Those who rise up

by SnowHeart

Summary

“Well, tell your friend Potus he has a funny name.”
“I would, except he’s not my friend, he’s my boss. And POTUS isn’t his name, it’s his title.”
“His title?”
“Yeah,” Alex grinned. “President of the United States.”

The West Wing AU that demanded to be written. History is happening in DC, and the Washington administration is ready to take their shot. At least they will be if they can make it though without killing each other.

Notes

No knowledge of the West Wing is actually necessary, except to spot my shameless references. Will be moving away from the show’s plot pretty quickly anyway…

See the end of the work for more notes.
“Excuse me, Sir, you’re going to have to put that away. We’ll be landing in DC in around five minutes.”

“One second…” Alex muttered, not taking his eyes off of his phone. He was midway through drafting an email, fingers flying over the screen, and barely registered the stewardesses’ words until she repeated them with a frown. “I’m afraid I must insist you put your phone away while we complete our descent.”

He sighed, running a hand through his dark hair. He liked to wear it down on the days he wasn’t in the office, and it had grown enough to hang around his shoulders. “Do you have any idea how advanced this aircraft is?” he asked. “State of the art navigation system, engines newly commissioned just over a year ago, sixteen separate failsafes in the event of an emergency… and you’re saying that I flummox this thing with something I bought from the Apple Store? Because if that’s the case we should get the NSA on that right away. Or at the very least I could give the director of the FBI a call…”

He trailed off under her glare and at least had the grace to look a little sheepish as he realized he was ranting. “Fine, it’s going away.” He was about to turn it off (and make a big show of it) when the device suddenly beeped into life. Alex cursed and dropped it in surprise. Wow, he needed to turn the volume on that thing down.

The hostess picked it up and frowned in confusion at the message flashing on the screen. “Potus coming home early, time to get back to work” She smiled, and handed it back to him. “Tell your friend, Potus he has a funny name.”

“I would, except he’s not my friend, he’s my boss. And POTUS isn’t his name, it’s his title.”

“His title?”

“Yeah,” Alex grinned. “President of the United States.”

--

If there was a time of day when the atrium of the West Wing wasn't crowded with people rushing in all directions, Aaron Burr had never seen it. Probably for about a minute at midnight, he thought to himself as he scanned his ID at the security desk, doing his best to avoid being trampled by the stampede.

He was greeted with a smattering of hellos and good mornings as he walked down the corridors, a stack of folders already having been handed to him. There would be more waiting on his desk, Aaron knew. It was going to be a long day but then, if the White House Chief of Staff wasn’t busy, there would be something seriously wrong with the country.

“Morning, Burr,” someone called out as he entered the bullpen, the hub of desks and offices where communications were based, and he glanced up to see John Laurens coming out of his office, balancing his own stack of papers precariously. Aaron had always thought him too young to be the Deputy Communications Director, but the kid from South Carolina had proven himself time and time again. He was loyal, quick-witted, and seemed to possess some supernatural ability to keep certain
colleagues under control. His hair was pulled off of his face and his eyes were bright despite the early morning. But the again, that could just be the coffee kicking in.

“Do we know why He’s coming back today?” John asked.

“I’ll explain in staff.” said Aaron. “Don’t want to have to go over it twenty times, there’s enough we've got to get done today as it is. Do you know if Alexander will be gracing us with his presence any time soon?”

John ignored the slight edge to the question and grinned good-naturedly. “Just got off of the phone with him, actually. Although now I think about it, I’m not sure how he managed to call me from a plane. But yeah, he’s on his way. Should be here in time for the meeting.”

“I don’t suppose we could somehow keep him out of the building until it’s over?”

“Good luck keeping Alex away from his work. Especially if he knows Seaburry’s going to be in here.”

“That’s what I was afraid of.”

Senior Staff was held at eight thirty every morning, a single permanent event before the chaos of the day unfolded. Eight thirty, every morning without fail, barring a national emergency, or a breakfast meeting, or a situation developing in a different time zone, or… Okay, so it was almost never held at eight thirty, but today was one of the few mornings they had managed to keep to schedule. Angelica Church knew it wouldn't last, of course, but the illusion of control and organization was nice while they could keep it up. They did have the small matter of running the country to deal with, after all.

The meeting was held in Aaron’s office, one of two rooms in the building with the privilege of direct access to the Oval. Unfortunately, Press Secretary wasn't so high up in the pecking order; her own office was at the other end of the corridor at the mercy of countless journalists looking for a scoop, so she hung out here more often than was probably necessary. Not that she couldn't handle the vultures, of course, but there were days when there just wasn't enough coffee in the world to fend them off all day.

But either way, Angelica had an excuse to be in Aaron’s office at the moment. She was perched on the arm of Lauren’s chair, watching Burr search through the papers on his desk. If she had mild office envy, then her desk envy was through the roof. The thing was genuine teak, for God’s sake.

“We might as well start,” he said, having clearly found whatever it was he was looking for. “There’s no point waiting for-“

“I’m here, I’m here!” Alex shouted bursting through the door, and she heard John stifle a laugh at Aaron’s frown. “The prodigal son has returned.”

“How was New York?” she asked.

“Great. I swear that city makes me feel like a new man every time I visit. And I spoke to Jay last night. We should have the go ahead for the appropriations bill if-“

Thank you, Alexander,” Aaron interrupted. “I’m sure you can fill us in later, but that’s not the meeting we’re having right now.”

“Sir,” Alex bowed his head in mock politeness, but he didn't press the matter, much to Angelica’s
relief. The two of them had been bickering for as long as she could remember, for far longer than they had been White House Chief of Staff and Communications Director. When they were getting on she didn't think she had ever seen a more effective team at work, but when they argued… well, it was a good thing they had the secret service on hand.

"Three things we need to deal with today. Firstly, as you know, the President has decided to cut his long weekend in Virginia short. It’s so he can receive the new French Ambassador, so not an emergency for once.” Aaron grimaced slightly. “Which is more than can be said for the second issue.”

“Congressman Seaburry?” Angelica asked, and he nodded.

“Seaburry?” Alex repeated. “He’s gonna be here today?”

“Afraid so. We need to make sure not to alienate the conservative right, and he’s a key part of that.”

“We’re Democrats.” Alex pointed out. “I’m pretty sure we alienate the conservative right by breathing.”

“This is exactly what I’m talking about, Alexander.” Aaron muttered. “It was your comments that got us into this mess, and now Seaburry’s demanding a full apology or he never votes our way again.”

“It wasn't that bad!”

“My dog speaks more eloquently” Angelica quoted. “And then there was that thing about his hair. All on the steps of the Capitol building as well, you and the Congressman screaming it out for the whole world to hear…”

“Seaburry deserved it, though,” said John. "The garbage that comes out of that man's mouth..."

“Exactly! All I did was call him out on the crap he’s been sprouting-“

“Don’t think I don’t know that.” Aaron muttered darkly. “But now we’re going to need to call him back in again because a lot of people out there are pretty angry. Our media perception’s through the floor, and we need to do something about it, fast.”

“I think you’re over-reacting,” Alex said.

“And I think you’re not listening to me!” Aaron rarely raised his voice, but when he did, people shut up fast. His words weren't even directed at Angelica and she felt the hairs on the back of her neck stand on end. “This whole thing’s a mess, and I’m trying to find a way out that doesn't involve me marching in there and telling the President that his best option is to show you the door. So how about you close your mouth for one minute and work with me here?”

There was silence for a minute, during which Alex and Aaron stared each other down, and Angelica failed to decipher the wordless conversation that passed between the two. Then Alex sighed. “So what is our best option?”

“That’s the third thing. We hire someone specifically to work on media strategies and projection.”

“Yeah?”

“I’m thinking Eliza Schuyler.”
“Absolutely not.”

“That’s a great idea,” Angelica chimed in. “She was awesome during the campaign, knows half the staff…”

“Plus she’s already Washington-approved,” John added.

“This is a bad idea…” muttered Alex.

“Can you give me one good reason that’s not personal for me not to hire Eliza?” Aaron asked.

“Sure,” Alex crossed his arms defensively. “She used to be my girlfriend!”

“Works for me.” Aaron scribbled something down. “I’ll speak to Him this afternoon and get it done by the end of the week.”

Alex opened his mouth to complain again, and Angelica hit him over the head with a memo. “Grow up, Hamilton.”

“Ow,” he pouted.

“We done?” she asked Aaron. “Because I have to brief the press in ten.”

“Yeah, dismissed. Just so long as everyone remembers the Seaburry thing at three.”

Angelica’s route back to her office took her through the bullpen, so she walked down with the other two. “I don’t see what the big deal is,” John said. “You haven’t been with her in over two years, and you guys had pretty much the smoothest breakup ever.”

“I wouldn’t say that…”

“You tag each other in monkey videos on Facebook! I’m pretty sure you called her up to ask advice on haircare last week!”

“Thanks for keeping your mouth shut on that one,” Alex mumbled, as Angelica snorted.

“Anytime, my friend.”

“But seriously, what’s the issue?” Angelica pressed.

“There’s no issue. It’ll be nice to have Eliza around again, really. It’s just awkward, working with someone you used to go out with. Make’s it so much harder to start anything up with someone new.”

“Who exactly are you planning to start something up with, Alex?” John laughed as he disappeared back into his office. “We haven’t got a hope in hell of dating anyone as long as we work here.”

“I know…” Alex said, but his smile didn’t quite reach his eyes as he watched John’s door close, and as she walked back to her own office, Angelica couldn’t shake the feeling she’d missed something important.

--

“Ok, tell me again.”

“John…”
“Come on. One more time like I’m stupid.”

Alex sighed, running a hand across his face. “I will keep my mouth shut. I will not piss off the Congressman. I will smile, and apologise, and make nice, and hate every damn second of it. Happy?”

They were waiting in John’s office, which had the infinite advantage of a couch, which Alex was currently sprawled across. He had come up with some of his best work here, John crammed at the other end with a laptop balanced on his knee, keys tapping away into the night. Alex had always preferred writing longhand himself; there was something immensely satisfying about watching the ink shape your words straight from your own hand. The entirety of Washington’s first State of the Union speech had been drafted out on a single yellow legal pad.

“Perfect.” John smiled faintly. “Though if it’s any consolation, I’m gonna hate every second of this too. The whole thing’s a joke. We should be holding these guys to account for what they say, not grovelling for their support.”

“So why are we? Why not take a stand on the issues that matter?”

“Because that’s how you get yourself fired,” John explained patiently. “And I’d really rather you didn’t. You’re the only one around here who remembers to buy the good biscuits.”

“This isn’t funny. It’s all Burr wants to do, please people here, make nice there. It’s a time for bold strokes, and here we are playing to Seaburry’s fiddle. The man’s stance on social policy alone… does he really think it’s acceptable to favor state bills restricting minority rights in-”

“Alex, please…”

“If I get fired, I get fired, Laurens! I’m not going to sit here and let him spread his hateful-“

“Alex!”

He was pacing, Alex realised in surprise, not even having noticed standing up. He turned to look at John, who’s smile was half-fondness, half-exasperation. Probably more like ninety-nine per cent exasperation. He took a deep breath.

“I will keep my mouth shut.”

John’s laugh was cut off by a sharp tap on the door, and Angelica walked in. “Are you guys ready?”

“Born ready, Miss Church,” said Alex.

She ignored him and turned to John. “Is he actually ready, or…?”

“Alex?” he prompted.

_God_, he was going to kill them both. “I will keep my mouth shut.”

--

Scratch that, Alex was going to kill Seaburry first. How could the smarmy bastard and sit there calling them dangerous rabble, while arguing for immediate cuts and cancellations for social welfare projects? Alex had swallowed his pride and issued a gushing apology, as requested, but now Seaburry wanted more from them. He had opened his mouth to argue but shut it just as quickly again when Angelica shot him a sideways glare. So here he was, silently stewing while the other two tried
to sort this mess out.

“So what is it exactly that you want?” she asked. “Stop all funding for anything remotely aimed at helping the poorest Americans? Because I’m pretty sure you know we can’t just do that.”

“For a start, I want him gone by the end of the week.” Seaburry gestured at Alex, who felt his stomach drop through the floor. Next to him, John tensed.

“I’m sorry?”

“He’s insulted me one too many times! He goes, or I don’t play ball.” Seaburry leered. “It was only a matter of time with you, Alexander. That Cuban sense of humor…”

“I’m actually from Nevis, but that’s not the point Mr. Seaburry, you see-“

“Immigrant, Alex.” John said, voice low and dangerous. “He’s calling you an immigrant.”

“Damn right, I am. Is it really right that we have foreigners influencing the most powerful men in our country, whispering in the ear of the president?”

Alex threw out his hand to restrain John, who looked ready to tackle the congressman to the floor. Had he not made John a promise, there was no way he'd be holding him back, more like helping his friend beat this ignorant toad into a pulp. But maybe it was Angelica he should have worried about. She stood, rage blazing behind her eyes.

“Is that what this is about, Seaburry? You don’t give two craps about Welfare; you just want Alex gone because he doesn't fit your pretty little picture of America? What about me, huh? Can your feeble little heart take seeing a woman get up behind the White House seal every day?”

“This is not a laughing matter!” Seaburry had stood as well, and was nose to nose with the press secretary. “This man cannot be allowed to keep speaking for our government. He’s wild, uncivilized, off the rails… Do you know a thing about real American values, boy? What’s the first Amendment? The First Commandment?”

“I am the Lord, your God, and thou shalt worship no other God but me.”

Alex had opened his mouth to retort, but it wasn't his voice that boomed out across the room. All four of them turned, to see President Washington stride into the room.

“Those were the days, right?” The president smiled, but Alex wasn't fooled. There was nothing but soldering fury behind his eyes. He leapt to his feet, John following suit, and Angelica and Seaburry took a step back from each other.

“So what have we got here, Angelica?”

“A lot of hot tempers, sir.”

“I think we have a bit more than that.” He turned to look at Seaburry. “Explain something to me, Congressman. How is it that I can be away from this place for less than three days, and come back to find an elected member of our fine government hurling slurs at one of my staff in my own house?”

He spluttered. Mr. President, I-“

Now that can’t be right, can it? Because then I’d have to personally bury such a man’s political career, and that would be a tremendous waste of my valuable time.”
“Sir—“ Get out of my White House, Seaburry, and be sure to tell your friends on the Hill that we won’t budge an inch on welfare spending while you’re at it.”

There was no room for argument in Washington’s voice. Seaburry shot one last, furious look at Alex, then turned on his heel and strode away. No one spoke until the door clattered shut behind him.

“Can I just point out that I was the calmest person in the room?” said Alex.

“I never thought I’d see the day. Honestly, I leave you people alone for three days…” Washington trailed off, shaking his head. “Now, don’t you all have something to be getting on with? Last time I checked, there was this little country we were supposed to be in charge of…”

They all filed out with murmurs of yes sir. Alex reached the door before Washington said. “Not you, Alexander.”

John shot him a sympathetic look as Alex let the door close and turned around to face his boss.

“Jokes about hair loss? Really, son?”

Had it just been George Washington he was talking to, Alex might have shot back that he wasn’t his son, and he didn’t need to be defended from people like Seaburry. But this was President George Washington who might very well be about to fire his ass, so Alex just smiled weakly. “It seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“This has to stop. These outbursts, these arguments on the capitol steps… we won, Alexander, but leading is a hundred times harder than winning. I need you to understand that.”

“Yes, sir.”

Washington gave him a long, searching look, then smiled. “You’re going to go far, if you manage to live past thirty. Go find Aaron and tell him I’m back, would you? Then get back to work. You’re not done yet, Alexander.”

Washington watched him hurry off with something that might have been close to a fond smile on his face. It wasn’t, of course; he was the President of the United States, he didn’t smile fondly at troublesome aides who gave him more headaches than the entire opposition combined, that would be ridiculous. He sighed and strode into his office, where papers were already stacking up on his desk.

“What’s next?”

--

The sun had long since set by the time Alex clocked off, but there was nothing new there. This wasn't actually a bad time for him, he mused shouldering his satchel; there were some days he didn't go home at all, crashing on John’s couch, or worse still, not realizing the sun had come up until someone stuck their head around his door to ask if he wanted a morning coffee. He didn't do it on purpose, per say, it was just easy to get lost in the work. These were the most important years of his life, of that Alex had no doubt. He could change more in a week here than a in a year working anywhere else in the world. Not bad for a skinny kid from the Caribbean who had come to this country with nothing but the clothes on his back and a battered notebook.

A gust of icy wind hit him as he stepped out into the street. Alex had walked to work this morning, not accounting for the chill the evening would bring. That was a mistake, he thought bitterly, pulling his coat tighter. He would be frozen by the time he made it home. But as it turned out, he needn't
have worried.

“I should have guessed I’d find you here so late.” He spun around, a grin spreading across his face as he saw who had spoken. “Eliza!”

She was standing on the pavement behind him, wrapped up in a long coat and scarf. A grin broke out across her face.

“The one and only,” Eliza said, and Alex let himself be pulled into a hug.

“What are you doing here?” he asked. “Burr can’t have hired you already?”

“I start next week. They needed me to fill out a load of paperwork. Apparently working here’s kind of important?”

“Nah, not really.”

She smiled and pulled away, brushing against one of his hands as she did so. “Jesus, Alex, you’re freezing! You’re going to get pneumonia at this rate. Tell me you weren’t planning on walking the whole way home like this?”

“…Maybe?”

“How did you survive this long without me?”

They ended up in an all-night cafe, the sort that did greasy tuna melts at midnight and coffee so strong Alex was considering getting it on tap in his office. It scalded his throat slightly as he took a gulp, but the heat was a welcome change from the autumn chill outside. No one ever told you how bloody cold D.C. could get, and they hadn’t even hit winter yet. Eliza slid a sandwich across the table and he raised an eyebrow.

“Don’t give me that look. When was the last time you ate something that wasn't caffeinated or covered in chocolate?”

He opened his mouth to retort, then closed it again. That was actually a good question.

“I thought so. What’s the point of all the free food they serve if you never eat any of it?”

They sat in companionable silence for some time, watching the cars flit past. It wasn't until the gum-chewing waitress had refilled their drinks that Eliza spoke again.

“So I’m guessing you raised hell when Burr told you he’d hired me?”

“Only slightly. More of an elevated purgatory, if you like. I’ve got a reputation to uphold, you know.”

“Alex…” she sighed, dark eyes on his. “You haven’t told them why we broke up, have you?”

_Crap._ He should have known she’d bring this up sooner or later. And that it would be sooner. “I thought we weren’t going to do this.”

“I’m not doing anything. But they’re your friends. They deserve to know that you’re-”

“No.” Alex cut her off, glancing around before he could stop himself. The cafe was empty apart from them, but this was D.C., where men could be made or broken from one word of gossip in the wrong ear. “What they deserve is not to have to worry about it while we’re in office. I won’t risk the
administration by putting pressure on anyone to confirm or deny anything. If I go down, I’m not taking anyone with me.”

“Who says you have to go down at all? Look around Alex, things are changing.” She moved her hands, warm from being wrapped around the mug, to cover his, and for some reason Alex wanted to cry. He managed a watery smile instead.

“You have too much faith in this world, Elizabeth Schuyler.”

“And you might just find some, one of these days.”

She had always been too good for him, Alex realized sadly. Even before he had recognized the closet he was hiding in for what it was, he would never have been able to hold onto her. “Tell John, at least? He’s your best friend.” Alex hummed noncommittally and changed the subject. But he wouldn’t be telling John anything, he knew, as Eliza chatted away about her fundraising work. How exactly would you go about telling your best friend that not only were you about as straight as a pretzel, but you were also ever-so-slightly completely in love with him, when you both worked in the most visible building in the world? Oh, that was right, you didn’t.

Who ever said that Alexander Hamilton didn't know how to keep his mouth shut?

Chapter End Notes

Now Beta'd!
Hercules picked at his collar uncomfortably. He hated wearing suits. They never seemed to hang quite right on his broad shoulders, and his tie always ended up too tight. But then, you didn't exactly come to the white house in jeans, did you?

He still couldn't believe he was sitting here. As a kid growing up in D.C., he’d cycled past the building almost every day going to school and back, but he’s never thought he’d see the inside of it. The room was panelled in rich wood, paintings hung in gilded frames, and an ornate fireplace stood in one wall. It was about as far a cry as possible from his little flat on the other side of town, and he’d never felt like he’d belonged anywhere less. To make matters worse, he still didn't know what he was doing here. He’d come in about a messenger job, hoping it could pay enough to see his kid brother into college, but that had been three hours ago. He’d been sent from one room to another, grandeur increasing with every stop while people shuffled forms around their desks, until finally someone had told him to wait here. It was more than a little unnerving.

The door at the far end of the room clattered open, and two men walked in deep in conversation. Not knowing what else to do, Hercules jumped to his feet.

“…I’m just saying, you can’t go wrong with earnings.” That was the taller of the two, who’s face was smattered with freckles.

“Do you have any idea how many different pairs of earrings I’ve bough her over the years? She’ll be able to set up her own jewellery shop before long.” replied the shorter one, who’s dark hair was pulled off of his face in a tight bun.

“And with all the events we have to go to, sit down, sit down-“ freckles waved his hand distractedly at Hercules who did as instructed, slightly bemused, “-she’ll have more than enough chance to wear them. Seriously, stop panicking. Angelica will love whatever you get her.”

“Your probably right.” He sighed, than glanced up and executed a perfect double take as he noticed Hercules for the same time. “Oh, hi. Hercules Mulligan, right? I’m Alexander Hamilton, this is my deputy John Laurens, we’ve just got to ask you a few questions while we process your paperwork. I’m sure you understand, it’s a very important job.”

Hercules shook his hand, frowning. “I think there’s been a mistake. I applied for a messenger job?”

“Oh yeah, about that…” Hamilton pulled out a piece of paper from a file in front of him. “You’ve been upgraded.”

“I’m sorry?”

Laurens smiled. “How does personal aide to the President sound to you?”

Hercules blinked. Then blinked again. “So is the messenger job not available, or-?”

“This actually pays more than the messenger job.” Hamilton said. “Plus you get to, you know, be personal aide to the president.”

“I’m sorry, Sir, I don’t understand.”
“God, never call me Sir again.” Hamilton shuddered. “We call the President Sir, and maybe Aaron Burr when he’s being annoying. I’m Alex, and this is John, okay?”

“Or hey you.” Laurens, no, John, added. “That works just as well. To cut a long story short, we saw your application and liked it a lot. You’ve been streamlined.”

“I am curious, though.” Alex said. “You’re smart, you’ve got the grades to prove it. Why were you applying for a messenger job in the first place?”

Hercules smiled softly. “I got a little brother. He’s a good kid, and it’s just us now. Hugh deserves a chance to go to college, and I’d accept a lot worse than messenger if it would get him there.”

The two men looked at each other, and for a horrible moment Hercules was afraid he’d said something wrong, that he’d have to take that job in the burger joint on 18th. But then they both broke into identical grins.

“I think you’re going to fit right in here.” Alex said warmly. “Shall we start with the questions? Let’s see… have you ever tried to overthrow the government?”

“N-no…”

John looked at him in mock horror. “No? What the hell’s been stopping you?”

--

“I need you to look calm while I tell you something.”

Eliza rolled her eyes, determined not to let Burr ruin her good mood. Honestly, the man was too serious by far. They were all camped out in the conference room riding the high of a great night’s work. The President had hit it out of the park in his address to a student’s union, and no one felt like going home just yet. Especially when the table was hidden under a mountain of take out that they hadn’t had to pay for.

“What’s going on?” she asked, eyeing up the katsu chicken.

“We lost five votes on the debt bill. I just got off the phone with the whips, and five have jumped the fence.”


“Great job looking calm. And I don’t know yet, but we’ve got twenty four hours to get them back, or any hope for financial reform this term goes down the drain.”

She swore. “Okay, we can fix this. You find out who screwed us over, I’ll round everyone up.”

“I can’t say for definite,” Aaron said, “But I think we can both guess who at least one of them was.”

Eliza looked at him blankly for a moment, then her eyes darkened.

“Jefferson.”

It didn’t take long to find everyone. She dragged a complaining Angelica away from talking to
Hercules had been in the White House for nearly a month now, and she had taken him firmly under her wing. Not that he seemed to need it - the young man was quietly proving himself and earning the respect of everyone, from the porters to Washington himself. Alex and John turned up deep in conversation with each other (although about what she had no idea, except that it wasn't the conversation she was sure they needed to have), and pretty soon they were all sitting in someone's office while Aaron explained the situation.

“Jefferson.” Alex snarled at once. “Why am I not surprised? He’s taken every chance to screw us so far…”

“We don’t know it was Jefferson,” Angelica pointed out.

“We do now.” Aaron announced, putting his phone down. Eliza tried not to smirk at Alex’s scowl at the mere mention of his name.

“If Jefferson’s jumped the fence, you can bet Madison has as well.” said John. “It doesn’t matter who else, those two are the important ones. The others will follow their lead if we can get them back.”

“And how are we going to do that?” Alex asked. “If it was anyone else I could talk them round, but that’s a non-starter. Madison won’t even talk to me these days.”

“We need to do this carefully.” Aaron said. “We’re dealing with a hostile congress, and we can’t afford to alienate any votes. If I meet with Thomas tomorrow, listen to what he has to say and see if we can come to a settlement…”

“No.” Alex’s eyes blazed. “If we give into him now, we let ourself get taken hostage by the south for another year and a half. Let me do the meeting.”

“What are you planning, exactly?”

“Sir,” Alex stood and drew himself up to his full height (which wasn't all that much, yet he somehow seemed to tower over the room). “I’m going to kick his ass.”

*Well this is going to go well.* “I don’t think-“

“One meeting to prove we’re not playing around. If it doesn’t work, you can step in and do your agreement thing, but it has to be worth a shot first.”

Aaron was silent for a moment, then sighed. “It’s on your head, Alexander.”

“Yes sir!” Alex grinned. “And don’t worry, I got this.”

“That’s exactly what I’m worried about.” Aaron said, but as they all filed out to go and get a few hours sleep before tomorrow arrived, Eliza could have sworn she heard him mutter “I should sell tickets to this meeting.”

---

*Only Jefferson, Alex thought. Only Thomas bloody Jefferson would turn up to a meeting that might decide the future of American debt payments for a generation with a goddam ice cream in hand.*

He hadn't managed to get a proper meeting with the Senator (Alex was convinced it was intentional),
but they’d agreed to talk over his lunch hour. So here Alex was, sitting on a park bench, in the freezing cold to boot, waiting. And now it turned out Jefferson had stopped to get a chocolate fudge cone. Brilliant. The man was dressed as vibrantly as ever, purple jacket almost as bright as the smile that spread slyly across his face. That should have been Alex’s first clue that something was up.

“Hamilton,” he said. “A pleasure as always.”

Alex was not in the mood for this. “You jumped the fence on the debt bill. Why?”

“Straight to business, is it? You’re no fun today.”

“Why?” Alex repeated.

Jefferson sighed, and ate a sprinkle. “Why? Because it’s a terrible plan. Because it’s putting more pressure on the states to pay for the federal government. Because it’s my job to vote in the interests of Virginia. But mostly… Nah, you don’t want to hear about that.”

This couldn’t be good. Alex was only comfortable when he was the most informed person in the room (or on the bench in this case) and he really didn’t like Jefferson’s smug smile, or the idea that he knew something Alex didn’t.

“Senator Jefferson…”

“Oh, you do want to know? Sorry, Hammy, can’t help you there.”

Alex bristled. “Look, I don’t understand how you can be opposed to this bill. The country can be aggressive, competitive, a new economic force for-“

Jefferson cut him off. “Are you still talking about your debt plan? Because I’m done talking about your debt plan. There’s bigger things going on here.” Jefferson laughed at the confusion on Alex’s face. “Wow, you really don’t know, do you? Just because Washington’s got you in his pocket doesn’t make you one of the big boys. What are you, really, without the big man standing behind you?”

“What’s happening, Jefferson?”

He stood up, taking a lick of his ice cream. “You got a tv, right? I’m sure CNN will let you know eventually.”

“Dammit-“

“Better go run back home and tell Daddy that Thomas was being mean to you. Oh, and that I won’t be swinging your way in the vote tomorrow. Have a nice day!”

He turned on his heal and sauntered away, leaving Alex staring red-faced after him.

Well Shit.

“--

“Well shit,” John said, once Alex had recounted his meeting, and Angelica had agree with the sentiment.
“So what do we do now?” she asked.

“I’ll meet with Jefferson and Madison this evening, see if we can come to an agreement.” said Aaron, making a note.

“I don’t like it.” Alex responded automatically, and Angelica rolled her eyes. No surprises there.

“We did it your way, Alexander, and all you did was piss the senator off. Now we do it my way.”

“That’s not what I mean. Well, I don’t like your way either actually… but that’s not the point.” Alex was pacing, flying around Aaron’s office and waving his hands wildly. “There’s something big going down on the Hill, and Jefferson looked far too happy for it to be anything other than bad news for us.”

“Maybe he was bluffing,” Angelica offered.

“Nah, he was practically skipping he was so smug.”

“We can’t worry about this now.” Aaron stood up. “Right now the problem is tomorrow’s bill, anything else can wait. I’ll do the meeting as planned.”

Alex opened his mouth to argue, and John grabbed his arm. The two looked at each other for a moment, one of their silent conversations that Angelica wished to God she could understand, if only to mock them for, and John slowly shook his head. Alex seemed to deflate slightly.

“Fine. But be careful.”

Everyone stared.

“What?” Alex asked. “I only meant that… Yeah, actually forget I ever said that.” He strode out of the office, almost tripping over the carpet as he went.

John grinned as soon as the door shut behind him. “Did anyone get that on camera?”

“It’s not funny,” she scolded. “If Alex is worried about this, maybe we should speak to Washington.”

“Alexander’s just upset that Jefferson has the upper hand. He’s overreacting, it’s what he does best. There’s no need to involve the President.” said Aaron.

She shared a glance with John. He liked it about as much as she did, Angelica could tell. But once once Aaron made his mind up about something, there was never much to be done about it.

John pulled her aside after the meeting. “Keep an eye on Burr, would you? He’s always been far too friendly with Jefferson.”

“If you keep an eye on Alex. I didn't know the word careful was in his vocabulary until today. I’m worried he’s going to do something stupid.”

John half-smiled, half grimaced. “When are you not? Don’t worry, keeping an eye on him’s my job.”

--
“If we move the press conference back, I think we can cut the whole thing down to twenty minutes and kick all the cameras out by nine. What do you think, Sir?”

Eliza was sitting in the Oval Office, schedules and notes spread out on the table around her. It was one of the easier aspects of her job, managing media coverage of events and dinners at the White House, mostly because it didn’t usually involve yelling at anyone for screwing up.

“That sounds perfect.” said Washington, signing a letter and handing it to Hercules. “We don’t need the cameras anywhere near Gilbert once he’s had access to the open bar. Don’t give me that look,” he added as Eliza shot him a scolding glare. “He’ll make a fantastic ambassador, and I love the man like a son, but we both know his mouth runs away with him after he’s had a drink or two.”

She laughed. “I’ve got to agree with you there. Remind me to keep him away from John.”

Washington looked stricken, and Eliza knew they were both remembering the trip to New York back on the campaign trail. That had been messy to say the least. She never did get to the bottom of exactly what happened (and if the guys remembered they sure as hell weren’t sharing), but she wasn’t in a hurry to repeat it.

“If the two of you can stop them breaking anything, that would be brilliant.”

“Yes, Sir.” Hercules replied, and Eliza suddenly realised something.

“Oh my God Herc…” she said, one hand covering her mouth. “You’ve never met Laf, have you? This is going to be brilliant!”

“Who’s Laf?” Hercules asked with more than a little trepidation.

“Lafayette. He’s our new French Ambassador, but we’ve all known him for years because…” The President trailed off, confused. “How do we know him exactly? Wasn’t he Alexander’s roommate at Princeton?”

Eliza shrugged. “I thought he was on John’s debate team. But then don’t ask me. I spent six months thinking he was your son.”

“You think I’d name my son Gilbert?”

“Adopted son, obviously.”

“That’s ridiculous. If he was my son, he would be better at baseball. And taller.”

“You do know he’s already taller than you, right Sir?”

“Yes, considering he takes every opportunity to remind me. Why do you think I keep Alexander around? It’s much better for my ego.”

“Look’s like both our jobs are safe as well, then.” Eliza grinned at Hercules, then noticed the look of utter confusion on his face. “But yeah, you’ve got to meet Lafayette. He’s absolutely insane. You’re gonna love him.”

--
Aaron closed the office door behind him and closed his eyes, letting out a deep sigh. Whatever he had been expecting from the Jefferson meeting, it hadn't been that. It was late, far later than any sensible person would still be at work, but he needed a moment to sit quietly in his office and process what the hell had just happened. And more importantly, what he was going to do about it. The card he had been handed, a phone number scrawled across it in violent ink, felt heavy in his pocket.

“Hey, Aaron,”

He would deny it later, of course, but the sudden voice made him jump about a metre out of his skin. His eyes snapped open and Aaron looked around wildly.

“Stressful day?” Angelica asked innocently.

She was sitting behind his desk flicking through a newspaper, half hidden in the shadows of the evening. No wonder he had thought the room was empty.

“Christ, don’t do that.” he complained. “What are you even doing here?”

“There’s a guy from the Post hanging around outside my office. I’m waiting for him to give up and go home.”

“And you couldn't find anywhere else to hide?”

She shrugged. “I wanted to find out how the meeting went.”

Shit. “Meeting?”

“The Jefferson meeting. You know, the ever so slightly vitally important one that’s gonna make or break our financial policy? That one?”

“Oh right. Yeah it went fine.” Aaron said, aiming for casual.

“Fine as in…?”

“Fine as in I got him and Madison to vote in our favour.”

“Seriously? What the hell did you have to promise them?”

“Nothing.”

“Nothing.” Angelica repeated slowly. “You’re telling me you won them over with the genius of your persuasive argument. They just agreed to support us?”

Aaron cast desperately around for an explanation that she would believe. “I think... to tell you the truth, I think Jefferson just wanted to deal with someone who wasn't Alexander. To show him that he’s not as smart as he thinks he is, that he can’t push him around, then rub it in his face by agreeing to vote when I asked him. You know how petty politics can be.”

“How petty Jefferson can be more like.” Angelica muttered. She still seemed wary, though. “And the other stuff Alex was talking about? No one said anything to suggest there was something bigger going on?”

Shit shit shit. “Like I said. Alexander was just worked up and overreacting this morning. Thomas was just trying to get a rise out of him. That’s a point, actually.” Aaron changed the subject. “Have you made sure he hasn't done anything stupid this afternoon. You know, find a way to attack Thomas or-?”
“John’s on it.”

“Good.” He smiled. “I’m going to go home. I’ll leave you to your hiding.”

Aaron picked up his bag and walked out, hyper aware of Angelic’s eyes on his back until long after he had left the building. He still felt like someone was watching him by the time he got home. Despite himself, Aaron shivered as he poured himself a drink and sat down, turning the card over in his fingers. And considered.

Chapter End Notes

So apparently Jefferson didn't have a middle name? Which makes writing insults much less fun (and yes, I actually went and looked that up. The things you learn when you write fanfic...)

Come talk to me on tumblr @hapless-and-hopeless or let me know what you think below. Thanks to the lovely people who have taken the time to leave comments x
Hercules wasn't exactly used to the pomp and ceremony yet, the wearing bowties and rubbing shoulders with heroes and royalty. But he knew a good party when he saw one, and good was an understatement when it came to the White House. Sure, he was technically working, but why should that mean he couldn't enjoy the ambassadors’ reception? And by enjoy, he meant trying not to choke on his drink laughing while Eliza gave him the dirt on everyone in the room.

She was a natural at this; The combination of a wealthy father and years working in these kind of circles. She knew exactly how to charm the Prime Minister of some obscure island, or what questions not to ask the Surgeon General, but seemed perfectly happy to talk to Hercules instead, the two of them gossiping away like a pair of teenagers.

“You’re joking,” he snickered. “On their honeymoon? How did you even find that out?”

“I’m serious, they… Oh God, brace yourself.” Eliza trailed off and grinned, staring at something over his shoulder.

“What?”

“You know how I told you about Alex’s not-roommate and Washington’s not-son? He’s the nicest guy you’ll ever meet, I promise, just try not to freak out…”

Hercules blinked, and was about to ask what the hell she was talking about, when a voice called out from behind him, “Eliza, ma belle, you are looking simply stunning tonight!”

He turned to see who had spoken, and couldn't help but stare. There was something that instantly drew the eye, between the waistcoat, bowtie and wild hair pulled into a braided bun. The man practically bounced across the room to place twin kisses on Eliza’s cheeks and another on her hand. And God help them but Eliza Schuyler, one of smartest and savviest women he had ever met actually giggled.

“Such a gentleman, Laf. How was the flight?”

“Tiresome, as always. Aeroplanes are inevitably a disaster for my hair. But I am here now, and here to stay this time.” His accent, thick and lilting, made the words disaster and hair rhyme.

Eliza grabbed Hercules’s wrist and pulled him forward from where he had been standing, trying not to stare. “Have you met Herc yet? He’s Washington’s new body-man.”

“Hercules Mulligan,” he said, sticking his hand out.


Hercules gaped for a second, which was exactly how long it took for Eliza to burst out laughing.

“Jeez, Laf, try not to freak him out! He’s new to all this.” And then aside to Hercules, “You can see why we just call him Lafayette.”
“I’m not freaking him out.” And if Hercules wasn’t mistaken, the Marquis of wherever-it-was and French Ambassador was pouting. Then he turned back to him and the pout turned into a grin. “You do not need to worry, my friend. I am not like all those other stuffy dignitaries, I promise you this. Call me Laf, and I will call you Hercules, and soon we will be the very best of friends, non?”

“Sound’s like a plan,” he replied with the beginnings of a grin. “Can I find you a drink?”

“That depends. Are the drinks here any better than the muck you Americans usually serve? Because more often than not I cannot find a thing worth drinking.”

Hercules laughed. “Is that a challenge?”

“Oh God…” Eliza groaned. “I take it all back. This was a horrible idea.”

The Frenchman draped an arm around her shoulder, a look of mock confusion on his face. “Whatever do you mean? This is the beginning of a wonderful night.”

And Hercules couldn’t help but think that they were both right.

There wasn’t enough coffee in the world, Alex thought bitterly as he poured himself another cup, not for him to be able to deal with the shitstorm that had landed on his desk this morning. For one thing, he shouldn’t even be here this morning. It was a Sunday, his one day off, and his plan had been not to leave his bed all day, and start making up for his total neglect of sleep. For another thing, he’d spent last night drinking on the presumption that he wouldn’t have to. It was always a good night when Laf was in town, but with the discovery that Hercules could drink any one of them under the table, and John’s determination to prove him wrong… well, it had been a better night than most, and it was making itself known this morning. So imagine his delight at being woken up to the sound of his telephone at dawn (not two hours after managing to make it home), with a disgruntled Burr at the other end of the line, telling him to haul ass to work. Alex had sworn at him, hung up, and rolled out of bed. Quite literally. The floor was harder than he remembered.

“Morning!” Eliza breezed in, far too loudly and cheerfully.

“I hate you…”

“No you don’t.” She threw something at him, and Alex caught what turned out to be a bottle of aspirin. He checked the label (maximum dosage 2 pills), poured four into his palm and threw them back with a mouthful of coffee.

“So what do we know so far?” she asked, walking around the desk to read over his shoulder.

“About as much as we knew an hour ago. Lee made the speech out of nowhere, no warning, and at this rate half the damn country will have flocked to his side by the end of the day.”

Eliza grimaced, and Alex felt the same. Charles Lee had been a thorn in their side for years, a senator who had seemingly made it his life’s work to oppose Washington at every chance he got. Their rivalry was the stuff of legend, dating back years and years, battle after battle over every single issue on the table. Alex had thought they wouldn’t have to deal with him after Washington became President, but it seemed he had been wrong. The speech Lee had made late last night was a whole new level. The man had attacked Washington on everything from his voting record from Congress, to his relationship with his wife. It was cruel, petty, and made Alex want to throw up (even more than he already did). Unfortunately, it was also political genius.
John stuck his head around the door, looking about as happy as Alex felt. “The President wants us all in the Oval. I hope to God you’ve got a plan, Alex.”

Alex did have a plan. A sharp, scathing, aggressive response that would call Lee directly out and make him put his career where his mouth was. Unfortunately, he hardly had the chance to start explaining before Washington shut him down.

“No.”

“But Sir-“

“I said no, Alex. We’ve got enough battles to fight without rising to every taunt and response that comes our way from the Hill. Lee has no power to back him up, he’s nothing more than big words. History will prove him wrong.”

“So we do nothing, Sir?” John asked. “Lee just gets away with his words?”

The President sighed. “Well make a short statement later today, denying his accusations and reassuring the people we’re keeping our attention on the real problems. This only becomes a big problem if we make it into one.”

“I agree,” said Aaron. “No sense in blowing this up because we acted rashly. How soon can you have a response ready, Alexander?”

“A response? A response would be writing him into his political grave. What you’re suggesting is a surrender.”

He looked from face to face in the room, searching for allies. Only John looked like he wanted to argue the point, and he was even angrier than Alex was.

“Alexander, please…”

“I’ll write it.” Eliza offered quietly, and Alex stared at her, shocked.

“Done.” Burr said. “The rest of you, have the rest of the day off. I’m sorry I called you in for no reason, I’ll handle this.”

“But Sir-“

Washington cut him off, voice firm. “Go home, Alexander. Sleep it off, and come back tomorrow ready to work. That goes for all of you.”

Alex was vaguely aware of Angelica watching Burr as they filed out, but he barely registered it, as angry as he was over the Lee speech. He turned to Eliza as soon as the door had closed behind them.

“What the hell was that?”

“I’m not sorry.” She crossed her arms defiantly. “You’re angry, you haven’t slept, you’re in no fit state to be writing a shopping list, let alone a presidential statement. Washington’s right, you need to go home.”

He opened his mouth to argue, then closed it again.

“Please, Alex. Let us handle this one. Take some time to take care of yourself and-“

“So I need taking care of now?”
Eliza sighed. “That’s not what I said.”

“That’s what you think, though, isn’t it?” Alex looked around at his friends, a strangled hysteria rising in his throat. “That I need minding, taking care of, I can’t be trusted without someone watching me?”

“Alex…”

But Alex was done listening. He shook his head and walked away, ignoring the shouts that followed him down the corridor.

--

“What the hell just happened?” Angelica asked as soon as Alex had stormed out of earshot. She was used to his tantrums, but that had been something else.

“I don’t know.” Eliza replied. “I mean, he’s been under a lot of stress recently, but he seemed okay last night…”

“It’s this Lee thing,” said John.

“Why? I mean, how long have we been dealing with him now?”

“No. Well, he’s angry about the speech too. But he’s more angry that we’re not doing anything about it. We’ve been sitting back and taking hits ever since we got into office. It’s exhausting. Think about it, can you imagine anything more un-Alex-like?”

Angelica bit her lip, suddenly feeling guilty. “I’ll go talk to him.”

“Nah, I got this.” John smiled. “You go stalk Burr, I know you want to.”

She stared at him. “How…”?

“I saw you giving him the death glare. What happened?”

“I don’t know,” she replied. “It’s just a feeling.”

“Well go get it out your system. I can’t deal with two of you in a bad mood. John hurried away in the direction that Alex had gone. Eliza watched him go, and turned back to Angelica.

“I’d better go write this thing. Be careful, yeah?”

Angelica rolled her eyes. “I’m always careful.”

As it turned out, keeping an eye on Burr wasn’t hard. He stayed in his office all morning, no doubt sorting out the Lee mess, and didn’t so much as raise an eyebrow when Angelica strolled in around lunchtime with a pile of work in her arms and settled down on the other side of the desk. Apparently her total disregard for personal space was coming in handy. But either way, she was getting the hang of this detective business.

“I’m going to go out for lunch,” Burr announced some time later.

“Do you want me to come with?”

“What? No, don’t worry, I’m just going to get a sandwich from that deli on the corner and read over some stuff. Don’t let me disturb your work.”
He couldn't get out of there quick enough, Angelica realised as Aaron swept a handful of papers into his bag haphazardly and snagged a coat on the way out. Hell, he was practically running out of the door. And that wasn't suspicious at all...

It was even easier to follow Burr than it was to watch him. He seemed distracted and, several paces back, Angelica watched as he went right down a side street, going in completely the other direction of the deli. *What the hell are you doing, Aaron?* she though, and set off after him.

--

He’d needed to get out of there. Aaron usually liked the dim, peaceful atmosphere of his office, but today it had felt more like a prison. That had something to do with Angelica taking up residence there yet again, but far more to do with the dilemma raging inside his own head. He’d needed air, some time to himself just to think (despite the fact he’d been doing nothing but thinking for a week now), which was how he found himself some time later sitting on a park bench. It was a good thing he’d remembered to bring a coat - winter was fast rolling in now. He pulled it tighter around himself and flung his hands into his pocket… and froze as he touched the piece of card.

Aaron took it out slowly and looked at it. The purple numbers seemed to be mocking him, all that they promised dancing in front of his eyes.

And what they promised was a lot. He was still trying to process the meeting. It had been in Jefferson’s office late at night, with Aaron, James Madison, and the man himself sitting around a dimly lit table. He had been ready to debate, to deal. He hadn’t been ready for them to all but offer him the keys to the kingdom.

“You want to what?” he asked.

“We want to hire you.” Jefferson replied smoothly. “Think about it, Washington isn’t going to be around for ever. Where do you want to be standing when he falls? Getting dragged down with the whole sorry team, or ready to step up? I’m going to get elected, sooner or later. We both know it’s true.”

“Then what do you need me for?”

“A smoother campaign.” Madison leaned forward. “Thomas has got the backing, but there are still some people who don’t like what he has to say. We want a balanced ticket, someone more moderate, to remind the people we’re all on the same side.”

“Plus, you know Washington. You know his staff, how they think, what moves they’re going to make. That’s all kinds of useful.”

Aaron sat back, perplexed. “You’re asking me to change parties? To betray my team?”

“You’re nothing more than a glorified pen pusher right now. But just picture it: Jefferson/Burr for America. The Vice Presidency. Just a heartbeat away from that awfully nice desk.”

“I-I don’t...”

“That’s okay. It’s a big decision. Take some time, think it over. And give us a call. We’d love to meet up and chat some more.”

Jefferson leaned across the table, holding out a card with a phone number. “Give me a ring when you’ve made your mind up.” Aaron reached out to take it, and Jefferson smiled. “Don’t take too much time though, Burr. We’ve got work to do...”
Aaron shook his head to clear the memory away. That had been almost a week ago, and he knew his window of opportunity was running out fast. If he didn't act soon they would move onto someone else, but he still had no idea what to do. All Aaron had ever wanted was to be in the room where it happened, making decisions and shaping the future. He had thought the Washington administration was his ticket in. But what if this was it instead? Chief of Staff Burr was alright, but Vice President Burr? Now that had a nice ring to it. Still, it would come at the cost of betraying his team, his staff, Washington who had always trusted him for some reason.

How could he do this?

How could he not?

Aaron took a deep breath, then before he could change his mind, pulled out his phone and called the number. The smooth voice answered almost immediately.

“Burr. What a pleasant surprise.”

“You’ve got your meeting, Jefferson.”

“Does that mean you’re on board?”

He gritted his teeth. “It means I’m coming, okay?”

“I’m free all afternoon.”

“No, it’ll look suspicious if I don’t get back to the office soon. It’ll have to be tomorrow.”

He could practically Jefferson’s smile down the phone, with all the confidence of a man who knew he’d already won. “I’ll book you in for the morning.”

Aaron didn’t bother to reply and hung up. Sweet Jesus.

He hadn’t been lying (as much as he’d also needed time to settle his frayed nerves before meeting with Jefferson), he really did need to get back to the office, or someone would wonder where he’d gone. And that was the last thing he needed right now - questions. Aaron stood up, turned to walk away… and walked square into Angelica.

He froze. She was staring at him with a look he knew too well, a look that was usually reserved for meddling journalists or people who hurt her friends, the beginnings of a supernova raging behind steel calm eyes. Aaron opened his mouth and closed it again, searching wildly for an explanation, and excuse, but coming up blank in the face of the storm brewing before him.

“Burr,” she said. “What the hell is going on?”

--

“I’m not here.”

John rolled his eyes at the muffled shout from inside the flat and knocked again. This time he was met with nothing but sullen silence.

“Come on Alex, let me in.” He waited for a minute, then sighed. “You know I’ve got a key, right?”

He herd movement, a shuffle, and a minute later Alex opened the door, scowling. “Remind me why I gave you that damn thing?”
“Because someone needs to come and get you if you OD on caffeine or knock yourself out in the shower, and you know Eliza would tease you about it for longer than me.”

His words didn't bring the smile he was hoping for, that little half grin when he was trying not to show it, but Alex did at least move aside and let him in.

John had always loved Alex’s flat in a funny sort of way. The room was a paradox, books and films on the shelf arranged with a precision you messed up at your own risk, yet papers and half finished pieces of work lay scattered across every surface. The brand new, high-speed laptop sitting on top of a peeling leather-bound book. The noticeboard above his desk, covered with everything from schedules to photos to a recipe for chilli he’d gotten from Martha Washington, despite the fact Alex couldn't cook to save his life. It was a whirlwind of contradictions, much like the man himself.

“What do you want, John?” Alex asked, collapsing onto the sagging couch.

“What do I…? Jesus, Alex, I want to make sure you're okay! You kind of stormed out on us earlier.”

Alex ran his hand through his hair. “I shouldn't have done that. I should go apologise, I should…”

“Alex, stop.” John held up his hand. “What the hell’s going on?”

“You know what. We won. We got into power, we get to run the country. What was it all for? It feels like we can’t do a damn thing. How are we supposed to help people if we can’t even stand up to a speech trashing Washington? We just roll over for these people, time and time again, let them get away with whatever they feel like…” Alex trailed off, swallowing, and John hated the look on his friend’s face. Alex’s face was made for smiling, and all he saw now was quiet despair. “We’re nowhere, John.”

“We’re not nowhere. We passed the debt plan-“

“Which will get strangled in committees and amendments. Madison, Jefferson, they'll make sure of that.”

“Then we don’t let them. It’s as simple as that. We pick up a pen and we fight and we win. Stop hiding from issues. If we’re walking into walls, we run at them full speed.” John hoped he sounded more sure than he felt, but when Alex looked up at him there was something of the light that had been missing from behind his eyes.

When John was young, before everything had gone to hell between them, his father had driven him out to the middle of nowhere one night to look at the stars. In all his nine-year old wonder, John had listened as Henry Laurens told him the stories of the constellations, taught him to read the map above their heads, and how to follow the North Star home. Maybe it was years living in cities where the constellations were obscured by the lights of the skyline (more likely it was that every memory of his father was now tinted beyond repair), but somewhere along the way the stars had stopped being John’s map home. As far as he was concerned, the only North Star that mattered any more was the one glinting behind Alex’s eyes.

“You really think we can do it?”

“I really do.”

Alex stared at him for a moment. “Something’s got to change. It’s got to give, or we’re done before our first term’s even up.”

Yes, John thought, as Alex jumped to his feet, rooting around his messy desk for a pen and paper. He
pulled his hair up into a messy bun as he went, and his eyes flashed as he began talking about counter strategies and angles of attack. John watched him rant without saying a word, taking a moment just to stand in the glow in the presence of the mind that was Alexander Hamilton, the energy and passion that never stopped. The man he would never be enough for. Yes, he thought. Something’s got to give.

Chapter End Notes

You didn't think I'd leave Lafayette out for long, did you? Or your daily dose of Lams-y angst?

And thank you so much to all the lovely people who've taken the time to comment so far. I may not have gotten round to replying, but I read every single one and they honestly make my day. You guys are the best!
“Let me explain.” said Aaron, his voice desperate.

“I think you’d better.” Angelica crossed her arms and waited for an explanation, any explanation that could account for what she had just heard. Eavesdropping on Aaron’s phone conversation hadn't been her plan, but when she heard Jefferson’s name she hadn't been able to help herself. And Christ, it was a good thing Angelica Church had been born curious. He was meeting with Thomas Jefferson in secret, trying to go unnoticed so he didn't seem suspicious? Well damn straight he looked suspicious now. Angelica had always learned to trust her instincts, and it seemed this time they had been right on the money.

Aaron was floundering, searching for the right words, but she was all out of patience. “Spill, Burr. What the hell have you and Jefferson cooked up that’s so secret, huh?”

He swallowed, paused, then the words spilled out in a rush. “He wants information on Washington, on us, what we’re doing and how we’re doing it.”

“And you’re telling him?” she asked, horrified. This couldn't be happening.

“No! I haven't said I thing, I promise.”

“Funny how I don’t believe you.”

“Believe what you want, it’s the truth. I swear I haven't said a word that could damage the president or anyone on the staff.”

Angelica shook her head, slightly hysterically. She didn't want to believe it, Aaron had always been good to her, and no matter how much Alex and John complained, he was as much a part of the team as anyone. Yes, he was aloof and guarded, and they’d gotten off on the wrong foot, but she’d let herself believe they were friends. And now it seemed he was selling them down the river. “So what do you expect me to do now? Keep my mouth shut, let this slide because ‘you haven't said a word’, huh? Because that’s not going to happen.”

“Please, Angelica, you have to let me sort this out.” His eyes were desperate

“As if.”

“Give me two days, just two days to deal with Jefferson myself. I need to handle this or he’ll never work with me on anything again, and we'll have lost our best chance to limit his damage. Two days, then I’ll tell the President everything myself, we can do it together if you want, just give me time. Please, that’s all I’m asking.”

She looked at him, uncertain. He’d always been on their side before, never once let them down. Her friend was asking her to trust him… but how could she trust him now?

“I can’t do it. I’m sorry, Aaron.”

He stared at her utterly broken, and she pictured it. Marching into the Oval Office. Telling Washington that that she’d been following him, that Burr was going to betray them, without giving
him any chance to explain himself. Watching the stone cold fury behind Washington’s eyes that was usually reserved for their enemies turn on Aaron, and knowing it was all on her.

“I can give you one day. That’s it. Fix this, or so help me, this time tomorrow I’m marching into the Oval and telling Washington everything myself. Have fun explaining yourself then.”

“I- thank you.”

“Don’t make me regret it. Because I promise you, you’ll regret it more when I’m through with you.”

Angelica turned on her heel and walked away, heart pumping in her chest as she did so, praying to God she hadn't just made the biggest mistake of her life and put her trust in the wrong man.

