my other personal enemies-by-proxy, but the trajectory in which my own must continue isn’t altered by anything that happened downstairs last night.” She looked again to her phone. “Effie is cross with me, which I calculated she would be a days ago upon sending her overseas to cover a lesser story. Inspector Ferguson is choosing to express his concerns in the form of allegations and accusations that I have been left with no way of answering, but such is the nature of half the conversations we have,” she paused. “Mary Anne is rather emotional about this whole messy business, which I had not entirely anticipated. Oh well. Nothing to be done for it. I’ll call everyone back at a more Christian hour.”

“It is nine in the morning,” Francis squinted.

Ellie sighed. “And everyone and their lawyer is likely on the phone with their stock broker in London and Frankfurt.”

“It is Good Friday.”

“Is that a Bank Holiday?”

“It is the day Jesus was crucified.”

“Strange nomenclature, then,” she remarked.

“‘Good’ in the use of ‘pious’ or ‘holy’,” her lover corrected.

“Is that why you are keen to make your exit?”

“It is more to do with the fact that I don’t wish my presence in your chambers to be discovered in a way that could well prove detrimental to your reputation.”

“Francis,” Ellie shook her head. “Last night over cocktails my uncle collapsed with some kind of aneurism that seemed to take a lifetime and certainly took his life whilst you locked the doors, my mother wept and my sister screamed and a number of clan leaders, members of parliament, industry leaders and assorted aristocrats wondered who among them was going to phone an ambulance. Before this crowd, I calmly told my father to undress and switch clothing with his brother before rigor mortis set in and when he refused, I had my assistant bring me my riot stick and my purse, which Patel kindly obliged. I said the same thing again several times to my father while Edna attempted some self-righteous speech that I’m sure she’s been constantly rehearsing in the confines of her mind for months, only to be out done by my little ‘how does it feel, Daddy? Being naked before all of these old men …’ that brought the bastard to tearful apology.

“After all this I turned back to the onlookers, pulled a flash drive out of my bag and told them that it was really in their best interest to pretend to the press and police that my father had died, for my uncle was the sort who was set on bringing everyone down with him should he fall and no one present wanted to risk that his that his computer be taken in the normal course of investigation, for their surnames hardly grant the same immunity from prosecution, that is, from normal prosecution. I think my uncle has faced sentencing, Mummy and Daddy too, so to speak. All that said, I sincerely doubt anyone will be all that saddened to learn that I won’t be joining them for breakfast. To that end I doubt I’m going to hear all that much criticism over how little they suspect me of eating so there is no point to prove with my presence at the table. Anyway, Jesus died – aren’t we all meant to be fasting? I’m quite pious, Francis,” she smiled, snorting back a small laugh.
Rawdon re-joined her on the bed, teasing before torturing with a conjunction, “I’d be more than happy to spend the whole day up here saying the rosery with you but for the fact that your fiancé is likely awaiting your blessed company.”

“You could say it in Greek if you wish,” she offered with a wink, “this rosery of yours.” Ellie pushed the covers away and turned herself over as to display her firm and shapely buttocks. In his lustful eyes she saw that he found her meaning. “Anyway, Campbell finds me a dreadful bore. I should really doubt I’ll much be missed.”

“I find that hard to believe, Darling. No one thinks of you as being dull company,” he said as he ran his long fingers softly down her spine, squeezing her ass and giving it a small spank before they fiddled to find her femininity, causing her to moan in pleasure. He leaned over on top of her, kissing her bare back and the base of her neck.

“Oh, but I am!” Ellie exclaimed, moaning, now with some measure of complaint, “And somehow no one sees that except for Torquhil. Who knows, perhaps I’ve found the key to a happy marriage, or an honest one at the very least.”

“Or you are looking to me to destroy the possibility of such,” Rawdon suggested. In another life, in one she had not spent half-in-love with a man of common birth, the Earl of Moria would have made for a fine match. Intellectually they two were well-suited to one another and the casual intercourse they had engaged in since Oxford was second to none and would have made the obligation of an heir and a spare every bit as fun as the solitary act of actually bringing two boys into the world would surely be fought for a woman with such a small pelvis as her own. She might have loved him, and, in another life, he might have loved her; but in this one Francis loved the idea of a conquest far more than he loved any of his courtesans and for her part, Eleanor simply could not stand the idea of having her duty and integrity compromised by the continued presence of a mutual friend after swearing herself before Father, Son, Defender and flock to his Lordship alone. It was better that she be wed to Argyll and secluded in Inveraray from any temptation. It was anything but ‘honest’, but with time it might be ‘happy’ for it seemed to Lady Eleanor that these abstracts were imperfect antonyms.

“I truly do wish matters were altogether that simple,” she answered. “But take your clothes off if you are going to say.”

Rawdon abruptly halted in his attempts to entice her to pleasure, removing his touch altogether as he seemed to warn, “Don’t say it like that.”

“What, too soon?” she asked, rolling on her side to face him.

“No, it’s just … you really have no idea how your uncle met his end?” he asked without meeting her eyes.

“Seems a to me a lot like natural causes.”

“Yea? Because it seems to me like my continued presence here serves as a kind of cover. Who helped you conspire?” he demanded.

“Among others, a woman neither you nor I have never met.”

“A woman?” he repeated, raising his heavy eyebrows.

“What did you think?”

“I thought you might well have finally let Tarleton taste the forbidden fruit, that maybe the two of
you were in the torturous throws of an affair that could never be actualised outside of such favours as the one I watched unfold last night. Then naturally I wondered if my physical presence served a kind of cover for a shared crime or if it was simply another incarnation of the same emotional ersatz it has always been between us … then for a moment I pictured the two of you together and found myself asking when the fuck our mutual friend possibly finds time to go to the gym, but now I am imagining you instead with this mystery mistress you mention -”

“You think Tarleton had anything do with any part of last night?” Ellie inquired sharply. “Get out.”

“You are always more generous with your body when attempting to satisfy and unobtainable desire,” he shrugged. “I don’t mind, quite the opposite actually -”

“Get out!” she shouted. “Get, out, get out, get out!”

“Ellie, I didn’t mean -”

“Leave!” she said, rising from the mattress and tossing his disregarded trousers at him from where they lay by the bedpost. “How very dare you say or even insinuate -”

“You are right, that was far too forward of me,” he said as he pulled her in for a kiss. She pushed him away. “Fine,” he said. “But don’t marry a man you have no desire towards. Tell me there will be not hurt feelings among our shared friends and I’ll happily ask for your hand. At least we two always have fun together, don’t we Darling?”

“Sometimes I worry you love me,” she answered.

“Sometimes I fear you would be right to.”

Chapter End Notes

Not really that note-heavy of a chapter. Hopefully it was at least a noteworthy one. Anyway, let’s do the thing:

**Let’s talk about sex, Baby**

A **cervelat** is a Franco-Swiss sausage. I’m guessing you have an idea to what the **fondue** was in that metaphor.

This one may have proved a little vaguer: when Ellie says to Francis that he’s welcome to “say it in Greek” she isn’t inviting him to be a pretentious dickhead, she is saying she’s open to anal. Ooh, naughty girl.

**Let’s talk about you**

New York City Mayor **Bill de Blasio**’s record with policing is shady at best. He’s currently running for president – maybe? Last time I heard? I do my best to keep up with world news but real talk for a sec – the American Primary Season has so many
damned hopefuls in it that the DNC needs to put out a poster a la those ones that listed all of the (then) 150 Pokémon that every little boy had hanging on the back of his bedroom door in circa 1998. Maybe with name, picture and three of their talking points underneath? Anyone feel me on this? Its August 2019 (the election is in November 2020) and I, a news-consuming world citizen who happens to reside in the EU would have a hard time picking Mayor de Blasio or even the far-more-popular Mayor Pete out in a line up. Just an idea. Anyways – policing. **The cops seem to hate him; the people seem to hate him**, just on that issue alone I don’t really see that he has a shot but then we said the same thing four years ago about a particular candidate when there were 150 Republicans in the running and just look where we are now.

And me

Patrick Ferguson probably took his dear sweet time explaining the ‘Split’ System in the Scottish Premiership (and he probably did it in suboptimal weather conditions with astonishing accuracy and surprising acrobatics ...) but we are going to try to do it in four sentences: there are 12 teams in the Scottish Prem. In the good ol’ days a season was made up of each club meeting four times. Now after 33 games, the league is broken into two separate groups of six for the remaining five matches because someone up top thinks 44 matches is too much for a season. Even if a club in the bottom six wins all of their remaining fixtures and a club in the top six loses all of theirs, the top/bottom positions in the table remain locked.

Does that make sense to you? I know. Me either.

To Ban’s “**commercial interest sweep in to claim naming rights and you’ve still got the ‘sized means of production’**” comment about club names in the Eastern Bloc, a few examples of the latter are: Dynamo, Lokomotiv, Torpedo; my FAVOURITE example of the former (as you well know) is RasenBallsport Lepzig – (“RasenBallsport” (literally: lawn-ball-game) being German for “Red Bull”)

**Sevilla** has won the Europa League a record five times, including 2014, 2015, aaaand in this time line (and in ours as well but H+S now officially counts as historical fiction) 2016. (Against Liverpool. :)

**Let’s talk about …**

Okay, so, you know how we just established that I write historical fiction now? This is a real throwback (and I actually had to look it up and it took way longer than you might imagine) but **“lock her up”** was something that people who went to Trump Rallies in 2015/16 chanted at Trump Rallies in 2015/16. The modern equivalent (which was in the news a LOT last week) is “send her back” … which, if I’ve got this correctly, the President tweeted about dually elected Somali-born Congresswoman Ilhan Omar but has since disavowed after hearing his words spoken aloud. I personally hate that the part of this narrative that is the hardest to believe is that one of the most powerful men in the world backtracked on hate speech, but that’s just me.

Almost fittingly, a Thales quote I’ll let you ponder: τί καινόν εἴη τεθεαμένος; Γέροντα τύραννον. (Angalised: Tí kainón eiē tetheaménos? Géronta týrannon; and in English: **“What is the strangest thing to see? "An aged tyrant."**)

Don’t care where you fall on the political spectrum, but use your voices to campaign for whatever is important to you, ladies and gents. We live in weird times.
Cheers.
Chapter Summary

Arthur calls everyone out at an early morning cocktail hour. Effie and Simcoe call one another cowards. Mary threatens Rogers with the reality of his predicament. Caleb and Ben struggle to reconcile their differences. Hewlett discovers his siblings’ deception and receives an unsolicited word of advice. Tarleton asks questions; Ferguson answers that he ought to be happy with the result as it stands.

-Or, a bit of ghosting / getting back up to speed. (It has been a while, I know!)

Chapter Notes

Hey Leute, wie geht’s wie steht’s? Believe me when I say I never intended to go so long without posting. I was on a month-long business trip with a bunch of teenagers which made access to WiFi untenable even in the instances in which it was (technically) available (mine was not the only class on this mad adventure – picture 300 kids trying to access Netflix at the same time on a network made for three devices – an impossibility!) Anyway, I’m back now and so is Hide and Seek. Before we get into it though, I thought I would relay the most stereotypically German thing I saw during my travels, not because it provides a particularly good segue or because I don’t consider that you have all waited long enough for the almost-outcome of a story you have invested so much of your time into (thank you!), but because it is the closest I have ever come to witnessing a physical expression of poetry and you ought to all have the same honour:

Okay. I make fun of Irish Pubs a lot for the simple fact that they are so infinitely mockable, but as few share in my opinion that a dive bar is the very best place to experience a city. I often wind up behind an overpriced pint of Guinness when out with my colleagues after a long day, discussing the sorts of things that at least make us feel like adults again. So. There I am, at an Irish Pub in a place that otherwise has much to recommend itself, engaged in the oddest Brexit debate of which I have ever taken part, sitting outside because of the smoking regulations in this part of the country while occasionally making comments on another jarring regional peculiarity – namely, everyone, and I do mean this without exception - enjoys a “Wegbier” after work. (German is such a literal language that direct translations are often strange sounding in their specificity, but a Wegbier is just any beer one drinks while underway, on foot, bike, skateboard, roller – I didn’t see anyone who wasn’t multitasking.) Anyway, the street we were on was made of cobblestone as many are in those areas in which over-priced bars whose main sell is an erroneous connection to Dublin are located, and a young man on a roller(it is like an electric skateboard with a handle, generally regarded here nationwide as Public Enemy Nr. 2 (behind plastic bags which will soon be illegal)) is rolling along, sipping his beer, when he hits a stone that causes him to lose his balance. Homeboy not only falls; he is thrown into a backflip and lands on his head. As my college and I produce our mobiles to ring an ambulance (while debating how this accident was physically possible giving the speed of collision) the lad comes to, feels at his head and jumps up in a panic, realising he has
lost hold of his libations.

Remarkably, the bottle did not break through its contents were bubbling out of it like a middle-school science-fair project. Panicked at the sight, he downs the what is left in a single gulp and carries on his merry way. Beautiful.Anyway, this all happened around where George Hanger lived during his time in Germany and if forced to relate this in some way to the American War of Independence, I think our favourite Jäger would have stood and applauded. (I certainly did!)

So, in that spirit, sit back and maybe raise a glass with a few old friends from what is likely the longest fanfic in these tags. Hopefully, you have something to toast to as well!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Arthur Wellesley cleared his throat as he glanced down at the reference notes which he had written whilst fretting the task of delivering this particular speech to a somewhat different publicum in circumstances which the hours that had elapsed since had altered only in venue and attendance. Though the gun charge had officially been dropped without review, he remained a fugitive from the law even if the bodies responsible for enforcement had yet to take note. Arthur had spent much of the morning’s small hours wondering vaguely how his crime of removing a few signed confessions from the relevant jurisdiction would be classified but a shoddy internet connection paired with a lack of immediate knowledge of the preferred nomenclature of the local bureaucracy had the effect of blocking these worries from their potential to outweigh the papers sewn clumsily into the lining of his dinner jacket.

He had made it through airport security without calling any particular attention to himself, partially because the brothers Tarleton had chosen the frequent flyer queue as an arena to test how their individual capacities for obnoxious distraction compared. Briefly, Arthur had questioned how much they in fact knew of what precisely he was up to given the specifics of the set up: Banastre casually employing enough of his A-Level Arabic on a too-loud telephone call that US officials felt a “random” search was in order; Clayton thusly panicking that their party would miss the plane as such – first in sentence fragments and the sweat drops that formed on his brow, then in legal jargon the unfortunate TSA officials who found themselves caught in this family squabble likely understood to no greater extent than they had what Arthur was later told had been the younger brother’s attempt to hang up the phone with needless explanation and apology - very-British in character whatever the language. In the ensuing commotion, Arthur himself had thusly been able to make his merry was through the x-rays and metal detectors undisturbed, undiscovered and fully uninteresting to National Defence despite being the only member of their party with something to hide. For a few blissful minutes, he considered that the two Tarletons had played a part in a clever ploy to assist him in his venture, but by the time their party had moved well out of earshot of anyone who might cause them consequence, Arthur decided for himself that - as it was with his own family and with every other surname name committed to public record or prose - it was often the case that siblings simply did not get on. With the Tarletons, surely, no great strategy was at play.

Arthur felt a small sense of relief upon spotting George Hanger at a bar near their gate, seeing him as providing a deterrent to the waves of petty bickering that ebbed, flowed and at times threatened to flood his active mind though he did his best not to listen too closely to the specifics.
Greetings were exchanged between all parties, then drinks, then seats – Arthur trading his in first
class against George’s in business, prompting Clayton to himself place a bid on the less (and less
than) comfortable backseat, unwilling to subject himself to six hours with both his brother and
Banastre’s self-described “better-half.” For his part, Arthur planned to sleep through the ordeal
and felt reasonably certain that he would regardless of company, aided as he was by wine and worn
down by the altogether uninteresting ways adults spent the larger part of their days.

As the bottle was emptied between them, Clayton raised a glass to an ideal, George to his own
ironic assessment of the last news item he had grazed before the Tarletons’ bombardment, Banastre
to an observation he did not expand upon regarding his height (or absence thereof) being a
particular asset to him twice within the same morning, and, when their eyes fell on Arthur – tired,
slightly nervous, and still a tad too annoyed at present company and every other separate factor that
had come to define the circumstance to come up with anything clever and cutting on the spot – he
had offered to read them the speech he had written for the assorted dignitaries, arresting officers,
and, of course, the Groom and his Bride.

“I find myself at an age where my experience with weddings was hence to for restricted to the
romantic comedies targeted at teens and twenty-somethings,” he began, “a genre I might have been
more tempted to lean on in composing this address had I not spent the better part of the past day
defending the existence of my girlfriend in Ireland to an allegedly dead commandant -”

“Oi! That’s you, mate!” Hanger commented needlessly, nudging his friend.

“Cheers!” Clayton added dryly, though to what precisely he felt the need to toast at this moment
was a matter of interpretation.

“… lest I risk adding ammunition to an argument that would have sounded absurd in any other
room. Here, however,” Arthur cleared his throat again before continuing to read, “we are gathered
to toast the Heir to Richmond on his betrothal to an American solicitor - allegedly to secure
himself a Green Card, which may well be the plot to ‘Suits’ or may just be something I’m
currently confusing with the things that regularly find placement in Britain’s world-renowned tabloids,
themselves about as reliable as the Embassy that left a fifteen-year-old intern the most senior
official member of delegation. I must say though,” he continued, slightly unsure of himself though
his sentiment was certain, “this may be to your shared benefit – having listened to Lord Cornwallis
dally and double-speak for the past week, I’d hate to think how long it might take him to phrase
what should be a simple congratulatory toast in the midst of a hollow paraphrase of the last
protocol he skimmed through with the same commitment he evidently brings to his post.”

“Holy shit, Atty – is that really what you have written?” Colonel Tarleton blinked, too stunned for
amusement to register on his vaguely-effeminate features.

“Alas,” Arthur continued after a small nod of affirmation, “I shouldn’t be so quick to hold it against
him, as is evidenced by the police station venue, the party was kind of dead by the time most of us
got there.”

“Damn son!” Hanger snorted, sharing nothing of the common-born Tarletons’ practiced manners.

“But it needn’t be so,” Arthur announced, growing more confident in his ability to deliver. “Ladies
and gents, we are here to celebrate and - if we all stop to think about it for half a sec - there is
nothing about this night and its particulars that separates it from the standard that having so many
royals of marriable age has set over the course of the past several years. If I might direct your
collective attention to the two vending machines in the corner,” he gestured vaguely to nothing and
nowhere, now hundreds of miles from the room he had intended to give his address in, “you might
note that we have over-priced, petit portions certain to leave us all hungrier than we were prior to
finishing our plates. We are crammed together in chairs that don’t exactly lend themselves to comfort with the most esteemed members of the local elite, making equally uncomfortable conversation, albeit in this case in interrogation rather than ball-rooms, a blessing in disguise, if you will, for the Earl and Countess’ football team looks to have an abnormal quota of left-footed players and there is a completely unrelated idiom about how such lends itself to dance. Added to all this: my poor attempt of the host’s speech. Defined such, this affair is one of the ages.”

“If only you were as committed to creating the illusion of your so-said Irish lass,” the colonel snorted, at last within mental grasp of the tone Arthur intended.

Arthur raised a finger for silence, growing more serious in his own running commentary. “If this sounds fanciful, let me leave you with consideration of how much we truly have to toast to: Today, Benedict Arnold was rescued as the result of - insofar as one can tell - the institutions charged with the task being otherwise too occupied to interfere with the normal course of justice. So let’s us all raise a glass to absence trumping incompetence, and then fill our chalices to the very brim once more as we toast to the marvellous timing of this case coming to a close in our world of twenty-four-hour news coverage - what with an approaching referendum in the UK and presidential election in the US - Arnold is again saving us as a news-consuming public from all many candidates his party has put forward in this cycle, as well as from our own bloated, red-faced elected officials arguing ‘leave’ or ‘remain’ in local pubs ostentatiously filled with camera crews now that we no longer have a wedding to saturate our yellow press with anything other than the piss of self-important politicians. Everyone, well done! Jolly good!

“Anna,” he addressed the absent bride directly, “welcome to Britain – it is everything you are already used to, just with more city busses. Edmund, if you can now vote in US elections – in doing so remember where you come from ‘Never Explain, Never Complain’ – which, I guess, as far as it concerns most, just means not having an active Twitter account.

“I realise I might have thrown a Google on your social media presence, Your Highness, before making any allusions in kind. Actually to that end, I’m claiming too much credit – a few of my mates told me that I in fact ought to after reading a rough draft, advice, like all the rest they offered, which I clearly didn’t follow, same as I neglected their cautions about getting a few digs in at those impowered to move this party from an Irish Pub blissfully free of mid-century Guinness adverts – something for which the ever-business-savvy Daily Mail editor Elizabeth Gwillim ought to be applauded and for which Colonel Banastre Tarleton who took them all down for the fact the a brewery did not want to settle with a tabloid for marketing ought to be given exactly one hand – you know, to help him put them back up as this morning gave me no reason to think that Bild’s favour freelancer will be of any assistance in that venture.”

“Oi! That’s you, lad!” Ban repeated with an eyeroll as he forced his nearly empty glass against one George had finished minutes before.

Arthur shook his head. “But at this risk of this toast becoming strictly a roast, let me end on a serious note. I don’t know the couple very well,” he admitted, “but they say one can judge a man on the quality of his enemies and, should there be any truth to that sentiment, then so many of you do the bride and groom great credit.

“Naturally,” Arthur could not help but to again slight, “I’m not referring to the NYPD, the FBI, the DGSE, the MI5, 6, or any other agent of an acronymed institution but rather to the rivalries that are actually worth pursuing; I spent a goodly amount of time this evening in a conversation with the Best Man who gave some perspective to my admittedly juvenile problems, most of which involve my mates – including, I might add, the gun charge I feared I might be faced with - making it clear, at least to me, that we dream of being free of such school-yard squabbles in folly.
“John Graves Simcoe and Edmund Hewlett grew up hating each other, from what I gather, they still do every day but Sunday, and yet they have long been one another’s first point of contact in a crisis – which makes sense, I think we should all be lucky enough to have someone as invested in us as we are in them, who challenges us to stand up when we fall and calls us out to our faces when we’ve dealt in error. I did not get the know the Hewletts that well this evening, but I am proud to say that I had the opportunity to play a bit of footy with much of the bridal party, with the kids Lady Anna coached, meeting their mums, her friends, and I have to say, I’m impressed.

“Differences are bound to arise in any long lasting relationship, be it romantic, familial, friendly or not-quite-so, but Edmund, Anna, and all of the people of Setauket as well as those who just passed through on occasion for a pick-up match and a pint stood to one another in crisis, may the world learn from the example you all set.

“To the bride and groom, for all of your titles and those you stand to inherit, I sincerely hope that you’ll always be able to identify yourselves first and foremost as having been residents of a small town that saved itself from the conflict thrust upon it. To the Maid of Honour, Abigail Ingram, thank you for being a pillar of strength to your friends, to your son and to his. To the Best Man, John Graves Simcoe as well as to Bridesmaid Mary Woodhull, thanks for taking the time and going out of your way to help myself and all of those more vulnerable through our immediate problems though Lord knows you have had to face enough of your own tonight. To Peggy, Aberdeen, Freddy, Jordan, Philomena, Cicero, Thea, Pip, Ban, George, Clayton and literally half a dozen blokes all christen John - thanks for not backing down when you were found with your backs to the wall,” he swallowed, setting his phone aside as he deviated from the unfinished script, “and lastly, I would like to give thanks to my brother, The Honourable Richard Wellesley, without whom I wouldn’t have the libations to toast to the happy couple in the worst of company.”

“Here, here!” Banastre raised his glass once more.

“That was actually rather moving,” his brother remarked flippantly as seemed to be his preferred manner.

“That was great, truly, but I’d add a shout out to the wine bar open at 5 AM,” George offered. Arthur nodded.

“It is mostly for pilots,” Clayton said, shrugging.

“Honesty is rarely a virtue,” the boy sneered at the suggestion, swallowing a larger gulp than he had initially intended to as he turned and sized up the outfits of the two men the elder Tarleton was eyeing as he slowly twisted his own glass of port.

“The truth is rarely pure and never simple,” Hanger laughed, leaning over to pat a choking Arthur on the back in a way that did nothing to calm his sudden nerves or clear his throat.

“Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!” Banastre finished the quote.

“At least I’ll die knowing you both in fact finished your Year Eight reading lists,” Arthur murmured.

“Oh no, he is on to us,” the journalist rolled his eyes before turning to his friend with a serious mien. “What do we do now?”

“Wait,” Banastre answered simply.
“Yes, but while waiting.”

“What about hanging ourselves?”

Though his worry for his own personal safety did not dissipate, Arthur grew increasingly annoyed at what was quickly becoming a literary review.

“Hmm. It’d give us an erection,” George pretended to contemplate.

“An erection!”

“With all that follows.”

“Do you see what you have done?” Clayton closed his eyes and began rubbing at his brow, again cluttered with beads of uncomfortable sweat.

“He is from Dublin, Clay,” Banastre cited, mimicking Arthur’s light accent loosely. “Haven’t you heard? We are just trying to make the boy feel welcome.”

“You ever make your way through Ulysses then?” Clayton challenged.

“Please, like you have!” Hanger snorted, returning the slight as though it had been directed at him.

“Nae, couldn’t do it,” Banastre complained. “There are enough words with no meaning that actually have a place in a dictionary.”

“Then you never – read me: never – get to complain about your international layovers again,” the scout said, his eyes growing small.

“Will you make an exception for this one?” his younger brother continued to pout.

“Might I reserve the right?” Arthur asked, ready to protest.

“Relax lad, next round is on me,” the colonel answered. It might have been consoling if not for the man’s crooked smile.

“Since when have you thirty-quid?” Clayton chided, albeit with a hint of amusement.

“I have a problem with this as well,” Hanger gave. “Having been in regular communication with your extended family over the course of the last few days, I’ve come to the conclusion that the only thing that stops me from thinking you a horrible individual is the fact that you are always strapped for cash.”

“Is there an economic divide between ‘truly evil’ and ‘simply awful’?” Arthur asked rhetorically.

“I’d say.”

“How terribly classist of you,” Banastre said, turning his nose upward. “But no, George. JJ wired me enough to make it through a few days in America while Mummy clears up an issue with my bank, namely that she cancelled my available checking account upon receiving false word of my untimely demise,” he complained, continuing sheepishly, “meaning my debit card would be of no use to me even if it were on my person, in which case it would be of no use to me even if it were active as none of my bets payed off last weekend.”

“Good man,” Hanger mocked.
Clayton shook his head. “Your problem is you are too emotionally invested in the league as a whole to maintain any critical distance to any individual fixture. Try your luck in Ligue 1. Or the Eredivisie. Or the Ligat ha'Al,” he suggested.

“What, no lecture?” the colonel squinted.

“Not today, brother-mine. I’ve given up on trying to change you, best I can hope for is to dissuade your ambitions of providing such a financial strain on our family’s joint resources by offering some practical advice. You know. It is nice, this,” he smiled to himself, his words taking an almost blissful tone. “Almost what I imagine a holiday being like. It has been an hour and a half since last my phone rang. I’m fairly buzzed at a little before five in the morning and I know I can afford to get every as plastered as the men about to pilot our aircraft because at the risk of sounding sentimental, you – you of all unlikely people to do so – saved me from committing this family to a conflict that Mummy wanted to avoid.”

“Ehh … honestly, I don’t know how I quite managed that one either.”

“So! I vote we order another of the same,” Clayton elected with some measure of triumph. “Alright with you, Ban? George? Richard?”

“Does ‘Richard’ mean something I don’t know?” the journalist among them inquired. “I’ve heard a fair few people falsely referred to by that name of late -”

“George,” Banastre said flatly. “Richard Wellesley? The MP? The one with an alleged bastard from a French burlesque dancer?” he said, passing the ID he had confiscated to his friend. Arthur wished for the death the two drunken pilots seemed to promise to take him prior to take off.


Before Arthur could decide how he wanted to answered, Clayton awoke from whatever day dream had taken him. “Oi, George, speaking in German - settle a debate for us on the Bundesliga?”

“Sure?”

“I have a problem with the nomenclature. ‘Budes’ means ‘federal’, does it not?”

“In an unrelated context. Here it describes the scope of the division.”

“I told you,” Banastre taunted, explaining for context, “Clayton went on for hours about how putting government in sport evoked national-socialism, which is ridiculous on its face because everything belonging to that time frame was called Reichs-Random Noun.”

“True,” George consented, considering aloud, “and even today Germans are so afraid of calling anything ‘German’ whatsoever that where ‘Deutsch’ or some gendered-declension thereof appears in proper titles, it is always abbreviated right out of it in word and speech – DM, SPD, FDP, almost counterintuitively to the political message AfD, where it might speak to your interests – DFB,” he listed off.

“DM?” Arthur squinted.

“Deutsche Mark,” Hanger clarified. “Before your time. Half the reason I’d argue they are so willing to keep paying into the EU if only for the privilege of doing so in ‘Euros’ which sounds so comparatively weltoffen than a currency that shares its name with Britain’s most notorious tabloid – you know what?” he shifted suddenly. “Fuck it. Give me a second to make Effie Gwillim regret
her rejection of my article, yea?” he declared as he pulled his phone from his front trouser pocket
before storming off as his phone dialled, remaining in earshot as he loudly began his sell.

“I am so glad to be on holiday,” Clayton smiled to himself as he watched another man contend
with the stress of his professional existence.

Arthur rolled his eyes at the very sentiment. “I fear as though mine may well never be over.”

He desperately wanted to go home.

For the first time, he was forced to actively contend the fact that over the course of the past few
days, his flat in London was beginning to feel quite a lot like the house in Dublin he so terribly
missed.

“Because I couldn’t John,” Effie Gwillim answered her accuser. “My threat wasn’t empty, but you
have to understand when I made it, I thought Ban to be dead. Publishing would have assured that
outcome, not to even mention the situation I might have put you yourself in if –”

“I’m fine with it!” John Graves Simcoe shouted back, sure of his own convictions though their full
scoped seemed to evade him.

“Well guess what?” Effie challenged, “you are not the only one who stands to be adversely affected
if I put André’s study to print. What you your team mates? Your friends – both here and abroad?”

“What of them?” John demanded, “They have been legally silenced, their voices exchanged for
having largely erroneous charges dropped. Because of André’s deception we were all implemented
in Arnold’s disappearance … myself, granted, more than most.” he acknowledged, his fingers
tapping unrhythmically against his thigh the way they always did when confronted by a fear he
could neither confess nor confront. They were still in Albany, seated in the otherwise closed bar of
the local Holiday Inn – lit only in periphery by the fluorescents in the foyer. Effie’s spine was
ridged enough to forbid itself contact with the back of her chair. John was leaned far forward
enough in his own that she could feel his hot breath from across the table, a distance that their
former familiarity forced her to define both as too near and too far. They two were too estranged for
their fight to be intimate. Effie tried to appeal to her opponent’s sense of logic.

“Then why are you willing to negate on what sounds like a good deal?”

John had followed her back to the hotel after she had bid him to return to the city, to flee into
Canada as soon as he was afforded permission to travel, to forget the life he presently led and the
one he had freely abandoned. He wanted to continue the conversation. As far as she had been
concerned, there was nothing left to say.

“Because unlike you, I’m not a coward!” John retorted. “These methods, the ones tested on my
teammates and I, could well be mass-implemented in the armed force – think of how that is going
to translate to the home front, to the private lives of these men and women who stand to have their
PTSD-born fears made actual via the act of seeking emotional counselling – think of the horrible
things that might happen to their loved ones by proxy,” he paused, shifted. “Do you remember
when you lost the baby?”

“How could I not?”
“I don’t,” John surrendered, slumping back slightly, out of view and out of tune – his falsetto reaching new heights. “I blacked out completely, succumb to blind rage for which I had no direction, same as I did during my altercation with Arnold, during various altercations with Hewlett, same as I did on the pitch after one of my teammates was fouled, same as John Robeson did when the only man he ever loved approached him from behind in a situation in which he was otherwise under distress -”

“What a pack on nonsense!” Effie exclaimed, knowing full well that it was not. “When are you going to grow up and take some responsibility for your own sins?” Though she did not doubt that his sentiment was genuine, his judgement was not sound. Could he not see that she was trying to save him? That sometimes in war disengagement was less of a surrender than it was an assessment of means, of morals and values, of the lives and livelihoods of those committed to the same cause? The John she had loved had been raise with and largely within the same library as she herself, her uncle’s military memoirs, volumes on theory and tactics that spanned the full scope of human history – had he learnt nothing from them? Had George Hanger, of all unqualified people, been so convincing in his rallying cry? *All else being equal,* she considered the wisdom of von Clausewitz whom she suspected the confessed Teutonophile likely had as well (at least to the ends of furthering his own journalistic career), *the course of war will tend to favour the party with the stronger emotional and political motivations, but especially the defender.*

But John, as always, wanted to stage an offensive.