--

There were some days when George Washington turned on the news and was proud to be the leader of his country. Today was not one of those days.

Perhaps it was a little strange, but when you are President of the United States, it’s the little, every day things that keep you sane. In George’s case this was getting up every morning, making himself a coffee and a piece of toast and watching the news in his kitchen. Never mind that he knew 95% of the news before it was read, or that he made half of it, never mind that there was a whole fleet of kitchen staff who would make him any breakfast in the world if he asked for it, every morning without fail he would turn on CNN and butter his toast, and remind himself he was still the same guy he’d always been before he had been put up on a pedestal.

But today it was all he could do not to turn the tv off in disgust, as the newscaster announced that a sixteen year old in Austin had been stabbed, not because of drugs, or gang, violence, or even because he had been in the wrong place at the wrong time. This kid had been stabbed because of the colour of his skin. What kind of country was he running here, George wondered as he changed and walked from the residence to the west wing, if they couldn't even stop days like this?

“Did you see it?” Alex asked as soon as he walked into the Oval Office (George had long since given up expecting him to knock), and there was no need to ask what ‘it’ was.

“Yeah. Do we know how the kid is?”

“Still in surgery, Sir.” That was Aaron, looking uncharacteristically hagged and worn, as if he hadn't slept last night. It was the kind of thing he had come to expect from Alex perhaps, but not his Chief of Staff. George made a mental note to ask if he was alright later. For now he just nodded.

“Keep me updated. What else?”

“Sir,” John stepped forward. “Me and Alex have been working on something. I guess it’s to do with hate crime, but it’s more to do with, well, everything.”

George raised an eyebrow. “Everything?”

“Our direction, Sir. Our policy,” Alexander put in. “It’s important. I was hoping we could speak to everyone now?”

He glanced at Hercules, who shook his head softly. What George had done without him he didn’t know; the man had his whole schedule for the day mapped out in his head, and knew exactly where he needed to be at any time. If he said they couldn't fit it in now, they couldn't fit it in.
“What about lunch?” Hercules offered. “The Japanese ambassador cancelled the conference call, so you have time then.”

“Lunch then.” He said, and Alexander deflated a bit, but couldn't stop the grin from spreading across his face. Whatever this thing was, it clearly meant a lot to him. Which, knowing Alexander, could either be very good, or very very bad.

--

The train shuddered to a halt, and Aaron groaned internally. This was just typical. The meeting that might define his career, and he was going to be late thanks to the bloody DC metro. As the emergency overhead lights came on, he wondered if it was a sign from the universe that he was making the wrong choice… but no, dammit, he couldn't think like that. He had always been nothing if not logical, trusting his instincts and measuring up every choice he made. Now wasn't the time to let his nerves get the better of him.

The woman next to him swore. Loudly. And at length. Possibly in several different languages. He raised an eyebrow and a moment later she noticed him staring.

“Sorry,” she muttered, sweeping her long hair away from her face. “It’s been a long day.”

“No, it’s fine. I’m actually kinda impressed.”

She laughed. “Wow, it doesn’t take much to impress you does it? Oh crap, sorry, that was really rude. Like I said, long day.”

“So I’m guessing you’ve got something you don’t want to be late for?”

“I’m visiting my boyfriend. Could really do without missing my flight. He teaches English down at Georgia State, so I don’t get to see him all that much and…” she smiled self consciously, a smile that lit up her whole face. “God, I’m rambling. You really don’t want to hear my life story.”

“Don’t worry, looks like we might be stuck down here a while. Which is just bloody brilliant.”

“Yeah, you look like the type that rushes off to big important meetings.”

“Lucky guess.”

“Or maybe I can just read minds.”

He stared at her for a moment, before she burst out laughing, the sound even prettier than her smile had been. “That was way too easy. I’m only messing.”

“I really hope you can’t read minds. It’s not all too pretty up there at the moment.” He hadn't meant to say that out loud, but the girl frowned sympathetically, and he realised he must have spoken. 

_Dammit._ How Alexander managed to even function on this little sleep he would never know.

“Long day for you too?” she asked.

“Yeah, you could say that. It’s…” Aaron trailed off. He wasn't the type to spill his soul for any stranger who asked. He didn't even open up to his friends if he could help it. But then, maybe it would be a relief to get all this uncertainty off his chest. It wasn't like he was ever going to see her again, after all. “Have you ever had a choice to make that’s gonna change the rest of your life? And you think you’re doing the right thing, and you want to do the right thing, and you’ve got the chance to get everything you ever wanted except you don’t know what that is anymore, or how to do it?
And… Ok, now I’m the one rambling.”

“No.” she said softly. “I’ve never had a choice like that. But do you know what I think?”

“What?”

“That you’ll make the right one.”

He laughed, without any real humour. “You don’t even know me.”

“I know. But I think you’ll chose right anyway.”

Aaron opened his mouth to reply, and the train jerked forward again, the screech of rails cutting out anything he might have said. A moment later light flooded the car as they pulled into the station.

“This is me.” she said, standing up and shouldering a rucksack. ‘Good luck with whatever it is.”

Aaron smiled, despite himself. “Hope you catch your plane. Thanks…”?

“Theo. My name’s Theo.”

And then she was gone, leaving Aaron alone with the thoughts chasing each other round in his head. And a decision to make.

--

Jefferson was nothing but smooth smiles and smug assurances as he welcomed Aaron into his office, and honestly, it made him want to be a bit sick.

“Sit down, sit down!” he said, gesturing to a pair of oversized velvet armchairs, and Aaron did what he was told uncomfortably. The room was too richly decorated by far, he decided. True, he had taken pride in decorating his own office with the best he could find, but Jefferson’s was just overkill, everything from the bookshelves to the decanter reeked of pomp and privilege.

Madison arrived soon after, looking just as gleeful as Jefferson. Burr was still trying to work the man out, after years of the political scene. He’d thrown his lot in entirely behind Jefferson, and his animosity towards Alexander was legend around DC. He had no idea what had happened there - the one time he had asked, Alexander had shot him a glare that Angelica would have been proud of, and changed the topic. Another mystery he hadn’t had the time to unravel.

Aaron sat silently while the two started talking about time scales and strategies. He wasn’t really listening, letting their voices wash over him, the odd word catching his ear. Announcement. Damage control. Information. Ticket. Washington.

“Congratulations, Burr,” said Madison, his name snapping him back into the conversation. “You’ll look back on this as the defining moment in your career.”

“I’ll drink to that!” Thomas stood up, and poured three glasses of whiskey. He offered one to Aaron expectantly.

“No.” said Aaron quietly.

“I’m sorry?”

He looked at the the offered drink, amber liquid glinting off the cut glass, and back at Jefferson’s face. “I said no.” he repeated, a little louder. “You know, I wasn't sure why I took this meeting, what
I wanted to say. I’ve worked it out now. I agreed to come so I could see exactly that expression on your face when I told you to go shove it.” “You what?” Aaron stood. “You heard me. You can shove your balanced ticket, and your inside information, and that smug smile. I serve at the pleasure of the President, that’s President Washington in case you’d forgotten, and I’m proud to do so.”

“Why don’t you just think for a minute? This is your ticket to the top.” said Madison.

“I’ll make my own way to the top, thanks. It’s worked for me so far.” Aaron turned to leave.

“You’re making a mistake, Burr.” Jefferson snarled the words, his eyes dark with anger. “You know you won’t be able to take us on when it comes to re-election.”

“Then I look forward to your administration. But forgive me if I don’t hold my breath on it.”

And with that Aaron marched from the room, savouring the twin looks of shock and anger as he went.

Alex had been flitting in and out of John’s office all morning, a ball of skittish energy and excitement, and as endearing as it was, he really had work to do.

“Do you really think they’re going to go for it?” he would ask.

“Yes, Alex, I really do.”

And then he would smile, that hopeful, nervous smile, and bound out the door, leaving John to get on with whatever it was he was supposed to be writing, all the while counting down the minutes to the next interruption. This went on all morning, until Alex appeared again, this time with Eliza in tow.

“You ready?”

“Born ready,” he teased, and the three of them walked to the Oval together, where they were met by Angelica. Who looked more strung out that John had ever seen her. He shot her a questioning glance, which she ignored. Alex, practically vibrating with energy next to him, didn’t notice.

“Let’s do this,” he grinned.

“Yeah…” Angelica murmured. “Have any of you seen Aaron since this morning?”

They all shrugged, and she seemed to deflate further. John wasn’t sure she’d meant for him to hear the whisper of “That figures,” but before he could ask what was going on Alex marched inside and they had no choice but to follow in afterwards.

Washington looked up from his work. “Is it time already?” he asked sounding exasperated, but John could see the fond twinkle in his eye nodding, bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet.

“Shouldn’t we wait for Aaron?” said Eliza.

“I doubt he’s coming. Might as well get on without him.” Angelica muttered darkly.

“Brilliant. Okay, so, me and John have been thinking. You guys know as well as we do that the administration’s getting crushed out there. Every policy, every bill, every little thing we try and do gets thrown back in our faces. We’re not getting anywhere trying to please everyone. It’s time to try something knew. We’ve got, well, not so much a strategy as a plan of action, in that-“
“What we’ve got,” John interrupted, because as much as he loved Alex’s rambling speeches, they were going to be here all day at this rate, “Essentially boils down to four words. Let Washington be Washington. No more hiding what we’re trying to do, no more pulling punches. Sir, the people elected you to lead. Let’s damn well lead.”

“From now on we’re putting the issues front and centre. We change the game, we raise the stakes, and we let the whole country and everyone who wants to stop us know where we stand. That’s what we’re proposing.”

For a moment, no one spoke. Then Eliza said, gently, “That’s the sort of thing that’s gonna get us killed in the next election cycle.”

“Then it’ll be worth it.” Alex replied, turning to the President. “This is your chance to make your legacy mean something. It’s the game we’re in. You stick you’re neck out, you’re gonna get love for it, you gonna get a lot of hate for it hate for it-“

“-but you get nothing if you wait for it.” They all turned to see Aaron standing in the doorway, still wearing his coat. Beside him, John sensed Angelica tense. “Treasure this moment because you’ll never hear me say this again, but Alexander’s right. There are people who want to take us down, and we can’t let them. If we’re going down, why not go down in style?”

They all turned to the President, his face unreadable. Then Washington cleared his throat and said “Alexander, that first draft of our statement about the stabbing in Austin?”

“Yes sir?”

“I want you to tear it up and start again. Make it absolutely clear we will not tolerate hate crime in any form, and that this administration is coming for anyone who tries to defend it, and they’re gonna wish they hadn’t got out of bed by the we’re through with them.”

He smiled grimly, and suddenly the general-turned-governor who John had given up a career and crossed the country to get elected President stood before them. “Let Washington be Washington, huh? We can work with that.”

John knew it was going to be difficult, that they were signing themselves up for two years of conflict at every turn. But somehow, the smile on Alex’s face, a grin spreading from ear to ear, made it all worth it.

--

“I owe you an apology.”

Aaron looked up from his work, frowning in confusion, and that only made Angelica feel worse. She took a deep breath. “I-I should have trusted you. With Jefferson and everything, I-I’m sorry, alright?”

Slowly, deliberately, Burr put down his pen. “You’ve got nothing to be sorry for.”

“No, you’re my friend and I owe you more than to assume-“

“Angelica, stop. Everyone seems to be assuming the best of me today, it’s a little disconcerting. It wasn’t easy, okay? Saying no to Jefferson, and on another day I might be sitting on the other side of town drinking his very fine alcohol right now. So don’t imagine I’m any better than I am.”

She frowned. Aaron Burr was an enigma, no mistake. She knew he had it in him to be a great man,
and maybe even a good one, if only he let himself. But for now, she only smiled tightly.

“So, Alex was right, huh?”

“Shut up. That’s a phrase I won’t be repeating for some time.”

“You know he won’t let you forget it right? The idiot will probably get it written on your grave or something.”

“Ah, but he’d need to outlive me for that. And let’s face it, I’ll probably end of shooting him one of these days.”

She shrugged. “Alex is sneaky. He’d probably find a way around it.”

“Dear God, not even death would shut him up, would it?”

Burr shuddered at the thought, and Angelica had to laugh. Maybe they were going to be fine after all. She picked her coffee mug and raised it in a mock toast. “I’ll drink to that.”

Chapter End Notes

Tumblr @hapless-and-hopeless

Just to let you guys know, this work might be on a short break while I re-write some of the story. The next chapter (which was written about a month ago) has some stuff that I don’t feel comfortable with posting after the events in Orlando, so I’m rewriting a huge chunk of it to avoid/amend a couple of plot lines. I’m also mid-exams, which I’d scheduled not to have to write in, so progress might be slow. I’ll try to get it done so that there won’t be any interruptions to uploading, but I can’t make any promises, especially as I’m not yet sure how I want to go about it and what I still want to include. If anyone would like me to avoid certain issues or themes or anything please tell me.

So much love for all of you. Stay safe xx
What kind of a day has it been?

Chapter Notes

Does it count as on schedule if I post at ten to midnight? I'm going to say yes...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nine days to go

As soon as Eliza saw the matching grins on Alex and John’s faces, she knew that something was about to go horribly wrong. It was an expression she had learned to recognise over the years, equal parts nervous excitement and glee.

It was another late at the office (if such a place as the White House could be described as an office), and with the annual State of the Union Address coming up, there looked set to be a more late ones to come. This wasn't a new thing. What was a new thing, however, was the fact that the heating in the entire West Wing had decided to break down on what turned out to be the coldest night of the year so far. Eliza shivered, and pulled her coat tighter.

“What are you doing?” she asked warily.

“Building a fire!” John replied.

“What?”

“A fire! We couldn't find any wood, but we've got a load of newspapers and-“

“Alex, you do know we’re in the White House right?”

“So? A fireplace is a fireplace right? It’s freezing in here!”

Eliza stared at the two of them for a moment, then shook her head. “Whatever. You guys explain it to Washington if you burn his house down. I’m going to get some more tea.”

She was half way along the corridor when John came running up behind her. “Wait up. Mind if I tag along on the caffeine run?”

“Sure. Thought you had a no coffee after ten rule or something, though?”

“This week? I’d inject the stuff into my veins if I thought it would help. But it’s not for me anyway. Alex is going to drop at this rate.”

Eliza bit her lip, the weight of everything she wanted to say threatening to crush her for a moment. She wanted to bang the two of their heads together until they got it into their thick skulls how they really felt about each other, but that wouldn't solve anything. The two idiots needed to work through it on their own. That didn't mean she couldn't steer things in the right direction, though.

“He’s not going to break, you know.” she said as the kettle boiled. “Alex is stronger than he looks.”

“Yeah, I know.” A pause. “But I think this evening is the first time I’ve seen him smile this week.”
That was true. There was no doubt that the pressure had been on recently, and Alex seemed to be baring the brunt of it. The speech was his baby, and he would accept nothing less than perfection. Even if it meant running himself into the ground to do so.

“Keep at it then. It’s you who makes him smile, you know.”

She left, mug in hand before John could reply, leaving him to process her words. Surely even he could make something of them. But the smug smile slipped from her face when she walked back to the others, straight into an argument between Alex and Hercules in the middle of the corridor.

“You can’t just start a damn fire in here, Hamilton! Have you got any idea how much of a safety risk that is?”

“Chill, Herc. It is safe.”

“You’re gonna set off the alarms in a minute. And guess who’s job it is to go wake up Washington and tell him he’s gotta go stand on the south lawn in his pjs because some idiot thought that setting the building on fire was a good idea?”

“I’m not going to set off the alarms.”

“Um, guys…” Eliza interrupted, and pointed at the door. Or rather at the smoke billowing out from under the door.

“Shit.” Alex muttered, at the same time as Hercules said “I told you. And any second now-“

He was cut off by the scream of an alarm blaring out though the building. Alex and Eliza cringed and covered their ears. Herc just rolled his eyes, shot Alex a final glare and strode off down the corridor.

Hercules was still glaring when he knocked on the President’s door.

“It’s midnight. What the hell could you possibly want right now?” came a muffled grumble from inside, and he sighed.

“I’m sorry Mr President. Remember when you said I wasn’t to disturb you unless the building was on fire?”

Six days to go

“You’ve got to be kidding me, Laf,” said Hercules as he examined the menu with distaste. “I don’t think I could afford tap water at this place.

Lafayette smiled and tapped his friend on the shoulder lightly. At least he hoped they were friends. He hadn't known the young aide all that long, but he had stubbornly wormed his way into their little family of misfits and he was strangely fond of him. “Then it is a good thing I’m paying, non?”

“Seriously, man, I can’t ask you to-”

“No. This is my treat. Let me spend some of my ridiculous inheritance irresponsibly on you and we will hear no more about it.”

Hercules was still clearly still a little uncomfortable, and Lafayette realised that maybe he hadn't picked the best place to eat. It was the kind of restaurant he he used to take girls with short skirts and
long eyelashes who were impressed by big money and an easy smile. He didn't do that these days, not since Adrienne had come into his life then left it again so quickly. His heart just wasn’t in it. But clearly old habits died hard.

“Okay then,” Hercules said eventually. “You’re going to regret this, by the way. What’s the most expensive steak on the menu? I want four.”

And Lafayette had to laugh.

“Tell you the truth, I’m amazed I got lunch off at all this week,” Herc said some time later around a mouthful of his (single) rump stake.

“I’m guessing it’s a madhouse at the moment.” Laf replied sympathetically.

“You have no idea.”

“Ah, that is where you are mistaken, my friend. You forget, I’ve been hanging around these buffoons we call friends for many more years than you. I exactly how crazy things can get. I remember this one time, about four days before the inauguration, Le Petit Lion turned up on my doorstep at three in the morning asking if I had a French thesaurus…”

“Le Petit Lion?”

“Dear Alexander. He is our little lion. Small but fierce, non?”

This time it was Herc’s turn to laugh. The sound suited him, Lafayette decided, and made a mental note to endeavour to make him laugh more in the future. “That sounds about right. Did I tell you he tried to burn down the White House last week?”

Laf held up his hand urgently. “I’m going to stop you right there, Hercules. This sounds like a story that should not be told until we are significantly drunker. You, mon ami, need a drink.”

Four days to go

George Washington didn’t get nervous. Not exactly. He was the President of the United States, for God’s sakes, he had given more speeches that he could remember and stood up in front of the world on a daily basis. He could handle one little State of the Union Speech, surely.

Except it wasn’t just one little State of the Union Speech, not since they had decided to completely change their policy strategy. The speech was big, the first glimpse the rest of the world would have at Let Washington be Washington, and it could make or break the administration.

It would have been easier if he knew what he was saying, but they were four days out and the communications department were still changing the wording. And by the communications department, he meant Alexander. The man must have been on about draft fifty one by now - the latest version had landed on George’s desk for no more than half an hour before the man had snatched it away again, muttering about beefing up the language in the B section. If past experiences were anything to go by, he would be editing the final draft in the car on the way over to the Capitol building, and George would stand up in front of the world and read a script covered in pencil scribbles and that didn’t match the teleprompter. But then again, that was nothing new either.

It wasn’t just Alexander that was showing the strain of the big speech approaching, although invariably he was always the one who worried George the most. John was putting in more hours
than anyone, Eliza’s eternally sunny outlook was starting to cloud over, and even Hercules, who had never missed an hour of work or slacked off for a single second had begged a long lunch break with Lafayette. He couldn't blame the man; there was a constant high-strung buzz of tension around the West Wing, and George only wished he could escape it as easily.

“Mr President, appropriations sent over some documents for you to sign.”

George looked up from his work, and silently amended his earlier thought. Everyone was showing the strain, except for his Chief of Staff. Burr was as unruffled as ever, suit without a crease and expression no more troubled than on any given day. It wasn't fair. George wondered if he could get the secret service to put out on Burr, just so he would stop making everyone else look bad. Probably best not to, he decided as he signed the papers with a flourish. Everyone would just assume that Alexander had done it and then he’d have two members of staff to replace.

Burr had just turned to leave when George remembered that there was something he had to talk to the man about. This at least was the fun part of his job.

“Hey, Aaron, hold on a minute.”

“What’s going on?”

“Do we have the press arrangements for the weekend yet?” he asked, voice carefully casual.

“Yeah, I think so. Angelica finalised them with me this morning, she’s done a great job dealing with the television companies so that everyone’s happy. Do you want to see them?”

_Aha_, George thought, but only shook his head. “No, don’t worry about it. So you and Angelica were working closely together on this one?”

“I… I suppose so, yes.” Aaron said, clearly confused.

“Because I couldn't help noticing that you two have been sending a lot of time together recently. Just out of curiosity, is there anything I need to know about?”

Aaron’s face was blank for a moment, then his eyes widened in understanding. The carefully schooled neutral expression was back a second later, but George hadn't missed the flash of panic.

“What? No, of course not. Nothing like… No. We’ve just been working on the arrangements for the State of the Union.”

And that had to be the worst lie George had ever heard. Which was saying something considering a lifetime spent in politics. He would have to chat to Angelica later, but as far as George was concerned, Burr’s terrible attempt at a cover up had all but confirmed it. There was most definitely something going on between them. He wouldn't have put the two of them together before now, but he wasn't an idiot. He could tell when his staff were hiding something from him, and the two of them had been keeping something secret for weeks.

And if the President of the United States spent a minute sitting alone in the Oval Office grinning like a school-girl at the prospect of some gossip, no one would ever know.

**One Day to go**

John had been having a good day. Despite the madness and the work load, and the fact he couldn't remember the last time he’d managed more than about four hours of sleep (God, he was turning into
Alex), he’d been having a good day.

There’s a moment as a writer when suddenly everything clicks into place and you know you’ve cracked it. These moments are few and far between, vastly outnumbered by scrunched up sheets of paper thrown into bins and hours spent staring at a blank screen, but they were worth it. Sitting in Alex’s dimly lit office, draft whatever-the-hell-they-were-up-to of the speech scattered all around covered in red pen, John was starting to think that it would never be right. And then, just like that, with a sentence moved here, a paragraph scrapped there, a thesaurus consulted, then discarded, then thrown at John’s head, it was done. They stopped writing and looked up at each other at the same time, twin expressions of relief verging on disbelief across their faces.

“Is that…?” he asked.

“That’s it.”

A grin broke out across John’s face and Alex pulled him into a hug. “That’s it!” he shouted, an almost manic gleam in his eyes as he spun John around… and he could have so easily done it then. High from the adrenalin and excitement running through his veins, it would have been the easiest thing in the world for John grab Alex by the tie and kiss his right there in the middle of the west wing.

Instead he pulled away, gathering up the sheets which had scattered onto the floor. “Let me type these up,” he said dryly. “It would be just like us to loose the perfect version as soon as we’ve written it.”

“I’ll go tell the others,” Alex replied, bounding out the door, and John let out a sigh. Damn, he needed to get a grip. That was too close.

But the point was, it had been a good day. The speech was done, relief palpable throughout the building, and Washington’s smile as he finished the final draft and told them to call it was the icing on the cake. Besides him, Alex was practically glowing from the praise, and John met Eliza’s eye from across the room, knowing they were thinking the exact same thing. Not your son, my ass. But even with the speech done, there was still a lot of work to do before tomorrow night. Organisation, rehearsals, speaking to sponsors and guests and going over seating plans to make sure that Alex would be nowhere near Jefferson… it all took time. So it wasn't until after eating lunch that John got around to checking his emails. Which probably hadn't been the best plan, because looking at his inbox John was sure it was all about to come up again.

Between all the official work stuff that could wait until later, was a message from his father with the subject simply CALL ME. In capitals and everything. Swallowing down the lump in his throat, he clicked on the email. It was a link to an online article, speculating on the contents of Washington’s State of the Union and the aggressive liberal approach they would be announcing. It was one of countless articles on the subject - Angelica had orchestrated a series of well-placed press leaks to create a buzz around the event and ensure the world would be watching. But this one wasn't focus on Washington or the administration as a whole. It was all about John.

He scanned through the article, which bore the headline Local boy key influence on Washington’s policy shift, and rolled his eyes slightly. That was the thing about having grown up in Charleston, South Carolina. Even if you hadn’t lived there in years, even if you had run away to the other side of the country to go to college and never looked back, as soon as you hit the news you were a local boy. He didn't understand what was so important about the story, though. It wasn't particularly critical of John or Washington, and he doubted it had even made the front page. So what… oh. John froze as he read the last paragraph:
What is less clear is how his father, Henry Laurens, will react to the new direction his son is helping to steer the country in. Laurens senior served in the Senate for eighteen years, and remains an influential pillar of the community. He has been known to have fallen out with his son in matters of politics before, and if the Washington plan is a success, it could seriously undermine his position in favour for more support for John’s stances. Already, Laurens’s influence over the South Carolina legislature is in decline, while that of his son’s over the President can only be growing.

Dammit. There was nothing more important to Henry Laurens than reputation, and as far as he was concerned, his was about to be rubbed in the mud by his own son. He needed to calm the man down before this got any worse. With a hand that only trembled slightly, John reached for his phone.

Two hours to go

“And you’re absolutely sure the television crews know where they’re meant to be?”

Angelica rolled her eyes. “Give me some credit, Aaron. This is my job. It’s sorted. Now get in the car, or we’re going to be late.”

God but the man was a control freak. They had had weeks to make sure that everything would run like clockwork, and Aaron had picked the moment that they were getting in the car to go to the capitol building to loose his famous cool. The President wasn’t coming with them; he would arrive later with all the fanfare and ceremony they could muster, but the majority of the staff were heading to the Hill now to get everything set up. At least they would be if they could get everyone into the car.

“What the hell’s taking so long?” she muttered to herself, and left Aaron to sort himself out. Him, at least, she could trust not to wander off.

She passed Hercules in the hallway who was grinning smugly. He would be coming with the later group so just sit back and enjoy the chaos at this stage, the bastard.

“Have you seen the others?” she asked, and he only smiled more, pointing down the corridor. She found out why a minute later - Alex and Eliza were mid screaming match.

“Jesus Christ children, can you do this later? They’re going to go without us.”

“We wouldn’t be having this problem if Alex didn’t want to go back and change his tie for the sixth time. Newsflash Hamilton, no one will be looking at you!” shouted Eliza.

“Angelica!” Alex turned to her. “Thank God, someone who understands. Can you please tell Eliza that the blue one’s my lucky tie, and she’s basically dooming us all if she doesn’t let me go and get it?”

She smiled tightly. “Sorry, Alex, I’m with Eliza on this one. Now haul ass, or so help me God…”

Unsurprisingly, they hauled ass.

Aaron had apeared out of nowhere as they sat down in the car, and Angleica had gotten as far as putting her seatbelt on before Alex asked “Where’s John?” She swore.

“I’ll go get him,” Alex offered, standing up, and she pulled him back down.

“Not a chance. I’d be sending search parties after the both of you. Let me find him.”
She claimed out the car, paused, then turned and shouted to Eliza through the window. “Don’t let them leave without us. And keep Alex in the car!”

It was always a little disconcerting, walking through the West Wing devoid of its usual hustle and bustle of people, but Angelica didn’t have time to think about that now. “John! John Laurens! Where the hell are you? You’d better be dying or something…”

She burst into his office, and was more annoyed than relieved at seeing the familiar figure standing with his back to the door, hands braces against his desk. “John, didn't you hear me yelling? We’re going to be late.” He didn't reply, didn't so much as move, and she paused. “John? Are you okay?” His knuckles were white against the wood. She reached out a hand to touch his shoulder, and John jerked away as if he had been burnt. “John?”

“Yeah, sorry, coming. Um, thinking for a second there, let’s go.”

Angelica wasn't convinced, but couldn't think how to ask him what was wrong that wouldn't make him shut her out even more. Now that she thought about it, he had seemed on edge all day. She had put it down to pre-speech nerves and thought no more about it, but Eliza had muttered something about a call from his Dad over lunch. She hadn't put two and two together at the time, but whatever had been said, it couldn't have been good.

But it would have to wait, at least for the next two hours. John gave her a watery smile and pushed past her, leaving Angelica standing alone in the office. Dammit, now she was going to be the late one. Washington better hit it out of the fucking park with this speech, she thought, and hurried after him.

--

“Come on, cheer up!”

Alex had appeared out of nowhere, and it was all John could do not to scream. On any other day, his enthusiasm was infectious, an addiction flowing through John’s veins with a pull stronger than any drug, but tonight he couldn't face it. With his father’s words still running in his ears and the slight spinning of the world reminding him of just how long it had been since he slept, it was too much, all of it. Too much that the shine in Alex’s eyes was only ever directed at his work, never at him.

“Seriously, smile! It went great!”

“Washington did well,” he allowed, (because the President really had been amazing), hoping that Alex would take the hint and leave him be. No such luck.

“Team Washington did well. They were our words up there!” Alex corrected him as they walked out into the open air to the sound of cheers. The repelling was crowded for people scrambling for photographs, or even just a glimpse of their hero, and Washington seemed more than happy to oblige. He smiled warmly, waved to the crowds, and John bit back a groan. The President would want to shake hands with every damn person here, no doubt, and at this rate they would be at it all night. Brilliant.

“What’s wrong with you?” Alex tried again.

“You know fucking well what.” He hadn't meant to snap, but somehow couldn't regret the words that sprung from his mouth.

“What, your Dad? Forget about him.”
“It’s not that simple.”

“Sure to is. He’s a dick, and you just helped the leader of the free world kick some serious congressional ass. You don’t need him.”

“Dammit, Alex, he’s my family. This stuff matters, okay? You can’t just pick a fight with the whole world and expect it all to work out!”

“I wasn’t going to suggest-“

“Of course you were. Because that’s what you always do. But that doesn’t work for me. You wanna know why? Because I live in the real world!”

“John…”

“You need to grow up, Alexander!”

“I need to grow up? I’m not the one who can’t even stand up to his own father!”

“This is my family, it’s complicated! You wouldn't understand, Alex, all your family are gone!”

John regretted the words as soon as they were out of his mouth. Even if Alex hadn't taken a stumbling step backwards, shock and betrayal etched across his face, he would have know he had gone too far, crossed the invisible line that friends were supposed to protect.

Alex took another step backwards, the pain on his features twisting into pure rage. For a moment, John thought he was going to hit him. He would have deserved it too, would have done nothing to avoid the blow. But then Alex turned on his heel and marched away.

“Alex! I’m sorry! I…”

But it was no use. Alex was gone, swallowed up by the night, and John could do nothing but stand there wonder if he’d just lost the one person he cared about most. Maybe his father had been right all along. Maybe John really was cursed to poison everything he touched.

--

Alex thrust his hands into his pockets as he walked, in a futile effort to keep them warm. He wasn't wearing a coat, and his thin jumper did nothing to stop the winter wind whistling through. It was something he had never quite gotten used to, no matter how many years he’d been living in America, the constant feeling of being cold, and right now he missed the climate of Nevis more than ever.

Alex didn't kid himself though. He knew it wasn't just the cold he was shaking from. John’s words wrung in his head as he walked - he could hear the scorn in every step, every beat of his heart.

“You wouldn’t understand. You need to grow up, Alexander. All your family are gone.

It wasn't so much the words that hurt - Alex had heard all of it and far worse before - but the fact it had been John who said them. John, who Alex trusted unconditionally, who had always had his back against the rest of the world. He had always been afraid, deep down, that John would wake up one morning and realise nothing to do with Alex any more, that he was a broken mess who could never be good enough for him, and now it had finally happened. He’s right, Alex thought. I have no family, no clue what I’m doing, nothing that’s worth a damn to anyone. It was only when the wind blew again, cold and sharp against his cheeks, that Alex realised he was crying. He hated the tears streaming down his cheek but made no effort to wipe them away as he walked down… wait, where was he, exactly?
Alex realised he had no idea where he was. He had been walking blindly, paying no attention to where his feet were taking him, and had ended up in an area of the city he didn't recognise. No matter. What did he have to home to right now? An empty flat? Friends that didn't want him around? No, far better to walk down streets with no names and pray to get lost in the city he had made his home.

He couldn't say how long he walked, but his feet were aching by the time he heard the voices echoing from the side alley of a bar. He was perfectly happy to ignore them - they belonged to other people with other lives who had never heard of a bastard orphan named Alexander Hamilton, when a woman’s voice began to shout.

“Get off me. I don’t want to hear it!”

“Come on Baby, don’t be like that.”

“Don’t you Baby me, James. Or better yet, don’t talk to me at all. We’re done, you hear?”

The click of heels began to echo towards him, before they cut off abruptly with a thump and a cry.

“Where do you think you’re going? We’re done when I say we’re done. And I don’t say we’re done.”

“Let me go!”

Heart rate spiking, Alex ran towards the voices. There was a man and a woman in the alley, and he had her pinned up against the dirty brick wall, one arm over her throat. The woman struggled, and in the dim light of the alley, Alex saw the man smile.

And just like that, all his hurt and anger had a new target.

“Hey, dick, get off her!” he shouted.

The man, James, turned, took in Alex’s small frame, and laughed. “Stay out of this one, short-stack.”

Alex ignored him. “The lady said let go. If I were you, I’d do it.”

“And if I don’t?”

Alex glared at him, hating everything he saw, and after a moment James released the girl, pushing her back against the wall as he did so. “Stay right there, Maria. I need to have a little chat with your new best friend.” She didn’t, frozen against the wall, and James turned back to Alex. “Last chance to walk away.”

“Not gonna happen until you let her go, you ass.”

“Oh, I was hoping you’d say that.”

James advanced on him, and Alex barely had a second to react before a meaty arm came swinging his way. He twisted to avoid the worst of it, but not fast enough. The blow caught him on the side of his jaw, hard enough to send him stumbling backwards. The world spun around him and Alex lashed out blindly. The sudden spike of pain in his fist and the accompanying bellow told him he’d got a hit in, but any triumph was short lived. A fist caught him in the stomach, then another on his cheek, and Alex would have hit the ground hard if not for the hand holding him up by the scruff of the neck.

James’ breath reeked of cheep beer. He pulled Alex closer, faces just inches apart and hissed “You
should have walked away.”

Alex worked up a mouthful of blood and saliva and spat. It probably wasn’t the smartest thing he had ever done, but for one amazing second it was worth it, to see the look of outrage on James’ face. “

Mistake.” he whispered.

And this time, there was no avoiding the worst of the blows. Nor the flash of metal, a sliver of silver in the dark. It was oddly beautiful, Alex thought as the shadows closed in and the ground came rushing up to meet him. Even stained crimson.

Chapter End Notes

Oops. My finger slipped.

@hapless-and-hopeless
In the shadow of two witnesses

Chapter Notes

Um, I'm sorry for last time? I've never got so many comments saying fuck you before... I'm gonna go ahead and assume its a good thing!?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

John knew he was abusing the power of the spare key. True, he had never been above doing it before - letting himself into Alex’s flat to take back the jumpers he’d stolen or force Alex to eat a decent meal, or even on the (occasional, no matter whatever anyone else said) nights when Alex’s couch was a shorter walk from work than his bed and he was too tired to care that his back would pay for it the next morning. But this was different, somehow. Right now, John knew he was probably the last person Alex wanted to see, and here he was, sitting in his apartment waiting for him to get home.

He was overstepping boundaries and he knew it, but it was all John could think to do. Alex wasn't answering his phone and no one else had herd from him, and there was no way John could go home until he’d had a chance to talk with him and apologise. He’d fucked up. Fucked up big tue, and nothing had ever scared him more than the thought of loosing Alex. And if he was choosing to ignore what that meant for the time being, so be it. Sorting through the tangled mess of thoughts and feelings in the Alex section of his brain was going to take time he didn't have right now, not before fixing up his friendship before he drove Alex away for good. Unless he was already too late, that was.

The sound of his ringtone jerked him out of his thoughts, and he pulled it out of his pocket, glancing at the caller ID. Alex. Thank God.

“Alex, where are you? I’m so sorry for what I said, okay, I didn't mean any of it.”

Silence down the other end of the line, which John took to mean that his friend was beyond pissed. He tried again.

“Come on, talk to me. I went too far I know, I fucked up, but don't push me away. You’re my best friend, Alex, I don’t want to loose you.”

Still Alex didn't reply and John wanted to scream in frustration. He knew he deserved everything coming his way and more, but this was childish, even by Alex’s standards.

“Just… Just come home, yeah? I’m at your place. We need to talk. And I know you’re pissed but, just come, please? I'll be here.”

John hung up the phone and sighed, running his hands through his hair. And waited.

And on the other side of the city, Alex stared at his phone screen in despair as it went dark, indicating the call had ended. He didn't have the strength to dial again. It had taken all his energy to extract his (remarkably unbroken) phone from his pocket and call in the first place. He hadn't even been able to speak, just lie there with lips that uselessly formed John’s name around shallow breaths. And now even John’s voice had left him. A crack of thunder sounded somewhere in the heavens,
and like a sigh, rain began to fall. *Circles*, he thought bitterly. *We run in circles*. It had been with rain streaming down his face that he should have died, all those years, ago, and it would be in the rain that death called him home. Funny how it felt more like a memory than the end. Alex let the phone slip from his bloodied fingers - he didn't have the strength to hold it any more - and for the first time since he was a child, Alexander Hamilton began to pray.

--

The sound of a siren leaked in through the open window, puncturing the silence of the night. Not that it was ever truly silent in DC, but as cities went, it was a lot quieter than New York where she had grown up. Maria never thought she'd find herself missing the buzz of the city, all the noises and people pressing in from all sides, but right now, all she wanted to do was run home. That wasn't an option, though. She'd tried that tonight, tried to finally stand up to the ass she called a boyfriend, and look what happened. That poor man…

A hot tear leaked out of the corner of her eye and splashed onto the bedsheets. Trying to shut out the memory didn't help. For as long as she lived, Maria knew she would remember the way his voice had shaken when he told James to leave her alone, the grunts of pain as knocks and boots collided with skin. The blooding the moonlight. And all because he had been trying to help her… God, this was her fault. If she had just kept her mouth shut and done what James had told her, none of this would have happened, and some innocent guy wouldn't be lying dead in a stinking alleyway.

But what if he wasn't dead, though? What if the stranger was still there, all alone in the dark? She shivered, despite herself. If she could do something to help him and didn't, then Maria had as good as killed him. But if she tried to do something and James found out… Look what happened last time. The bruises, she could take. Pain faded quickly, and as long as she was sure to wear long sleeves, they were easy enough to hide (he did always say he liked her to look pretty after all), but if someone else ended up getting hurt because of her own stupidity… God, she just wanted to go home and stop being so afraid.

The worst thing was, she had loved him, once. He had been charming and kind and good to her, and for the first time since moving to the city, Maria had felt like there was someone she could trust. For a while, at least, they had been happy.

There were still days like that, when James was sober and his touches were soft, and she could convince herself that it wasn't all bad, that she still knew how to love him. And then he would come home one night stinking of cheap alcohol and it would start all over again.

She glanced at the sleeping form next to her. Surely he would be asleep for ages? That was the pattern, one she had come to know like clockwork, that it inevitably ended with James passed out on the bed, sleeping off the drink. He would never know, never find out. But God, if he did…

Slowly, area slipped out of bed. The floor was cold under her bare feat as she crept around to James's side, slowly and without making a sound. She looked him over with distaste. Where was - there! His phone was sticking out of his back pocket and Maria carefully began to ease it out, not daring to breath. If he woke up now, she was screwed. James stirred, and for a moment she froze. But then he mumbled something incomprehensible and turned over, burring his face into the pillow. Jesus. Eventually she managed to extract it, and stole into the bathroom.

As soon as the door was secure locked behind her, Maria sank to the floor. The mobile was a guilty weight in her hands, and she couldn't believe what she had just done. What she was about to do. It wasn't too late, se could put it back before James woke up and he would never know and…

Maria thought of the man in the alley again, and another tear slipped down her face. Her hands were
shaking so badly she almost couldn’t dial. It was a good thing she only needed three numbers.

“Nine One One, what is your emergency?” a voice asked.

Maria held the phone close to her and whispered “I’d like to report an assault…”

---

John hadn’t meant to fall asleep, hadn’t even noticed it happen, but one minute he was sitting in Alex’s dark flat praying that he would walk through the door, the next he was startled awake by the sound of his phone ringing. He snatched it up, sparing a moment to squint at the incoming number that he didn’t recognise, and answered it.

“Hello?”

“Am I speaking to a John Laurens?” a woman’s voice asked.

“Yes, that’s me.”

“You’re listed as the emergency contact for Mr Alexander Hamilton, is that correct?”

John’s breath caught in his throat. Emergency contact? “Yes. Is Alex okay? What happened?”

“Mr Hamilton was admitted to GW hospital around 2:30 this morning following an anonymous police report of an assault. He is currently undergoing surgery for penetrating pulmonary lacerations, as well as serious internal bruising, and-”

“What does that mean?” John asked desperately, the medical jargon not making any sense through the fog of panic that had seized his thoughts.

The woman took a deep breath. “It means that your friend was beaten up and stabbed, Mr Laurens. He’s in emergency surgery as we speak, mainly for a damages to the chest and gut area. I’m so sorry to have to tell you this but you… I would suggest you get here quickly.”

John was out of the door before she had even finished speaking.

---

Angelica had never seen John look so lost in all the years she had known him. In fact, she almost hadn’t recognised him at all, sitting motionless in the corner of the waiting room, staining at something no one else could see. It took Eliza calling his name twice before he looked up at them with wide, fearful eyes, and Angelica was forcefully reminded of just how young John was.

It had been Eliza who received his phonetical, who’s horrified gasp had alerted them to the fact that something was horribly wrong. They had all been crashing at Herc’s place, celebrating the success of Washington’s speech. They knew that Alex and John had had a big blow-up about something, so we Eliza’s phone flashed up with Jackie-Boy calling, they’d assumed it would be John telling them that they’d patched things up.

No one had been expecting their whole damn world to fall apart.

The journey to the hospital was a blur, and later Angelica would only remember certain snapshots. Aaron’s mug crashing to the floor. Herc making phone calls, face pale. Somehow finding herself sitting in a taxi watching the DC lights go past, and wondering how the rest of the world could still be turning.
She didn't know how they made it there, exactly, but suddenly the four of them were standing in the lobby of GW hospital, trying to find out what had happened to Alex, and where the hell John was.

They eventually found him in a private waiting room that had been cornered off from the rest of the hospital by the Secret Service. It hadn't even crossed Angelica’s mind that this could have been a politically motivated attack, or that the rest of them could be in danger. It was a chilling thought, but some part of her almost hoped that that had been what happened. Far better that Alex had been targeted for what he believed in and there was a coherent enemy they could fight than her friend was just a random, nameless victim of pointless violence. Alex couldn't just be another statistic. He was so much more than a number to be checked off and sited in reports.

John looked about as bad as they all felt; pale cheeks, red eyes, and a look of abject desperation on his face. Eliza swept him into a hug and he tensed for a moment before returning, burring his face in her hair. Angelica wanted to offer him her shoulder, but didn't know where to begin. This had always been Eliza’s thing, the hugs and words of comfort, and ability to convince people it would all be okay. Angelica had always preferred to help her friends by going after anyone who dared hurt them with something long and sharp, but right now that wouldn't help anyone. They were stuck in a nightmare, a limbo, just waiting to fall off, and there wasn't a damn thing she could do for her friends. Not John, and certainly not Alex who was here, somewhere, fighting for his life. It was that realisation that sent the room spinning, and she quickly sank into the nearest chair. The guys followed suit, and Eliza, finally releasing John, did the same.

For a while, no one spoke, each lost in their own thoughts. Then Aaron said “John, what happened?”

John swallowed. “I don’t know. We were fighting, and Alex stormed off, and I went to his place to wait for him and… and them I got a call. God, I got a call from Alex. I asked him to come home, and he didn't say anything and I though he was just in one of his moods but… what if he was already hurt? What if he was bleeding out somewhere and all I could do was complain that he was being childish, and hang up? This is all my fault…”

“Don’t say that!” Eliza said.

“But it’s true,” he mumbled miserably. “I pushed him away, I couldn't even help him, this is all on me.”

“John.” Herc’s voice was soft, but there was something in his tone that made everyone shut up and look his way. “You didn't do this. There’s some fucker still out there who hurt Alex, so don’t you dare take one speck of the blame off his shoulders, you hear me? This isn't your fault, and when Alex wakes up he’s gonna have our hides if he finds out we’ve been letting you beat yourself up over it. That’s not going to help anyone.”

Despite Herc’s size, he was usually the gentlest person Angelica knew, and she could never have imagined being scared of him before today. But right now, with that vicious gleam in his eyes that has half protectiveness and half rage… well she wouldn't want to be the fool who decided to get in his way tonight.


Aaron cleared his throat. “I’m going to go see if I can find out what’s going on.”

“They said they’d tell us as soon as there was news.” Angelica pointed out.

“It’s worth a try, though, if there’s anything anyone can tell us.” He was gone before she could reply,
and Angelica cursed. “I’ll get him,” she muttered, and followed Aaron out the door, half jogging down the corridor to catch up with him.

“We should all be in one place right now.” she told him. “This isn't something you can just take control of.”

Aaron turned to look at her. “It’s Alexander.” he said simply, and something cracked in his facade. He’s scared, she realised with a start. No matter how much time they spend at each others throats, he’s terrified out of his goddam mind.

She let go of his hand, which she hadn't noticed taking, and let him go to find someone. He wouldn't find out anything knew, she was sure. But if it helped… It was all any of them could do to try.

“I’m sorry, sir, but this area is off limits at the moment. I’m going to have to ask you to move.”

Aaron sighed at the voice behind him, and turned around. He was itching to yell at someone. “Not to me it’s-" But then he stopped dead, because he recognised the nurse’s face. She was wearing hospital scrubs instead of a bright yellow skirt, and her hair was braided off her face, but all the same… “Theo?” he asked incredulously.

Theo frowned at him, then her eyes widened in recognition. “Train guy! Hey! How’d the decision-making go?”

Despite everything, Aaron smiled. “It’s Aaron, actually, not train guy. And, let’s just say you were right. I’m pretty sure I made the right call.”

“I’m always right. And I’m glad for you, really, but I’m afraid you still can’t be here. We’re under some pretty tight security in this wing of the hospital right now. The FBI are involved, maybe even the secret service, it’s pretty serious. I don’t know if you saw the news, but-

“I didn't need to see it.”

“What do-“ her hand flew up to cover her mouth. “Oh shit, Aaron. You’re Aaron Burr, aren’t you? Washington’s Chief of Staff?”

“Afraid so.”

“Oh God, I keep swearing in front of you and…” she trailed off. “Sorry, probably not what your thinking about right now,”

Aaron ran a hand over his head. “Can you tell me how he is?”

“Even if I was at liberty to share patient information, we won’t know anything until Hamilton’s out of surgery. I don’t know how long…”

She looked away, biting her lips, and Aaron frowned. “What is it? Please?”

“With these things its all about the timing. And he’s been in there a long time. It could be nothing, but…”

“But we need to prepare ourselves.” Aaron finished, cold dread pooling in his stomach.

“Like I said, it could be nothing. Don’t give up hope, Aaron. You’re friend’s a fighter.”
Aaron laughed bitterly. “That’s an understatement.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, how long’s he been under now? About five hours? I’m pretty sure that’s the longest he’s ever gone without picking an argument with someone. Usually me. And before that… let’s just say Alexander hasn’t had an easy time of it. He’s taken on more than a little switch blade and come out on top before. If there’s anyone who could pull through out of sheer stubbornness, it would be him.”

Theo opened her mouth to reply, but was cut of by the crackle of a radio clipped on her belt. She snatched it up at once, and turned away to talk into it, her voice hushed. Aaron held his breath, unable to hear what she was saying yet knowing instinctively it was about Alex. Finally, Theo turned around, face unreadable.

“You should go back to your friends, Aaron.”

“What?”

“Surgery’s ended. That’s all I know, I’m sorry.”

“Thank you,” he whispered, and then he was all but running back down the corridor, dignity thrown to the winds.

Aaron burst through the doors into the waiting room with a clatter, and everyone looked up at the sudden noise.

It must have been written all over his face, because John stood, his eyes desperate. “What is it?”

“Something’s happening. I don’t know, but—”

“Can everyone sit down, please?”

Aaron turned as a doctor walked through the door, clipboard in hand and hair pulled off her face, and something knotted painfully in his stomach. He half collapsed into the nearest chair, and everyone looked at the doctor. For all the power and influence they collectively wielded on a normal day, she might as well hold the fate of the world in his hands.

“My name is Dr Bartlett, and I’ve spent the last six or so hours overseeing the treatment of your friend. I can tell you that Mr Hamilton has undergone major surgery, the primary worry being a collapsed lung, as well as several other lacerations to the chest area and three broken ribs. We cannot yet say whether this has been successful, but we are doing all we can for him, and his prospects look a lot better than they did earlier. If he makes it through the night, I would rate his chances of a full recovery favourable, and—”

“If he makes it through the night?” Aaron repeated faintly, and Dr Bartlett grimaced. “As I said, we can’t say whether or not the surgery was successful. There’s a chance that infection will set in leading to pneumonia, or Mr Hamilton may lose the ability to breath on his own if his respiratory muscles fail him. We just have no way of knowing, I’m afraid.”

Silence fell around the room as they took in the information. Aaron had been steeling himself for the worst but it was hardly the good news they’d been praying for either. Yet more limbo.

“He’s alive,” Eliza whispered, more to herself than anyone else, and he tried to hold on the thought. Alexander was still with them. For now at least, he was fighting.
“Can we see him?” John asked.

She pursed her lips, considering. “I don’t see why not. I don’t have to tell you not to try and wake him, I hope?”

They all shook their heads and Aaron got to his feet, wondering how the hell he was supposed to prepare himself for the sight of his friend half-gone from the land of the living. Maybe there was no preparing.

--

“You always had to win the argument, didn’t you? You know you could have just accepted my apology and saved all the theatrics.”

Alex, of course, didn’t reply.

John could hardly bare to look at him. His Alex was never still for a moment, face flushed with energy and eyes sparking. He was the definition of alive. His Alex had never been so still nor pale (in that little of his face that wasn't bruised purple), had never gone so long without going off on a rant about the forty-two reasons that someone was wrong. It was wrong, all of it, and John didn't know what to do.

He was sitting alone in the hospital room, silence punctuated only by the beeps of the machines hooked up to his best friend. Everyone had been here earlier (apart from Washington, who was still in the residence and raising hell about being under effective house arrest by the civil service until they had a better grip on security), but Eliza had gently lead them away to give John a minute alone with Alex. He had been grateful at the time, but now it was all he could do not to call them back, just so he didn't feel like the only living person left in the room.

He adjusted his chair sitting forward to take Alex’s hand (that too, was too pale), and griped it tightly, silently begging for a response. None came.

“You dick. You absolute dick, Alexander Hamilton. You can’t do this to me, not now. Not when… You just can’t okay? When you wake up, we’re going to have a very serious conversation, but for now, you just hold on Alex. Hear me? The world’s not going to change itself, you know. We need you. I need you, hear me?”

If Alex heard, he kept it to himself, and then it was all John could do to blink back the tears forming behind his eyes. And pray.

John must have nodded off. He didn't remember going to sleep, never imagined he’d be able to, but one moment he was clutching Alex’s hand, the next there was a whisper in the dark.

“Mama?”

He jerked his head up, at once wide awake.

“Alex?” he asked, hardly daring to hope.

His friend hadn't opened his eyes, but under his fingers, John felt his hand twitch. Then the whole of his body began to shake.

“Mama, where are you?” Alex cried.

“Alex, it’s me, it’s John. I’m here love, it’s me!”
“Mama! Il fait froid, please, c’est sombre, estoy asustado!”

“Alex, stay with me!” John pleaded, tearing his face away from his friend’s to the machines, which were screaming in warning, alarms and flashing lights incomprehensible. He found the alarm button and punched it. Pure panic was pumping through his veins, all else replaced by a fear that threatened to strangle him. On the bed, Alex’s broken body started to shake harder, his (too thin, dammit Alex, how many time’s have I told you?) frame convulsing and arching, eyelids half open to reveal eyes rolled back. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth, the red so wrong against the his pale skin.

“Help me!” John shouted, then to Alex a whispered “Please, I’m here.” He wanted to hold him still, but was afraid to even touch him, in case he somehow made it worse. He had never felt so useless. Nor so scared.

“Eliza!” Alex screamed, and John’s heart shattered at the fear in his voice. “Pa! Dónde fuiste? Eliza! John! Where are you?”

“Yes, I’m right here. Stay with me, Alex!”

“Stand back!”

John hadn’t noticed the nurses and doctors burst into the room, but he did notice when someone grabbed his arm and pulled him away. He struggled, the only thing going through his mind was that he was being pulled further away from Alex, who needed him, who was calling for him, who-

“Someone get him out of here!”

He was propelled backwards, and out of the room. Someone was screaming. It might even have been him. The door slammed shut behind them, curtains at the windows drawn. There was the hard plastic of a seat beneath him, the cool of the wall at his back, and there might as well have been an ocean between him and Alex for all he could do to help. This time John didn’t bother to fight the heat welling behind his eyes. There was only one thing going through his head, a record skipping over the same words, again.

*If he make’s it through the night*...

Chapter End Notes

Translations:
Il fait froid - It’s cold (French)
C’est Sombre - It’s dark (French)
Estory asustado - I’m scared (Spanish)
Dónde fuiste? - Where were you? (Spanish)
(Because I’ve decided that Alex is fluent in both. Fight me on this one)

Also, virtual hugs and cookies for anyone who spotted my blink-and-you-miss-it cameo...
“Get off of me! I will not… Non, I am asking you step aside… not make me ask again, or so help me I swear…”

Hercules looked up at the sound of shouting from through the doors. It was a stark contrast from the silence that hung like an oppressive fog over the rest of the room. He didn’t think they had spoken more than ten words collectively since Alex had gone back into the emergency room. This was even worse than before - before they had had no idea what was happening, and it had been easy to hope that Alex would be fine and they’d get through this. Now, well, now they knew just how unlikely that was. He hadn’t seen Alex fighting for his life, but he had seen John’s face, and that had been enough to know just how bad it was. God help him, the man was breaking before their eyes.

That had been over an hour ago, and now they were back to sitting in the tiny room, looking anywhere but each other, and everywhere but the door. Everyone was here, sitting quietly in their own private hell, waiting… praying…

God he hated hospitals. There was always that smell in the air, the chemical stink that never quite covered up the scent of fear and sorrow that clung to the building. The faces of the nurses were always too grim, or worse, sympathetic. And the walls were too white, absurdly clean. He glared at them. A mockery of the shadow handing over them all, the splashes of blood still staining John’s hands. Hercules seen his fair share of hospitals over the years. It didn’t make it any easier.