She questioned in the screeching tone if he suspected to survive the charge himself and how many others he intended to sacrifice to an end that they had already more or less collectively elected to abandon.

“I’m trying to, but Effie I need your help -”

“I refuse to lend it in the fashion you suggest. If you think –

“Can’t you see beyond yourself for once?” he accused with insulting hypocrisy, “I know publishing is a risky move for the Daily Mail to make -”

“This isn’t a purely business decision,” Effie interrupted. “If this came out, *everyone* you claim to care about -”

“This is bigger than us, its -”

“What, the US Army? The British? The blasted armed force that didn’t find you it for service when you tried to enlist? Don’t you think our service men, men – whom I’ll point out for the sake of argument, all passed a basic psychological and physiological screenings you yourself couldn’t prior to their basic training would have more capacity to contend with the potential side effects which you let yourself give in to?” she challenged, accused. “This was you, John. You and Eddie and this Robeson fellow – no one else on your team insofar as I can tell had an episode of actualized fear that expressed itself violently. You want me to print the research, Hanger’s longform article on the topic or preferably some combination thereof because you mistakenly think a few thousand words will serve to excuse your past behaviour? I want to know why you aren’t taking the recent actions of other into account in your assessment as to what constitutes an appropriate response.”

“I signed the damn -”

“That is not what I am getting at: How many times have Washington and Hamilton and their assorted cronies pulled the wool right over your eyes? You like statistics – tell me you are keeping a tally of this somewhere? That acknowledged, how can you be so sure this whole Executive Order
business isn’t just another bluff?

“Because I’m engaged in it,” he hissed. “Actively. Washington is forcing Abraham Woodhull, Clayton Tarleton and myself to somehow coerce Robert Rogers – the man who kidnapped Benedict Arnold – to find and kill his best friend John André. Granted,” he snorted, “this is probably the sort of mundane order of business Clayton is made to pencil into his diary at least one a month – but I am done with having blood on my hands. Innocent, tainted – what is the difference when it never stops flowing?” he questioned, shaking his head. “If it comes to it, I’ll find some other means of protecting Mrs Woodhull – but forcing her husband, the father of her child, to commit a crime against his conscious is counterproductive to my goal of helping her escape the night in question.

“What does this actually cost you, Effie? You were ready to charge into battle yourself a few days back, but now? I don’t understand what it is you think you have to lose. Ban is on a plane back to the UK where the City of Liverpool is sure to throw him a full Roman-style Military Triumph for being such a complete twat. Edmund is back in Scotland no doubt enjoying to some extent the realities of his birth right being actualised. Despite your misgivings, I’ll be returning to London myself sooner than later and no one else involved in the test group or resulting inquiry was additionally involved in placing secret documents in a government sponsored study into your hands. We are safe, and even if action were to be taken, don’t you dare use me as an excuse for your sudden reluctance ... I haven’t earned that as you are otherwise so keen to point out.”

Effie felt as though she were on the verge of tears. “You can’t … you simply can’t …”

“I can’t what exactly?”

“England isn’t your home anymore, John.”

“I understand that I mightn’t be welcome at our family home -”

“Our family?” she snorted to hide the fact that her voice was otherwise cracking. “That is a first!”

It was a tragedy.

John was still the same man she had once fallen in love with.

What hurt the most in this moment was that she was not in love with him any more tough the sentiment in itself remained.

He was family. He was part of her patchwork of orphans, widows, spinsters and other lost souls she called her own. Effie hated herself for denying him this truth right when he seemed ready to accept it, but much as he may have needed her, Aunt Margaret, Uncle Samuel, and the semblance of home, Edmund Hewlett was right - at the moment, John could not return. Nor could he stay to fight a losing battle.

Edmund, she considered, was likely not the only Hewlett to have come to this assessment.

Effie thought of Percy waiting patiently upstairs for her return, of their conversation, of his high expectations, of how terribly misplaced John would feel in all of the places he had once known if forced to meet a mirror of what might have been. She thought of Ellie, questioning if sending this particular member of staff was cruel or kind or if there was even a philosophical difference in these abstracts when the artillery was mounting its cannon.

This was war, nothing else.
“John, do we maybe want to continue this conversation upstairs?”

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**Two Weeks Later**

Mary Woodhull felt a slight pull of nostalgia as she pushed down on the breaks. This was the second time she had driven this particular mid-sized sedan, a vehicle she still thought of as belonging to Anna Smith – though the Anna she had met as an undergrad had been through two surnames since and another individual altogether currently held the title and registration. The next morning, Mary would drive the Escort to the harbour, pack it on a cargo ship and watch the last physical connection to her original crime disappear beyond the horizon, eventually reaching a single father with a physical impairment that prevented him from driving a shift. Mary could not help but to wonder how much the quick-thinking Aberdeen (and, she supposed, Anna by relation) had gotten out of this transaction - if it was instead better understood as being merely a ‘strategical misplacement’ or if it might be the kind of favour that further absolved them all of fault.

She would personally miss the car.

She already did.

Gone now were the scents of stale smoke, adrenaline, unused condoms and, resultingly, a high enough concentration of Febreze as to give the vehicle the sense of having been used as a gas chamber of the kind depicted in ever cinematic drama concerning the Second World War. In fifteen minutes, what might have been picked up by any passenger - not to mention a forensics team - had been replace by the pleasant scent of baked goods which she Aberdeen, Abigail, Peggy and( to a lesser extent) the boys had created as a kind of cover for a new offensive throughout the week.

Mary closed her eyes, recalling the atmosphere if none of the exacting details of the foster homes she had passed through as a teen, feeling the dough in her hands, kneading, needing, as she watched reruns of Martha Stewart with the hope that mastering these skills would render her worthy of what absence had transformed into an ideal. She had always felt clean in the flour, sugar, butter and eggs that stuck to her hands, even - and especially - now that they had been stained with blood. ‘Wasn’t Martha herself for all intents and purposes exonerated for being a model housewife?’ Peggy had jested with a hint of pride after pulling the only batch of cookies she had somehow managed to scorch from the over. ‘The strategy has worked for me, anyway,’ Mary had answered her.

Maybe, she considered, this was as close as she may ever again come to having ‘normal’ manifest in her life.

Maybe it was for the best.

She and John had barely exchanged a word since the wedding. Like any wound that had since begun to heal, his silence still stung but the throbbing pain had long since ceased.

Maybe they were ‘the lucky ones’ however far removed from her romantic associations this reality was proving.
Her friends were not so fortunate by comparison.

Then, they had never learned to cover over the cracks with modern manifestations of anachronistic gender roles generally perceived as ‘goodly’, ‘gracious’ and ‘nice.’

Ben Tallmadge had laughed at her and her cookies when she had ridden into the city to pick him up, Aberdeen driving to Albany ahead of them in Hewlett’s Jaguar which Abe had clandestinely reprocessed from Rogers’ garage and repaired together with John Easton (who owned enough taxi licences to know a thing or two about transmission.) The au pair would spend the morning giving Anna a quick lesson in driving a European sports car (to which Mary hoped this student would be more successful than the Hattian’s last.)

Mary had first dropped a short-haired Ben off in her Liberty which she had lent Anna after the wedding before driving back to the new countesses’ borrowed residence to make another exchange back to her now familiar (and yet now literally foreign) getaway car, concerned as she was about hospital CCTV spotting the same vehicle several times in quick succession.

The operation she was undertaking was not sanctioned by any recognised authority.

She was not wearing a wire or carrying a weapon.

Instead, still balancing herself on crutches, she made her way to the ICU wearing a guest ID and carrying and assortment of Tupperware filled with cookies as any other hospital visitor might. Mary could not help but wonder once more if this was as close as she might again come to that evasive normality she sought and if it was worth returning to. In so many ways, she felt as though she had ventured too far from this illusion for it to again be conjurable - even mentally – going forward. She was not the good wife of a promising young law student with a famous last name whose father sat on the state’s highest court, who worked for a non-profit that provided for disadvantaged children world over - she was a soon-to-be-divorced single mother complicit in starting a war in West Africa and a succession crisis on the British Isles because she happened to have driven her friend’s car into an American War Hero whilst he was in the midst of a drunken brawl in the car park of a local dive bar. Perhaps, in all actuality, she was exactly the sort of woman to whom such wholesome pleasantries belonged.

Martha Stewart had been convicted of obstructing justice.

Mary Woodhull had, by comparison, befriend nearly everyone with a personal or professional interest in seeing her brought to justice to the point that she was now working with a former cop to protect the dignity of the law she had otherwise evaded. She had not become her childhood heroine; she had surpassed her by every measure.

Almost every measure.

Picking an admittedly too-sweet chocolate chip cookie out for herself, she texted Ben from the lift >>Hey, I know it is short notice, but we are doing tacos tonight- any interest?<< to give him a signal, receiving >>Is Caleb coming?<< moments later in response to let her know the coast was clear.

Mary made her way in the direction of the suite, wondering if she was not calling too much attention to herself by way of her limp. Perhaps Anna had been right and someone else ought to have carried out this part of the plan – but who? Philomena would have been the obvious choice but she was too famous to not attract attention. The same could be said for Anna and Peggy, the latter of whom had the additional issue of having to wear an ankle monitor which would have proven even more difficult to manoeuvre than a cast, albeit for entirely different reasons. Abigail
was herself far too timid and Aberdeen too assertive to be of any practical use to this phase of the mission. Everyone else was too easily compromised by pre-established connection, sisters, mothers, wives of someone empowered by the word of the law to say no.

Mary, for her part, wanted the danger of the offensive too much to let anyone else grab the glory if she was to be honest with herself.

Mainly, she wanted to relate.

She was lucky. Not everyone had been.

She wondered at how many lives had touched each other so briefly as the direct result of her actions, questioning why some of these connections seemed that they would prove far longer than the respective charge sheets of the individual parties involves and why some fell apart as the hastily erected alibis that had become their own kind of truths, however briefly.

Anna had not heard from Edmund since he landed in Edinburgh. She knew, of course, that he was alive and well, but had come by this information the same way anyone else might, namely, the nightly news.

By stark contrast, Aberdeen and Peggy for all of their bickering were as close as ever, something that could be said of the entire sisterhood that Whitehall had seen established in recent weeks – the aforementioned ‘girls’, Abigail, herself, the mothers of Cicero’s teammates who would occasionally swing by after practice and stay for dinners that turned into drinks.

Mary might have thought this a feature of the fairer sex save for the fact that Abe and Ban now spoke regularly as well. Ben’s parents had befriended the Yilmaz family, who themselves had befriended the Arnolds. As to the senator himself, Mary and Abe had gone to visit him twice in the past week alone, but as a couple, they two were over as was her fling with John Graves Simcoe who, except for inviting her to visit his flat later next week when he had arranged for a real estate agent to be present, had gone dead silent.

He would go back to Britain and that would be the end of it.

She wondered if he would ever one day find himself in a car park in Liverpool with Anna’s Escort, if he would think of her when.

But, as she continued to remind herself, she was lucky, if only by comparison.

Caleb, in contrast to John, was not going anywhere and neither was Ben but the two had been worlds apart since their fundamental disagreement manifested itself in the police station bathroom.

Perhaps owing to this, Mary felt a kind of special comradery with the former inspector.

Perhaps it was better said that she simply felt like interfering.

Maybe, it occurred to her, she should in fact host a taco night.

Then again, maybe she had long ill-defined love as something evasive and had been wrong to tie her ideas of happiness to romance. Her marriage was over, her affair ended, but this turmoil had left with far more than a mess. She had close friends and the remnants of a family which she now recognised held the same values she strove towards. Perhaps she should host a dinner to say ‘thank you’ - regardless if anyone else would use the event as an excuse to say what clearly needed to be said for Ben Tallmadge looked miserable in his uniform.
“Cookie?” Mary offered as she approached. As promised by his response, he was alone.

“I shouldn’t,” Ben dismissed.

“Ben, how often do we need to review this?” Mary teased. “You are by no stretch fat; you just wear trousers with a bit too much stretch in them.”

The former inspector with an unflattering new haircut to match the persona of a beat cop he was borrowing went positively red. “No … it is not that. I just don’t want to give the impression of bribery and corruption.”

“My desserts have been laureled with lavish praise in that past but that is a bit far.”

“I’m certain that it isn’t, Ma’am.”

Ma’am? Mary squinted. Was he simply committed to the role or had he just gotten off the phone with his mother? “Good,” she dismissed without questioning the address outright, “save your appetite, you are coming over for dinner tonight.”

“What is on the menu?” he asked in an uneasy tone.

“Really?” Mary pandered, “I’ve a five-year-old, a twelve-year-old and two college students in my home who have all heard the phrase ‘Taco Night’ being thrown around for days now. Anything else – save for perhaps pizza or chicken nuggets – would result in armed revolt.”

“I wish my mom had been half so compassionate when it came to the kitchen.”

“Invite her ‘round. Your father and the Yilmaz family as well. All that texting will surely distract you enough for me to slip in. Now, take a cookie and let me pass, I have another invitation you know I need to extend.”

“I’m apparently saving my appetite,” Ben politely excused himself.

Mary suspected it was, in fact, the uniform.

Though no longer his to wear, Ben did not want to disgrace it openly.

Mary felt badly for having joked in kind, but before she could formulate an apology that did not go so far as to directly address an issue that she suspected he was not ready to fully acknowledge, a loud noise broke her from her thoughts. Ben heard it too and told her to wait, turning his head from the door around the corner to see two nurses whose pushcarts had just crashed into one another’s accidently, prompting a quick exchange of apologies that fell just as quickly into a conversation made up of room numbers, medical terms, and milligrams. It could hardly be said to have been a commotion, but Ben’s practiced distraction proved her invitation in.

Mary Woodhull slipped into the room where Robert Rogers was (otherwise) being kept under round the clock surveillance and puled the window curtain shut. The Scot - who had intimidated so many for so long - looked helpless and utterly hopeless lying asleep in his hospital bed. Mary nudged him awake.

“Cookie?” she asked, giving him a sardonic smile.

If Rogers felt threatened by her presence or even fully registered it, such did not show. “Yoo’ve
onie crisps, Pet?” he asked, his words slurred and slowed by the pain killers he was being steadily fed in a dilated drip-dosage. As she watched his mouth struggle to form the words which he could barely speak she pictured Senator Arnold being held in the same state, injured, confused and kept just outside his scope of understanding by this very man. Mary wondered why she had been blind to Rogers’ capacity for cruelty prior to learning that he was the true culprit – gambling with Arnold’s life and the liberty of everyone in the town of Setauket for the sake of an ill-thought-out retirement scheme. Certainly, he had abused his workforce in ways that bore some resemblance, but she had chosen to ignore it insofar as it concerned repairs to a home that she had been a fool to purchase in the first place. He deserved his present predicament. Mary, however, now needed to atone for her loose association.

“I do,” she answered, taking a tube of Pringles from her purse, proceeding to eat them at eye-view one by one, decidedly slow, “But these are for me. You, my friend, are on a low sodium diet.” It was the opposite of putting salt in a wound to the self-same effect.

“Worse than bein' shot, 'at,” Rogers complained.

“I’m having tacos tonight,” Mary could not help but to brag before her immediate enemy though her plans had yet to be finalized. “So is nearly everyone else you terrorised by holding the senator captive.” She shoved the cookies in his lap. “I baked these for you all the same. Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth.”

“Tryin' tae poison me 'en, Pet?” he sneered.

“No,” she corrected, “trying to give away the spoils of my stress-baking before the sugar winds up on my ass and thighs.”

“Them Ah’m canty taeoblige.”

“Good that we understand one another,” Mary smiled, “for I have another favour of sorts to ask.”

At this, Rogers broke into a hardy laughter she had not anticipated. “Yer guidman finally come sobbin’-”

“You didn’t break Abe, Robert,” Mary informed curtly. “He is well. In fact, you’ll see so for yourself in a few days. In fact, that is precisely what I’ve come to warn you about. Surely you didn’t think I’d sneak behind enemy lines just to cheer you up with some empty calories?” she snorted before falling into a whisper. “Abe’s working with the police. You yourself left him with few other options. In a week or so he will come into this room, wearing a wire, playing off your greed by suggesting that the Tarletons offer of - what was it? Fifty-thousand?- for you to off your old friend John André as you suggested could still be on the table. Abe will make it sound convincing - that much will be easy: the feds set up the family somehow and as a result one of the many brothers working in sport will be in the US on a summer tour with a soccer team, doubtlessly throwing enough of his money around that it might be tempting for you to try and grab at it. Don’t fall for it. Washington, Hamilton, they mean for you to murder John André – they want him out of the picture, sure, but that doesn’t mean they won’t charge you with the crime, regardless of what Abe has been told to suggest in the contrary. They will have eyes on you. André disappeared from Witness Protection and they think you the best chance they have at finding him.”

Mary watched as this information began to register itself in Rogers’ features. Before he could speak the door opened behind her, but Mary was loath to look away.

“Mary, we need to -” Ben said as he entered, nearly out of breath.
She held up her hand for him to stop. “Not quite yet, Ben. Why don’t you tell him what he has won?”

“You’ll get ten years max for the kidnapping. I’ll represent you myself. Or Jordan Akinbode will if you prefer and if you can convince André to come out of hiding and hand himself over with you to local authorities.”

“Wa ur ye daein’ thes? Makin’ them kinds ay offers, threats. Whit is in it fur th’ tois ay ye?”

“John André has for all effects and purposes been convicted and sentenced without trial –” Ben began. He was going about this all wrong, appealing to the morals of a man who quite clearly had none of his own to speak of.

“You can still retire to Alaska,” she interrupted. “Abe is surely going to come in here in a few days with the same sell. If you take him up on his offer as I suspect you otherwise might, you’ll rot in prison for the rest of your life with the guilt of having killed your only friend. Help us instead and you’ll get out with some life left in you and the knowledge that you saved a man who may not be innocent, but who is certainly entitled to due process. Ben Tallmadge was a cop for years and knows all of the tricks the prosecution might try to pull. Jordan Akinbode is one of the best lawyers in the state – help them help you or try your luck with a public solicitor,” she suggested, struggling to keep her tone calm and level.

Rogers shook his head. “Ye misjudge me, Pet. Ah wulnae be havin’ ‘at.”

Abraham Woodhull seemed that evening every bit the parabolic young adult who always had CSPAN on in the background, regardless of company or setting. The former inspector had only previously encountered this sort in allegory and rhetoric and found the living incarceration of this idea all the more amusing and unsettling for it.

As the colours from the television screen barely flickered in Ben’s peripheral vision, Abe grew more distant as he actively watched out of the corner of his own eye, muttered something and shook his head ever so slightly, though well enough to fully interrupt the conversation that Ben was growing all the more aware was not equally shared.

After a short moment of silence, the young Woodhull half-heartedly apologised and explained by way of complaining, “That isn’t the full story. I spoke with Ban Tarleton just this morning on the matter.”

“I … hadn’t been paying attention,” Ben admitted, glancing at the screen just long enough to glimpse the former British Ambassador to the United States turn from a podium before the network began running commercial spots for its own programmes as they did every quarter hour.

“He demanded upon his release here in Albany that an extradition order be issued with respect to André. Cornwallis answered that such was not so simple - what with André ‘officially’ being dead already - something Ban naturally reminded him he could easily relate to in, well … less polite language.”

Ben nodded as though he were actively following the events of the British Ambassador’s
resignation with the intensity a good half of the party guests thought it warranted. Privately, as he listened to Abe speak, he was coming to the conclusion that the only logical reason his host and Colonel Tarleton had hit things off so well as they had was the same reality of twenty-four-hour news coverage and the ability of the former to effectively tune out present company whilst reading a live-ticker. Maybe, Ben began to consider as he felt his hand unconsciously reaching for his own mobile device though he was not expecting anything in the immediate by way of either coverage or correspondence, such was simply a cornerstone of modern relationships. Half of the Englishmen standing around Whitehall’s living room discussing the matter of their representative’s resignation were simultaneously checking their stocks of texting their spouses as they fought to find something witty to say in the moment and tweet out seconds later, hoping to leave a mark that would extend beyond a quick laugh -

- Maybe, Ben thought, it was instead he himself who was not paying attention to the moments in which he found himself in his want for clear focus.

“I’m probably the only one here who has yet to read his op-ed,” he commented.

“He didn’t write it,” Abe shrugged. “Mary Robinson did. Apparently, she is always up to that sort of thing. I mean don’t repeat that but … it is just, with Ban, he is in the same general situation I’m in here. He is staying with his ex and the kid they are co-parenting in London as his sister cleaned out the flat that he was keeping in Liverpool. He tried to renew the lease there but the landlord now wants two-hundred pounds more each month because – almost ironically all things considered - the Tarleton family proper bought a few blocks of housing from Fenway trying to get access to previous tenant records when John Wakefield was under suspicion, leading area properties to artificially explode in value as theirs tipped off other investor interest. Then, what with the Hewlett contract secured for another twenty odd years at least, Ban is facing his share of competition when it comes to rent applications and it isn’t entirely as though he doesn’t have a record –”

“Truly a victim of his own success,” Ben smiled lightly.

“Isn’t it just so fucking weird that the only cause and effect to be found in any of this is in the real estate sector?” Abe pondered. “Rogers wouldn’t have been so desperate as to abduct Arnold had the bubble not burst. Asbestos is now the least of my problems when it comes to selling my house as it has since become a quartered off crime scene – same as Jordan’s. Even if I wanted to stay in Setauket there is nowhere here to rent since Edmund Hewlett and John Graves Simcoe bought up every available property and for all intents and purposes have not been seen or heard from since, so I’m stuck on my dad’s couch, co-parenting with my soon-to-be-ex-wife and occasionally helping her to conspire against the government. Nothing has really changed that much but the context and cost,” he snorted. “But yeah, Mrs Robinson went to the Echo after being denied by the Mail with an op-ed over the whole affair which The Guardian then picked up, but only after an MP named Richard Wellesley - whom I’d never heard of before now and whom probably no one other than Aberdeen of course – had either took the matter to the floor. Now it looks like Cornwallis is resigning over it, or, as they apparently say in Britain, ‘is being reassigned’. Still, no extradition request has been forthcoming from him or his superiors at the Foreign Office. This thing with Rogers … André, I mean it has to work, right? Otherwise, what was it all for? For any of us?”

Ben did not share in Abe’s surprise. “The Diplomatic Service has no direct interest in fighting Washington and, well, George Washington over this one,” he remarked, fully disillusioned by politics both foreign and domestic.

“I take it went well today all the same,” Abe answered in a whisper.

Ben bit his lip. “Are you ready for phase two?”
“Hamilton has no idea about Mary’s visit, if that is what you are asking,” he shrugged.

“That strikes me as odd,” Ben frowned. “I made quite a show of detaining her when my fellow officers arrived back from their extended lunch break.”

“It strikes you as odd that someone in uniform did not want to deal with the paperwork?” Abe retorted.

“That is fair, sadly enough,” Ben gave.

“Do you miss it?”

“I miss the case itself, but if that is the only aspect my mind immediately lands on, I think resigning was the right call. It is only …. things have gone back to normal now in so many ways, things we hoped would, other things … things we thought ourselves freed from. It doesn’t feel right, that is, it doesn’t feel that it can be righted anymore. That is what I miss about the investigation.”

There was nothing worse than feeling alone in a crowded room. Ben caught Caleb’s eye but just as well might have missed it for the smaller man as quickly as their gaze had locked. It was as though they were strangers who accidented upon one another on the subway, directing their attention immediately elsewhere out of social caution, the remnants of a response learnt in childhood towards persons unknown and the conversations that might arise. Ben considered that Caleb might indeed be a stranger to him now, perhaps he always had been and his mind had previously been fooled into a sense of comfortable familiarity though superficial discussions and tender caresses.

It had been a mistake to take Mary up on her offer of a mid-week impromptu dinner party. Half of Setauket, it seemed was in attendance, giving him little quarter though no one had said anything outright that matched the mistrust their general posture showed. Maybe it was not him. Maybe he simply did not belong. The lads on the soccer team kept mostly to each other’s company, crowded around the television after packing their plates, cheering on Cornwallis’ reassignment in between the questions they asked with regard to their captain’s present whereabouts and if there would be any coverage of tomorrow’s funeral here in the US, if they mightn’t use it as an excuse for another wake at the same locale where Wakefield mentioned having mourned the son of his late mother’s former employer. Most of the women – his mother and Mrs Yilmaz among them - had confined themselves to the kitchen around a bottle of wine that lightened their hearts and loosened their tongues. Ben knew better than to enter save to fill his plate. His father and his friends were keeping the children amused in the library, teaching them how to play chess against a backdrop of dialectics. One of the Arnold sons had already left to bring a plate to the senator, still recovering in hospital, another had gone out back with the elder of the two remaining Yilmaz sisters and the two had since been absent long enough from festivities that Ben, who had been bored enough to notice, suspected they were not just sharing a fag. Caleb, for his part, was making the rounds and making himself scare whenever Ben accidented in upon the same room.

Everything had returned to normal.

Ben was again growing used to being alone.

“Do you know where your wife is?” he asked. “I think I should head out.”

“I don’t think you should if you want things to change,” Abe countered.

“Jesus,” Ben sighed, covering his brow with his palm in mild frustration. What was it about evening news consumption that turned everyone into an armchair philosopher?
As though on cue, his father appeared beside him. “I can handle the disappointment of your refusal to sort out your personal life, Benjamin, but I’ll not have you take the Good Lord’s name in vain. You were raised better than that.”

Ben nodded, cursing to himself that his father was perhaps the only preacher in the region who took such a liberal view of sexuality and then cursed himself that he could still cite every relating chapter and verse.

“What is that look?” the reverend seemed to scold.

Ben wished he had Abe’s talent of half watching the news as he spoke as a means of escaping from a conversation that he was not keen on having at present or, perhaps, ever. “I just don’t see how this is any of your business, Dad. I had a long day. I’m tired. I want to go home.”

“Do you?” his father pried.

“Yes,” Ben insisted.

“Alone?”

“Dad, come off -”

“What exactly happened between the two of you that you can’t have an adult conversation about it – that you, specifically, you who spent the entirety of your youth and adolescence trying to demonstrate to your mother and I how very mature, polite, witty and wise beyond your years you happened to have considered yourself - now, as an adult, elect to behave like a spoilt child who has not gotten his way?”

“That isn’t what is going on -”

“Isn’t it?”

“Caleb and I have philosophical differences that I don’t think can be reconciled,” Ben sighed. Abe bit his bottom lip as though he begged to differ.

Ben’s father was hardly one to ask for permission in this respect.

“Philosophy is overrated in relationships of any kind, my dear boy, as are any ideas that are bigger than ourselves. My best friend follows a different faith as you know, we talk about our differences and the Words and Worlds that lend themselves to our perceptions as we come to more clearly define the very terminology in which we choose to voice our individual understandings of the Divine, and we do this civilly with the shared interest of intellectuals. When he and I truly get into a heated argument it is always about the banal topics of our day to day, who was supposed to arrange transpiration, or snacks, or something else for Interfaith. Or we are not of the same mind when it comes to college sports,” he gave, laughing, “That truly is beyond reconciliation.”

“I wish it were that simple,” Ben shrugged.

“It is. At least, it is the same way with your mother and I. She lives by the letter, that is, in the partisan sense and when we watch debates, I have a feeling she does not truly hear what is being said. On occasion this annoys me and annoys me to no end. Centrism is a luxury we was reasonably well off westerners may be able to comfortably afford but as world citizens and Good Christians we can hardly turn a blind eye to either side of the aisle, but again, when it comes up, your mother and I will talk about it - argue a little over morning coffee, but fight? Fights only arise when I try to empty the dishwasher or hang the laundry – which I apparently never do right and
which only makes more work for her. The truth is Ben, in the scope of any relationship, if you find yourself offended by an ideal, chances are you simply don’t fully understand it. But you surely can recognise that from your other connections, romantic or otherwise.

“So I ask Son, what are you and Caleb fighting over? You are both too smart for it to be philosophical as you say. Consider this – are you fighting at all or are you personally simply fleeing back to a self-imposed isolation that you are so familiar with you have come to define as comfortable?”

“I think it is the latter,” Abe offered in Ben’s silence.

“I think I need a drink,” Ben said.

They were at the kind of bus stop that sought to reduce the entire nation to ninety square metres of merchandise – kilts, knitwear, shortbread, stuffed animals whose shape celebrated the country’s most famous hoax, tea towels that toasted to its most recent, blunted replica weapons from Scotland’s storied past and several more from commercial franchises set in fictional landscapes that bore a closer resemblance to New Zealand than anywhere on the British Isles, and jerseys from the two clubs in Glasgow which, itself, was as far separated from the store, its racks and all the roads that might lead one here as either Middle Earth or Westeros.

The coffee, at least, was doing its active part to be horrible which Patrick Ferguson rather appreciated, for at least tourists were being given a truly authentic experience in the large Styrofoam cups that could be purchased for three pounds in the cafeteria-area of this (and every other) rest stop on the country road. He walked around the shop to avoid the rain, hoping that the tour-bus headed to the highlands would leave with the whole of the bathroom-queue sometime before his commuter arrived to take him back into the city. He continued to drink the sweet-bitter substance all the same, despite signs that strongly discouraged the behaviour (something, one might argue, the owner would have done better to display in the dining area itself.) In short time, he began contemplating the bathroom queue and if it mightn’t be worth his while to start moving it its general direction and was resolved to do so when he happened upon a travel companion of sorts, albeit one whom he had not sat beside on any of the busses that had brought them this far by way of identical road-side convenience stops that offered a commercial idea of Scotland up as a souvenir.

“I’m surprised to see you here,” he commented.

“Sometimes it works out that way, old chap,” Banastre Tarleton replied without bothering to feign amusement. “The Americans are sloppy in their efforts and approach. They announce victory before the first whistle -”

“I meant here-here,” Ferguson clarified, “I had thought that you would be at the reception.”

“Pretending to mourn a man I can’t claim I’ll miss?” Tarleton snorted. “Hard pass. I’d hazard to say that everyone who is in attendance is only able to approach the ‘appropriate’ level of misery courtesy of the vegan-haggis the Hewletts so like to serve up plus whatever other plant-and-chemical-based approximation of food found its way onto the menu as a side. I just got back from the States, lad. There, at least, it makes sense to stick to strictly bio-produce given the comparatively relaxed nature of their food and drug stands to that of our own. But I tell you, even
without cancer-creating fertilizer coating my lettuce and cucumbers, I felt rather ill the whole time I was away – lost nearly four pounds at that which I can hardly afford with my frame. No. I’m back in Britain. I want my haggis to be made of sheep intestines and I damn sure want something to have blead for my black pudding.”

Ferguson wondered why he even bothered. “You should go into politics. You speak in sound bites that say nothing but damn if it doesn’t sound bloody patriotic.”

“You should hear me when I’ve actually a point to make,” Tarleton smiled briefly before again going deadpan. “Apropos, the wake. Am I to take it that you not being there is a failure on the part of Police Scotland to open an inquiry? It seems suspicious to me that an otherwise healthy man in his mid-fifties would die suddenly of quote ‘natural causes’.”

Ferguson found it curious that he would bring the matter up at all. “But then as you managed to convince ADIC Hamilton, you have no medical knowledge on which to draw of weigh this assessment of yours.”

“I don’t, Lady Edith, however -” Tarleton began to protest.

“Are you a student of history, Tarleton?”

“If you are as familiar with my conversation with Hamilton as you allude to being, you’ll know that I read law without completing any qualifications. If you are asking, however, after my intellectual interests, I find myself given more to literature and language, by which I mean Tolstoy or Tupac, depending on who is asking and of what precisely I am being accused. Sorry, I’m struggling to place the conversational shift. I’m a bit knackered from the trip back up here from London -”

“Coffee?” Ferguson suggested, offer the remnants of his own.

“Anywhere else. Nothing personal, mate, but I generally say no to the motor oil you package in canisters and sell as coffee here in the north.”

“Offensive, yet far less so than the idea that the Hewletts have anything to do with Scotland,” Ferguson commented eyeing another sorry display of mugs commemorating Lord Edmund’s recent marriage – which, in keeping with royal tradition seemed to have lasted no longer than the wedding itself. “They are opportunistic Englishmen - a charge you resemble and can no doubt relate to- hence my surprise that you did not attend the afterparty, nutritional preferences notwithstanding.”

“Politics keeping you away then, Patrick? Is an investigation in fact going on without your prejudice to hamper it down?”