“You know what, fuck this, you will not stop me-“ There was another shout, then the door banged open and Lafayette marched through, a secret service agent following behind in protest. The man opened his mouth to argue, picked up on the mood in the room and hastily backed out again. Laf’s face was a picture of blazing anger, but his expression softened as he looked at them.

“My friends, this is horrible, but do not look so grim. Our Alex is out of surgery, non, and soon to be awake? That’s what you said, right?”

Hercules stood up, heart heavy. He had last spoken to Laf about two hours ago, after they had stepped out to give John a minute with Alex. He’d calmed his friend down, who was frantically trying to get across town, told him that Alex was out of the woods for the time being, and not to worry himself. That had been before John’s terrified shouts brought them running. “Yeah, Alex finished surgery a while ago.”

“Then what is the problem?”

God I can’t do this. Hercules took a deep breath. “He’s… He’s not good Laf. He started having some sort of fit and… they’re saying he might not make it. They’re saying…” Hercules couldn’t finish the sentence, but whatever he might have said would have been swallowed up a second later as the Frenchman pulled him into a tight hug. A part of him argued that this was ridiculous. Lafayette had known Alex for years and Herc had just dropped a bombshell on him; he should be comforting
Laf and not the other way around. But then that part of him hadn’t got it’s face buried in Laf’s neck, trying to hold back tears.

“Mon Dieu,” Laf whispered. And then to Hercules, “Shh, save the tears. We don’t want to have to tell our Little Lion you were crying over him, do we? You know he’ll never let you live this down.” Hercules smiled, a weak, watery excuse for a smile, but a real one all the same. Laf released him and he sat back down, his friend next to him, and resumed his at the walls.

And they waited.

--

He didn’t know how long he’d been here, as the seconds blurred to minutes blurred to hours, but suddenly Lafayette couldn’t do this any more. He was a man of action just as much as his friends, and this feeling of powerlessness was entirely alien to him. He had to get out of here, of the stifling silence of the room. He tugged at Hercule’s sleeve gently.

“Can we step outside for a minute? Please?”

He looked like he wanted to argue, but nodded after a moment and rose without a word, Laf following suit. In fact, neither of them said a thing as they walked down the busy corridors, the weight of words unspoken hovering until they stood on the pavement outside. He gulped in a lungful of fresh air gratefully.

“What was that about?” Herc asked.

“I couldn’t be in there any longer,” he admitted.

“You may have to be. This could be a while.”

“How did this even happen?”

“That’s what I keep trying to work out. The FBI think it was a political hit, but it doesn’t make any damn sense. There’s nothing to tie Alex specifically to anything we’ve done, and most people wouldn’t have a clue who he was anyway. There’s no reason he should have been a target.”

“Apart from the fact he works in the White House.”

“Apart from that.” Herc conceded. “He’s got the president’s ear, no mistake. But then why try and kill him? If it’s his influence they were after why not kidnap him, or blackmail him, or threaten someone he loves? There’s no reason they’d just leave him to bleed out in an alley. If it was a hit, he’d already be dead.”

Lafayette shivered involuntarily at the last bit, but he couldn’t help but be impressed. “You’ve put a lot of thought into this.”

“Not much else to think about. Nothing that could help Alex, anyway.”

“Don’t say that.” he said.

“Why not? It’s what we’re all thinking!” Hercules snapped, but is face softened the moment the words had escaped him. “Sorry. I didn’t mean it. It’s just…” he trailed off, looking at something over Laf’s shoulder.

“It’s just…?” he prompted, but Herc held up a hand to silence him.
“Over there. Six o’clock. Does that look weird to you?”

Laf began to turn, but Herc grabbed his arm. “Subtly, idiot.”

He tried again more slowly, casually glancing around to look at the street behind him. Nothing seemed out of place, the usual morning buzz of traffic and pedestrians. “What am I looking at?”

“That girl… The one in the red jumper.”

Now that she had been pointed out, Laf spotted her almost immediately. Unlike the rest of the people on the sidewalk who were hurriedly bustling about their business, she was standing stock still, long hair blowing in the breeze. Her face was a mask of cool indifference but her eyes… even from across the street Laf could see the pain in them as they looked towards the hospital. As they watched, she began to walk towards them, then abruptly turned and practically ran in the opposite direction.

There was no almost practically it when Hercules exploded into action. One second he was standing next to Laf, the next he had broken into a sprint after her. Cars honked their horns as he dashed across the road, people shot him dirty looks as he barged his way through the crowd but he paid them no attention. “Hey!” he shouted. “Wait!”

Laf cursed and gave chase. He caught up just in time to see Herc grab her wrist.

“Hey! Get away from me!” she hissed.

He realised her, holding his hands up. “I’m not going to hurt you. I just need to talk. Please.”

“Go away.”

“What were you doing at the hospital?”

“I don’t have time for this.” she pushed past him and continued down the street. Herc sagged for a moment, then turned and called out “What happened to Alexander?”

Laf didn't know what he was expecting the woman to do, but stopping dead in her tracks as if she had seen a ghost wouldn't have been it. For a second she stood, frozen, then turned to face them, terror and guilt written across her features.

“Alexander?”

“He’s our friend. I know you know what happened last night.”

She shook her head. “I don’t… I can’t…”

“Please.” There was no missing the desperation in Herc’s voice, and something twisted painfully in Laf’s chest. “He might not make it. We have to know. You can help us.”

She bit her lip, looking from Herc to Laf, and back again. When she finally spoke, it was barely a whisper. “James.” she said. “His name is James Reynolds.”

--

It was the first time in almost two years that everyone in the room hadn't jumped to their feet when George Washington entered. It was an odd thing to be thinking about at a time like this, but for some reason he couldn't stop obsessing over it. It was one of the things he despised about being the President - sure it was a nice little ego boost but it got a little repetitive after a while, but right now he would give anything for his staff to have stood to attention when he marched through the doors.
Anything other than the sight that greeted him. Burr, usually so attentive was lost in his own thoughts. Angelica, never a hair out of place, drained in every sense of the word. Eliza, face tear-streaked yet expression fierce, fingers were between with John’s, who… well, if George had ever needed a definition for the word broken, he was looking at it. Lafayette and Hercules were nowhere to be seen (he wasn't sure whether or not to be relieved or concerned about that), but theirs was not the most conspicuous absence. A room containing his staffers should never have been this quiet nor so still. It was as if, without the whirlwind that was Alexander, the rest of them had lost voices.

Alexander. What had his son ever done to deserve this? The thought came unbidden, but George didn't bother to correct the voice in his head. Alexander was as good as his son, in every way that mattered, and if they lost him… well, George couldn't speak for the consequences.

He’d always been something of a religious man, although faith had come and gone over the years. Right now, he couldn't say what his heart was telling him. One part of him wanted to get on his knees and beg the Lord to bring Alexander home to them. The other half was more inclined towards screaming at the heavens for doing this in the first place. Perhaps he would have to go and find an empty church later, and either pray or rage in latin as he saw fit. Right now, all he could think was please.

George would have been here hours ago if he’d had his way, but the secret service had refused to let him leave the residence until they had a better idea of what the hell was going on, and if he was under threat. To hell with that, I was a soldier! he’d wanted to shout at them. I survived fire fights and militants and fire reigning down from the heavens, I can survive a hospital waiting room. It would have done him no good, though. The secret service were pretty much the only people in the country he couldn't give orders to.

They still didn't know why Alex had been attacked, but there wasn't anything to suggest that it had been politically motivated (apart from Alex’s job title, work address, and the tax status of his employer, that was.) So, finally, he had been allowed to make the journey to GW hospital. Only now that he was here, he had no clue what to do next.

“Do we need to discuss as statement?” Angelica asked suddenly, making George jump. Everyone just stared at her, and he could read there expressions clearly enough, because he was thinking the exact same thing. How could she be thinking about politics right now?

“People are going to be wondering who’s running the country with us all here,” she explained with a small smile. “They’re going to want to know if we’re safe, if their families are safe, what we’re going to do in the face of people who want to bring us down with senseless violence. And you know what Alex would want to do right now.”

“He’d want us to tear them apart.” John said. “Show that we’re strong, and coming for them.”

“But who’s them, exactly?” asked Eliza. “Sir, do the secret service know anything they’re not telling us?”

“Not unless I’m being kept out the loop too,” he said.

“You’re not.”

They all turned to look as Lafayette walked through the door, Hercules behind him. Both looked just as exhausted as the rest of the staff, but there was a vicious gleam behind their eyes that made George’s fingers itch for the the weapon he hadn't carried in almost twenty years.

“What do you mean?”
“There’s no threat, sir, not to any of us anyway. This wasn't a political attack.” Hercules explained.

“How do you know?”

Lafayette opened his mouth to reply, when a nurse walked in, and suddenly everyone was on their feet expectingly. George couldn't breath, fear a weight on his chest.

“Mr Hamilton has been stabilised. His vitals look positive, and while I can promise a difficult recovery, well,” for the first time she smiled. “I can promise a recovery.”

“You’re sure, Theo?” Aaron asked, and some small pocket of George’s brain that wasn't looping her words on repeat, sure he must have misheard, wondered how the hell Aaron had managed to make nice with all the hospital staff already.

“I’m sure. Your Alexander isn’t done with the world just yet.”

George sat down, head spinning with relief. He was faintly aware of someone whooping, someone else weeping, but he couldn't have said who. All he knew was that, for once, he had asked, and the universe had listened.

“--

“You look like you need this.” Lafayette said, and Herc looked up to see his friend holding out something steaming in a cardboard cup. He smiled his thanks and took it gratefully. Hercules had always been a tea kind of guy, something of a rarity when his friends were all caffeine-crazed lunatics who always seemed one cup of coffee away from a breakdown. Not that anything that came out of a hospital vending machine could really be called tea, he thought, taking a sip of the weak, gritty liquid with distaste, but he appreciated the warmth, and the gesture even more.

He watched the steady rise and fall of Alex’s chest, still not daring to breath that he was really going to be okay. He didn't know how, but somehow they’d caught a miracle. And miracles, in his experience, weren't the sort f thing you complained about. No one knew exactly what tomorrow would bring for Alex, but, for now, the fact that Alex would have a tomorrow at all was enough.

He’d woken up twice since they’d been allowed to see him, each only for a couple of minutes. The first time, he’s called for his mother, and John had looked like he wanted to throw up. The second, he had muttered something incomprehensible, and the President had leaned in close to hear it.

“What did he say?” Eliza had asked, once Alex had succumbed to sleep again.

Washington had only shaken his head ruefully, the ghost of a smile on his face for the first time. “He said What's next?”

Eliza and John had since fallen asleep, stress and exhaustion and relief finally getting the better of them. The others had gone back to the White House - Angelica had to brief the press (although the look on her face told him just how little she wanted to), and Washington and Aaron had remembered there was a country they were supposed to be running. The world doesn't just take a day off, as it turned out. Herc had though that Laf had gone too, but apparently he had someone to share his lonely vigil with after all.

“I have to ask,” the Frenchman asked, “How the hell did you know about the girl?”

Herc grimaced at the thought. The girl. Maria, who’s hands had been the only things shaking worse than her voice as she described what had happened, what she’d been through.
“I didn’t.” he confessed. “Not for sure at least. But… i don’t know, I’ve always had a pretty good
sense of people, a sort of gut feeling that tells me when they’re lying, or scared, or just a shitty piece
of work. Something about her didn't look right.”

“And you’re sure she won’t come forward?”

He shook his head. “The girl’s terrified, Laf. I’d be amazed if she’s even still in the city. There’s no
way she’s getting up on a witness stand and telling the whole world her story.”

“So then this morceau de merde get’s away with it all?” Laf asked hotly. “Where’s the justice for
her? For our Alex?”

“Of course not. We won’t let him. We’ve just got to find another way to give Reynolds what’s
coming to him.” James Reynolds. The name was branded across his mind, and even thinking it made
him want to break something. Herc wasn’t a violent person, but right now? Well, Reynolds would
never lay a finger on Alex again, put it that way. Not if he ever got his hands on him…

“My turn for a question,” he said abruptly, because his own thought were starting to scare him. “This
has been bothering me for months, Laf,”

“What?”

“How exactly do you know everyone? No one seems to have a clue.”

Laf smiled. “Ah, now that is a long story.”

Herc gestured at the quiet room, at their friends who looked in no danger of waking anytime soon.
“We’ve got time.”

“You really want to know? Okay then, prepare yourself for a story of loose morals and daring
escapades, Hercules Mulligan. The first time I came to America, I was eleven years old…”

--

Union train station had always seemed to grand by far, the sort of place for people who were going
somewhere in life, in every sense of the phrase. It’s marble floor and imposing columns seemed to be
ejudging her as she sat, going through the contents of her bag for the twentieth time in as many
minutes. But never matter, she would be gone soon, with no desire to ever return. There was nothing
in DC for her any more, and every reason to run as far and fast as she could. Which was exactly
what she had decided to do.

Of course, there was nothing waiting for her in New York either, but at least he wouldn't be there.

C-SPAN was playing on a tv screen, broadcasting the White House Press room, where a young
woman was fielding questions from the reporters. It was muted, but the information banner across the
bottom of the screen told her her everything she needed to know. White House Communications
Director in recovery following attack. She smiled softly. The stupid brave guy had pulled through
after all.

Platform 9 for the ten twenty service to Pennsylvania Station. That’s the last call for the service to
Penn Station, New York, came a voice over the speaker, and she sighed. That was her. Last train to
nowhere. Story of her life. But at least she wouldn't be writing it here anymore. And, well, she
wouldn't be her anymore. Maria Reynolds had caused nothing known nothing but pain and misery,
and had broken everything she touched. Not to mention James would never stop chasing her. No,
better by far to start from scratch somewhere far away. A brand new beginning. As far as she was
concerned, Maria Reynolds was dead.

She fished in her pockets for the last of her change and ordered a coffee to go from the pop up stand, in the hope that it might keep her warm on the long ride north, and watched patiently as the girl behind the counter peered at the name written in marker on the cup.

“Coffee for Peggy?”

“That’s me.”

Chapter End Notes

tumblr @hapless-and-hopeless

Oh, and if y’all are into west wing /modern politics AU s (Which I'm guessing you are if you made it this far ;)) go check out The Icarus Division by theother51. I've tried to draw the line at shamelessly copying it, but it's a really good read and it's been great help when I was writing this so I'd definitely recommend!

And thanks again to anyone who's taken the time to say hi
“Not a chance,” John grinned, snagging his jacket off the back of the sofa.

“Why not?” Alex complained, sounding for all the world like a small child denied his favourite toy.

“Why…? Because you were stabbed, Alex! Because you nearly died. And far more importantly, because Angelica’s forbidden me from bringing you any work, and I’m scared of her.”

Alex pouted from his spot on the couch. “Come on. Case notes are hardly work. That’s a hobby at best.”

“Forget it. I’m not smuggling you confidential legal documents from the White House just because you’re bored.”

“I’m not… okay fine, I’m bored alright? I’m going out of my mind here! I have no work, my friends have turned against me-“

“How exactly have we done that?”

“You’ve imprisoned me in my own home, denied me my basic human rights, undemocratically and unconstitutionally taken away my freedom of movement…”

John smiled, letting Alex rant. They’d been having a version of the same argument every day for two weeks now, since Alex had somehow managed to convince his doctors to let him continue his recovery from home instead of a hospital bed. Every day Alex would beg him to give him some work, and every day John would tell him to stop being so stupid and binge Netflix like a normal person. What John didn’t say was that this conversation was possibly the highlight of his morning, because everyday Alex’s voice was a little stronger, his arguments more impassioned and outrageous. Every day Alex came back to himself.

“… and looking at the evidence, I’m pretty sure you’ve committed enough felonies against me that I could march up the the Hill and have the whole lot of you impeached!” he finished.

“You’d rat us in to Jefferson?” John asked in mock outrage.

“Right now? I’d rat you in the the Ku Klux Klan if it got me out of here.”

John laughed, then glanced at his watch and cursed. “Dammit, I’m going to be late.”

“You know I’m your boss right? I say not late.”

“The President’s gonna say otherwise. I’ll see you later, Alex.”

In truth, no one minded in the slightest that he was late in to work more days than not at the moment. They only wanted to know how Alex was, and hear his daily reassurance that he was well on his way back to his impossible self. Not that John was going to tell Alex that, of course. The last thing he needed was an ego boost.

John visited Alex twice a day, (and once three times, whatever anyone else said): first thing in the morning, and again in the evening after work. The others took shifts in bringing him lunch or
True, for the first week he hadn’t even bothered going home between visits, sleeping on Alex’s lumpy couch. Maybe sleeping wasn’t the right word for it - he spent hours just listening to the sound of deep breathing coming from Alex’s room, irrationally terrified that something awful would happen if he closed his eyes. It had taken a combination of concerned looks from his friends, and Alex’s grumbling that he didn’t need a nanny for John to break the habit (and that one time he fell asleep in the middle of a security briefing, but he preferred not to think about that one). Even still, he slept with his phone on full volume next to him, and a coat thrown over the back of a chair with car keys in its pocket. Just in case.

The West Wing was as it ever was, minus one young, scrappy speechwriter. John smiled at the interns and replied to the cheery good mornings as he made his way to his office. He opened the door, only to find someone already sitting behind his desk, flicking through her paper.

“Jesus, Angelica! You’re gonna give a guy a heart attack!”

“That’s what Aaron said, when he kicked me out of his office.”

“So you came to mine?”

She shrugged. “How’s Alex?”

“Threatening to get congress to impeach us unless we grant his fundamental human right to access of the papers for the 408 bill.”

“Can he do that?”

“Probably. He’d find a way. Ask him when you go over later.”

“It’s Eliza’s turn today. And he’s getting his bandages changed over lunch. I don’t need to see that when I’m trying to eat my bagel, thank you very much.”

That had been one of the conditions of Alex’s early release from hospital, that a district nurse come round four times a week to check on his progress. To John’s huge surprise, it had been Burr who negotiated it, probably fed up of Alex’s complaining no doubt. How he’d managed it they still didn’t know, but half an hour later Alex’s release papers were being processed and one of the nurses that Burr somehow knew had agreed to do the house visits. Alex saw Theo for an hour and a half, four days, a week, no exceptions. John might have suspected it was Burr’s own unique form of punishment for Alex scaring the crap out of all of them, had she not been so completely lovely.

“Eliza’ll stop him from suing our asses. She’ll just do that puppy dog thing and he’ll be helpless.”

“What puppy dog thing would that be, John Laurens?” said a voice from behind him, and John winced as Eliza walked into the room.

“The ferocious, bad-ass attack-dog kind?”

“Correct.” she grinned, and then she turned to Angelica. “Aaron wants to see you in his office. Right now.”

“You sure? Because he kicked me out like half an hour ago.”

“Pretty sure. He seemed kinda stressed. What the hell did you do?”
“Nothing!”

“Have fun, Church,” John smirked. She punched his arm on her way passed without a word and left. Eliza turned to him.

“So how’s Alex?”

He sighed. “Remember the days when people would ask ‘How are you, John?’”

“Laurens…”

“He’s the same as he was when you called me last night. “Bored and threatening a coup.”

“So good then?”

“That’s what I said, isn't it?”

--

It was no secret that Eliza didn't like the Vice President. John Adams was obnoxious, arrogant, and she was pretty sure he was a closet racist, but irritatingly the man was a damn good politician. It had been Aaron’s idea to bring him on in the first place during the campaign to provide a more balanced ticket, and she had to admit he'd been useful in winning them the White House. But that didn't mean she wanted to work with him on a day to day basis, if she could help it.

And for the most part, she didn't have to. He had his own staff, and it seemed he wanted nothing to do with the President’s aides. Which was absolutely fine by her, and probably for the best, considering all the times he and Alex had gone toe to toe on the campaign trail. But occasionally, she was sent to deal with him.

Aaron had seemed stressed when she went into his office to get approval for a press release, but she didn't stop to wonder why. Stressed was the default setting when you were Chief of Staff, after all.

“I need you to go talk to Adams,” he’d said, and she'd felt her heart sink.

“Why?”

“He made a comment in the New York Times about the upcoming AC3C vote, saying “The President’s going to need all our support right now””

“What the hell does that mean?”

“That’s exactly what I want you to ask him. Get him to make a clarifying statement if necessary. We can’t be seen as divided over this one, so he needs to give Washington his full backing.”

“I’m on it,”

Eliza had turned to go when Aaron called “Go find Angelica for me, would you. I need to talk to her right away. As in yesterday.” And if he had seemed particularly on edge, Eliza had just put it down to trying to run the West Wing with one key staffer missing in action.

She walked to the Vice President's office (via a quick trip to communications to send Angelica Aaron's way and get her daily update on Alex from John) with something close to dread pooling in her stomach. Which was crazy - she was a grown woman who stood up to ambassadors and kings as part of the day job, she could take speaking to one fat politician.
“Come in,” he called when she knocked at his office, and Eliza pushed open the door.

“Good morning, Mr Vice President,” she said, forcing herself to be as cheery as possible.

Adams looked up. “Oh, Schuyler, it’s you. I was expecting, well, someone else.”

“Well, it’s me, Sir. Burr sent me over to ask about your comments on AC3C? *The President’s going to need all our support right now?*, I think it was? I’m just wondering, if you could clarify-“

“I don’t think i need to clarify anything. I said exactly what I meant.”

“Sir?”

“Washington isn’t exactly in a strong position right now, and we both know it. Hell, the whole world knows it. He stuck his neck out at the State of the Union, without talking to anyone else in the party, and he’s been loosing momentum after it. He’s been off focus, distracted.”

“Distracted?” Eliza repeated. “Alexander Hamilton got shot, Mr Vice President.”

“And Washington’s been head over ass ever since. I’ve said it before, you’re all too cozy by half down the hall. We’re trying to run a country here, not a lost boys club for orphans and bastards.”

Eliza bristled. She’d spent the best part of two yeas between the campaign and coming back to Washington’s staff setting up an orphanage in New York, and she didn't like the sneer on Adam’s face as he said the word orphans. Never mind the fact he was hurling insults at her friends. Still, she forced herself to keep her composure.

“You’re right, sir, this is a difficult time for the administration. Which is why we need a strong show of party unity. You can’t imply that the President is struggling and weak, and not back it up.”

“The last time I looked, I was the Vice President, not you.” Adams drew himself up to himself up. “Which means you don’t tell me what I can and can’t do.”

“If you’d just-“

“We’re done here. And you can tell Aaron Burr that next time he wants to take me to task he can come down here himself, instead of sending some pretty face to bat her eyelashes at me. I’ve got my own Press Secretary.”

“Hey!” They both looked around at the shout. Eliza had left the door open, and now John Laurens was striding through it face red. “You can’t talk to her like that!”

“John…”

“Who do you think you are, sitting there behind your desk and-“

“That is enough!” Adams stood up. “I won’t listen to this!”

Eliza grabbed John’s arm. “He’s right, that’s enough. Come on John.”

“But-“

“We’re done.” The two men continued to glare at each other, and she had practically drag John away. “Thank you for your time, Mr Vice President. I’ll pass on the message.”

“What the *hell* was that?” John hissed as she frog-marched him down the corridor. “Did you not hear
“That dick! How could you just stand there and take it?”

Eliza smiled grimly. “Oh, I’m not taking anything. But a fistfight between you and the Vice President in his own office only gets your ass fired and gives me weeks of damage control on my desk. There are better ways to take him to task.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“Well, lets see,” she said. “Who do we know who trashes people for fun, has plenty of time on his hands right now, and would love to personally burn John Adams to the ground?”

John stared at her for a moment, as a smile slowly broke out across his face. “I’m gonna go get my jacket.”

“I’ll bring my car round.”

---

The President had always fancied himself something of a matchmaker, Aaron knew. It had started on the campaign trail, with Washington deciding seemingly randomly that certain people would make a cute couple, and trying to set them up. Annoyingly, he had been pretty damn good at it - He still liked to talk about the day he had taken one of his young aide’s arm and suggested he ask out the pretty girl from advertising, and and the fact that Tom and Sarah’s wedding photograph now sat in his study.

Aaron hadn’t forgotten the conversation he’d had with Washington about him and Angelica before the world got turned upside down in the space of a single phone-call, but he was hoping that, what with everything happening to Alex, the President had. Perhaps that could be the one good thing that came out of all this. Unfortunately, it didn’t seem as though the President was going to let it drop. Aaron had kicked her out of his office at some Godforsaken hour of the morning, where it would seem she had been hiding yet again. This was getting ridiculous, and he told her as much without any real malice behind it, or hope that she would stop invading his private space. Nothing had discouraged her so far, and they had come to a sort of unspoken arrangement centred around resigned acceptant. Of course, that wasn’t the only unspoken arrangement between the two of them any more - Aaron still felt prickles of shame every time Madison of Jefferson’s names came up and Angelica shot him a glare before she could stop herself, but what with all that had happened… Aaron could tell that everyone was just trying to act as normally as possible, and apparently that included her gatecrashing his office again. Normally he’d be perfectly happy to let her stay, but he had to make a call to the director of the CIA, and no matter informal the administration seemed to be, he did have to obey the odd security protocol on occasion.

They bumped into Washington just as he holding the door open for her with a pointed look that said get out.

“Aaron, did we hear back from Gallup about…?” he trailed off at the sight of Angelica coming out of his office, and raised an eyebrow. “Sorry, am I interrupting?”

“Um, no.” Aaron said, a little confused. “What was it you needed, Sir?”
“The poll numbers from last week.”

And Aaron really didn't like the tone of his voice, nor the gleam behind his eyes. He fished around his desk for folder, all the while aware of the the President watching him with a smug smile on his face. Eventually he found what he was looking for and handed the documents to the President.

“So when are you two going public with your relationship?” he asked as he took them.

“I’m sorry, what?”

“You and Angelica. I understand your hesitation, you’re both in high profile jobs and people would talk, but I’d hoped you’d at least have told the staff by now.”

“Sir, there’s nothing to tell.”

“I don’t have a problem with it, if that’s what you’re scared of. I like to think of this staff as a family, and what comes first is my staff’s happiness, so-“

“Mr President.” Aaron interrupted, because he could tell this was going to get out of his control very quickly. “I can assure you that there is nothing other than friendship and a working relationship between me and Angelica.”

Washington raised his eyebrow again, then sighed. “I suppose I’ll just have to ask her then.”

As soon as the door closed behind him, Aaron sank into his chair. And then stood up, got halfway to the door, before turning around sitting down again. Shit. This could get very messy and very embarrassing very quickly. And if she told the president the real reason they had been shooting each other odd looks recently… Dammit. He had to talk to her before Washington did.

“What’s the big emergency?” she asked, sticking her head around the door some time later.

“We’ve got a problem. Close the door.”

“Who’s trashing the administration today?”

“Not the administration, just you and me.”

She narrowed her eyes. “Jefferson. I swear to God…”

“Not exactly. I don’t know how to put this, but…” he sighed. “The President is somehow under the impression that you and I are conducting a secret love affair right under his nose.”

There was a beat of silence where she stared at him, and then Angelica burst out laughing.

“He what?” she managed between gasping for breath. “Oh my God. That is the best thing i’ve heard all week!”

“Best…? Angelica, our boss thinks we’re a thing!”

She only laughed harder, clutching the back of the chair for support. Aaron rolled his eyes and waited patiently for the mirth to subside. Eventually, he said “So what are we going to do about it?”

“Do about it?”

“Er, yeah, fix it. He won’t believe me for some damn reason, so if he asks you you’ve got to be absolutely positive that we are in no way dating.”
“Yeah, yeah I could do that. Or…” she grinned mischievously, and Aaron had the sudden urge to bang his head against the desk. “Or, I could break down and confess our tragic yet beautiful love affair to him.”

“Why the hell would you do that?”

“Come, on, it could be hilarious.”

“It could be disastrous.”

“How many chances are you gonna get in life to mess with the President of the United States like this?”

“I’m pretty sure that the President of the United States is the one guy you don’t mess with. You know, on principle or something or something.”

“Sure you do. The job’s got to have some perks, right? And God knows I could use a laugh. Come on we could get everyone in on it, and-”

He shook his head. “You’re absolutely insane. Please don’t do anything stupid.”

“You know, that’s usually my line.” she smiled, and then she was gone. And Aaron still had no idea if she was joking.

--

“Isn’t that, like, a felony or something?” Alex asked, proving himself up on the couch cushions.

“Of course not,” said Laf smoothly, at the same time as Herc replied “Probably.”

“Thanks a lot,” the Frenchman muttered at Hercules who just shrugged, and then turned back to Alex. “But it doesn't matter anyway. It’s hardly a lie, and it’s our best chance to lock the fucker away. Isn't that what you want?”

Alex grimaced, pain from his wound flaring as if in response. Of course he wanted to get James Reynolds. The guy was a piece of shit who deserved everything that was coming his way. Never mind it was his fault that Alex was being kept from his work, or that he still couldn't bare to look in the mirror, at the purple bruising he was starting to think would never fade, Alex would want to nail him for what he had done to Maria alone. It had been obvious that he was an abusive fuck when Alex interrupted him in the alley, but after hearing the full story from Herc (or at least what she had told them of it, he had no doubt that there was worse that had been left unsaid), his blood boiled at the very thought of the man walking around his city free.

“Yeah, I do. But lying to the FBI?”

“Don’t look at me.” Laf held up his hands. “It was Herc’s idea. I’m only saying it’s the best one we’ve got.”

Herc crossed his arms defensively. “How else do we have the evidence to bring him in? As far as I can tell, Maria’s left town and even if she had there’s no way we’d get her to testify. And they’re sure as hell not going to take our word as hard evidence. Face it Alex, you’re the only witness we got.”
“Can the victim also be a witness?” he wondered aloud.

“He can if he just so happened to hear the guy’s name and surname before getting the shit beaten out of him. Convenient that.”

Alex was about to open his mouth, whether to argue to heartily agree he wasn’t sure, but just then Angelica barged through the door (without knocking, of course), Aaron trailing after her with a long-suffering look. “Alex, I need your help with—“ she broke off, realising Herc and Lafayette were in the flat. “Oh, didn’t know you guys were here. That’s great actually, you can all help.”

“Please tell Angelica she’s out of her mind.”

“Don’t be such a killjoy, Burr.” she said. “So basically, Washington’s somehow gotten it into his head that me and Aaron are secretly screwing or something, and Aaron’s all for telling the truth that there’s nothing going on.”

“But…?” Alex asked.

“But, wouldn’t it be more fun to tell him that we’re actually dating and madly in love with each other?”

“I don’t know, Angie. You in love with Burr? Washington’s never going to believe that.”

“Hey!” Aaron protested. “I don’t see why it’s so hard to imagine.”

“You’d never be a couple in a million years.” said Laf. “I mean no offence, Burr, but you’re kind of the worst.”

“Not true. I’d be an amazing boyfriend.” he argued.

“Ok great, so you’re on board.” Angelica said.

“What? No, I never said—“

“So we’re gonna need your help on this one guys. The President’s not going to go for it if you guys don’t play along, and Alex, you’re practically the king of fucking with people, so I thought you wouldn’t mind masterminding the whole thing.”

“Does this mean I can come back to work?”

“No on your life.”

He shrugged. “It was worth a try. But yeah, why not? It’ll be something to do to keep my brain from rotting. But you know, the real king of fucking with people is John. Why don’t you ask him if—“

“Alex!” John shouted, as he and Eliza marched into the flat. “We need you to beat the ever-loving crap out of John Adams on Twitter!”

“Never mind, he’s here.” said Alex, then registered John’s words, not just his presence. “Wait, what? You’re actually asking me to go online and rant?”

“Yeah, not happening.” Angelica said. “As Press Secretary, I’m gonna have to veto that one.”

“He was mean to Eliza.”

“That still doesn’t justify—“
“Really mean.” Eliza added, completely abusing the power of her puppy dog eyes, all the while trying to hide a mischievous grin.

“You can’t just… Oh, who am I kidding, tear him apart Alex.” Angelica said.

“Hold on a second, let me make sure I’ve got this right.” Alex said, looking around at his friends and pointing at each one in turn. “You,” he gestured at John, “Want me to start a twitter war with the Vice President. You two,” turned to at Herc and Laf, “Want me to lie to the FBI in the middle of a felony investigation. And you,” he pointed at Angelica, “Want me to mastermind and carry out a staff-wide conspiracy against the President. Is that about the sum of it?”

“Pretty much.” Herc agreed.

“That sounds about right.” said Angelica.

“Wait, mastermind and carry out a what now?” asked John. He face scrunching up in confusion in a way that Alex totally didn't find adorable. Not at all. “Anyone want to fill me in?”

Angelica rolled her eyes and began to explain, and from his spot on the couch Alex grinned. This alone had been worth surviving for. God, he loved his job.

“Can someone pass my laptop? I have so much work to do.”

It took two hours for John Adams to delete his twitter account.

It took two days after Alex’s latest testimony to the FBI, in which he gave the full name of the man who had attacked him which he just so happened to remember, before James Reynolds was dragged from his flat in cuffs and charged with assault and attempted homicide. He was due to appear in court a few days before Christmas.

And it took two whole weeks of Angelica randomly taking Aaron’s hand while they walked down the corridor, Eliza loudly suggesting they go to her favourite Thai place for date night, and Washington looking as smug as it was humanly possible to look, before he finally worked out that Angelica and Aaron weren’t dating. John had never wished he’d had a camera on him more than in that moment.

Chapter End Notes

I felt bad for you guys... hope y'all enjoyed some pointless fluff

Also, one of you awesome commenters suggested I write out the stories that Lafayette told Herc last chapter, so I though this would be a good time to tell you about the bonus fic I'm writing. It's going to be a collection of extras that didn't make it into Those Who Rise Up but that I wanted to share anyway. I haven't decided yet if I'm going to wait until this is finished to post it, or if I'm going to upload it soon and add on chapters as we go through the story in parallel with the main work, so I'd like to know what you all would prefer? And also, if anyone has any suggestions/requests/ideas for chapters (spoiler alert... get ready for John Adams getting roasted on twitter and maybe even the
real story behind how they met Laf...) I'd love to hear from you.

All my love until next time x
Somebody's going to Emergency, Somebody's going to Jail

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Do you swear that you will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?”

Alex swallowed, throat dry. He still wasn't sure if he believed in a higher power, if it had been luck or divine intervention that had saved him twice when he had no right to be here. If it was divine intervention, why did it feel so much like divine wrath? Maybe it was because he should have died all those years ago.

Get yourself together, Hamilton, he thought viciously as he tried to calm his breathing. This isn't the place.

Outside, rain pattered gently against the window, despite the promises that it would have turned to snow by now. Eliza had told him that with wide eyes this morning, as if snow was some great excitement to him. She still forgot sometimes, he thought, that Ales wasn't the skinny kid who had gotten off a boat and gone to college without having a clue what to expect from America. He was used to snow by now, so much that it was just another minor irritation that soaked his gloves through and made him late for work. But right now he would welcome some snow, anything to stop the relentless drum of water against the glass. Or was that the beating of his heart? It was hard to tell.

Dammit, he couldn't afford to lose it now. Not with everyone watching, waiting. Not with James Reynolds’s eyes fixed on his with hatred, daring him to open his mouth. Not when the wound under his shirt still screamed in the morning, and he had to be careful to hide his discomfort now that they’d finally let him come back to work. He had to get through this.

His eyes found John’s in the gallery. He shot Alex the briefest flicker of a smile, and he tried not to shiver in response.

“I swear.”

--

Five Days earlier

“Is this going to turn into a field trip then? A full family outing?”

“Don’t be an ass, Aaron,” Eliza scolded, sending him a dirty look from across the taxi. They were on their way to vet potential Presidential photographers across town when he started asking about the trial. At least he had the grace to look a little ashamed.

“I’m just trying to work out if we’re going to loose the entire West Wing on Tuesday morning.”

“Of course we’re going.” she replied. “We’re all going to be there to support Alex. He’s pretty much going to be testifying the whole day. You’re not coming?”

“I’ve got a conference call with the Indian ambassador that Washington wants me to sit in on. And anyway, I’m not sure I’d be able to offer Alexander much in the way of support. I don’t suppose it would mean a lot coming from me.”
She smiled gently. “You’d be surprised.”

Eliza certainly had been, on seeing Aaron’s state when Alex was in hospital. She’d been more worried about John and Angelica, and of course out of her mind worrying about Alex, but she hadn’t missed the harried look in Aaron’s eyes, his determination to find out what had happened. He and Alex had never seen eye to eye, and there had been too many times over the years when Eliza had been worried she was going to have to help cover up one of their murders, but now she realised that they had dragged Aaron into their family against his will, and he cared just as much what happened to Alex as any of them.

“Is he going to be ready for it then?” Aaron asked.

“Of course. He’s just got to get up there and tell the truth.”

“You think?”

“When has Alex ever had a problem standing in front of a crowd and trashing someone he hates? I’m more worried we won’t be able to get him to shut up than anything else.”

Aaron hummed non-committedly, turning back to his notes, and Eliza frowned. The thought hadn’t even crossed her mind. But Alex would be fine, right?

Alex was a long way from fine, he knew. He hadn’t been ever since a letter had arrived on his doormat with summons to testify at the trial of James Reynolds. He hadn’t been before that, if he was being he was honest with himself. But there was no reason anyone else needed to know that. He could handle it mostly.

He just wished that everyone would get off his back about the trial.

“So you’re absolutely sure what you’re going to say?” Herc asked, dealing another hand.

Alex rolled his eyes and picked up his cards. It was Thursday night, and (baring any international disaster) that meant poker night in the West Wing. It was probably illegal to gamble on government property or something, but Washington had never seemed to mind as long as they claimed it was good for team morale. Angelica used to win most nights, with Aaron and John picking up a few hands apiece. (Alex had never been able to hold a poker face for for shit, and Eliza hadn't gotten the hang of bluffing). That had been before Hercules arrived. Alex didn't have a clue where he'd learned to play cards like that, but he wiped the floor with the lot of them every week.

“Yeah, I got it Herc, alright?”

“You’re sure?”

“Yes! I heard shouting, I went to see what was going on, I tried to get him to leave the girl alone and got myself nicely cut up in the process.”

“Alex…”

“And before he ever so kindly beat me within an inch of my life his lady friend said “Don’t call me baby, James Reynolds.” Can we please stop talking about it?”

They all looked at him uncomfortably, and Alex realised he had been shouting. The conversation moved on, and he shifted in his seat. He was allowed to not want to talk about nearly getting killed
right? It hadn’t exactly been fun at the time, and he was in no mood to go over it again.

---

Now

“Do you know the defendant?” The barrister asked Alex, gesturing to Reynolds.

He nodded stiffly. “Yes.”

“And when did you meet him?”

“The night he tried to kill me.”

“The night of the sixth, when you claim the defendant beat and stabbed you, you mean? For the record.”

“Yeah.” A white hot pain in his stomach. Somewhere, a woman screaming. Knuckles and boots and the crack of bones. He breathed in sharply, a phantom blow knocking all the air out of his lungs.

“Mr Hamilton, can you tell the court what you were doing in that part of the city alone at that time of night?”

“I was walking?”

“Where exactly?”

“Just walking.” Stumbling blindly through the night, feet carrying him God knows where but away, far away from John’s words and his glare and the pain in his chest. “I’d had an argument with my friend, and I kind of stormed off and… just walking.”

“How did this argument make you feel?”

Hidden behind the wood of the witness stand, Alex’s hands curled into fists. “It made me…” In the gallery, John’s face was stricken with pain and guilt. But he didn’t look away. If John could do that, Alex owed him the truth. “It made me angry.” he mumbled. “Angry and hurt and betrayed. I guess you could say I was running, and I ran straight into James Reynolds.”

From the stand, Reynolds’s lips twisted into a cruel smile. And Alex just felt empty.

---

Three days earlier

Alex had always been something of an enigma to John. The man could talk and rant spill his beliefs to the world, and all the while you never learnt a thing about him, not really. Not about the man behind the words, who smiled for the world to see, yet kept shadows behind his eyes.

Take now for instance. They had all been a bit twitchy when Alex returned to work, irrationally worried that he would freak out at the sight of the secret service guns, or curl into a ball when the first congressman started shouting at him. Thankfully, these fears had been completely unfounded. Alex was back with a spring in his step, exchanging banter with the staffers and giving as good as he
got when anyone on the Hill tried to get in their way. He was himself, the genuine article. Well almost.

It was the little things John noticed, tiny little details that didn't seem to bother anyone else. Like the morning that he had walked into Alex’s office dripping from head to toe complaining about forgetting his umbrella, and Alex had dropped his coffee in the middle of the conversation. He wouldn’t have remembered it at all, except for the fact it had been Alex’s favourite mug, one Eliza had bought him years ago, with the words don't make me adult printed across it. Two days later, he’d stuck his head round the door to ask if Alex wanted to catch a film that evening and he’d agreed, not looking up from his work. Only when John went to find him later, Alex was nowhere to be be seen, and he was eventually told he’d gone home in a hurry. Then, on poker night he had shouted at Herc out of nowhere…

Like John said, it could be nothing at all. It could just be him protecting his stupid worries onto Alex and over-reacting as usual. He couldn't help it though. They’d all been through hell, but no one else had watched as Alex shook and screamed out for his mother, not knowing who John was or what language he was speaking. It had been jarring to say the least. No scratch that, it had been the worst thing John had seen in his life.

But Alex said he was fine. He rolled his eyes every time John asked him the question, and went about his work like nothing had changed. Some part of John wanted that to be true, to go back to the way it had been before he’d opened his mouth and let the stupid come flowing out. But he knew they could never go back. Not after he’d been faced with loosing Alex forever.

It terrified him, but John couldn't ignore what was happening inside his head. No matter what he did, his thoughts always circled back around to Alex, permanently trapped in his orbit. And it wasn't a gravity he could shake, even if he’d wanted to. If only for the fact he felt that Alex was shutting him out at the same as irreversibly drawing him in. Putting up his walls and not talking to John about what was going on in that head of his.

But maybe that was okay. For all his love of words. Alex had never been one to talk about his feelings. They didn't do the hair-braiding, crying-over-chic-flicks, sharing and caring stuff. Whatever it was, Alex would work through it, and when he was ready to tell him, John would be there offering an ear.

(And if he was honest with himself, offering whatever else Alex needed as well)

Insomnia was no stranger to Alex. He was used to functioning on minimal (or no) hours of sleep, staying up through the night because there just weren't enough hours in the day, and getting by on a mixture of coffee and denial. But it had been different, somehow, before. He'd never had trouble sleeping before, it was just that he'd never wanted to.

Now, he simply couldn’t.

It was this damn trial, he knew. That was the thing always ticking over in the back of his mind, whispering in his ear in the early hours of the morning, and ever minute in between. It wasn't that he was scared of seeing Reynolds again. The dick would get what was coming to him for ever treating Maria like that, and Alex wanted to be part of that. It was the fact that he would have to live through it all again.

He told everyone he was fine, and he was. In fact, he was doing a great job of forgetting that night, and everything that came with it ever happened. So of course, suddenly his friends wanted to talk
about it all of a sudden.

What are you going to say, Alex? Are you sure you’re alright, Alex? Does it still hurt, Alex? Alex? Alex?

“Alex!” someone shouted, snapping him out of his thoughts, and he looked up with a jerk. Damnit, he hadn’t even noticed John come into his office. It was happening more and more, Alex zoning out like that. Yet another thing he was doing a fantastic job of ignoring. It was probably just a lack of sleep, anyway.

“Yeah, what?” he asked, trying to look alert.

John shot him an odd look, then shook his head slightly as if to clear it. “I was just wondering if you wanted to go grab some lunch? There’s that new Mexican place two blocks down that you wanted to try and-“

“No.” Alex cut him off. “I mean, I can’t sorry. Got too much work to do, especially what with me being out the office all day Tuesday.”

John deflated slightly. “Okay then, if you’re sure. I’ll see you later.”

Alex waited until John had shut the door behind him before letting his head fall against the desk with a clunk. He hated lying to his friend as much as he hated blowing him off, but what was the alternative? It wasn’t John’s fault, after all. And there was no way he could explain to him, in terms that he’d understand, that the closer they got to the trial, the less he could bear to be around John.

It made no sense, he knew. There was no logical part of his brain that blamed John for what had happened. It was just that every time John so much as opened his mouth…

“Alex where are you?”

Breath coming in shallow gasps, lungs crying out for air he can’t find. Can hardly breathe, let alone speak. He’s choking on his own empty throat.

“You’re my best friend Alex, I don’t want to lose you.”

And the pain, oh God the pain. It burned like wildfire, a chasm ripped right through him… yet he was cold, falling away into the icy grey. He didn’t want to be cold, he knew what the cold meant. Cold was laid out on a grey slab somewhere, a hand that didn’t respond when he squeezed it, strangers ushering him away from his mother…

“Just come, please. I’ll be here.”

And then the silence. Nothing but drum of the rain and the failing beat of his own heart, and-

Alex took a deep breath, and gripped his desk, knuckles white against the wood. He just had to get past the trial. Then it would all be okay again.

--

Now

“Mr Hamilton?” the attorney prompted, and he tried desperately to refocus. The sooner this was over with, the sooner he could go home and pretend it was all a bad dream.
“Could you repeat the question, please?”

“I asked what happened after Mr Reynolds refused to let his companion go.”

His throat was dry. Alex eyed the bottle of water sitting on the end of the lawyer’s table, impossibly far away. God he could do with a drink, and for once he didn't even mean the alcoholic type, just some cool water running down his throat and the icy beat of raindrops on his face, mixing with the crimson on the concrete and...

“He walked towards me, and hit me twice. Once on the jaw, once in the stomach. I tried to roll away, and when he grabbed me I spat in his face, and then” and then his whole world was multicoloured flashes of pain, a whole symphony of different nerves screaming out for relief and “and then he carried on beating me. I tried to fight back. That’s when he pulled out the knife.”

“Is this the weapon you’re referring to?” the judge asked, and someone shoved a photograph in front of his face. He blinked at the weapon it showed, barely comprehending it.

“I couldn't say for sure,” he admitted. “I didn't get a clear look at it.”

I got a clear feel of it, though. Why don't you find it and stab me again? I’d know it then. We're practically old friends.

Movement up in the gallery caught Alex’s eye, and despite his promise to himself that he wouldn't again until this was all over, Alex looked up at his friends. John had made to stand, but Lafayette clamped a hand down on his shoulder, pinning him in place. Let him go, Laf, Alex wanted to shout. John Lauren’s was never meant to be a caged bird, and why should he stay when he'd already left Alex alone with the company of a dial tone and the rain and-

“Mr Hamilton, would you like some water?”

Alex blinked. He was pretty sure that voice belonged to the lawyer, but he couldn’t say for sure. The white noise and the pounding of rain in his ears made it kind of hard to tell.

“Mr Hamilton? Are you alright to continue with questioning?”

Yes, let it be done, Alex tried to say. He was pretty sure it came out as “I.. Ugh..”

“Your honour, I call for a ten minute recess for the sake of the witness.”

“Granted.”

Somewhere, there was a sharp tap and Alex could still think through the grey that was his mind to know that meant he could move. He stumbled out of the witness box and out of the courtroom, feet moving of their own accord down streets with no names, hands flung into his pockets-. Someone shouted his name and he ignored it. Blindly, Alex pushed his way into a bathroom and stumbled over to the sink. He took a deep breath, trying to steady the world that was spinning around him.

“Alex?”

It was John’s voice. Which meant the voice would soon leave him with nothing but the cold and-

“Alex, look at me.”

Soft hands grabbed his and forced him to turn around. Alex frowned. The hands weren’t supposed to be there. He was meant to be all alone by now. Slowly his eyes tracked up from the hands, and he
realised they were connected to John, whose face was just inches from him and filled with concern.

“What the hell happened? You looked like you were about to faint up there.”

The words were heavy on his tongue. “I… I can’t…”

“Yes you can. Hear me? You can do this.”

John said the words with such conviction it seemed impossible that he could be wrong. Alex wanted to believe him, he really did. Only…

“But you’re going to leave me though. You’re going to go quiet and-“

It seemed to take John a moment to wok out what Alex meant. When it clicked, he looked like he wanted to throw up. “Never again.” He promised. “I won’t do that to you again. I’m going to be right up on that balcony and as soon as you’re done I’m going to take you home okay?”

“Okay.”

Later, Alex wouldn't be able to remember what the questions that followed were. He gave his answers in toneless narrative, recounting every detail of what happened. He got no pleasure from it, no vindication. Only the dull knowledge that each question was one less he had to answer. And afterwards, he wouldn't be able to remember how he got out of the court and past the cameras, the worried looks John shot him as he drove. Only that suddenly there was a bed beneath him, and he was so dammed tired, and John’s smile didn’t reach his eyes when he said “Sleep, Alex,” but he tried anyway.

Alex wouldn't remember whispering “Stay,” hands tightening around surprised fingers.

He wouldn't remember wondering why John did.

--

God Alex hated the sun. Or, more specifically, he hated the one beam of sunlight that was shining across his face through the gap in the curtains. It was as if a ball of burning gas ninety three million miles away, and the crusty apartment building built about forty years ago had conspired deliberately to wake him up with as much as discomfort as possible. Knowing his luck, that was exactly what had happened. He groaned and rolled over, burring his head in the pillow.

And then froze. The pillow? He was actually sleeping in a bed, it seemed, which was… well, it was really strange, to be honest. Alex didn't sleep that much at the best of times, but recently? On the rare occasion he did manage to fall asleep it was hunched over his desk, cheeks pressing into his laptop keys or passed out on the sofa, only to jerk awake soon after, somehow more tired than before. So he was actually quite proud of himself.

What was less great was the fact he had no idea how he'd gotten here. Alex thought back to the night before, but there was nothing but a grey blur. Which was weird, because he didn't feel hungover… He actually felt a lot better than he had in a while. Strange.

Alex shrugged and pulled himself out of bed groggily. Now he was awake, he was just waisting daylight. He snagged a towel off the back of his chair, heading for the bathroom, and stopped dead in his tracks as a thumping sound came from the rest of the flat. Shit. There was someone else here? Was he being robbed? Probably not, he owned nothing worth stealing. Did bring someone home
with him last night then? Unlikely, but it wouldn't be the first time he’d had an unfortunate drunken fumble. That would explain the fact he’d woken up in a bed for a change. He crept across the room (in case it was an intruder) and carefully inched open the door.

“John?” he asked, confused.

John Laurens looked up from where he’d been reading on the couch and his face split int a relived grin. “Alex! You’re up. I was beginning to wonder if I was gonna have to dump a load of ice water on your head or something.”

“How long was I out?” he asked, because it was a much easier question to deal with than ‘and what are you doing in my house’, or, even worse, ‘did we…?’ Because that was something Alex would never forgive himself for forgetting.

“About twenty hours, I reckon.”

“Twenty…? You’re joking.”

“I wish.” John smiled ruefully. “Right little zombie you are. It’s about five in the evening now, and I put you to bed at nine yesterday so, yeah, twenty hours.”

Alex shook his head. “That’s impossible. I’ve got too much work.” He doubted he’d slept twenty hours in the last two weeks.

“Relax, Alex. It’s Christmas Eve tomorrow. No one expects you to be working except you. I think your body just shut down, man. I mean, you were pretty out of it by the time the trial was over and you just, I don't know, crashed or something.”

The trial. Oh God, Alex remembered the trial. Remembered standing at the witness stand trying to separate the past from the present while his heart pounded in his throat. And… wait, and John taken him home? He remembered clinging to someone for dear life, taking comfort in their warmth and whispered promises. But Jesus, what state must Alex have been in if he’d let himself break all his own rules when it came to John. He had drawn lines in the sand where he was concerned for a reason, and it sounded like he’d crossed them yesterday. But for some reason, John hadn't been driven away. He’d been hanging out on Alex’s sofa, looking relaxed as ever.

“What are you still doing here?” Alex asked. “You’ve just been hanging around the whole day?”

John smiled, a little sheepishly, and stood up. “You asked me to stay. Bet you don't remember.”

Alex didn’t. He wished he did, though. With John smiling that half embarrassed smile, a slight tinge of pink to his cheek… this was the man they sent to the tough meetings because he wasn't afraid to call statesmen and millionaires out on their bullshit, who would fight a whole army if it came down it. And he had stayed, because Alex had asked.

“John, I… Thank you.”

“Don’t be stupid.” said John, coming closer and running a concerned eye over him. “So this is what Alexander Hamilton looks like when he’s not fighting exhaustion, huh?”

“Pretty stunning, right?” Alex joked.

John shrugged. “Don’t flatter yourself, you’re still a mess. Nice bed-hair, by the way.”

Alex’s hands automatically jumped to his hair, which had half fallen out of its bun in the night.
Damn, it was going to be all tangled up in the hairband.

John laughed as he started to pull at the mess. “Leave it, Alex.” John reached across and brushed a wayward strand behind his ear. Alex froze at the sudden touch, more out of surprise than anything else. Had John been standing that close a moment ago? It was suddenly as if his whole world had been compressed down into five and a bit feet of John Laurens. And still he was looking at him! Alex’s mouth was suddenly very dry.

“John…” he began, before the sharp sound of a ringtone sounded. John jumped, and fished out his phone with a curse. In doing so he stepped back, and Alex immediately chided himself for morning the loss of the proximity.

“It’s Laf,” John announced. “Probably wants to know if you’re still counting sheep.”

“I think you’re mixing up your metaphors,” Alex pointed out, out of habit, and John shot him an exasperated look.

“I’m gonna to tell him to piss off, okay? Then I’ll find you something to eat. Which may be hard, going by the state of your fridge, but I’ll work some culinary magic.”

“I’ll go… have a shower.” Alex managed, gesturing to the towel he was still holding, and backed out of the room. He locked the bathroom door, turned the old showered up as high as it would go, and quickly stripped out of the crumpled shirt and trousers he had obviously been wearing yesterday. The water was almost scalding, but Alex found he didn't care. He rested his head against the wall tiles and closed his eyes, allowing the stream water to wash away the strain of yesterday. If only he could wash out today’s problem so easily. He didn't know why the idea of John being in his flat was so alien right now - they’d been best friends for years, and John had practically lived here when Alex was newly out of hospital, but he couldn't help feeling that something had changed since. A tectonic shift, and they no longer stood on stable ground. Alex didn't know what was the new normal for them, or if John was even aware of the change. What he did know was that when John smiled at him, or waved his hands around animatedly as he spoke, even when he was stealing Alex’s fries over lunch and making shitty jokes to distract him…

*God.* Alex though. *I'm fucked.*
It wasn't unusual to walk down the corridors of the West Wing and hear someone shouting. It was even less unusual that that person was Alex. John smiled fondly as his friend’s voice carried through the building, wondering which congressman, or aide, or possibly monarch (it wouldn't be the first time) was on the receiving end of his wrath today. But as he got close enough to discern his words, John frowned.

“-how the hell is he allowed to do this? And people are actually listening? Good God, Laurens is gonna wish he had never crawled out of his hole by the time I’m through with him, the ignorant, lobotomised- “

“What the fuck did I do?” John interrupted, marching in the office. Alex jumped and looked around, and Angelica (who was clearly being ranted at) shot him a guilty look.

“John!” Alex yelped. “Hey! I thought you had a breakfast meeting with the committee on-“

“It got cancelled.” John interrupted. “What the hell’s going on, Alex? Why am I suddenly… is lobotomised even a word?”

“Yes! And we weren’t talking about you anyway.”

“No?” John raised an eyebrow.

“You haven't seen the news yet, have you?”

“Well, I was up at the ass-crack of dawn for a meeting that no one bothered to tell me had been rearranged until I got there, so no.”

“It’s your father,” Angelica said, surprisingly gently, and John bit back a curse. This was going to be much worse that he’d feared.

“What’s he said this time?”

When neither one of them answered, shooting each other uneasy looks, John wanted to bash their heads together. “What? He’s in the opposition, it’s not like I’m not used to him trashing us. Come on, lay it on me. It can’t be that bad.” Yes it can.

“Yes it can,” Alex said. “He’s sponsoring a new bill through the South Carolina legislature, which would almost single-handedly reverse the entire social equality progress that the administration has made. I’m talking restriction on same-sex marriages and refusing to even recognise the legitimacy of relationships. You can read the whole thing when it’s published, it’s a nasty piece of work, but the point is…”

“The point is he’s standing for everything we’ve been trying to fight, and if my Dad’s successful, other states will follow suit and we’ll have come nowhere in three years.”

“We haven't come nowhere-“ Angelica began in protest, but John cut her off.

“Damn right we haven’t. Know why? Because we’re gonna burn it to the ground if it kills us.”
Alex smiled at him, a grin that said if John was going in swinging, then Alex would be right behind him, and for a moment, it felt okay. It was easy to forget his ignorant homophobe of a father, who, despite everything, some part of John wanted to make proud, and whom he would soon be fighting in the most public political arena in the country. And it would be the same fight they’d been having behind closed doors for years. It was mad, and John found himself sniggering aloud at the whole thing.

“What’s so funny?”

“Family values, Alex. We’re going into an election year, any major fight could be the end of the re-election campaign before it’s even begun, and the thing that’s gonna sink us is my father’s family values. Tell me there’s not someone up there laughing his ass off right now.”

“"The important thing is to keep on message. We will denounce the bill in the strongest terms and do everything we can to stop it from seeing the light of day, but we’ve got to centre the fight around the issues. We can’t make this about Laurens being John’s father, and we sure as hell can’t make it about you pouncing on the opportunity to bash some conservatives at the start of your election campaign, sir.”

George nodded as Eliza finished talking. They were all gathered in the Oval Office for the morning briefing, which had turned into an impromptu strategy brainstorm on how to deal with Senator Laurens’s latest hit at the administration. It was these kinds of meetings he liked best, when schedule and formality were thrown to the wind, and ideas and passion just flowed out of his staff. These tiny moments every day reassured him that he had picked the right people all those years ago, and that the country would be in good hands for years to come, God willing.

“I thought we pounced on every opportunity to bash some conservatives?” he joked. “Why else do you think I hired Alexander?”

“I thought it was for my winning smile and cute butt, Sir?”

“Hamilton’s cute butt aside,” Aaron said, “I agree with Eliza. We can make this passionate all we want, but not personal.” He turned to John. “Which is why I want you sitting out of this one.”

“What?”

“I’m afraid he’s right,” George said before he could argue further. “You’re too close to this one, John. I don’t want to have to put you in a position with a conflict of interests, not when it’s this important.”

“There wouldn’t be a conflict of-“ George held up a hand.

“That’s final. Take a back seat.”

John looked like he wanted to argue, but he simply nodded, and if George wasn't mistaken there was a flash of relief behind the young man’s eyes. It wasn't that he didn't trust him, it was just that he knew how complicated John’s relationship with his father was. Forget the knife-edge that was the political climate at the moment, he didn't want to see John hurt if he could keep him away from it.

“I suppose I’d better pick up some of the strain from your schedules if I’m not gonna be involved then,” John said. “Alex, do you want me to take over the address for the teachers’ union?”
“Please.”

“We do you think you could do my meeting with appropriations tomorrow morning?” Aaron put in. “Ideally I’ll be talking with the whips then, in case this goes to a floor vote.”

John nodded and pulled out a notepad, jotting down the details. George just sat back and watched as his team worked seamlessly round each other, coordinating and rearranging schedules, discussing who they were going to talk to and when, where the weak links and potential players would be. They still looked to him for a nod of approval on every decision, but for the most part they had this handled without him even needed to be there.

*Look at my sons,* he thought. Pride wasn't the word he was looking for, not when he knew just how far they’d come from a ragtag group of idealists bound together only by a joint delusion that they could get Washington elected president. And now look at where they were.

It was good this, really. His staff were going to have to learn to function without him soon enough.

George still hadn't found a way to tell them. It was stupid, he knew. Not only did they deserve to know, but they needed to start preparing for what would come next. He’d been trying to find the words for months, but with everything that had happened… *When Alexander gets out of hospital and back to work,* he’d promised himself, *after the trial’s over and we can get back to normal.* And then *after christmas, no sense in burdening them just before the holidays.* And now it looked set to be *after the Laurens crisis blows over, I don’t want to distract them.* It could go on forever, George knew, a kind of cowardice-in-denial that wasn't at all Presidential, but the fact of the matter was the country would elect it’s leader in less than eleven months, and George Washington still hadn't told his staff he wouldn't be running for reelection.

‘You didn't need to do this, you know.” Theo said, letting Aaron pull out her chair and sat down.

‘You helped my friend. The least I can do is say thank you.”

‘It’s kind of my job, you know.”

‘Well then maybe I just wanted to have a conversation with you when we weren’t in the middle of an emergency.”

‘Really. Cus that sounds dull.” Theo wrinkled her nose, and he had to laugh.

They were in a tiny Italian cafe in downtown DC, tucked between a newsagents and a beauty salon. He could have taken her anywhere - one phone-call quoting his work dress tended to free up at table at pretty much every place in town, but there was something about this little cafe he’d always liked. Maybe it was just that he wasn't going to run into half the congressmen in the city here.

“So how’s Alexander doing? You know, for one of your friends, he spends a lot of time complaining about you.”

“Oh Jesus, do I want to know? It’s all lies, I promise.”

“So you didn’t steel his security card and lock him out of the White House?”

“I-Ok, actually that one’s true. We told him not to even think about coming into work until he was
well enough. I think my staff were getting bored of shouting at him so I made a pre-emptive move.”

She laughed, shaking her head.

“What?” Aaron asked.

“You really care about them, don’t you? Your team?”

“Absolutely not.”

“You do! You walk around here like such a hard-ass, and you never let anyone see what’s going on inside your head.”

“Is this a pop psychology session now?”

Theo shrugged. “Medical school. Imagine a crash course in everything then subtract seven years of sleep. I know a thing or two about people.”

Aaron opened his mouth to reply, when the waiter came it over to take their order. He ordered his usual seafood spaghetti, stubbornly ignoring the voice inside his head (which sounded suspiciously like his mother’s) that whispered _never order spaghetti on the first date_. This wasn’t a date, anyway.

Almost to remind himself of the fact, Aaron said. “So, how’s the boyfriend in Georgia?”

“James? He’s great, I think. I mean, always bitching about trying to keep wayward students in line, but he seems to like it down there. He even stayed on campus over Christmas to help out some of the other professors with research or something.

“Shit. You gonna get to see him any time soon?”

“Yeah. He’s flying up in a couple of weeks. And…” she bit her lip, and looked around as if she were a conspirator. “Okay, I haven’t told anyone this because I could be wrong and maybe I’m just misreading him but—“

“Told anyone what?”

Theo smiled, excitement lighting up her whole face. “I think he’s going to propose!”

“You’re serious?”

“Yep,”

“Jesus, Theo, that’s amazing!” he said, and reached across the table to hug her, the smell of lemons filling his nostrils. “I’m so happy for you!”

And he was, really. She got to spend the rest of her life with the man she loved Theo was going to married, and Aaron could get over this… well, there was nothing to get over anyway, but it was still for the best.

“To you,” he said, raising his glass. “Congratulations.”

“Shh, you’re going to jinx it! There’s nothing to congratulate yet anyway.”

“I don’t know about that. Look how happy it’s made you already.”

She smiled softly, the grin not quite meeting her eyes, and Aaron frowned. “You are happy, right?
This is what you want?’”

Her expression didn't change. “Yeah, of course.”

--

The steam curled up from his cup, the scent of coffee mingling in the morning air, and John inhaled gratefully. This was his favourite kind of morning in DC, when the sky was a clear icy blue and the hint of frost still sharp in the air. It spoke of promise, and mornings like this reminded him why he had chosen this life in the first place - there was something in the city morning that spoke of possibility. Still, the perfect morning, and a rich coffee from his favourite vendor wasn't enough to lift his spirits.

It wasn't like he couldn't understand why he was being sidelined over the issue with Henry Laurens. The whole thing was messy, no doubt, and it wasn't like he had been looking forward to fighting a campaign against his own father, but still, there was no pretending it hadn't hurt when Washington had said “Take a back seat,” and everyone had agreed. It just simply wasn't in his nature to stand back and let others fight the battles he cared about. Not to mention, John had been left picking up all the everyday slack for everyone else.

Aaron’s appropriations meeting had gone exactly as expected once he had explained several times that, no, the Chief of Staff could not attend the meeting and, yes, John was a qualified and senior member of the White House staff. Seriously, what was it about him that made people not take him seriously? He was a year older than Alex, and three older than Laf, yet somehow he was the only one who got the aren’t you a little young to be important? looks. Honestly, he would never understand this city.

John could have gotten a taxi back to the White House, but it hadn't seemed worth it, somehow, not when the morning was so nice. And besides, it wasn't as if he was desperately needed at the moment, so he could afford to take his time a bit and enjoy a rare moment to catch his breath. At least he had been enjoying it, until a voice from behind called out “Jack!” and he froze.

He could have kept on walking, John supposed, pretended not to hear the shout and keep his nose clean. It’s what he should have done, for sure. But John stopped dead and (as he always had, as he always would do God dammit) slowly turned around.

Henry Laurens was striding towards him, briefcase in hand as if he to were on his way to or from a meeting. And wasn't that just typical?

“Jack, I thought that was you.”

“Dad,” John said evenly, internally cringing from the childhood nickname.

“It’s good to see you son. I always said it was ridiculous, the two of us barely seeing each other when I come up here with work.”

As if you want to spend time with me. You’re the one that told me not to bother coming back when I quit law, but I suppose that now I’ve made something of myself… John silently raged. Out loud, he said “Well, there’s a lot going on at the moment.”

“They keeping you busy over there?”

“Busier than usual this morning.” The words were out of his mouth before he could stop himself.
Dammit, the one thing he hadn't wanted to talk to his father about.

Henry Laurens sighed. “Ah yes, I suppose you will have heard about the bill by now. Tell me you’re not getting yourself caught up on the wrong side of this one?”

_The man hadn't changed_, John thought bitterly. _Wrong side._ “No sir. President Washington has requested I step back from the issue all together. I’m staying out of it.”

“Well I’m glad to hear it. You were always too much of a bleeding hearts liberal, but it sounds like your time in real politics has knocked some sense into that head of yours. You’re finally starting to make sensible decisions. I suppose it’s only a matter of time before you remember your family interests, hey?”

The senator phrased it as a joke and punched John on the shoulder, but a whole childhood of learning to read the man meant that John heard how deadly serious his father really was. He really thinks I’m going to come crawling back, one of these days, he realised. “With all respect, that’s not going to happen. I serve at the pleasure of the President.”

“And when Washington’s gone? What are you going to do then, Jacky? Go grovelling after the next guy to serve? You were meant to be a leader, boy. I could help you.”

“Help me what, exactly? Help me restrict the rights of thousands of American’s? Help me pass discriminatory legislation and tell people that their love is somehow a bad thing?”

“I thought you didn't want to get involved with this debate anymore,”

“You’d love that, wouldn't you? Because you and I both know I can debate you into your grave on this one. We’ve had practice. What, do you think that a couple of years in DC had made me 180 on everything I believe in?”

“I don’t want to argue against you, Jack. Think about what you’re doing to the family name!”

“To hell with the family name! Let it rot.” John was shouting, he realised, but somehow he occludent bring himself to care, about that or the small crowd of onlookers who had stopped to watch. It was all the rows they’d ever had, that John had convinced himself he could put aside and forget about, all bubbling up to the surface again. “This isn't about me. It’s about you and your terrible, ignorant policies and the fact that you’re just plane wrong!”

“I will not be spoken to like this by my own son!”

“You will. And you will be beaten into the ground by your own son and his friends if this goes to a debate and floor vote.”

“Think very carefully about the next words out of your mouth, Jack. There’s might well be a day when you need me on your side.”

“When that day comes, I might be a bit preoccupied with the fact that hell has just frozen over. See you in debate, Dad.”

John turned and marched away, blood pounding in his ears. He was vaguely aware of the crowd that parted to let him through, the flash of a cameraphone in someone’s hand, but he kept moving. It was only when he was sure that there was no one watching any more, when he could hear his own thoughts again, that he sank down onto a park bench and let out a shaky breath. What the hell had he just done? Forget the fact it had been a direct order to stay the hell out of it, John had just broken the one rule he’d set himself concerning his father when they’d started working in the same city. No
direct confrontations. Nothing that would make it worse.

He pulled out his phone and sent a quick message to Angelica, knowing full well she’d hear soon enough and it would be better coming from him. *I’ve fucked up. I’m coming back now.*

His coffee had gone cold.

“Is the White House stepping into the middle of a family feud?”

“I wouldn’t call it a feud, but it’s not for me to comment on private family matters of our staff. The White House and the Presidency remains committed to its own agenda. Hugh?”

“Angelica, was there Presidential pressure for John Laurens to conform to the administration’s view on gay rights over those of his own?”

“John Laurens has made several statements and speeches on the subject during his career, many of which were long before he worked for President Washington. I refer you to those, I trust they will speak for themselves. One at a time, please! Ann?”

“Has the President expressed anger at the outburst in the middle of the street?”

“The President would like to encourage everyone to keep the arguments civilised and within official channels on this issue. We have the infrastructure for a proper debate, let’s use it. Thank you.”

Angelica stepped down from the podium and walked out of the press room, ignoring the cameras, waving arms, and shouts of “Angelica! Angelica!” Jesus, journalists were nothing more than a mob of crows some days.

These were the times she absolutely hated, having to stand up there and try to defend her friends when they’d slipped up, without saying anything that could harm the administration at the same time. It was exhausting, fielding questions and trying to keep all the balls in the air, and she always ended up feeling a little complicit by the end.

John had been watching from her office, she was sure. He’d texted her with a heads up three minutes before the first twitter alert had popped up on her phone, and by the time he’d made it back to the West Wing, she already knew the whole story of how he’d gotten into a screaming match with his father for all the world and their Facebook accounts to see, after the one thing he’d been asked to do was stay out of it. She couldn’t say she blamed him; if her father had come out with half the crap John’s had she would have raised hell by now, but there was no denying he had just doubled her work today. Aaron had certainly told him so, before sending him in to see the President. Angelica had no idea what had been said there, but John had been even more subdued ever since.

“Good job,” Eliza said, appearing from nowhere to walk by her side back to her office. “With any luck it will barely be a story this time tomorrow.”

“It shouldn’t even be a story in the first place,” Angelica grumbled, opening her door, and sure enough John was waiting at her desk.

“You did well,” he muttered. “I… thanks, for that.”

“It’s my job, John,” she pointed out. “And of course I’m gonna get up there and cover your ass!
That’s what we do for each other.”

His attempt at a smile was hollow. “Am I good to go home? I think I need to… just not be here for a bit.”

“Sure. Got to sleep.”

The two of them shot him reassuring smiles as John walked out the door, but as soon as it swung shut Eliza turned to Angelica, the same worry reflected in her face. This wasn't like John at all, this monotonous, listless man who’d taken the place of their friend. Not for the first time, Angelica wondered just how deep this thing with his father went.

“Maybe we should send Alex over there when he’s done with his meetings,” Angelica suggested. “It seems to work the other way around with those two.”

Eliza smiled softly, although Angelica had no idea what the joke was, and pulled out her phone to text Alex. “These boys really are idiots.” she said, almost to herself.

“True. But they’re our idiots.”

“You should get that printed on a t-shirt.”

--

He’d never wanted this. He laughed at the irony, sometimes, when it all got too much and he was ready to lock the doors of the capitol building and burn the whole thing to the ground, but George Washington had never wanted to be President. There were so many people in this city scheming and backstabbing and doing whatever it took just to get a foot in the door, and the guy sitting in the Oval Office didn't even want to be there.

Well, that wasn't entirely true. There were days he loved it, truly, when he looked at the eagle seal in the middle of the carpet with swelling pride in everything it stood for. It was just those days were getting rarer and rarer, and George wasn't one to kid himself. He wasn't as young as he'd once been and, well, it wouldn't be all that many years now before he’d find his way to his mansions of rest. Was it so wrong to want a moment alone in the shade, reflecting on the page of history that would forever be his?

Of course not, some part of him whispered. Then why haven't you told them? the other half responded slyly, and George did his best to ignore the argument going on inside his head. He had other things to deal with right now, most pressingly the pompous arse he had been forced to take a meeting with. George nodded as the man spoke, trying to look both attentive and calm, but it wasn't difficult. Because there was nothing he didn't despise about George King.

“I’m so glad we could have this little chat,” King said, sickly sweet. “I’ve been hoping we could get together for some time now.”

“Likewise,” George responded, meaning the exact opposite. King was the worst of the worst as far as he was concerned - born rich and only got richer, mostly at the expense of the poorest in this country, an arrogant, self-centred ass… George really just didn't like him, okay?

“I mean, we are probably the two most powerful men in the country right now… well, I don’t know about you, so much, you know what they say about the power of the presidency in a divided government. But anyway, this seems like the sort of meeting they’ll write about in the history
books.”

George just raised an eyebrow. “You think?”

“Oh absolutely. Do you want to know why? I’m going to be making a very exciting announcement tomorrow and I wanted the great George Washington to be the first person to know. You’ve given so much to this country, after all, almost as much as I have.”

*What have you given to the country, exactly? A business empire? A failed casino chain? Casual racism?* “You honour me. What’s the announcement?”

“Well…” King rubbed his hands together joyfully, looking for all the world like a child hyped up on sugar. “I’m quitting the world of business, and going into politics instead.”

“You’re what?”

“Mr Washington, sir, I’m going to run for president.”

The man had to be joking. There was no way… Oh God, he wasn’t joking. George looked at King, and realised not only was the man deadly serious, but the world was mad enough that he might well win. And wasn’t that a terrifying thought?

Out loud, George said “Well then I wish you luck. It’s not an easy job, let me tell you that.”

“Oh I’ve heard. All that power at your fingertips, the rise and fall of oceans on your call? It’s a big job, which is exactly why I’m going for it. What would you advise be then?”

*Go home and spare the country your presence. Get yourself a good staff. They’re your team, your family, they guys that have your back when it all goes to hell. That’s what makes or breaks a President.”

“Oh yes, I was so sorry to hear about that man of yours a few months back. Horrible business.”

“Alexander? Yes, that… wasn’t a pleasant few weeks.”

“Got you the sympathy vote for a bit, though, didn’t it? Maybe I should try that, get some random immigrant to go out and get stabbed.” The man laughed as he said it, and it was all George could do not to punch the smug smile of King’s face himself, actually, but he had resolved to show him how a real president behaved. He stood, drawing himself up to his full height, and for the first time in months, George Washington felt worthy of the eagle on the floor.

“I wish you luck, Mr King, I really do. And for future reference, when you read those history books you were talking about, turn to this page. ‘Some random immigrant’? That’s the moment I decided to personally kick your ass.”

George King only smiled. “Looking forward to it, Mr President.”

--

*What the hell’s taking so long?* Hercules wondered, glancing at the closed door to the Oval Office. He usually sat in on meetings like this, hovering somewhere discreetly behind Washington ready for instructions, but for whatever reason George King had insisted on a private briefing with the
President. When you’re that rich, I guess you can insist on pretty much anything, he thought. At least it gave him a chance to catch up on some paperwork; the administration department didn’t seem to realise that being on call for the President 24/7 didn’t give a lot of time for filling out forms.

“Hi, Hercules. Does He have five minutes?”

Herc stood up as John André walked into the room. He didn’t have that much to do with the FBI agent on a day-to-day basis, but the man had bothered to learn his name, which was more than could be said for most of the big-shots who briefed the President. But then again, he’d be amazed if there was anyone who so much as did Washington’s laundry that the man didn’t know everything about.

“Good morning Mr André. I’m afraid President Washington’s got a personal meeting right now. Is it a security matter?”

“Nothing that can’t wait a couple of hours, don’t worry,” the man smiled. “What are you doing out here if Washington’s got a meeting, though?”

Herc shrugged. “Apparently when George King says private he means private.”

“King’s here? Wow, you guys must need something bad.”

“You know I couldn’t tell you what’s being discussed even if I wanted to.” Hercules said, trying not to feel like this was a test of some kind.

“Only because you don’t know.” André shot him a knowing look. “But while we’re talking…” he lowered his voice, and Herc found himself leaning in to hear. “I’ve spoken at length with Ambassador Lafayette, and with the President concerning the Reynolds trial and the whole ugly incident with Alexander. I hear you had a big part in closing in on Reynolds?”

Herc froze. “Alex remembered he’d heard his name before-“

“Yes, I know that’s the official line, and I understand why we’re sticking to it. A staffer’s hunch and the word of a girl who hasn’t been seen since are no grounds for a conviction. But I have to say Mulligan, that was on hell of a hunch.”

He shrugged. “I’m good with reading people, and the signals she was giving off were all kinds of wrong.”

“Still, from what Lafayette tells me you pieced the whole thing together. That’s some jumps some of my agents would struggle to make. You ever consider a different kind of federal career?”

“I work for President Washington, sir.”

“Then this little chat never happened.” André shot him a conspirator’s wink. “If you’d tell the President I need five minutes at some point this afternoon?”

“Sure thing.”

Herc watched him go with a slight shake of the head. Him, a spy? God, this town was crazy.

--

Alex didn’t know what to think. He’d come out of his meeting with party representatives from South Carolina, turned on his phone only to find dozens of tweets about a Laurens family showdown, and
a message from Eliza asking him to go check on John, because he’d seemed off. Alex wasn't surprised. Even he didn’t know the full details of all John’s fallings out with his father over the years, but he’d been told enough to work out that *complicated* didn’t even begin to cover it. They’d argued about every topic under the sun, John had run halfway across the country to go to college, and Henry had disowned him at least twice, but despite all this John still wanted to make his father proud.

“I’m a Laurens,” he had said once, after Alex asked him for the millionth time why he still gave his father time of day. “That has to mean something.” What it meant now, Alex had no idea, only that John probably wasn’t in the best of places at the moment. And if there was anything Alex could do about that… well, he hadn't bothered going back to the office before coming here.

But Alex was doubtful he could help John at all right now. There were still days he could barely talk to his friend, no matter how much he wanted to, for fear of suddenly finding himself in the middle of a rainstorm with a stab wound to the gut. Which really sucked, considering spending time with John was all that kept him going the rest of the days. But this wasn't about him right now.

His tentative knock had been met with a sullen “No!”, but the door was unlocked so he let himself in anyway. John was sitting at the kitchen table, his television muted but the rolling banner of news told Alex they were reporting on the South Carolina bill. There was a half-drunken bottle of beer on the table, but a quick glance round revealed it to be the only one. John hadn't come home and gotten smashed on his own then, which was something of a relief, although at least Alex might have been able to deal with that one. The art of bundling a drunk John Laurens to bed was one he’d perfected years ago, between student days and the stresses of the campaign trail. This John Laurens merely looked… lost.

“What the hell do you want Alex? Was *no* not clear enough?” John said, not taking his eyes off the news.

“What did that asshole say to you?” Alex asked, blood beginning to boil with hatred towards Henry Laurens. The fact that someone could reduce John to this with a few carefully chosen words was unthinkable.

“The inevitable. The fact that I don’t have a clue what I’m doing here, not really, and sooner or later I’m going have to go crawling back to the man who hates everything I stand for.”

“You’re not him, John.” Alex said as gently as possible. “You’re not who he wants you to be either.”

“Then who am I, exactly?” he asked bitterly.

“You’re you. Your own person, a better man than your father will ever be.”

John took a swig of beer. “And what if I don’t like who I am all that much? What if I don’t even know who that person is anymore?”

His voice cracked on the last word, twisting like a knife at Alex’s chest. This wasn't the John he knew, the eternal optimist, the idealist with nothing but hope for tomorrow and a smile for tonight. This was a John shaken, unsure. *Afraid*. Alex crossed to his friends side and took his hands, forcing John to look up at him. “Maybe that’s okay. You don’t have to know just who you are, because I do. You’re the strongest person I’ve ever met, and you don’t have to let him define you.”

“Don’t say stuff like that,” John muttered, trying and failing to push him away. “I don’t deserve it. I let you down, Alex, I let you down so bad, and it nearly took you away from me. If you’d have… God, if I lost you, I don’t know what I would have done…”
“Hey. I’m still here. Look at me.” Alex moved John’s hand to cover his own chest, so he could feel the thump of his heartbeat through his ribcage, “I’m here. I’m not going anywhere.”

John’s eyes slowly moved up from his chest to meet his. His pupils were blown wide, ringed with hazel. Black holes in the half light, pulling him in. But that was probably just the alcohol, Alex reasoned. Or the dark room. Or..

“Alex…” John breathed, and there was so much behind that one word. It was a question, a reassurance, a plea. He was suddenly hyper aware of the distance between the two of them, the mere inches separating his face from John’s. He was close enough to count the freckles scattered across his friend’s nose, to feel the warm brush of his breath. Underneath John’s fingers, Alex’s heart rate jumped up, frantically pumping as if someone had taken all the air from the room. Which, in a way, John had.

And still neither man moved away.

Alex swallowed thickly, trying to remember how to speak. But for once in his life, he had no words, nothing to fill the void apart from the endless loop in his head, a beat of John, John, John…

Alex had no words, but just this once he didn't need them.

He didn't know who moved first, but suddenly the air between them vanished, and there was nothing but the taste of John’s mouth on his. The two of them clashed together, a desperate blur of lips and teeth and tongues that was probably all kinds of messy, as if they were teenagers again. But in that moment, he couldn't imagine anything more perfect; the two of them were made to collide. He was only half aware of John’s hands in his hair, pulling at the bun until it came loose and tangling themselves in his dark locks. Alex snatched a ragged breath and deepened the kiss, pulling the taller man closer still, pressing their bodies together. He wanted to live in this moment forever. All the times he had thought about kissing John, he had never imagined that he would taste of black coffee and ginger biscuits, that his hands would shake as he ran them over Alex’s chest, the sound he would make when Alex’s teeth grazed his lower lip, a desperate groan in his throat that made all the blood in Alex’s body change direction.

“Jesus, Alexander…” John whispered into his jaw, and Alex broke off suddenly. His mind was reeling, breath shallow, John’s touch magnetic… but he couldn't do this, he realised. It wouldn't be right, and it wouldn't be fair to John. He was upset and vulnerable, and possibly drunk to boot. It would be like taking advantage of him. God how he wanted to, God how he wanted to hold him until nothing hurt any more, to pull him close and never let him go. But if there was any chance that John wasn’t ready for this, that he would regret anything that happened tonight… Alex loved him too much to even consider it.

“I’m sorry.’ he said the words thick on his tongue. “I shouldn't have-“

“Shut up.” John cut him off.

“What?”

“Shut up and tell me this is alright.”

“Well I can’t do both at the same time-”

“Alex…”

And God help him, John practically growled his name. Alex’s gaze tracked from his swollen lips to the flush of his cheeks to the brown eyes that held no question, not a shadow of uncertainty. Just a
desperate need, the same need coursing through his own veins. And any resolve Alex had crumbled into the wind.

“This is alright.”

“Thank God.”

And after that, Alex pretty much forgot about anything else.

Chapter End Notes

I needed this as much as you guys tbh
The first thing he felt on waking was a strange sense of *de-ja-vu*. The second was pure panic.

Alex opened his eyes slowly, silently cursing the shaft of sunlight assaulting his face, and wondering if he could somehow blame the building’s (long dead) architect for angling the room in just the wrong direction. It was an odd feeling, that intangible sense that everything was somehow familiar. Not just his anger at being woken by the sun, but the feeling that he was opening his eyes to a world where something had shifted irrevocably. The sensation was gone a second later, dissolving as *de-ja-vu* is want to do, and for a moment he relaxed into the bed, content. And then he woke up enough to realise he wasn't alone, and the memory of last night came flooding back to him.

*Shit.*

*Oh Jesus fucking shit on a stick.*

This was bad. This was really bad. Alex lay stock still, barely daring to breath out of fear of waking John who was curled up next to him, one leg splayed lazily over Alex’s. What the hell had he been thinking? He had crossed the line he had drawn for himself, sprinted so far past it he couldn't even see the damn line anymore, and when John woke… would he regret it? Would he look with Alex with a mingled expression of horror and embarrassment, and pull away from him forever? What if John didn’t feel the way Alex did right now?

Because whatever this was Alex was feeling, there was a lot of it. He carefully turned his head to take in John’s sleeping form. In the dawn light, he looked nothing less than beautiful, from the freckles scattered across his face like drops of paint, to the hair that only hours before Alex’s fingers had laced through as he whispered John’s name.

Up until last night, the two of them had been at an equilibrium of sorts, a crossroads where everything or nothing could still happen, and all the consequences with them. It hadn't been good, exactly, not when being so close to John, yet so far away at the same time was constant ache in Alex’s stomach, but at least he’d been able to be close to John. They’d been able to make dumb jokes together and stay up for hours bouncing ideas off each other, and if Alex’s hand had occasionally lingered that second too long on his arm, it hadn't meant anything. Now… there was a chance that he’d never have that again.

As slowly as he could, careful not to disturb his sleeping (friend?), Alex disentangled his limbs from John’s and slipped out of bed, creeping into the kitchen. For a moment he eyed John’s coffee machine longingly - if there was ever a time when he needed caffeine, this was it - but he couldn't risk the noise. Instead, Alex sunk into a chair and put his head on his hands, trying to think. His first instinct was, shamefully, to run. The grab whatever clothes he could find and haul ass to the White House, lock himself in his office and not have to see John until he’d had a chance to sort out the mess that was his head right now. But the idea of leaving John to wake up in an empty flat with no explanation… No. Alex may be a coward, but he couldn't do that to John. His second was to call Eliza. They had established long ago (after an unfortunate decision on his part to challenge a whole crowd to a fight outside City Hall) that she was his first phone call whenever he got himself into trouble. Well damn if he wasn't in trouble now, but he had a feeling this wasn't the sort of thing she’d had in mind. And calling your ex to ask what to do after you’d not-so-accidentally slept with your best friend? Alex really didn't want that page turning up in his biography one day. He was on his
own on this one.

“Alex?”

Alex looked up so sharply he almost gave himself whiplash. John was standing in the doorway, a dressing-gown hastily thrown on, with a slightly confused expression on his face. Alex stood up.

“Hey.”

“Hey.”

A pause. Then “I woke up and you weren’t there,” John said. “I thought, maybe-”

“I’m here,” Alex interrupted, walking over to him. I’m right here. I’m not going anywhere. “I just had to, have a moment.”

“A moment?”

Alex bit his lip. “Yeah. To, you know, process.”

“You always did think too much.” John leaned down and planted the softest of kisses on Alex’s lips, a cool breath of air in the morning. “Please tell me you don’t regret…?”

“What? No, John, I only meant…” Alex ran a hand through his hair distractedly. He was going about this all wrong. “I’ve made a lot of mistakes in my life. Last night wasn’t one of them. Except maybe that it should have happened years ago.”

John shook his head softly, a faint smile on his lips. “You have no idea, do you?” But before Alex could ask what he meant, John skirted around him and turned the coffee machine on, shooting him a knowing look.

“So what do we do?” Alex asked some time later, hands curled around his mug. “Because I want this John, I really do.”

“This?”

“You. Us. Sitting in your kitchen drinking coffee and just all this. But…”

“But,” John agreed. It was the elephant in the room, the big unspoken shadow hanging over their heads. They worked in the White House (where they both had do be in… shit, forty minutes), the most visible building in the world, under a President facing mass scrutiny who was about to start his re-election campaign. The government was divided, the country even more so, and two high profile staffers who both just so happened to be men embarking on a relationship was a disaster waiting to happen. Oh, and Alex was technically John’s boss. In case this wasn’t going to be messy enough already.

“So we keep it between us.” John said eventually, as if it was the easiest thing in the world. “The country doesn’t have the right to our private life.”

“And if it comes out?”

“It won’t. We’ll be careful. I know that’s not a word the two of us usually want anything to do with, but we may just have to make an exception in this case.”

John was joking, but Alex recognised the truth behind the words. They were both loose cannons, more prone to action than subtly. But if this was what it took to keep John…
“And the others?” he asked. “What do we tell them?”

“Nothing. For now at least,” John added hastily as Alex opened his mouth to protest. “Until we work out what this thing is between us, we don’t say a word.”

“I don’t know if I can do that,” said Alex. “They’re our friends.” Friends who had stuck by them for years, with whom they had shared triumph and defeat. Friends who had sat by his bedside while he fought to get back to them. The idea of keeping this a secret was horrible.

“I don’t like it any more than you do.” John said. “But it wouldn’t be fair to tell them. If it’s a secret that gets out, it’s barely a scandal and it’s all on our heads. If someone finds out about us and it transpires that the whole West Wing knew? That’s a different matter entirely.”

Alex grimaced. There was truth in what he was saying. He owed Washington everything, and couldn't stand the idea of putting his friends’ careers at risk. The smart thing to do would be to put this thing with John on hold until they were out of office, and it didn't matter what ignorant assholes said about them anymore. But one look at John across the table, and Alex knew he would never be able to do it. He had always been too selfish by far. It didn't mean he had to like the alternative, though.

“So we keep it between us.”

John took his hand. “We’re gonna work this out together Alex, whatever happens, yeah?”

And despite the fact it could topple their careers, Alex couldn't help the warmth that spread through his chest, nor the goofy grin that crept onto his face.

---

“King’s doing what?” Eliza asked, horrified.

“He’s running. He should announce to the press sometime today.”

She had never seen such pure disgust and anger in the President’s face as she had this morning, when he’d called an emergency meeting to tell them about yesterday’s meeting with George King. She couldn't say she blamed him. The man stood for everything they despised, after all. But that didn't explain the fire she could see behind his eyes, a sort of drive she hadn't seen in him since the campaign days. Whatever King had said to him, Washington must be pissed.

“This is good.” Alex said, and she turned to him, confused.

“How is this good, exactly? If that dick gets into power—”

“Because now we’ve got something to fight for.” he smiled. She couldn't decipher the look that passed between him and John (maybe it was something to do with whatever pep talk Alex had given him last night after she sent him over there, or maybe just the love of fights the two of them seemed to share) but whatever it was, John nodded in agreement.

“I suppose that makes sense,” Aaron pitched in. “Now we can start formulating a coherent strategy to target King specifically, to highlight his flaws to the public and—”

“No.” Washington cut in. “No negative campaigning. I won’t stoop to his level, not while we hold office. And I hate to break it to you Burr, but I think the public is already well aware of his flaws. It’s
just that they don’t seem care that much.”

“Alright then,” Aaron muttered, making a note. “No negative campaigning, at least for now. That’s gonna make finding an angle of attack a lot more difficult though.”

“Why don’t we just let the policies speak for themselves?” Eliza suggested. “Show the country exactly why ours are in every way better, destroy him in debate, and not bring the personal into it at all?”

“Welcome to DC,” John grimaced. “The personal is how politics works here. That’s non-negotiable.”

“She’s right about the debate, though. We owe it to the people to have a proper debate at some point, not one of these network-controlled faces. Somewhere we can debate real ideas instead of hurling cheap insults at each other.”

“I’ll get on that.” Angelica said. “See if I can talk to whoever’s running press or PR on his campaign. But in the meantime, I’ve had an idea that might boost out favorables.”

“Shoot.”

“A tell all interview. A chance for the public to really find out what makes Washington for America tick, put a human face to the politics.”

Washington laughed. “Do you know how many ‘tell all’ interviews I’ve given since I’ve been here? And not one of them was anywhere close to tell all, you know.”

“Oh, I know.” Angelica smiled. “But I didn’t mean for you. I meant for the staff.”

Aaron choked on his coffee, clearly imagining all the ways this could go wrong. Eliza however, felt herself beginning to smile at the idea.

“It could be a chance for them to get to know not just the President, but the whole team of people who help him to run things. Make the whole administration more approachable.”

“I like it.” Eliza said, flashing Angelica a smile of support.

“Me too.” added Alex.

“Absolutely not.” said Aaron. “Not live, anyway.”

“Yes, live.” Angelica argued.

“I don’t know. I mean, how many secrets do the lot of us know that we really don’t want to blurt out on camera?” John said. “We might want to be careful about this one.”

Eliza looked at him and opened her mouth to ask why the hell John Laurens of all people was suddenly advising caution. But before she could, Angelica turned to Washington.

“Seems like you have the casting vote, Sir.”

That was something of a joke in itself; For all that he fought the good fight of democracy, George Washington wasn't afraid to evoke a brutal and absolute dictatorship within the White House when he wanted his way and thought his staff were getting in the way. The man seemed to consider a moment.
“Who would do the interview? It would have to be someone we trusted.”

“I was thinking Martha Manning? She’s a talk show host, not an actual journalist so we’re looking more approachable before we’re even out the gates, and she did a great job with the exclusive we gave her on your London trip last year.”

“Manning…” Alex muttered, frowning. “Which one’s she?”

“The one who had a crush on John,” Angelica supplied and Eliza had to stifle a giggle. She’d completely forgotten about that.

“Wait, she had a crush on me?” John put in, confused.

“Oh yeah, huge one. You didn’t know?”

John shook his head. “Can I veto this?” he grumbled.

“No. Make it happen.” Washington said, then turned to the stacks of files that had appeared on his desk in the time they had been talking. Hercules was getting sneakier every day, Eliza swore.

“What’s next?”

“I was thinking you’d never show up,” Hercules grumbled as the figure slipped into the bar stool next to him. “I’m beginning to feel like the date you stood up.”

Lafayette laughed, and clapped him on the back. “Forgive me, my friend, I was held up unavoidably in the embassy. This messy business with the British… In any case, I am sorry. And let me tell you something, when I take someone on a date, they never feel stood up. On the honour of my country.”

“Bullshit,” Herc said with a grin, and singled the bartender for two more glasses. He wasn't pissed, not really, but the Frenchman didn't need to know that. It was far funnier to make Laf all flustered and apologetic. In truth, he knew more than most how all-consuming any job in DC was - you didn't spend almost all your day at the President’s shoulder and not get a healthy respect for the political game.

“You wound me, Mr Mulligan,” Laf pouted. “I would have you know that a date with Gilbert de Motier is one of the most sort after evenings in the whole of Paris.”

“Oh, so you save being an idiot for when you’re state-side then?” He slid a shot across to Laf before he could argue further. “Shut up and drink, why don’t you?”

“Now that is the first smart thing you’ve said all evening.”

They weren’t drinking to get drunk, not really. Neither could afford to turn up to work the next morning with a hangover, nor to be unable to come back into work at any time if their phone rang. Not with the re-election campaign well underway. But it was nice to get away from the madness, if only for a few hours.

“So will you stay on with the President after his glorious victory in November?” Laf asked some time later.

“There’s a long way to go before any glorious victory. You know King’s running, right?”
“Ugh, yes, I have heard that particular piece of news.” Laf made a face. “But I have every confidence in my dear friends. So my question stands. Will you stay with Washington?”

“I haven't even thought about it.” Herc confessed. “I suppose so, if he still wants me. What else would I do?”

“What would you be doing if you didn’t work at the White House?”

“God knows. I was just trying to make some money to send my brother to college.”

Laf shook his head. “You are a better man than most. No ambitions of your own, once you are done holding the door open for the leader of the free world? Because that’s going to look pretty impressive on your CV.”

“Not really. Well… don’t laugh, okay?”

Laf put his hand on his heart. “On my honour.”

“When I was younger I really liked art. Textiles specifically, and fashion. I always thought, if things had gone differently, I’d like to design clothes one day. Or maybe just open my own tailors shop. I don’t know, it’s stupid anyway.”

“Stupid?” Laf gestured to his jacket, affronted. “You know how highly I regard my clothes. Why would that be so stupid, if it is what you want to do?”

Herc shrugged. “That’s not what most people would say. And anyway, it was a long time ago. I haven't thought about doing that in years.”

“But you are good, non?”

He thought about the sketch books that were probably still sitting in a box in his flat somewhere, filled with various designs and doodles. “I’m alright.”

“You must let me see your drawings one of these days.”

“Yeah, that’s not going to happen. Besides, ever since I started working for Washington, it just seems like I should be doing something more worthwhile with my life.”

Laf plucked at his sleeve. “What could possibly be more worthwhile than creating such masterpieces?”

Herc thought about the men who had been working around the clock to find out what had happened to Alex. He thought about how he had looked at Maria Reynolds and just known, somehow, that she was important. He thought about the conversation he’d had with John André that officially had never happened, that he was still trying to get his head around. Then Hercules shrugged and laughed. “Well, when you put it like that… Now, onto important stuff. What’s this I’ve heard about you getting back together with Adrienne?”

Laf grinned sheepishly. “I wouldn't say back together, not properly. It is complicated. But you are worryingly up to date with my personal life.”

“What can I say? Friends in high places.”
Aaron tilted his glass, watching the light dance through the amber liquid. He wasn't much of a drinker, but a glass of scotch at the end of a long day (at the end of a long week midway through a very long four...), well, it wasn't the worst thing in the world every now and again. Washington had all their noses to the grindstone at the moment, and although Aaron was glad that the President was finally focusing on re-election, something he’d been weirdly quiet about up until now, it was bloody hard work. It was raining yet again outside, and knowing Aaron’s luck it would still be pouring when he had to go to work tomorrow morning. Brilliant.

His thoughts were interrupted by an impatient knock on the door, and he rolled his eyes. It was… yep, gone midnight, and there was only one person who would be bothering him at this time of night. Sweet Jesus, he thought, can’t I just have a few hours in the day without you being a pain in my ass? The knocking started up again and he climbed to his feet, sighing.

“I swear to God, Alexander,” Aaron complained, unlocking the door. “Somebody better be dying-“ He stopped abruptly as he swung the door open. “Theo?”

She was soaked to the skin, no umbrella or even a coat in sight, and raindrops were running through her hair. She looked up at him with wide eyes. “Can I come in?”

“What are you…? Yes, of course.” He moved to let her in mystified. He couldn't think of a single reason she'd turn up at his flat in the middle of a rainstorm.

“I’m sorry, you were probably sleeping, I-“

“Theo.” he interrupted gesturing to the shirt he was still wearing. “Does it look like I was sleeping? It’s fine. Now for the love of God, let me find you a towel or something.”

She nodded, and after routing around in a draw for a moment, threw her a guest towel. When she didn't say anything he asked “So, is this just a random social call, or-?”

“Yes. No. I don’t… James is flying in tomorrow. He wants to take me out for dinner, to the restaurant we had our first date in and he’s going to ask me to marry him.”

“That’s great isn't it? What you want?”

“Of course. I love him.”

“So what are you doing here?”

She shook her head, helplessly. “I don’t know. I was just awake, thinking about it, and then I just had to walk around outside a bit, and then… you’re the only person I can talk to about this, you know? How sad is that? All my friends, and you’re the only one who I think might understand.”

“I’m the one you’re coming to for relationship advise?” Aaron asked, confused. Because that was the last thing he would consider his area of expertise. “Why would you think I could help?”

“Because you know about hard decisions. About not having a clue and being desperate enough to turn to a complete stranger for help. It’s crazy, I know.”

“So it is a hard decision. You’re not sure you want to marry him?”

“I didn’t say that. James is awesome, he really is. But I’d be giving up my whole life, moving down to Georgia, being someone’s wife. It’s kind of a big deal.”

“That doesn't mean it’s a bad thing,” he pointed out. “Not if it’s what you want.”
She looked away, brown eyes downcast, and he caught her chin with his hand so she looked back at him. “You came to me because I know about hard decisions. So you already know what I’m going to say to. That you’ll make the right one.”

She smiled, despite herself. “You don’t know me.”

“Yes, Theo,” he muttered, brushing a loose, rain-soaked curl from her face. “I really do.”

“What do-“

He kissed her. Aaron hadn’t planed to do it, hadn’t even known he was going to until suddenly her lips were soft under his own, parting in surprise. For a moment, the world stopped spinning around him and there was nothing but the scent of sunlight and wet hair curling through his fingers. For a moment, everything was right.

And then she slapped him.

Aaron reeled back, partly because of the sharp sting in his cheek, but mostly because the pain had brought him crashing back to reality. What the hell was he doing? Theo was his friend. His soon to be engaged friend.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn't have…” he said.

She shook her head slowly, eyes wide.

He tried again, the words that usually came so smoothly sticking in his throat. “I’m… and you’re…”

“I should go.”

“No, Theo, wait. Let me apologise.”

She stood up and shook her hand free of his grasp. “I’m going Aaron. I need to… goodnight.”

Aaron let her go, helpless. He didn’t move until the door swung shut behind him, leaving him alone in the darkness of his apartment. He sunk into the chair she had vacated, head spinning. God he was an idiot, a damn fool who might have just ruined everything with one of the only friends he had. It didn’t help that his lips were still tingling. He brushed a finger to them, before cursing and standing abruptly. He was only going to make things a thousand times worse, letting himself think like that.

Although of course he’d already done that.

Chapter End Notes

Four things real quick...

1) Blown away by the comments from the last chapter. You guys rock, and I'm sorry it took a while to get this one up. Technology has been failing me (which is why I haven't been replying to the comments, but I've just read them all and <3)

2) I forgot to do this last chapter but shout-out to @alab1510 who was asking for Lams.
Don't tell me I don't give you guys anything!

3) There were a few people asking if I had made King George into Trump. Me, projecting my own anger at contemporary politics onto characters who died hundreds of years ago? Crazy. Ridiculous. Whatever gave you that idea? ;)

4) I'm guessing that most of you know how the election system in the US works, but it's gonna be kind of important for the next couple of chapters, so here's a quick crash course for all my fellow non-Americans!

Elections are on a fixed cycle - Presidential every 4 years and congressional every 2 (where the whole of the House of Representatives is up for re-election every time and only 1/3 of the Senate, so a senator's term lasts for 6 years, a congressman's for 2 and POTUS's for 4.) A president can only serve for a maximum of 2 terms. Unlike in some other countries, election campaigns (especially Presidential) last months. They are held in November (with the term officially beginning at the end of the following January) so it is usual for campaigning to be underway going into an election year, despite the fact the actual election isn't held for another 8 months. This is because you have to win primaries in the Spring to stand as your party's nominee for November. (So technically King would have had to declare way before now - this chapter is in about January - but I wanted to do Alex's PTSD stuff at Christmas like in the West Wing.)

Elections are held in each state, and the winning candidate in that state takes all the state's electoral college votes, which depend on the population of that state, making some states more important than others if they have a big population or are swing states. A candidate needs 270 electoral college votes to win.

Hope that made sense - shout if I got anything wrong!

(I lied about real quick...)
Lights up on the stage as an unseen audience claps. Six people sit on bar stools, five visibly nervous although doing their best to hide it, and the sixth beaming straight into the cameras. Her dress matches the shade of her lips, and she flashes her viewers a winning smile as she begins to talk.

**Martha:** Good evening and welcome to Eye on America, with me, Martha Manning. We’re joined tonight by five key players from the Washington for America campaign, who are here to give us the inside story from the campaign to re-elect the President. As you all know, both Democratic and Republican primaries are well underway, with Washington enjoying big wins in Iowa and New Hampshire. However, the real surprise story has been the unexpected success of George King who is currently leading the race to become the Republican nominee. It’s an exciting time in politics, folks, and it’s about to get even more exciting. Please join me in welcoming our guests, Aaron Burr, Eliza Schuyler, Angelica Church, Alexander Hamilton and John Laurens!

**Applause from the audience. They smile nervously, shifting slightly in their seats.**

**Martha:** The campaign is in full swing now, and we’re all very excited to find out just what exactly Washington has planned for his second term, should he be successful.

**Alexander:** So are we!

**Laughter (and a sideways glare in his direction from Aaron).**

**Martha:** This is your second time on campaign trail. Am I right in thinking that you were all part of Washington’s campaign for election four years ago?

**Angelica:** That’s right. I suppose we all saw something in President Washington a long time ago, and here we are now.

**Martha:** How does this campaign feel different from the last one?

**Aaron:** I suppose we feel more responsible now, responsible to the American people. You’ve put your trust in Washington, and here we are asking you to do it again. The weight of what we’re standing for, what we’re trying to change, there’s no way you can truly understand that until you’ve already been through it all.

**Alexander:** Exactly. Four years ago, we were just a group of people. We didn't have governments and armies at our disposal. We didn't have teams of experts lining up to help us make the right decisions. Hell, we didn’t have a team at all to start with, or even a headquarters. We were working out of a store front when I first met the President.

**Martha:** You didn’t know him before?
Alexander: I knew of him, and respected his work. But we had never met. I was clerking for Nathanial Green at the time, and he had a breakfast meeting with the then-Governor. Something I probably should have been told…

---

Four years and 5 months earlier

Alex lifted his head blearily from the and groaned. Crap, he hadn't meant to fall asleep. He’d wanted to work through the night and finish his position paper so it would be on the Congressman’s desk when he arrived. If he could just persuade Green to stand with the welfare package in time for the floor vote, he would convince others, and the mess that was America’s social security might just be untangled by the time he turned eighty. Dammit, Alex needed coffee.

Unappealing a stray sheet of paper from his face, Alex glanced at the clock. Just gone seven. He could still finish before Green got into work, but first he needed the magic of caffeine. Where was his assistant? Oh right, he had quit last week, and he hadn't gotten around to hiring anyone new. Alex still maintained it hadn't been his fault, no matter what anyone said; if he couldn't handle his (hugely flawed) ideas being torn to shreds in the middle of a meeting, he should have never gone into politics in the first place. Either way, it looked like he would have to make his own coffee.

As the machine in whirred to life, Alex caught a glimpse of his reflection in the window and didn't bother to suppress a groan. Hair tangled, stubble uneven, yesterday’s shirt still on… Oh well, it wasn't like he'd be leaving his office (which connected onto the Congressman’s) for hours. He could afford to look a little scruffy if he wasn't going to be seeing anyone all morning.

No sooner had he thought it, there was a knock on the door and someone poked their head around the door. He was sharply dressed and his very presence commanded an air of authority. Of course, having gone sometime around forty hours without sleep, Alex didn't notice any of this, only that his face looked vaguely familiar.

“Excuse me, I’m looking for Nathanial Green?”

“He’s not here yet, and even if he was the Congressman’s got a full schedule today. I’m sorry, but-“

“I have an appointment. I fear I’m a little early, but-“

Alex looked up at him. “Oh, are you the new guy?”

“I suppose I am, yes. New to all this anyway.”

“Brilliant! We can start straight away then, sit down.” He gestured for the somewhat bemused looking man to sit in one of the old chairs, and flung his latest draft at his head. “Read this back to me. We’ve got until Friday to persuade the Congressman to vote yes to the welfare amendment, so let’s get to work.”

“I think there’s been a misunderstanding. I’m not-“ he trailed off as he glanced at Alex’s position paper, then frowned and read it more closely. “You wrote this?”

“Of course.”

“This is good…” he murmured. “Succinct arguments, passionate wording… Where did you learn to turn a phrase like this?”
“King’s college. Although I’d been writing long before that. Not important right now though, we’ve got about half an hour before Green gets in to get this perfect.”

The man looked at him, a single eyebrow raised, and then smiled. “Shall we begin then?”

As it turned out, it was closer to forty minutes before the Congressman arrived and knocked on Alex’s door. By this stage, the two of them were lost in their work, arguing over phrasing and which members of the House could be pursued to jump the fence.

“Morning, Hamilton. I need you to find that report from Ways and Means, I’ve got a breakfast with—“ He looked around the room properly, and broke off in surprise. “Governor Washington! I wasn't expecting you so soon.”

“I’ve got a habit of being early, I’m afraid.”

“No matter. I see you’ve met my assistant Hamilton?”

Alex looked from Green to Washington, a sinking feeling in his chest. Governor Washington. Who’s face had been familiar because he had been on CNN last week announcing his intention to run for President. Shit.

He met Washington’s eye, sure that he was about to tell Green how Alex had more or less conscripted him into writing a position paper (and had he made Alex coffee? Oh God…), but the man only smiled slightly.

“That I have. Shall we get to it?”

The two of them walked out of the office, and the moment the door shut Alex collapsed into his chair. Had that just happened? Jesus…

It was around a week before he saw Washington again, which was just long enough for Alex to convince himself he wasn't going to get fired, or made a laughing stock of over his mistake. His opinion paper and argument to go alongside it had convinced the Congressman to support the amendment, but even so it hadn't been enough to save the welfare vote.

“Mr Hamilton?”

He looked up from the memo he was drafting, and his heart sank. Washington was standing in the doorway.

“Governor Washington!” he yelped, standing up hurriedly. “I, um… Congressman Green’s not in town at the moment, but if you’d like me to schedule… I am so sorry, by the way, for last week. I—“

Washington held up a hand to stop his rambling. “I didn’t come here to talk to Green. I came to talk to you.”

“Me? Why?”

“Why not? You’re an interesting guy. Tell me, how does a Fulbright scholar from Princeton end up in some tiny back-office clerking for a Congressman?”

“It’s a tiny back office on Capitol Hill. With an expresso machine.” Alex said defensively, before stopping to wonder how the governor knew about his education. “That’s not half bad for someone
Is this all you aspire to, though?"

"Of course not. It’s more of a temporary stepping stone. Green’s a great mentor, and—"

"Alexander." Washington interrupted. "This is small scale stuff. You worked through the night to
persuade a single Congressmen to make a vote you knew wouldn’t change the overall result. You’re
not making the slightest bit off difference here and you know it."