“Politics in that my mother’s brother tried to kill the whole lot of them decades ago or politics in that my paternal cousin made a more recent attempt on the Duke specifically before her French exile? Which sins of the father do I own the stones you seek to throw to specifically?” Ferguson snapped. For everything else he may have been, he was a dedicated law enforcement officer who hated being positioned where he was unable to strike.

“No sin per se, I’m simply asking if it makes you nervous that with so many old men in the room, one of them is bound to know you by your given name and voice it before your little sweetheart, Lady Eleanor. That … or your screenname. I wonder what would be worse for you, personally, professionally …”
He knew that Tarleton was trying to get to him. He also knew that the man likely had a decent enough moment to do so which was his to now deduce. “Did Kolina tell you about Eggshell?” he asked, happy for the engagement though its nature annoyed him.

“Ben Tallmadge if you would believe it.”

“I would.”

“This what you meant by history?”

“No quiet. I listen to a lot of podcast to pass time on train platforms, regular customer of public transit that I am.”

“I feel that. More of a sporting man myself though in that respect.”

“Regardless of era or actors,” he mused, “there is always an episode like this severed up with the caveat that modern scholars suggest that there is evidence of foul play when someone of significance dies suddenly – but then, I often think, who can truly say for certain once that page has been turned?”

“Isn’t it literally your job to find out?” Tarleton challenged, frowning.

“I’ve been given a better offer,” Ferguson smiled.

“Lady Edith -” Tarleton again began.

“Everton,” Ferguson tried.

“What?”

“That is the club-side you follow, am I mistaken?”

“Sadly, you’re not.”

“Think of the whole of this ordeal between your city and its capital investors as being a Merseyside Derby. You – Everton - are up 2-1 thanks to a penalty but they - Liverpool - get an equalizer in the ninetieth minute. A neutral watching the match would tell you to be happy to walk away from Anfield with a point. It is not easily done.”

“I didn’t take you for neutral.”

Ferguson did not consider that he was one, much as he lacked whatever was present in the colonel’s deposition that lead him to make an ill-advised charge from a weakened position whenever the opportunity arose or could be roused -

- Not, he admitted, that such did not have its strategic value to the greater cause.

Perhaps ironically, Ferguson considered, they two might genuinely have been friends if profession allowed any conversation a genuine quality.

As it stood, however, Inspector Ferguson knew everything that might be known about Colonel Tarleton as a result of his proximity to various persons of interest and was more than certain the same could be stated in the reverse.

Tarleton had clearly grown bored of keeping up the pretence otherwise and Ferguson felt his own patience and resolve wearing thin. Technically, he was outranked if reverence and deference were
given to the titles that preceded their respective surnames, but within the current scope of this investigation he was the most senior officer and felt compelled to caution the colonel to bear this in mind.

“No, Ban,” Ferguson hissed. “You took it a step further, potentially incriminating me and several far more innocent -”

“That is ludicrous,” Tarleton dismissed.

“I read the transcript from the tape of your interview with Hamilton.”

“Without there being an official inquiry in the works?” Tarleton pressed.

“There is an ongoing case against Edmund Sr who we just saw committed to the earth,” Ferguson offered. Much more he was not at liberty to give.

“Ashes to ashes.”

“it is still ongoing. I’m still leading it. There isn’t much the aristocracy can’t get away with but as they still sneer at openly engaging in commerce, the Crown has a continued interest in pursuing this angle. I have to imagine the newly risen Earl of March knew this in giving his confession, same as I have to imagine you yourself had some insight into our monarch impartiality towards further inquiries being formally opened -”

“Would it surprise you to learn that I genuinely wish that were not the case?”

“No,” Ferguson surrendered without needing a moment to reflect or consider. “You are a good person and we all want to live in a better world.”

Somehow this took Tarleton off guard, or, at least, invited him to lower his weapon. “Yea … so what is this, your new job?”

“I’m going to work for the firm I’m currently auditing,” Ferguson shrugged.

“That is not at all corrupt,” Tarleton scoffed.

“Not in the same department,” the inspector assured him. “I was an engineering major. Our mutual friend is providing me the position and means to build a function prototype of a semi-automatic combat rifle that can fire off four times the current market standard, planning to throw this in with the standard fare of decommissioned weapons they are selling to some sheik in exchange for an agreeance not to expand a domestic drilling operation. Don’t worry. The design is difficult to operate and expensive to both produce and maintain should relations turn hostile. Britain’s armed force is not being put at any added risk.”

“I didn’t realise the Hewletts dealt in arms.”

“Really?” Ferguson blinked. “‘It is Scotland’s Oil’ and it is considerably more valuable the people - in terms of subsidies and the Hewletts politically - giving their continued role in securing a higher price and therefore pay out by way of creating a monopoly and the autonomy that follows.”

“That is so much worse than the explanation I’d anticipated …”

“If you can’t beat them, join them. As you are right to point out I haven’t a shot at bringing any evidence to trial giving my family’s history. Everything I find will be dismissed if this goes to court and inadmissible in future cases. Best I can really hope for is to keep check from within and … that
is, I have two boys I barely know and a backlog of missed child support payments making higher morals something of an impossibility at this point."

“One does what one must,” Tarleton nodded.

“I might thank you for setting an example.”

“No need to get sentimental. You are right, I ought to be satisfied with a draw.”

Slightly concerned that Tarleton mistook is meaning for something far more sinister, he adjusted quickly, “I mean your girls -”

“They are exceptional. That comes from within, I don’t know that it would be just or fair of me to claim any credit whatsoever for the competent, confident young women Marie and Georgie are growing into, I’m just glad that I get to watch.”

“No?” Ferguson could not help but smile. “They adore you and aspire to your better traits.”

“Because they know the sentiment is mutual,” Tarleton shrugged. “That is all that really is. Write to your lads. Let them know that you think of them.”

“You say that as though it were simple.”

“It is if you don’t constantly give yourself reason to second guess your choices,” the colonel said, softening. “You’re o’rite, Fergs. Do what it is you think you need to do and the rest will fall into place or it won’t and you’ll have to try something else – but just, just try to enjoy yourself in the meantime, yea? That is all there is to life.”

“Maybe.”

“You are not solely responsible for your family’s crimes, or those the aristocracy commit against each other with relative impunity or the corruption of your current employer in Police Scotland or the socioeconomic circumstance leading you to seek greater gains via the professional connections you have made.

“I don’t agree with you on much, it is true, but if I thought you were not generally a decent bloke, I’d never allow you to move in with my daughter and her mum. We’re cool from my end at least – unless we are talking about sport as sport and not as an extended metaphor for conflict – but then that is pretty much my relationship with most people and I’m guessing yours as well.”

Ferguson nodded and forced himself to return the younger man’s smile. He had something in mind for him. “Apropos sport – any interest in helping me destroy the charges the Americans are seeking to build against your mate Simcoe as my final act as an officer of the law?”

“What did he do now?” Tarleton exclaimed a little too loudly, burring his face in his unscarred hand. “Why do I always bloody get pulled into these things?”

“Insider trading under the guise of talking about upcoming league fixtures over WhatsApp.”

“Yea … read something to that tune of FiveThrityEight and didn’t understand a word of it, not going front.”

“I’ll explain the math-y bits, I just need you to come up with insults that can be turned into convincing arguments as it pertains to the football side of things. You have helped me in this fashion before.”
“Well, friend, that is my factory setting – but I’m struggling to see why you or I should involve ourselves.”

“We are already involved. It is all but a done deal. It has not been announced yet, but with Effie Gwillim the acting Chairmen, Simcoe is sure to be set up as CEO should we put an end to these erroneous American charges, that is. This will come to the benefit of share prices in the company and therefore your daughters’ dividends and my future salary.”

“Is it a long ride back to Edinburgh from here?”

“Long enough for me to explain the basics of statistical analysis and how to write a misleading report for a market setting from there.”

Tarleton fell silent for what amounted to a rather long while. “Aren’t all statistics fake?” he squinted.

“Naturally!” Ferguson grinned. “The art is making it look real which is surprising complicated even in an innumerate society.”

“Then I guess we’d better get a go on it.”

“Is he really worth it?” Hewlett asked.

“Christ, no,” Chiara Agnelli snorted after hanging up the phone.

“Good for you then, I suppose,” he responded, his eyes scanning the crowd. He had been imprisoned in his own home for weeks, a reality he had half expected but had failed to plan for. As he was being investigated and interrogated, he could not risk communication with those who could detail his more recent crimes – his wife included. He wondered if his Anna was subject to some version of the same, but then, how could she be? She was a world away. Scotland was the problem.

It had taken two weeks the arrange the funeral. With each day that passed his siblings grew anxious over what they feared might be questions raised in the autopsy, which Edmund had taken some small pleasure in witnessing. Whatever contracts had been hastily agreed upon as to convince those who had been present for the swap not to speak had evidently not been communicated to the middle classes. Too many were using the wake as an excuse to do business.

He hated everyone present but allowed himself some measure of enjoyment in the fact that his father got to hear first hand what everyone he had ever known privately thought of him – which, evidently, was not a great deal. The value of their company’s stock had risen exponentially since ‘death’ had dismissed him from the board and his wake was showing that the trend could be expected to continue.

Edmund kept his conversations short – ‘My condolences.’ ‘My thanks.’ No one asked what had happened, for they all wanted to know what would happen next.

“It is not, not really,” Chiara dismissed. “Last Friday I made the deal of the century and should doubt the success will ever be repeated, a hundred-million-Pound transfer evidences on its own that we are in a bubble ready to burst. I want out. There is no reason a woman of my talents should be stuck at a subsidiary rather than FCA directly, something that,” she clenched her hands into fists
as she continued to complain, “… I saw the Pogba transfer finalized, helped secure a US-EU trade partnership under conditions that favour my family’s principle concern and I woke up the next morning thinking that I’d never have to step into the Continassa district much less J-Village ever again so long as I live and breathe, that surely I’d get my call up to London. But I didn’t. I got a call from Andrea insisting that I run it by PR if I’m ever again in a position to put up a ransom for a foreign dignitary under the Juventus header. Yeah. That is it, isn’t it? That is my life and I can promise it will be yours, too if you don’t get the fuck out of this place.”

Hewlett met her with a hard stare. “Did my sister send you? Trying to get rid of me so soon after my arrival?” The two were friends, which was to say, their personal and political interests were often in tandem, nothing more. He had caught whispers about Edna having stuck a secret deal with the Saudis and as the Agnelli dealt in petrol as well he might have reason to suspect something of a joint venture. He had heard a number of other almost-secrets as well that might well prove motivating in a perhaps forced collaboration. Chiara’s teenage son was evidently close enough to one of the princes that they might both lose their heads if the connection could be proven. He hated playing politics, but he need not admit as much, Chiara just had, which gave him the upper hand regardless of how negotiations unfolded from here.

“Don’t be blind, Edmund. Edna doesn’t want Richmond, if she did, she would not have lent herself to a situation that in and of itself rescinds any claim she might have had to that crown. We just buried the duke under his brother’s name: a paternity test would show that the man currently occupying that role, presumably readying himself to abdicate, isn’t her father – though he is yours. Thanks to your marriage and a host of factors beyond you influence and control, the coming referendum, European investments in Scotland post-privatization creating stronger economic ties to Frankfurt than London, the cry for Independence is getting louder. Edna is already a duchess. She doesn’t want to be a queen, she doesn’t need to, not so long as your return and prolonged presence in the midst of the sudden popularity of yours, of an emergence of ideas you don’t share and economics you have no personal stake or passing interest in promises a kingdom. You want my advice?” the Italian entrepreneur asked rhetorically, answering her own query in flat tones, “Run. Regardless of your political savvy, whatsoever it might be, you’ll never be anything more than a marionette monarch, and I don’t think you know your land or its people enough anymore to every be able say for certain who is pulling the strings, even if cause and effect seem themselves clear.”

“With respect, you are the GA of a football club. I’m a Prince of the Realm. I think we have a fully different understanding of ‘family businesses.’”

“I think the only difference between you and I is that you’ve yet to be disillusioned. We play the same games, you, I, all present. There is no winning. There is just next weekend, the one after that, the one after that, and all of administrative acts of extortion between. But if you are referring to yourself as a prince now, I’m sure you already know as much. Take heed, Edmund,” she warned, “power is an illusion however you otherwise chose to define it. I stumbled; your father fell.”

“Might I take that as a threat?”

“Oh, as an heir apparent you should take everything as a threat. Don’t trust anything you are given — everyone has an angle. Even me.”

“What does Edna want then?” he inquired again.

“That is not what you should be asking.”

“What do you want, Chiara?”

“Ideally,” she seemed to muse, “I’d like to never have a conversation about transfer rumours again
so long as I live, but as my family thinks this is where my talents are best served, allow me to offer some advice that might well prove to both of our benefits: Relieve the Head of Clan Campbell from his obligations towards your younger sister. I’ll make an introduction at the reception to one of my cousins beforehand, an acceptable alternative that might serve to eliminate any internal strife before it should arise. Order Eleanor to instead marry Rawdon, it will serve as a precedent to and punishment for all of your siblings who seek to use you, and, if you are smart enough to keep this quite until it reaches its logical conclusion, will eliminate the greatest threats left to your house and that of my husband.

“Eleanor will loath you for this altercation in her arrangement; Banastre will become too much of a presence in her life for them to leave it alone. They will elope, stripping your sister of her title, disassociating your house to some extent with the identity some Independence-minded Scots force upon it, and by relation, yourself and Lady Anna who herself, mind, has never set foot on these shores. At the same time, this would serve to strengthen the Tarletons’ hold on Merseyside as well as market confidence in its local economy in a way that won’t seem a threat to the council’s other proud families - for their fear of titles blinds them to true threats to their place in the power structure. Banastre will be refused an OBE, and Her Majesty will be refused her preferred alternative to the seat she expects you to abdicate on the morals you espouse. You can decide from there how it is you wish to win hearts and minds: condemn your sister, be liberal, lenient towards her, you’ll have your people behind you either way. And insofar as Rawdon is concerned, I’d not afford him all that much of yours, he is too savvy of a politician in his own right to let anything to play out in private serve as a setback.”

“So, in other words, what you are saying is that you want your name added to the short list for the vacant CEO position?” Edmund smiled. Chiara’s gaze darkened as she returned it.

“I don’t believe it is still vacant. My cousin John was told in no uncertain terms by Effie Gwillim to toss your mate John’s CV, as has most everyone else in the Square Mile. I assumed the matter was settled. That said … I’m surprised to not see him here. Or maybe I’ve underestimated you. I’ll leave to let you mingle, let me know how who else approaches you with unsolicited advice that I might pre-emptively amend my personal stock portfolio accordingly,” she winked before walking away, leaving Edmund to wonder to what end his sometimes-friend’s future prospects were being so blatantly and deliberately limited -

- Leaving him to wonder who precisely was profiting from such and who was pulling the strings.

Chapter End Notes

…I could probably write an entire epic purely around the palace intrigue of this particular wake, but it is late and I kind of have to work tomorrow, so I’ll just write some notes instead, yea?
Sport:

Ligue 1, the Eredivisie, the Ligat ha'Al are the respective domestic leagues of France, the Netherlands, and Israel. I would make some kind of a joke or snide comment that ran the risk of being taken as one but I’ll assume you are about as interested in these divisions as Clayton accuses Ban of being. Apropos sports betting, while the Muslim in me is quick to call such sinful, the mathematician feels compelled to relay that if you really want to turn a profit you have a better shot of doing so the further down the tiers you look, so shop local. Like with produce. ;)

J-Village is a huge industrial park in Turin, Italy that exists for the administrative support of the local football club.

Translations:

“Im ernst?” means “in earnest” if literally translated but has more of the spirit of “the fuck?”

DM: Deutsche Mark, the currency that proceeded the Euro.

SPD: Social Democratic Party of Germany, the oldest political party in the country, currently lacking leadership and from the looks of it, a coherent agenda …

FDP: actually the Free Democratic Party, (no ‘Deutschland’ in there) which makes sense as their stance is economic liberalism. Astonishingly, for a party that puts so much on free markets, its elected representatives tend to struggle with basic maths even when judged on the generous curve on which one grades politicians.

DFB: the German Football Association (German: Deutscher Fußball-Bund) the single largest sports federation in the world. I wonder if that makes us all complicit in the corruption?

AfD: the Alternative for Deutschland, though the public and the press usually prefer the term “Neo-Nazis” or “Saxony” when discussing their platform.

Quotes:
The lines: “The truth is rarely pure and never simple.” / “Modern life would be very tedious if it were either, and modern literature a complete impossibility!” and “What about hanging ourselves?” / “Hmm. It’d give us an erection.” were taken from Oscar Wilde’s The Importance of Being Earnest and Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot respectively. I think Wilde is funnier in adulthood but there is really something to be said for the fact that children are assigned something which I (even as a grown-up) can’t decide is surrealistic or existential at an age where “erection” still sends them into fits of laughter. Anyway, as alluded to in the text, both writers were born in Dublin (and died in Paris.)

All else being equal, the course of war will tend to favor the party with the stronger emotional and political motivations, but especially the defender. is from Vom Kriege (Eng.: On War) by Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz, generally considered to be one of the world’s great strategists. You can find a copy between The Art of War and The Prince on the desk of any divorced, middle-aged, mid-level manager who is inclined by nature to overstate his own importance. All the same it is worth the read.
… I hope this chapter was as well! Cheers.
The Prison

Chapter Summary

Three months after Arnold’s rescue and recovery, those responsible for his disappearance attempt to contend with the aftermath of their initial crimes and of the resulting coverups in which they took part.

Chapter Notes

It has been so long since I last posted that you are probably owed an explanation, but the answer to where I’ve been and what has been occupying me these past few months is logarithmic in nature and I’m just not up for giving a 500-character introduction as to why 0+0=3 when we’re measuring in decibels. It is not what you came for, either, so let’s just crack on with it, yea?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Aye, an’ ‘en th’ boy cam an’ tried tae pit th’ idea in mah heed,” Robert Rogers explained from the other side of the thin wall of the nameless motel he had tracked John André to upon resolving to find him when Abraham Woodhull in fact appeared at his bedside wearing a wire, trying to make good on his wife’s threat.

The rooms were small and cold, letting in a draft despite the absence of windows. It was the kind of place truckers, transients and travellers came for a quick fuck and a cold shower for no one with any sense of reason would spend the night. Having twice done exactly that before establishing contact, the Scot’s skin itched with the bites of the small insects infesting a stained mattress whose filth fresh linens barely disguised. This was the second room he had taken at the inn, moving that morning to get closer to its longest resident, to hear how the man who might have once been the good Dr André moved through life now that he had abandoned any pretence of living.

Nothing Rogers was met with had surprised him in the least.

After Woodhull had relayed to him the details intrusted to him by the government about André’s last known location; the rest had been relatively simple to piece together. The doctor had evaded a number of acronymic organisations operation with varying levels of legality and sanction for the past several weeks to great success, but, as Rogers knew, everyone left a trail and, as he had assumed, André considered himself clever in taking a path that seemed to contradict the image he projected to the backers and benefactors who now wanted to ensure that his absence status became permanent.

Rogers knew (far too well, he considered) his once-friend’s love of theatrics, his want to audition roles he was not cut for, mistaking himself for being above whichever situation in which he engaged and indulged. In this act, he would not be imitating the dandies whose approval and acceptance he sought, men like Simcoe and Hewlett with their stiff upper lips, bespoke suits and strange perplexity for elongating each small word they spoke. No, André would have read every
narrative to have gone to print about Arnold’s detention and recovery and would seek to emulate the conditions of a man he saw as having overcome his crucible with the idea that he, too, could find the same strength under sustained fire.

A not insignificant part of Robert Rogers wanted to simply leave his former friend to the filth in which he had found him.

He had been able to locate the doctor in disgrace by running a state-wide search of properties with recent water damage that had reopened without doing any major renovation since and comparing this list against each property’s relative location to a liquor store. He had visited three other potential sites before finding this particular hell, making his way westward, surprised slightly at how far the not-all-so-athletic André had managed to get by foot.

When he first laid eyes on his target, on the man that the nation and world’s best evidently could not find, Rogers wondered why he had never come on the idea to do police or detective work. It would have been easy money (that was, had he any reason to believe the Tarletons were good for their debts.) He had spent the bus-ride from New York to Idaho engaged in morphine-induced imaginings himself entering this scene as a jaded private eye in a twenties crime-noir of the supermarket-checkout variety: André the man accused of the crime which Rogers himself was in the process of committing, DCI Tallmadge frustrated behind his desk at the station, the pretty Peggy Shippen, Aberdeen Declasias and a badly-dragged-up Freddy Morgan as a trio of deadly dames, equally convinced of André’s guilt coming to PI Rogers’ dimly office and asking for his help with puckered, painted lips.

When he had been a young boy, Rogers had quite liked pulp fiction and recalled warmly reading his gran’s collection of 50-pence paperbacks whose pages time and the strong tobacco she had smoked whilst cooking had made as yellow as the curry that centuries of colonial trade had made a Glasgow staple. It was ionic almost to the point of poetry, Rogers mused when he at last spotted the man who might have once been John André, after a lifetime as far removed from the sorts of adventures fiction had promised and reality had failed to deliver upon, he was at last faced with an opportunity to be truly heroic against impossible odds –

And for this act, Rogers was certain that he would spend whatever time he had left in this world locked away in a cell, occasionally returning to the stories he favoured, ones told from a single perspective with which he was inclined to relate.

This, however, was exactly as he now wanted things to end.

He had only made himself know to André a quarter-hour ago, but had, in a sense, been living in his head since being tasked -or, rather, threatened- with his recovery.

It had been exhausting, predicting the moves made by a sporadic, panicked mind, especially as his own concerns had consumed him all the while.

He wanted to lay down despite the condition of the bed, but there was still a battle left to him to fight.

Perhaps, he considered, it was too late to truly make amends, to hurt and hold accountable those who had by the construct of society robbed him of his personal ambitions and the possibility of seeing them fulfilled.

He did not want to look at André, he could not trust himself to hold true should they meet face to face, all the same, he wished the motel had windows, that his once-friend had a way to offer him better spirits in the form of the bottle he knew him to be nursing.
“And the authorities?” André asked, surrendering to the working-class undertones of his otherwise polished accent, the articulated and over-enunciated English that was only spoken in period dramas or high-production adaptations of fantasy novels giving way to the post-industrial rot in which he had once confessed he had been raised after a few uncontrolled rounds. He now sounded as awful as he look from a distance, with his wire frames and rack-apparel, pale, placid skin, and shortened hair hidden under the kind of knit-cap that Rogers had long suspected kept the younger Woodhull from gainful employment or marked him as someone not expressly seeking such. The image was too honest to be André, and yet, Rogers could not help but to wonder, perhaps even hope, that the good doctor was happier now absent of the pretence that had never quite been convincing despite every dedication.

“Ah left afair they kent tae swatch,” the Scot could not help but to chuckle, instantly cringing with the pain this caused in his abdomen.

“Left what, the hospital?” André seemed to worry, again putting on the sorts of acoustic airs that marked his concern to be ingenuine.

“The hospital, aye,” Rogers confirmed with a grunt. The gunshot wound, he knew, had grown infected untreated, his bandages long unchanged.

“Then come, have a drink, take off a bit of the edge,” André offered, sounding equally exhausted as Rogers himself felt from the case, now that he knew what precisely he had been running from. The offer was indeed tempting, but Rogers knew they two could not -could never again- be in the same room; André would see his injury and from act or instinct move to help, his pretty little face would twist with nausea upon seeing the extent of the damage until it settled on the evaluation that this was vengeance for the condition in which Senator Arnold had been kept in his care. Rogers would not be judged by such a man; not by the man responsible for the extent of pain that had consumed a town they had both called home at one point in a past that now felt so distant that the Scot considered that it might not even be shared -

It was enough that he knew John André at the end. Extending a like courtesy to his counterpart at this point was spoil what little happiness Rogers considered he had been left.

“Won risk meetin' ye, Johnny,” he told him. “Won dae. Ye an' Ah, uir paths won’t cross again in thes life, an' yoors has tae change. Pay in cash an' lae afair sunrise.”

“No. I think you should take the chance that has been given to you,” André said slowly after some considered thought. “I’d rather it be you, to be honest, at least that way fate would feel personal. You can’t save me, Robbie, I’m already dead. If not by order of the US Government than by the Hewletts or their associates. At least if I meet my end by your hand, I’ll have done right by you with the last of my borrowed time,” he sighed, “take the Tarletons for their money and find yourself somewhere remote in Alaska -”

“They arenae guid fur it,” Rogers cut him off. “Nane ay them. Ah’v mair tae win by makin' a point ay ’at than by daein' th' biddin' ay some factional stalwart backed only by inertia. Th' senate refused tae tak' a vote oan yer senator’s defence bill, makin' it likely 'at thes president ur th' next will mandate th' implementation ay yer methods ben Executife Order,” he explained, however certain that André, logically if not emotionally, was already conscious of the domestic ripples. “Ah’d but bunsens oan them nae givin' a damn whit happens tae ye insofar as th' treatment yoo’ve proposed, th' testin' an' th' subsequent implementation despite its failures -”

“I never meant to hurt Edmund Hewlett,” André sighed, cursed, screamed. “Fuck man! I was trying to protect him with the overdose, not … not …”
“Aye, but hoo diz he see things?” Rogers challenged. He could hear André shift, perhaps slump, which was all that was truly significant about the reality of a prince’s rage at this point. It would not be acted upon. “Gie it nae thought,” Rogers adjusted after he was sure the metaphoric knife André had placed in the backs of so many had time to now fully twist in his gut. “Ah’d caa it a wash, Ah woods. Ye failed tae protect th’ loon, an’ did sae in sic’ a spectacular an’ dramatic fashion ’at noo, while he gart bide, he is a figurehead, an official representatife ay th’ Croon tae whom some wee faction ay Scots nationalists has pit aw ay their hopes ay separatism upon. He is stuck. He can’t dae anything; he can’t say anythin’. He is th’ marionette monarch baith Elizabeth an’ Edna main hae separately conspired tae see heem fill.

“But he can’t make them baith happy, an’ he is alienatin’ th’ personal support he micht hae otherwise foond. Wee Quine Eleanur seems tae actively hate her Laird Francis. Th’ Campells aren’t canty withit a Royal Weddin’,” he told of the marriage contracts the young Lord had made since practically abandoning his own bride at the altar. “Th’ other clans thes fear th’ Hewletts breakin’ whit nominal promises they hae gart tae them in scenarios ’at hae yit tae an’ main noo ne’er manifest. Jist, as a body can be certain, th’ Windsors wanted. Th’ Croon, however, main tay tak’ issue wi’ th’ way things ur playin’ it up north if rumoors ur tae be believed … as they aye ooght be when it comes tae fowk fa hae their hans kissed an’ faces licked an’ placed oan envelopes.”

“Your argument is that I’m safe because Hewlett may have accidently suggested a figure for how much the Rawdon-Hastings have lent to Crown to a French sport executive at his father’s funeral?” André spat.

That specific fuck-up had not been at the forefront of Rogers’ mind, but it satisfied him to know that André was keeping up with the papers enough to be sufficiently paranoid. It served his purposes to see that this status was shared.

“Ah hink th’ British Isles ur gearin’ up fur a proxy war an’ ye arenae a likely targit. Edmund Hewlett in alienatin’ aw ay his allies oan either side ay th’ boarder isn’t gonnae gonnae-no th’ war, isn’t e’en gonnae delay it – it will jist lae heem withit onie friends when th’ shootin’ inevitably starts.

“Europe is gonnae dae its best tae ensure thes ootcome: fur one, it makes an example ay Brexit, ay whit it means tae lae th’ stability ay th’ system. ’At … an’ cheers tae Hewlett an’ lae ay ur auld team France has foond itself committed tae a war it a former colony they can’t afford withit th’ British pay-in an’ don’t hae th’ weapon ay yer study they wanted tae obtain, as they woods hae hud thes aw bin worked it wi’ a senate vote.

“So,” his tone darkened, “ye ur gonnae dae whit Ah propose. Ye ur gonnae lae an’ Ah’m gonnae confess tae yer mudder. Ye micht nae be a targit, Johnny, but ah’d onie day tak’ mah changes wi’ th’ American penial system. Ye micht nae be a targit, Johnny, but ah’d onie day tak’ mah changes wi’ th’ American penial system. Ye micht nae be a targit, Johnny, but ah’d onie day tak’ mah changes wi’ th’ American penial system.”

“So, that is why you are helping me,” André seemed to muse. “Political speculation. Self-interest. Tell me, when has that ever served you?”

“No, nae, Johnny. Am nae tryin’ tae help ye. Am makin’ sure ’at justice runs its coorse. Ah hae life threatin’ injuries frae a lassie frae a rich fowk fa hud somethin’ tae gain frae yer death. Efter Ah confess, I’ll gang tae hospital an’ hae comfortable accommodations givin’ ’at Ah went an’ did whit Washington speart upon mah release an’ I’ll gie th’ press an’ th’ glory an’ everythin’ ye ever soothg, nae ’at is suits me, nae,” he smiled, “But sic’ will spaur me frae remainin’ a targit in thes war yer actions hae gart most likely an’ remin’ ye ay hoo terribly anonymously ye ur an’ hae aye bin in aw ay
“Ah pure techt tae punish ye, John. It falls oan me tae dae sae coz ye hae left yerself sae isolated ‘at nae a body else knows ye enaw tae execute justice justly.”

“And if I don’t consent?”

“Then yoo’ll coopon persecution, an’ nae jist ye personally. Th’ Tarletons ur back in power which says enaw abit th’ constituency ’at voted fur them, an’ Ah shoods doobt ye need a reminder ay jist hoo close Manc lain an’ Liverpool. Efter everythin’ else yoo’ve pit yer fowk ben, dae ye pure want tae risk them bein’ pit at th’ mercy ay th’ green dragoon’s restless raiders?”

After this André did not speak. It was enough for Rogers that he could hear him breathe, for truly he was better off with something to offer up should Washington be as committed to his impending imprisonment as his agents had been to Arnold’s safe recovery. None of America’s European allies were satisfied with the way the case had been handled, with the realities that delay and speculation imposed.

France was now committed to a lengthy war in which they had nothing to gain, left without André’s weapon to fight it of Britain’s money to back it.

Scotland was being more or less mislead by a man whose ideas of establishing peace meant denying his allies at court their ambitions, and while this might have pleased the Crown to which he owed his homage, he was evidently accrediting himself at home by attacking England as well and destroying relationships there - evidence of how destructive André’s controversial methods had in fact been.

Despite the trade deal that had been secured in part by conditions presented by the market instability occurred via Arnold’s absence, the Euro Zone was instable as ever post-Brexit, with the southern states sure to suffer first and the German ones in due course - forced to pay more during a refugee crisis that had already thrown them into debt, unable to cover the costs accrued at their boarders indefinitely.

The world, Rogers thought, had been on its way to ruin long before John André had gotten himself involved, but as long as there were people in power who held him accountable, Rogers meant to ensure that the good doctor remain alone in his hands. It was enough for the Americans that he died without a defense. Tallmadge, however, seemed to need him expressly for this purpose. He speculated that the French would be happy to behead him themselves, that the Germans would be happy to let them have at it, that the English were better served by pretending towards the same idealism that the small town of Setauket sought, and that the crowned heads would follow whatever whim possessed them when presented with the reality of what would become André’s predicament.

He could not die but he could not live. Robert Rogers would spend the rest of his life behind bars no matter how good of a solicitor stood to defend him. He needed the insurance of a pawn and proxy, not trusting that iron and isolation alone could not keep him safe.

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3 Months Later
John Anderson tugged nervously at the end of a curled lock of his short, poorly cut hair, until taught whilst he scrolled through the online editions of the few remaining newspapers from which he had not yet wasted the month’s five subscription-free articles on either post-Brexit hysteria, Benedict Arnold, or the circus that seemed to surround the late Edmund Hewlett’s estate. There had been little else to occupy his active mind in his new position but to read about the lives in which he had once played some small role back when he, himself, had had a life of his own –

- or at least a construction that came closer to mirroring one than his present state could be said to.

Anderson worked at an inbound call centre out in the Midwest, lived in a modest flat in a midsized city and kept to the company of memories just out of reach. His home was sparsely furnished, containing only a coffee table which used for takeaway, Netflix and cheap boxed wine; a pull-out bed which he never made; and a pair of dark drapes that were always pulled shut. He kept only the company of Memory and Regret, who, between themselves, named him Paranoia and laughed openly over his downfall. Occasionally -bitterly- Anderson joined in.

He refreshed the CNN World Edition Homepage again, hoping against Hope itself that his eyes had deceived him, that his best intentions had not left the world in such a sorry state, half forgetting his headset as he began to blink rapidly, uncertain if his eyes were dry from the central air conditioning or if they were, in fact wet and burning from the cheap mascara he had begun wearing more openly some weeks back, shortly after seeing how red and blotch his bare face had grown after a particular night of heavy drinking in a series he had no great intention to stop had lead him to try to use concealer to create the illusion of relative sobriety – not that it mattered much. As far as he could tell from the interactions which he otherwise tried to avoid with his co-workers, his sedative of choice was fairly tame when compared to their expensive prescription drug habits. He wondered sometimes how long it would be before his own problem drinking gave way to his likewise seeking out stronger remedies for the tortured awareness of his own existence on streets no one would otherwise walk.

They did not do background checks here, part of the reason, Anderson thought, that he had been able to secure himself employment. He had asked at the interview when he was not handed a standard consent form that had proven a barrier at several chain supermarkets to which he had applied, only to be laughingly told that the company was happy to save itself the twelve dollars, there was, after all, nothing in the building to steal.

It had not been a lie.

John Anderson worked in a cubicle with a phone that had no buttons, one made to receive calls rather than make them. The computer he used both for work and distraction purposes was his own and many of his co-workers at the call centre did not so much as bother bringing a notebook with which to extend their industry-specific vocabulary. He had been in the job for two months and felt that he, too, could now reasonably do this cold, having memorised enough of the standard sales script to retain regular clients.

He blinked again, reading over the flashing headline of breaking news and feeling all the more broken for it.

John André, the ticker said, had been found dead.

And Robert Rogers was in police custody standing accused of his murder.

Anderson swallowed.
He had been waiting for months for this debriefing, waited whilst the world at large moved on in the directions that Rogers had foresaw in a threat that felt closer to fruition each morning Anderson awoke to find himself breathing still until the thought that his mother and siblings had paid for his pound of flesh. He had not anticipated feeling the same pain in his chest upon discovering that Rogers had either gone through with his side of the bargain, or that the authorities at play had grown convinced enough of his deceitful words to release them to the public.

John André was dead.

And John Anderson? Well, he was here. He had nowhere left to go and nothing left to do but begin waiting anew.

He was certain Rogers knew his whereabouts though he had left the motel before dawn, as soon as he had been sobered enough to stand. He did not consider that Rogers had been following him until encountering his predictions in print in such quick succession that he began equating the Scot to the regret that followed him everywhere, that hung over him like a shadow and seeped into his skin like clammy air on a morning wet and cold.

Britain wanted to leave Europe. Scotland wanted to leave England. Lord Edmund had left his Lady wife on American shores and now she was moving to leave the legal profession she had entered into on his benefit and behalf. Jordan Akinbode and former DCI Benjamin Tallmadge were moving to sue the government over his research. The French police and parliament seemed as if they were readying to up and shot at each other on the same grounds. Not much was said about America’s wars a decade after the public had abandoned even the pretence of interest, but the price of petrol spoke to the widely accepted premise that they were again winning, and Anderson hoped he had nothing to do with the reason why. There had been nothing in the news to the fates of John Robeson and Charles Joyce, whose lives he had all but ended – had, in fact, if his former assistant Abigail’s online periodical, which had since been purchased by a major publisher and picked up by TMC for a limited series.

It was ironic, Anderson thought as he continued the call, that the same man he had help fiction kill had in fact been the supervisor of a centre such as this. Perhaps, he thought, it was justice -

John André was dead.

“You can start by taking responsibility for the energy you’re giving out,” he told the caller, more scolding than he had intended, overestimating how collected he felt. “As disruptive Uranus continues his transit of Taurus, it can be challenging to stay grounded and centred—but it’s more important than ever.”

>>You’re right,<< the caller, a recent college graduate with a degree in a struggling market whose hopes of moving out of her parent’s house were being made all the more unrealistic buy the every minute he kept her on the line at a rate $5.99 by feeding into superstition.

Naturally he was right, Anderson felt himself sigh. The assessment was, after all, not a shot in the dark, into the darkness of the night sky where stars billions of light years away from one another conspired to sparkle in proximity that imitated picture and pattern. He had once held a degree in psychology. In a past life. In a life that was now officially for all of the world over. Part of him wanted to tell her as much, for no other reason than she happened to be listening at present. He wanted to cry out to someone - anyone – that the wrong man had been arrested for the wrong crime. A crime that had never taken place.

John André was dead.
And Robert Rogers had been arrested for his murder.

This was all, after all, part of a plan.

A plan, Anderson mused, that he had ultimately had so little say in his stars might truly be to blame.

The credit card information of the next caller in queue popped up in a window on his screen and from the date of birth there provided and the current date, he could reasonably expect that a Capricorn was calling, likely to talk about finances, which said nothing about the month of January or those born into it, but rather the fact that it was the end of July, in a hand-to-mouth recession economy no one had any cash to access before the first and turning on the nightly news over the course of the past several weeks had turned every layman into a market speculator.

His eyes quickly scanned a list of words the call-centre that employed him encouraged – planets, houses, their numbers and the like before drifting back to the home page of CNN’s World Edition and the headlines that made him feel all the more a liar, all the more alive.

Anonymity, as Rogers had promised was a far worse fate than that which he supposed many had wished upon him, from which Rogers’ confession presently held at bay.

She did not change her name.

Or his.

In the same novel where she had graced all the other major players with some degree of anonymity, of deniability rather, she had kept herself, him – them honest. Perhaps, he considered to himself, they were, in fact, the only honest people left to this world, regardless of century or staging.

Jordan Akinbode had been late to court that morning, late in the relative sense that his client was due to afford testimony to the bench at 9:10 – not that he, nor the defendant, nor the bailiff, nor the justices, nor the press expected Anna to give a statement prior to the midday recess. Still, by the clock, he had been late, and his self-supposed “friend” might have afforded him the curtesy as to inquire into why, but as was and had always been her nature, Anna Strong, neé Smith, and now, he supposed, Hewlett, was far too preoccupied by her own perceptions to permit him a moment to smile.

Akinbode could not believe that a few months before he had attended the celebration this particularly annoying woman’s thirtieth birthday - partly because the more she spoke the more he came to question if he could have ever enjoyed her company or conversation, partly because she made no claims at “creativity” that might have excused this level of self-obsession after the end one’s early twenties concluded the concept of centrisim with some small investment in news items outside of the social media sphere. But perhaps, he thought as he sized her up, Anna Hewlett was still lurking on Facebook, looking at the pictures women she had known when they had been girls posted of their new-borns, their new homes and the horrid DYI-Projects they were proud enough of to post as evidence of the “perfect” lives they told the world they led, Anna deleting them one by one as they shared a news item that did not conform to her brand of liberalism, to the decidedly white feminism she defined as “woke”. She would likely have been active in this circus herself had
she not surrendered this particular form of her right to free speech to a foreign crown and he hated her more for all of the pictures of her growing baby bump he would never be obliged to “Like” before scrolling on in search of the lads still sour over a weekend result on a Wednesday –

But Lady Anna, wife of the future Duke of Richmond, led anything but a normal life. Perhaps misdirected spite left her unable to let anyone in her immediate vicinity openly enjoy some small aspect of this ideal.

Akinbode wanted to talk about the final chapter of his ex-girlfriend’s book, the one she had posted late last night, the one that he had read on the train up from New York City that morning, the one that made him want to get off at every stop along the way and turn around, the one that he had read again five times over as the love letter he was convinced it was. Anna was Abigail’s best friend – did she read these words in the same way?

More than likely, or so Akinbode concluded somewhere in his client’s continued beratement of her own one and only. Anna surely resented the chapter’s title, the book’s final line, and, perhaps, him for having inspired it.

A Family, Akinbode heard echo again in his mind. A warrior cast into chains who had won his freedom, learnt letters for the woman he loved, saved her young son from the horrors of war and purchased a home with its spoils whilst the idealists blind to true inequality as they fought and died for principles and prejudice wound up in the same station as they had found themselves at the start, naming this progress out of exhaustion more than anything else.

When the work first posted, he had taken offence to the very premise, but that fiction had since come to represent the only thing that felt real. He wanted to return to it, to take out his phone and read it once more for the beginning, to text the Revolution’s other pragmatists and laugh about the false interpretations of what had transpired half of his circle had leaned to the static central cast. Ben, surely, would be in on the joke. His boyfriend, too. Same with Abe Woodhull, who, like Akinbode himself, had nearly lost everything in a fight that had been forced upon him until finding strength in laying down his arms. Then there were the surprise winners, the Tarletons who had restored their house’s position, wealth and prestige whilst those who would cause them harm had waited for the dust of the chaos to settle, laughing, most likely as they lifted their champagne-in-beer-glasses, toasting to election results whilst making something of a show of being “of” the people whom they again stood to represent as -

A family.

A family.

Akinbode had half a mind to turn on his heel and leave without caution or comment as he had done before with separate company in his own moment of heartbreak when his friends had shown themselves to be deaf to his concerns. He checked his watch. The next train from Albany to Grand Central Station left in twenty-five minutes, which meant he would likely miss it even if he trusted that he could run as quickly in his brown leather dress shoes he had shined for court the night before across a series of busy intersections as he could in old cleats on the pitch. He would surely miss it, and then he would need to wait an hour for the next train, putting him in New York at just after five where, even assuming that he could force his way into an over-crowded carriage on one of the first three subways to take him to the Setauket bus stop, he would still likely miss the five-thirty, stranding him until seven in the city, far from the woman he loved, from the touch of her fingers, those long fingers that had written and published the words he was so desperate to hear spoken in her sweet voice –

Which incidentally meant tolerating Anna’s offsetting baritone as it whined like a violin longing to
be tuned in the hands of a student with neither patience nor skill. He cringed. Realistically, he considered, he would get over this aversion as soon as she came to accept that she had gotten everything she had wanted or wished for at the on start of her affair and should not feel entitled to anything more, which, surely, she someday would. Hopefully prior to driving him home.

“Don’t take this wrong or ‘nothin,” Akinbode tried to phrase diplomatically, “but don’t you have live-in-girlfriends you could talk about this kind of thing with? I mean,” he retracted briefly, “not to make this an issue of gender, but don’t women comparatively enjoy hyper-analysing every little detail of they relationships – romantic and otherwise – with an extended audience of, let’s say, “echoes”?"

“I wanted a man’s perspective,” Anna informed him, exhaling slowly as he lips formed themselves into a fake smile of the sort that told that she had long known him not to be directly listening. He wondered in her unspoken critique if she had ever truly had a conversation with a man, and, if so, how she possibly might then expect him to care about a situation that had remained static for months. Anna could not follow Edmund to Scotland in the days following his father’s untimely death – she had not a passport and had to wait eight weeks for her paperwork to be processed and issued. In that standard span of time, communication between her husband and herself had broken down – the two, insofar as he had been made to follow, had Skyped at first, but Edmund, Anna said, was “distant”. *His father just died*, Akinbode would remind her, occasionally drawing on the recent examples of how closed off the Arnold brothers had been to the press when they had collectively begun to believe they would never again meet their father again in this life. No, Anna would always counter, *it isn’t that – it isn’t just that – it is like he is keeping something from me. You don’t understand.*

Only Akinbode did understand, he had been friends with Hewlett for years, he had shared his secrets and helped him in a legal capacity when the lad feared the truth of his less than licit engagements and undertakings getting out. He had seen him under the stress of setting himself up as a suspect in the Arnold investigation, hell, he had gone with him to a brothel to drink to the memory of a man Hewlett had real cause to believe he had helped kill. He reminded Anna of these things, or he had before realising that his point made hers –

Causing him to wonder why she meet her husband’s sudden absence with shock and sorrow.

To that end – why wasn’t she thrilled with the opportunity she felt she was again being extended to walk away from a relationship she clearly felt was one-sided?

Anna did not have answers to these questions. Akinbode knew that. He also knew that they two would have words were he ever to phrase them, so he let it be.

For a few blessed weeks as winter turned to spring, she had as well.

Anna was proving herself to be every bit the trial lawyer she had shown the potential to become back at Columbia and putting her before the bench headed by Judge Woodhull came with the unexpected side effect of providing the prosecution endless opportunities to place itself in contempt:

Unnerved by all the ways in which she was beginning to resemble her mother during proceedings, Judge Woodhull could not help but to make snide, base comments about Anna’s increasingly opulent physique, which Abigail Adams took as a platform for her second-wave feminism, making mistakes where she should -and likely did- know better in ways that paid directly into Anna’s benefit. Akinbode had spent years preparing this case for trial and would see it won for a shared sense of spite, which suited him just fine.
It was not as though he did not have principles, but as he had told assistant council over a weekend work-session, he was alright with personally stepping back from the more lofty questions of this particular class-actions in favour of the kinds of conundrums everyone found themselves faced with;

“Conundrums such as - can you eat that with ketchup?” he had gone on to ask Anna both in genuine curiosity and to punctuate this assessment of their odds.

For a while, at least, Anna was putting ketchup on everything from pommes to powdered donuts. Akinbode did not make anything of it at first, he had long known her to overeat under stress and nothing about her situation, he knew, was ideal.

He did not think much of it until she suddenly adapted an aversion to the condiment and developed an equally odd affinity for sauerkraut, coleslaw, side dishes in general based in cabbage. Then came the eggs.

He supposed by then that she was pregnant, and supposed she would say something to that effect but instead she began to spiral in the dichotomy modern conventions forced all women into between body positivity and the kind of self-loathing of which, Akinbode reasoned, only the fairer sex was truly capable.

Evidently, Anna and the distant Edmund had by this point ceased with Skype altogether. Anna thought he found her unattractive. Akinbode, after a brief reflection absent of any significant consideration, countered as he always did when faced with women whose ridiculous hang-ups and dilemmas he could not pretend to understand, that she was very beautiful, adding here that he was certain that Edmund felt the same way, giving the amount of petrol-station pralines he had bought her from the offset of their courtship and his widely known appreciation for works of art from Renaissance. Anna had taken offence. Akinbode was fairly certain the same would be true if he mentioned his suspicions around her having missed a period or several.

Edmund Hewlett, he decided, was a true genius despite having failed to defend his dissertation, for he, at least, had somehow gotten himself out of having these awful sorts of conversations with the same woman.

“Yeah, that is it though,” Akinbode sighed, “I can’t be perspective here, Anna, at least not in the way you want. Eddie is my friend, too. I get where you’re coming from, but I don’t want to get mixed up in what is going on between you two right now,” he stopped, adjusting his game slightly to Hewlett’s exposed playbook of throwing another bloke under the bus. “Ask Ben out for drinks and lay this on him if you need a token guy friend’s quote unquote “perspective”. He used to do a version of this for a living. Or Caleb, or Abe – far as I can tell, neither of them ever liked nor respected Eddie all that much. They will have your back in all things related, hundred pro.”

“And John?” she inquired.

“Simcoe? Provided that you can get a hold of him, fuck yeah,” he tried to encourage.

“Exactly,” she paused, returning stronger, “do you think it is a British thing? Do you think -”

“Anna, I can all but promise to the fact that you don’t want to hear what I think,” Akinbode said sharply, “but if it provides consolation insofar as we can consider this conversation concluded, I’ll lay on you what I know: I know that the first thing Hew did when he began to suspect that Simcoe had something to do with Arnold’s disappearance was to volunteer himself as prime suspect. I know that when he needed money to save that bar you so love from becoming an Applebee’s, Simcoe was up in it like ‘let’s make this insider trading scheme look legit’. I know – and they
know – that a whole host of acronymic organisations wound up benefitting from the bet they placed on those two having each other’s backs whilst driving knives into their own. I know that things went way the fuck too far for either of their consciences, what nearly sentencing Colonel Tarleton to death for what essentially – nay, literally - amounts to his supporting the wrong team, and I know that Hewlett, and Simcoe, and you and I and everyone else we fucking know were made complacent in the murder of John André because for all our fancy Ivy- Oxbridge educations are worth the best we could together come up with faced with those lofty questions of liberty and equality before the law was to put all our faith in fucking Robert Rogers – the same who had us running in circles for weeks while he held the senator hostage. I think … it could be that you husband just learnt his lesson and is laying low. Could be that he in fact hasn’t to the same effect. Same goes for Simcoe. That’s my two cents.”

Anna glanced down, possibly at the bottom lip she tended to protrude when she had something worth pondering. The doors to another courtroom opened, flooding the halls with nervous men and women in their Sunday Best, whispering amongst themselves about something Akinbode supposed he would latter hear spoken loudly about on one of the judicial pods to which he subscribed in the hopes of eventually hearing his own name. Just as quietly, Anna eventually gave, “It is the wrong lesson.”

Akinbode had barely heard her over the clicking sound of modest heels and gentleman’s shoes with too-thin soles.

“Ain’t that just the pot calling the kettle black,” he snorted, increasingly conscious of their shared set and how Anna had cast herself – and him. How he resented her for the whole of it!

“Jordan -” she started in the same heavy whine he would have been tempted to himself describe as whale song had Judge Woodhull not used the same language when Anna was in the middle of cross-examining a witness, leading Adams to object on a connotation Akinbode would not have otherwise placed. Were he to issue insult, he wanted that his complaint be specific rather than shallow.

“Anna,” he interrupted. “I mean I get you wanting to protect your mom. I do. But she is the one who should face the punishment prescribed for her crime – not you.”

Nancy Smith was being debarred for her involvement in leaking files related to an ongoing investigation to its leading suspects – her daughter and son in law along with Mary Woodhull and John Graves Simcoe.

Anna thought to save her mother’s career by volunteering her own.

The entire notion was ridiculous.

Even if Smith were to be acquitted, she would lose her post as District Attorney in November if she were to stand for re-election as such scandals were slowly forgotten in an electorate increasingly mistrusting of their public figures.

Moreover, the case Akinbode was currently in the process of litigating could be ruled as a mistrial even if he were to dismiss Anna from his team now. He did not, however, want to dismiss her, he did not want to in the slightest; she was a damned fine trial lawyer and the plans he and Ben Tallmadge had made to hold the government accountable for its support of John André’s unethical research and the subsequent fiasco to which it led very much involved keeping his college buddy and her considerable talents secured for their side.

Anna shook her head as though she had somehow heard the whole of the conversation they were
not presently having. “It was only because of me that -”

“Imma stop you right there and make a moral counter argument of my own,” Akinbode said, crossing his arms over his chest. “Your friends need you right now, need you specifically in the lawyerly capacity you seek to deny them of by taking the fall for your mother’s act of gross negligence. Your team needs, you, your town needs you, and Anna,” he inhaled, retuning in a lower decibel and frequency, “real talk, absent of what is or isn’t happening between you and Eddie and what that forebodes for your fairy tale ending as a couple, your baby is going to need you and you’d be much better positioned to provide for it working for rather than behind the bar.”

Anna’s already large eyes grew impossibly wider. “I … I’m not pregnant,” she stammered. “I just … between all of the other battles we’ve been through I stopped fighting my weight somewhere along the way and .”

“You don’t sound positive,” Akinbode observed, “Hell, you don’t even sound persuaded by your own argument. If I were you, I’d be damn sure one way or another before deciding upon anything else.”

With this Anna came to mirror the same battle stance he took. “I’m sure that I don’t want to live my mother’s dream for me. I’m sure that were I with child, that isn’t the kind of example I’d want to set for him or her,” she growled.

Akinbode wished he had not agreed to this. He wondered again if it was not in his better interest to in fact to public transportation back to Setauket, back to Abigail, Cicero and the dreams they promised of a family of his own. Back, almost ironically, to DeJong’s Tavern where this had all begun, to the flat Anna was now letting to her best friend, herself having been whisked away to the glamorous Manhattan skyrise she and Edmund had received as a wedding gift from one of the princes, which was to say, from Scottish taxpayers. Did she realise all the ways in which she had allowed her hypothetical crown to compromise her?

Akinbode knew not put her on trial for this charge prior to her giving testimony. He had already said enough. He hoped in a few minutes time she would not say too much.

There was nothing grand about it, Ben Tallmadge thought as he sat at the bar, watching the sister of a former subordinate order herself another glass of wine. White, she smiled with the Arnold boy’s eyes upon her, whispering for the benefit of her religious conservative sister to the tavern’s owner Anna Hewlett once the young man had turned his attention back to the trivia game Aberdeen and Peggy were hosting as part of the celebration, that she should cut the glass with water, drink was, after all, counter to her culture and she was unaccustomed to taking it. This way a lie, of course, albeit one, Ben supposed to himself, which Emine Yilmaz told so often in navigating the dichotomy of Turkish-American culture that it had its own truth to it. Hatice, her sister, his sergeant whose given name he had only learnt to pronounce post-mortem had conducted herself in the same fashion.

Ben wondered at all the ways the secrets he kept had morphed into their own idiosyncrasies.

He wondered if the truth was of any consequence, being that it so plainly deviated from fact with each mind it met.
There was, he supposed, something to be celebrated tonight. The police tape had been removed from the tavern door, a new sign had gone up, and people were now free to enter and order themselves wine as though it were water, rivalling in their hypocrisy without recognising it as only like company could properly enjoy. But there was something missing from the scene as a whole, something that caused the room to feel empty despite the dozens gathered around the bar trying to order, crammed together at tables with countless toasts, heckling one another around the dart boards, scribbling answers at trivia or sneaking off into the darkened corners they took upon themselves to create to take their lovers to that they might share a kiss with the illusion of privacy – in all of the familiar scenery, no one here, Ben noted, had anything to say for the past.

He was not in the practice of going out, but his experiences doing so however occasional with his former police unit or with the few friends from high school and university that he had been able to maintain though time that never seemed to exist for one another had shown him that at least after - and often before - the first round had been finished, the façade of excitement over the plans one made to escape the mundane aspects of the daily lives gave way to sharing memories of the good old days, of a time when they had each wanted to be exactly where they now were.

Woe to the vanquished; woe to the victors. Woe to the very misconception of what ‘enough’ might be.

Ben Tallmadge had in short order achieved everything he had scarcely dared to hope for over the past few months.

He had a boyfriend he was now living with to the delight of his parents and their equally old-fashioned close friends and extended flock. He had resat the New York Bar and set up a small law office where he and Jordan spent days that would otherwise have grown too long tossing notes they no longer needed into the plastic basketball hoop attached to their rubbish bin, often missing to the delighted mockery of distraction. He had a case he could bring against the US Government, Columbia University and John André’s estate - the affidavits that would have stood in the way missing though convenience, compliance or rather, the more notorious means of the children conspiring against him or the badge he had long worn.

He did not ask Cicero - who understandably still eyed him with mistrust when he occasionally visited Jordan at the office, who likely always would hold him in some contempt – for any of the details. Ben did not push the relationship with the boy (or with his mother) beyond basic plenaries which were occasionally returned, often with the kind of question his answers could only disappoint –

For all of his time as a police detective, he did not know the precise fates of those who had since left Setauket, since left New York, since left the county altogether.

He had left his string-on-a-corkboard existence in the city, in the past where it belonged and could now, like everyone else, only speculate and scan various news media for the names of those who had once been suspects.

It occurred to him that same night at Strong Tavern - with its absence of the setting-specific conversations of past glories and grave misfortunes time had made humorous in its passage - that perhaps he, too, had begun facing forward. There was no personal grievance the last serval months had not seen resolved – the men responsible for Nate’s death were now all dead or behind bars thanks to a street war he had unknowingly started when he had arrested Edmund Hewlett is association with Benedict Arnold’s abduction. The man who he had come to learn had slain his brother was also behind bars –

Which meant that the past was truly over.
Which meant that the future was infinitely more complicated than he had ever considered it might for him become.

Tallmadge could not accept that Rogers had killed André, despite his confession and the evidence that stood to support it, despite the toast he had begrudgingly raised Caleb that night on the boat when the news had broken.

Rogers, Ben challenged aloud at the time and challenged himself ever since, had left hospital knowing the plot that had been laid for him, why then he willingly walked into it suggested another?

Perhaps it a plea deal was involved.

Perhaps Rogers recognised André as the most devastating target of everyone he blamed for his hopes of the kidnapping not coming to fruition.

Perhaps he instead cherished André’s friendship or at one point had and wanted to spare him from retribution.

Perhaps he had spoken in earnest when he said he feared for the same.

Ben had since gone to see him upstate where he sat awaiting trial, asking the same questions Rogers laughing told he had already been subjected to by men whose opinions determined the truth, which, he reminded, Ben’s no longer did. To Rogers suggestion that in federal prison he would be freer than he ever again might be on the outside, Ben -again falling into the role of DCI Tallmadge- had countered that the Hewletts seemed to have a lot of associates who wound up behind bars, to which the Scot only laughed. ‘This isn’t state,’ he had said. ‘Ah held a senatur hostage, Ah killed yer bonnie loon psychologist in braw bluid. Pure, Ah gae them aw whit they wanted; it is whit they make ay it noo ’at shoods be keepin’ ye up at nicht.’

To an extent, it did, but not for reasons of fear. Ben Tallmadge again looked around the tavern, at the people who could again focus on their futures and knew himself to be stepping into his own. He owed them justice for the crimes that had been committed against them-

- for mere closure did not compare to all that had been lost.

But hope? Hope just might.

“Still nursing that beer, Benny-boy or you needing another?” Caleb called to him from behind the bar, catching him in a chaste kiss when he turned to answer.

“Is it weird to you that Anna doesn’t have Guinness on tap?” Ben asked when their lips parted.

“Is that what has been buggin’ ya?” Caleb frowned, reaching for Ben’s glass and topping it off.

“Only in that it is the only aspect of this evening that feels reminiscent … of anything, really.”

Caleb knitted his brow, “I think Guinness both as beer and as a brand borders nostalgia for a past no one remembers nor bothers to study, I mean we have bottles if you want one -”

“Nah, I’m good,” Ben shrugged.

“Are ya?”

“I think so, yeah,” he answered. He smiled and knew in the way that Caleb returned the expression
that all truly was right with the world in this moment, that he was now better positioned to right the wrongs of the past than he ever had been in his own.

That is what it was.

Recognising as much did not lend itself to any elevation in esteem, but it certainly made the little man seem less threatening.

He had not phoned him when he arrived in London six weeks prior and meeting him this afternoon was pure happenstance. Simcoe had been walking past parliament, past the assorted groups of pro-Europe protesters, lost in their signs and chants, reminiscing over all that he had left behind in America, his friends who had shut the streets down when he had been arrested for a foul that barely warranted a card when taken in the wider circumstance. He wondered -as he had since his arrival- if it had been right to leave when it felt so wrong in London as Effie had promised him it would; he had felt a further tug of familiarity in Tarleton’s erratic call and had let it stop him where he would otherwise be glad to ignore it as he had the man himself and every other element of his former life in Britain since his return.

To say he was presently happy for the minister’s company would have been exaggeratory, but it was a welcome alteration to the emptiness with which he had been met thus far in his attempts to start his life anew. Simcoe was running out of money, and, torn between putting his mother’s flat on the market and being forced to speak with the ogre pretending to be his brother over how the profits from this inheritance were to be split and making his way up to the other capitol to ask Hewlett to return a favour, it felt better to simply complain than arrive at a solution. For this, ‘Sir’ Banastre was proving himself the perfect sparring partner, which came as little surprise giving the man’s new distinction; the masses made to live with the decisions of men who called their mistakes ‘representative democracy’ were, despite their size and the sounds of their cries, nowhere near as adapt at complaint as the standard politician’s reaction to everything that extended the scope of their responsibilities - which was to say, anything belonging to the so-said ‘real world’ to which they could scarcely relate.

“I had interviews lined up,” Simcoe told him as the two walked together, presumably to the Chinese restaurant Tarleton had once mentioned in passing and Simcoe thought to ask after in hopes of asking Hewlett to be of help. “Now I don’t.”

“Oi, lucky you …. I can’t be much help beyond that, never had to sit though one me’self. Seems awful though, the whole – ‘what is your greatest professional accomplishment to date and where do you see yourself in five years?’ - kind of thing,” he mimicked, dropping his Scouse for something verging on discernible for the vague impression he offered from a conversation he self-admittedly never had. “It is just whimsy; it has nothing to do with the practical realities of supply and logistics which is what most work.”

“You’ve never been on an interview and you’ve never worked a bloody day in your life,” Simcoe
interrupted, scolding, “don’t attempt to converse beyond your comprehension.”

“The sheer audacity of your suggestion and the situation that led to my current status,” Tarleton rebuffed him. His tone suggested nonchalance, but his expression spoke to anger and offence. Simcoe realised with an admitted discomfort that he could not distinguish which was the act.

“You mean Leicester winning the league against all odds and that almost egalitarian bet you place each year landing you with funds to launch a failed campaign for local office?” he smiled, trying to lighten the sudden mood he had invited, instantly sharing the embarrassment in that it occurred him to talk about the league with someone who had ultimately snatched a defeat from glory. Banastre Tarleton had used the millions he had won form that bet to put his name on the ballot to fill a casual vacancy on Liverpool’s City Council, only to be narrowly defeated by his own brother who decided in the last moments that he could not consciously do nothing and thereby allow Banastre to do much to weaken the city’s standing and prestige. To add injury to insult, the election coverage had alerted creditors to the former colonel’s physical and mailing address and debt had taken what little remained from a failed campaign. Now, as the result of a by-election and his successful candidacy therein, Ban was again in the position of owing money to his siblings, who had supported his parliamentary campaign with the hopes of disabusing him of his ambitions towards local government.

“Nah,” Tarleton sighed, continuing as though such were an imposition, “I mean the fact that I managed to secure myself an OBE for my role in that whole American mess you got me into. I mean … the honour doesn’t really compare to the solid ‘thank you’ I feel I deserve for repeatedly saving your ass in every conceivable theatre -” he complained.

Simcoe rolled his eyes. “Yes, thank you, Ban -”

“‘Sir Banastre’, to you -” the minister corrected.

“Thank you,” Simcoe continued mockingly, “that your consistently awful taste in football and inability to conduct yourself accordingly in a delicate international situation gave Inspector Tallmadge cause to want to question you whilst I was otherwise too preoccupied trying to save everyone who might yet stand to be saved from their worst inclinations to be the chief suspect in a missing person’s inquiry.”

Tarleton seemed to ponder this version of events for a moment.

“You know why they gave me this, don’t you?”

“I know your answer is ‘for making fun of Liverpool Football Club’, ” Simcoe informed him blandly, “same as I know that a closer approximation of the truth is that ‘such is seen as something of a stain in your beloved city and the national government has grounds to want to see Clayton’s expansionist ambitions kept in check by any suggestion of aristocracy’ – but what do they call that? Six of one, half a dozen of the other?”

Tarleton met his gaze with one that confessed his own altogether absent understanding of irony. Without a hint of humour he began under his breath, “I spent about ninety hours in total arguing your and Edmund Hewlett’s innocence with regard to insider trading, Arnold’s abduction, the crisis in Mali, I mean - you fucking name it before various boards of industry experts and police commissioners in The Hauge.”

Simcoe moved to increase the volume on his hearing aid, which Tarleton, perhaps misreading the action for a gesture, took as a bidding for him to speak louder than need be. Upon repeating a sentence Simcoe was now fully certain he had not misheard, he continued with the same volume
and imitative animation, “I had to stand there as though I were the one on trial before people like Fouché and Talleyrand and shit and be like ‘Oi, that is pretty legit criticism of that tackel, pity that courts don’t allow mobiles otherwise I could show you on YouTube,’ and there were always like, ten, twelve people each individually more intelligent and far more corrupt that either you or your better half, mind - just looking at me deadpan going through each line item in your little WhatsApp.”

“Shh!” Simcoe warned him, grabbing the smaller man by the shoulders, concerned for his continued safety, concern for the prospect of securing his own. They were still close enough to the financial district that one did not want to be seen with a public figure screaming about insider trading on the pavement, even if disguised in the language of football. Simcoe swallowed, understanding how poor his and Hewlett’s plan had been and had a mind to apologise to Tarleton for his having stood trial for yet another crime which he had no part in committing but was forced by some understanding of proximity to cover. Simcoe released him as briskly has he had brought him into his grasp in the first place.

He did not seek out company, because he struggled to believe that he deserved the friendships on offer to him, certain that he would cause further hurt to those who least deserved it from his hands.

After the wedding, his communication in New York had been kept to a minimum. He had his solicitor draw up a lease for the lovely Mary Woodhull to live in what had been his flat while she figured out the specifics of her divorce settlement, he had not been present at the signing. He had made plans for drinks with Anna and Akinbode, but these were cancelled from all sides. He bid farewell to the team he captained in a text and the one he had temporarily coached in a series of the children’s attempts at selfies, fearing his further influence would drive them as far into themselves as he had crawled to hide.

He could not have Mary Woodhull.

He certainly could not help her either.