"What are you getting at?"

"Want to move up to the big leagues?"

Alex blinked. "What?"

"I don’t know if you saw the news, son, but I’ve got a pretty big job ahead of me. And I’m in dire
need of some assistance. I could do with someone like you, scrappy and hungry and not half bad
with a pen. Want to come work for the next President of the United States?"

Alex swallowed. He thought of the day he walked off a ship in New York, vowing to make it in the
country that had taken him in when he had no where to turn. Of the hours spent hunched over a
desk, writing papers he knew probably wouldn’t even get read, let alone change anything. This was
his shot, and he sure as hell wasn’t going to throw it away.

--

Now

Martha: The campaign trail can get pretty intense, I’ve heard.

John: You can say that again.

Eliza: It’s simultaneously the best and worst months of your life. The best because you get to meet
people from all over the country, have a chance to speak with them, hear what they have to say, see
more of America than you ever knew was out there. The worst because, well, let’s just say I’ve
learned to treasure my sleep. It’s a rarity.

Angelica: That and decent showers.

Eliza: Oh God, yes. Forget education or healthcare, we should be putting all our money into hotel
showers that actually work!

Martha laughs along with the audience, before her face grows serious as she asks the next question

Martha: So I guess some pretty hardcore team bonding happens during these months?

Alex: Whether you like it or not. You’re thrown in a room with a whole bunch of people you’ve
never met, and everyone’s got a different set of ideas. And somehow you’ve got to pull off what is
essentially the world’s longest job interview. And if you can make it through without killing anyone
on your team, that’s half the battle.

Aaron: It’s the difficult half as well. Our careers are based around the politics. That we can handle.
But no one ever taught us how to get along with each other.

---

*Four years and 1 month earlier*

“Tell me this is your idea of a joke!”

The sound of someone shouting echoed through the door and Aaron rolled his eyes, hoping whatever the commotion was, someone would sort it out quickly and get around to dealing with him. He prided himself on being a patient man, but he had been sitting in an empty office for a good half hour now, waiting to be seen.

It wasn't even an office, really, as it was a converted store cupboard. The headquarters for the campaign certainly left a lot to be desired; the man who might one day lead this country was currently working out of a converted storefront, a Washington For America banner hanging over the entrance reading covering up the faded letting on a sign that read Vernon’s Mountaineering Supplies. It wasn't exactly the stuff of presidents, but Aaron wasn't fooled by the low-budget operation. He’d spent enough time watching the players move around the board to know that George Washington might just be the real deal. He could make it all the way, with a bit of luck, and a lot of help. Which, if all went as planned, was where Aaron came in.

“You can’t be serious!” the voice said from outside the room. “We can do better.”

“We can do a lot worse, too,” came the reply, and Aaron recognised the smooth tones of Washington himself. He straightened. Maybe this was a conversation worth listening in on after all. “The man’s a political genius. If anyone can deliver us the middle ground—”

“But we shouldn’t be aiming for the middle ground in the first place! It’s cheep, it’s a personality contest, it’s bloody awful rhetoric! If you want me to write anything worth more than the paper it’s printed on, you’ve got to give me more than the middle ground.”

“That’s enough, Alexander. I’ve made up my mind and in any case it’s too late.”

“Too late?” the voice asked, puzzled, just as the door swung open. Aaron had been correct in identifying George Washington, dressed in worn jeans and an old sweatshirt yet somehow looking every inch the presidential candidate. By his side was a man who’s similar clothes instead gave off more of a sleep-deprived student vibe instead. His hair was mussed up as if he had been running his hands through it, and his eyes which fixed on Aaron with a frown were ringed with shadows.

“Ah, Mr Burr. Glad you could make it.”

Aaron took Washington’s offered hand, standing as he did so, and trying to notice that the man’s frown had turned into a full-on glare.

“I’m sorry about that chaos. We’re working on getting some more permanent office-space soon, but I’m afraid the madness is something you’ll have to get used to. That is, if you’re still interested in helping out with the message around here?”

“Very, sir.”

“Then welcome to *Washington for America,*” the governor smiled. “God know’s we’re going to need all the help we can get in the coming months.” He gestured to the other man. “This is
Alexander Hamilton. He’s been running communication pretty much single handedly so far, and the two of you are going to working very closely together. Burr meet Alexander, Alexander meet Aaron Burr, and for the love of God sort yourselves out quickly. We have a campaign to win, let’s move along people!”

An intern appeared with clipboard and Washington followed her away, leaving Aaron alone in the room with Hamilton. Who hadn't stopped glaring at him.

“Can I help you?” he asked.

“Aaron Burr, sir. I know who you are, you know.”

“I’m glad to hear that, considering we’ll be working together.” Aaron said, dryly.

“No. I heard your name at Princeton. You’re the guy who graduated in two years, and then never expressed a single opinion ever again.”

Aaron kept his face neutral. He knew his reputation. He’d heard this all before. “It’s worked for me so far.”

“Well it’s not going to work here. Washington’s a good man, and we’re trying to do the real thing here.”

“And you think I’m not? Look around, Hamilton, we’re standing in a store cupboard. Does this look like somewhere I’d come if I didn’t see something special in Washington, and I wasn't prepared to put in the work to make it a reality? At the end of the day, I can get him elected.”

“But how much of him will be left by the time you’ve finished whitewashing our message so that we never say anything of any value?”

Aaron sighed internally. He had met so many people like Hamilton over the years, idealists who got into politics with big dreams and big beliefs, but who weren’t prepared to accept the nature of the game. You didn’t get elected without making friends, and you didn't make friends if you mouthed off the entire political board. This campaign had potential, but it would need his help if Washington wanted to even get out the starting gates.

“By the sounds of it, we’re going to be spending a lot of time working together. I suggest you get over yourself and maybe we can make something that’s going to last here.”

Aaron walked out of the office before Hamilton could reply, and took a deep breath. This was going to be a long campaign.

--

Now

Martha: It sounds like working fro the campaign is a huge commitment and sacrifice on the part of the individual staffer. That requires a huge drive. Did you always know this was what you wanted to do?

Alex: Absolutely.

John: Absolutely not
Eliza sniggers, and Angelica just rolls her eyes.

John: What Alex means to say, is that he is one of the few lucky ones who has know he wants to run the world since he would walk. The rest of us, not so much. We each found our own way to it, I suppose. Like me, I was a lawyer before I joined Washington for America.

Eliza: And I was still living with my Dad

Angelica: And me? I was already working in a cut-throat, dog-eats-dog world. Hollywood.

---

Four years ago

Angelica hoisted the cardboard box out of her car with a groan. Who knew desk supplies were so heavy? Well, ex-desk supplies, she supposed, because she no longer had a desk to put them on. Or a job to sit at the desk and do.

Damn all these big-shot movie producers to hell. If she hadn't desperately needed that job, Angelica would have said good riddance, the lot of them. They were the most arrogant, pompous prats she had ever had the misfortune to work with, but what could she say? The pay in Hollywood was good, and any movie that wanted to be anything needed good media relations. That was where she came in, or at least where she had before one terrible movie she had been forced to market flopped, and the company had scapegoated her to save face. Screw them all, she thought bitterly, manoeuvring her box around a taxi parked in front of her building.

The lift, of course, was broken, leaving Angelica no choice but to lug the box up six floors herself. By the time she made it to her flat she was sweating in the LA heat, and breathing heavily. Wow, she must be a mess. Good thing she was a lonely failure, and there was no one waiting in her flat for her, she thought bitterly, not bothering to sweep the hair that stuck to her face away as she unlocked the door. She was holding the box in front of her face as she walked in, blindly feeling her way to the counter where she set it down with a thump. So Angelica could be forgiven for not noticing that she wasn't alone in the flat until someone cleared their throat and said “Rough day?”

Angelica would deny it later, but she shrieked in surprise and turned around to see the man sitting on her sofa.

“Alex?” she asked incredulously. “Is that you?”

He smiled. “The one and only.”

Alex held out his arms, and she accepted his hug. He would just have to deal with her being sweaty and disgusting. They had been friends at college, bonding over a mutual love of hot-pockets and kicking the crap out of sexists, but she had barely seen him in years. The last she heard, he was hoping to get some work with some congressman in DC, so what the hell he was doing on the other side of the country she had no idea.

“How did you get into my flat, Hamilton?”

“I’m magic. And I may have told your landlord that I was your boyfriend. But that’s unimportant! There’s a million things we’ve got to do!”

“Slow down,” she said, trying not to laugh. It was hard though - Alex was exactly how she
remembered him, a non stop blur of energy. “I still don’t know what you’re doing here.”

“Right! Have you heard of George Washington?”

She racked her brains. The name had been in the news recently. “He’s the governor of Virginia, right? Didn’t he just announce he was running for President?”

“Bingo! And you’re looking at his new campaign manager. Well, co-campaign manager, but still!”

“Seriously? Wow, Alex, congratulations!” And she meant it. He’d always dreamed of making t big in politics, of changing the country that had given him everything for the better. Well, so had she, once, but Angelica had long since found out that when you worked in media, the money was much better and the work much easier to come by in pretty much any other job in the world.

“How about you?” Alex asked. “Are you on board yet? We’ve got a long way to go yet before we do anything worth congratulating. And I was thinking maybe you could come help with that?”

She blinked, taken aback. “Me?”

“Yeah, you. You know how to handle the press, how to spin bad news and make the most of the good stuff. The Governor asked for you personally.”

“The governor doesn’t have the first clue who I am, does he?” she challenged, crossing her arms.

“Okay, not so much.” Alex admitted. “But I persuaded him to let me fly out here, so he must like the sound of you.”

“I don’t know, Alex. I’ve got a life here. I can’t just throw it all away and go running across the country to work on a campaign which may or may not collapse within months, no matter how nicely you ask. I’m sorry.”

Alex stood up defiant. “Why not?” He nodded at the box on her table. “It looks to me like you need a job. We’ve got one. This is your chance, Angelica.”

She sighed, but she already knew her answer. “Who else is on the team?”

“Important staffers? Just Aaron Burr so far.”

“Who?”

“Exactly.” he grimaced. “But don’t worry, I’ve got a fully thought out plan to change that.”

She laughed. Alex and his mad schemes, which had an annoying habit of working brilliantly. “Oh really? What’s stage one?”

He looked at her. “If you’re on board? You.”

--

Now

Martha: So you all came from different worlds before you joined the campaign. Was it difficult to adapt?
Eliza: You don’t get the luxury of finding the transition difficult. From day 1 it’s all go, and you get to speed or get left behind.

John: If anything, it’s the decision to go for it at all that’s the difficult one.

He shoots a quick look at Alex, who grins

Martha: What do you mean?

John: You know if you sign on, it’s going to change your life one way or the other. Taking that leap… it’s not easy to just close your eyes and jump off a cliff.

--

Four years ago

“Laurens. Laurens!”

John jerked his head up sharply, hoping to God that he didn't look like a man who’d almost fallen asleep in the middle of possibly the most important meeting of his life. At least that’s what they were saying, anyway, that if they managed to close this deal it would be huge for the firm, and for John as well. No one had said as much to him, but John could read between the lines and if he could help successfully negotiate this merger, there might well be a partnership in it for him. It was a nice thought: John Laurens, youngest guy to make partner at Germantown and Co. law firm. His father would approve, that was for sure. If only John could convince himself it was what he really wanted.

“Yes sir?”

His boss frowned at him across the conference table. “Didn’t you hear me the first time? I said there’s some guy in your office insisting he see’s you. He won’t leave until he does.”

“What guy?”

“Said his name was Alexander Hamilton?”

John up, suddenly wide awake. Alex was here? What the hell?

“Alex was here? What the hell? “If you’ll excuse me for a minute?” he said, clumsily getting to his feet and walking out the meeting.

He hadn't seen Alex in… God, in almost three years now. Sure, they talked on the phone occasionally, sent an email ever now and again and made plans to catch up that somehow always seemed to fall through, but this was completely out of the blue. That was what happened when you graduated a year before your best friend and moved to New York to become a hot-shot corporate lawyer, apparently. John was confused as hell, but he couldn't hide the goofy grin that spread across his face as he opened his office door.

“Alex?”

Alex, who had been examining his law degree with distaste spun around. He looked out of place, standing in John’s office in jeans and a scruffy jacket, hair loose around his face. A ghost from another chapter of his life, colliding with the present.

“Well it’s about time, Laurens. I though they were gonna throw me out.”
“That takes me back,” John smiled and pulled Alex into a tight hug. “What are you even doing here? I thought you were down in DC?”

“Yeah, not any more. Slight change of circumstances.”

“Aww shit, Alex. I’m sorry.” He really was. It was all Alex had ever wanted for as long as John had known him, to be working at the heart of American government, writing change into existence. And now it sounded like he’d lost the chance.

“Oh no, don’t be. I quit. I’m running Washington’s campaign now.”

“George Washington?”

“You know any other Washingtons running for President? Of course George Washington. And I want you on my team.”

John blinked. “You’re joking.”

“Nope. You were always a writer, John. You’re wasted on this lawyer business.”

“I can’t, Alex. I’ve got a life here now, a career. I’m going to make partner by the end of the month if this goes well, and I can’t just throw it all away for one of your escapades.”

“It’s not one of my escapades. This is it. What we always talked about.”

“And you can promise that?”

“Of course I can’t promise we’re gonna win, but if I had you on the team-“

“That’s not what I mean.” John interrupted. “Can you promise that Washington is the real thing? The one you wait for? The guy that runs once in a generation that you drop everything to follow?”

Alex bit his lip, and despite the years that had passed John knew exactly what he was thinking. He wanted to say yes, desperately, but he couldn’t. And John and Alex had been through too much to lie to each other. “I don’t know.” he admitted finally. “Not yet.”

“Then figure it out. I’ve got to get back to this meeting. You gonna be around later?”

Alex nodded, and John turned to leave. He was almost at the door when Alex said “And if I do know? For sure I mean, that Washington’s the real thing. Do you want me to tell you?”

John smiled softly. “You won’t need to tell me. You’ve got a pretty crappy poker face.”

It was over a month before John saw Alex again, by which time he had almost forgotten about their conversation. His work had become all consuming, exhaustingly so, and there were only so many times he could tell himself to keep pushing through, because this was his way up in the world. But the deal was going well, and John was almost convinced he would be offered a partnership within the week if he got all the final contracts signed.

It was in one of these final meetings when it happened. There was a rainstorm outside, water lashing against the conference room windows. The noise was so loud that John didn't hear the knocking sound, and it was only when one of his colleagues muttered “What in the hell…?” that he looked up from his paperwork.

Alex was standing on the other side of the glass door, soaked to the skin and dripping from head to toe. He was tapping gently on the glass, eyes fixed on John, who put his pen down with a
questioning look. Alex didn’t say a word, just pointed at the cheesy grin spreading across his face. Slowly he gave a single nod.

Alex knew. This was the real thing, what he was offering, and he had come all the way to New York through a rainstorm to tell him. It was absurd, crazy, the stupidest thing John could ever even consider doing…

He stood up, closing his notes, and walked towards the door.

“Laurens!” his boss said. “Where do you think you’re going?”

John only smiled, his grin as wide as Alex’s. “Mount Vernon!”

--

Now

Martha: We’re almost out of time, folks. I’ve got one more question for all of you. Sacrificing a huge chunk of your life, your home, your friends, careers in some cases, all to join Washington’s election campaign. Was it worth it?

Aaron: Without a doubt.

Angelica: Definitely. We’re making real changes now, and that has to be worth a few difficult months

Alex: We’re doing it all again. That should say it all.

John: Crap, we are aren’t we? Laughs. But yes, worth every second. God knows where I’d be today if I wasn’t doing this.

Eliza: God knows who we’d be as well. Because doing this, it changes you. You grow, you learn, you do things you never dreamed you could. Wow, that’s cheesy, sorry! But it’s true! All it needs is someone to take a chance on you.

--

3 and a half years ago

“Hey, John, you seen my schedule for Kansas?”

“No idea, sorry,“

“Try your desk, dumb-ass,” Angelica shouted from across the bull-pen and he cheerfully shot her a salute as he headed for his office. His and John’s office, in truth, but they were lucky to have one at all, considering most people in the campaign just had a desk in the central bull-pen. At least they’d moved out of the camping shop now, into real hired office space. And it could be worse. He could have to share with Burr.

He opened the door, and stopped, confused. There was a girl sitting behind his desk, talking on his phone and writing on one of his sticky notes. “I’m sorry,” she was saying, “Mr Hamilton’s out of
state on a campaign function then. Would you like him to get back to you when he’s back on Monday? Brilliant, thanks.”

She hung up and Alex cleared his throat loudly. Not that he tended to mind finding pretty girls in his office, but this was kind of odd.

“Oh hi, do you have an appointment with Mr Hamilton?”

“I am Mr Hamilton.”

Her face fell for a moment, before she smiled again. “Right. I’m Eliza. Eliza Schuyler. I’m your new assistant.”

The name did sound familiar, but he was pretty sure someone would have told him if he was getting any more staff. “I have a new assistant?”

“Yeah. Me.”

He closed the door with a frown. “Who assigned you here?”

“This kid on the main desk. I didn’t get his name, exactly, but—“

“Eliza…”

“Fine. No-one okay? But you’re going to need an assistant at some point, and I can be good at this.”

“So you just hoped no one would notice we didn’t hire you?”

“You’re the first one to notice in fairness. Mr Hamilton—“

“God, you make me sound like my Dad. Alex, okay? But you can’t stay, I’m sorry. We’re packing up and taking the campaign on the road next week.”

“I’ll pay my own way.”

He sighed. “This is an election campaign, not a place for people to see the world and make something of themselves.”

“Why can’t it be both?”

Alex opened his mouth, but just then he worked out why her name was familiar. “Hang on, Schuyler? As in Phillip Schuyler? The senator?”

She grimaced. “He’s my father.”

“Your father? Why the hell didn't you go to him if you wanted a job in politics?”

“Because then I’m only getting hired because of who my dad is. I want to make it on my own merit, or not at all.”

Alex looked at her, honesty and determination written clear across his face, trying to hold back the smile on his. He really shouldn’t hire her. Really…

He pulled off the staff badge that was hanging around his neck and threw it across the room to her. She caught it, surprised.
“We move out next Thursday. If you’ve impressed me by then, you can come.”

“You won’t regret it.”

And Alex didn’t. It took that single week for him to wonder how he’d ever managed to function without her. He slid her her train ticket across the desk one morning, and when she smiled warmly before jumping up to stop him shredding the wrong document, he knew he’d made the right decision.

Three weeks into the campaign on the road, and it was obvious Eliza was wasted as an assistant. It was Angelica who eventually pulled him aside and asked him why the hell she hadn't been promoted yet, much to Alex’s relief. Because he wanted to promote her, he just wanted to be sure it wasn't just his own selfish reasons clouding his judgement. As Eliza’s boss, it would have been wrong to even think about asking her out. But now… well, who knew what could happen in the future?

Chapter End Notes

Sorry about the lack of plot advancement as well. I was gonna put in all the flashbacks earlier when Alex was at the hospital (à la West Wing) but it got way too long so I had to save them for now.

And I'm really excited to tell you guys that I finally got around to publishing my 'deleted scenes' as it were. It's basically just a collection of extras to go along-side the main fic that didn't fit in anywhere or that I decided to cut. I'll update that one every Sunday (and the main fic will now get new chapters whenever I can) to make my life a bit easier. So if you're in the mood for Twitter battles, Aaron generally having a hard time of it, and the introduction of a certain 9 year old poet, please go check out Decisions are made (by those who rise up)

Shameless self-promo over. Have a good day y'all
“Break it up, you two.” she smiled. “We’re about done back there.”

“How was the D section?” Alex asked urgently. “Did he land it? Because we talked about how the emphasis should always be-“

“The President did good. Stop stressing.”

Alex threw up his hands. “I knew it. He never listens when I tell him about the cadence in his voice, every time!”

“We wrote it,” John pointed out. “The speech will have been fine.”

The continued to bicker good naturally the whole way back, and Eliza couldn't help but notice that something had shifted between her friends. There had always been a camaraderie between the two of them that she’d secretly envied, the way they played off each other’s ideas and seemed to always know the other’s arguments before he’d made them. It was the sort of thing that wouldn't be out of place on the battlefield or on some great war council of old (if the two of them weren’t massive nerds and wars were fought through well rounded political oratory than through violence, that was.) But
recently… well, she just hoped that the two of them would get their acts together some time soon. It was getting ridiculous.

“Why don’t you just make the damn speech yourself next time?” John asked. “We can cut the ponytail off and pretend you’re the President. It’ll be great.”

Alex’s hands flew unconsciously to his hair as if to protect it, and Elia began to laugh. She shut up a moment later, however, when they walked out of the last of the high crop towards the stage and she stopped dead.

“Oh shit.” she said.

“What?” Alex asked, before taking another look at the scene and executing a perfectly-timed double take that, under any other circumstances would have been funny.

People were taking apart the temporary stage, stacking plastic chairs into piles and generally making the mess associated with post-speech clear up. But there was not a white house staffer anywhere in sight.

“Where the hell is everyone?” John asked, frowning.

“Excuse me,” Eliza approached a spotty-faced volunteer who was busy untangling microphone cables. “Do you know where the motorcade is?”

The guy straightened. “Sure. It’s over there,” he pointed over Eliza’s shoulder, and they turned just in time to see the procession of black cars, stars and stripes flying, driving down the road in the distance.

“Did… did they forget us?” John asked.

“HEY! WAIT!” Alex yelled, waving his arms and running after them fruitlessly. Eliza and John just shared a look, one that simply said _fuck_.

--

“Hey, Alex, can you sit in on my meeting with commerce this afternoon?” Angelica asked, balancing her phone between her ear and shoulder as she struggled around her office with about twenty folders in her arms. That was the problem with trying to run a successful presidential campaign at the same time as a country; there were days when the workload and the entire West Wing just spiralled into chaos. “I could really do with your help in organising the committee.”

“Yeah, that’s not gonna happen.” Alex’s voice was faint through the poor connection.

“Why not? Hang on, I’ll come down to your office.”

She dumped the workload in an undignified pile on her desk and made her way towards the door, when Alex said “No, don’t do that! I’m not in my office.”

“Then where the hell are you? I didn’t think you had anything this morning.”

“Um, Kansas?”

She stopped. “Kansas?”
“Yeah.”

“And what exactly are you doing in Kansas?”

He sounded sheepish. “We may have missed the motorcade and got stranded in some random field.”

Of course he had. This man was supposed to advise the President, for God’s sakes, and he couldn’t even manage to - wait a second. “We?”

“Me and John and Eliza.”

She paused, replayed what he’d said, and then there was nothing to do but laugh. She was practically cackling, Angelica knew, but she couldn’t help it. The silence on the other end as she clutched her desk for support told her that Alex was waiting for her to get it out of her system, and imagining his expression as he listened to her laughing down the phone only made it twice as funny. Eventually, he asked “You finished?” and she pulled herself together.

“Yeah, sorry. You gotta admit it’s pretty funny, though.”

“Not from where I’m standing.”

“Where is that exactly?” she asked. “You guys still in the middle of a field?”

“Nah, we’re… John, where the hell are we? Darwin Springs, apparently, some tiny backroad town. We got a lift in the back of a truck. Apparently there’s a bus that can take us to Lawrence, where we can get a train to Kansas city, where there’s a coach we’ll be able to catch to DC if we get across the town quick enough, and…”

“You organised this?” Angelica asked, sceptical that Alex would be able to do more than wring his hands and panic.

“God no. This was all Eliza. She hasn’t been off the phone since we worked out we were screwed.”

“So you guys just sat back and let her do all the work?”

“I scored us a lift into town!” John’s voice interjected.

“Yeah, on a turnip truck.”

“Pick-up truck. And it got us here in one piece, didn't it?”

“Boys!” Angelica shouted because as entertaining as it was to listen to them squabble down the phone there were more pressing matters. “Let’s stay focused, shall we? When are you gonna get back?”

“Sometime this evening. So I need you to do me a favour and cancel all our meetings today. Me and John are supposed to be seeing Paine, Eliza’s got a thing with campaign advertising…”

“I’ll get it sorted. Anything else?”

“Yeah. I need you to go and kick Burr’s head in for leaving us in the middle of freaking nowhere. Do you think he did it on purpose? Because I do.”

Angelica heard Eliza shout at Alex, although she couldn’t make out what had been said, and John shoot something back hotly. She smiled. “Honestly? It wouldn’t surprise me.”
“So that could have gone better.” John commented dryly.

“You think?” Eliza shot back. “Not only did we miss the bus and have to catch a more expensive train which happened to be going in the wrong direction, but now, after I wrecked a perfectly good pair of shoes sprinting across town, it turns out that this bus stop doesn't even exist.”

“Hey, look on the bright side,” said Alex, gesturing to his cardboard cup. “We found coffee.”

She glared at him, and Alex decided that the safest course of action would be to shut up. If Eliza, the most lovely person he had ever met, was pissed off… well, that just went to show how badly things were going wrong. The bus hadn't been his fault - he was perfectly content to blame the incomprehensible timetables in Kansas for that one - but even Alex had to admit that getting on the wrong train had been his mistake.

At least John was seeing the funny side.

“So what now?” John asked.

“I just got off the phone with campaign logistics.” Eliza said. “There’s no-one on staff in the area who can give us a lift—”

“Where is the area, exactly?” Alex interjected. He would be hard pressed to even tell you what state they were in right now.

Eliza just shot him a look and carried on as if she hadn't heard. “- but one of the kids who volunteers, you know, pamphlets and stuff, got his licence last month, so if he can borrow his Mom’s car…”

“This is nuts.”

“Come on Hamilton, where’s your sense of adventure?” John teased.

“Left behind on the side of the road where our bus got a puncture.”

“Alex…” Eliza began, but the sound of her ringtone interrupted her. She smiled ruefully and moved away to take the call.

As soon as she had gone around the corner, Alex closed the space between him and John to plant a kiss stealthily on his lips. He was rewarded with a muffled “mmfff!” of surprise, before John relaxed into the kiss, lips moving in time with Alex’s and parting slightly, an invitation too tempting to refuse. But a moment later, John pulled away, and placed a hand squarely on Alex’s chest to push him away.

“What the hell was that?” John demanded.

“I thought it was fairly obvious.” Alex replied, raising an eyebrow. John just shook his head.

“Are you out of your mind? What if someone sees?”

“Look around, John. There’s no-one here. And even if there was, we’re in the back end of nowhere. No-one’s going to know who we are.”

It was true. They were standing on an empty high street (if this tiny cluster of stores could be called a
high street) with not a soul in sight. Still, John scanned the shopfronts and house windows with a worried eye, as if expecting cameras and reporters to jump out at any moment. Alex took his hand.

“Relax. It’s fine.”

“We’ve got to be more careful. It’s not just us at stake here.”

Alex grimaced. He knew what John was saying was true, especially now they were campaigning for re-election. The wrong person seeing the wrong thing could wreck everything. But they had been careful. Always maintaining a certain distance from each other in public, being sure not to let a single word or action slip. It wasn’t easy, and it sure as hell wasn’t fun, not now that Alex knew exactly how John’s lips tasted, the way his hands felt on his body, but it was worth it. If it meant that he got to keep John, and keep doing the work he loved, it was all worth it.

“Don’t you trust me?” he teased.

“Of course I trust you. Not to get on the right train, or to get my coffee order right or anything, but, you know, in general.”

Alex smiled, and was about to reply when Eliza called out “We’ve got ourselves a lift! He’s gonna pick us up in front of the the police station. What are you two girls talking about?”

“But as they they trooped up the world, Alex didn’t miss the quick road John shot his way.

“Are you allowed to campaign for the President?” Hercules asked, confused. “I thought that foreign diplomats were supposed to be separate from party politics?”

“Special case.” Laf smiled. “I pulled a few strings and got permission to openly campaign for your re-election.”

“Gilbert’s support is no secret.” Washington added. “He was campaigning for me long before anyone made him ambassador.”

“And besides, did no-one tell you? I’m America’s favourite fighting Frenchman!”

The three of the were sitting in the Oval Office, co-ordinating schedules for the next few weeks. Eliza would have been here, except for the fact that she’d somehow gotten herself stranded in the midwest. Herc still wasn’t sure how she’d managed that, but he’d get the full story later. For now, he’d offered to step in and give Washington a hand with the scheduling. He had the President’s whole timetable pretty much mapped out in his head anyway.

By now, there was little doubt in anyone’s mind that Washington would stand as the Democratic candidate in November. There were no major challengers in the party (one hurried meeting had dissuaded John Adams from launching a rival campaign.) But what was less than good news was that there was no doubt that he would be facing George King. The man had spent the last two months sprouting hate, strutting around as if he ruled the world, and inexplicably winning over half
the country.

He had the support of some pretty major political forces as well as just the electorate. Seabury had been the first major figure to declare his support for the King campaign, although Herc was pretty sure that everyone was secretly relieved about that one. Or, as Alex had put it, “Gives us a free pass to trash him.” Charles Lee had been next, and while that one was hardly a surprise, given his history with the President, it was a damaging blow none the less. And only yesterday, the latest round of figures to jump on the King bandwagon had shown their faces. Including, among others, Henry Laurens. No one had wanted to break that particular news to John, but he hadn't seemed surprised, just given a soft shake of his head and asked “What’s next?”

“I think we’re done here.” Washington said, some time later. So we’ll see you in Chesapeake for the rally?”

“Wouldn’t miss it for the world.” Laf smiled. “Try not to have all the fun before I get there.”

He stood and hugged Washington, something Herc had never seen anybody but his wife do, yet it seemed totally natural when Laf did it (he amused himself for a moment imagining Washington’s face if any other member of his staff tried that), then the Frenchman turned to him.

“I’d better be going. Things are not the most stable at home right now, it wouldn't do to be away from the office for too long.”

Herc offered to walk him out. “So what’s the problem in France? I didn't see anything on the news-“

“You wouldn't have. Let’s just say that our dealings with the British have been somewhat frosty of late. Nothing that can’t be handled, bien sûr.”

He said it all with a big grin on his face, and Herc frowned, instantly suspicious. “What’s going on, Laf?”

“What do you mean?”

“Why are you in such a good mood all of a sudden? Usually just the word British is enough to piss you off all day.”

Laf shook his head ruefully. “I can get nothing past you, it seems. If you really want to know…? Adrienne and I have decided to give it another go.”

“Seriously? That’s awesome, man.” And Herc meant it. Adrienne was Laf’s on-again, off-again, long distance girlfriend who lived in Paris. He had never met her, obviously, but from what he could see, Laf was absolutely head over heals for this girl. So whoever she was, she must be a pretty special lady.

“I know. And, the way things are going, I might have a chance to see her soon.”

“What do you mean? You’re not going home, are you?”

“And abandon you all and this country to King? I think not.” Laf looked offended. “But work will probably send me on a trip to France sooner or later to sort this mess out. It seems that America isn't the only country I must single-handedly save from disaster.”

Herc rolled his eyes. Lafayette really was an idiot. “Good to know you’ve got such faith in our campaign.”
“You, I have faith in. The rest of these crétins? Not so much. I mean, how do you miss a motorcade? Aren’t they supposed to be obvious, by definition?”

“You’d have thought.”

They had reached the door, and Herc could see the black ambassadorial car already waiting. “I suppose I’ll see you on the trail, then?”

“That you will. Oh, and Herc, do me a favour would you? If you could avoid mentioning the whole Adrienne thing to John and Alex and the others? Just for a while?”

“Yeah, okay. But why?”

Laf grimaced. “I fear they will not approve. Adrienne is the one thing we do not see eye to eye over for some reason. Ours has not been an easy relationship, true, but they only seem to see the bad in it.”

Well that was weird, no mistake. He’d never heard the guys say a bad word about Adrienne, but then they hadn’t discussed her at all, apart from mentioning her in passing while recounting some scandalous story with or other. But still, if it mattered to Laf…

“No problem.”

Lafayette was almost in the car when Herc frowned and called out “Hey, Laf, why did you tell me if you didn’t want anyone to know?”

He shrugged, a half-grin on his face. “Because, mon ami, you asked. So long!”

The Frenchman shot him a lazy salute, and then he was gone, and Herc couldn’t help the squirm of shame in his stomach. Because Laf trusted him with the truth, and Herc was still keeping a huge secret from them all.

Because he hadn’t told anyone about John André. He hadn’t told a soul he’d said yes.

--

There was no denying that it hurt that it had been Alexander of all people who told him. Aaron had been about 200 pages into the dullest commerce report he’d ever seen when Alexander had marched into his office with a copy of the Post. Still not bothering to knock, then, he sighed internally. Out loud, he said “What is it this time?”

“Why didn’t you tell us?” he demanded, throwing the paper down onto the desk. Aaron glanced at it. It was open to the announcements page, and it only took him a moment to find what he was looking for.

James Marcus Prevost is delighted to announce his engagement to Miss Theodosia Bartow.

His stomach twisted, and he was surprised at how much it hurt. It’s just that she didn’t tell you, he told himself forcefully. It’s just that you had to find out from Alexander. That’s all.

“Did you forget to tell us that Theo got engaged?”

“I didn't know,” he replied, honestly. “I haven't seen that much of her recently, and it’s not like we’re that close.”
“No? I thought you guys were.”

_The scent of sunlight and wet hair curling through his fingers._ “Not really.”

“You’ll get an invite to the wedding though, right?”

“I honestly don’t know.”

“Do you think I’d get invited?”

Aaron sighed, running his hand over his head. “Why do you want to go so badly? And don’t say open bar.”

Alexander, who had opened his mouth to reply paused, then closed it again. He grinned sheepishly. “I wasn’t going to. Say congrats from us when you see her, yeah?”

That had been almost two weeks ago, and Aaron hadn't heard so much as a word from Theo since. It was probably for the best, he knew, but he had been so afraid he’d wrecked everything with her and now it looked like that was exactly what had happened. It was his fault, but that didn’t change the fact that he found himself, crazily missing her. Which was ridiculous, but seemingly out of his control. This whole thing with Theo was out of control. Jesus, he needed help. He needed an expert in keeping it together in the face of disasters and dealing with the staff’s screw ups. He needed…

Angelica knocked. “You called?”

“Thank God. Close the door and sit down. I have a problem.”

“You don’t say. I think Alex may murder you. At the moment it’s only John and Eliza retaining him, and if they have to sit in one more turnip truck I think—”

“What are you talking about?”

“You didn’t hear? They managed to miss the motorcade in Kansas. Alex is convinced you ditched them on purpose.”

Aaron blinked, momentarily side-tracked. “Seriously? Oh God, what are the chances they make it back alive?”

“It’s fine, Eliza’s with them. If it was just the boys I’d have sent out the search parties already.”

“When did they- You know what, that’s not important right now. I’ve made a mistake and I need your help.”

Angelica frowned. “What did you do?”

“I kissed Theo.”

“You what? When?”

“About three weeks ago.”

“But isn't she-?”

“Yeah.”

“So why-?”
“Because I’m an idiot, Angelica. Because I’m a damn stupid fool who can’t recognise a good thing until he ruins it.”

Angelica pursed her lips. “You’re worried you’ve lost her as a friend?”

“Exactly.”

“But do you really just want to be her friend?”

“What do you mean?”

“Think about it.” She slid into a chair across the desk. “You kissed her, knowing full well she was with another guy. This is you we’re talking about here, I’ve never seen you do a thing that wasn’t meticulously thought out and planned within an inch of its life. I mean, no offence, but you’re not exactly what I’d call spontaneous.”

“I know that.” he said miserably.

“So what is it about this girl?”

“I don’t know. Nothing. I mean, she’s kind, and she makes me laugh, and she can swear in about twenty different languages and she doesn't know if she really wants to get married, and getting a text from her is the highlight of my day, and—“ He shut up abruptly, noticing Angelica’s single raised eyebrow and realising he was rambling. “Oh God, I’m screwed.”

“Not necessarily. She doesn't know if she wants to get married?”

“It’s the smart thing for her to do.”

“Doesn’t make it the right thing.”

“I won’t hurt her, Angelica. She deserves better than that.”

She cocked her head to one side, considering him. It was kind of freaky, to be honest. “You’ve changed, Aaron. I don’t know when, exactly, but…” she shook her head. “I can’t help you.”

“What?”

“Not until you figure out what you want. I can give you advise on how to make up with Theo and be her friend again, and sit there and watch her get married, but I’m not sure you want that. Not really.”

“And if I decide I want something different? Hypothetically, I mean.”

“Then, I would hypothetically tell you that you can lie in wait all you like but that won’t get you anywhere. Decisions are made by those who show up, Burr. That doesn't just apply to politics.”

“---”

“What’s so funny?” Eliza asked, frowning at the smirk on John’s face. The three of them were sitting in a bar across the road from the coach station. They’d managed, finally to find a coach that would take them into DC (having squeezed into a beat-up polo and been driven for the best part of an hour by a seventeen-year-old you wouldn't shut up about Taylor Swift) but it didn't leave for another three hours. And as far as the three of them were concerned, that meant drinking.
“Nothing.”

“No, really. I’d love to know what you could possibly find funny right now.”

“This.” John gestured around. “When was the last time any of us just sat in a bar and had a drink somewhere, when it wasn’t a meeting or damage control, or trying to get the dirt on someone?”

“That’s… actually a good question.” Alex said.

“Laf’s birthday.” Eliza prompted, and all three of them grimaced.

“I thought we’d agreed not to mention that night again.” John complained. The night itself had been great fun. The morning after… well, he was never drinking tequila again, put it that way.

“You brought it up.” she shrugged.

“It’s true, though.” John said. “We never get to do anything normal these days. “It all comes back to the work.”

“You’re only now getting this?” Eliza asked. “I thought you were supposed to be the smart one.”

“I’m the smart one!” Alex protested.

“No, you’re the idiot.” Eliza corrected.

“I got a scholarship to Kings! I’m a McArthur genius!”

“Doesn’t mean you can’t be an idiot as well.”

She stood up, ruffling his hair fondly as she did so, and Alex ducked his head out of her reach. Eliza laughed. “I don’t get any signal here. I’m gonna go see if my phone works outside. Make sure no-one’s started a war without us.”

“And that wouldn’t have anything to do with the cute guy standing next to the door who was giving you the eye?” John asked, partly because Eliza was fun to tease, but mostly because it made Alex choke on his bear next to him.

“Wouldn’t you like to know.” she grinned and strode away.

Alex craned his neck around to watch her go. “Which guy?” he demanded, and John had to laugh.

“Eliza can take care of herself. You know that if anyone tried anything she’d be more than capable of burning him to the ground herself. Or she’d just get Angelica to kick their asses. She’s fine.”

“But are you?”

John frowned. “What do you mean?”

“All this crap about not being normal. Where’s it coming from? Are you not happy, or-?”

“Alex, stop. I’m fine. I’m great. It’s just difficult, you know?”

“It doesn’t have to be.” Alex’s voice was barely a whisper, his hand brushing lightly over John’s on top of the bar. “It could be the easiest thing in the world. Screw what everyone else says. Screw them. Screw-“
“Screw you as well?” John teased, although he didn't move his hand away.

“That is the general idea.” Alex replied. “I mean it though. You just have to say yes, and I’ll shout it out for the whole world to hear.”

“No, Alex. We’ve been over this.” It was hard to concentrate on his argument with Alex smiling that infuriating half smile, just inches from his own face. “We’re not going public.”

“Say yes.”

“No.”

“Then say yes to this.”

Alex’s eyes were alive with dark light, glinting mischievously in the dusky room. His north star, John swallowed, mouth dry. There was nothing else to say, but “Yes.”

--

In a dark bar, across the road from a coach station in some nameless midwest state, two men sat kissing in a bar. No one paid them any notice; the bar was fairly empty as it was, and any patrons still in there had far better things to do than stare at the two of them. They didn't know that their names were John and Alex, that the two of them had been a long time coming, and that they worked for the President of the United States. They didn't care all that much, to be honest. That was someone else’s life.

Everyone, that was, except for one man sitting in a corner nursing the same drink he'd been on for the past hour. On the table in front of him sat a letter that he’d been reading and re-reading all evening. Only the words *we are sorry to inform you* were visible over the top of the envelope, but it didn't matter. He knew the words by heart anyway. He scowled, and knocked the rest of his drink back. It just wasn't fair. That job had been his for the taking, and now he was back to square one. No, not even that he was back to zero, because that was what he had to his name right now.

He looked up, trying to decide whether to call it a night or have one more lonely drink, and he froze as he caught sight of two figures sitting at the bar. There was no way that could be… It was.

He fumbled for his phone. Maybe he didn't have zero after all. The click of his camera went unnoticed in all the noise of the bar. Grinning, he checked his photos. They were poor quality, not as clear as they could have been.

But it would be enough.
So I'm not super happy with this one, but consider it the calm before the storm.

“We still need an answer for capital punishment, flag burning and proportional responses. If we can’t snappy deliver a response on them—”


“Relax?” he shook his head. “We have two days before Washington goes head to head with King, and one chance to get this right for the whole country to see. And it’s the ten word answers that are gonna make or break it.”

John fought the temptation to roll his eyes (a skill he’d practiced to perfection), electing instead to take another bite out of his pastry. He could understand why Alex was so antsy; the coming debate between Washington and George King, now the respective nominees for the election was a huge deal, what with the polls too close to call, and with many of the undecideds planning to make their minds up on their performance, but over the last few days Alex had spiralled into obsession over the smallest details. The colour of Washington’s tie. How long he would shake hands with King. The precise wording on any question he could possibly be asked. It was driving them all to distraction, and he doubted it was doing much good for the President’s blood pressure either.

“We’ll get it. That’s what we’re here for, right?”

“But what if we don’t?”

“Then Washington will still do brilliantly, and I’ll just have to distract you until the whole thing’s over.”

“And how exactly are you planning to do that, Laurens?”

John grinned. Alex was too easy, really. A slight inflection in his voice, a single quipped eyebrow, and could completely derail that brilliant mind, if only for a few minutes. “Wouldn’t you like to know.”

Alex swallowed, adams’s apple bobbing, and John had to remind himself not to do anything stupid, like kissing that infuriating look off of his face (and not stopping at kissing) when anyone could walk in and see them. The cabin offered some illusion of privacy, but he wasn’t fooled. Privacy didn’t exist at Camp David for all it was the Presidential retreat, and any minute they would be called back to what John had had privately christened Debate Boot Camp. Each staffer would take turns pretending to be King (although Burr had vetoed the ridiculous wig they’d somehow found) and grill Washington on every debate issue under the sun while everyone else scrutinised his performance until it was perfect. The whole thing was exhausting - and no wonder Alex was getting a little obsessive - but it had to be done. This upcoming debate, masterfully organised by Angelica, was their shot to win the election in a single move, and they couldn’t afford to throw it away.
“What did you want to see me about?” Aaron asked, pushing open the door into the kitchen with a yawn. It had been an exhausting day, between trying to prepare for every question under the sun and wondering if he was going to have to physically restrain Alexander, and all he wanted to do was go to bed. So, of course, as soon as he had made it to his room, Angelica texted him saying she had an urgent problem and she needed him right now.

“You kissed Theo? What the hell, Burr?”

He blinked. Sitting around the table was his whole team, John and Alexander looking like they’d been pulled from their respective beds, Eliza nursing the biggest cup of tea he’d ever seen, and Angelica sitting in the middle smiling wickedly. He turned to her, bewildered.

“What is this? You told them?”

She spread her arms. “May I present your war council. We’re sorting this shit out, and we’re doing it tonight.”

“This is possibly the worst time—“

“I don’t want to hear it.” she said, holding up a hand to silence him. “I told you to fix this weeks ago and you’ve done nothing. It was time for drastic action. Plus, we all need a distraction right now. Have you even spoken to her?”

He shifted uncomfortably, but sensed he wasn’t going to get out of this one. “I sent her a card to say congratulations. And, four days ago, I got an invitation.”

“See, told you you’d get invited!” Alexander chirped, and was immediately shut up when Eliza stamped on his foot.

“But was it a plus one invite?” John asked. “Because if it was a plus one that’s sending one signal, but if it wasn’t…”

“You think she’s sending messages through wedding invites?” Aaron said faintly. “You are aware we’re adults right, with access to phones and other normal ways of communication.

“Then use them. Pick up a phone and talk to her, dammit.”

“No.”

“Aaron, you can’t just—“

“No. I’m not doing this over the phone.” he said slowly. “I’ve got to… I’ve got to go see her.”

Angelica smiled triumphantly, and held up her mobile. “That’s what I thought you’d say. Your taxi’s gonna be her in fifteen minutes.”

He stared at her. “What, now?”

“Yes, now!”

“Okay, so here’s the plan.” Alex said. “I’m gonna be the good cop. You three are gonna be the bad cops. And Burr’s here—“
“Your not coming.”

He pouted. “We’re gonna miss all the fun.”

“You’re fired from the war council.”

It was as if in a daze that Aaron threw a random selection of items into his rucksack. This was madness. But he was really doing it. The car pulled up, the driver looking slightly terrified at all the security, and he got in the back seat.

“Good luck! You got this.” Angelica said.

They had began to pull away when Alexander shouted. “Hey, Burr! You love this woman?”

He nodded, because there was no point in denying it even to himself. Not anymore

“Go get her. What are you waiting for?”

Aaron grimaced. “I’ll see you on the other side.”

--

It was well past midnight by the time the taxi pulled up outside Theo’s apartment block, and Aaron had spent the last hour and a half going through every reason that this was a terrible idea in his head. And ignoring all of them. It was time to go after what he wanted for once in his life, even though this was sure to end in disaster. His friends were clearly horrible influences on him. He looked up at the building, swallowed, and climbed out.

His heart was in his mouth by the time he reached her door, four flights of stares and two minutes of building panic later. This was it, his last chance to run and-

Aaron knocked.

There was no response, and he was almost ready to turn around and go when the door opened. To his dismay, there was a man standing in the doorway wearing a dressing gown. He was taller than Aaron with sandy blond hair and that carelessly handsome air that women seemed to fall in love with. This must be James Prevost. Little wonder Theo was with someone like him.

“Can I help you?” he asked.

At once, all the reasons this was the single stupidest thing that Aaron had ever done came flooding back. “I, um, I need to talk to Theo. It’s kind of important, and-“

“She’s not here.”

“What?”

“She’s not here.” Prevost grimaced, bitterness writ clear across it, and Aaron frowned. What the hell was going on? “She’s…” Prevost trailed off, eyes narrowing. “Hold on. Are you Aaron Burr?”

“Yeah. Why-?”
He punched him. Aaron didn't see it coming, had no time to prepare or defend himself before pain erupted between his eyes and suddenly he was on the floor. He blinked up at the man, a little dazed.

“What was that for?” he demanded.

Prevost’s face twisted into a snarl. “If you’re Aaron then you know full well where she is. Fuck off.” The door slammed shut behind him and it was all Aaron could do to stare at it, perplexed. That and try to stem the bleeding from his nose. He had no idea what had just happened, but it couldn't be good. And he had a horrible feeling that it was all his fault. I’m so sorry, Theo, he thought miserably. Then he frowned. Prevost had thought Aaron would know where she was. Did that mean…? He ran for the stairs.

This time the taxi ride passed in a blur, not because he couldn't believe he was doing something so stupid, but because he could hardly hear his thoughts as they competed for space inside his head. If there was the slightest chance that this meant what he thought it meant…

When they arrived at his flat, he threw a twenty at the driver and all but sprinted into the building, taking stairs two at a time, heart pounding frantically like a caged bird. He didn't stop until he reached his corridor, and saw the figure sitting on the floor by his door.

“Theo?”

She looked up at him, eyes red, and the relief was palpable across her face. “Aaron! I came over and you weren't here and you weren't picking up your phone and I didn't know what else to do and I-“

“Theo, talk less.” He realised with a silent curse that he must have left his mobile in his room in his rush to get back to D.C.

She took a deep breath. “Right sorry, You were probably off saving the world from a nuclear war or something.”

“I was at Camp David. I just got back.”

“Camp…? Yeah that figures. I’m sorry, I shouldn't have come here, I…” She trailed off, frowning. “What happened to your face?”

Aaron frowned, touching his eye and wincing at the spike of pain under his fingers. The damn thing must have bruised. “I met your fiancé.”

“What?”

“He didn't seem best pleased to see me, I have to say.”

Her hands flew to his face. “Oh my God, James did that to you? And it’s all my fault. But hang on, when was this?”

“About…” he checked his watch “Sixteen minutes ago. When I went to your place.”

“It’s not my place anymore. That’s why I’m here. I sort of broke it off with James.”

He gaped, brain stalling.

“Can we not do this in the middle of the corridor?” she asked, drawing an arm around herself a little self-consciously, and for the first time Aaron noticed the chill of the hall, and the way Theo was shivering.
“Of course,” he managed, fumbling for his keys and trying desperately to remember how to unlock the door while his brain repeated the words I sort of broke it off with James on a loop. He eventually managed to open the bloody thing, and the two of them found themselves standing in of all places, his kitchen. All the words being left unsaid hovered in the air between them, making it difficult to draw breath. Eventually, he gestured to a chair. “Do you want to tell me what happened.”

She sat. “I told him about the kiss. He didn’t take it well, didn’t even let me finish trying to explain before suddenly we were screaming and… you know, I don’t think we’d ever had a proper fight before, and everything I’d never said just came pouring out. And then he asked me if I even wanted to get married and I realised something.”

“What?”

“That I didn’t.”

“Then what do you want?” What do you want, Burr? What do you stall for?

“This is starting to sound like the notebook,” she teased, but he could tell the joke was more about avoiding the question than anything else.

“Theo…”

She smiled softly. “You know, I have no idea. For the first time in my life I have no clue what I want, but I know it’s not moving to Georgia and being the housewife everyone seems to want me to be. That much, I know.”

She lowered her eyes, silence fell between them, not an awkward one but not what you would call comfortable either. The two of them were at a limbo, a crossroads, neither wanting to stay were they were yet both unwilling to take a step forwards incase it was the wrong one. Eventually Theo looked up at him again. “What were you doing at my place, Aaron?”

“I was looking for you.”

“Why?”

His tongue was heavy in his mouth, but Aaron had spent the whole night working out exactly what he was going to say. He’d spent far longer than that, if he was being honest. “Because I’ve finally worked out what it is that I want. And that I’m willing to fight for it.” He moved his hands to cover hers on the table, making sure there was no way she could miss what he was trying to say. Her mouth formed a small oh of surprise and for one horrible moment Aaron thought he’d miscalculated, that he’d made a horrible horrible mistake and ruined everything again. And then, she smiled. “Is that right?”

He could have shot back with some witty reply, but in the end it was easier to just lean across the table and kiss her. This wasn't the impulsive rush of lips colliding and rain-soaked hair, nor the recklessness with which Alexander attacked life, all fire and no thought for the consequences. This was the easiest thing in the world, the breath of fresh air at the end of the long day. And when Theo smiled against his lips, as if they had all the time in the world, he knew that this had been worth waiting for.

--
“Mr Mulligan, could you please explain to me what it is you think we do here? In other words, what is the job of the secret service?”

He frowned, shifting uncomfortably. All these years, gladly suffering any job if it would get him or his family up in the world, and Hercules still couldn't stand being talked down to. It happened surprisingly often, he’d found, people underestimating him as soon as looking at him, assuming that the only talent of an aide was to carry the President’s bags or take phone calls. If only. Still, there was something in the way that John André had phrased the question, or maybe it was more in his body language, that had Herc convinced that this was more of a trick question than a deliberate snub.

It was two weeks since he’d decided he wanted to important with his life and told André he was interested, but he hadn't heard a word back until now. Hercules wasn't stupid. The President and the entire senior had gone up to Camp David for two days to prepare for the debate, and suddenly André wanted to meet with him. All of a sudden, he had a feeling that this was more than just a future job offer.

“To protect the President.” he said carefully. “To protect the President from every kind of threat.”

“Correct.” André said (his smile saying anything but,) “And do you know what the most important kind of threat is? The kind that our dear Commander in Chief doesn't even know exists. And for that reason, we need to provide him with protection he never even knows he has.”

“I’m not following.”

“Agents in dark suits standing at the door, strolling down ropiness and talking into their watches? Anyone can spot them. And true, that’s part of their purpose, to be the visible presence of the security detail. But these agents lack a certain, let’s say finesse. A subtly I was hoping you might bring to the table.”

“What you want me undercover or something?”

“Precisely.”

Herc snorted. “This is ridiculous. I didn’t sign up for any of this spy shit. I’m out of here.”

André held out an arm to catch him. “Then what did you sign up for?”

“I don’t know.” He shrugged. “Somewhere for my career to go if I decide I don’t want to hold doors open for the rest of my life? A chance to protect people?”

“Both of which you would achieve under our guidance. Don’t you want to make more of yourself? Plus earn a handsome pay rise while you’re at it?”

“I don’t care about the money.”

“Sure you don’t. But what about that brother of yours. Doesn't he start college in the fall?”

Herc didn't even waste time wondering how the hell André knew about Hugh. “Virginia Tech. But I got it covered.”

He shrugged. “if you’re sure.”

Herc gritted his teeth. “And what happened to Hugh if I get myself killed running around playing
“007, huh? What happens to him if some random nutter decides it’s a good idea to try and blow up the President?”

“You should have thought of that before you started working in the White House. Except I want you to help me stop the random nutter before he can hurt anyone.”

And damn him to hell, but Herc already knew what he was going to say. “And I couldn’t tell anyone?”

“Security reasons.” André replied smoothly. “You know how these things are.”

He didn’t like it. But he liked the idea of not doing something meaningful with his life even less. And the President already had the best security in the world. What was the worst that could happen? “Okay I’m in. Where do we start?”

---

“Has anyone heard from Burr?” Alex asked for the millionth time, running a hand through his hair in agitation. For once, Angelica couldn't blame his stress. The debate that may well decide the presidential election was due to start in just under an hour, and still there was no sign of the Chief of Staff at the Yorktown lecture theatre, leaving the burden of the work on everyone else’s shoulders. Privately, it wasn't the workload she was worried about, but what had happened between Aaron and Theo. She had all but thrown him into that taxi, and while she didn't regret it (the idiot would never have gone for it without a little push) if this all went badly, it was her fault.

The staff’s love life would have to wait, though, because the debate certainly wouldn't. All the last minute preparations, the positioning of television cameras and drinking water for the master of ceremonies and the like were taken care of. Now, it was just a matter of making sure the President was in the zone, and trying to prevent any last minute disasters before it began.