As London thus far had proven, he could not even help himself.

When the jolt had gone its way through him, Tarleton raised his gaze from Simcoe’s eyes to the heaven above them, presumably searching for the train of thought that he had lost in the short shuffle. “And basically, yeah,” he continued as though this were a question for him as well, “I convinced all of Europe of … the legitimacy of the Prem. And the amazing thing is because of all the sports exes they brought in validity on show that what I said about what you meant …ahm was legit, it kind of became a self-fulfilling prophecy because low and behold everyone wants to play here now and not Spain or Italy or Paris or Bayern - which aren’t really France or Germany, not when it comes to footy -”

“Fairly sure Talleyrand is willing to do business with any club able to pay his fees and none of the lies you told about the texts Oyster and I sent one another convinced any Russian or Arab oligarch who was not already in the market of reputation-laundering to buy out an English club side … how,” he paused in thought, “how did you even get your eyes on my correspondence in the first place?”

“Yea … my being football expert, ‘innit?” Tarleton smiled over a secret he for once clearly meant to keep, adding as an aside to an argument Simcoe could well imagine him having with practically everyone though he had not himself taken part, “As recent events indisputably show!”

At this Simcoe frowned, wondering if the man who claimed to be his friend had a certain grasp on reality, if this failure played into his inability to leave anyone or anything alone, if their history in
its entirety could be explained by Tarleton’s penance for projecting his own self-image unto others, if he ought not to simply leave him to it and take his leave. He had not contacted anyone since his return, he now understood the external reason though he failed to fully understand himself.

“And you came back to Britain and weren’t arrested, and Eddie is now free to leave the country again whenever he bloody well wants.” Tarleton continued flippantly.

“He’s what?” Simcoe stopped.

“Right?” Tarleton laughed without challenging himself with the significance, “And all I have for it is a ‘Sir’ before my name as a thank you for saving the nation from another embarrassment, but that doesn’t help me for shit because I’m still broke in London, living on my ex’s couch, without even your thanks, not to mention the nation’s at large, not to mention -”

“I really had no idea,” Simcoe murmured. He felt his fingers tapping against his thighs and quickly pulled them into fists, first in a want to quiet his unease, tightening them still when the phantasy of pulling a punch began to mould into a perverse excitement.

He had been playing with the idea of going up to Scotland, but this news made such a matter of duty rather than an act of shame.

He had threatened Hewlett not to break Anna’s heart and for all of the acts of love that had once seemed to bind them, he had left her the instant his relationship had achieved all that which Simcoe was forced to reckon it had been set up to. He had heard in passing that Edmund could not return and believed the rumours because they fit the image he had of the man, an image he had been too distracted to notice had been carefully crafted to his sympathies -

The worst of it was, that Anna had believed in this man, too. Though he harboured no romantic feelings or inclinations towards the barmaid of the sort that had kept him company those long nights before he truly knew what it was to be lonely for someone, he considered it his chivalric duty to defend her name in kind. His fingernails scratched against his palms, reminding him of an old ache from the night of the wedding when he had inadvertently drawn his own blood during his interrogation in attempting to keep a cover on the limits of his nerves.

Doubt again set it –

Had he not done the same to Mary?

No. He decided. Mary did not want him. Mary had told him to leave.

“That was kind of the point,” Tarleton smiled, clearly satisfied with some secret he had almost managed to keep, the details of which no longer held Simcoe’s interest now that he felt the implications of the outcome.

“Thank you, Ban,” he said, trying his best to mean it, half wishing Tarleton and whomever he had been working with had instead let justice play out, had left him behind bars rather than in the prison of his own mind which felt, in this moment, far more restrictive.

“Now, was that so hard?” Tarleton chided.

“Devastatingly,” Simcoe admitted, forcing a smile of his own to make the remark seem ironic.

“Then we will call it even.”

“So, you and Mrs. Robinson. Are you still -”
“Hitting that?” the minister laughed as he fell into a lewd gesture. “I mean, it is kind of just muscle memory at this point, ‘innit? – ‘Oh Ban!’” he imitated with surprising accuracy and articulation, “‘Oh thank God! I never thought I would be this happy to see you!’” he pulled Simcoe into a demonstrative and altogether too-dramatic embrace, Simcoe to slow in pushing him away in disgusted protest allowing Tarleton to place a kiss on his cheek.

“You see?” he laughed as he shook off the sting. “Muscle memory, what most long-term relationships can be summed up to - way it has always been between us, ay lad?” he asked, hitting him back with the same sense of jest.

“You are vile.”

“I’ll take it,” Tarleton nodded, “if only because I appreciate the heightened language of the insult, at least it isn’t the kind of hyperbole too commonplace in politics.”

“So where is this Chinese place you are taking me to?” Simcoe shifted, now fully certain of his want to leave London extending past economic necessity.

“Oi, you actually hungry?” Tarleton blinked.

“I told you,” Simcoe said sharply, “I want to get to Edinburgh.”

“Yea, I’m going to Edinburgh,” Tarleton followed as though he had only just remembered himself. “Pick up my kid from school, drive back to the flat so she can say goodbye to her mum and get her suitcase and then we’ll be off. I could probably eat though beforehand,” he considered. “I don’t know if I’m really feeling Chinese though, how do you feel about perogies?”

“Don’t have a strong opinion either way,” Simcoe squinted, marvelling at the sheer disconnect in conversation and concern. “But Ban – there is no way I’m riding with you and Marie up to Scotland,” he said, adding out of a want to recognise the hospitality he supposed he was being shown, “I couldn’t impose. Just tell me where I can get a buss on the cheap and -”

“I’ll hear none of it,” Tarleton dismissed. “Anyway, she wants to meet you because that schoolmate of hers who I asked you to play a little five-a-side with has been singing your praises.”

“Really?” Simcoe asked, found completely off guard by the sentiment.

“He referred to you as ‘adequate’ once in my presence, which is equivalent to what I just said giving the source. Kid’s these days, ay?”

John felt his heart ache for the team he left. None of them took the announcement especially well, and some were taking the separation worse. Thea had cried. Cicero had called him a coward, something he repeated every now and again in between his complaints that John Wakefield who had taken over with him gone and Anna up in Albany just was not up to task in the weekly voice-recordings which Simcoe had since stopped listening to. Perhaps he should. Perhaps he should write the boy back as well. Perhaps he should play another pick-up game with Marie and her classmates in this bout of undeserved nostalgia.

“Dinner is on me then,” he consented, paused. “We’ll make plans to meet up, though? Understand, and give my apologies to Mary, but I don’t want to go back into that building and be reminded of another life I’ve forsaken.”

“Effie isn’t there,” Tarleton shrugged.

“She moved?” Simcoe asked, swallowing his shock.
“No, she and Mary Anne are ‘house-sitting’ for a few weeks while your godparents are on a cruise.”

The thought of this caused him to smile as he mused aloud, “Nothing at home changed but there is no place left for me here at all.”

“I mean,” Tarleton squinted, taking a long inhale though clenched teeth, “there is … look, it is not really my place, but I kind of assumed that was why you had to get to Edinburgh so bad.”

“I don’t follow,” Simcoe confessed.

“You have a job. You just have to work under the Hewlett banner,” Tarleton shrugged. “That is why no one in London wants to hire you, fear of repercussions. I thought you knew that. The whole bloody City does. Ah, here we are then,” he said, stopping abruptly, reaching into the front pocket of his tailored trousers for his mobile, “can you do me a favour and here, text my daughter – just tell her that we are waiting on the corner, where I won’t embarrass her by proximity.”

“This is the same child who trended higher than the Royal Wedding itself by running away in reaction to your alleged death?” Simcoe asked sceptically as he fumbled with the Blackberry, trying to remember what it was to type on a phone with push keys, pitting the former colonel his injury and what he had never truly considered this lasting wound entailed for the man’s compatibility with modern electronics.

“I know,” Tarleton sighed with a smile that Simcoe was tempted to describe as proud, “they grow up so fast.”

“That was three months ago,” Simcoe responded flatly.

“Wait till you have teenagers,” Tarleton shook his head, shifted as he took a step to turn the corner. “You know what, fuck it, it is the last day in term. My car is parked in that direction anyway. Let’s make a show of it – Marie!” he cried out, “Ready to go, kiddo?”

Some twenty children in school uniforms in various states of disarray glanced in their direction, roughly a quarter of whom were female. Simcoe guessed that Marie was the one who immediately began hugging everyone in her immediate vicinity before she left to embrace the summer holiday.

Suddenly, it seemed she changed her mind, dropping her school bag and returning to conversing as though the entire theatre girls made out of goodbye had merely been a dress rehearsal. Simcoe read her lips. “No, we’re not really going on a Disney cruise like my dad promised,” he relayed for Tarleton’s benefit. “We’re taking the ferry to Dublin next Tuesday, but Georgie is too young to know the difference and she’ll just be excited to wear her fancy dress again – You are a great father,” he commented on the exchange, rolling his eyes.

“She looks excited,” the minister seemed to object.

“She’s making plans to meet up with Atty and someone named Kitty at something is sounds like Francis – our Francis - has going on.”

“On his bloody yacht, yea,” Tarleton scoffed. “The engagement party … the other Wellesley mentioned to me in passing this morning that he would also be in attendance. Wonder if the younger brother plans to use their non-existent likeness to get past the fucking gate.”

“Apparently his girlfriend is going to be there, which is why everyone is now heckling him,” Simcoe cringed, hoping to have landed on something to distract from a conversation neither he nor presumably Tarleton particularly wanted to have regarding the glasses that would soon be lifted to
Francis Lord Rawdon and HRH Eleanor of Richmond and the mugs that would be mass-produced with their likenesses.

“They look in good cheer,” Tarleton sighed to himself. “O’rite. Enough of that. Marie!” he cried out again. “We have to get a move on unless you want to be stuck in London traffic for three hours where all of your friends could feasibly see you kickin’ it in a midsized sedan my nineties playlist blasting with the windows down because my mate here is half deaf. Come say hello to Mr Simcoe!”

“Fine!” the girl shouted back. “Oh my God! Just give me a sec!”

Arthur Wellesley, the only child, Simcoe noted, who had not bothered to glance at the minister when he loudly announced his presence, turned at his choice description of him personally and offered something approaching acknowledgment. Simcoe smiled back and raised his hand to wave when he saw that the lad had lifted his phone to take a picture, something Simcoe in short order deduced was intended to be posted in a chat group by the cold glance gave him before return his full attention to the device and typing ferociously.

“I told you he was a little shite,” Tarleton commented before turning his focus to his eldest, who – not a block away from the opinions of everyone who influenced her - returned to being the kind of child who could laugh at the highly censored jokes fathers told to challenge growing vocabularies, those which adults sneered at as cheap puns.

Simcoe walked a few paces behind the two, finding some small measure of satisfaction in the understanding they equally shared between them, for a moment nearly forgetting that he was so far removed from those who were coming to build his ideas of family until he spotted his taxi - legally parked in a fire lane with a licence plate indicating it as belonging to someone who got to casually make life and death decisions as it suited their sense of convenience –

But the location and subsequent implication was not what caused him to stop dead in his tracks.

Simcoe would know the car anywhere.

He once threw the lifeless body of an American senator into its back seat.

In that moment, he knew that he had to get back to whatever was still salvageable of what he left behind.

Chapter End Notes

I had ought to level with you guys, I find conflict without causation and [romantic] relationships studied in isolation so uninteresting to read, write, … mentally engage with in any active fashion that concluding this narrative on those terms feels for me the kind of tax worth raising arms over. That said, if you are like presumably most
users of this site and are anxious for an ending that simultaneously works as a thesis statement on True Love™, we are going to do that in the next two chapters. Don’t worry.

If, however, you read the Rogers scene with the Scot’s sense of nervous urgency around perceived mechaions in Europe and are anxious to find out what Fouché, Talleyrand, Robespierre, and co. are actually making of the mess they kind of shoved Hewlett and by relation many others into way back with Aberdeen’s sloppy translation of a telephone conversation that never actually took place (or, alternatively, if you are curious what years of Rogers’ makeshift prison has done to André, or if you didn’t understand the dialogue at all and are looking for some clarification …) I am readying post the first chapter of *Hide and Sequel* within the next few days, and I hope you will be around for the Champions League extension of this Sunday-side season. (Chapter One doesn’t spoil anything of what happens to our main characters of Simcoe, Mary, Hewlett and Anna a few years on, so you are safe on that front. They will be back in starring roles, of course, but are due their happy endings before everything gets upended, or?) Anyway, look forward to that in the feed. Tja. No actual notes this time, everything that might warrant one was already covered in a previous chapter. I guess that is just what happens when a 700k word story finally wraps things up. Maybe next time, lovely faces. Maybe next time.

… which reminds me-

Up Next: Simcoe v Hewlett (“v” immer)
The Stiff

Chapter Summary

Mary and Aberdeen contend with their darkest selves before making choices about those they love. Peggy attempts to find herself within the scope of a painful decision. Simcoe's inner feud with Hewlett intensifies in tandem with the urgency of a development across the pond. Cicero exploits old alliances and other people's tortured romances to assert his will, namely in getting his coach to come back to the team.

Chapter Notes

Anyone else sick of watching footballers playing keep-up with a roll of toilet paper? Here is something … else to waste your eyes on during the quarantine. Have fun, I guess.

…Oh, um – if you are a month behind in your various AO3 updates because you were standing on line for the aforementioned toilet paper at your local grocer, I ought to warn that this chapter is Not Safe For Ramadan (though I struggle to imagine anyone particularly devout would have made it this far.) Still, sorry about that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Mary Woodhull read the letter five times before the question of if she had ought to contact its intended recipient became one of the more general, more damning ‘if’, the ‘if only’ that ignored circumstance in the presence of hindsight thereby threatening future prospects with past failings.

By this time next week, she realised as her eyes drifted around Whitehall’s legal library, she would be living in the city, alone but for her disabled son, the occasional assistance of Aberdeen, and the muffled sounds on a new upstairs neighbour who - by the way the letter had been addressed - might soon be facing sentencing for the only crime she had not knowingly committed. Part of Mary - a part larger than she wanted to recon with even as the fleeting thought crossed her mind - would be happy to be fully and finally rid of Anna Hewlett, who herself had done her no ill beyond coming to embrace her own bad fortune – a fortune Mary had personally live through to the worst possible consequence of a loveless marriage and stagnant career, a fortune, however, which she would have been happy to be able to throw herself into again were only the opportunity still present -

Mary Woodhull had again been with the child of a man to whom she bore no ties.

She had not known until she lost it, and with it in turn every concept she had of gain and growth these last few months had lent themselves to.

She reached into the pocket of her too-tight jeans for a lighter, letting it flicker in the dimly lit room with the urge to burn though funds she presently did not have in the form of nicotine, the
French cigarettes to which she had of recent been given to retreat when confronted with any recollection or reminder of whom she had been and again become. In a sense as tangible as it felt metaphoric, she was returned to where she had been as an undergraduate – student debt, a one-night stand, inner isolation and now, above all, a want to fall back into the same temptations of entrapment that had shown Abe and herself so many unhappy years.

But John was gone. Gone from her, gone from here, gone to where he had once belonged, gone to where Mary wished he would again find himself in all the same ways in which she was now lost. At no point had she attempted to reach out after farewell and remained grateful that incentive had been lost to her in the havoc left to her life, a life she could not expect that John would have truly wanted any part in had she opened it to him as she once had her heart.

Mary sat in Whitehall’s legal library, studying the books that lay open on the desk without committing her eyes to them, questioning why it had never once occurred to her to make use of this resource as it had to Aberdeen, Peggy, and every other driven women with whom she had dwelled. She wondered if she were truly ready for law school or if instead she had been right to give up her dreams in exchange for an easy paycheque years before and if she would ever again be quite as good at anything as she had been at the position at UNICEF which she had recently left.

Perhaps, she considered, she never entered Richard’s library in the entire course of her residence because she feared the reminder it lent of the life she was not leading.

Perhaps she would find no place in the wider world again.

Perhaps there was, in truth, no place within it for someone like her who could always find a way to benefit from misfortune but could who barely bring herself to help others from of their own.

She knew she should pour through the books at hand and find a solution to Anna’s legal conundrum prior to announcing the problem to which she had accidently made herself aware, opening the envelope without paying attention to the addressee, certain as she was that it - like everything else in her mailbox of late – was another doctor’s bill she would have to delay payment on until the house she owned on the other side of town was sold at well below market value given the infamy of its last true resident and the circumstances that had come to keep him there.

But she also knew herself well enough to have limited expectations on her own good will.

She should ring Anna, at least, and let her know of the troubles with which she would soon be faced, but should she do so, Mary feared she would only be announcing how very resentful she was of the struggles her friend faced - a reality of which Anna was already more than aware, which she was perhaps rightly losing patience for. Anna was pregnant. Mary was not. It had been more than a week since the two had enjoyed anything more than a passing exchange that could not have ended quickly enough for either of their enjoyments. Were Anna not friends with the women with whom Mary once might have been able to call hers as well, were these women not at present still relying on her for housing, she doubted that the countess-in-name would have still reason to come to call.

Which was a shame.

Mary missed Anna almost as much as she envied her.

All the same, as it felt had always been the way between them, since Anna’s return form Albany Mary had been able to do little more than frown where others fawned. The well wishes she had initially attempted came from an empty spring. Even prior to knowing how closely their conditions might well have been, Mary had been made to surrender her identity as a mother by circumstances
she had done nothing to create and over which she could hope to execute no control. The blood she
had awoken to a week before of that which would never be deepened in its shade as confusion
turned to consciousness. She had a child a room away for whose needs she alone was not enough.
She could no longer afford her au pair and could no longer count on all of the other luxuries to
which her married name had entitled her. She was in no position to bring another child into a world
she knew to be so cruel, and yet, at once she felt as though all that had been left of her had died
alone with the baby she would never hold.

Mary Woodhull had gotten herself up, changed her sheets, and said nothing of the matter until well
after she had had her fill at the reopening of the local tavern where everything had begun and might
well have ended. She sat with her friends and felt all the more isolated for it – Abigail having
realised the happy ending she had written for Jordan and herself; Peggy and Aberdeen hiding their
growing mutual curiosity behind partisan bickering; Ben investing too much of his attention in
what he called the ‘present moment’ and what everyone else saw as a bottle of Guinness, peeling at
its label in a way that signified that he was, at least subconsciously, caught up in his immediate
future of yet another intimate moment with his boyfriend; Rob and Abe heckling Caleb on such
grounds in between rounds of darts in which the score had been forgotten if it had ever been
recorded; and everyone, positively everyone commenting on the enthral glow of the woman of the
hour. Everyone except Mary, who saw in Anna once again everything she herself was not. If Mary
had been fully sober since the episode that had robbed the countess of some of her spotlight, it had
not been for long.

Lady Anna positively shined in pregnancy, she never seemed to suffer nausea and the symptoms
that presented themselves most prominently subsequently granted her an identity that had
otherwise largely been lost in her by the virtue of marriage. Anna was not merely carrying the to-
be-twenty-seventh-in-line to the English Throne (second-in-line to the unactualized Scottish one
that existed, as far as Mary could tell, mostly on Reddit) – for she was at the same time and for the
same reason a feminist icon, the symbol and spokeswoman of body positivity simply by virtue of
being a reasonably attractive woman who happened to be a bit heavier than whatever recent
statistic or media standard defined as ideal.

Mary, in contrast, often found herself returning to the night of Arnold’s abscondence, to the
reflection she saw in the toilets of what had then been known as DeJong’s Tavern, preoccupied
with the phantasy that all of her cracks could be covered by cosmetics. The circles under her eyes
had since grown too dark and deep for anything at the MAC counter, her skin itself had grown
placid under all of the tears she had shed and her hair was going grey and seemed thinner besides
under the weight of its own oil, Mary having struggled to shower with the cast and having lost the
care to consume herself with upkeep since having it -and all of its reminders of love and support –
removed.

Stress baking had turned to stress eating and her hips were the worse for it, the skin on her
stomach, stretched from when she had been pregnant with Thomas, still sagged despite the few
pounds that had slowly crept on underneath. Anna, she could not help to think bitterly where she
had once smirked, was so fortunate to have always been given to plumpness. She would have a
perfect child in some months and her figure would remain round as it was wont to, protecting her
from the scars of having had shared her body with a man and all the came with it. She would be
able to take a new lover (provided she had not already) without feeling self-conscious about her
naked form. She was beautiful in ways Mary knew that she herself never again would be if she had
even in fact approached them – Anna was smart, secure, she had a law degree she had twice
happily thrown away. Mary had had every possibility to pursue one but neither the confidence nor
drive to have sat with any of the books she might have opened.

But above all, Anna was pregnant, which meant that there was a chance - however slim - that
Edmund would return to face his responsibility to his family rather than the ones he was presumably off fulfilling to his late father’s allies and enemies and Mary resented her this fortune of phantasy more than anything for which she could cite evidence in her complaint, for she had once shared the same fate, entrapped a man in the same manner.

Not, she noted in distress, that Anna seemed to need one even half as much as Mary coveted the same.

Mary had covered a crime and started a war and in doing so had damned someone else to something she had never cherished enough to know how to miss. John was gone. Abe was more present than he had ever before been, but his presence further reminded her of the emotional emptiness she had not so long ago almost been able to forget, first in her illusions of marriage, then in the reality of a fake affair that had sparked true love, however short lived.

Mary reached into her purse for another cigarette, stood and walked to the cabinet, intending to use one of Richard’s tumblers as an ash tray and the other to pour herself a stiff drink. She studied the dark liquor in the glass flask with its ornate design indicating that whatever it housed was expensive, at least in comparison to the raki she had awoken with as she had every day this past week, having noticed in the glasses of some of the foreign elements the failed attempt on Ben’s life and the sorrow and solidarity that followed had brought into Setauket that, mixed with water, the Turkish liquor looked like powdered aspirin and smelt like store-brand mouthwash as it lingered. She considered that it might not be the best cover - as she kept the bottle ill-hidden in the refrigerator behind various sized containers of leftovers that no one had any great intention to either eat or throw out and the high-calorie protein shakes which Peggy had dedicated herself to since the wedding had evidently left her to question her pronouns - but Mary could hardly bring herself to care and no one she presently lived with seemed to trust themselves enough to call her on it.

That, or they saw how much she was suffering and let her self-medicate as she saw fit.

That, or they had as little love for her as Mary had come to show for them.

Eager to further escape all that she was and all that she knew she would never become, she filled the accompanying cup to its brim with Richard’s forty-proof and took as sip without bothering to taste it, shuttering as it passed her throat, causing her insides to condense in reaction to the swift, sudden dryness in liquid form. Having finished the one she had pressed between her chapped lips, she lit another cigarette as she let the shutter settle, inhaled deeply and wondered in the smoke rings she blew into the air if she would ever again know fulfilment -

She had done everything right as a mother and could not spare her only son the wrongs of the world in which they lived.

She had done everything one could as a wife to a disinterested man without bothering herself with understanding until she filed for divorce.

She had used women she admired and had come to love and now hid herself from them with the secrets she kept.

Mary Woodhull was a complete mess. Somehow, she felt as though she deserved the hell she lived. No, she knew as much was true.

Her soul was rotten, her body fruitless.

Mary stared into her cup, into the reflection she saw in a midday sin at her widened pores, placid
skin, and grey-streaked which hair she had not bother to style since Thomas first came down with a fever she feared would define the rest of her life and - more significantly - all of his.

She began to weep once more for the life she had lost, crying harder when she considered all that she might instead force herself to do to make things easier on Anna who would soon enough be living some form of it. Mary cried for her son, for the sibling who had barely been, for her failed marriage, for her abrupt affair, for her inability to be a friend. She cried until her eyes had grown as dry as her throat.

Mary took another sip of the glass she had poured, hoping to leave her life in its taste for a moment that would end with a swallow.

Instead, the door opened, and she choked on the responsibility with which she again found herself faced. Seeing the boy, she straightened and fought between pulling her lips into a smile and opening them in protest.

“It is cool, Ms Mary,” Cicero shrugged as she fought to collect herself. “I know what adults do behind closed doors. You ain’t got worry about putting that out or nothin’ … I just came, I just got -”

“Cicero,” Mary rose, feeling her maternal instinct take over upon hearing the relaxed speech her friend’s son had adapted at some point between being made victim to police violence and prejudice and keeping Thomas safe as the both awoke to hear Aberdeen cries whilst being attacked a storey below. He and his mother had moved themselves, but not their things, from Whitehall weeks prior. Now as their living situation had become more certain, the two had returned with Jordan and half the Johns from Bye-Week to empty the garage of their belongings before Mary left as well at the month’s end and Whitehall went was turned over to a realtor. Abigail had been insistent that her son not be allowed near the place where he had found Aberdeen rendered unconscious, where Arnold’s blood still stained the cold cement floors, and had given him over to the care of his godmother for the afternoon, who, Mary was forced to reason to her own great shame, might have done more to protect him from her.

“Here,” she scrambled, “help me open the window. I’m so sorry, you can’t be here with all of this smoke, it’s bad for your lungs -”

“Yours too,” the boy shrugged as he moved to do her bidding.

“What … what do you need?” Mary stammered, ashamed to be found in this state by a child, ashamed at the Cicero’s lack of surprise seeing her as such. Mary’s entire body ached in his unphased expression. She wondered how much of all that she lacked Thomas had likewise picked up on, if her son’s crippling screams might be directed at her as opposed to a general frustration he would not have been able to voice even if he still possessed the cognitive abilities to speak in multisyllabic words and string together simple sentences without a world of struggle.

No, Mary tried to dismiss. As bad as things were, she kept her composure in front of her son. She only indulged in her grief and jealousy and the physical manifestations of such when Aberdeen was with him for the four hours a day Mary could still pay her to babysit.

“I just … there is something I have to show you and it might be best if you was sitting down,” Cicero again misspoke in a way that suggested conscious intent. He went to one of the best prep-schools in the city with the sons and daughters of New York’s elites; his mother was a writer who cringed at the use of colloquialisms in general and mis-conjugated common verbs in specific – she had told Mary that she thought this might be her son’s way of punishing her, at least subconsciously, for not being able to protect him when he had needed her most. Mary was of the
mind that everyone was in the process of reinventing themselves in some way since the Arnold Investigation had left its watershed on their lives; Cicero, at least, was at an age where this was to be expected absent of gunpowder, treason and plot – which did not help her guilt in hearing Abigail’s alternate assessment that he would have never been subjected to the factors that were seeming to form him had, by Mary’s own reasoning, she not gotten behind the wheel of a borrowed vehicle under the combined influence of wine and Xanax which she had also self-prescribed and the words of Jane Austen reminding her how far she was from the heroines of her youth – perhaps, in a sense, she had robbed Cicero of his altogether.

Mary swallowed. “Should we maybe go -” she gestured towards the door to the parlour he had slammed shut upon entering.

“Nah,” Cicero was quick to hold up his hands in protest, “you don’t want anything to do with what is going down out there at the moment. I blinked for a second and Miss Peggy and Miss Aberdeen went from arguing about the proper conjugations of French verbs to have made their way into the English language to fuckin – freaking,” he tried to correct.

“No better,” Mary mouthed.

“To … ‘my great surprise and astonishment’” the boy again rephrased with a nod at sarcasm before returning to his narrative, “kissing on the kitchen table like there ain’t no one else trying to get a drink up in here,” he said with wide eyes. “Nasty.”

“Oh finally,” Mary sighed. “At least that is sorted, then. Is … is that what you wanted to show me?”

“ Heck no! Not that I have anything against it … but like, not where we eat and … finally?” he repeated, suddenly lost for words of his own.

“Cicero,” Mary tried to explain as gently as she could manage, “you did not blink ‘for a second’, you blinked for about six months by my count. John Byrd’s been taking bets down at the pub since it reopened and if I recall correctly … I think I now owe both Uncle Lewis and John Easton ten dollars I don’t exactly have, so maybe keep this to yourself until the twenty-third when I can cash in?” she smiled, trying to coax him into doing so as well. He was so young and so plainly unaware of his innocence. He would be fine, Mary told herself. The world still held surprises for him after all.

Instead of laughing, however, Cicero only shook his head. “All I have to say on this -or any matter - is that adults are uniformly awful.”

Or any matter, Mary repeated in her mind. Eyeing her unfinished drink, she reasoned that this was going to be another conversation about John or Coach Simcoe as Cicero knew him. He had been taking his extended absence worse than anyone else and lately, Mary felt, he had been taking it out on her.

“We are not,” she said, wishing she could come up with a better counter, wishing that Cicero could be, just for a moment, mature enough to understand that his beloved trainer had in her nothing worth returning to. “Not really. We are all just bored.”

“Yeah … I don’t think it’s just that,” Cicero frowned. “But I’m like …I’m not here to throw stones or nothin’, I just, Arthur sent me somethin’ from his school in London that I think you will want to see, and I’d just texted you and I can right if you want to finish your drink that Imma pretend is soda so you don’t have to feel worse about whatever it is that you are working through,” he began to ramble, “but I didn’t have your number and -”
“Cicero,” Mary blinked, shaking her head as she struggled to follow, “what is it? Who is Arthur?”

“Arthur is that kid who brought a gun to the wedding reception that Miss Peggy used to shoot Robert Rogers before she went insane and started pulling her hair out and pointing it at everyone else, anyway, they didn’t charge him like he was afraid they were gon do and now he is back in London and he just sent me this,” he said, holding up a blurry image on his mobile.

It was too much. “Why are you in contact with someone who would bring a firearm to a family event?”

“Why are you off at the bar placing bets on the personal lives of people you pretend to be friends with?” Cicero acussed, mimicking, “Just boredom, I don’t know – fill in whatever blank you got, that kid saved us all - same as Peggy did - and from where I sit you in no position to judge.”

“Okay,” Mary consented to the criticism, “okay … you are right. I know you are right. What did this Arthur tell you, then?”

>>Found him.<< Mary read as Cicero continued to speak as he pushed play on the thirty-two seconds of tape. “He is really good at finding people,” the boy claimed, continuing breathlessly, “remember Marie from the hashtag? He slept through like the first twelve hours of that and then solved the case before the police could even organize a proper search, and this while keeping from Colonel Tarleton that his daughter was missing, that he was supposed to be dead and that Cornwallis who they were with at the time at least by proxy likely had something to do with it all. So, I told him last night that last I heard, Coach Simcoe was in London but we all really miss him here and next he sends me this and I mean maybe it is just dumb luck but -”

“Cicero, you are right, you friend is a low-key strategic mastermind, but I can’t hear anything with you talking like this and the thing has played twice now.”

“Oh, there is nothing to hear,” he shrugged, “If we really turn it up you can make out Tarleton shouting something about traffic and nineties music and Coach being deaf, but uh, here,” he scrolled upon shutting the footage without affording it its supposed soundtrack.

>>Marie and her dad are going to Edinburgh to pick up her little sister. Best guess would be he is catching a ride with them, at least the way up. I’m meant to meet up with her next week though in Dublin and if JGS is still rollin with, I’ll head you up to it. <<

>>Can you give me Marie’s number?<<

>> Marie - +44 151 9496 0115  

Col. T – +44 151 9496 0710, but if you plan to ring

Pls do your best to forget about the time difference.<<

>>Will do.<<

“I though since Coach hasn’t answered when either of us call him, we could call someone he is in the car with and they would answer and then he would have to … I mean, he would have to talk to
us, wouldn’t he?” the boy seemed to beg.

“I don’t even know what I would say,” Mary told him honestly.

“That you miss him and that you love him and that you want him to come back, because look,” he tried to reason with her, “even if you don’t - there is no way we are going to win a trophy with Coach Wakefield and even if that is not important to you at all, I mean … maybe Coach would be better at helping Thomas than you or I or Mr Woodhull or Miss Aberdeen or Miss Peggy or my mom or anyone else because he … his voice, I mean … I don’t mean to imply that there is anything wrong with Thomas but maybe Coach can understand him on a level we can’t between us because he’s been, well not there, exactly, but certainly nearby.”

“I can’t ask John for help with my son, I can’t … but if he is going to Edinburgh,” she said, seeing in this a solution to the larger problem she alone knew needed solving, “I could … Cicero,” she smiled, “you are a genius!”

“Yeah, I got you,” he returned with a cheeky grin. He would be alright, Mary told herself. He was, she reasoned, to his great benefit at least as blatantly manipulative as the awful adults in his life all were.

“When you grow up,” she told him with a warmth she had long stopped thinking herself capable, “You’ll surely surpass us all.”

“I mean … ain’t that hard.”

“I’ll work on it and you’ll go remind Aberdeen she is on the clock?” Mary suggested, needing a moment to herself to plot out all that she would need to say.

“Thomas is with John Byrd and it is not like Aberdeen is going to take your money. I heard her talking to my mom about it last week. She says you are like the sister she never had and she isn’t going to hit you up when you have already been hit so hard, besides, she has a few shifts at the pub now and makes up the difference in tips and whatever else people mistakenly leave behind.”

“That is … so sweet,” Mary said, feeling the weight of the sentiment and wondering if Cicero picked up on her former au pair’s acknowledgement of herself as a pickpocket.

“You know,” Cicero said as he opened the door, “… it is not my place or whatever, but you don’t got it as bad as you’ve been making out,” he squinted as he seemed to study her. “You should let people care about you, or at least accept that they will regardless. It is what I told my mom after she and Jordan broke up, what I told him too and they didn’t want to listen because they thought they had to cry and then go buy each other flowers and write love-poetry ’cause they too invested in media and marketing I guess, but look how happy they are now they got over themselves. Just throwing it out there.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Mary promised him. And herself.

Aberdeen Declasias had spent most of the past week or so wondering how long it would take Anna Hewlett to figure out that she was, in fact, dating Peggy Shippen.

Same as she had alternatively been questioning how long it would take her friend Peggy to realise
that the relationship, such as it was, was purely a product of her imagination.

She should not have said anything. Things were weird between them now. And Aberdeen felt lost as to how to set it right.

Everyone else involved in the larger conflict that had consumed the town - everyone, that was who had contact with John André be it direct or by relative proximity - had been handed a mirror in metaphoric terms and been faced with a very real reckoning with some suppressed, ugly truth of their innermost and Aberdeen now felt forced to contend with the fact that she had failed herself and everyone she loved most in this respect.

Peggy sat on the sofa opposite to the one where Aberdeen was herself camped out in the trench warfare taking place in Whitehall’s drawing room, unconsciously holding a pillow against her in want to disguise her size and shape where the clothing she had borrowed from the absent Edmund’s wardrobe soon would no longer suit. Aberdeen considered that this was for her own benefit as much as it was for Peggy’s pride (or rather shame) and in this thought she tasted the same acidic sick on the back of her tongue that the words she had spoken the night before had tossed up into the atmosphere, inviting in a rot to every room they two both occupied.

She and Peggy had spent most of all of their time in each other’s company over the past few months and in the course of this otherwise successful collaboration, Aberdeen, unbeknownst to herself, had developed an obsession that had played itself out to be every bit as damning as the indifference Peggy had in such time received from everyone she had deemed worthy of her heart.

Peggy continued to flip through the dictionary as though it were a woman’s glossy which she had already read a handful of times before.

Aberdeen, for her part, looked at the letters on her board wondering if they could be pieced together in any cohesive way to give words to her confused reflections.

“You turh, Ab-air .., Ab-ah-da” Thomas said, poking at her side as he painfully stuttered though her name, something else he had no trouble pronouncing prior to his sickbed.

“This is bullshit,” Cicero said from beside Peggy - be it of the board game, the little boy for whose benefit they were playing or the reason why he, personally was being made to participate was difficult to place in the exclamation. Peggy protested. Aberdeen, however, agreed with the sentiment enough that she did not move to scold him as the drawing room’s other designated responsible adult did, instead meeting his eyes with a moment’s understanding before asking Thomas to read the word he had just spelt and to use it in a sentence.

She would do the same of whichever word she was able to write, the same of Peggy’s choice vocabulary, of Cicero’s and then of Thomas’ again.

The former au pair felt a twinge of guilt that her mind’s present and, of recent, constant preoccupation would find a way of resolving itself absent of anything she did to hurry it along when the full of her attention should have been with the boy she had cared for since infancy, who might never again be able to speak cohesively and would forever then suffer the scrutiny that in a just world would be burdened by those other-people’s-mothers whose limited comprehension of the past two centuries of medical science had effectively disabled the boy.

Now when Aberdeen went out with him, strangers who heard his stunted attempts to communicate himself spoke slowly at a volume that likely frightened the frustrated poor Thomas further.

Now, the boy who pitched a fit when it was time to leave the park, who could hardly finish his
supper fast enough out of a want to return to play, never wanted to leave the house and spoke as little as its other inhabitants let him get away with.

It took his two attempts to approach ‘horse’ and his approximation was a homophone at best.

“It’s alright, I can’t make the ‘h’ sound either,” Aberdeen tried to assure him. Peggy afforded her self-irony a short-lived smile until recognising Aberdeen’s acknowledgment of it. Cicero continued to silently announce his indignation of being relegated to playing board games when there were cardboard boxes which he could otherwise be helping to move out of the garage by focusing the full of his attention on the screen of his phone. Thomas, for his part, nodded and gave it another try.

Aberdeen bit her bottom lip and closed her eyes, trying to block from sight and mind distractions from hearing him as carefully as she might.

Shortly after returning to kindergarten from the Easter holidays, the boy had come down with a fever and after four days in bed had lost the ability to employ multisyllabic words and use them effectively in a sentence. At first, Mary had thought this the effect of the medication he had been prescribed but after a few days of the condition continuing past the last dosage, had brought him back to the doctors Wakefield, worried that the measles had affected her son’s hearing.

Countless tests and scans and specialists later, it had been diagnosed that the illness - one that the vaccine he had received prior to starting kindergarten had done nothing to prevent given the number of mothers who had made the opposite choice in how they prioritised the heath of their children - had affected the speech centre of young Thomas’ brain. Mary had not wanted to accept the doctor’s original diagnosis of the illness and had sought multiple second opinions before filling the prescription Dr Wakefield had written. It had amounted to a difference of nothing more than a few hours, hours that Aberdeen suspected her employer would never forgive herself of despite Dr Wakefield’s insistence that the damage had likely already been done by the time the symptoms began to show themselves.

The both misters Woodhull, for their part, were in the process of suing the school’s other parents for criminal negligence. Peggy and Aberdeen had taken it upon themselves to stay up late each night in Whitehall’s legal library to write a bill that would mandate vaccination in the State of New York, had used the podcast they had started to generate popular support of the measure on both sides of the aisle and had gotten Anna Hewlett to exploit the friendship she had struck with Abigail Adams in Albany to convince the other solicitor’s husband to attach his name to it and introduce it to the floor.

But whenever Aberdeen played Scrabble with Thomas - something the boy’s paediatrician had recommended to Mary and Abe as part of what was masked as an extended speech therapy – she could not help but to think that nothing had come from all of their efforts, that nothing would ever be right or even recognisable.

The former au pair could not help but think that nothing had come from all of their efforts, that nothing would ever be right or even recognisable.

She simply did not care as much as she told herself she ought about all of the children and families that she personally cared about and for had and would continue to regardless of those the law would protect, regardless of the gratitude of the few that knew the narrative to have given it language.

Aberdeen could not help to share in the resentment her favourite little human had around his
inability to communicate in a way that won him the same responses that everyone else enjoyed. People heard him speak and they shouted at him as though he were otherwise incapable of understanding, as though he were dumb or deaf or would have deserved their insensitivities even if either of those things were in fact true about him.

Her little boy was lost.

Part of the problem, Aberdeen considered, opening her eyes and glancing at the woman who sat opposite her, was that Thomas truly was too young to understand that the adults around him wanted to scream at one another rather than at him, and this because they were just as bad at otherwise communicating themselves as he presently was, as prognosis told he would ever be.

“Of course he can’t use ‘pardonner’ in a sentence, it isn’t English,” Peggy scolded of the word Aberdeen had written out and had been in the process of encouraging of young Thomas.

“Nothing is English in the original,” Aberdeen bit back, “It is a combination of all of the world’s languages and ‘pardonner’ is well within its scope.”

“As ‘pardon’, ” Peggy bit. “P-A-R-D-O-N my French but there is no fucking way I’m letting you off with a double letter score when -”

“Language!” Cicero scolded his godmother in a mimic of her reaction to half the things he had said of late. “You are actually keeping score of this mess?” he went on the ask without taking his eyes from his phone.

“I wouldn’t have to,” Peggy said, lowering her voice into a hiss, “if we could all trust Aberdeen not to try and cheat.”

“She ain’t even,” Cicero said without affording to comment much interest. “Thomas peut parler Français. N’est-ce pas, mon homme?”

Thomas smiled and mouthed ‘oui’ without vocalising it until Aberdeen nudged him encouragingly and applauded his broken sound.

Peggy, evidently frustrated with her inability to influence the game in a way that would afford her the lead, rose and announced that she was getting herself something to drink, making a like-offer in a tone that warned not to take her up on in.

Aberdeen watched with pain as her once-friend walked out, again tallying all of the deeply personal offences she had levelled the night before when what she instead meant to say was ‘I’m struggling to process all that I’ve come to feel for you’; ‘I can’t stand to see you freely give your heart to someone else who will only break it’; ‘You are enough as you are’; or, put plainly, ‘Why isn’t it enough for you that you are the centre of my world?’

Aberdeen felt her heart sink deeper into her chest. She crossed her legs tighter than she already held them in hurtful hopes that the tingling feeling that stained her thongs with a sticky moistness as it always did when she stared at Peggy of recent – of recent her favourite thing to do – would be suppressed, to what she found was the opposite effect. Giving in, she squeezed her thighs tighter still imagining a touch she had never in truth known from another and suspected she would never come to learn, returning her to another moment of the night before, damning if only in its solidarity nature when she had awoken with her hand between her legs, bringing her fingers to her lips and licking them dry, wondering if Peggy Shippen tasted sweeter still, increasingly certain that she must, increasingly envious, covetous and damned.
She had turned on the light and reached for the diary she kept in Creole and hid under her pillow, flipping through it in hopes of finding when precisely her scribbled entries became fully absent of context, when she had gone from chronicling the world that existed around and independent of her to simply recording her observations around her ever-growing obsession –

- Peggy saving her from certain death at the wedding without taking the cost of her own liberty into account seemed to have been the last entry that gave a nod to anything subsurface, perhaps, as Aberdeen had since been forced to reconcile, because it was the last moment that fully conformed to the conceptions she could freely accept. 

Afterwards, Aberdeen had written briefly of the haircut Freddy had given his oldest friend in the gents room at the Albany Police Station where they all had spent the night - Peggy worried about the comparative size of her forehead in the courtroom sketches she envisioned, herself certain of nothing with regard to her own future save for the fact that she did not want to enter into it as the girl who had been forced to come to New York to watch her senator give a speech he never would - the girl who in a phrase let life happen to her, who discovered too late and in the worst of ways that she did not have any say in her affairs that equated to a realisation of self. Bangs - as far as they could be called such - suited Peggy perfectly, as did the rest of what remained of her golden locks, cropped short on top in a way that fell towards and over the part of her face the caused her such exaggerated concern and buzzed to no longer than a centimetre in the back and on the sides.

Wow, Aberdeen had written of the boy who since had ever-increasingly come to replace her best friend.

Within what she estimated in hindsight to have been a week, Peggy ceased with the staples of her wardrobe that she had brought into the closet they shared, instead opting for Aberdeen’s band shirts and skinny jeans until the two could no longer be said to share a size and Peggy began shopping elsewhere, namely in the designer suits Edmund Hewlett had left behind. She had mentioned the night they spent in the wine cellar as her fingers hesitantly graced over Aberdeen’s biceps that she wished she had arms like hers, causing Aberdeen to become as embarrassed about the manual labour in which she had always been engaged as Peggy evidently was about the relative frailty of her frame. She confessed that had been taking diet pills since hitting puberty, pills her mother prescribed using a colleague’s prescription pad for fear that her prettiest child would otherwise pear out the way all of her older sisters had. Peggy had been forced by her mother’s further vindictive, vicarious tendencies into breast enhancement not long thereafter, far physically and emotionally younger than state law otherwise allowed, to make up for what chemistry had ceased from developing naturally. Aberdeen had made nothing particular of it at the time, but Peggy made several generalised declarations that as soon as the dust had all settled and she had saved enough money for an operation, she would have her implants removed. This, she had gestured, simply was not her body, it never had been and now that she was a woman grown, men she had known for the span of a night claimed it is their property.

Arnold had seen her as an object.

André as an empty conquest.

Peggy, as a result, began seeing herself differently.

Aberdeen was more than understanding when even prior to the wedding Peggy began making use of the weight bench in the basement which Abe Woodhull owned for reasons that neither of them could place and started to supplement her diet with raw eggs and high-calorie protein shakes. Wanting to rid herself of every reminder of the insistence that had shaped her, she asked Aberdeen to help her pawn her jewellery, handbags and the items in her wardrobe that would fetch the most,
reinvesting the profits in elegant drag that so suited her that in her constant company Aberdeen found it easy to forget that this was a phase her friend needed to go through to find herself, that being supportive meant not succumbing to the attraction that was becoming increasingly difficult to suppress.

Aberdeen had always - shamefully - fancied slightly androgynous white boys and found that her political disposition made it hard to accept that actual gender made little difference in the scope of her own human attraction, for by some great twist of irony all of the queer people she knew – Freddy Morgan, Mr Woodhull, DCI Tallmadge, Peggy Shippen – by her own admission, Senator Arnold – or so Aberdeen had come to suspect, John Robeson and Charles Joyce were all registered republicans (though in the case of the Brit this simply meant that he did not much like Hewlett or people like him, which was understandable but hardly excused the trend.) Caleb Brewster did not count as he was a convicted felon who did not have a vote and probably would not have bothered to even if such were still within his rights. Soon, Aberdeen thought, she would be an American Citizen - something else she owed to Peggy’s influence - and she wanted to throw herself into the roll with a sense of certainty which Peggy defeated as much as she enforced with her selfish, self-serving politics and personality. To be properly American, Aberdeen reasoned, meant to abide by partisan principles and, giving how little else she and Peggy shared, they could not possibly share in one another’s caress. It was not what was done, but then, Peggy seemed to have lost all interest in propriety.

She said that André had not been mistaken, she had not enjoyed having sex with him and had not had much fun with Banastre Tarleton either, taking this as evidence that she did not enjoy sex with men at all.

Aberdeen, who had not yet had the experience of intercourse, alternated between trying to pass herself off as experienced and empathetic, all while feeling that such was as close to the act as she herself was ever likely to come. The men she had been interested in had barely been conscious of her existence and she expected that she did not exist for Peggy in the same way she might if she were white or even light-skinned, for the governor’s daughter was given to casual, inaccurate racism – convinced as she was that President Obama had produced a fake birth certificate, that the Yılmaz’ whom she had since hosted multiple times were Mexican (which was how Peggy pronounced ‘Latinx’), and that Affirmative Action was an undue burden on people like her – by which she meant white girls from affluent backgrounds who were about to be kicked off of their parent’s health coverage and thrown into the real world that everyone else had existed in since birth (which Peggy confused with ‘conception’.)

The attraction, Aberdeen was tempted to surmise, laid simply in the fact that she enjoyed engaging in verbal arguments of the kind that ordinarily restricted themselves to social media and message boards. But rationality played little into the ways in which her body was increasingly given to reacting to Peggy’s presence. Were she to ever pursue them to their logical ends, she reasoned, not only would she surely be rejected, but she would risk Peggy again feeling unsafe in her own skin, which, as a friend, was the most horrible outcome of all of this she could imagine -

- That was, until someone beat her too it.

Anna Hewlett returned from Albany with all of the messages of confidence and body positivity to which Peggy was in her own – opposite - way trying to aspire and in her found not only a willing disciple but a worthy distraction.

Peggy wore Edmund’s shoes, clothes and cologne, went shopping Anna in expensive boutiques for items that exaggerated the countess’ growing opulence rather than try in vain to suppress it. They drank tea at cafés meant for coffee and fed one another fancy pralines over the hours they spent
talking about whatever there was to be discussed between a woman whose absent husband’s title banned her from sharing her opinion on politics and a gubernatorial daughter clearly struggling with her gender identity but unable to express as much in preferred pronouns as she considered such far too progressive.

At home, Peggy played with Anna’s hair to the extent that Aberdeen was beginning to suspect that the whole reason she had cut her own off was to have the excuse it gave her to do so. She sensually rubbed Anna’s stretch marks and cellulite with shea butter and coconut oil if only as an excuse to touch her naked skin, and to Aberdeen’s horror, Anna—whom she otherwise had liked and respected—welcomed these advances, disinterested in the moment as every bit of her seemed to be invested in memory.

The lads at the pub had quite a laugh over them on the nights when they came in, Jordan pointing out that Edmund’s tastes excluded themselves to enlightenment depictions of the Greek and Roman gods, muscular men and plump women dressed in bedsheets that became his own, laughing that he had likewise grown a bit of a gut in his manipulation of Anna towards an ideal of beauty she now seemed all too happy to embrace, something else of him Peggy was beginning to embody.

‘You think we can convince her to play left back?’ Wakefield jested. ‘I’m starting to feel self-conscious about being the fattest bloke on this squad.’ For that, Aberdeen, angered at the insult and objectification, relieved him of the dope she knew him to have stashed in the inner pocket on the jacket he had hung over the back of his bar stool rather than on the coatrack where it belonged. She could not believe that anyone who saw Peggy could see her as anything but perfection actualised, though she, too, upon the briefest of considerations was forced to wonder if the high-protein, high-fat diet with which Peggy attempted to undo everything that had been done to her were not equally as unhealthy—both mentally and physically—as the diet pills and implants that had defined her early adolescence. She was, objectively, not only bigger but rounder as well—and maybe this was the result of the time she was spending with Anna, pretending for both of their sakes to be the prodigal prince of Scotland and Setauket.

Some nights after overhearing this exchange, Aberdeen had chanced a glimpse of Peggy from the as she examined herself in the full length mirror, surprised at exactly how much the girl managed to hide in menswear, wondering if all of the effort Peggy seemed to be putting into making herself as unattractive to men as was possible for someone with such a perfect face was really worth the tyre these past four or five months had made of her one-petite waist. Her whole body seemed to bulge, and Aberdeen felt betrayed by a truth she knew she had no right to—that despite her short hair, unshaved legs and increasingly strong frame, Peggy was perhaps more of a woman than she had ever before been.

The worst of it was that her feelings did not alter upon this realisation though her expression of them shifted to fury. Aberdeen felt as though she had been twice deceived, first by Peggy and then by the limited scope of her own perceptions—she felt that she had ought to have been the first to know, though what she thought entitled her to the secrets her friend thought to keep by exposing some other truth she could not name.

‘Your mum was right about you, Peggy,’ she began meanly. ‘You do tend to pear. At this pace you won’t be able to pass yourself off as a boy much longer … and then, oh—what do you think Anna will say when the ‘as been lifted from ‘er eyes?’

‘Jesus!’ Peggy cursed, rushing to the adjoining washroom for a bathrobe—also borrowed—as though she felt fully naked in the old tee shirt and boxers she had once looked quite cute in. ‘Aberdeen, what are you …’ she stammered.
‘Are you in love with ‘er?’ Aberdeen asked, rather – Aberdeen accused.

‘Leave,’ Peggy insisted. ‘Go, please just go.’

‘Are you in love with ‘er?’

‘With Anna?’ Peggy seemed to accuse with equal weight. ‘Of course I’m fucking in love with Anna! She is the only one in the world who can understand … who even cares to understand what it is I am going through.’

‘I care …’ Aberdeen started, stammered, ‘I would, if you ‘ad let me -’

‘You wouldn’t,’ Peggy spat. ‘You are a hypocrite; whatever limited support you think you’ve shown me is nought but value signalling. My body in some sick twisted way appeals to your politics to the extent that you can’t even admit to yourself that I disgust you, that you shy from my touch as though I had some kind of infectious disease … and I can live with that, I can – because I, God I need to take back some semblance of control so badly that I’ve ceased caring what form that takes. But it is impossible, isn’t it? No matter what I do I have no right to my own body whatsoever. It is still André’s and it is all I can do to disguise that fact by pretending to the world, to myself that this is all … that it is all me by actively working to put on more mass, more muscle as some kind of apology, some distraction from the fact that I have this thing growing inside me for which I have no love. And I hate myself for it, I do, so much sometimes that it is all too much to bear … so can you just, can you just laugh with the lads at the pub? Tell them that I was on speed until quite recently if they can’t otherwise understand why someone who spends as much time lifting as I have of late looks so terribly out of shape all of a sudden. Tell yourself that too, while you’re at it because, I can’t … I can’t do this with you. I can barely manage it on my own and if you had any sense of human empathy you would just … let it go.’

‘And Anna knows all of this?’ Aberdeen pressed though she knew that was hardly the point she was meant to take.

‘I don’t want this baby,’ Peggy repeated. ‘I’m only carrying it to term though tortured as I am, I don’t think a child deserves to suffer, to die, for its father’s sins. I dare not say as much to Abigail who had Cicero under not dissimilar circumstances, or to Mary who was so devastated by the loss of her own unborn child – a child she did not even realise she was with until it was lost in the stress of Thomas’ impairment – that I couldn’t, I daren’t … Anna just, we talk because she is the only one I can talk to, and I’m all she has. Her situation is not what anyone would define as ideal and where I am able to give my baby up, she can’t … she thinks that this was all Edmund really wanted from her and now that it is guaranteed, he is gone … and so she and I are both looking into legal options for what we are going to do when they day comes. My baby needs someone who can be a mother to it. Hers has one and it needs to stay that way because Edmund …’

‘Peggy, I’ve seen the two of you together and I worry … your heart has been broken so many times and Anna seems so willing to take advantage of that -’

‘Yes, Aberdeen, oh my God – yes! Hearts break! You think you don’t break mine every day, that you are not breaking it now? You think that I don’t know that Anna and I have no future together? We don’t even have a present – she doesn’t feel the same way but that doesn’t mean that I can’t enjoy the time we share.’

‘Ow do I break your ‘eart? You close yourself off to me with clothes and lies and covers and accuse me of the responsibility?’ Aberdeen returned.

‘Oh you are the worst of them all! Had I told you the entire scope of my present conflict before it
had grown too big to ‘fix’, you would have argued until blue in the face a woman’s right to choose as though my choice were not valid, as though it were not in and of itself impossible to arrive at and it is more than I feel I deserve.’

She was not wrong on any of these counts and Aberdeen had in a fit of anger over this perceived rejection made certain that Peggy knew as much by falling into the exact conversational patterns of which she had been accused until they both were left weeping. Outside of the game of Scrabble Peggy had entered into from mere proximity – rather, from Aberdeen’s insistence that she not test her new strength by helping the lads move Abigail’s boxes and crate from the garage and her fear of it escalating in a way that would affect Mary – the two had not spoken a word to one another all morning. Peggy in her borrowed suit, in shows that fit her swollen feet, in a persona that Aberdeen was forced to recon was not entirely lent to her by these items sat shooting daggers from the eyes she had not bothered to paint since Freddy’s mascara had caused them to burn at the wedding, her still-perfect face in a fixed glare until suddenly and without warning Aberdeen’s plea for ‘pardon’ had caused her enough offence that entertaining her further company had evidently become an impossibility.

Aberdeen could not accept this would be the way of things.

Five minutes later she found Peggy in the kitchen eating the full of her sentiments over the exchange and that which had proceeded it in the form of shredded cheese and a chocolate flavoured protein shake.

“I’m pregnant,” she whispered when she met Aberdeen’s gaze. “I’m allowed to do things like this without feeling guilty over it.”

“I am not ‘ere to judge; I am ‘ere to to tell you how sorry I am. For everything … really. I lied last night,” Aberdeen started slowly, “I lied even in the way I looked at you. You are so fucking beautiful it is painful to be in your very presence and I feel lately as though you are in mine, constantly, even when you are physically absent. I don’t know ‘ow to apologise to you in the way that I know you are owed, I ‘ate everything that ‘appened to lead you ‘ere as much as I hate myself for thusly being so attracted to the person that you are -”

“I wouldn’t be anyone else if none of that had ever happened; the only difference a bit of backbone might have meant for my life would have been that I would have been this … person sooner. Aberdeen, you have been so … I know it can’t be easy for you to except … that I’m not what you want me to be … what I myself want to be … when I have my clothes off, but maybe one day. No, one day in the abstract, I mean, when this is really all over, when -”

Aberdeen, frustrated and impatient, pulled her into a kiss that proved every bit as impassioned as she came to realise that she had been privately envisioning since the moment she and Peggy first met.

“Forgive me,” she gasped when their lips parted in a panic born from their hands joining in the waltz of their tongues by grasping at the parts of one another of which they were most ignorant and most intrigued from the innocent to the explicit as their bodies became increasingly entangled on the kitchen table; Peggy’s efforts on Abe’s weight bench, to the leg hair she had long stopped shaving, to the love handles which Aberdeen still felt just in blaming on Anna’s influence and the boxer briefs that left a red indent on her pale flesh, stretched out as they were by a bloated stomach that at this point might just as much have been a beer too many than an unwanted baby; Peggy, for her part, playing with the ends of Aberdeen’s long, thin braids, squeezing her breasts with an ecstasy of unknowing anticipation that the caresses that followed told Aberdeen her body had done nothing to disappoint. She felt her own stick once more and could not stand the labour under the
intense longing she had to know if Peggy felt it, too, daring her hand to reach beneath the elastic of her friend’s boxers to the blonde curls she soon found covered in the girl’s cum. Aberdeen brought her fingertip to her full lips, impatient to know her Peggy’s taste – sweeter, she smiled, than she ever dared imagine.

“You have no idea how much I want you,” Peggy whispered as she made a weak attempt to regain her own equilibrium.

“I’m sure I can guess,” Aberdeen returned seductively. “But I have to work and you … God, I could not care what occupies you next few ‘ours in so long as whatever your undertakings, you do these things in my presence that I might enjoy the unparalleled sight of you.”

The next few hours, however, were anything but unproductive. Where Peggy was unparalleled in siege warfare, Aberdeen prefer to turn all of her efforts to a direct assault. Upon finding that Cicero had left the drawing room for the library, she followed to find her former employer in a somewhat improved state and began about setting her plans into action.

“Dad, turn it down?” Marie Robinson complained of the radio to a bit more success than Simcoe’s own expressed grievances with the sound had been heard. He considered that he had misremembered the music of his past, or that it, like everything else he had come to find, had simply fit the age and his when he had first heard it. Simcoe no longer liked the songs he had once sang along to and felt slightly bad for his chauffer that the man’s life had remained so static that he still could without seemingly able to reflect on what he wanted and what he might be willing to give away.

Personally, he had given up on his idea on London, on the idea that happiness could exist in isolation, on romanticism of the sort that favoured the past above the present moment. He would soon return to the life he had thought to leave, knowing full well that he would now need to demand his place in it, lost as to how but increasingly undeterred with every old track that spun on one of Tarleton’s copied CDs.

“Sorry - hello?” Marie spoke into her mobile, “yes, this is she. With whom am I speaking?”

“Telemarketer?” Tarleton guessed from his daughter’s adaptation of a professional tone and manner. “Christ its … nearly nine in the evening. Tell them you don’t speak any English.” He frowned and counted on his fingers, causing Simcoe concern that his friend and former dorm-mate needed a visual to add five to the time displayed in Anna's car, that he evidently did not know how to reset the clock for himself, that he was not affording the road the full of his attention and that he had not been made to surrender his driving licence upon returning home from the front with a crippling injury, the last of which he voiced in hopes of giving Marie a bit of privacy in which to practice her school-German on a hapless sales associate.


“Oi, is it George?” Tarleton grinned. “Pass it here.”

“Pull over,” Simcoe insisted. “Are you so reckless? You have a kid in the back.”
“Where?” the driver demanded of the two-lane motorway. “Where should I pull over?” Tarleton continued to gesture while Marie pressed the phone to Simcoe’s ear, causing his hearing device to chirp in a confusion he himself shared. Gently, he took the mobile from the girl’s hand and reangled it from his ear to his chin. The reception remained subpar. “George, I beg your patience. Marie, do you mind if I couple my hearing aids with your phone?”

“Are they Bluetooth compatible?” she asked, unbuckling her safety belt and leaning forward in hopes of watching the two-second process she quite likely completed multiple times daily with other devices to the same effect.

“Yep,” Simcoe smiled at her. “Buckle back up and I’ll show you at the next rest stop.”

“So … you can like be at work listening to music or whatever and no one would even know the difference?”

“How do you think I get through conversations with your father?” he winked.

“How much does it cost?” the girl inquired further.

“Without a prescription necessitating it … let’s just say Leicester would need to win the league again for your Dad to finance this bit of fun.”

“Oh,” Marie resigned herself. Simcoe found it amusing that something he had always personally associated with the archaic could be of such interest to the devious mind of someone so young, but he was certain the child had it within her nature to find other means of distraction come next term, despite the apparent detriment perfect hearing played on her latest design.

“So, George,” he shifted, “what misadventure can’t wait till morning?”

“Is he in jail?” Tarleton snickered.

“It is a Lady!” Marie announced, unhelpfully to her father’s predictable phantasies which erupted in a fit of laughter, far too late for Simcoe to take this information into account.

>>John, it is me,<< he heard Mary Woodhull announce before her tone and pace of speech grew increasingly erratic and uncertain. >>Sorry to ring you out of the blue like this and to surprise you by dialling a stranger’s number, but someone named Arthur sent Cicero a picture of you earlier this afternoon and then he – Cicero, asked for Marie’s number since Arthur mentioned you were riding with her and her father up to Edinburgh and I know you don’t want to be bothered and honestly I wouldn’t if it were not urgent, but if you are headed in that direction anyway … John, listen, the INS wrote Anna this afternoon that if she doesn’t provide evidence of and testimony to her relationship with Edmund within the next two weeks they will both be facing charges of immigration fraud and since you left. God, John, all of the bullshit we have been through since you both left, we can’t – I can’t … can you …<< he could not be sure, but Mary sounded as though she were on the verge of tears if these had not already begun to fall.

“Mary … I, I was going to talk to Hewlett -”

>>Well you have to bring him back.<< she insisted, explaining lest an argument ensue, >>It doesn’t matter if he plans to actually stay or not. You have to bring him back. You have to write an affidavit and have it notarised and Jordan and Abigail and Ben and Senator Arnold and I and since Judge Woodhull is refusing we don’t between us know anyone else in good standing - the Hamiltons and Aaron Burr who barely know Edmund at all and only know Anna as the other former coach of their kids’ soccer team - all have to do the same and Edmund has to come back
because Anna is pregnant and you think that would be ‘evidence’ enough of their relationship but the government seems as happy to ignore the press around it as Edmund himself and she stopped. Simcoe was not certain that she was weeping.

“Mary -”

>> I’m sorry I’m … I’m so lost without you.<<

“As am I. Mary, I wish, believe me I wish it was not under these strains, but it is so good to hear your voice again. I would have called except I thought you wanted me to leave. I thought that meant leaving you alone by extension, but … that you know, you could have called my number. For you, I’d always answer.”

>> It is not just me, John. It is never just me or just you or just … look there is something I have to tell you. Not something that I want to tell you, but I think you have the right to know. I’m having a baby.<<

“You are pregnant?” he choked. A long silence ensued.

>> I was.<< Mary told him. >> I lost it. There is something that has been going on with Thomas and in all of the anger and confusion I lost it before I even knew it lived. But there is still a baby that needs a mom being that it was conceived … well, we will call the incident statutory. I found out … I found out a couple of hours ago, Aberdeen explained everything to me … told me that my own grief belonged to the reasons the child’s mother -biological mother, at least, has been going to such mad lengths to hide her condition, afraid to upset me further and I … I can’t tell you how horrible I feel. That I resent Anna her child, that I … that I went so far as to make fun of and place cruel bets on the inner life of this other women whom I also have not bothered being much of a friend to of late, and I … so I offered, well, Abe and I both offered despite our marriage being effectively over, to adopt, that the mother, the biological mother, would not be a stranger to the child, that she could be as much of a part of its life when and if she is ever ready to.<<

“You and Abe are … adopting a child,” Simcoe repeated slowly. He should have never left.

>> We are postponing our divorce.<<

“I had heard he moved out months ago.”

>> He moved back when Thomas got sick … well, he moved back when it became clear that Thomas was never going to recover.<<

Simcoe felt his heart stop. “Christ Mary, what happened? Is there any way I can help?”

>> It is nothing to worry yourself over.<< she claimed, though not altogether dismissively.