They had almost failed the second job within minutes of arriving in the press pit. It was a huge space, more resembling an aircraft hanger than a room where the staff would watch the debate from and be available to clarify points and give spin on every word said. Unfortunately, that was also what King’s staff would be doing, and it seemed that they had no sooner gotten there than John was having to drag Alex away from and argument with Seaburry who had pitched up to spin for his candidate. Other than making sure ‘Alex wasn't about to commit a homicide, Angelica had stayed well out of that one. She was effectively steering the ship single handedly what with Aaron’s absence, and she was determined to keep her cool. Seaburry had an irritating ability to get under her skin and make her scream stuff that probably wouldn’t look so good printed in the papers.

“How’s the President doing?” she asked Eliza, who had surreptitiously appeared at her shoulder.

“He’s good. Calm. Looking forward to kicking King’s ass.”

“Aren’t we all?” She was relieved, although not especially surprised that Washington was unruffled. The man could walk straight through hell with a steady hand, she always thought. Far better that he let the rest of them do the freaking out for him.

“Do you think-?” Eliza began, but whatever question she’d been about to ask was lost as her mouth fell open, looking at something over Angelica’s shoulder. “Aaron!”
Angelica spun to see Aaron walking towards them, suit perfectly pressed as always. In fact, all of him was perfectly presented, down to the shine on his shoes, except his face which was a haggard expression.

“I’m so sorry I’m late-“ he began, and Angelica cut him off.

“Screw that, what happened with Theo?”

Aaron paused, looked away as if carefully choosing his words, then pulled her into a hug. She froze in shock, and was distantly aware of everyone around them staring in horror. Because if Aaron Burr was not only instigating human contact but an actual hug… well, it must be bad. Angelica had no idea what to do, what to say, and was just about to tell him how sorry she was when he whispered “Thank you,” in her ear.

“What?” she demanded, pulling away to look at him. “As in… you guys…?”

“As in, yeah. Us.”

He seemed slightly dazed, as if he couldn’t quite believe the words coming out of him mouth, but there was no mistaking the grin that broke out across Aaron’s face as he said them.

“What happened?” John yelled, somewhat wrecking the moment.

“The big idiot did it!” she yelled back, and the room erupted into cheers. Well, half the room erupted into cheers, the other looked around blankly without a clue what was going on.

“Congrats, Burr,” Alex said, “But you couldn’t send us one text? I mean, I was joking when I asked if you were allergic to technology, but-“

“I forgot it at Camp David.”

Alex rolled his eyes. “Of course you did. You should have been born in the eighteenth century.” But he was too busy smiling to put any real bite behind the words.

“Come on you two.” Angelica slung one arm around Alex and another around Burr, a position they failed to wriggle out of. “Let’s go kick King’s ass back to Daddy, shall we?”

They watched as, on the countless screens around the room, lights went up on the stage and the two candidates shook hands before taking their places at their respective podiums.

“Should have gone for the grey tie…” Alex muttered.

“Shut up,” said Angelica, Elia, John and Aaron at exactly the same time, no one taking their eyes away from the televisions as the debate got underway.

The first two questions were about taxation which, while important, didn’t have the scope to set anything ablaze. Then, the topic turned to social policy, and the role of minorities in American society. King spoke first, shelling out one corrupt, twisted idea after another. Washington didn’t say a word throughout his speech, didn’t so much as twitch, but Angelica wasn’t fooled. She knew that flame dancing behind his eyes, visible even through the grainy screen, growing more and more intense with every word.

“Mr President, your response?” came the promo, and it seemed the whole world was holding his breath. Then Washington opened his mouth. And Angelica swore that in that moment, he could have lifted whole houses clean off the ground.
Washington had ninety seconds allocated for a rebuttal. He needed only half of that to tear King to shreds, leave him open-mouthed and red-faced and on the back foot, desperately scrambling to cover lost ground.

Angelica glanced sideways at Eliza, and they were slowly coming to the same realisation. They were going to win. Then she took a deep breath and turned to the surge of cameras and microphones waiting. “Who needs spin?”
Angelica had thought that today would be a good day. Their numbers were looking good, she wasn't overloaded with meetings, and the mess always did her favourite Greek Salad on a Wednesday. For once, it was looking like a day when nothing could go wrong. That was before she saw the photograph waiting on her desk.

It took her a few minutes to process what they were showing, long enough for any last trace of optimism about the coming day to drain away. Because this single, grainy print out was enough to turn the world upside down.

It showed, or at least appeared to show, Alex sitting in a dingy bar somewhere. And he wasn't alone. The picture quality was poor, so bad that all you could tell about his companion was that they most definitely weren’t female. That and the fact they were kissing.

(That was, it was all most people would be able to tell about his companion, people who hadn't spent years working in close quarters as a group. Angelica was almost certain she knew who the brown hair belonged to, but she refused to let herself jump to conclusions until she had spoken to Alex. Oh God.)

She would have to get to work now, get spinning and managing and diminishing what could be a potential disaster a week and a half before a presidential election. Because there was no way this could be anything but a nightmare, and it was her job to contain the worst of the damage, act as a shield against her friends and the rest of the world. But first Angelica allowed herself one minute to let her heart break a little for Alex. He hadn't wanted anyone to know about him. Very soon, the whole world would. And he had no idea that the sky was about to come falling down over his head.

Alex wasn’t in yet, and neither was John, but she left messages for them both to haul ass in her direction as soon as they arrived, and collected a grumbling Eliza en route to Aaron’s office.

His face fell as soon as she marched in the door, clearly noticing the expression on her face. “And here I was thinking today would be a good day.”

“You and me both, Aaron.”

She deposited the picture on his desk, carefully watching his face, and Eliza's who had leant over to see over his shoulder. Oh crap, Eliza. Angelica hadn't even considered her history with Alex, had completely forgotten about the two of them in the wake of seeing the photos. And now she was going to find out in the worst possible way. But Eliza didn't seem shocked at all. Instead a small, sad smile played around her lips, and she whispered “Oh, Alex.”

Aaron had frozen for a moment, but her words seemed to snap him out of it. He looked up at Eliza, thunder brewing in his expression. “Who has this?”

She held up the fax in her hand that had come with the photograph. “The Pamphlet, sir. It’s a church right. Tiny circulation. This is going to be… It’s todays’s paper, Aaron. This is coming out today.”

“I’m guessing their circulation’s going to be a lot bigger by tonight.” He growled darkly. “How could this happen? Do we even know who-?”
The door swung open and Alex strolled in, take-away coffee in hand. “What’s going on, guys? Angie said you’d be in here.”

“Sit down, Alexander.” Aaron gestured to a chair.

He faltered. “Why?”

“Just sit. Please.”

“Okay. But these guys are standing. Just saying.”

Eliza passed him the photo with what was probably meant to be a comforting smile. Alex didn’t seem to notice. He stared at it, mouth hanging open, for once entirely lost for words. She could all but see the cogs whirring in his brain, gears clicking as he tried to process what he was looking at. What was about to happen to him. Then he turned to Angelica.

“Tell me someone’s tipped us off early.”

She shook her head. “This is happening now Alex. On the front page of today’s Pamphlet. I’m so sorry.”

He stood up, shaking hands slowly closing into fists. “I’ve got to… I’m going…” And then he sat down again, realising he wasn’t going to do anything.

“Alexander,” Aaron said, voice surprisingly gentle. Angelica hadn't known he had it in him, but then he was making a habit of surprising her lately. “I’m only going to ask you two things before we deal with this, I promise. But we need to know… Is this real? What it looks like?”

He nodded, looking smaller than Angelica had ever seen him, and it was all she could do not to pull him into a hug and tell him that it was all going to be okay. But Angie, Alex’s friend, couldn't help him now. Angelica Church, White House Press Secretary might be able to.

“Ohkay. We can work with this. And secondly, Alexander… do you trust him?”

He looked up at that. “What?”

“This guy. I’m not going to ask who he is, but can you trust him not to open his mouth? If we’re going to get you through this I have to know he’s not going to make this worse.”

Alex shot Eliza a look full of panic, which she returned with a sad nod. And Angelica was suddenly certain she had been right. It was close to heartbreaking what two of her best friends were going to have to deal with.

Alex swallowed. “With my life.”

“Can you be sure of that? Because if there’s the slightest chance-“

“Dammit Burr, it’s John, okay? That’s me and John.”

No one spoke for a moment. Aaron closed his eyes, pinched the bridge of his nose, and opened them again. “John Laurens?”

“Yeah.”

“Then this just got a whole lot more complicated. The two of you have to talk, Alexander, that has to happen now, and work out exactly how you want to manage this. I’m sorry, but you need to do that
before we can decide-"

For the second time in as many minutes, Aaron was cut off by the door opening and a member of his staff walking in. “Morning,” John said cheerfully, and Angelica wanted to weep as she saw the smile slowly slip from his face as he picked up on the atmosphere. “Did something happen?”

Aaron looked at Angelica and Eliza. “Can you two wait outside? I’ll join you in a minute, and we’ll go speak to the President.”

Angelica wanted to argue, to stay, to throw her arms around both her friends, but Eliza took her arm gently and pulled her away. Somehow, the simple movement took all the fight out of her, and Angelic allowed herself to be led away, sending Alex one last look over her shoulder.

Out in the corridor, Eliza sank into a chair. “Jesus…” she whispered. “Jesus fucking Christ…”

She had never heard Eliza swear before, Angelica realised. It was an odd time to notice it, but a lot easier to focus on than the question she had to ask next.

“Did you know?” Angelica asked softly.

“Know what exactly? Did I know that Alex isn’t exactly straight? Yes. Did I know that he’s spent the last three years hopelessly in love with John? Yes, although I’m not sure he did until recently. Did I know they were hooking up?” Eliza smiled, genuine despite her shining eyes. “That one was news to me.”

“News to everyone I think. Are you okay, though? I mean, you and Alex…”

“That ship sailed a long time ago. But of course I’m not okay. The two of them are about to go through hell, and there’s not a damn thing we can do to stop it.”

“We can try,” Angelica said, letting some of the fury that was coursing through her veins be heard. “Our idiots, remember?”


“--

“What the hell are we gonna do?” John asked, staring helplessly at the photographs, and Alex had to admit that it was a good question. There was no stopping this getting out, not if Angelica was right and the pictures were public as of this morning. *Alexander Hamilton, consider yourself outed*, he thought bitterly. Funny, he’d always imagined that he’d out himself in some reckless political statement or fit of passion. Now he was just the latest in a long line of D.C. scandals.

“What we’re not going to do is panic.” said Burr. “This is what we’re here for. We can handle this.”

“I’ll resign.” Alex said quickly. They were words he never thought he’d hear himself say, but right now it wasn’t even a decision.

“Me too.” John added, standing up. “If it will help.”

“You can’t.” Alex was at his side in an instant. “This doesn’t have to wreck your career as well. Look, you can’t even see your face! We can protect you, and-”

“Enough with the secrets! If you think I’m just going to let you take the fall for our mistake-“
“No one needs to take the fall.” Burr interrupted. “As far as I’m concerned, and anyone else who matters is concerned, you haven’t done anything wrong. So no more talk about resigning, okay? Not until we’ve spoken to the President.”

Alex frowned, dropping John’s hand (which he hadn’t noticed taking.) “What are you doing, Burr?”

“Trying to help you. I thought that was fairly obvious,” he replied dryly.

“You don’t even like me. And your job’s to help the President, which we both know would be best done by letting me quietly slip out the door.”

“First of all, that’s not necessarily true. The last thing we want a week out from election is to alienate the liberal left with implications that we’re homophobic. Secondly, and far more importantly, you’re right. Most of the time, I don’t like you. You’re abrasive, impulsive, reckless, and I’m still convinced your disrespect will sink this entire administration one day. But you’re also loyal to a fault, the best damned writer I’ve ever seen, and, tragically enough, one of the only friends I have. So why not, for once in your life, stop assuming the worst of me and accept some help out of this fucking mess?”

Alex stared at Burr for a moment, then swallowed. “Okay.”

“Okay.” Burr seemed to deflate slightly. “I’m going to go brief Him with Angelica and Eliza. “I’ll let the two of you have a moment alone.”

He left through the side door, and Alex stared at it for a moment, before collapsing back against his desk and breathing out a deep sigh. Bloody hell…

“You alright?” John asked.

“Yeah. Course. I’m always alright.”

“You know it is. You know the way the world works. But it doesn’t have to be the same for you.”

“I thought we were in this together.”

“We are. Which means it’s time for me to stop being selfish and start doing what I can to protect you.”

“I don’t need your protection, Alex, I’m not a damn child.”

“It was you who wanted to keep this a secret in the first place!”

“And you’re the one who wanted to go public!” John held up the photograph. “There is no secret any more!”

Alex bit his lip, looking from John’s face to the photograph and back. He opened his mouth, trying to decide how to explain, in terms that John would understand, just why he was so desperate to keep John out of this. Yes, he had wanted to be out and proud, the two of them against the rest of the world and fuck whatever anyone else thought. But now… it was real, all of it. This wasn’t a game, or
another fight, this was his career brought to it’s knees by a single photograph. And the idea of John’s face splashed all over the papers instead of his made him want to throw up. John didn't deserve this, and if there was any chance that Alex could somehow spare his boyfriend the fear he was feeling right now? Well, there wasn't a hope in hell he wouldn't take it.

“Please, John…” he began, but didn't get any further than that before Aaron walked back in.

“Okay, so we have the beginnings of a plan. There’s no need to confirm or deny anything today, and so far the only chatter we’ve picked up has been about Alexander. So unless you guys tell us otherwise, we’re going to work on the assumption that it’s only Alexander we have to defend at the moment. You can go see Angelica, she’s working on a statement. But first…” Burr trailed off and cleared his throat. “He wants to see you, Alexander.”

Alex nodded, swallowing down the stab of anxiety in his gut. He squeezed John’s hand. “I’ll see you in Angelica’s office, yeah?”

“Sure.”

John left, and Burr was about to follow him when Alex shouted. “Hey B-, Aaron. Thank you.”

Burr gave him a long searching look before nodding and following John out the door. Leaving Alex alone in the office with his thoughts. And a president to see.

--

“I would love to say I’m surprised, but somewhere along the way I’ve started to expect the dramatic from you Alexander. This is a new record though, I suspect.”

Alex found he couldn't look bear the man in the eye, and kept his eyes on the carpet. That proved to be no better - the Presidential seal stared back at him accusingly, reminding him of just how much he had put at risk with his own damn stupidity.

“I won’t lie to you, it would have been a lot easier on the us all if this had happened sometime after next week, or on our own terms at least.”

I know, Alex wanted to say, but what would be the point? He knew all this and more, and knew what had to happen next, no matter what Burr or anyone else said.

“I’ll resign, sir.” he said quietly. “I’ll draft my letter by the end of the day, or if you think it would be better to wait after the election-“

“Alexander.” Washington interrupted. “Stop talking right now. I’m only going to say this once, so pay attention. You have done nothing wrong, and have nothing to be ashamed of, except perhaps not having the common sense to check for reporters before you kissed a cute boy in public. This is something we can deal with and will deal with, but only if we go at it together. You have given more for this administration than anybody, and…” he faltered for a moment and cleared his throat. “And you are about the closest thing I have to a son. I forbid you to let this beat you, and I forbid you to resign, understand?”

Alex found he couldn't speak. He finally looked up, to see Washington smiling at him warmly. He swallowed painfully, blinking pack the pinpricks of moisture threatening to creep into his eyes.
“I have to say, Hamilton. I’m impressed.”

Alex froze, one hand on the door handle. Of course. With his luck, who else could he possibly run into at six in the morning in the capitol building? He had arrived early for the same reason that he was working here today, borrowing Aaron’s office on the Hill instead of the West Wing. It was the day after the Pamphlet story came out, couldn’t face the stares, the whispers, the look of pity in his friends’ eyes… It was selfish and cowardly, Alex knew, but if he could just get through today, things would be easier. John had frowned when Alex told him he wouldn’t be coming into work today, but he had understood. They still had an election to win, after all, and he just needed to be able to work without any distractions. That was the plan anyway. The universe clearly had other ideas. The universe and Thomas Jefferson, that was.

“Impressed?”

“Yeah. You’ve managed to screw yourself over more brilliantly than I could ever hope to manage. And we both know how long I’ve been trying to screw you over.”

Still, Alex didn’t turn around. “Go to hell, Jefferson. I’m not in the mood today.”

“When will you be in the mood? Tomorrow? Next week?” The Virginian shook his head. “You don’t get it yet, do you? This ain’t ever going to go away. The world’s never going to be the same, Ham.”

“Oh, I get it.” Alex whispered, though he wasn’t sure if Jefferson had heard him.

“I mean think about it. You know the game better than anyone. You’re never gonna be president now. You’re never going to hold real office now. This is going to be it for you.”

And damn if Alex didn’t know the man was right. Slowly he turned to look at him. “Did you just come here to gloat?”

Jefferson shook his head, a strange smile on his face, but it wasn’t the look of triumph Alex was expecting. “Nah. For what it’s worth Hamilton, I’m sorry this is happening to you. Really. I was
“looking forward to kicking your ass once and for all, and it won’t be a fair fight anymore. You know, you were the only one around here worth beating.”

“Stick your fair fight. I’m going to bury your legislative agenda so deep up your ass—“

“-that it will never see daylight again, sure. Jeez, find some new insults. And you call yourself a writer…”

He turned on his heels and walked back down the corridor before Alex could reply. He was left staring after him, and it was only when he sat down at Aaron’s desk that he worked out why he was smiling. Arguing with Jefferson had been the first thing to feel normal since this whole mess began.

---

It wasn’t fair, Eliza thought to herself as she squeezed onto the couch between John and Herc. This should have been a night of celebration, one long party to make up for the months of nose-to-the-grindstone toil. Election night should have been Washington’s lap of honour as the first-term President became a two-term president with public opinion through the roof and a landslide of support. Instead, here they were, all crammed into a small room watching the results roll in with baited breath.

The Washingtons were in the residence, but everyone else was here; Angelica who glared down every number that went against them as if she could scare the votes into submission. Hercules who had baked biscuits that no-one really felt like eating, but that everyone had anyway because it made him smile, an expression no one else could seem to manage. Aaron who’s gaze never left the numbers on screen. John, hands nervously tapping against his thigh and refusing to meet anyone’s eyes. And Alex, more despondent that he had ever seen him, a shadow of the man who could write kings and emperors under the table and would blow up in the face of anyone who got in his way. This Alex was withdrawn and pale, and didn’t look like he’d slept since he laid eyes on the pamphlet. And it wasn’t fair.

Alex didn’t deserve this. After all they years he had spent putting his own heart to one side in favour of his work, he had finally found some happiness in John. Only to have it come crumbling down in the worst way imaginable, at the expense of everything he had worked so hard to build. He deserved to be happy, damnit, they both did. Eliza took John’s hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze, and for some reason, found herself thinking of another time the two of them had sat like this.

It had been a January morning, flakes of snow curling through the air like springtime petals, and she had just moved her things out of Alex’s flat after their breakup. Not all of her things; for months afterwards Alex would find a hair clip in a draw or one of her books slotted on the shelf and smile sadly. But still, it felt like the end in a way that had hurt more than she was expecting, a finality that couldn’t be overcome.

John had appeared on her doorstep (Angelica’s temporarily, until she could find a place of her own) with beer and a sympathetic smile and she had let him in without question.

“Do you want to talk about it?” he had asked sometime later, the two of them on the couch with some meaningless disney film playing softly on the tv.

“Do you want to talk about why you’re here, and not with Alex?” she countered. It was a fair
question. Alex was his best friend.

John had smiled tightly at that, shook his head firmly, and taken her hand. He didn't push, didn't pry, and any fears Eliza had had about loosing his friendship when she ended things with Alex had evaporated. She only wished she could banish his fears as easily now.

For a moment John didn't respond, but then returned the gesture, squeezing tight as if he were about to fall off of the world.

The news anchor continued to talk on the screen, and Eliza wanted nothing more than to find the remote and turn the damn thing off. Forget about politics, about this weight hanging over their heads if just for a minute. Except, of course, for the fact that she, like everyone else, was hanging off his very word. It was neck and neck, states falling like dominos as both sides approached the magic 270. They took California, lost Texas. Ohio and Pennsylvania for Washington. Florida and South Carolina for King. John let out a hissed breath at the last one, but made no comment. He didn't need to. They all knew he was thinking of all the hours and dollars his father had given King, of the endless campaigning and lobbying Henry Laurens had done against his own son. Eliza wanted to tell him that it wouldn't have made a difference, that they would have lost the state anyway, but her words wouldn't help even if they were true. So she bit her tongue kept silence, each one of them defend by the noise of all they weren’t saying.

--

New York. Alex shouldn't have been surprised, really, when it all came down to New York. The city had always represented make or break for him, from the moment he had stepped onto the harbour as a child. It was the place of opportunity, danger, big dreams and crushing defeats, and he couldn't help but wonder which side would show its face tonight.

He could do the math. The State’s 29 electoral college votes, winner takes all, would be enough to see either man across the line. And the polls had been too damn close to call for a week and a half. If they lost this (lost everything) it would be on his head. Of that Alex had no illusions. He was the one who had taken everything they had built and torn it all apart with his own stupidity.

“And we’re now ready to bring you the results for this vital New York state, the college is ready to declare.” On screen the anchor was handed a piece of paper and touched his earpiece as conformation came through. Everyone in the room leaned forward in equal parts expectation and fear. Alex had forgotten how to breath. This was it, the knife edge. The eye of the hurricane.

“And yes, we can confirm, that New York is declaring for Washington. That’s New York State, and it’s 29 votes for President Washington.”

No one spoke. They all looked around at each other slowly, comprehension slowly trickling in, double and triple checking the numbers in their heads. Alex’s heart was pounding a military tattoo in his chest.

“Did… did we just do it?” Hercules asked.

“We did it.” said Aaron slowly.

Another moment of silence. Then Angelica let out a woop of triumph, and it was as if the floodgates had opened. John leapt to his feat and punched the air and Hercules picked Eliza up and swung her
around. Alex just sat back, stunned, a smile inching its way across his face.

“We did it.” he repeated quietly.

“Hell yeah we did!” That was Angelica, pulling him to his feet and into a hug. Then it was Herc, with a high five and a bone crushing embrace. Alex might have even hugged Burr at one point, it was hard to tell in the rush of joy and relief. And then John was standing in front of him.

“Well what do you know…” John grinned. “Looks like we’re gonna have to try a little harder if we want to tank the administration.

And Alex wanted nothing more than to kiss him there and then, kiss that stupid beautiful smug look off his face for everyone to see. But he held back. They had come within a hair’s breath of destroying all their work, and he wouldn't flaunt it now, wouldn't make light of what could have been the end. It would be unfair to his friends. Later, maybe, (definitely) but not now.

“Oh for God’s sake Alexander, just kiss him, would you.” said Burr from across the room, looking deeply uncomfortable. “This is painful to watch.”

Alex opened his mouth to protest, but John’s smile split into a laugh, and then there was really no way Alex could help himself. He closed the last meter between them and kissed him, one hand on the back of John’s neck, the other pressed against his chest, feeling the thump of his heart. He felt John smile against him, and his lips were the cool water in a dessert, sweet and addicting, and tasting of nothing but relief.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact - this is the first chapter I wrote (although the rest have been pretty much in order) so if the characterisation or seems a bit off, it's because this is the first Hamilton thing I'd ever done.
So you can imagine how long I've been looking forward to hear what y'all think of it!
Eliza glanced at the memo in her hands with distaste. You’d have thought that after all the stress and strain of the election, there would have been some sort of grace period, a few weeks where the rest of the world just took a back foot and let the Washington administration get it’s breath back. But no. Not two weeks after their narrow victory over King, and there was another fire they had to put out. And this crisis was from their own party as well. God damn the whole of Congress, and the whole of South Carolina at the same time. Apart from John, of course; he remembered to put cinnamon in her coffee, so he could stay.

She almost collided square with Angelica on her way to senior staff. Seriously, these corridors that everyone walked down at high speed were a safety hazard. Fortunately, she doubted that the pissed off look currently on Angelica’s face was her fault.

“What’s up?” she asked as they walked.

Angelica gestured to a piece of paper she was holding. “The President’s not gonna like this one.”

“Is that the South Carolina thing? Because that one landed on my desk too.”

“Yeah, if you want to call it that.”

“What else would you call it?”

“Oh I have a few suggestions. The Henry Laurens can kiss my ass thing, for starters.”

Eliza blinked, confused. “I think we may have a different South Carolina thing. As eloquent as that was, I’m guessing that yours isn't the fact that we’ve got no-one to run in the House race for the 7th district there?”

“We’ve got no-one? How is that possible? Didn't we just have an election? I seem to remember it being a pretty big deal at the time…”

They had reached Aaron’s office, where the rest of the team were waiting.

“What’s going on?” Alex asked.

“We’ve both got a nice problem to deal with. And by nice, I mean a real pain in the ass.”

“Let me guess, more hate mail. Or is it a charming death threat today? I haven't had one of those for a few days, I’m starting to worry.”

Eliza bit her lip. It was nothing they hadn't expected, of course, but no matter how much Alex made light of it, there was some horrible stuff coming his way. He acted like he didn’t care, there was no other way he could possibly act with John looking at each homophobic letter or tweet like it was his own fault, but there was no way he was unaffected by this. Or maybe it was that he had no idea of the bulk of the hate he was being sent. Eliza and Hercules were making sure of that between them - Herc intercepting most of his White House mail, Eliza sweeping every social media he was
connected to twice a day, and making sure every trace of his home address was removed from the public domain. It wasn't enough, of course, there would always be ignorant bigots, and a lot of it still got through, but it helped. And if Alex wanted to pretend he was fine, Eliza wasn't about to call him out on it in the middle of a meeting. Instead she rolled up a newspaper sitting on Aaron’s desk and prodded him with it.

“What was that for?” he complained.

“Not everything’s about you, Hamilton. Tone down the ego.”

“Actually, my one’s kind of about him.” Angelica said. “Well, it’s more about our favourite resident of Charleston, but-”

John groaned. “What did my Dad do now?”

“When asked for his thoughts on the election result, he said, and I’m quoting here “Damn shame. King could have gone all the way, and maybe he would have if certain truths about the Washington administration had been public knowledge sooner.” When asked to clarify on certain truths he said something about deficit projections, but I think it’s safe to assume-“

“It’s safe to assume he was talking about me.” Alex finished bitterly. “And the pictures in the Pamphlet.” He glanced at John, but Eliza could tell that none of the fury in his eyes was directed at him.

“Afraid so. People are gonna want to see how far we’ll go to support you against him. And there’s also been some chatter about John as well.”

“Chatter?”

Angelica swallowed, clearly searching for the words before deciding there was no point sugar coating it. “Some people are saying you’re a homophobe, never mind how many times you’ve spoken out on gay rights, both under Washington and in your career before. It’s one of those sins of the father things.”

If anything, Alex looked more furious at that. John just sighed. “I don’t suppose it would be easier just to tell everyone I’m screwing Alex instead of hating on him?”

Angelica smiled tightly, while Aaron shifted. Clearly the phrase I’m screwing Alex wasn't one he wanted said out loud in his office. Alex just frowned. “Well we’re not doing that, so what are our other options.”

There was a story behind the look he shot John as he said it, Eliza was sure. She didn't know what conversation they’d had that ended with the decision to keep their relationship and John’s sexuality a secret, but it clearly hadn't been an easy one. But that was between the two of them. Instead, she said “Wait until you hear the second problem, we might be able to kill two birds with one stone here. You know that Jay won the South Carolina 7th congressional district? Well he’s ill again, but bad this time. He’s not going to be able to stand, and they’re calling a special election to replace him. And the party doesn't have anyone to run.”

“How can there be no-one?” Aaron asked. “We lost the House last time I checked, there must be a lot of unemployed congressional hopefuls hanging around?”

“No-one will do it. Everyone knows a Democrat can’t win the 7th, and we can’t find anyone willing to stand for a second loss in as many months.”

“Why is it our problem? Shouldn't party leadership be handling this? Separation of powers and all
that?"

Eliza checked the memo. “The campaign manager’s kicking up a fuss. Say’s the White House isn’t
doing enough to help the races no-one cares about.”

“In fairness, we really don’t care about this one.” Alex pointed out. “We can’t win it.”

“But this isn’t the time to be pissing off the rest of the party. There’s a lot of people angry that we
didn’t deliver the landslide they were expecting.” Aaron said. “The least we can do is send someone
down there to show our support and re-assure them we’ll stand behind whoever they eventually find.
If we’ve got to sort out this Laurens thing as well—“

“I’ll do it.” John said quietly.

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” Angelica asked. “I mean last time you spoke to him, the two of
you had a screaming match for the whole world to see.”

“That’s not gonna happen.”

“You can’t promise that. I trust you, John, I’m not saying I don’t, but wouldn’t it be easier if someone
else—“

“I’ve got to do this.” There was no room for argument in his voice. “It’s my name, my beliefs he’s
trashing. My boyfriend he’s sprouting crap at. I’ve gotta go clear this mess up with my father once
and for all.” He looked at Aaron with something close to a plea.

“Okay then.” he said finally. “I’ll tell the campaign office to expect you. How soon can you be on a
plane down there?”

“As soon as there’s one going.”

“Get it done.”

The meeting moved on, but Eliza couldn’t help but notice how quiet John was, speaking only when
necessary, and determinedly looking anywhere but Alex.

--

John took a deep breath before climbing out the taxi. He hadn’t been home in years, not that the old
plantation was home anymore, but he couldn't help feel daunted all the same. One look at the place,
and he was sixteen years old again, full of rage and fear and, despite all that, a desperate desire to
make his father proud. He shook his head, forcefully. He wasn't a child, and Henry Laurens had
done nothing but let him down. Why should he care what the man thought of him? Maybe it had
been a mistake to come here instead of his fathers office, but he really wanted to avoid another public
blow-out if he could help it. In any case it was too late now. With a confident stride that probably
wasn't fooling anyone he crossed to the metal gates and rang the buzzer.

“Can I help you?”

“Hi, is Henry Laurens home? His son’s here to see him.”

John was shown into the kitchen (as if he didn't know his way around) and asked to wait. He
couldn't help but find the whole thing ridiculous, some bizarre attempt at intimidation. He worked
with ambassadors and senators on a daily basis, no, worse, he shouted at ambassadors and senators on a daily basis. He could deal with being in his childhood home.

Briefly, he wished that Alex were here, before hurriedly pushing the thought aside. Having him confront his father would probably lead to a homicide, and anyway, it was John who’d told him not to bother coming. Alex had been subdued watching him hastily pack a bag, and John knew he was against the idea of him flying down here in the first place. After everything, he still hadn't been able to understand that this was something John had to do for himself.

“You’re sure you don’t want me to come along? I could get a ticket and-“

“Alex, stop.” You know you can’t. Not when the papers are still speculating about who you’re hooking up with.” He’d said, taking his hands. “I’ve got this.”

He’d taken a deep breath. “I know you do.”

Alex believed in him, at least, which was more than John himself did right now. But maybe that was all he needed. It had been enough to get him on the plane at least. Alex had grabbed his arm before he walked out the door.

“Don’t you want a kiss goodbye from your boyfriend? Don’t think I didn't hear you call me that earlier.”

John obliged with a quick peck on the lips. “Do you have a problem with that?”

“Well, it’s not like there are any other contenders. Get out of here.”

And the memory of his grin had kept John warm on the whole journey south. It wasn't as good as having him next to him, but it was the next best thing.

“Jack. I wasn't expecting to see you here of all places.”

Showtime. He stood and turned to face his father. “I wasn't expecting to be here of all places, Dad, but sometimes it’s my job to get people back in line.”

They weren’t even bothering with the pretence of politeness this time around. Henry pursed his lips. “So I’m out of line now, am I? I wasn't aware that I had to listen to a damn word Washington said. Isn't that the nature of two party government?”

“You wanna bat for the other side? i couldn't care less.” John said. “You wanna throw yourself behind a wreck of a candidate in the hope he gets elected? Go ahead. But when you start sprouting hate towards my friends, and rumours start circulating about my own beliefs? You better believe it’s my damn problem now.”

His father sighed dramatically. “If you’re referring to that interview about the results, I can assure you that if you look at what I said in context-“

“Cut the crap, Dad. We both know that you were calling Alex out for being gay.”

A pause. And then “And so what if I am? The public has a right to know these things when they elect their leader.”

“No-one was voting for Alex.”

“But they were voting for the man who’s ear your friend whispers in. How are honest Americans
supposed to trust Washington to make decisions in their interests on family matters when—"

John laughed. “Are you even listening to yourself?”

“I can’t stop you throwing your lot in with these people and what they stand for. God know’s I’ve tried, Jack, but you’ve always been a will unto yourself. I can’t stop you from destroying your career, but I can stop you from dragging the family name through the dirt as well.”

“The family name? Is that all you care about?” John asked, and then froze. Because he’d suddenly had a very, very bad idea. An idea so bad it might just work, God help him. “You’d do anything to protect it, wouldn't you? Anything at all. Including backing the hell off from Alex, and the whole administration while your at it.”

“What are you talking about?”

John walked towards him, gaining confidence with every word. “You’re not going to be a problem for Washington ever again, or I’ll tell the whole world just who it is Alexander Hamilton is dating. You must have seen the pictures. Studied them. Didn’t you recognise your own son, or was it just that you didn't want to see it?”

“Jack…”

“Because it’s all true. I’m with Alex, and I’ve never been happier. So unless you want to face questions and whispers about your gay son for the rest of your life, you’ll butt out.”

“You’d end your career.” Henry snarled. “Any chance of one day holding office would be gone.”

“I know. I’d loose everything if you said a word to anyone. But so would you. And I think I know which one of us you care more about.”

“Get out of my house.”

“Is that a yes? You’ll leave Alex and the administration alone?”

“Just… Yes, okay? Now get out, Jack.”

“Gladly.”

Well, John though as he walked away, heart pounding in his ears and the heat of his fathers glare on his back. At least it wasn't public this time.

--

“No way is Ben 42. I would have pegged him at 30, 35 maybe.”

“Ask him what moisturiser he uses.” Angelica replied distractedly, not taking her eyes off the mountain of work on her desk. Two weeks after the election, and the Press Secretary was possibly the busiest person in the White House, with every journalist, media outlet and wanna-be blogger looking for an inside scoop. “What are you even looking at?”

“Staff files.” said Eliza, who was sitting on the other side of her desk. “PR’s doing their annual review and I need to check we’re not going to have any problems.”

“So you thought you’d take the opportunity to be nosey.”
“Of course. Five hundred personal files to read by the end of the day, I’ve got to find my fun where I can.”

Eliza picked up another folder, flicked it open idly, and frowned. “Hang on. What’s the date?”

“The seventh. Why?”

“It’s Herc’s birthday tomorrow. Why don’t I know that?”

“Seriously?” Angelica peered at the documents upside down across the desk. “I had no idea. He hasn’t said a word.”

“Do you know if he’s doing anything?”

“I doubt it. He hadn't asked for the evening off. I think he’s just gonna be working.”

Eliza frowned. “Well, that’s not happening. Are you thinking what I’m thinking, Miss Church?”

“Miss Schuyler, I think I am.”

They went to Washington first, what with it being his house and all, and his staff they wanted to get stupidly drunk. He hadn't known it was Hercules’ birthday either, but was completely on board with the idea once they got a few things cleared up.

“You’re not going to break anything are you? Or accidentally start a nuclear war?”

“Don’t you trust us?” Eliza replied, the vision of innocence.

“You, I trust. The rest of them… Just do it in the bullpen. I don’t think we keep anything too expensive there.”

Lafayette was next, as they had all decided years ago that he was the undisputed king of party planning. They could practically hear his grin down the phone as they explained their plan, and Angelica could imagine only too well the mischievous glint in his eyes as he took the horse by the reins. “Have you got a pen? Okay, here is what we are going to do. We’re going to need one of those huge pots of dip that our dear Hercules is so fond of. And streamers, lots of streamers! Get the red, white and blue ones, very presidential, they’ll already stock them at that place on 27th for next year’s 4th of July. And as for the alcohol…”

Twenty minutes, five sheets of paper, and countless vetoes from both girls later, and they had both a shopping list and an action plan. Laf sighed dramatically down the line. “But why did he not tell me sooner?”

“You and the rest of us, Laf.” said Eliza. “Don’t take it personally.”

“But you don’t understand! How am I supposed to find him the perfect gift in a day and a half? This was most inconsiderate of him!”

Laf hung up, and Angelica smirked. Although that was a good point. “What are you gonna get him?”

“A kiss the cook apron and matching oven gloves.”

“Good call.”
John closed the office door behind him, and let out a sigh. He was running on far too little coffee to deal with this whole day. If dealing with his father hadn't been enough to drain him, he'd just had to go and shout at a very stressed campaign manager. He hated these types of jobs - it wasn't Montgomery’s fault that the party couldn't give him a candidate to represent, but neither was it Washington’s and they couldn't have him taking a hit at party unity two weeks after an election. So John had had to go in there and play the bad cop, all the time trying not to think about how quickly he could be on a plane home.

“John Laurens. This is a surprise.”

He gritted his teeth. There was no way that could be- It was. “Lee. What the hell are you doing here?”

Charles Lee was sprawled out on a bench in the hallway, idly typing on his phone. “I’ve got a meeting with Montgomery. When they told me he was busy with someone from D.C., well, I wasn't expecting you. How long is it since you were in this neighbourhood?”

John ignored him, bristling. “Why have you got a meeting?”

“To find out if they’ve found anyone for me to run against yet.” He smirked at John’s surprise. “What, did no-one tell you? I’m standing for Jay’s seat.”

“You? Since when are you a resident?”

“Since we had a shot at turning the district red. And seeing as there’s nothing in the way of competition… well, I’m looking forward to bringing the party platform to this fine district.”

If it were possible to be gritting his teeth even more, John would be doing it. Running into Lee made his blood boil at the best of times, but what with everything he’d had to deal with already today, his stormy mood was fast blowing into an all out hurricane. And the idea of Lee taking political office in his own town… John may have some pretty lousy memories of the place, but they were mostly of his father, and didn’t chance the fact that he had grown up here, and that he honestly cared about the place. That paper all those months ago had been right. He was a local boy, no matter how long he had been away.

“That’s not going to happen. We’re gonna knock you off your ass on this one.”

“Oh really? You and what army? Or should I say what candidate? Face it, Laurens. You’ve got no-one willing to take me on.”

“Yes we do. Me.”

“You?” Lee scoffed, but John could see the unease in his eyes, how taken aback he was.

“Yeah. Have fun campaigning.” He turned and walked away without waiting for a reply. That had wiped the smug grin off of Lee’s face anyway, which had been worth lying through his ass for. It wasn't like he would ever actually have to follow through with it. The campaign office would find someone eventually. And if Lee was left sweating in the meantime, all the better. Right now, John had a plane to catch, and a boyfriend to get home to.
“We have a problem.”

Herc looked up from his desk in surprise as Laf walked through his door, looking unusually stressed.
“Wait the are you doing here?”

The Frenchman grimaced. “It’s a long story, but let’s just say that Le Petit Lion has made another mess for us to clean up. It’ll be easier to show you.”

He sighed and stood up. Of course, on the one night a year he should probably entitled to some peace and quiet, someone in the West Wing was in the shit. That was what he was here for, he supposed. Laf led the way to the Bullpen, uncharacteristically quiet. Herc was just about to ask him if something was wrong when they walked into the dark room, and it was suddenly flooded with lights and people.

“SUPRISE!”

It was a good thing that André hadn't issued him with a concealed weapon yet, because he just about jumped out of his skin. “What the fuck you guys? You’re gonna give a guy a heart attack!”

“Happy birthday!” Laf grinned, bouncing on the heels of his feet excitedly. “Did we get you?”

“You organised this?”

“Not me. He gestured to Eliza and Angelica who winked at him. “These lovely ladies put the whole thing together. They just borrowed my artistic flair.”

“You really didn't need to do this.” He told them, trying to fight a grin.

“We really did.” Eliza hugged him. “We weren't going to let you work on your birthday.”

“How did you even find out?”

“Because Eliza’s far too nosey for her own good.” Angelica replied, passing him a beer. “Have a drink, for God’s sakes. You’re making us all uncomfortable.”

He hadn't wanted a big party (in fact he always preferred as low-key birthday as possible) but he had to admit he was having a good time. The bull-pen looked like a fourth of July bomb had gone off (so he suspected that Laf had had a hand in decorations) with everything covered in streamers, balloons and glitter that would be a bitch to clear up in time for work tomorrow but no-one seemed to care. He had laughed out loud at Eliza’s gift and promptly put the apron on over his shirt and tie (which proved to be a mistake as he ended up dodging his friends trying to kiss him for the rest of the night.) Angelica had gotten him a set of classic disney films (after he’d confessed he’d never seen them, much to her horror) and Aaron had brought a bottle of god knows what, something expensive looking, which immediately became the next two rounds of shots. Alex handed over a package so lumpy looking that he had to have wrapped it himself, containing the warmest jumper Herc had ever seen. “That’s from me and John,” he explained, because Laurens was on a plane somewhere and probably hadn't even gotten the text about the last minute party. But half an hour later, John burst through the door, brandishing one of those giant toblerones you get in the airport with a bow stuck on it, and demanded someone get him stupidly drunk. Alex had been only too happy to oblige.

The party was winding down when Laf sidled up to him, a smile on his face that, had it belonged to anyone else Herc might have called shy. But that was ridiculous - the words Laf and shy didn't belong in the same sentence.

“Are you having a good time?” he asked.
“Yeah, I really am.” Herc admitted. “Of course, I hate you all for throwing me a party… but good job.”

Laf smirked, then eyed the apron he was still wearing. “Do I get a kiss then?”

“Fuck off.”

“Come on, you know you want some of this. In Paris, they say-“

“Is a single word that comes out of your mouth ever true?” Herc interrupted, having another drink.

“And here I was ready to give you your birthday gift.” Laf feigned offence. “You know, I think instead I will go, and-“

Herc grabbed his arm, laughing. “Ok, I take it all back. You are truly the God of all things sex, and every woman in Europe is head over heals in love with you. Now gimme my present.”

“Not here.” Laf lead him into an empty office and Herc followed, intrigued.

“What’s going on?”

“You did a rude thing, not telling me it was your birthday, so I have not had the time I needed to get your present sorted. However-“ He pulled an envelope out with a flourish. “Today I paid a visit to a very good friend of mine who happens to run admissions for the Virginia State art program. He was very impressed with your designs, I must say.”

“You showed him my sketches?” Herc asked. “How did you even find my sketches?”

Laf carried on like he hadn't heard. “And he was so impressed, that he wants to offer you a place on his part time fashion program. It’s yours, if you want it.”

Herc didn't know what to say. On one hand, he couldn't believe that Laf had done that for him. On the other hand… “Laf, I can’t. You know I can’t. My job-“

“Wouldn’t be a problem. It’s a part time course, all lectures and assignments available online. You could do it in your time off.”

Time off didn't exist anymore, not since he had started his training in secret with André. That was why he had been working tonight, trying to catch up on all the work he didn't have time to do any more during working hours. He didn't have time for a lot of things these days, including sleep for the most part. And definitely including a fashion degree.

“I just don’t have the time. I wish I did, Laf, no-one’s done anything this nice for me before, but-“

“What’s the but?” Laf pressed. “This dream of yours, it doesn’t have to be a dream. This could be your chance. Why are you so determined not to take it?”

Perhaps it was the drink, or the way that Laf had said “Because you asked,” as if it was the most natural thing in the world when he had told Herc about him and Adrienne, but suddenly his mouth was running of its own accord. “Because I’m joining the secret service, Laf! That’s my future, okay, that’s what I’m doing in my free time, not some fashion degree.”

Laf stepped back as if burnt, horror in his eyes. “You’re doing what?”

“You said I should do something worthwhile with my life. This is it.”
“Not if it gets you killed!”

“Well it’s too late.” He crossed his arms defensively. “It’s a done deal I’m in. André—“

“What did André say to you?” Laf’s eyes were dark.

“Nothing that wasn’t true. This is my chance to make something of myself.”

“You’re already something, Hercules.” Laf whispered, his eyes searching his face. “You really want this?”

“Yeah.”

The Frenchman swallowed. “Then be careful, please. I don’t trust André. He’s always been too slippery for his own good.”

Lafayette walked past him without another word, without so much as looking at Herc, and stuffed the envelope back into his pocket as he went. And Herc supposed that was about as close to acceptance as he was going to get. Even if it did feel like crap.

--

“What the hell did you say to him?” Alex asked around a mouthful of chips. “Sounds like you did a real number on him.”

John smiled softly. They were sitting in a quiet corner of the bull-pen, watching C-SPAN. On the screen, Henry Laurens was standing outside his house and delivering a reading a statement which was effectively an apology of for how his remarks may have been interpreted, all wrapped up in fancy political rhetoric. “Something like that.”

“No, seriously, what? I want to know what you said in your brave and daring defence of me.”

“You are the least in need of defending of anyone I’ve ever met.”

“True. But what did you tell him?”


Alex stilled. “The truth. I told him about us.”

Alex smiled. “You did what?”

“He won’t tell anyone, not if he wants to keep his precious family reputation. It’s mutually assured destruction if either one of us opens our mouth, which is exactly what I promised to do if he didn’t leave you alone.”

“You outed yourself to your dickwad of a Dad so he’d stop being mean to me? What the fuck, John?”

He shrugged. “It worked.”

Alex sighed, then shook his head. “How’d he take it?” he asked softly.

“About as well as you’d expect. But hey, on the plus side, at least I probably won’t ever have to sit
through another Laurens Thanksgiving dinner.”

“You’re mad.” Alex grinned. “You know I love you, right?’

And then there was nothing John could do to stop himself returning the smile, “I do now.” It was then John noticed that Alex had taken the moment he was distracted to steal a big chunk of his cake, and rolled his eyes fondly.

“So how did the congressional thing go?”

“Oh, you know. Uneventful, mostly.”

“Ah, you know. Uneventful, mostly.”

“Oh, look, they’re talking about it now.” Angelica said, butting into the middle of the conversation and planting herself squarely between them on the sofa. “Turn it up.”

John fumbled for the remote, and found the volume button just in time to hear the newscaster say “-new development in the story that is catching everyone’s eye, the House race for the South Carolina’s 7th congressional district, not three weeks after it was won by John Jay. Up until now, there has been no name put forward to challenge Charles Lee, but we can report some rumours that are circling around.

“They got someone already? Two out of two for Laurens!” Eliza grinned, materialising out of nowhere. John only frowned. The campaign office down there had been pretty desperate when he was there this morning. How had they found someone to run in a matter of hours?

“This is unconfirmed,” the anchor continued on the screen, but the name currently being floated by party leadership is the White House Deputy Communications Director and Charleston local, John Laurens.”

Mouth suddenly dry, John stared at the picture of himself that appeared on screen, idly noting how young he looked in it through the building dread. Then, slowly, he turned to look back at his friends who were staring at him in confusion.

Finally, Alex said “Uneventful?”

John smiled weekly. “Mostly.”

Chapter End Notes

Huge thanks to the amazing squishbanana who’s Beta-ing this work. Of course, all mistakes are still my own.

tumblr @hapless-and-hopeless. Come say hi!
Decided to post this one early. Don't say I never give you guys anything.

In case anyone else was wondering, my chapter titles are all West Wing Episodes, which are all goldmines. Turns out I forgot there was an episode called In The Room which I'm gonna have to work in somewhere, and another one called Jefferson Lives...

"Which one of you wants to explain this?"

John had been working here long enough to know when the President was angry. How to spot when he was secretly amused instead of annoyed, when it was one screw-up too many at the end of a long day, and those rare occasions when Washington’s mild temperament turned to white hot fury (usually when dealing with King, for example). For all this he wouldn’t claim to fully understand him; not even Alex or Laf could say that, though they were probably the closest anyone outside his wife would ever get. But even so, John understood him enough to know that right now, George Washington wasn't angry.

He was just disappointed. Ugh.

Angelica glanced his way, and her expression clearly said all yours, genius. He cleared his throat and stepped forward.

"That would be me, Sir."

"Funnily enough I worked that out for myself. What with it being your name splashed across the papers.” Washington held up that morning’s copy of The Post, an article bearing the headline 'Laurens to run for House?' across the front.

"This is all a big misunderstanding. I got into an argument with Lee and said some stuff that wasn't true to put him on edge, and he must have run to the papers or something. I don’t know. But this is all coming from him.”

"I’m getting a lot of questions in the Press Room,” Angelica put in. “Is John running? Are we endorsing him? What platform is he gonna campaign on? There’s only so much I can do to deflect them before we have to come out and make a statement that’s gonna be all-round embarrassing for us and the Party, once they realise we still don't have anyone to run in the 7th.”

"Embarrassing for me too.” John added.

"Don’t worry about that, you’ve already reached maximum embarrassment.”

There was no malice behind Angelica’s reply, but John knew it was true. He’d been an idiot, letting Lee bait him like that, and now the President was going to look bad right after winning re-election. It was one screw-up after another with him at the moment.

“We’re gonna have to come up with a response, and an actual candidate then.” the President said.
“Today. I think we can all agree that it’s your mess to clear up, John.”

That was true. But still. “You want me to find a candidate by the end of the day?”

“Find them, vet them, and write a statement, explaining exactly why you won’t be running and why your new man is better for the job than you could ever be.”

John groaned internally. This one was going to be a bitch. Alex had clearly come to the same conclusion, because he said “I can give him a hand.”

“Absolutely not.” Washington shot back, and everyone else smirked. “No offence, son, but it would be a bit counter-productive to put you on damage control. Besides, I need you with to take my place in the Treasury meeting this afternoon, I’ve got a security briefing. Burr can help John.”

This time John groaned out loud, and Burr with him. “What did I do?” he complained.

“You laughed. What’s next?”

They all filed out one by one after the meeting was over, Angelica to brief the press, Aaron next door to his office (after telling John not to bug him unless he was desperate), and Eliza and John back to the bullpen. Alex hung back to talk financial policy with Washington, but grabbed John’s arm before he left.

“Is there any chance of finding someone to run by the end of the day?”

“Not a hope in hell. The DNC couldn’t find someone in a whole week.”

Alex smirked. “Have fun.”

Three hours later, and John most decidedly was not having fun. It was as if all the competent politicians had disappeared overnight, and any that were left flat at refused to get involved, or were already working for the opposition. This was Washington’s personal branch of punishment, he knew, and he had to admire the President’s ruthlessness. He groaned, crossed another name off his list and leaned back in his chair. This was hopeless. He needed a break.

He was waiting for the ancient coffee machine to whir into life and eyeing up a tray of muffins in the rec room, when someone switched to C-SPAN, and a grainy picture of Lee was suddenly in his face. Fantastic, just who he wanted to look at right now. Lee was clearly at some campaign event or other, smiling warmly for the cameras and shaking hands. John just gritted his teeth and watched.

“Mr Lee, why are you running for the House?” someone asked.

“Because I care about the people of the 7th District. And someone has to turn around the backward policies of an administration that is treading all over them. A vote for me is a vote for some serious change around here, let me tell you.”

John rolled his eyes. He knew exactly what kind of changes Lee was talking about, and not one of them would help the people who needed it most. And if he couldn’t find anyone good enough to take him on, he was all but handing the district to Charles Fucking Lee. He had some serious work to do.
“So, to summarise, I think that the technical term for the situation is _up shit creek._”

Laf knew he could joke all he wanted, but the situation between Britain and France was no laughing matter. The two countries were at each others throats, and it was only a matter of time before all out war was inevitable. That was, unless a peace could be agreed upon first. Surprisingly enough, neither Washington, nor André who he was briefing laughed, although he noticed Hercules smirking in the corner before he could stop himself.

Lafayette had a feeling that, under any other circumstances, André would have wanted the aide out of the room, and well away from any sensitive security meeting. The man was paranoid like that. But Herc wasn't just an aide any more, no, he was Mr Secret Service now or some bullshit like that, and apparently that meant that he was in the need to know. Washington hadn't seemed to notice, and Laf was doing everything in his power to ignore the man all together. It wasn't that they were fighting, not really, but things had been somehow awkward between them ever since his birthday, when he had told Laf about André, and what he was doing. Complicated didn't begin to cover the chaos in his head whenever he thought about Herc (although he was pretty sure it was most part worried, convinced that he was in over his head) and right now his friend was just a distraction when they had a war to stop. So if Herc’s feelings were hurt by Laf ignoring him, he’d just have to live with it.

“Is there any chance General Howe would agree to a ceasefire?” Washington asked.

“Not unconditionally. And you can bet your ass that their conditions will be steep. My countrymen will not be able to accept them without a serious affront to our pride. And it has not come to that just yet.”

“But will it?” André asked.

Laf spread his hands. “I cannot say for sure. Few in France want war, yet our leaders seem to be spoiling for a fight. The British know they cannot win, yet they refuse to back down either. It may well come down to who blinks first.”

“And if neither side blinks?”

“Then we have an all-out conflict on our hands.”

“Well obviously that’s the last thing we want.” Washington said. “What are the other options?”

“We may be able to pursue them to come to the negotiating table with the backing of other world powers. The United States included. Your support may be key on this one, Mr President.”

Washington pursed his lips, and expression that Laf knew all too well from years of being friends with the man. He didn't like what he was hearing, and Laf couldn't blame him. The situation was shit and would only get shitter in the months to come. What was it the English said, in times like this? Something about a heavy crown? He couldn't remember exactly, but it probably applied to Presidents as well as kings.

“Keep me informed.” André said after the meeting, and Laf only smiled politely. He had never liked the man, even back when he had been a young agent, and he liked him a whole lot less as the President’s special security advisor. There was something behind his smile that always made him a little uneasy, although that could have been the whole world of espionage he represented. Laf had never had much time for secrets and lies - he liked his battles fought out in the open when your enemy was clear to see, and you were sure that you were doing the right thing. He only hoped to God that Herc knew what he was doing, getting mixed up in it all. 
“How do you spell Pyongyang?” Aaron demanded as soon as John walked into his office, and the young deputy looked a little taken aback.

“Er, with two y’s?”

Aaron threw up his hands in exasperation. “That’s what I said. But apparently the editor of the New York Times doesn’t see it that way.”

“What?”

“They spelt it wrong in the crossword.” He held up his paper to prove his point. “But when I called up whatever idiot they pay to write it, he wouldn’t believe me. Even when I told him I’d been there twice and personally organised trade negotiations with-“

“Let me guess, he hung up on you? Aren’t you supposed to be working?”

Aaron shrugged. “I’m hoping you’ve done my work for me, that you’ve got the name of someone we can run against Lee all ready to go, and I can just sigh off on it. Please tell me that was what you came in for.”