>> Really. I – John, you have no idea how much I’d wanted to call you over these past few weeks. How I thought … I thought I would be calling you tonight, that I could, cruel as I know as it sounds exploit Anna’s horrible predicament to retract on everything that I said and pretend that nothing happened since you left outside of this notice showing up, and that you would come back the next day even and you would see me and it would be just like you had never been gone – and I would somehow find time to colour the greys from my hair and use one of the mud masks I always buy at the checkout and then forget about by the time I’ve unpacked my groceries and have a full night’s sleep and redirect some of the worry weight that found its way onto my hips down to my pale, shivered leg that I honestly have a mind to break again just to rid myself of the chore of having to look at it<< she tried to laugh, stopping abruptly >> and not … not the cast that everyone signed that day at the police station when we were … what I mean to say is, lovely as that all would have
been, it isn’t realistic, is it? Because, life is bigger than me or us or just what I may think I want from this relationship. It is everyone here and its you as well and since we met I’ve been nothing but an interruption in your life and mine … mine is just so messy, and it is always going to be messy in ways that can’t be washed over or covered up and I don’t kid myself that you want to be part of it or have any reason to now that our business is through, except … well except for where it isn’t. Edmund and Anna, I mean. Our friends. Sometimes.<<

“My life was a void until we met. I would give anything to be there now, with you with every perceived flaw that adds to your perfection, to this mess of a life I’ve never wanted anything but to share in since first I saw you, but that is not …” he paused, “I don’t think that is what you want to hear. Not right now, at least. We will save that until I get home.

“In the meantime, call Philomena Cheer and tell her she can finally throw Anna her INS-gagement party. Stop moving things out of Whitehall, decorate the house for Christmas, Easter, Thanksgiving, the Fourth of July, whatever you can come up with and call everyone we know to help stage the years-long relationship between Edmund and Anna. We’ll say … this coming Saturday? I’ll make sure the groom shows up. Of that you can rest assured.” Simcoe curled his shaking fingers into a fist and smiled.

“Ohmigosh,” Marie said from the backseat, seeing his intention plain. “Are you going to beat the crap out of and kidnap another prominent political figure? Can I help?”

“No,” Tarleton spat. “Girls who get away with attempted manslaughter don’t get ‘B’s in Maths and History. You can plot against the government next year if you bring your grades back up.”

“There were extenuating circumstances -” Marie began.

“Guess what, kiddo? The Binomial Formulae don’t change with the fortunes of war and for that matter - you can’t assume the psychology of combatants centuries after a battle has been waged, especially where terrain was such a credit to one side’s strategy that even the most politically charged first-hand accounts cite -”

“Yea, that is what Farid wrote and he got a B, too. No one in my year got perfect marks. Atty said we could have all just written “Prussians” as the answer to the Waterloo question and that would have sufficed but too late now,” she rolled her eyes. “I guess I’ll just wind up destroying the government from within the established democratic framework the way you have to with your ‘bad’ grades that most parents would have been proud of being as that you still got into Oxford and still got yourself elected.”

“Yea, and while I’m over here bored and boring in Parliament, Mr Simcoe - who had better marks by far - went on to fight a foreign leader in the parking lot of some dive bar, started a war and held the world’s economy hostage and he can afford that fancy ear piece so your point makes mine, Miss. Now, since we are on the topic, leave Mr Simcoe to his peace and list me ten of Fredrick the Great’s military reforms and give me his Fredrick number while you are at it.”

“His what?” Marie frowned.

“Like what Roman numeral would we refer to him by if not for the epilate?”

“Two,” Simcoe whispered to her. “I’m … apparently an excellent role model,” he joked into the receiver.

>>Or so I hear. Seriously, from everyone you every kicked a ball with.<<
There was so much he wanted to ask, most of which he would have the answer to were he half the man he wished he was. Instead he listened to Mary as she slowly began to trust him with her truths within the lies they all told. Whilst he had been in an interrogation chamber the night of the wedding, a plan had been set into motion to capture John André and bring him to justice. It had failed in the form of its unsolved variable Robert Rogers, and Mary considered in hindsight it would not have stood a chance of success even if Clayton Tarleton had not promptly left his offices in Milan for a triumphant return to Liverpool, besting his younger brother in what might have been his finest hour, ensuring that the laurels with which Washington thought to secure his cooperation by threatening to recommend were never bestowed.

Not believing in the promise of further financial security, Rogers had killed André in cold blood and confessed to the crime, returning to Tallmadge who had offered him a defence that he was safer behind bars than he ever again might be should his liberty be restored. He had confessed to everything, the kidnapping, the blackmail – all which Mary thought was Rogers’ way of getting back at everyone who had moved to bring him down. Her whole reason for sending him away to London had been negated once it was too far in motion to stand amendment.

Other things, she told him, had happened to her in such time that kept her from calling, Thomas had suffered a speech impairment as the result of a fever and needs that she had never precedent now took up most of her time. The rest she confessed to spend envying Anna Hewlett the fortune of the son she would soon bear, despite the circumstances that otherwise defined her life being far from those one would willing bring a child into. Before gathering the nerve to take a pregnancy test, Anna had confessed to a crime her mother had committed that she might keep her seat. In this, she had surrendered her right to practice law and declared herself a criminal before the bar, which would not carry consequence in itself were she not in a domestic conflict. Anna feared that Edmund -or his family – would try to take the child from her, that she had unwittingly put them in a better position to do just that. He had not called in months, and Anna considered the affair all but finished – she had, after all, renamed the pub Strong Tavern upon reopening - Strong as opposed to Hewlett.

Mary had quit her job and had been intending to enrol in law school herself, as he knew, but without a reliable salary she could not afford to keep Aberdeen on as a nanny, even part time, ironically when she needed the help more than ever. Richard had signed Whitehall over to Abe, who had taken a job in Washington as a member of Senator Arnold’s staff and was planning to sell the property and use the profits to pay Thomas’ accruing medical bills and ensure he received the sorts of therapy that might serve to make his life easier. The problem was that the Arnold Investigation had shut down Setauket’s already real estate sector as the property Mary herself had had on the market for months stood proof.

There was, however, some happy news to report – Jordan and Abigail were back together, and she was in the process of moving in with him, which meant that the flat above Strong Tavern was vacant. Anna, who had become quite close with Peggy of late, agreed to let her and Aberdeen live there rent free, provided that Aberdeen’s arrangement of babysitting Thomas in the afternoon held free of charge and that Peggy was willing to cover some of the shifts downstairs Aberdeen was otherwise scheduled for should something come up related to the boy’s care, insofar, of course, as her condition allowed.

It was at this point that it came out that Peggy Shippen - who had no part in the conflict until its resolution - had been the most shaken and shaped by it. The shooting and the interrogation that followed had either broken or strengthened her psychologically and she had since been actively combating the signs of pregnancy by extreme measures, unwilling to abort given deeply rooted religious beliefs, unwilling to see herself as the girl who had unknowingly been a pawn and play thing for the child’s father prior to ever making his acquaintance. Her parents, school and entire
social network had abandoned her as soon as the scandal broke and she had been left broke and with nothing, with strangers in a strange town.

Mary had the experience of this exact isolation; she also had the experience of having grown up in foster care and would not wish either on anyone.

She had other reasons, reasons that she did not expand upon, as to why she felt that she was not herself ready for law school and was going to defer entry in favour of a paralegal course, promised a job with Akinbode, Tallmadge and Associates that would pay the bills and ensure that both mother and child got something of the lives they deserved. She and Abe were delaying the divorce until the adoption could be finalised, and Simcoe, feeling the weight of his and Mary’s loss harder within the scope of she was still able to sacrifice herself out of maternal instinct.

She claimed her life was messy, and perhaps it was, but he felt he would fight dragons for the pleasure of returning to this chaos, alone in her presence if circumstance kept him from being at her side.

At some point, Tarleton had pulled over at a petrol station, taken his wee small dog out for a walk and his daughter in for a late-night hot chocolate, leaving Simcoe to light a cigarette in the car park listening to Mary talk, laugh, cry, allowed himself to do these things with her.

“You don’t want to talk about us,” he said.

>>It not that I don’t.<< Mary negated. >>It is just that … I think we both might have a few more conversations with ourselves first.<<

“I’m sure you are right.”

Chapter End Notes

Sorry it took me a day or so longer than intended with the notes, I have no excuse. Before we get started, I’ll address something in what I recognise is the worst possible place to do so – as I write this I’ve just deleted a number of my works and intend to continue this trend over the next few days. As I explained in an email to some of the people to have received these past postings as gifts, there is always an expected element of demoralisation in every update – few enjoy the types of stories I am given to writing, and I am cool with that, but it is the added element that every increase on my hit count over these last months has more or less restricted itself to older works which I have to assume by the absence of accompanying kudos and comments are (were) almost universally despised that led me to make reductions to my library. If by some off chance you care or would care to read any number of side narratives set in this universe that I’ve mentioned in past notes and you can no longer find, contact me and I’ll just send it to you. Hide and Sequel will stay despite the lack of public interest because I am personally invested. Just the way these things work out. Anyway, that is sorted, so on to what you presumably just read:
The phone numbers listed in the SMS exchange have no special significance beyond being unregistered. +44 is the country code for England, 151 is Liverpool’s area code, the rest is random and (at time of posting) unassigned. It was noted at some point that Atty still had a number registered in Ireland, which is why he has the numbers saved the way he does rather than with a 0. There are no roaming charges in Europe, so a lot of people never bother with a new number when they change regions, especially if already locked into a 2-year contract (now illegal, at least in Germany, but pretty standard for 2016.)

Did anyone else think it was just weird that Thomas almost NEVER spoke on TURN and when he did it was always in fragments unbefitting his physical age? The explanation I arrived at admittedly sounds like liberal paranoia, and it might be to an extent as I’ve only come across a handful of cases like this, but um, not to go there but … I don’t think it is a stretch to say that this is likely more common than autism itself.

It is very unlikely, though not impossible, that Simcoe would have a Bluetooth compatible hearing aid in early 2016 (and lets be frank, even in 2020 he would not have had as much ease as he did coupling his devices with Marie’s iPhone, though this is a lot less complicated than with an Android device, just in case there are any hearing aid users or acousticians in the audience ready to call me out.) I really thought about explaining how magnetic fields could be created and exploited to the same end, but such would not fit any of the three characters in that scene or its mood and honestly who wants a short physics lecture at the near end of a story they wish would just end already? See, I got you, boo.

In case you need a refresher from the 8th class, the Binomial Formulae are:

\[(a+b)^2=a^2+2ab+b^2\]
\[(a-b)^2=a^2-2ab+b^2\]
\[(a+b) \times (a-b)=a^2-b^2\]

In case you are wondering if you have ever used this in real life … I mean, a direct example is a stretch, but it helps kids develop crucial mental arithmetic stills, which is why I guess the school board says we all need eight months of it.

Fredrick the Great was the King in Prussia, who then became the King of Prussia sometime between beating the Austrians at everything, reforming the military, giving civil and religious liberties to his subjects, inventing infrastructure, naming all of his wee small dogs after the mistresses of other monarchs (really) and introducing the potato to the German diet through aggressive educational initiatives and placing guards armed with blanks around fields where they were grown which served as an incentive for farmers to steal the plant which they had previously refused. Depending on where you grew up, you either know him for his line of being the “first servant of the state” (anywhere outside of Germany) or because of the potato thing (anywhere in Germany).

The Duke of Wellington chose to stage his stand at Waterloo because of the lack of undergrowth in the wooded areas allowing for a neat, organised retreat (not to overly generalize but - along with hiding the bulk of his strength also using typography- his go to tactic), and because he was guaranteed Prussian forces (who should really get a lot more credit in the histories that celebrate the event.) At the battle he is reported to have prayed "Either night or the Prussians will come", which was later changed to the more pfiffig and politically astute "Give me night or give me Blucher" (which apropos
is the answer at pub trivia if this ever comes up, even if it is not well, accurate.)
The End

Chapter Summary

Hewlett and Simcoe wind up in a holding cell, Mary and Anna wind up being friends.

Chapter Notes

It is the final chapter and I should offer some parting words. Reflecting back on this work as a whole, I think all that is left to be said for myself was once spoken with such remarkable eloquence by Italian football trainer Giovanni Trapattoni in a fabled fit of anger that I have nothing truly worth adding. Paraphrasing for my own purposes, [this mess was] schwach wie eine Flasche leer!

Really, I can’t believe anyone made it through all ninety minutes, so to speak.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Friday

“Somehow I always knew it would end this way,” Edmund Hewlett said from the far side of the holding cell, musing bitterly, “The specifics surprise, but then … only slightly.”

“The ends justify the means,” John Graves Simcoe answered him, smiling as he moved to cross his long legs over the bank between them.

These were the first words the pair had exchanged since their joint arrest, two hours by the clock on the wall but a full ten in terms of perception. Hewlett looked past the wall to the window, trying to discern from the sunlight and shadows she could observe from this angle if his mind was deceiving him or if the mechanics that suggested as much were in want of a new set of batteries, but this testing did not much make it past the formulation of a hypothesis – his head hurt too much at the moment to concern itself with calculations.

Hewlett thought to call out to the clerk, a young man doing his best to concentrate on administrative activities that would likely otherwise go ignored until Monday as the new earl reasoned things were in every office on a Friday afternoon, but for the distraction such spreadsheets provided from his own royal presence. Reflecting on circumstance, Hewlett reasoned that he should not divert the young clerk with his want for a cold compress and a shot of something hard. The boy would certainly have enough to fight against telling his friends at the pub this evening without an unengaging conversation testing his resolve.

Occasionally, the lad looked over, curious and quiet. Hewlett had to suppose that it was not every day that a member of the Royal Family was held in custody, for the nation as a whole had ceased
with such pedestrianism somewhere between the Princes in the Tower and the tourist attraction the London prison had since become. Curiously, his time in title caused him now to consider, aside from public perception, much remained the same in the ruling classes as it had been since time immemorial - coups remained a normal conclusion of regular palace intrigue, crimes of nearly every sort were excused and ignored in those upon whose blood law was both written in and sworn upon –

but Edmund Hewlett had knowingly made himself an accomplice in one of the only offences he could be called to account for and his people wasted little time in rising to this charge.

He supposed he had something of a latent talent for precisely this kind of thing.

“I will let you say that to Anna when we get back,” Hewlett retorted, trying to form the parts of his face not fully swollen with contusions into a fixed glare. He never felt fully in control of his countenance, but he rarely had to so reckon with the reality that it held so much control over him.

Hewlett was sure the wounds he had been dealt in the end caused the fight as a whole to have been more one sided than he personally considered it being – true, he had not been able to counter Simcoe’s fists with his own when words came to blows, but the fact that his sometimes-friend had shown up in Edinburgh at all spoke to the success of the war he had been waging since arrival. Everyone in his court and everyone they routinely did business with seemed to underestimate his intellect and resolve, which had, in truth, been precisely what he had hoped would happen. That his beloved had been hurt in the process was unfortunate, but upon arrival Hewlett had seen in the souvenirs being sold with his and Anna’s faces that such was a necessary sacrifice.

That Simcoe disagreed with this particular assessment had not come as much surprise, either.

That he chose to continue in this vain, however, was quickly shifting from minor aggravation to something entirely more cumbersome.

“I am sure she will agree with my assessment,” Simcoe snorted.

“Isn’t there meant to be a photoshoot?” Hewlett frowned as much as his broken lip would let him.

At this, Simcoe shrugged. “Giving that the INS will likely want to interview you as well, I should doubt that any low-level bureaucrat will have a difficult time imagining that someone took it upon themselves to kick your ass at every public gathering over the last ... what was the lie again? Year? Three?”

“I suppose that is true as well,” Hewlett consented as he knew he now must.

He had taken pains to try to explain to Simcoe that his people were confused - panicked at the prospect of being forced to leave Europe scarcely a decade after London had abandoned them economically through privatization, and as happened in every great uncertainty, those who had made up their minds long before there were fears to exploit in others proceeded to do exactly that.

Scotland, they said, should be free of English rule.

Edmund, who objected to such sentiment both legally and morally had become as the result of his marriage the face of this movement, primarily on the basis that his and Anna’s faces covered the whole of the country.

He could not object to this image without putting his house and holdings at risk, he could not have embraced this role even if he had wished to for the self-same reasons. The only option he saw was to play down expectation slowly, giving his wife - the woman his people and their presses had
dubbed The Patriot Princess - no invitation to join him at his side. He had been crowned without her, and within the six weeks that had elapsed between his father’s death and his own custodial, courtesy ascension, the surprise that might have otherwise been felt was met by a public numbed to its own disaffection. The cries for him to assume a throne that had not existed in three hundred years were silenced by his personal absence of charisma, the same deficit that he simultaneously relied upon to reassure the other nobles that he had little design on their domains whilst he actively worked to strip each and every one of his opponents of their hoard and hold.

Everyone he had met since arrival sought something from him and Hewlett had quickly become the primary benefactor the rather joyous luck that the mercantile class was still not nearly as steeped in the manners and customs of his stately peers. He was approached with countless expansion proposals from leaders of industry assuming him -more or less correctly- to not hold his father’s ecological stance, beliefs that would further hurt the Scottish economy in uncertain times. Hewlett had worked to engage them with other landowners, namely those ever-petty aristocrats who might have otherwise accused him of being a man without honour were the profits not shared.

If Scotland was working, Hewlett assured himself and his backers, there would be neither time nor incentive to heed any factions cry for open revolt.

But in order to work within this established system, Hewlett additionally needed to actively work against it.

To outrage of his colleagues, he had asked former Inspector Ferguson by way of enticing him with an offer his of granting cousin in exile pardon, to look into rumours that his own cousins to the south were in part retaining their majesty on the loans of his younger sister’s casual lover, a fact quickly confirmed. Upon paying the full of her dowry to the man to whom Eleanor had been betrothed to for nearly a decade without an oath being exchanged, he ordered her to accept Rawdon-Hasting’s offer in kind, knowing that Her Majesty would not lightly suffer the threat of being made a client monarch to her own vassal. Everyone saw the ploy for what it was. That was the entire point.

Hewlett had since lost any personal interest in the outcome of this arrangement - it having since achieved all of his objectives; He had announced to the Queen that he knew where she was weak and in this, he managed to silence the Tarleltons who were growing too uppity and self-assured for his liking. Agnelli had assumed that Banastre would be stripped of all state-honours that might otherwise be bestowed where instead, as Hewlett expected, the MP was awarded insignia intended to make him a more viable option for Eleanor’s hand. If the ex-army colonel ever chose to actually seek it was irrelevant, at least as far as the bothersome English North-West was concerned. Clayton, who had been gone for too long for his friends on the council to conclude that he was not, in fact, after a crown of his own to wear with the chains of his family’s historical office, was at present too preoccupied with concessions and assurances to continue making his unrealistic demands on a conglomerate currently without official leadership – demands that always seemed to favour Merseyside at Scottish expense until Hewlett saw to it with a sly hand that such lopsided attempts at his grace were ceased.

It was not anything personal against either the Lord Mayor or his ignoble house. For a while, even, Hewlett had quite enjoyed the challenge and cheek. As far as his ends would be affected, their two siblings could elope to Merseyside’s entirely dormant monarchist delight and actively increasing federalist frustration, or Eleanor could do her duty as it was laid out for her by wedding Francis and baring his heirs. Should this second - increasingly likely - scenario be actualized, Edmund Hewlett was certain his own seat would be secured where it was presently precarious. Anna’s confession created an obstacle to the English title he was in line to inherit, but as Eugene had abdicated his place in succession and since moved with his fortunes and faithless wife to Vienna where the rest
of Europe was ignored, and as both biology and politics separated Edna from steaking a claim to Richmond, Anna’s future children would be viewed with favour over any born to Eleanor and a glorified banker just over the Irish Sea – Francis being more of a threat to the House of Windsor (which he already all but owned outright) than some assumed obedience in Anna to a bishop in far off Rome.

With Anna herself unseen and unheard from, it was easy to keep her current pregnancy from the respectable press in Britain, especially within the feuds Hewlett had worked to create. Effie Gwillim of The Daily Mail was happy to likewise give the claims little credence in her own widely distributed publication in exchange for his allowing her sole oversight on whom would take the CEO position in the family conglomerate that had just lost its leader. Hewlett then did his part to threaten London bankers and businessmen to cancel their appointments with the man she clearly meant, with the man Hewlett had meant for her to select in extending the offer of partnership in the first place.

And so, Anna had the sacred privacy she had sought prior to their wedding.

And so, Simcoe had come to Edinburgh without the kind of direct bidding that would have heralded further cries of corruption when the fires of their interventions on the US Stock Exchange still burned and the embers of police interest in the affair continued to smoulder -

It was a perfect situation or rather would have been without the detriment of personality at play.

Edmund Hewlett, having explained himself in full had his arguments met with the back of John Graves Simcoe’s hand and a series of lofty statements that seemed irrelevant in the grand scheme of things, particularly when the solution to the problems that had arisen in his absence had already been arrived at.

But nothing was ever easy with Simcoe. When Hewlett had finished his series of logical explanations for his dealings in the preceding weeks, he had been told to get himself a damned good lawyer, for he had failed to convince a jury of but one. He had initially assumed this statement was metaphor of the kind the verged on hyperbole and confessed his partial upbringing under the Irish admiral and his editor-wife who seemed to speak only in inflation, but Simcoe continued that he had his own set of conditions under which his future employment would need to be negotiated. Simcoe had shaken his head at the figure Hewlett sought to then offer and informed him that he was owed one last offensive before putting the past behind him, behind them –

Behind, quite specifically, everyone who had been slaughtered by Hewlett swords in a 1477 uprising memorialised in an ugly mural from the same century that spanned the palace’s Great Hall and had stood as a caution to occupiers over the following centuries that they would come to share the same fate.

Fine, Hewlett thought.

Simcoe had since his first visit to Scotland taken personal offence with the picture to the point that he often alluded to it in order punctuate arguments of no direct relation. Hewlett, certain he would have found reasons of his own to object to scenes of slaughter without his sometimes-friend bringing it up to the point of aggravation consented to this unwritten condition of contract, had himself gone to the home improvement shop and there purchased enough white paint to bind the wounds of the past – at least a fourth of them, which is all they had between them been able to eradicate in the three hours between beginning their weekend-project and being met with an arrest warrant and reminder that though several wings of the fortress bore the names of the young earl’s ancestors the site, as it was, was in the procession and therefore under the protection of National Heritage, themselves more fearsome and fanatical than most recognised terrorist organisations.
And so, they two sat in a cell, knowing there would be heavy fines, public apologies and accursed fundraising events for the mural’s refurbishment in their immediate future, both likely wishing for a sentence that would excuse them from having to personally engage tweed-clad historians and costumed hobbyists at such events. If Anna remained offended that he had kept her out of a situation she could not herself help and could in turn only cause her harm, Hewlett could reasonably assume that his sparing her several extended conversations about the medieval and early modern period would suffice an apology.

“You know what I told Abigail?” Simcoe smirked.

“Abigail?” Hewlett questioned, confused and accusing, “That is how you used your call?”

“Well, I called Akinbode’s mobile, but she answered. They are evidently back together, moved in and everything.”

“That is nice,” Hewlett gave, genuinely as he could bring himself to before returning to the concern laden in this statement of romantic bliss, “Did you manage to speak to him?”

Simcoe bit his bottom lip and nodded slightly. “I managed to let him know where we were, and he predictably offered a few choice expletives and made a number of empty threats and promises against both of our persons.”

“So, he is sorting it then?” Hewlett clarified.

“One would assume,” Simcoe dismissed.

Hewlett sighed, half certain of what he ought to prepare himself for. “What did you tell Abigail then? Let’s have it.”

“That we were literally arrested for whitewashing history,” Simcoe smiled. Hewlett found himself fighting the urge to laugh though the quip had been expected.

“I prefer ‘forgetting the sins of the past in order to move forward,’ but quality punning, that,” he gave.

“I’ve been sitting on it since London,” Simcoe confessed.

“Worthy,” Hewlett nodded.

“Indeed,” a deep voice concurred, shifting both of their attention from one another back to the bars that held them.

“Ferguson,” Simcoe addressed, “Thank God – can you get us out of here by chance?”

The ex-inspector smiled sardonically at the suggestion. “Quite the contrary,” he answered lightly, “I’m here as a private citizen. My former colleagues called me in because they knew I’d get a kick out of this and sorry, lads … sympathetic as I might otherwise be to the action taken that led to your arrest, I’m going to need you to … can you scoot closer together?” he asked. To Hewlett’s aggravation, Simcoe was quick to comply. “Ah, yes that is good,” Ferguson continued as he snapped a photo on his phone, “Wait,” he commanded, taking several steps back, presumably to get the full of the cell and the station’s name and numeric designation in the frame. “Lovely. Myles, you got that?” he asked, turning to the clerk who himself turned to check his phone, responding with a thumbs up.

“You can’t take pictures,” Hewlett objected though he knew it to be too late.
“Well, no – you see, they can’t take pictures,” Ferguson corrected with a swoop of his arm, indicating to the clerk and a number of uniformed officers walking past as they attended to their daily business, paying the cell no particular mind, “but as I’ve stated, I’m here as a private citizen, what I do in this station isn’t bound by sanction. But truly Hewlett, you’re fortunate to be behind bars. I have more than half a mind to hit you. You see, I thought we had quite seen the last of one another and now it seems we will forever be in each other’s lives.”

“The crime is that serious?” Simcoe wondered, worried even.

“Well, no, but I’m part of a re-enactment society -” the former inspector began.

Hewlett rolled his eyes. “Christ,” he muttered. “That explains so very much.”

“Oh, I’m not in it for this history,” Ferguson dismissed, “as a younger man - owing to rugby injuries that led to extended stints in NHS waiting rooms with limited reading material, and given the choice between dated celebrity gossip, political diatribes destined to come to nothing, church flyers and the occasional educational publication - I was quite taken by the latter in the hours spent with nothing else to occupy me, there through finding that so long as one is willing to be costumed in ludicrous attire while doing so there are ample opportunities -even locally - to fire inaccurate, impractical firearms from yore,” he smiled wistfully. “Great fun. Something to do on weekends when I haven’t a match – sometimes something to do simultaneously. Depends if it is a league or pub fixture, really.

“Wait,” Simcoe seemed to consider, “so as a teenager you were more interested in like … breech loading rifles than in shooting a load to what was clear to be seen beneath the sisters Kardashian’s breeches?” the ginger grinned. “You bent, Fergs?”

“No,” Ferguson answered, unphased by the insult and accusation. “I’ve always had enough opportunity to engage in the act as opposed to satisfying such desires in unfulfillable phantasy,” he countered, “but your smirks explain rather a lot of your own empty beds. No matter, there is enough drink at these historical-dos to suffer the both of you and all of the blokes who will be there to engage you over the snow that allegedly turned red when it fell on the field of battle for seven years after the fact … makes one question why you instead went with white,” he frowned before breaking out into laughter. “Certainly, my mates will question you on it and find themselves witty while doing so and - oh Christ! Oh, this is a quite a worse punishment than anything the ordinary means of state could come on.”

“White was the cheapest,” Hewlett murmured.

“Way to play into negative stereotypes,” Ferguson scolded before shifting in kind, “You’ve any left?” he asked. Before Hewlett could decide if this was facetious or not, Ferguson continued in the same vain, “Kolina’s been on me to paint the foyer for an age and I’ve simply not gotten ‘round to it, what with well … the two of you proving constant means of contention. Ban,” he turned, shouting down a hallway Hewlett could not see. “Come here if you want to have a look.” Shifting back to the cell, he added almost apologetically, “Sorry, lads – I really can’t be staying. My ride … you see, he tends to forget that there are in fact limits to his jurisdiction as MI6 does tend to as an entire operative body – even post-placement, and, having myself been in so many interrogation rooms with the man to the same effect, I shouldn’t want to risk – ah, there we are,” he shifted in greeting. “Have a nice look around, did we?”

“O’rite Simcoe? Hewlett?” Banastre Tarleton squinted, seeming as defeated by the situation as Hewlett himself felt.

“I didn’t know you could drive,” Hewlett answered.
“He can’t, not really,” Simcoe said, “but apropos Sir Banastre, you had one call and you rang the only Tarleton strapped for cash? I ought to have spent the whole of mine just chatting it up with Abigail about accurate historical representation out of pure spite.”

“How preposterous!” Hewlett spat. “I rang my sister to come bail us out.”

“The duchess or the diva?” Simcoe tried to clarify as dismissively as he dared of someone on whom he was presently reliant.

“Ells,” Hewlett answered. “Edna is back in Haddington with her husband. Though in hindsight such might have been faster. Neither she nor Patel ‘feel’ like coming down to the station and she doesn’t want to put someone named Percy in the position of having to encounter you again, so I suppose we are waiting on all of her other retainers to pull straws. Doesn’t seem to be high on her list of priorities.”

“And who do you have to blame for that?” Simcoe spat.

“Who the hell is Percy?” Hewlett countered.

“Ginger bloke,” Ferguson answered. “Once cleaned my old flat and help my mum sell a few antiques on eBay.”

Tarleton raised his arms in defeat. “Oi, that satisfies me then. You see,” he began to explain without cause, “I’d rather assumed, rather logically, I might add, that it had been Ells to be in holding and I …”

“Charged in to save her when your better instincts should have told you to flee?” Simcoe suggested in mocking tomes though the sentiment, at least, was something he would have otherwise agreed with on principle.

“I mean, something of that nature, I’m sure,” Tarleton smirked in such a way that stood as counter to all he said. He dropped his façade and his Westminster smile, continuing in earnest, “But seeing as I’m thus under no immediate threat or suspicion I’ll take my absence of you both and ask that you, Eddie, give your dear sister my well wishes. Best of luck with whatever charge the fuzz finally got you on, don’t take this wrong or any way, really, but I’m out. Saved your arses enough damn times to suffice me eternal.”

“I think you should stay and fight it out,” Simcoe suggested. “Oyster here plans to marry Ells off to Francis because he has a problem with the Papacy and thinks that the Windsors will move to murder any offspring the union produces – legitimizing his own heirs in the process - but that established, confusingly, Eddie here doesn’t care much if you want to instead elope with his sister because he has already somehow proven himself more threatening than the Holy See as everyone calls you ‘Sir’ now. Or something.”

“That is not remotely what I tried to impress,” Hewlett said under his breath.

“The Crown personally owes Rawdon enough money to accept anything over the formalization of an alliance with its principle rivals,” Ferguson translated. Tarleton nodded as though he were reflecting on his own debts to relatives and other lobbyists. Ferguson frowned. “I had forgotten that Lady Anna was Catholic, though. I had forgotten that anyone outside of Glasgow’s rival football clubs gave a shit for the distinction, to be frank.” Turning back to Tarleton, he asked with a gesture towards the cell, “Do you suppose that is why you had to give our defence of these two fully ungrateful louts to that priest when we were called to The Hauge?”
“What is this?” Hewlett wondered.

“It is about to be an Evertonian’s take on FC Liverpool’s 8th place finish,” Simcoe answered. “Just thank him and spare yourself the tirade. Sir Banastre is deserving of the former - shame though I am to admit it - but no one, not even you deserve the latter.”

“No,” Tarleton said slowly as realization took him. “No, Talleyrand ... I don’t know if he was ordained or simply left seminary upon deciding that the church was not a ripe enough institution for his ambitions, but he works in sport. He’ll probably wind up the President of FIFA, cunning and corrupt like he is. But no, no … the church wasn’t involved in anything relating to the hearing,” he considered before taking the opportunity to address Hewlett directly, “I don’t know why you hate the Pope, or me, or for that matter Francis or Ellie – but I’m fucking done with you, mate. You can’t come and play at politics at the expense of the lives of people you should care about only to try to sink back away to the States when you think your objectives met. Not everyone here has the option or the means to escape your continual incompetent, selfish -”

“This is starting to sound a lot like you last night,” Hewlett whispered to his partner in crime as the former colonel continued to berate him.

“I thought he would be pleased, to be honest,” Simcoe remarked.

“No,” Hewlett countered as Tarleton continued to remind everyone of why his name carried such inimical sobriquets. “I was rather counting on him working himself into a rage if the opportunity ever came up. This way when Ellie inevitably rebukes him, he won’t let it drop and she will have to make a decision based on more than her overblown sense of propriety as how and with whom she wants to lead her life. It isn’t freedom, not exactly,” he clarified, “but it is as close to it as I’d ever convince the lass to venture.”

Simcoe considered this. “Sometimes … Oyster, you do confess yourself to be a decent man.”

“I’ve been accused of worse,” Hewlett nearly smiled but for the shooting pain in his broken lip.

Saturday

Anna Hewlett felt herself lost for words as she entered the kitchen to find Mary Woodhull opening a tube of dough with as much ceremony and nervous caution as one ordinarily afforded a bottle of champagne. The uncrowned countess identified with the sentiment if not the exact situation, recognising the same emotions so acutely in herself that she could not help but to wonder if these translated to the visual without a prop to aid in construction. She had a sense of how the afternoon would play out and regardless of what she found herself repeating in her mind, no mantra could motivate her beyond the fear of all that she reasoned she ought to meet as a comfort. Edmund would return, stammering though explanation and apology with an honesty that could only underscore the lie they were living a top the one they were constructing with the help of everyone they knew. As it was with the business with the senator, it seemed as though no crime had been committed until everyone chose to create a cover for the night in question. She had agreed to marry him for financial incentives, she had gone through with it in spite of everything because she had truly loved him. He would come back, claim to love her, and believe this to be true.
Anna was uncertain if Edmund was indeed capable of love, or of recognising truth as it was, either within others or within himself.