John smiled apologetically, and fiddled with the cuff of his sleeve. “Not exactly, but… Burr, what are the chances of anyone beating Lee in this race? Honestly?”

“Honestly? Next to nothing. He’s gotten most of the district already sown up, and the rest isn’t far behind. Some random Democrat waltzing in isn’t gonna have a fun time.”

“But there is a chance?”

“Mathematically, yes. But then there’s also the mathematical chance that you could spontaneously combust right now, and wreck my office in the process. Notice I haven’t got the fire extinguisher out.”

“You’re really not making my job any easier here.” John complained.

“Hey, you brought this one on yourself.”

“I know.”

Aaron wasn’t exactly a people person, but even he could tell there was something up from the tone in John’s voice, almost a wistful sigh.

“What’s wrong?”

“I’ve got a plan. A name to run in the 7th. But you’re not going to like it. You’re gonna tell me it’s a terrible idea and I’m out of my mind and-“

“Who’s the name?”

“John Laurens?”
Aaron blinked. “You.”

“Yeah, me.” Laurens was pacing around the office, hands gesturing wildly, and Aaron decided he’d been spending way too much time around Alexander. “I mean, I’ve got the local advantage, no-one get’s damaged trying to backpedal, the party loves Washington for giving them a candidate…”

“… and you get to to quit your job, hop on a plane, and tank your career fighting an unwindable race half the country away.” Aaron finished.

“I didn't say I’d thought this the whole way through.”

“You’ve thought none of this through.”

“So what, we just let Lee walk away with the district? I’ve got a duty to the party, and I’ve got a duty to my people. There is no one else, no one who could give him a fair fight. Tell me it’s impossible, and I’ll drop this right now.”

“Why are you coming to me about this?” It was a fair question. He respected John Laurens and the work he was doing, but they had never exactly been chummy.

“Because you’re the only one around here who would give me a truthful answer. Tell me it’s impossible.”

“It’s not.” Aaron admitted finally. “I mean, it’s a horrible idea, but… I suppose you’d have the best chance of any of us.”

John swallowed, clearly working things over in his head. Then he said “Will you help me?”

Aaron so desperately wanted to ask the question that was on his lips. What about Alexander? But he had a feeling that it wouldn’t go down well. Whatever was happening there, it wasn't something he should wade into the middle of. Instead, he took in John’s desperate face. And nodded.

--

I can never repay the confidence you have placed in me over the years, nor the advise that… John scowled, and crossed out the sentence savagely. What was happening to him? Sure, he had never been as good a writer as Alex, but he worked at the White House, for God’s sakes. He should be able to string a few words together. Maybe the last thing he’d ever write for the President, and suddenly any talent he’d ever had had abandoned him. Typical.

“John? What are you doing?”

He cursed under his breath. John had been counting on Alex not coming home for at least another hour, so that he would have time to get him thoughts in order. He knew they needed to have this conversation, and have it fast, but he’d been hoping to put it off for a little longer, so he could pretend it didn't have to come to this.

“Hey babygirl,” he said, standing hurriedly and trying to hide his work. Alex was having none of it. He skirted round John and snatched up the paper before he could stop him. His eyes narrowed as he read the first line, then looked up at John, an expression of horror on his face that twisted somewhere in his gut.
“Is this a resignation letter?”

“I can explain. Lee-“

Don’t do this, please. It’s not too late to find someone else.”

“There is no-one else, Alex. The party needs me to do this.”

“And your pride’s more important that your life in D.C? Than me?”

John closed his eyes, pinching the bridge of his nose. “That’s not fair.”

“Fair?” Alex spluttered. “I’ll tell you what’s not fair. Finding out from the that your boyfriend was moving to the other side of the country. That he was planning to destroy his career. That he didn’t even think about us before…”

He was shaking, John realised with some alarm, trembling the way that only happened when he was truly angry. Or truly afraid. John wanted nothing more than to wrap his arms around him and tell him that everything would be okay but he knew if he did that, he would never let him go again. And he owed Alex of all people the truth.

“I did think about us. I’ve been lying awake every night for the past month thinking about us. About all the shit you’ve gone through because of me.” Because he had, endless hours whole Alex slept next to him, thinking about the piles of hate mail he found in the bin every day that Alex tried to hide from him, the weariness in Angelica’s eyes whenever she had to deflect a question about it, the evidence of nights spent in front of a computer minimising damage all over Eliza’s face. And there wasn’t a damn thing he could do to stop any of it. John swallowed, and forced out the words that stuck in his throat, that he hated himself for even thinking, let alone saying. “And maybe… Maybe this is for the best right now.”

Alex took a step towards him, shock and hurt writ clear across his face. “What are you saying?”

“That I can’t keep doing this, Alex. Not like this.”

“So what, you’re done? What was I to you, John? A fling?”

John knew he deserved it, and more, but the words still stung. “Of course not. You know that’s not what this is. I want to be with you Alex. But I want to be with all of you, all the time. I know it was my idea but his sneaking around, always looking over our shoulder, pretending to be something we’re not while you’re the only one taking the hits…” He took Alex’s hand. “I want to be able to do this.” He moved his own hand up, softly tracing his jaw. “And I want to be able to do this. And…” It was the softest of kisses, lips barely brushing. “…And I want to do that, for the whole damned world to see. This hiding, it’s killing me Alexander. I know it was my idea, but that was before.”

For a long time, Alex didn’t say a word. He just stared at John, face inches from his own yet unreadable. Then, he whispered “Please. We can find a way.”

“There is no way. You know that. Look what’s happening to you, and that’ll be nothing compared to the hell that will reign down if anyone found out about us. They’ll be talking about a conspiracy within the White House, wondering what other secrets are being kept. It’ll destroy the administration and I won’t do that to Washington.”

“So you’re just going to run away?’

“I’m not running away. I’m going to to stand up to Lee and make my country a better place. Go
home, make a difference…”

“You won’t win. You can’t, not in South Carolina, not against Lee. Your father will make sure of that.”

“Then I’ll lose. But I’ll do it on my own terms.”

“Are you even listening to yourself? You’re a fucking idiot John, and you’re refusing to let me help you get out of this mess!”

“I want this, Alex.” And God forgive him, but it was true. He wanted to be here with his friends and the man he loved, but he also wanted to be out there. Running for office in his home state, campaigning for what he believed in, taking his shot to change lives and kick Charles Lee’s ass… and yes, maybe it was cowardice as well, but he didn’t want to have to face the everyday heartbreak of having Alex but not having him, of the tiny distance between them that might as well have been an ocean.

There was no distance between them now. Alex searched his face for a minute, then closed the gap. This was no soft, tentative brush of lips, but a collision. Two immovable forces of nature crashing together. Alex pushed him backwards, a beautiful rage behind his kisses that John strained to catch every trace of. These were the moments they were truly alive, passion and despair bursting at the seams as his heart race and breath came in desperate gasps.

His jacket was somewhere on the floor, discarded. Alex began working at his tie and top buttons, tugging the fabric with shaking hands. John’s back collided with something solid, and it took his brain a second to register that he was pressed against the wall. Not you could blame him for being a little slow - he was somewhat preoccupied with Alex’s mouth at his throat, with his own efforts to pull his jacket away, with the hands that, tie removed, were slowly working their way downwards. Maybe the two of them had always been this, a pair of fireworks that went off too soon, lighting up the whole sky in a trail of glory before they burnt out.

John closed his eyes.

Later, much later, when even Alex had succumbed to sleep, John lay awake and counted the hours slip by. The two were intertwined, so that in the shadow on the far wall cast by city lights through a window no one had bothered to draw, it was impossible to tell which man was which. He tucked a stray strand of hair behind Alex’s ear, fingertips brushing against his face. John realised he was memorising Alex, every tiny detail until he could close his eyes and form a perfect picture of the man he was about to loose. Not that he would admit that to himself, though. In the same way that when they had kissed, all fire and desperation, and John had clung to him as if to life, neither man could admit that they were saying goodbye.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, maybe I should have named this chapter after the Things Fall Apart episode...
Eliza had seen Alex hurting before. This wasn't that. This was... she couldn't say what it was, exactly, but she knew it scared her because she didn't have a clue what to do about it.

John had left on a Friday, packing up his office into a cardboard box and slipping out without fanfare or ceremony. She had been amazed that everything could fit into such a small box, everything that was John Laurens neatly packaged away and gone. He'd always seemed to take up so much space in the West Wing, and now here she was standing in the doorway to an empty office, wondering how the hell he could be leaving.

“Don’t you need to go? You guys are gonna be late.” Angelica said, coming up behind her and eyeing the room with distaste.

“Yeah, probably.” Eliza sighed. “Alex definitely not coming?”

“Nah. We tried to re-arrange his meeting up on the hill but he wouldn't let us. It might be for the best, though. I’m not sure he could take a goodbye like that in the middle of an airport.”

“Yeah...” she replied, thinking about all the other things she wasn't sure Alex could take. “I’ll text you when we get there.”

Eliza met John in the atrium. He was standing in the middle of the room, backpack over one shoulder and looking around at everyone coming and going with a slightly wistful expression on his face. “All set?” she asked with forced cheeriness.

“Yeah. I’m ready to go.”

They drove to the airport mostly in silence, some dreadful music playing out over her cheap radio to drown out the silence. Eventually, John leaned across and turned it off. “Do you hate me, ‘Liza?”

“What?”

“I mean, I wouldn't be surprised. All this...” he laughed without any real humour. “Kind of a dick move.”

“Kind of.” she agreed, eyes fixed firmly on the road.

“Do you at least understand why I’m going?”

“No. I think it’s a horrible idea.” she took a deep breath. “But I could never hate you, John. None of us could. It’s what you want, and you’ve got to go for that.”

He hummed, unconvinced. Then sighed, and said “Look after him for me. I really fucked up this time.”

There was no need to ask who he was. “I’ve been looking after Alex for years.”

“He’s lucky to have you.”

And all too soon they were standing outside airport security. He looked up at the flight board, and
Eliza bit her lip. She was still unbelievably pissed with John, at him throwing away his career and all the hurt this was going to call Alex but, well, it was John. And she hadn't realised how much she was going to miss him.

“Don’t I get a goodbye hug?” she asked, and she thought she saw a moment of relief flick across John’s face before she threw her arms around him. “Good luck, Laurens. Kick Charles Lee’s ass for me.”

“Planning on it. Could you do me a favour and tell Alex…”

“Tell him what?”

John shook his head. “It doesn’t matter. He knows.”

She tried for a smile, failed, and told him “Get out of here. You’re gonna miss your plane. Call me when you get settled in your office down there?”

“Sure,” he said, and neither of them acknowledged the lie. John wouldn't be calling.

--

Six days was how long it took before Angelica snapped. Aaron had honestly expecting it to be sooner, but maybe she was taking special care not to treat Alexander with kid gloves. He could see how much it was killing her to try and act normally, just as he was able to see that Alexander was by no definition okay. It wasn't like he’d been before the trial, when he’d made every effort to cover up what he was feeling and pretend everything was fine. It was as if he’d lost the energy to even do that.

It was in Senior Staff when it happened, the arm of Alexander’s chair accusingly empty as the rattled through the agenda of the day. He was part way through explaining his strategy for dealing with an upcoming House vote on education when he noticed what was wrong. Alexander hadn't said a word, hadn't so much as looked up when Aaron started talking about an amendment that would no doubt strangle inner-city schools, let alone burst into a full tirade like he would have expected.

“Anything to add?” he prompted, and Alexander looked up with a start, then slowly shook his head. Come on, say something! Aaron wanted to scream. Where’s the fight? Instead he just closed his notes. “That’s it for this morning. Keep me updated on the talk from the hill.”

Alexander couldn't get out other quick enough, and everyone watched him go without a word. Then, slowly and deliberately Angelica said “What. The. Fuck?”

Aaron sighed. “This isn't normal. You know I had to ask him to beef up the language on our statement on the oil lobby yesterday? I had to tell him to be more aggressive towards big oil. I mean we’ve all had bad break-ups, but…”

“It’s not just a break-up, though.” Eliza said quietly, and Aaron wondered how much more she knew. She was closer to John than him, after all, and far closer to Alexander. But before he could ask, Angelica said “Well we gotta do something. Cheer him up. Distract him at least.”

“What did you have in mind?”
“It’s Thursday. When was the last time we all played Poker?”

“You just want to take our money.” Aaron accused, and she laughed.

“Nah, we’ll invite Herc as well. That way it’s fair and we all lose.”

He shrugged. “Yeah, why not. I mean, it’s not like it can get any worse, right?”


“Okay, so I think we can agree that Poker Night was a disaster?” Angelica said.

“You know, I don’t think that one was your fault.” Theo put in. She’d been over visiting Aaron at work when Team Cheer Alex The Fuck Up (name still pending) convened in his office, and she’d been only too eager to join in. “I mean, nutter decides to send the building into lock-down? Totally outside your control.”

In their defence, she was right. There was no way they could have foreseen that some idiot would chose that of all nights to hop the White House fence and start shooting when they were midway through the first hand. It had turned out to be just a bb-gun in the end, and all the glass in the window’s was bullet-proof anyway, but try telling that to the secret service agents who hadn’t let them leave the room for hours while they locked the building down. Funnily enough, no-one had much fancied playing poker after that.

“Yeah, but that doesn’t help us. The man’s miserable.”

“Well, have you tried talking to him?” she demanded, before looking round at their guilty faces in surprise. “No-one thought talking to Alex might be a good idea? Tell me again why you guys are supposed to be the best and the brightest?”

Aaron took her hand gently. “Alexander isn’t exactly the most open of people. I don’t think he’s really one for talking.”

“Don’t give me that bullshit. I’m the one who had to look after his ass every day for a month. He does nothing but talk.”

“Yeah,” Angelica pointed out. “But he never really says anything. Not about the stuff that matters. I mean, look how long it took him to say anything to John.”

“He’s just terrible with the whole emotions thing. I speak from experience.” Eliza said.

“Isn’t that just men in general?”

“True.”

“Hey!” Aaron protested. “I’m feeling ganged up on here.”

Theo smirked and kissed him on the cheek. “I’m sorry sweetie. We can’t help it if it’s true.”

“Yo, guys-” Alex’s voice drifted down the corridor, and everyone tried to look as natural as possible as he walked through the door. His face broke into a grin when he saw Theo. “Hey, my guardian angel’s here. How you doing, Theo?”
Aaron grimaced. “How long are you going to call her that?”

“For about as long as it makes you uncomfortable.”

“Don’t you worry yourself, Aaron, I’ve changed Alex’s bedpan. That’s sort of the ultimate turn-off.” Theo said, and Angelica had to smirk at the expression on Alex’s face. Aaron had found a good one in her, that was for sure.

“Ugh, way too much information.” Aaron complained.

“Not important right now, guys!” Alex said, seemingly remembering what he had come in about and waving a memo around. “Jefferson’s coming at us on the whole French neutrality thing, and we’ve got tonight to figure out a way to shut him down or shut him up, or this whole thing goes up in flames. We need to show a unified government, or we won’t be taken seriously at the negotiating table.”

“Okay…” Eliza said slowly. “So what are we doing about it?”

“I’m gonna start work on remarks refuting his position, in case it comes to an all out debate. You guys start working out how we can pursue him to but out… is there anyone in this room he’ll still talk to?” They all looked around awkwardly, and Angelica realised that even Aaron had pissed Jefferson off one too many times now. He wouldn’t work with anyone.

“Laf.” Eliza said suddenly. “He’s friends with Laf, right?”

“For some reason.” Alex muttered, but there was a fire dancing behind his eyes that she hadn’t seen for days. “Okay, you find Laf and tell him to get his ass down here, you two try and find out if there’s anything we can threaten him with, me and John.” Alex faltered, and for a moment the shadow crossed his face, but then he blinked and it was gone. “I’m gonna start writing. Theo, I’m sorry, your boyfriend’s gonna be a little busy for a while. We have so much work to do!” He yelled, and then he was gone, in the whirlwind that was Alexander Hamilton. Everyone just stared after him.

“Well, that was…” Aaron tried.

“You call that miserable?” Theo asked. “He’s fine.”

“Huh, guess all he needed was a chance to kick Jefferson’s ass five ways from Sunday.”

Eliza just bit her lip. “He’s. He’s gonna close himself off, bury himself in his work-”

“You’re right, but would you prefer the quiet, jumpy Alex?” Angelica asked. “I guess this is him dealing. And it does sound like we’ve got a genuine problem on our hands right now. Why is it always fucking Jefferson?”

“I don’t like this any more than you do, but you have to understand why we have no choice but to stay out of it. There is no way that our economy can support an intervention between you and the British.”
“You can’t be serious.” Laf and Jefferson spoke at the same time, matching looks of incredulity on their faces. Herc had never seen it himself when people said that the two of them looked alike, but he couldn't deny that the effect was a little creepy.

“Sir, we made a promise to the French.” Jefferson tried.

“A promise to another leader, in another time.”

“So you’re just going to abandon us?” There was no missing the hurt in Laf’s voice, nor that in Washington’s expression as he looked back at him, unrelenting. This was one of the reasons he’d never wanted to go into politics; the two of them were closer than family, yet this issue was tearing them apart.

“We’re not abandoning you. We just can’t commit—“

“You won’t even come to the peace summit!”

“We can’t be seen to be taking sides!”

“Then don’t.” Herc had no idea who had invited André to the meeting, but the man hadn't said a word thus far, just sat in the corner and watched Alex and Jefferson trade arguments, and Washington and Laf glares. He leaned forward in his seat. “Sir, the United States has a unique position, and you know as well as I that the threat of action can be more powerful than the real thing. What’s to stop you taking a mediatory role at the convention in London next week? You wouldn’t have to do more than agree to stop the arguments getting out of hand.”

Washington glanced at Burr, who cleared his throat. “This thing’s the best shot for peace we have, Sir.”

“And you wouldn't attack our policy if we agree to go to this thing?” he asked Jefferson. “It wouldn't work if we didn't seem like a united government.”

“One condition. I’m coming too.”

“No.” Alex short back.

“Yes. Someone’s got to stop you giving away the whole farm.”

The President frowned for a minute, then sighed. “Done. The four of us will fly to London next week, and see if we can stop this situation getting any messier.”

“Four of us?” Alex asked.

“Not you, Son. You’re staying here.”

“But—“

“Stay, Alexander. That’s and order. You as well, Burr. Keep the ship running while I’m not here.”

“Then who-?”

“Gilbert will be representing French interests, obviously, the Senator for the interventionists and I’ll be on the side of neutrality. And of course I’ll need my bodyman.”

It took Herc a second to realise that Washington meant him. It looked like he’d be going to London with a stormy President, an arsehole he couldn't stand, and a best friend who refused to speak to him.
Oh, and if they didn't pull this off, they might just start a war. Brilliant.

“Deal.” Jefferson said eventually. All eyes turned to Laf, who’s eyes were narrowed. The Frenchman shook his head. “This is bullshit,” he muttered shaking his head angrily, and before anyone could react he was out of his chair and storming out.

“Gilbert!” Washington called after him. Laf didn’t so much as turn around.

“Can I…?” Herc asked, already half way towards the door and Washington responded with a quick nod.

It wasn't difficult to catch up to Laf. Herc grabbed his arm, forcing him to turn around and look at him. “What the hell was that?” he asked. “I mean, hate to break it to you man, but you kind of just stropped out of the Oval Office there.”

“Do you think this is a joke? We’re getting screwed over here, and you don’t even seem to care.”

“Of course I care. We just can’t-“

“Can’t, or won’t?”

“Come on Laf, that’s not fair. There’s no way our economy could afford a war right now, and getting in the middle of a European grudge match would-“

“Are you an expert on foreign policy now? Do they cover this is your super special spy school?”

Herc automatically looked around, but they were alone in the corridor. Even so, he dropped his voice to a hiss. “Is that what you’re pissed about? That I’m gonna join the Secret Service?”

“I’m pissed because you didn’t tell me, Hercules! I’m pissed that you would trust this snake André over your friends. Or do you not trust me?”

“Of course I…” Herc ran a hand over his head in frustration, and let out a deep breath. “Of course I trust you. It’s just… complicated, you know.”

Laf shook his head, smiling incredulously. “No, I don’t. There’s nothing complicated about trust. Either I have yours, or I don’t.” When Herc didn't reply, he nodded, as if that had been what he was expecting. “I’ll see you in London.”

Lafayette turned and walked away, leaving Herc standing in an empty corridor, watching his friend walk away.

--

“Can you bring me back something from England?”

“What the hell do you want from England?” Herc asked, folding a shirt neatly into his bag.

“I don’t know, something English.” Hugh shrugged, with all the gracelessness that only a seventeen-year old could manage. “Some fish and chips, a monocle, some shit like that.”

“Language.” Herc shot back without even looking up - they both knew that he swore far more than
his younger brother. Hugh just stuck his tongue out and hopped down from the wardrobe he’d been sitting on.

“Don’t you have homework or something?”

“Done it. Mostly.”

“Mostly?”

“It’s just trig. I can do that in my sleep.”

Herc rolled his eyes, knowing it was probably true. He wasn’t stupid, but there was no doubt that his little brother had inherited the brains of the family. The kid was going to college in the fall, something he still couldn't quite believe. He was gonna make it out of here. He was gonna be something.

They ordered in pizza because Herc was too lazy to cook and it had become something of a tradition on the night before he went flying off around the world with Washington. He still didn't like leaving his brother, but they’d gotten used to it over the years, and Hugh knew how to look after himself. Even so, Herc had to check.

“You know what you’re doing for food?”

“There’s a lasagna in the freezer.”

“And in an emergency?”

“There’s $200 hidden in the the Taken DVD box. Alex’s number’s on the fridge, same with Eliza.”

“And no parties?”

“Only the football team.”

Herc swiped playfully at his head at that, which Hugh dodged with practiced ease. There was no way you could have a party for more than about three people in their tiny flat anyway.

“Good kid.”

Hugh paused, taking a huge bite of Hawaiian pizza (pineapple on a pizza was heresy in Herc’s eyes but there you go) then said “Is there really going to be a war?”

Herc suddenly had a sudden snapshot of his little brother marching off to some battlefield, uniform too big over his gangly frame but wearing it proudly none the less, with a gun strapped to his back. He shivered, and pushed the image away. This was what they were doing it for. “Absolutely not. Not with me going over there to save the day.”

“Oh God, we’re doomed.”

He was running to get out the flat early the next morning, yelling at Hugh to pass him his coat while he tried to find his keys when it happened. From behind him, Hugh said “Herc, what the hell…?” an odd tone in his voice, and he turned around to see his brother holding up a small pistol with distaste. Dammit, it must have come out of his pocket. He grabbed the weapon away and shoved it back in its sheath hurriedly, taking half a second to make sure the safety was safely on. When he looked up, Hugh’s eyes were incredulous.

“Well?” he demanded. “Is there any particular reason you have a fucking gun?”
“Language.”

“Language…? A gun, Herc. What the hell?”

“Don’t worry about it.”

“You’re not going to assassinate anyone, are you?”

“What? No. It’s just a precaution.” He bit his lip before adding “Everyone around the President has a gun for security. We just try to keep that secret so people aren’t looking for it.” He hated lying to his brother, but there was no way he could have this conversation right now.

“Okay then.” Hugh still looked a little disturbed. “Be careful, yeah?”

Herc smiled, planted a kiss on his forehead that was too quick for him to squirm away from, and picked up his bag. “I’m always careful.”

Chapter End Notes

Yeah I wasn’t gonna include Hugh in this story (I basically invented his whole character apart from the name) but I wanted to write some Herc being a big brother.

Can I ask you guys a huge favour? This (unlike some earlier chapters I could mention...) isn’t a self promo or anything, but it was the anniversary of some pretty crappy stuff for me this week, and I was wondering if you could go ahead and have a read of a Hamilton/Lams fic I wrote called Light From Dying Embers. Don’t worry, it’s much shorter than this one! Some major triggers for depression, suicide, and homophobia (so please don’t if that’s an issue) but it’s message and story is really important to me. So if you’ve in any way enjoyed Those Who Rise Up so far, please go have a look, it will only take ten minutes and it would mean everything to me. http://archiveofourown.org/works/7253386

Please look after yourselves and stay safe out there. Thank you so much for all the comments (you have no idea how much reading them makes me smile) and I’ll see you all next time for the Shit-Going-Down section of this story (ominous music plays in the background...)
Someone pointed out that South Carolina isn’t actually that far away from D.C. Sorry about that, my knowledge of US geography is pretty minimal. Can we all just agree to suspend disbelief and pretend the entire state just migrated to the West Coast or something? ;)

And a quick explanation for Adrienne here, I’ve basically ignored any and all historical fact apart from her name when it comes to this, and she’s the closest thing to an OC in the whole fic. I more or less had Irresistible by Fall Out Boy playing on repeat when I wrote her, if anyone's interested. Oh, and any conversation between her and Laf in italics is all in French - it seemed kind of annoying for you guys to have to scroll up and down looking for the translations, but of course they don't speak English to each other.

The seatbelt sign switched off and Herc breathed a sigh of relief, standing to grab the President’s bag. He was used to flying around the world on Airforce One by now, but the seven-hour flight had been one of the worst he could think of. Laf still wasn’t talking to him, had refused even to look at him as he boarded the plane, and the tension between the ambassador and Washington was palpable, making for an awkwardness that, in the cramped conditions of the plane, was nothing short of painful. That left him with either the press corps, most of whom he had rudely brushed off by now and all of whom just wanted an inside scoop, or Jefferson for company. Unsurprisingly, he had chosen to plug his iPod in and ignore everyone else as soon as the wheels were up, but it seemed like the senator had other ideas. About half an hour in, and Jefferson had come to sit beside him.

“Can I help you?” Herc had asked, gritting out the politeness from between his teeth.

“What’s happened between you and Gilbert? He’s miserable.”

Herc though he deserved some sort of prize for not rolling his eyes at Gilbert. “Why do you care, Jefferson?” he’d replied.

“He’s my friend.”

For some inconceivable reason, Herc had though. Out loud, he said “Then why don’t you go ask him about it?”

“Because, thanks to you, he’s in a foul mood.”

Despite himself, Herc had snorted. “You’re telling me.”

“Whatever. Just sort it out, Mulligan, for all our sakes. This is excruciating.”

Depressingly enough, that had been the closest thing Herc had had to a real conversation for the whole flight, so it wasn't exactly surprising that he was in a bad mood as he helped herd Washington through the swarm of cameras into a waiting car. In fact, he didn't even notice that they weren't alone in the back seats until the woman spoke.

“It is an honour to meet you, Mr Washington.” she said, shaking his hand. “I will be your translator.
for the duration of your stay in London.”

“Charmed.” Washington replied distractedly. “Miss…?

Her curly hair was cropped into a faux hawk cut, and she brushed a stray corkscrew curl out of her face with a practiced ease. “Miss Noailles, Sir. Adrienne, Noailles.”

“As in Laf’s Adrienne?” Herc asked before he could stop himself, but she didn't look offended.

“You mean Gilbert, yes? You must be his friend Hercules that I have heard so much about.”

“That’s me.” he smiled, not surprised that this woman, who was utterly beautiful, was the one Laf had fallen for. Everything from the cut of her suit to her carefully schooled expression screamed of class, elegance, and the general impression that she could kick your ass into the new year.

“Well, as much as a pleasure as it is to meet you, if we could get to business?” Washington prompted nodded, taking out the documents that they needed to go through before the summit met. Herc glanced at the size of the folder, and tried not to groan. This was going to be a long weekend.

---

I’m sorry, but that is unacceptable. We will not tolerate such a disrespect.”

“Disrespect? It is not France that is being disrespectful here, General! Your country continues to encroach on our sovereignty-“

Your sovereignty? Who is sovereign, exactly? Who’s in charge at the moment? Your governance is a mess…”

And so it went. Lafayette closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose, elbow resting on the polished wood surface of the table. They had been going at it for hours, the British General Howe and William Von Steuben who was representing the French, and so far all they’d managed to achieve was to piss each other off. If he had a dollar for every barbed insult that had been thrown across the table, he could have probably just bribed the both of them to just shut up and get along for the next ten years, but unfortunately it looked like they were going to have to try and make this work through diplomacy instead. Fantastique. And all this time, the Americans hadn’t so much as lifted a finger to get peace talks back on track.

He glanced down the table to where the US delegation were sitting. Washington could have been hued from solid marble from the way he held himself, motionless and imperial with nothing but stone cold authority behind his eyes. This was not the man Laf thought of as a father, but a man with all the weight of a superpower resting on his perfectly still shoulders. He had the power to end this now, to leap to their defence and force the British to back down, yet he seemed resolved to do nothing and maintain his precious neutrality. It was maddening.

Jefferson, two seats down from the President was a different story. He was jittery and unsettled, Laf’s own frustration mirrored in the senator’s. He wondered what conversation had gone on behind closed doors, what the President had said to him, that his friend hadn't opened his mouth to hurl insults at the British yet. They’d had their disagreements over the years, but they were friends and Laf had been counting on Jefferson to be his ally in this one. He tried to catch the man’s eye, to send his a questioning look, but Jefferson’s eyes were firmly fixed on the tabletop. Instead, Hercules
looked up and their eyes met.

Here was standing at Washington’s shoulder, ready to jump into action as soon as the President said the word. The stare they shared was an awkward one, and it was Laf who looked away first, pretending to turn his attention back to Howe’s dull monologue. He hadn't spoken more than a handful of words to his friend since their argument outside the Oval, and Laf hated every second of this rift between them. He missed the young aide, his stubborn nature and easy smile and unwavering devotion to his President. He hated that they weren't speaking even more than he hated Washington’s silence. It just felt wrong. Somewhere over the last few years the two of them had become Laf-and-Herc, the inseparable pair who just seemed to work, slot into each other’s lives like each man had been saving a place for the other. But right now… who knew what they were?

Adrienne, standing on Washington’s other shoulder smiled in his direction, and the corner of his lips quipped upwards in response. Yet another relationship he couldn't begin to categorise. There was no denying it had been good to see her after so long. She had cut her hair since the last time he had sailed away, and while he missed the cascading curls that had been smooth as silk under his fingers, he couldn't deny it looked good on her. Add that to her clever, wicked eyes and her clever, wickeder mind, and suddenly it was so much easier to remember why he kept running back to her.

Laf didn't kid himself into thinking she was in love with him, or he her. He had loved her, once, when he had been young, and love was a thing to give easily and without thought, but he wasn't that boy anymore. Alex and John had never forgiven Adri for breaking his heart the first time around, and they’d never been able to explain to them what this thing was between the two of them, mostly because he didn't understand himself. She wasn't his girlfriend; they had fought far too often, spent too much time apart and found too much comfort in the beds of others for that. Then what was she? Fuck-buddy? Too vulgar, and didn't begin to cover the history between them. Friends-with-benefits? He wasn’t sure they were even friends any more. His lover? For the millionth time, Laf silently cursed the English language - it never seemed to have the right words.

The room they were in was lavishly decorated, too much even by his standards. There was a huge fireplace on one wall, with an ornate carriage clock resting on the mantelpiece, it was a beautiful thing, but after hours of sitting here and achieving nothing it’s loud ticking seemed to be mocking them as much as anything else. He was pretty sure it was running slow besides, so he glanced at his watch. It was far past the agreed time to break for lunch, but the argument now raging looked in no hurry to wind itself up. Laf but the inside of his cheek in annoyance. This whole thing was a farce.

“Aww crap, what’s Madison doing here?” Alex groaned, walking into the Roosevelt Room and immediately spotting the senator amongst the group assembled.

“Get over yourself, Alexander. He’s not too bad, once you get him away from Jefferson.” Aaron replied mildly.

“Easy for you to say. He doesn't hate you.”

“And who’s fault is that?”

He was met with only a sullen silence, and Aaron quietly chalked it up as a win in his head. It was the first of the daily conference calls with the full American delegation in London, the group meeting
in the Roosevelt Room chiefly because it would feel wrong to be in the Oval Office without Washington. He and Alexander were representing the West Wing, along with John Adams, the NSA, several consultants and, apparently, James Madison.

“James.” he said politely, crossing to the Senator. The falling out between him and Alexander had been something of a legend around D.C. but he’d never done anything to piss Madison off (besides flatly turning down his offer to betray his team. Oops. But that had been years ago, there way no way the man would still hate him, right?) so it would probably be better if he talked to him rather than Alexander.

Madison looked up. “Oh, Burr. What do you want?”

“I wasn’t aware you’d be joining us.”

He shrugged. “Neither was I, until about a day ago. I’m Thomas’s point man on this one.”

“Lucky you.” Aaron said dryly.

“It could be worse. At least I didn't have to go all the way to London. Although I think Thomas is planning to come back via Paris or something so he’s happy.”

Aaron had to smile. “Naturally.”

The picture that the American delegation painted, when they finally got the conference call working, was a bleak one. Neither side was milling to back down, the wrong word at anytime could spell disaster, and there was increasing international pressure to intervene. And of course, the team was completely split over the issue in the first place. Such fun.

He didn't envy Washington one bit, but at least the President would know that his White House was in good hands in his absence. It was something that Aaron prided himself on, the running of a tight ship when it’s captain was away. Right now he and Angelica were the senior figures in the building unless you counted Adams (which no-one ever did) or Alex (who was more often than not part of the problem, and who knew what was happening in his head space right now?) and between them they had the whole thing pretty well locked down. It made him wonder, sometimes, why he hadn't taken up Jefferson’s offer to try his hand at doing this for real, but those moments were few and far between. It only worked so well because everyone trusted each other, and had he screwed Washington over, he would never have had that with another team again.

Still, he could never quite shake it. The desire to be in the Room. And who knew what would happen in four years, when Washington’s second term came to an end. In eight. In twelve. There was time yet, and Burr was nothing if not patient.

But it wasn't just his decision any more. With any luck, in four, or eight, or however many years it was when he decided to make his move, he would have to take Theo into consideration. The idea of someone having that permanence in his life, wanting to have her around for the long term, it was a terrifying concept. And Aaron couldn't deny that he loved it.

--

Laf had never much liked the smell of cigarettes, nor the acrid taste they left on the tongue. Sure, he had smoked plenty when he had been young and rough-edged and looking for purpose or at the very
least something to rebel against, but since coming to America he hadn’t touched the things. In fact, he had imposed a ban on smoking in the embassy and would regularly drive his staff crazy lecturing on the virtues of fresh air and healthy lungs.

Adrienne, of course, didn’t care about any of that.

He had to admit, there was something mesmerising about her silhouette in the window, shadowed against the lights of London and breathing long drags of smoke into the night air. His eyes traced the shape of her throat and the curve of her back, and decided that she would look even more mesmerising back in bed next to him. He told her so, and she laughed lightly.

“Greedy, Gilbert. You have been away too long, I think.”

Maybe that was true. He almost hadn’t come to her room at all tonight, sitting up for hours in his room, going over his notes from the day of fruitless meetings and getting increasingly frustrated. Then he had gone in search of Hercules. If he couldn't fix this mess with the British single-handedly, he could at least patch things up with with his friend. It wasn't worth this stupid fighting.

Laf had gotten as far as walking up to Herc’s door, fulling intending to do the awkward apology speech thing from every movie they secretly loved until he looked so pathetic that his friend had no choice but to forgive him. If he wasn’t asleep that was. It was gone midnight, he realised, and there was a high chance that Herc wouldn't appreciate being woken up by a stressed out Frenchman. But he needn’t have worried. As Laf got close enough to hear through the crappy hotel walls, he could make out the low murmur of Herc’s voice. He strained to hear the words.

“I don’t know, Sir. It doesn’t look good from where I’m standing.”

At first, Laf thought he must be talking to the President, but when no-one replied, and a moment later he said “I know. But we’ve got an early meeting tomorrow. The British just changed the start to eight so they must want something…” he realised that Herc must be on the phone, and most likely to John fucking André. At once, all the resentment came flooding back. What the hell had the spymaster ever done to deserve Herc’s confidence when he wouldn't even talk to his friends now? Laf sighed. It had been a mistake to come here. He turned to go, and an odd thought struck him. Could he be jealous of André? Impossible, Herc could talk to whoever he wanted, and that clearly wasn't Laf, so it wasn't any of his business. He was just pissed, obviously, he thought to himself, shaking his head and walking away.

And two minutes later Adrienne was opening her door to him, smirking because she knew he’d come sooner or later, and promising to do something about his trouble sleeping.

“Do you think there’s any hope for the summit?” he asked her.

“Of course. No-one here wants a war, not really. They just want to see how far everyone else is willing to go to stop one. But that isn’t what you are worrying about, is it?”

He turned his head on the pillow to look at her, frowning. “What?”

“Don’t try and give me that, Gil. We’ve known each other far too long. What’s really on your mind?”


“Me? I’m right here.”

She moved closer to him, as if to emphasise the point and he smiled at the sudden warmth. “You are.
But how long have we known this was never going to last?

“Long enough. But that doesn't mean it doesn't work. We are stars, my dear. We flare and fade.”

Was everyone in his life doomed to be that? Nothing ever lasting, and him, grabbing at the world with lights sparkling off his broken edges because he knew that everything was temporary, that he could never make a good thing last and sooner or later he would throw it all away? That’s what he’d done so far. Laf scrambled for the glasses of champagne that had been abandoned, half drunk, some time earlier. He pressed one into Adrienne’s hand and held his own high in a mock toast.

“To stars.”

--

Herc had always had good instincts, and over the years he had learned to listen to them. It was the little voice that whispered that his brother was lying to him the day that Hugh had gotten into his first fight, the nudge to intercept anyone Washington didn't have the energy to deal with after a long day, the push that had driven him to apply for the messenger job in the spur of the moment in the first place. They results of years dodging the rougher parts of the city, they had translated surprisingly well into the world of high-flight politics. And right now they were screaming.

He couldn't say what it was, exactly, but he’d been on edge all morning as they stood in the hotel lobby, waiting for everyone to assemble so they could drive across to the summit. And all the time, a feeling that he was missing something. Something important.

There was nothing obvious out of place. Washington looked a little stressed, but that was to be expected, and he had accepted the coffee that Herc handed him without comment. All around, aides and translators scuttled around, the type of organised chaos he was used to. A secret service agent stood by the door, wrist coming subtly up to his mouth to speak into his radio. There was nothing out of the ordinary, and if anyone else felt there was something wrong, they weren’t showing it. It was maddening.

Herc spied Laf across the lobby, Adrienne’s arm looped through his (and didn't that take a moment to swallow down, for some reason) and Herc decided fuck it. Screw this stupid fight, he needed to talk to his friend and check he wasn't just going mad.

Herc had made it half way across the room when someone grabbed his arm, and he turned to see Jefferson standing there. If Washington had looked stressed, the senator was closer to distressed, hair out of place and a harried look on his face.

“I need to talk to you, man. Now.” he said.

“Me?”

“Yeah. It’s gonna sound crazy, but-“

Herc shook him off. “I don’t have time for this now, I’m sorry.”

If Jefferson was pissed that Herc had brushed him off, he didn’t hang around to see it, skirting around him and carrying on towards the others. Adrienne smiled when she saw him coming.
“Hercules! How are you this morning?”

“I need to talk to you guys. Like now. Does anyone else get the feeling there’s something weird going on?”

“Oh, so we’re doing talking today are we?” Laf asked in mock surprise, and Herc wanted to scream.

“Cut the crap, Laf, I’m serious here. Something’s not right. We should talk to the President, postpone the summit.”

“You can’t be serious.” Adrienne said. “On what grounds?”

“On the grounds I say there’s something wrong.” Laf snorted, and Herc glared at him. “Look, I know you’re pissed, but think. Have I ever been wrong about this sort of thing? What about Maria Alex? I know it sound stupid but you’ve got to trust me.”

He stared at Laf, praying for the man to believe him, but his words seemed to have the opposite effect. “Trust you? How can you ask that when you clearly don’t trust me?”

“This isn’t about-“ but Laf had gone, marching past them and outside, where people were starting to move as the first of the cars arrived. Herc watched him go, panic rising in his throat, and Adrienne took his arm, steering them in the same direction at a much slower pace.

“You’ll have to forgive Gilbert. He’s under a lot of stress at the moment, and I know that he cares about you, truly. He just needs time to get over himself.”

“Never mind that. I wasn't joking, something’s not right here.”

They were outside now, standing on the pavement outside the hotel. People were all around, diplomats on one side of a ropeline that separated them from the press and general public.

“You’re imagining things.” she told him, then frowned. “What are you doing?”

“Looking for something.” For what, Herc had no idea. It was something right in front of his eyes, something obvious, and every part of him was screaming that it was going to happen nownowNOW. He scanned the crowd, the buildings and cars, the faces behind the ropeline… and felt his heart fall out the bottom of his stomach.

The boy couldn't have been older than eighteen or so. Hugh’s age, he thought absently even as his body was firing into action of its own accord. The kid’s eyes were fixed on Washington (who was standing somewhere near Herc) and full of a determined fury. Something flashed in his hand, and Herc didn't stop to find out if it was a gun or a knife or some other kind of device. He had time to do nothing but let out a bellow of warning and launch himself towards Washington. His hands had just closed around the President’s jacket (whether to pull him to the floor or out and away from danger Herc couldn't have said, but it didn't matter in the end) when the air turned white hot around them. The blast of pure hot air and dust and the sound, oh god the roar threw them backwards and into the air, and the last thing that Herc felt before everything faded to black was Washington’s jacket slipping out of his fingers.
Hercules opened his eyes and coughed. The air was thick with dust and smoke, and there was a ringing in his ears that made it hard to focus. He blinked, willing the world to right itself, but only succeeded in sending a sharp jolt of pain through his head. Why was it so difficult to think? His brain felt sluggish, as if each thought was struggling through a mire just to make itself herd. *Come on, Mulligan, focus dammit!*

He blinked again and everything swam into focus a little more. He was lying behind what seemed to be an overturned car, shattered glass and the stink of fuel all around. He quickly took stock of himself. Nothing seemed to be too badly injured; all four limbs were still there and in working order, maybe some bruising but no broken ribs as far as he could tell. There was a dull ache in his left temple and when he put a hand to it it came away red, but he told himself it wasn't a big deal. These things always looked worse than they were, he was sure he'd heard that somewhere.

Something shifted near him and Herc reached automatically for the gun he no longer had, before realising that that something was the President. *Oh God.* It all came back in a rush - talking to Adrienne, the boy in the baseball cap, lunging for Washington as the air exploded around them, the wave of heat throwing them off their feet. The President was lying a few feet away from him on the tarmac, suit ruined and one arm twisted at an unnatural angle. Herc’s first instinct was to yell for help, but he had no idea if they were still in danger. Instead he crawled over to Washington.

“Mr President?” he whispered, shaking his uninjured arm. “Sir, can you hear me?”

Washington slowly tilted his head upwards to look at Herc through unfocused eyes, and he let out a breath of relief. “Are you alright?”

“What happened?”

He swallowed. “I don’t know. I think there was a bomb, a guy in front of the hotel…”

Washington closed his eyes, and for a moment Herc was worried he’d slipped into unconsciousness, but the President just let out a deep breath. “I can’t… I’m going to need… Twenty Five”

Although Hercules was more concerned about getting them out of there in one piece, his breath caught in his throat. He understood what he was asking for at once, and Washington would know full well what it would mean for him. God Dammit, the President must be hurt worse than he realised. He must be hurt bad.

“Tell them… don’t let them escalate this until we know…”

“You can them him yourself, Sir,” he said, and Washington managed a smile, although it quickly turned into a grimace.

“Mr President!”

Hercules looked up to see three secret service agents hurrying towards them. “He’s hurt!” he warned as one of them reached out to grab Washington. “His arm. I don’t know what else. What’s happening?”

“Explosion ripped up half the street and the building front. No saying how many are hurt or…” The agent trailed off, and Herc was gripped by a cold horror. In his panic over Washington, he hadn't even thought about Laf, or any of the others. The Frenchman had been standing closer to the blast than they had…

Washington seemed to be thinking the same thing, because he grasped Herc’s wrist, grip surprisingly strong. “Gilbert, he said, a fear that Herc had never seen before behind his eyes.
“I’ll find him,” he promised, and then to the agents, “Get him out of here.” It was only later he would wonder why they did what he said without question.

With Washington secure, Herc straightened and surveyed the scene around him with dismay. The agent hadn’t been lying. What had been a bustling street now resembled the set of a low budget disaster film, nothing but rubble and dust. He picked his way across the road with only a slight limp, desperately scanning around for his friends. There were people everywhere, clutching each other for support and far too many lying unmoving on the ground. He swallowed down the rising panic. Laf would be fine. He always was.

There was a crowd of paramedics moving urgently, and as he walked towards them Herc saw Adrienne sitting on a car bonnet, an orange shock blanket thrown around her slender shoulders. And next to her…

“Laf!” he shouted, hurrying towards them, but a moment later, as he got close enough to see the pair clearly he faltered. The shock of dark hair he’d mistaken for his friend belonged to Jefferson, not Lafayette. The senator looked like he was in shock, staring numbly at the devastation around them, but at least he seemed unhurt.

Adrienne looked up. “Hercules!” she cried, throwing off the blanket and racing towards him. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah, so’s the President. I mean he’s hurt pretty bad, but he’s safe. Where’s Lafayette?”

Her face fell. “I don’t know. You haven’t see him?”

“Not since the explosion.”

Her lip trembled and he pulled her into a hug. “It’s gonna be okay, we’ll find him.”

But as the minutes slipped by with Herc frantically moving through the crowd, there was no denying the fear pooling in his stomach. He ran a hand through his hair frantically and called out “Lafayette! Where are you, you dumb fuck?”

But there was no answer, and the truth hit him like a freight train. Laf wasn’t here.
Chapter Notes

I'm sorry (again) for last chapter, although you guys have the best nicknames for Laf - my personal favourites were Baby Baguette and My French Daveed. I wrote this in tandem with the next chapter so I might post that later tonight - they kind of go together...

Herc leaned against the cool glass of the phonebox and closed his eyes, thinking. He would have used his mobile, but the damn thing had smashed in his pocket when he hit the ground, and unsurprisingly finding him a replacement was pretty far down on the priority list at the moment. He only had enough change for one call, and while there was a call he desperately wanted to make - to his friends to tell them exactly what had happened here before they went mad with worry, there was another one he had to place. He sighed again, silently apologising to Alex and the rest, then dialled.

André picked up on the second ring. “Who is this?”

“Hercules Mulligan, sir.”

“Mulligan? Thank God you’re alright, boy. What’s it looking like down there?”

“It’s a mess.” he replied honestly. “Half the street torn up, no-one really seems to know what happened or who’s got jurisdiction. We got the President away alright, he should already be en route back over there. But now MI-Whatever-fucking-number-it-is are crawling all over the scene and no-one will tell me anything.” He took a deep breath. “You know about the Ambassador?”

“The Marquis? Yes. We’ve got some news on that front actually.”

“You’ve found him?”

“Unfortunately not. But the agents at MI-Whatever-fucking-number-it-is, as you so eloquently put it, managed to tap into local security cameras. It would seem that the explosion was nothing more than a distraction.”

“A distraction?” Herc repeated faintly. “That’s their idea of a distraction? People were hurt, hurt bad. The President-“

“Will survive. You’ve never done military service, have you Mulligan? Trust me, when someone’s trying to kill you, you’ll know it.”

He looked back down the road, at the crater that used to be a busy pavement, at his own bruised body. It had felt real. But there would be time later to breath into a paper bag and properly freak out. Instead he squared his shoulders, glanced at the numbers on the screen telling him that his time was fast running out, and said “So what were they distracting us from?”

“I’m looking at pictures of two men rushing out from the rope-line, grabbing the Ambassador and bundling him into a van.”

He took a deep breath. It didn’t help. “And you don’t know where they went?”
“Scotland Yard’s working on that, but do you have any idea how many white transit vans there are in London? And with all the chaos following the explosion… I don’t hold out that much hope of tracking their movements. Nor can we identify who the two individuals were.”

“Three.” Herc said. “There were three of them. The two who grabbed Laf plus this kid in the crowd, late teens maybe. He set off the blast.”

“You’re sure of this?”

“I saw him, Sir, just as he was doing it. See if they can track him on the cameras instead, it might tell us who these people are at least.”

A second later Herc realised he had just given John André an order, but the spymaster only said “I’ll look into it. Good work Mulligan. Now get yourself on a plane. We’re going to need you on this one.”

“With all due respect, Sir, wouldn't I be more use on the ground?”

“You’re not an official resource. You have no jurisdiction on foreign soil. You can’t represent the service, or the FBI, or—”

“I wouldn't be. But I’m not leaving here without Laf. It’s my fault he got hurt.” Because it was. If Herc had just gotten over himself and apologised sooner…

“Your loyalty is admirable, but protecting him wasn't on you. You got the President out, that was your job.”

“Not good enough. I’m sorry but he’s my friend and I can’t just fly home. He could be a mile away from me right now and I’m not going half way around the world.”

“Maybe you didn't understand me, Mulligan.” André’s tone was all frustration. “It wasn’t a request. Get your ass on a plane in the next few hours or God help me—” The rest of the rant was swallowed by a dial tone, and a flashing message telling him he had run out of minutes. Herc sighed, and placed the receiver back on the cradle. He should go home. Washington would need his help, his friends would need his support, and now he had been directly ordered to.

But Laf needed him more.

Herc bit his lip, then walked back towards the sea of blue lights at the end of the road.

--

“Tell me it’s not true!”

George Washington winced at the noise of the door slamming open and the half-angry, half-terrified voice of his aide shouting. But then he had spent the last six-and-a-half hours wincing in pain at every breath he took anyway. He couldn’t remember much of the immediate aftermath of the explosion, just the odd flashes of image, but they told him that they’d put him on a plane almost immediately to fly him back to D.C. With some difficulty, he propped himself up on his good arm, and Alexander Hamilton came into view, standing at the foot of his bed.
“Son…”

“I’m not your son.”

“Listen to me—”

“You can’t seriously think this is a good idea!” Clearly in his state, all Alexander’s ideas of respect and protocol had been left by the wayside. His hands were shaking, George realised as he advanced round the bed.

“It’s not a good idea. It’s the only idea there is.”

“Bull. You can’t just hand over power to Adams.”

“I’m not just handing over power, my boy. The Twenty-Fifth Amendment states—“

“The Twenty-Fifth says that the Vice President shall immediately assume the powers and duties of the office as Acting President. How is that not handing over power?”

George sighed, and immediately regretted it as pain flared up the side of his body. “When the President is unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office. Don’t for one second assume you know our constitution better than I do. Tell me, Alexander, do I look like I am able to discharge the powers and duties of my office right now?”

Alexander paused, and George knew he must be a sight. Still in the same ruined suit, right arm in temporary strapping that did nothing to hide its unnatural angle. All manner of cuts and bruises and burns covering his body, and laid out on a hospital bed about to be wheeled into surgery. “There’s precedent to just transfer power for the hours you’re under general anaesthetic,” Alexander argued eventually. “The country needs you right now. Lafayette needs you.”

A wave of pain that had nothing to do with his injuries washed over him. “Alex, listen to me.” He said, and Alexander’s head snapped up at Alex. “What did I say to you the day I was sworn into office?”

“Remember, my boy, from here on in history has its eyes on us.” he said, and some tiny part of George was impressed at his recollection.

“Exactly. There’s the bigger picture to think about here. It would be irresponsible of me to continue to lead while I am in no fit state to do so.”

“You’re more fit to lead than Adams will ever be.”

He still wasn’t getting it. “So I stay in charge. And what happens when a group of terrorists or militants or whoever the hell we’re dealing with get in touch and tell me I have 24 hours to withdraw all troops from their country or transfer or $50 million, and if I don’t comply they’re going to send Gilbert back in a body bag?” Alexander paled, but George had to be sure he understood. “Do you think I could stand there and say the United States doesn’t negotiate with terrorists? Do you think I could ever look you in the eye again if I did? This country wouldn’t have a commander in chief, his would have a man out of his mind with worry because his son’s in a shack somewhere with a gun against his head!”

He had gone too far, George only had to look at Alexander’s face to know that. He looked like he was about to throw up, and he was reminded that the young man had already lost more people than most. “Do you understand, son? Why I have to plead the Twenty-Fifth?”
“Yes sir.” It was no more than a whisper.

“Adams is going to need all the help he can get, for however long this takes. And if this surgery goes wrong-“

“It won’t.” The reply was automatic, and George didn't have the heart to argue the point.

“Mr President, we need to take you to prep now.” A nurse had re-appeared, and Alexander moved aside reluctantly as they made preparations to wheel him into surgery. George closed his eyes.

--

This was wrong. There was no other word for it. In the space of a single phone-call the whole world had been turned upside down, and now Angelica was desperately searching for something to hold on to to stop her from falling off altogether. She took a deep breath, trying to calm herself although it did no good. How could it, when they were standing in the Oval Office with John Adams sitting behind Washington’s desk.

The swearing in ceremony had been a rushed affair, a judge hastily summoned to the White House and the ink not even dry on Washington’s letter transferring emergency powers to the Vice President. Alex had barely made it back from the hospital in time; Angelica was amazed he’d made it back in one piece at all from the state of him. Washington must be in worse shape than they were letting on if a conversation with him had left Alex looking half a ghost himself.

He was holding Eliza’s hand now as they all stood in the Oval Office, awaiting instruction from an acting President who looked like he was waiting for some himself. John André had been all too happy to provide them, talking Adams through various security procedures and advising him on the immediate emergency steps to take. The Joint Chiefs were here too, along with the NSA, and it seemed like the West Wing staff were the only ones feeling redundant. Technically they were the employees of the White House, not the President, but Angelica for one had never thought of them as anything other than Washington’s team, and the idea that, for the time being, they reported to Adams was jarring.

“Both the British and French have scrambled their reservists.” André was saying, “And while neither has claimed knowledge or involvement in the attack, you can bet it came from one side or the other.”

“That’s not necessarily true.” Aaron put in, and Angelica glanced up at him in surprise. He had never been one to speak out of turn. “There is always the chance that both governments are just as much victims of the bombing as we were. This could be a small, unaffiliated group looking to start a war-“

“Burr, what is your job title again?” André asked in exasperation.

“White House Chief of Staff.”

“And does the White House Chief of Staff have classified knowledge of national security?”

“No.” Aaron spat out through gritted teeth. “But if you look at-“

“Enough, Burr!” Adams interrupted. “We don’t have time for this.”

For a moment, Angelica thought Aaron would push the point further (and she was more than ready
to jump to his defence), but after a tense movement he bowed his head. “Yes, sir.”

Washington would never have shut him down like that. He had never really warmed to Aaron even after all these years, but even so he wouldn't have so abruptly dismissed a valid point. Angelica didn't know whether to be indigent on Aaron’s part, or terrified that Adams was about to take them to war. But she needn't have worried. Alex was about to do both.