Whitehall was already full of a wide assortment of guests pretending at a not-so-distant past with the same sense of romanticism that felt a fatal sin in re-enactments of any era prior, be it presented in straight-to-paperback novels, in those impossibly dull dramas they showed on public television, in living museums or in Broadway musicals. She could not approach the scene with the enthusiasm it held and as such, costumed as her slightly younger self sought private refuge where she might reconnect with the strength of which she had found herself capable before life had shown her true loss.

She should have expected the kitchen would come with company.

It was probably the most accurate depiction of the past which Whitehall with all of its decorative splendour and eager impressionists had on offer.

But then, perhaps, some things could be said to have never changed at all.

Mary jumped when the paper and cardboard packaging made a slight pop, excusing her embarrassment with explanation. “Super Bowl,” she said. “I’m making pigs in a blanket.”

Anna wished she would just stop. She wished everything would.

Mary had already made a turkey for ‘Thanksgiving’, a ham around which she planned to stage both ‘Christmas’ and ‘Easter’ and hotdogs for the ‘Fourth of July’. She had recreated countless birthday cakes of celebrations past and even managed to pull a three-tier wedding cake from the hull of her oven. She had the children painting hardboiled eggs out in the garden and hiding them from one another when they were dry. There was an assortment of hors d'oeuvres with a New Year’s flair, which did not even take into account all of the dishes brought by the sorts of women Mary seemed destine to become in middle age if she had not crossed that line already; Missuses Tallmadge, Yilmaz, Akinbode, and Adams were deaf to such statements as ‘no, you needn’t bring anything, we really have enough’ and had shown up with stacks of Tupperware with which one could presumably feed an army on Flag Day, Eid al-Fitr, Super Tuesday and for the whole of Black History Month.

And now this. Honestly, Anna wondered, who had company around this often?

Anna knew what should have expressed was something in line with the obligatory ‘Thank you for all that you have done,’ she had offered ad nauseum at every instance the opportunity to do so had been presented, but now, instead, she said, almost critically, “You really managed to include everything.”

If Mary took her tone, she did nothing to acknowledge it. “It will look as though Edmund did more to integrate if we snap a few shots of him watching ‘real’ football with Abe and Rob and Caleb and everyone,” Mary answered breezily as she proceeded to unroll the canned croissants, separate them from one another and bind them around miniature Vienna sausages. “Anyway,” she continued with the same lightness of spirit, “we didn’t do it this year, so I thought it was due, I still have the game recorded, habit really – Thomas and I always fall asleep long before it is over and -”

“You shouldn’t,” Anna interrupted. “Mary, this place, you’ve done so much and I,” she stopped, searching for a way to phrase what she meant without assigning blame where it had no place or further detracting from her professed gratitude, from the words it had taken on the week over.

Mary had accidently opened an envelope addressed to Edmund and herself from the INS and
brought this to Anna’s attention by way of explaining that she had already seen most of the obstacles overcome – she had secured letters of testament accrediting the relationship from nearly everyone who attended the wedding and was still in good standing, had conference with Philomena about staging a few photographs and had invited the whole neighbourhood over the following weekend to help stage the charade. She had the whole menu planned (and then some) and with all of the boxes that she was presently going through in the attic with her upcoming move, had managed to locate loads of craft store kitsch she had used to create countless seasonal and holiday settings. Peggy had reached out to Freddy who claimed to know stage makeup, or rather knew how to stage makeup to make them all look a few years younger and John, whom Mary had not spoken of or presumably to since his departure, was evidently traveling to Scotland to bring Edmund back to Setauket – to abduct him if need be.

Anna had tried to smile as all of this was being relayed to her.

Glad as she was that her community was coming to her defence, that she thus would not need to appear in court or pay a fine, the news found her after an ultrasound that had made Edmund Hewlett the very last person she ever hopped to again see.

“I would offer to let you ‘help’ the way you did when we in college,” Mary continued, “by which I of course mean passing a bottle of wine back and forth between us, you keeping me company in the kitchen, but that wouldn’t,” she paused, “they say you can have a glass of red something like once a week without -”

“I don’t want to take any chances,” Anna shook her head and began to pace. “None, honestly none whatsoever and this is just … I believe I’ll need to be in the full possession of my cognitive abilities to see me though the afternoon. I’m sorry I … I’m so grateful to you, really, but,” she confessed. “I can’t imagine this is going to be a happy reunion.”

Mary look up from her handwork. Blinking, she said with some audible cation, “You have me and everyone here behind you, Anna. Everyone who lives in Setauket, everyone whose occupation brought them here in recent months … even the senator who wanted to come back and match voices to faces. But no one,” she paused, beginning to rephrase, “if you want to call this off, no one would be cross with you. Believe me, I know where you are at, unexpectedly pregnant, married to someone who let’s face it, was all but a stranger to you a few months ago … uncertain about how to proceed despite having made up your mind.”

It was as though Mary had been anticipating a version of this conversation would occur. Perhaps her self-confessed penchant for stress-baking explained the full calendar of public holidays, a cornucopia filled further with every hour she was made to wait.

Anna swallowed; fully certain her discomfort could be seen, wondering if it so consumed her that she failed to recognise the same in others. “That is not …” she started. Stopped. She was not sure of anything. She knew she had left herself little choice but to go through with it all the same.

“No,” Mary shifted as one of the timers she had set began to beep. “Scratch that. I would be cross with you, but only because we have a lot of food to get rid of today and I don’t trust anyone here to return my Tupperware,” she tried to joke, shifting when she took note that Anna could not bring herself to even try to meet her expression, “but that is pittance.”

“It isn’t,” Anna insisted. “Mary, you have been so generous -”

Mary shook her head. “I was moving my boxes out of the attic anyway, unpacking to see what we have and how we are meant to divide it – Abe has otherwise been shit at helping, you know how men are. I’d forgotten we owed half of the decorations we do and he is absolutely hopeless – no
memory for a single keepsake kept out of sight the year over, at least now he’s staked his claim to a few items now that he has seen them light up and working again, I doubt he’ll take the time to decorate himself though. And if he ever manages to, I doubt he will clean up afterwards,” she began to laugh with genuine mirth, “So I will visit him a year from now and we can have an INS-engagement party all over again – Santa and Frosty and a Jack-o-Lantern in birthday hats with Easter eggs all scattered about and him not able to find his tie for work in the charming chaos of it all. It will be like … well, it will be like university, and by then you’ll be able to hang back with me in the kitchen and laugh and most importantly toast once more.”

Anna nodded.

They had been though countless renditions of this same conversation without either of them giving actual words to their actions -

But then, perhaps there were none to speak.

Mary somehow found grounds for shame in her perception that she had not been the friend that she ought in recent weeks – not that anyone would have expected her concerns to expand beyond her child’s health and well-being or had any cause to hold the resentments that emerged with the loss of a pregnancy against her, even when she chose to work though this in ways that might have otherwise been hurtful. Anna had done her best to reassure her, but worried that she had been inward looking as well of late. She was having a son, which meant that the Hewlett line had been assured succession and, in such, she feared she had already lost custody of her little one. Had the news of Edmund’s return come a few hours earlier, she might well have rejoiced, she might instead have raged and cursed his very name – but now the distinction of name held her in constant fear she dare not express to someone who had less of a choice that she had been given over recent fate. The fact of the matter was Anna knew who Edmund Hewlett was when she married him. The tragedy was that to that time she had thought herself someone else entirely – someone with the strength and resolve to contend with all that lie ahead. But life had since disabused her of such beliefs.

“I hope so,” Anna said. “I hope in a year I can laugh … smile even. I hope I can manage the latter at least today but I … I know I owe you that much,” she choked as she fought back tears. “You have done so much for me and I -”

“Hey,” Mary leaned over, rubbing at her shoulder, “I thought you spoke to him. I thought he said -”

“He did say that the baby and I would be safe, that everything he had done had been to insure that outcome absent of whatever other intentions may be at play … it is only, if it is not my baby, oh Mary, it will be someone’s son or daughter and how could I possibly live with that? I’m sorry, I know I shouldn’t … I know you have your own … problems right now, against which my worries can’t even begin to compare, and I don’t mean to -”

“Pain isn’t a contest, Anna.”

“I know,” she gave, “I just wish it were not a constant.”

Mary nodded, her expression becoming uncomfortable. “I’m going to … I am going to actually open this, if that is alright,” she asked of a bottle of wine.

Anna swallowed and did her best to repaint her smile. “Do you want me to? Do you think you can manage?”
“Bitch,” Mary stuck out her tongue. “Those Pillsbury packages are the absolute worst. Try as I might to psyche myself up for it, the pop always finds me by surprise.”

“Hard to believe a girl like you was ever involved in the crime of the century,” Anna found herself teasing in a humour as bleak as the recent past and foreseeable future.

“Not as hard as it is for me to believe that we didn’t,” Mary paused, “that we waited for the world to end to make this lie our truth. I’ve missed you. I think I missed you for years.”

“Same.”

“Anna, I’m sorry if this all seems like overkill but I know I have not always been the best friend to you, even … especially recently, so if you need to talk or, if you need me to for a while, I’m here – whatever needs to be said to make this right.”

The two embraced and for a while Anna simply let herself be held as she did her best not to let the overwhelming feelings of confusion and relief with which her fears and sorrows were suddenly faced come at the cost of the hour Freddy had spent trying to make her closer resemble the woman in her early-to-mid-twenties whom Anna routinely found herself falling back on (less convincing) deceptions to try to create. It was all for nought. She soon found herself crying quietly heavily and Mary helped her into a chair, taking the one beside her and continuing to squeeze at hands pregnancy had caused to swell.

“I don’t trust Edmund,” Anna confessed, “but I do trust that he trusts himself and the words he says to me and that makes it all the worse. I’m having a son, Mary. A little boy that I don’t think will ever escape his name regardless of what I do to defend him from it. Edmund couldn’t escape in the end and I had … I had this one single moment when I was forced to play on my new role for the sake of that little Irish boy amidst the heist he and Cicero managed to pull – something our actions and incompetence pushed all of these kids into and I just fell into … fucking Disney when I had ought to … you see that is the thing isn’t it? I have no fucking idea what I ought to have done. I think relying on his getting away with it was probably the wrong move though. I also don’t think I should have given him my garter. In hindsight that seems rather inappropriate and I’m frankly shocked his mother hasn’t yet moved to sue me for sexual misconduct though such was not my tone at all -” she rambled.

“I think ‘Let It Go’ might be decent advice here,” Mary broke in.

“How can I?” Anna demanded. “I have this terrible feeling that they will never be able to. The Hewletts. The Press. The people looking at me to be some -”

“Holy shit,” Mary snorted, “you have never seen ‘Frozen’, have you?”

“What?”

“Oh, Anna,” Mary sighed as she seemed to fight a smile, “just, just wait. As though parenting were not enough of a challenge you have musicals and merchandising to look forward to in your foreseeable future,” after a long pause she added with a hint of hope, “At least Edmund is keen on cartoons.”

“Well … anime,” Anna felt obligated by nights of explanation and argument to correct.

“Did you know that before you married him?” Mary pried.

“I mean,” Anna cringed, “you can kind of tell just by looking, can’t you?”
“I know,” Mary nodded, “but you still said ‘yes.’ Look … if it seems like I am making light of this, I don’t mean to be, but I doubt he has so changed. No one is perfect, and you certainly knew Edmund of all people wasn’t when you fell in love with him. When you see him,” Mary bit the corner of her bottom lip as she searched for the right words, “I don’t know if the time that has passed between you will be too much to ignore, but the titles and the roles you’ll however seldom have to play, that that isn’t you or him or the plural-you and you will remember that. You will both remember that.”

“Aren’t we here just playing at a role?” Anna countered. “Aren’t we always? Even if that might have been enough for us at one point … I’m carrying his child, a child that he will have more claim to than I and Mary I can’t,” she choked, feeling that she would again be as sick as she had been after getting off the call, wishing that Mary would put the lid back on the canned sausage presently making such an increasingly literal possibility. “Do you know what he said about his sister?”

“Not in so many words but I would have guessed that whatever was meant came out completely wrong because with Edmund, darling, it always does. It is part of his … ‘charm’ if one can call it that and you do … or did and I know in my heart you will again. If not today then,” she seemed to reconsider, “Anna, really, it is not too late to postpone. I’ll call Philomena and tell her to just bring them to a hotel after picking them up at the airport, we can do this all some other time if it suits.”

“We don’t have time,” Anna moaned. “But you know … you know what I stayed up thinking about last night?”

“What?”

“About Robert Rogers, well, about what Ben said he told him after the arrest - that he would be safer in prison. I can’t help but wonder if that is true of myself as well. Edmund effectively nullified any threat he might have to his seat both from within his family and without by arranging and breaking a marriage contract that, should it have been fulfilled and likewise fulfilled its obligation … Mary those children would have been slaughtered. And he said this all with such nonchalance …”

“Well Lady Eleanor has no children and now she never will. I’m sure that was the tone he was taking. John explained the situation to me, too,” Mary frowned. “I think you are just taking the historical narrative and making undo associations with the modern day. You should really stop listening to that podcast you found about Scottish history, it isn’t healthy. For all of their ill deeds it is not as though the Hewletts are wielding claymores at the heads of armies these days.”

“No, but they can still easily contract officers into doing their bidding as has been recently shown. And I can’t help to think that I am at least partially to blame for getting Edmund mixed up in all of this – had I never asked him to buy the pub for me, I might never have found out that he comes from an exceedingly wealthy family who he spent most of his adult life fleeing … and Mary, I swear I wish I had never said anything to encourage him to fight, because now he thinks he does so in my name when in truth he has forgotten me entirely.”

“I think you need to correct that assumption … both in him and in yourself. I think you might be believing some measure of the propaganda he created less to secure power but to keep those who mean to use him towards their own agenda in check,” Mary shifted. “To my immense delight, he used to do the same thing to Richard -”

“Speak insouciantly about the harm that might come to Abe if it met with his pleasure?” Anna spat.

“I meant,” Mary cringed, “more in terms of putting him in his place, but he could be petty and
passive aggressive when Abe came home from a gig smelling of drink and God knows what else – making a show of opening all of the windows – making the rest of us, and himself, colder in winter as he paraphrased Catullus or Hugo Chavez – whatever histrionic statement on body odour came first to mind. But it was,” she took a deep breath, clearly fighting the urge to smile, “men always cast themselves as heroes of myth in any narrative they go about relaying, probably seeing themselves in the mind’s eye doing this all shirtless and in procession of a muscular build of the kind one only sees in blokes who spent nearly every waking hour on a weight bench just to excuse themselves of the social obligation of wearing a shirt. I mean this honestly – go out to our guest and hear the ways they talk about basic shit like picking up a pint of milk-substitute before Tarde Joe’s closes. And we, as women, as all women do, nod and say ‘that is nice, honey’ knowing that in their moment of ‘tremendous nerve’ they probably bore a closer resemblance to Freddy last night screaming as he was trying to kill a tiny spider with hairspray than they ever could have to like a Putin campaign poster from way back where he is fighting a bear with this bare hands and presumably winning.

“Anyway, that is what Edmund looked like when he caused Abe offence or even threat in the past – the Freddy thing, not the,” she paused, “… oddly metaphoric if I have a think on it for half a second Putin v. Duma version that probably played out in his mind in all of these moments of asserting his will on the situation, as it were.”

Anna found herself laughing hearing her fears expressed in precisely this perspective, something, she considered, likely closer to the truth than any version to insert itself into her phantasy. “You are a good friend, Mary.”

“No,” Mary shook her head, “I’ve just been there before with some version of all of the worries that consume you, that you are now translating to your relationship with Edmund because it is completely normal to do so. Look - you are never going to be able to protect your son form everything, even if you somehow managed to against every odd … in the end you would not have been able to protect him from yourself. It isn’t easy under any circumstances but then … I mean look at Thomas for Christ’s sake.”

“Mary, don’t -”

“No – not at him, but at all of the people who have since come to his defence, who would have been there for him absent of any extreme necessitating it. You are going to fail and you are going to triumph and it is always going to feel so completely overwhelming either way you’ll hardly be able to catch your breath all the while, but that is what being a mom is and you are going to rock this, Anna. You rock everything else.”

“I don’t know,” Anna nodded slowly. “I’m pretty shit kitchen company.”

“No one is judging you on your cooking abilities. I mean,” Mary squinted, “we totally are, but only behind your back.”

“Thanks, hoe,” Anna stuck out her tongue.

“It will get better,” Mary assured her.

“I think I will feel better in time, with me and Edmund, I mean, but I doubt things will ever get better than this, right now, with you,” Anna amended.

“The next time we get together for a big party like this, it won’t be just for show,” Mary said in the tone of a larger dream she did not want to spoil by voicing. Instead, she pat Anna on the back once more. “Our fights will be over things less substantial and our worries will be more grounded in the
things we can influence.”

“Yeah,” Anna gave, “but then we won’t have turkey and stuffing on the Fourth.”

“I mean, there will probably still be leftovers by then,” Mary snorted. “I really went overboard, didn’t I?”

“Thank you … for everything,” Anna said once more. “I do mean it even I’ve been shit at showing it.”

“I know. And hey, thank you for letting me make up for six years of bullshit in a single afternoon.”

“I would answer ‘anytime’,,” Anna smiled, “but I serious hope such never befalls us again.”

“Same,” Mary agreed, “you have no idea how hard it was to find canned pumpkin and condensed milk in the summer.”

The light turned to green, but Philomena Cheer did not shift gears.

Instead, she turned back to him and re-joined their conversation for the first time since she had picked them both up from the airport. “That is quite enough,” the actress seemed to warn, catching John Graves Simcoe entirely off guard. “John André did not invent this circumstance any more than either of you did, but whereas your lot is rejoiced for your role in it and gets to rejoice after it all, my husband was buried in nameless grave and not as the man you once knew nor the one whom I once loved. Christ, Hewlett!” she exclaimed, “The only reason you are alive now is because of his efforts to save you! He loved you! He loved you both and I’ll not sit here and have you pretend otherwise, not aloud. Not to me.”

“Ah … apologies, Ms Cheer, I meant only,” Hewlett stumbled as he glanced out the side window once more. “The field, the one we once practiced and played in. I find it strange that it still looks same as I ever knew it.”

“Will you continue with it?” she asked curtly, smacking her red lips together in a way that could not remotely be described as a kiss as the light retook the same scheme. “Either of you?”

“If the league allows me to come back,” Simcoe gave. “My last match ended in a booking – by which I mean I had my Miranda rights read to me in addition to the yellow-red that might itself have been deserved.”

“They decide to punish you and then they decide on the crime,” Philomena seemed to agree for her own reasons, “believe me, that is true whatever your foul. And you, Hewlett?”

Simcoe did not entirely understand the line of questioning, but he found a strange comfort in what he gleamed of its motivation. He was still struggling to work though the family life he had left behind in Britain without having tried to engage it whilst there – the disappointment his godfather’s wife Maggie never missed an opportunity to profess; sentiment he suspected the admiral of sharing despite his objections an denials; Effie, his almost-wife turned almost-sister who remained his primary defender despite all of the pain he had put her through, who confessed that – for the moment at least – she needed a bit of distance from him now that the dust of them had settled, happy to review the proposals and spreadsheets he sent but loath the answer the
personal sentiment in correspondence she requested remained strictly professional outside of birthdays and bank holidays; Percy, who may have been his brother, who a DNA test had confirmed to be so, who had lost any interest in this distinction by the time Simcoe had asked him what percentage of their shared biological mother’s flat he felt himself intituled to should he be forced to sell.

John Graves Simcoe knew himself to have done wrong by them all and struggled to find forgiveness within himself for his own maleficence, but in judging his sins against André’s, against the strife through which Philomena had suffered and against the tone she now took, he felt as though he might someday accept that anger was not indefinite, that wounds would one day scab and heal. He would be traveling to the UK often enough, he reasoned. If André could be forgiven, so too could he.

He would check in next time. Eventually, he would be worthy.

Eventually, he would be both welcome and able to see himself as such.

“Back half, perhaps,” he heard Hewlett answer. “I still intend to defend my dissertation this fall, plus my wife and I have a little one on the way and I should doubt I’ll have time to make it out to practice in the week. We have something of a standing order that if you don’t train you don’t start and John would keep me on the bench for spite, I have no illusions otherwise.”

“And the rest of them, will they still play?” Philomena seemed to genuinely wonder.

“There isn’t much else to do in Setauket, madame.”

“I know you can’t believe it,” she answered as she began to drive, “but I am sure that would have made him happy. John, I mean. I wish you would let Bye-Week be his legacy, or at least be part of it. We all are given such limited influence over our fate … and yet your lives, at least, are infinitely better from where I sit that my late husband had been allowed to affect them, whatever his methods, means or motivations might have been – who can really argue them now?

“Hewlett, you survived and defeated all of those who would see you fall. You married to a beautiful, accomplished woman who is carrying your child and you forget for your own conscious and convenience that it was my husband who not only introduced you to Anna but helped you to realise the possibilities for connection within yourself.

“Simcoe, when I met you, you were so lonely, so tormented by your own ghosts that they seemed the only company you were truly capable of keeping. Now you are the one everyone looks at for leadership, from the children you coach to the captains of industry and the lawmakers they shake hands with to save either side the degradation of a bow … something I am not entirely certain they would hesitate to offer you were it within your character to make such demands. You didn’t just face your fears because of John’s research, you befriended them and let them lift you up onto their shoulders for the parade,” she paused. “So, no. No, I have to disagree. I don’t really think that field looks much the same at all.”

“I’ll give you that, at least,” Simcoe said.

“That means more than I know myself to be expressing,” Philomena answers. “Thank you.”

“Thank you,” Simcoe repeated under his breath, likewise meaning these words more than he might ever express.
He felt ready, come what may.

Mary and Thomas Woodhull slept through the Super Bowl as always. She awoke on the couch with her son in her arms to the smell and sounds of the mess being added to rather than cleaned. Such, Mary thought as she rose with a groan, was simply the way of things.

And it was good so.

Much as Anna had fretted the day before would constitute the worst kind of community theatre, long before dusk, it had shown itself to be truth in its superlative – at once ugly and exquisite, certain, confused and tragically comedic. The fear that had bound Mary to her neighbours, to set and stage however small or grandiose had been banished in the joy of extended company.

Aberdeen had snuck with the marijuana and the man she had stolen it from into Richard’s study where they rolled a joint with a thing page taken from one of the judge’s legal codices, smoking it with Philomena, Caleb and his Uncle Lewis – possibly the best use of the room Mary had avoided for so long.

Rob Townsend, the Reverend Tallmadge, Cicero and Benedict Arnold tried their best to explain American Football to her John who quickly lost patience with the whole of it, electing to instead seek her out in the kitchen despite Mary’s insistence that he had ought to mingle, she had everything under control.

In truth, Mary had lost any authority she might have had in that domain – Jordan and Ben’s mothers having completely taken over and last tasks of preparations and presentation and sharing what remained of the wine Mary had opened between them afterwards –

In this, she saw something of her and Anna, though she barely saw Anna at all for most of the evening, she and Edmund having snuck upstairs to talk and later touch until someone realised that the bride and groom should probably be in a few of the pictures, at least.

Thomas found his voice within the person of Mrs Yilmaz, the unlikely housekeeper-sleuth who seemed to delight in his presence and fascination, comfortable enough with her own limitations to be able to explain loud enough for her two living daughters to hear her in a crowded room that no, the boy was no bother at all, she was fond of children and liked having them around as hers were doing everything possible to refuse her of grandchildren – Emine with her nose ring and heavy eyeliner, Madison with her headscarf. Mary struggled to understand at first and ultimately only did in the eye roll the sisters who shared little else fell into simultaneously. It came as a comfort to both Abe and she, having spent weeks worried about what they might be missing, somehow assured that their son would get better at communication – even if he physically could not.

Abe and his former band set up in the now empty garage for a final set – the ring was split by his coming return to Washington DC and Rob’s being sent on assignment to where he would not say. Anna and Edmund shared the first dance of three – the local police showing up mid-set and Alexander Hamilton learning shortly thereafter that his office held little power against local noise ordinances, which everyone – due either to the situation that defined their first meeting or due to the amount of alcohol that had been consumed by that point – found to be hilarious.

Later on in the evening, after years of playing largely to audiences of twelve or less in pubs that
made Strong Tavern seem grand, after playing their last show and packing everything back up, Cicero, Thea and Pip interrupted a hot-dog eating contest Ben and Jordan (for reasons no woman understood) thought would be a good idea to get started with the news that Culper Ring was now ‘big in Europe’, causing nearly half of the men to choke on the meat and bread they were barely chewing to begin with. Cicero had made a video of Anna and Edmund’s first dance as a married couple and posted in a WhatsApp Group he had made with a few of the friends his recent misadventures lead him to finding overseas. The first response had been a young couple imitating the Earl and Countess’ ‘moves’ insofar as they could be defined as such, insofar as was possible – for to everyone’s surprise Atty was a rather skilled dancer and Kitty (who to everyone’s outright shock existed) was having far too much fun with the impression to make it viable, falling into laughter whenever she approached the seriousness of Anna’s mien. The video ended with a voice asking what they were listening to, prompting a text of the same question which was answered with a Spotify playlist. Twenty minutes later came a second clip, this one of a number of prominent figures, mostly from political circles, trapped at sea while Culper Ring played – a few, at least, clearing enjoying the sound. Abe was thrilled and Mary happy for him, if Rob felt anything, he did not express it and Caleb was too sour that Wakefield had beaten him at hotdogs to take much notice of his commercial success, for what it was.

Sunday came before the first guests began to leave and the people who meant to stay the night congressed in the living room, electing to finish the ‘real’ football game a series of soccer matches had interrupted in the afternoon. Anna proved herself far better at explaining the game than the men who had tried hours earlier, but if such aided in John’s enjoyment match itself Mary could not say, having fallen asleep on the sofa – she guessed – not all that long after, likely to the amusement of anyone to have ever watched sport with her before.

Drowsy and slightly disoriented, Mary Woodhull made her way to the kitchen, finding the chorus of sounds she had heard from the living room - as she had very much expected – equated themselves to the calamity she found.

“No,” she said in lieu of an actual greeting. “No, we have too many leftovers for you guys to be making breakfast. Eat the stuff that is still on the table and wash a few dishes before you go about dirtying new ones. I’m not cleaning this whole mess up by myself.”

“I like my eggs warm,” Abe gave sheepishly from his perch at the kitchen counter.

“I’m doing a load now,” Anna said with a vague gesture towards the dishwasher, calling Mary’s attention instead to the pile still in the sink.

“Sponge? Soap?” she suggested.

“Well, don’t blame me, I’m not eating - I can’t keep anything down these days,” Peggy said. “Give me this one single moment of pregnancy that is proving itself to be truly beautiful – watching all of these drunks moving through the morning in slow motion without anything approach the hangover I might otherwise have.”

“Is it John André’s baby?” Arnold asked absent any notion of sensitivity at the same time Aberdeen complained “Not so loud!” with even less.

“No, it is mine,” Mary answered the senator. “Peggy’s been kind enough to surrogate.”

“I needed something in my life to give it meaning after you effectively split up my favourite band,” Peggy expanded with a deadpan expression.
“Do you mean that?” Abe smiled to a few scattered, suppressed snickers.

“Fine,” Mary sighed, “I surrender, I’m going to need coffee for this – is there any left?”

“Just black?” John conformed.

“Yep,” Mary said, taking the cup she was handed and a seat in one of the empty chairs.

“As I was explaining before you woke up, my love,” John continued as he walked back towards the stove, “culinarily speaking there are few things we brits do right, but breakfast – that we know.”

“Fish and chips,” Aberdeen offered.

“Nah, can’t do seafood at all since, well, ask Oyster.”

“It is not that exciting of a story,” Edmund shrugged, acknowledging a nickname Mary realised she still had yet to hear the story behind.

“I got one better,” Akinbode offered before Mary found the chance to ask, “last time this motherfucker said he’d cook for our asses – this me and half the team right – he takes as big of a plastic container his microwave can fit, think it were like an old ice-cream carton washed too many times for the flavour to be remembered in either the taste or by the packaging -”

“Yeah,” Mary squinted, “that is what happens when you wash – dishes!” she exclaimed, exasperated. “Really most of us are in our thirties and forties, how am I the only adult-adult to grasp basic household chores?”

“I loaded the dishwasher,” Anna complained as though she expected credit.

“I mean it don’t matter, the explanation was more one of dimensions,” Akinbode sought to clarify. “So Simcoe takes this bucket with a lid, fills it about a third of the way with water, puts some six packages of those instant ramen noodles in, then takes a can of condensed tomato soup and just lays it on top, looking like a little red log, doesn’t even try and break it up or anything.”

“Did it work?” John demanded of him as he busied himself with bacon and eggs.

“Nah, nah – I’m not done,” Akinbode held up his finger, “the best part, Coe goes and covers this concoction with individual-packaged cheese – the kind sold as yellow that everyone sees as orange – it floats by the way,” he added with some measure of wonder.

“Dinner and entertainment,” Abigail said with a roll of her eyes.

“Sticks it into said microwave for -”

“Five and a half minutes,” John offered. “Came out though didn’t it?”

“Oh yeah, that shit was amazing,” Akinbode verified. “Not complaining, just strange seeing you doing normal things in a normal way is all.”

“I think I could get used to it,” Mary smiled.

“Um … this probably isn’t the time or place to be having this conversation, but you may well need to – short term, at least … as I’m letting you my flat I’m presently without walls myself and I was wondering if I might trouble you to crash,” John stammered awkwardly, his fingers twitching as a blush at once filled his cheeks and found it’s way to Mary’s own.
“I’m open to it,” she tried to tease, though she knew herself to be beaming by the time the words had parted her lips.

Chapter End Notes

For years I planned on including an epilogue set about a year out from these final scenes, but this seems like a good enough note to end on should we never again meet. The fact that I’m doing this once more in what will likely turn into another sixty-odd chapter crime-comedy cum political thriller speaks to the fact that happy endings don’t exactly sit with me, and they lived (absent of any adverb or value statement) is quite enough for my purposes here. Before I (presumably) bid most of you farewell forever though – let’s do this one last time:

Nothing about the Hewletts is, of course, real, nor were they based on any noble family from northern Europe. Naturally similarities exist between their narrative and several dynasties of the Near and Middle East where history is either told in shamelessly absolutist terms (“and all who stood were slaughtered”) or alternatively entirely denied in order to avoid paying reparations or because such would be perceived as a challenge to the maths that serve a great sense of pride, and I suppose for this reason I allowed for a rumour of Afghan blood entering the line as the result of the nineteenth-century conflict (in a far earlier chapter), you know … because whitewashing history is just flat out wrong.

Large sections of this chapter took on a somewhat meta theme of romanticising the past, and as proof positive that we are ALL guilty of this sin … o’rite, this is about to get serious: Liverpool FC in fact finished 8th their first season under Klopp and I have absolutely no recollection whatsoever of what it meant to be midtable. Everton, if you were wondering (which you weren’t) finished in the natural order of them being 11th.

There is some grain of truth to the allusions made about national sentiment in this chapter, Scotland remains fairly split on leave/remain and God Save the Queen rather famously gets booed in Merseyside (though, I’m sure it is nothing personal against HM)

The Great Hall in Edinburgh Castle looks nothing like what has been described over the course of Hide and Seek. Actually … it is just red (like the blood and the snow and all that bullshit if we want to now wax poetic.)

Was the football-relevant religious schism in Glasgow, Scotland ever mentioned in the notes? No? Okay so there is a football relevant religious schism in Glasgow. Celtic are Catholic, Rangers are Protestant.

Super Tuesday isn’t a holiday … unless all you do is read news all day. Then it might
as well be Christmas/Hanukkah/Eid or whatever your faith gives out presents for. It is when a bunch of states hold a primary.

If you are too young to remember Vladimir Putin for anything beyond his hacking of American democracy, go throw a google on him shirtless and before you let it sink in that such is actually part of his campaign strategy, I mean … stop reading this fic and get yourself over the 20th century RPF section and just marvel at the number of people that works for.

And … that is it!

Thanks, truly, to everyone who read this to the end. Ich habe fertig! - but you should be patting yourself on the back. It’s been real.

Up Next: Hide and Sequel … it is like the second leg of this fixture, if you feel – the “but can they do it on a cold Tuesday night in Stoke?” edition of what we all just spent the past four years on. Cheers.

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