“You must be out of your Goddam mind!” he yelled, and everyone in the room stilled, looking in shock from the aide trembling with anger to the President.

Adams stood up slowly. “I’m sorry?”

“How can you think this came from the governments? No-one wanted a war, and that’s exactly what’s going to happen unless you can sort this out. We need to be calming things down, not escalating them!”

“Boy, watch your tone-“

“I’ll watch my tone when you get off your ass and start acting like a responsible leader!”

"YOU WILL SHOW ME SOME RESPECT!”

“Oh SIT DOWN JOHN!” Alex yelled. “YOU FAT M-“

“Alex, enough!” Eliza shouted, moving herself between him and the spluttering President. “That’s enough,” she repeated, and this time it barely a whisper.

“Alexander, take a walk.” Aaron grabbed his jacket and all but bodily hauled Alex backwards into his office. Eliza and Angelica followed, closing the door behind them. Aaron had deposited Alex in the chair across from his desk. “What the hell are you playing at?”

“I’m going to kill him.” Alex growled. “Who does he think he is, sitting there like some oversized emperor-“

“And I’d help you, but it wouldn't solve anything. Right now, we need Adams on our side.”

Alex laughed bitterly. “Think that ship sailed a long time ago.”

“Well you’d better call it back to port.”

“Adams won’t work with me in a million years. That’s a non-starter.”

Aaron shot him an exasperated look. “Just… please try to calm down, Alexander. I need to get back in there.”

He walked back into the oval office, and Alex snorted as soon as the door closed behind him. “Calm down. Doesn't he get what's happening.”

“He’s trying to help.” Eliza said gently.

“Help? There’s nothing we can do, ’Liza. Nothing!”

“Alex-“ she began, and Angelica cut her off. “Alex, go home.”

“What? No, you need me here.”
“Right now we need you in the right frame of mind, and this isn’t it. You’re only gonna make things worse.” He looked at her, eyes wide, and Angelica pushed down the bubble of self-hatred. She had no time to wrap him in cotton wool, not when they had a country to save from disaster and Alex refused to accept what was best for him. He was only get him fired if he stayed in the White House right now.

“Go home, Alex.” she repeated, a little more softly. “Please.”

--

John Laurens hadn’t found the South Carolina he’d been hoping for. Sure, he’d known it would be almost impossible to go up against Lee, that he didn’t have a chance, really, but there was no denying the defeat had hurt. Even as he watched the votes roll in, there had been some part of him hoping, madly, for some last-minute movie-style victory. That hadn't happened. He’d lost, lost hard, and it had all been for nothing.

Well, not nothing. He’d forced Lee to the debate floor, raised the standard of campaign, got people talking about issues and ideas and put up a brave fight for the party and the President. It still hadn't been enough, and John didn't just want to be the guy who’d made his opposition work a bit harder. It had been easy to talk about running in his home district and standing up for the little guy when he’d been working in the building with the eagle on the floor. It was more difficult to generate the same conviction from this little grey cubicle he now worked in. *You chose this*, he reminded himself.

Yet again, he was the last person in the campaign office that evening. True, there wasn't a campaign to run anymore, but the party had been able to keep around half the staff on to run the day to day affairs of the opposition office. They still called it the campaign office for some reason, half misplaced optimism and half bitter irony. Alex would have laughed at that, John knew, but he still hadn't been able to bring himself to pick up a phone and bloody call him already. He told himself it was because it wouldn't be fair to Alex when he had been the one who had ended it (and ignored the stubborn voice that told him it was because he was too cowardly.) He still spoke to Laf on occasion, and the President had called him briefly to give commiserations after he had lost. He hadn't offered to put anyone else on the phone, and John hadn't asked him to. He had made his decision, started this new chapter in his life for better or for worse, and he had to accept that.

John checked his schedule for tomorrow, and scowled. He had another meeting with the local neighbourhood watch first thing, followed by a press conference where he would surely be asked for his opinion on Lee’s first few weeks in office, and he’d have to find a balance between gracious loser and strong, credible opponent. Writing was one thing. Being the mouthpiece? Fucking exhausting. He really should head home sometime soon, or his long-suffering assistant (could you be long-suffering if she'd only worked with him for about a month? Probably, he tended to have that effect on people at the moment) would have to stand outside his flat with a megaphone to get him up tomorrow.

He rooted around his desk for a memo he wanted to read over at home, fumbled for the remote to turn off the television playing on mute in the corner… And froze as he took in the pictures on the screen. A smoking crater where a street used to be. Figures huddles together in orange shock blankets, and those lying unmoving under sheets. A harried looking police constable answering questions outside of Scotland Yard. And… *Oh God,* a photograph of Lafayette flashed up on screen, his name printed neatly underneath. Numbly, John found the volume.
ambassador is still missing, now in the fourth hour of the search. Gilbert du Motier, who was representing both French and American influences at the London talks has not been seen since the explosion outside the Strand Hotel this afternoon. So far, detectives have no definitive leads on his whereabouts and are appealing for information.”

John’s breath caught in his throat. Jesus, Laf… his hand was halfway to his phone when he froze again as the broadcast continued. “But the main concern of the nation tonight is the state of the President, one of many injured in the blast. The whole of D.C. has been plunged into chaos, and no-one really knows what’s going on or who’s in charge. There are a lot of people talking about the Twenty Fifth Amendment…”

John found his coat with one hand, his bag with the other, and ran for the door, the television still playing to the empty office behind him.

“--

“Well?” Angelica asked, standing as Eliza walked into the office and shut the door behind her. The three of them were in Aaron’s office again, not sure if they were wanted next door and without a clue what to do. And it was just the three of them. No Washington, somewhere in the residence under heavy duty pain drugs, no Laf and Herc who were a whole ocean away, no John, in South Carolina and safely out of the whole thing. And no Alex either now.

“He’s gone.” Eliza reported, biting her lip. “I bundled him into a cab. You were right, there was no way he could stay here without punching Adams or something.”

Angelica nodded. She was worried about Alex, but that was nothing compared to her eclipsing worry for Lafayette, and the whole of America in general. The whole world was falling apart on their doorstep, and she couldn't spend time worrying about her friend falling apart right now, not when the rest of the country was doing the same. And somehow they had to stop that from happening.

“So what do we do?” she asked. “Adams doesn't have a clue what he’s doing and he won’t listen to a word we say.”

“We have to make him listen, somehow. We’re what’s left of the West Wing, he’s got to let us do our jobs.”

“Well do you want to march in there and tell the acting President he’s not paying you enough attention?” Eliza demanded,

“If I have to, yes.” Aaron sat back, and Angelica closed her eyes. This wasn't going to solve anything, and the last thing they needed was the three of them to start arguing. But before she could open her mouth, Eliza’s phone began to ring. She glanced at the number, then looked up in confusion. “It’s Herc. Herc’s flat, I mean. But he’s in London…”

Eliza answered the phone, then her eyes went wide in understanding. “Hugh! Oh my gosh, are you okay?”

Hugh. Shit. In all the chaos, Angelica had completely forgotten about Hercules’s little brother. The kid was pretty independent and usually looked after himself when Herc was away, but this didn't fall into the category of usually. She imagined being seventeen, all alone, and turning on the news to see
a bomb crater where your brother was meant to be, and pushed the thought away.

“Calm down, Hercules is fine.” Eliza said. “What? Well, no, I haven't, but he’s probably kind of busy at the moment…. yeah, I know, but I promise if he were hurt we would know about it.”

She covered the microphone with her hands and looked up at them, face knotted with worry. “Hugh had herd a word from Herc, not even a quick I’m okay. That isn't like him.”

“Maybe his phone got broken.” Angelica offered, refusing to consider any alternative.

“Yes, maybe…” Eliza said, and then into the phone “I know you're scared, but he’s gonna be on a plane and back here as soon as he can. Look-“ She bit her lip. “I’m gonna come over there, okay? Just sit tight, I’ll be with you soon.”

She hung up and met Aaron’s gaze defiantly. “What? Don’t you dare tell me I’ve got to stay here, because that kid’s got no-one right now.”

“I wasn't going to. We’ll call you if anything happens.”

Eliza shot him a grateful look, and then she was gone, hurrying out the door. Angelica bit her lips and turned back to Aaron.

“It is a legitimate question.” she said. “What the hell do we do?”

“Our jobs.” he said, feigning a confidence she was sure wasn't real. “I’ll take everything internal, you take everything external. Keep the country calm and make sure nothing leaks. It’s all we can do.”

She nodded. Briefing the press, chasing down leaks, controlling the flow of information coming in and out of the building… she was good at this, she could manage this. It was just a day like any other. The two of them could handle it. If Angelica kept telling herself that, she might just convince herself it was true.

“You got this.” Aaron told her as she left his office, and she glanced back, confused for a moment. Aaron was her friend, but he wasn't exactly one for kind words of encouragement. But then, there was nothing about today that was normal.

“I know.” she replied, and his replying smile warmed her the whole way down the corridor to the press room. She took a deep breath before opening the door to blinding camera flashes and screams of “Angelica! Angelica! What’s happening?” and made her way to the podium. “Alright everyone, listen up…”
As promised, two updates in one because these go together and I could have put the chapter split anywhere

See the end of the chapter for more notes

No-one had a clue what was really happening. Herc gritted his teeth in frustration as thanked a Scotland Yard detective for his time and walked away. For all he was desperate to work out what had happened to Laf - so desperate that he had ignored a direct order from André and probably tanked his career in the process - he had nothing to show for it. He didn't even have the official badges and papers of the FBI, he was forced to try and get information out of people with nothing but charm and persuasion. And of course, charm was the last thing on his mind when he was terrified for his friend.

Herc pulled out a handful of crumpled notes from his back pocket (the first thing he'd done was buy a cheep set of clothes because torn up suit didn't exactly scream trustworthy) and decided he could afford to buy himself a coffee at least. He'd been at it all day, had long since lost all feeling in his fingers, and needed time to go over what little information he had and try to make some sense of it. There was a little cafe wedged between a bookshop and a dry cleaners and he headed inside, setting the bell on the door ringing as he swung it open.

The place was actually more of a greasy spoon diner than a cafe, and the coffee he was served by a bored-looking waitress was grey and weak, but it was warm which was all that really mattered right now. He laced his fingers around the mug desperately seeking its warmth and he sighed, trying to put some sort of order to the facts jumbling around his mind.

They went to the effort of setting off a bomb, but not one powerful enough to kill anyone. Luck, or something else?

They wanted Laf, but they haven't made an announcement about what they want with him.

All they've achieved is chaos. Somehow, this is to their favour.

He had no idea who they were, maddeningly. He was on his own and out of his depth. It was like chasing shadows. Washington, explosion, summit, Laf, negotiations-

“Mulligan!”

The voice jolted him out of his thoughts and Herc was on his feet in an instant, drawing his pistol from his pocket automatically as he turned. It was a second before he realised his gun was pointed in the face of a very startled Thomas Jefferson.

“Woah, take it easy.” The senator held his hands up defensively. “Where the hell did you get a gun?”

“What are you doing here, Jefferson?” he asked, more annoyance than aggression spiking his tone, but still Herc didn't lower his weapon. After all, why should he trust him?

“I followed you, obviously. I told you, we need to talk. Now get that thing out of my face.”
With everything that had happened, Herc had completely forgotten the way Jefferson had grabbed his arm in the hotel lobby minutes before the whole world went to hell. He had dismissed it at the time, too caught up in his own growing panic, but what if that had been his big mistake? He reluctantly lowered the gun and jerked his head, indicating Jefferson take a seat.

Jefferson picked at the grubby tablecloth with distaste. “Can’t say I approve of the location. Do you usually slum it in places like this when you visit Europe?”

“Cut the crap. What do you want?” Herc had no time `for this, and no patience for this asshole.

“I knew it was pointless trying to talk to you earlier, you’d never believe me, but I had to try. You should have listened, Mulligan, and maybe then Lafayette…” his voice caught on the word Lafayette, and for a moment Herc saw through his facade. Here was a man, a whirlwind of bravado and bullshit that barely papered over the fact he was terrified. Jefferson cleared his throat. “Maybe Lafayette wouldn't need our help.”

“Our help?”

“This is me helping. The rest’s up to you. I’ve already ruined one suit in the fuck-up of diplomacy, thank you very much.”

It took a lot of self-restraint to stop Herc punching the false smug look off his face. You need to know what he has to say, he reminded himself, and carefully schooled his face back to mutual.

“What do you know?”

Jefferson drummed his fingers against the tabletop a movement that Herc somehow translated to nervous and said “This didn't come from me, alright, you haven't even seen me, but I heard them talking out by the fire escape just before everyone went to the lobby. Discussing angles, timings, I think she said something about a getaway van at one point.”

“Who was talking, Thomas?”

“This kid. Couldn't have been older than eighteen. And a girl.”

The kid who set off the bomb, Herc realised, wondering how he’d been dragged into all this. “Girl, what girl?” he asked, but as soon as the words were out of his mouth, he knew. Later, he would have no idea where it came from or how his brain had somehow made the connection, but he knew what Jefferson was going to say before he said it.

“Adrienne.”

--

George Washington let out a sigh as the doors closed with a soft thump, the secret service sealing him inside the Cathedral. He had asked to come here, requested he have a moment alone in the building to - well, he had no idea. George only knew that Gilbert was out there somewhere, alone, and the God he had strived so hard to serve was nowhere to be found. His arm was screaming, chest on fire, and he wanted nothing more than to collapse into bed following an operation to more or less reconstruct his entire arm. But he had strength enough for this crisis of faith.

“You’re a son of a bitch, you know that,” he whispered, slowly starting to walk down the length of
the church. The National Cathedral was vast enough that you could lay that big monument in the centre of town on its side in here. He supposed that was the idea, to make you feel small in the presence of God, but George had been feeling small for some time now, and it had nothing to do with some fancy architecture. His footsteps echoed as he moved towards the far alter.

“He’s just trying to make the world a better place, and you send someone to kidnap him? You can’t conceive, nor can I, the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God, say’s Graham Greene. I don’t know who’s ass he was kissing there ’cause I think you’re just vindictive. And what was Alexander Hamilton? A warning shot? That was my son. What did I ever do to yours but praise his glory and praise his name?”

George took a deep breath, trying to calm himself. Outside it had started raining again, and he wondered if it was still raining in London, if the same storm was still raging somewhere over Gilbert’s head, wherever he was. The sound of the raindrops clattered against the roof high above.

“Hear that?” he gestured upwards. “They say this is the start of a storm, that it’s out there somewhere gaining power and speed. They say we haven’t seen one this bad since you destroyed St Croix all those years ago. Hundreds of people, a whole town… all except one boy, and now look what you did to him. To his family. Are you happy yet?

*Gratias tibi ago, domine.* Yes, I’ve sinned, we’ve all sinned somewhere along the way. Have I displeased you, you feckless thug?”

He held his arms out and shook his head, advancing on the sanctuary with greater pace.

“3.8 million new jobs, that wasn't good? Increased foreign trade, stood up for freedoms, fought in the name of you and this country. We’re trying to stop a war, I’ve raised my sons the best I can… That’s not enough to buy me out of the doghouse? *Haec credam a deo pio? A deo iustro? A deo scito?*

He stopped abruptly before the sanctuary. He was pleading, George realised, pleading with an absent God with all the rage he could find in him.

“*Cruciatus in crucem! Tuus is terra servus nuntius fui officium perfeci. Cruciatu in crucem. Eas in crucem!*”

George turned away in anger, lighting a cigarette as he marched back down the isle the way he’d come. He took a single puff and dropped it on the marble floor, crushing the glowing butt under his heel as he went. He didn’t stop until he had almost reached the doors, when he turned to look back at the alter, at the light shining in from the window above it.

“You get Adams,” he muttered, shaking his head. “I can’t… You get Adams.”

--

“Rise and shine, princess!”

Lafayette forced his eyes open with some difficulty. He would have rolled them as well - the same phrase that woke him up every morning hadn’t been funny the first time - but the swelling from the bruises made it painful. Instead he opted for mentally punching this piece of crap in the face.

It was the shorter one of the two who always woke him up. Laf knew him well by now. A nasal
voice, thought he was a lot smarter and a lot funnier than he was, and would take every opportunity to prove he was in charge, which usually involved hitting Laf somewhere. There was a sort of comfort in that, though, the predictability of it. With this one, Laf knew that opening his mouth would result in a beating, and could calculate the cost of every word. It was the other one who scared him, although he tried not to let it show. The tall man who could spend hours just watching him without moving a muscle and hadn't laid so much as a hand on him so far, but there was something about his silent stare that made Laf certain that, when his retribution did eventually come, it would be far worse than anything he'd seen as of yet.

He was pretty sure, though, that these men weren’t behind his kidnapping, nor the bomb at the hotel. He doubted that they had enough brains or the motive to have orchestrated those - these were just grunts, disposable and unimportant enough to have been given the job of making sure he didn't go wandering off. And he had to admit that they were doing a pretty good job of it.

Laf couldn't say where they were holding him, except that it was cold and made of concrete with a steel door that he didn't have a hope of getting through, even if he wasn't handcuffed to an uncomfortable wooden chair all hours of the day. He’d spent hours trying to slip free of his restraints, twisting and pulling at the metal, but all he’d achieved was to cut gashes into the skin on his wrist (although he couldn't see them, being secured behind his back) he had a nasty feeling were getting infected. Besides, he was no action movie hero. Yes, he’d spent a short period of time in the army, but that didn't give you any training for a situation like this. To sum up his situation, he was fucked and he knew it.

The only consolation was that they didn't seem to have any interest in actually killing him or doing too much damage, despite all their threats. Whatever play they had cooked up, it seemed to need him alive and (relatively) well. Sure, they would beat him and taunt him and demand answers to questions they knew he didn't have, but there seemed to be some unspoken line they didn't dare to cross without word from the higher ups. Whoever the higher ups were.

But all this came as small comfort. It didn't change the fact he was trapped in some stinking room hurting in places he didn't even know could hurt, with no chance of escape. It didn't change the fact that his friends were dead.

It was the shorter one who had delivered that particular news. Laf figured it had been at some point on his second day of capture, before he’d learned that shouting only wasted breath and hurling insults at his guards would result in a shiny new bruise. Clearly tired of his struggling and demanding they tell him what was going on, the man (Laf hadn’t bothered to learn their names; in his head he had christened him cretin number 1) had grabbed the front of his shirt and pulled him close.

“Fight us all you want, pretty boy. Escape if you think you’re up to it. Your friends will still be dead either way.”

That had shut him up. “What did you say?” he had asked, struggling to keep his voice steady.

“The bomb, genius. We got the lot of them. Your precious President. Your pretty little lady friend. The dip-shit senator. Even that bag boy you hang around with. Gone.”

“Bullshit.” Laf hadn’t believed him, hadn't wanted to believe him. There was no way they could all be… It just couldn't be true. But Cretin 1 had just shrugged and the next morning his greeting of “Rise and shine Princess!” was punctuated by a newspaper being thrown at his feet. It was a copy of the Post dated three days after the attack (Laf had assumed it was that morning’s) bearing the headline President Adams appeals for calm following bomb chaos.

President Adams. That could only mean… He still didn't want to believe it, but there was no arguing
with the evidence. They were all gone. Thomas, who always cheered him up when he was missing home. His beautiful Adrienne whom he had loved once, and whom some part of him would always love, despite all they had gone through. Washington, his father in all but blood, the steady rock in the maelstrom that was his life. And Hercules. Brave, loyal Herc who had never once put himself first and who had been right all along. And who Laf had failed so utterly. *I'm so sorry, my friend,* he thought as he desperately tried to fight the tears, not wanting to give his captors the satisfaction. *I should have listened to you.*

--

Herc took a deep breath before knocking twice on the hotel door. He was fully aware that this was the most important thing he would ever do, and the most stupid if he got it wrong. And he was going off Jefferson’s word, of all people! When had Jefferson ever proved himself to be trustworthy? Herc wondered, briefly, if it was too late to turn and run, but then the door was opening and he forced a tired smile onto his face.

“Hercules?” Adrienne asked, confused.

“Hey. Mind if I come in?”

She stared at him a moment through red-rimmed eyes, then stepped aside. “Of course. What are you still doing here? I thought you would have gone with your president back to America?”

“I’m not going anywhere without Laf.” he replied (which was the truth after all) and she nodded in understanding. “Gilbert is lucky to have someone like you in his life.”

“All the good it’s doing him at the moment.” he muttered. “Adrienne, is there anything you know? Anything at all you can think of, that might explain why someone would do this to him?”

She shook her head, and for a moment Herc doubted every instinct in his body. She certainly looked nothing short of distraught. “There is nothing. He was not acting out of the ordinary, unless you include fighting with his best friend that is.”

“And he had no enemies?”

She spread her hands helplessly. “Everyone loves Gilbert. You know it is impossible not to. Why would someone do this?”

“I don’t know.” This was it. Showtime. No turning back now. He spared a thought for Hugh, for the brother he was afraid he wasn't going to come home to, be it due to his arrest or a bullet in his head. I’m sorry. “You tell me.”

“You what?”

“You heard me, Adrienne. Why would someone so ruthlessly sell out their boyfriend and hand him over to people who think blowing up a street full of people is a good idea?”

“What are you accusing me of?” she asked, making a move towards him, but Herc was quicker, lining his gun up with her heart before she could manage more than a single step. “Please!” she pleaded. “Whatever you have been told—“
“Don’t lie to me. I’ve had a very long day, and right now you can only make this worse for yourself. I know what you did. I know you’re involved in this.”

She stared at him, brown eyes wide in fear. Herc had just began to think that he had made a horrible mistake, when all at once her face changed. The facade dropped. And Adrienne smiled.

--

John swallowed, staring at the door. He shouldn't be here, he knew he had no right, but he couldn't think of anything else to do. He hesitated for another moment then knocked. There was no response, and he sighed. Alex probably wasn't even here; most likely he was at work making himself useful. Coming here had been a long shot anyway, and a stupid idea. John shouldered his bag, turned away, and-

“John?”

He froze. Alex’s voice was incredulous , as if he wasn't quite sure John was really there. Slowly, he turned around.

Alex stood in the doorway, looking about as good as John felt. He was pale and drawn, hair hanging limply and a crumpled shirt thrown haphasidly over his skinny frame, as if he had slept in it. Well maybe not slept in it; Alex rarely looked well-rested, but as John looked at him the word that came to mind was drained. He wanted to reach out to him, to pull Alex into an embrace and never let him go, but something held him back.

“You’re here.” Alex stated, although it came out more as a question.

“I turned on the news and… Laf… and Washington… and…” He shook his head helplessly. “Alex, I-

The rest of his sentence was lost in Alex’s sudden embrace. He didn't thrown himself into John’s arms so much as as he collapsed into them, clutching at the front on his shirt with shaking hands. His whole body was shaking, John realised with some alarm, and he stroked his hair gently.

“It’s gonna be alright,” he whispered softly, not sure who he was trying to reassure, but Alex just shook his head.

“You don’t know that. The secret service has all but given up already, and-"

He’s been dealing with this alone, John realised, all of it. The fear, the uncertainty, having to work under a man he despised knowing full well that it wasn't doing a damn thing to help his friends but not knowing what else to do. And he’d had to do it all on his own, because John had been too afraid to hold on to what they’d had, had run away to the other side of the country instead of fighting for him. He had let him down so badly, again.

John knew he didn't deserve Alex. Nor could he bear to let him go.

They ended up in Alex’s kitchen, John making coffee because Alex was seemed to have forgotten how. His hands moved of their own accord, finding mugs and sugar as if by muscle memory, because all of his brain was focused on the man sitting in front of him. John had seen Alex hurt. He had seem him broken and battered and lost but apparently that hadn't been enough. Because even
after everything they had been through, John had never seen Alex look so scared.

“How’s the President?” John asked after a long stretch of silence, because that was safe to talk about.

“Washington or Adams?” came the bitter reply, and John had to curl his hand into a fist under the table to stop himself doing anything stupid. Alex sighed. “What do you want me to say? His ribs and arm’ll heel up fine and there’s no permeant damage from burns or whatever, but he’s not fine. How could he be fine?”

“Alex…”

“He blames himself, you know. And Aaron blames himself for not taking the situation more seriously. And Herc blames himself and—”

“Herc?”

“He was there. He’s okay!” Alex added hastily, clearly seeing the look of fresh panic on John’s face. “He’s the one who pulled Washington down. But… he’s taking the whole thing pretty hard.”

John wanted to ask if it could be survivors guilt, but he couldn’t bring himself to say the words that implied that Laf was dead. Instead, he asked “And what about you? Are you okay?”

Alex smiled sadly, a smile that shattered what was left of John’s heart into fragments. “I don’t think I’ve been okay for a long time now.”

There was none of the tearful girl in Adrienne’s face, no trace of innocence nor fear now that she knew the game was up. Her face, as Hercules for lack of a better option cuffed her to the radiator, twisted into a snarl.

“Congratulations, you got me. I’m with the British warmongers. So what happens now?” she spat, accent heavy.

*British warmongers?* He hadn't known that. “Now, I get my superiors on the phone and tell them what you are. And after that, you and some very scary people are gonna have a nice chat about how you can help us, unless you want to save yourself the trouble and tell me now.”

Despite everything, she laughed. “Hercules Mulligan, are you threatening me? I didn't think you had it in you. Always pegged you as the gentle giant type. Gilbert would be so disappointed.”

His face was inches from hers in an instant. “Don’t say his name. You don't get to talk about him, not after everything you've done.”

“Hit a nerve, did I?” she smirked.

“Just…” he gritted his teeth, regretting the outburst. “Just shut up. I’ve got a phone-call to make.”

“Oh, you have no idea what’s going on here, do you? How far this goes? That’s just *adorable*”

The hotel number would be able to be tracked as soon as he placed the call, but it didn't matter. By
“Mulligan?” André’s voice was tense. “Tell me you’re calling because you’re getting on a plane.”

“Afraid not sir. I told you, I’m not going anywhere without Lafayette. And I’ve got something for you.”

“What could you possibly-?”

“There was an insider in the French diplomatic party, one of the translators. She gave them information on scheduling, security arrangements, even what the ambassador was wearing. It’s how they managed to grab him so quickly. I don’t know what else she passed over, but if anyone knows where he is, it’ll be her.”

There was a weighted pause down the other end of the phone. Then André sighed. “You’re joking.”

“Nope.”

“Well done, agent. That was good work, even if you’re supposed to be on the other side of the Atlantic right now. This puts everything in somewhat of a different light. I’ll make arrangements for my field agents to rendezvous with you and we’ll take it from there. You’re back on the case. I’m sorry I doubted you.”

There was almost a fondness in André’s voice, a warmth of approval that, rather than relax Herc put him on edge. The agent never spoke a word that wasn’t to his advantage, never so much as smiled unless there was some victory in it for him. And now he was apologising, of all things? Across the room, Adrienne looked back at him, one eyebrow raised. There was no way she could hear the conversation, but she could probably read his expression clear as day.

“Thank you, sir.”

“There are you and Miss Noailles? Sit tight, I can have men there within the hour.”

“We’re in a hotel. It’s…” he trailed off, breath catching in his throat. He hadn’t told André who the contact was in the French party. He’d never mentioned her name. Was the man watching them, even now, or…?

Or had he known all along? For the second time in as many hours, Hercules shivered as everything fell, horrifyingly, into place. André who had been briefed on every stage of the tensions between Britain and France, and who had pushed so hard for American involvement and an all out conflict. Who had been ever so conveniently unable to come to London, and had been so desperate to get Hercules back where he could keep an eye on him. God, and he’d been reporting to him! Herc felt faintly sick as he recalled how many conversations they’d had about Washington’s schedule, where he was going to be at any given hour of the day. And now he was hurt, and it was all on Herc. And Laf… what had he done to his friend?

André, a voice insisted in his head. This was all André, and Herc was the only one who knew. The only one who could do something about it. He glanced at Adrienne again, at the notepad sitting on then table with the Sherlock Holmes Hotel logo at the top, and made a split-second decision.

“We’re in The Exeter Arms in Holborn, sir. Room 208. Ask for a Mr Lloyd.”

There was another silence, which Herc hoped to God was André making a note of the address, not somehow seeing through the lie. Then, he said “Very good, Mulligan. Stay there.” Then there was
only the crackle of static as the line went dead.

Herc let out a huge sigh, hardly daring to believe what he’d just done, and turned back to face Adrienne. She was smiling. “So, he’s starting to get it, huh? How utterly screwed he is? So tell me, Mr super spy. What do you do now? Because they’ll be coming for the both of us.”

He desperately tried to think. Pretty soon, André would know he’d been lied to, and that Herc knew more than he should. When that happened, he’d trace the call, and they couldn't be here when that happened. The smart thing to do would be to call someone at the Pentagon, to try and convince them of André’s guilt, but he had no idea just who the spymaster had in his pocket. Besides, there was no guarantee they’d believe him, not with just his suspicions and the word of a girl who had betrayed her country as evidence. By the time he’d convinced anyone that he was telling the truth, it might be too late for Laf. And there was always the chance that whoever he told would be put in danger, and no one else was going to get hurt because of his stupidity.

On the other hand, he had Adrienne. He had the edge, the ability to disappear before anyone found him, and possibly the only chance to save his friend. It was a chance he had to take.

“Now?” He unclipped the handcuffs from the radiator, and for a moment Adrienne looked hopeful before he securely fastened the other end around his own wrist, effectively chaining them together. “Now, we run.”

Chapter End Notes

I guess that half of you saw the André thing coming just from his name, and the other half are still thinking who the hell is this guy? John André was the British spymaster during the revolutionary war, knew pretty much everything, and was eventually caught and executed by the continentals. Hamilton actually spoke out against his execution with an argument that essential said 'he’s too pretty to hang'. See, we're learning stuff here…

Latin translations:
Gratias tibi ago, domine: I give thanks to you, oh Lord
Haec credam a deo pio? A deo iustro? A deo scito?: Am I really to believe that these are the acts of a loving God? A just God? A wise God?
“Cruciatus in crucem! Tuus is terra servus nuntius fui officium perfeci. Cruciatius in crucem. Eas in crucem!”: To hell with your punishments. I was your servant here on Earth. And I spread your word and I did your work. To hell with your punishments. To hell with you!”

(I did my best. Please don’t judge me on my shitty Latin)
“Hamilton, close the door behind you. That’s everyone.”

Alex did as he was told, wondering if there was any way to mentally prepare himself for whatever John André had called an emergency briefing for at three in the morning. Probably not, he decided wearily and sat down between John and Angelica. No one had questioned it when John had walked into the West Wing with him, no one had stopped them or thought it was out of place. He supposed that just showed how far everything had gone to hell in the last thirty-six hours.

“André’s closest friends. We’re the first ones they’d tell if... he thought before he could stop himself, and shivered. Oh God... John took his hand without looking away from André. They were all hanging off the spymaster’s every word.

“The President and I are about to attend a full briefing in the situation room with them. This meeting is because I thought you should all be the first to know we have a lead on the Ambassador. In fact, we have a suspect.”

Alex let out a sigh of relief, too worked up to even be embarrassed about it. André only grimaced, however. “Don’t look so happy. You’re not going to like it, I’m afraid.”

“Who’s the suspect?” Eliza asked.

“Hercules Mulligan.”

A stunned silence filled the room, everyone too shocked to so much as move. Then John said “Bull.”

“I’m sorry?”

“That’s total bull-crap. There’s no way that Herc’s involved.”

André smiled thinly. “Oh, I’m sorry Mr Laurens. I wasn’t aware you were an expert in our investigation. Or that you were even still a member of staff, for that matter. Is there a reason you’re here?”

Alex bristled, but Eliza beat him to speaking. “John’s right. Herc is Lafayette’s best friend. He’d
never do something like this.”

“I did say you wouldn’t like it. I know this will be very hard for you all, but you need to accept that you never really knew the real Hercules Mulligan.”

“We know him a whole lot better than you do.” John challenged.

“Did you? So he told you he was one of my undercover operatives, did he?”

“What?”

“I thought as much. Mr Mulligan has been in my employ for some time now as part of the President’s security detail. A promising agent. But I never dreamed… He ignored a direct order to come back to D.C. two days ago, and this morning he went AWOL, giving my agents the slip and disappearing without a trace. He played us all, and now we have to bring him to justice. I trust you will give me your co-operation in this?”

“Of course they will.” said Adams, rising from behind his desk. “Mr André, we have a briefing?”

“After you sir.” The spymaster made to follow the President out of the door, before turning to face them all again. “Take some time to let this sink in. And then we have work to do.”

No-one spoke until the door had closed behind him. Eventually, Angelica let out a breath. “What. The. Fuck?”

“It’s bollocks, right?” Eliza said. “There’s no way… I mean, Herc’s our friend.”

“He’s also an agent.” Alex pointed out miserably. “He didn't think that was important enough to share. Who knows what else he didn't tell us?”

“You’re not saying you believe this crap?” John asked.

“I don’t want to. But it wouldn’t be the first time that someone wasn't who I thought they were.”

“This is Hercules we’re talking about.”

“And he’s been lying to us!”

John reached for his hand, and Alex jerked it away. Didn't they get it? These things didn't have happy endings. They had put their trust in the wrong person, and now Laf and Washington had paid the price for it. And Alex had let them down again.

“So what? Everyone has secrets. That doesn't mean he’s the piece of crap who’s behind this.” Angelica crossed her arms. “They way I see it, all Herc did was not tell us that he was risking his life to protect us. And now he’s in trouble as well as Laf.”

Alex wanted to believe that, to have her conviction. He just couldn’t. “How can you be sure of that?”

“Because the last time I didn't trust one of you, I nearly tanked their entire career because didn't give them a chance to explain themselves. That's not happening again.”

Aaron who had been quiet until now, staring at the door André had left through looked up at that. Then nodded. “She’s right. We’re a team. We stick together.”

“As much as I hate to admit it, Burr’s right Alex.” John said. “Herc didn't do this. André’s got it
“There’s something else going on here.” Eliza added.

And suddenly Alex was sitting across the table from her in an all-night diner a million years ago, frozen hands wrapped around a coffee cup.

“You have too much faith in this world, Elizabeth Schuyler.”

“And you might just find some, one of these days.”

He still didn’t have much in the way of faith, not when he’d seen what the world could do to him and the people he loved. But maybe that was okay. Maybe his friends had enough for him, for now. He swallowed.

“So what do we do?”

“Yeah, sure.” he deadpanned without looking up from the maps he was scanning, as if expecting an answer to leap out of the paper, and from where she sat re-cuffed to some piping Adrienne snorted.

“Why? You haven’t been trained for this, and André’s the best at what he does. Face it, you’re in over your head here and if you carry on you’ll only get the both of us killed.”

Hercules looked up, surprised. Adrienne hadn't said a word for hours, and he though she was asleep. Clearly not. They were in one of the countless empty brick houses in London, abandoned and falling into disrepair which made it perfect for squatters. Or wanted fugitives for that matter. There was no electricity, and certainly no heating, and without a coat she was probably freezing. Funnily enough, Herc couldn’t bring himself to care.

“So you really think you’re gonna outsmart him, somehow, and save the day?”

Herc shifted. He had thought of that of course, and stopped thinking about it very quickly because that wasn't going to help him find Laf. Instead of answering her question he said “What are you doing working with someone like him anyway?”

“John André?” Adrienne considered, then spat on the floor. “I hate the man. He’s a snake, a sneaky, selfish reptile, and he is only out for himself. Personal gain is all he understands.”

“You blew up a street with him.” Herc pointed out. “You almost killed the President of the United States, and a lot of other people.”

She bit her lip. “The President was accidental. The others… unfortunate. I work for André, he is a means to an end. That doesn't mean I approve of his methods.”

“And what exactly are those ends?” he asked, heart racing.

“His ends? God knows, I cannot read that man. Mine, on the other hand are very simple. The British have been stepping on us for too long, and your President stands by and does nothing. We will only be free through war, a war that can only be won with a America’s support.”
“So what, you’re a freedom fighter? Trying to provoke a fight, trying to get us involved? Not a very good plan.”

“No?” she looked at him, eyes sparking intelligence. “Do you imagine that there is any length that George Washington would not go to save his son?”

There was nothing he could say to that. They both knew that Washington would raze heaven and earth for his family, and Laf was more his son than any of them. Had he still been in control of the US armed forces, there would be boots on the ground within the week.

Adrienne was smiling like she’d already won, and Herc turned his attention back to the items in front of him. A London street map. A disposable cell. His remaining money, about £100 in a small pile of notes. And a pair of phones, his and Adrienne’s, hooked up to a radio he’d taken from the hotel room. It was one of the first things André had taught him, and he couldn’t help but find the irony funny. Take two cells with access to a secure line (in this case André’s), hook them up to the radio and tune it to the same frequency and, with any luck, he could listen in on the Spymaster’s conversation. It was a long shot, he knew, but it was all he had right now.

“You must care about Gilbert a lot, risking life and liberty for him.”

“He’d do the same for me.”

“That is probably true.” she allowed. “That has always been his problem, too much heart. He trusts too easily, cares too deeply, loves too freely.”

“And you’d be the expert on his heart?”

She cocked her head and smirked. “Hercules Mulligan. Is this jealousy?”

“You must care about Gilbert a lot, risking life and liberty for him.”

“Of course not.” he replied quickly, ignoring the pink tinge that was probably making its way across his face. “I just don’t understand how you can possibly justify this to yourself. He loved you, and you all but gift-wrapped him for your little psychopath friend. Will it be worth it, your war? Because let me promise you something. If he dies, you sure as hell aren’t gonna live to see it.”

Adrienne looked at him, clearly working on her next sarcastic comment but there was no missing the new fear behind her eyes. As much as half of him was terrified at what he was becoming, the other half could only feel a satisfied vindication. But before either side of his brain could come out on top the sound of a new voice echoed through the room, and it took him a moment to realise it was coming from the radio. He rushed forward to press the record button.

“The timeline’s moved forward.” That was André, and even hearing his voice set Herc’s hands clenching into fists. “Someone’s getting close to me. The boy’s no threat, he doesn’t have a clue what’s really going on, but all the same, I want this done with as soon as possible.”

“So what’s the plan boss?” Herc didn’t recognise the second speaker. Some nameless grunt, most likely.

“If there is no American declaration of support by midnight, which is looking increasingly likely going by the state of the meeting I just sat in, we go to phase two. You have somewhere appropriate to dump the ambassador, I hope?”

“I got a nice little spot lined up, not too far from the warehouse. We’ll pop in the van, no problem. They’ll find him quickly, don’t you worry.”

“Do you think that Washington will wrestle back control and declare war before or after the
funeral?” André joked. “I’d better make sure my suit still fits. Unless you hear from me before midnight, we go ahead with it. Call me when you’re done.”

The line went dead and wordlessly, Herc reached out and turned the recorder off. Then, after a second of wondering whether or not he was going to throw up, Herc swore. And then again for good measure.

‘Calm down.” Adrienne told him.

“Calm…? Weren’t you listening? They’re gonna kill him tonight, and there’s not a damed thing I can do to stop it.”

“Not if you don’t calm down. Listen to it again.”

He did, paying closer attention to the details this time, and frowned. “Warehouse?”

“There’s a mile of old shipping warehouses by the river just east of the city. I bet some of them are abandoned.”

“It’s a long shot.”

“It’s your only shot.”

“Why are you helping me?”

She shrugged, and gestured to her wrist, cuffed to a pipe. “I’m screwed, we both know that. There is no version of this story where I come out on top. It’s over. So why should Gilbert have to die for nothing?”

He studied her face, and found no trace of a lie. Herc sighted. “A mile. That’s a lot of warehouses to look through.”

“And you’ve got about three hours. Better get moving, lover boy.”

She was right, he realised. Already, time was slipping through his fingers, Laf’s life reduced to an hour glass and he couldn't catch all the sand. He nodded. “I’ll make sure the police or someone come find you.”

“Good luck. You’re gonna need it.”

“So are you.”

She almost smiled at that. But Herc was already out the door. Three hours to go.

--

“I’ve got some good news for you.”

Laf didn't look up didn't so much as acknowledge the taunt. It wasn't worth giving them the satisfaction, nor wasting the energy. Instead he focused on breathing, keeping the rise and fall of his chest as even as possible. Every breath came with a sharp twinge of pain that he knew from experience meant a broken rib. Ribs, possibly, going by how much it hurt. He should probably get
someone to take a look at that.

He smiled to himself at the absurdness of the thought, and had to stop it from becoming an all-out giggle. A voice in the back of his mind (sounding weirdly like the attractive instructor of a first aid course he’d taken years ago for that very reason) informed him that it probably wasn’t a good sign, that he was verging on fever or delirium from his infected wrists. He couldn't bring himself to care.

“Something funny, pretty boy?” do the short one asked, and Laf silently scolded himself for letting emotion cross his face.

“Just excited about my good news.” he replied quickly because he had already fucked up and might as well provoke him further at this stage.

The man stopped, seemingly trying to work out if he was being made fun of. Then smiled. “The good news is that we don’t have to put up with your ugly mug for much longer. The powers that be have given you a get out of jail free card.”

Laf frowned. “What?”

“Yeah. You see my friend here?” He gestured at the tall one who still hadn't said a word, and Laf failed to repress a shiver. “He’s gonna take you on a nice little drive tonight. You understand what I’m saying?”

And through the fog that was slowly consuming his thoughts, Laf did. He wasn’t getting out, of course he wasn’t. These guys were never going to let him go. What they were planning was a different kind of freedom entirely.

Laf would be lying if he said he’d never thought about it, what dying would be like. Not in the sense of wanting to take his own life, not even on the darkest of days, but more of a morbid curiosity. He’d wondered how it would feel, what would come next, how and when he would bite it. He’d always thought that the way you died meant something, that you could tell something about the way someone had lived or what kind of person they were. That was bullshit. Whether you lived or died had nothing to do with you, and everything to do with cruel luck. You never witness the problems of the drunk driver that runs you over, never do anything to piss off the cancer cells that are slowly eating you alive. You’re just dead. Another statistic.

You couldn't chose anything in this world, but you could choose how you faced it, and Laf was determined not to give these men the satisfaction.

“Nothing to say?” the man enquired. “No comment? No please don’t kill me, sir?” Laf stared determinedly at the floor and he after a moment he hummed. “Huh. Shame. Oh well. We’ve got hours and hours left, you know, all those minutes just sitting there waiting to be filled. How shall we pass the time?”

“White House Communications.” Eliza said, picking up the phone. Technically speaking, she wasn't part of communications, but there wasn't exactly much call for Washington’s long-term media projection at the moment, so she was helping out wherever she was needed. Hell, right now she’d go around emptying everyone’s bins if that was what was needed. She hated this, feeling helpless.
“Eliza? Thank God. I need you to listen to me.”

She was glad that no-one was looking her way because she brought her hand to her mouth in a gasp. “Herc?” she hissed. “What the f-“

“I didn't do it, alright Eliza? I don’t know what you’ve been told but I had nothing to do with the bomb or Laf or any of it.”

“I know, I believe you, we all do.”

“Everyone?”

She thought of Alex, the man who had been burnt one to many times and didn't know what to believe. But he was trying, and Herc didn't need to know the rest. “Everyone. What’s going on, Herc? What have you gotten yourself mixed up in?“

“It’s a long story.” he said, and she could practically see the grimace in his voice. “But I’ve been set up. I was getting too close to the truth, and André must have realised and-“

“Hold up. John André?“

“This was him, ‘Liza. All of it. He’s behind this. I don’t know how, or why exactly, but somehow he wins big if America gets involved in an all out war between the British and the French.”

She bit the inside of her cheek. “That’s a pretty big accusation. André’s all but running things up here and if you go blaming him without proof-“

“I thought you believed me.”

“I do. But we’re gonna need something more solid if anyone else is going to believe us. I hope to God you have a plan.”

“A plan? I’m gonna find Laf, that’s the plan.”

“On your own? Herc, there’s no way-“

“I’m the only one who can. Please, it’s my fault he’s gone. I should have stopped it. I have to make this right.”

She hated the idea of Herc alone on the other side of the world running headfirst into danger instead of as far away as he possibly could. But it wasn't like she could stop him, only do her best to make sure he didn't get himself killed in the process. Eliza took a deep breath and straightened her back. “What do you need?“

“I’m sending you an audio file. That should be all the proof you need that André’s all over this, or at least enough to place him under suspicion for now. You’ve got to get it to someone you trust on the security team without him finding out.”

“And you think I’m gonna be able to pull this off? I’m not James Bond, I wouldn't even know where to start.”

“You have to try. If I get arrested I get arrested, but if they get me before I get to Laf that’s his last hope gone. You know I wouldn't be asking if there was any other way.”

She swallowed. “I’ll do my best.”
“I’d better go. I doubt they can trace this but even so…” he trailed off, and Eliza was asking the question that had been on her lips before she could stop herself.

“Are you really working for André? Were you lying to us this whole time?”

“Yes. I know I should have told-“

“You did what you thought you had to do. Never apologise for that.”

The sound of the dial tone told Eliza that he had hung up the phone and she let out a deep breath, placing the phone on the receiver. Holy crap. What had they gotten themselves into?

She rounded up the others, ushered everyone unceremoniously into one of the empty basement rooms that the legal teams used to use, closed the door and quickly summarised what Herc had told her. Then played the recording which she’d stuck on a memory stick, and was met with a sea of disbelieving faces. Alex had looked like he’d wanted to faint when André joked about the funeral, and she couldn’t say she blamed him.

“This is insane.” Aaron eventually said faintly. “Absolutely insane.”

Angelica nodded. “Agreed. When do we start?”

“We need someone we know we can trust. We have to know for a fact that they won’t go running to André. Or Adams for that matter.”

“Tallmadge.” Alex hadn’t said a word this whole time, and his eyes were still fixed on the floor, but there was no shaking in his voice now. “Ben Tallmadge. He’s our contact over at Langley.”

“The CIA? I don’t know…” John said.

“He’s a good man. He’ll know what to do with André. Can you trust me on this?”

“Of course. You can get hold of him?”

Alex nodded and turned to the rest of them. Eliza took a deep breath, and handed over the memory stick. “Do it.”

--

This was not Lafayette. Herc knew it the moment he clapped eyes on the man in the chair, sitting alone and head bowed. This was not his Laf, the shooting star who had crashed into his life and lit the whole damn thing aflame with a smug grin that said follow me. No, this man was a marionette whose strings had been cut.

In the end, it hadn't been difficult. That still worried him, that it had been so easy to track them down. He’d found the warehouses Adrienne had been talking about, and after just an hour of methodically tearing his way through every single building on the row, he’d seen it. At the end of a line of completely abandoned sheds, a white van parked up. Who were these people, who went to all the trouble of kidnapping an ambassador, yet were so careless in covering their own tracks?

There had only been two of them as well. That also struck him as odd. The short one hadn't even seen him coming, had been standing in an empty corridor smoking on a cheap cigarette, and it had
been all too easy to knock him out. Unfortunately, the grunt of pain as he went down brought the other guy running. Well, not so much running as calmly strolling around the corner, a pistol pointed directly at him. Herc moved quickly to mirror him, his own weapon up in an instant. The tall man chuckled.

“Give me a break, boy. You don’t have it in you.”

“No?”

“No. I can see it in your eyes. You’ve never taken a life, and you’re not about to start today. I can see it, you’re scared.”

“True.” Herc agreed. “I am scared. And I’m not gonna kill you.”

He moved his gun, and before the guy could react let a bullet fly. It struck him in the shoulder, exactly where it was meant to go and he went down hard. Herc moved quickly on, but paused to bend down as he passed him, relieve him of his gun, and whisper “But I am gonna hurt you pretty bad. That was for Laf, you fuck.” And then there was nothing left to do but unlock the steel door, and pray there was something of his friend left to save.

He crossed the room in an instant and knelt down beside him, hand searching for a pulse on his neck. There was a horrible moment before he felt the pounding of his heart under his feverish skin. Faint and erratic, but there. He let out a sigh of relief and tilted Laf’s head upright to see him better, praying he would open his eyes.

“Laf! Come on man, wake up.”

He was rewarded with a faint flutter of eyelashes, and then Laf was peering at him, confused. “Hercules?”

*Thank fuck.* “The one and only.”

“*Merde.*” Laf licked his cracked lips, and if anything looked even more broken. “*Suis mort, je ne suis pas? Mon ami, je suis désolé, je-*”

“Laf stop.” Herc said, trying to translate using his very limited French, and frowned. “What the hell are you talking about? You’re not dead. Neither am I for that matter.”

Laf just seemed confused, and tried to get a clearer look at Herc through the swelling bruises on his face. “Washington? Adri?”

“Washington’s fine.” Herc said hurriedly, because this was the last place he wanted to have a heart to heart about Adrienne. “He’s damn worried about you though.”

Herc wasn’t sure Laf understood, and him, just continued to look at him blankly. *What did they do to you?* The question was on the tip of his tongue, but Herc wasn’t sure he wanted to know the answer. Definitely not here, when he could practically smell the wrong on the walls, and if he found out all the details there was a very hight chance he would walk out into the corridor and shoot both men in the temple without the slightest drop of remorse. Laf’s head lolled forward again and Herc caught him. “No you don’t, don’t go back to sleep. We’re getting out of here.”

He made short work of the handcuffs, and tried not to look at the mess that was Laf’s wrists. Clearly he hadn’t always been this broken, this passive, and the evidence of his struggling was clear. They would need to be cleaned, probably treated for infection, but that would have to wait until they were anywhere that wasn’t here.
Laf protested wordlessly when Herc tried to move him and Herc swore under his breath before dropping down to eye level with him. “Come on, we’re getting out of here. Don’t you trust me?” And this time, Laf allowed himself to be pulled up.

Herc wasn’t exactly weak, but even so he struggled under the weight of his friend as he helped him to his feet and draped his arm around his neck. Laf was about six and a half feet of pure muscle (at least he had been until they locked him in a warehouse for nearly a week) and it took all his effort just to keep them upright as they struggled to the door. Laf certainly wasn’t much help, feet dragging along and all but collapsing onto Herc, but he was conscious at least. And moving. And alive. God, Laf was alive. For the first time since this whole thing began, Herc allowed himself to smile.

It eventually became clear that they weren’t going to get very far like this. Stairs had almost spelt the end of them, and now they were limping through an empty dockyard, pace slowing with every step. Somewhere nearby, obscured by warehouses, Herc could hear traffic, the roar of London churning on as if nothing had changed, but this place was abandoned. He checked his phone, was relieved to see there was signal, and set Laf down against the edge of a shipping container. He quickly dialled, pausing a second to remember the British variation of the number, and only breathed when a cool female voice answered. “Nine nine nine, what is your emergency?”

“Send an ambulance. And probably some cops as well, but the ambulance… my friend needs to go to hospital right now. Please, he-“

“Calm down, sir. Where are you?”

He rattled off the address, plus some quick details about Laf’s condition and hung up. The smart thing to do would be to disappear before the police arrived. He had no idea if Eliza had managed to get the recording to someone yet, if he was still an wanted man, and he really didn't feel like getting arrested today. But that didn't matter any more. There was no way in hell he was leaving Laf alone. When he turned back to look at Lafayette his friend was looking at him, a faint smile on his lips.

“I should have guessed it would be you. If this was real, I mean, that you’d be the one that would come get me. I mean I know you’re 007 now or some shit but that doesn’t matter.”

He still didn't believe it was real, Herc realised with a sinking feeling. He sat down next to him and gently (so as not to agitate any injury he didn't know about) wrapped his arm around the Frenchman. “You’re delirious,” he told him.

“I mean, even if you weren’t some super spy you’d have come. That’s what you do. What you did. I wish you weren’t dead Herc. I mean I’m probably never going to get out of here anyway, but I’m not sure I could do it without you.”

“You don’t have to.”

Laf’s hand came up to trace his cheekbone. “Forgive me.”

*I’m right here! Herc wanted to scream, because this was scaring him. He’d done everything in his power to get his friend back, and the idea that he still wasn't here, that he had gone somewhere Herc couldn't follow was terrifying. He was so busy wondering how to convince Laf that he was really here that he didn't even notice him move until suddenly his lips were on Herc’s: broken and cracked and tasting of blood and dust and home.*

Herc was still sitting there, stunned when Laf pulled away. “I’m sorry. I should have done that when you were alive.”
Herc couldn't even find it in himself to tell Laf that he was. The Frenchman smiled sadly, then tucked his head into Herc’s chest as if seeking the warmth. Herc swallowed down the lump in his throat then pulled Laf closer, shuffling so he would be more comfortable. “I’m sorry too.”

And that was how they stayed until the sound of sirens filled the air.

Chapter End Notes

In case anyone was wondering, the working title for this one was You knock me down, I get the fuck back up again.

French translations:
Suis mort, je ne suis pas?: I’m dead, aren’t I?
Mon ami, je suis désolé: My friend, I am sorry
If anyone’s wondering, Benjamin Tallmadge was Washington’s spymaster. My head cannon for him is Dulé Hill in this (although feel free to picture Seth Numrich if you’re a Turn fan!)

It was dusk by the time John André made it home, after another day of fruitlessly co-ordinating the London investigation. Of course, fruitless was the way he liked it, with the FBI chasing their tails and no-one having a clue what was really going on. Any second now, he would get a call telling him that the dear French Ambassador had met an unfortunate end, and once the Met found the body, he’d have to go back into work, so he was going to enjoy what little time he had to relax. Honestly, this espionage business was hard work. But is was all going to plan. The only problem now was what to do about the Mulligan boy.

André wasn't stupid. Somehow, Hercules Mulligan had worked it out and given his agents the slip, which meant he was a threat. He was out there, somewhere. But what could one boy do, really? Mulligan had minimal training, no resources, and the intelligence networks of two global powers on his tail. They’d get him sooner or later. And then who would people listen to? The respected, decorated and trusted American hero, or a young aide gone AWOL? And besides, Adrienne would probably take care of the problem anyway.

He sighed, wondering if it was worth trying to get some sleep before the inevitable phone call came in, and decided against it. It was going to be a busy night, after all, and he’d often found that no rest was better than an interrupted one. Which was how he found himself sitting in an armchair and flicking through an old book on the Civil War when someone knocked on his door. André got up, peered through the spyhole, and opened the door with a little confusion.

“Ben? I didn't expect to see you tonight.”

Benjamin Tallmadge looked weary, but that was no surprise. The whole US government looked weary these days. The FBI agent was wearing a wool trench coat and suit, as if he’d been in interviews (or possibly a modelling gig) all day. “I didn't expect to be here. But we've hit a few pitfalls in the London case, and I was wondering if you could give me hand going through some of the details.”

“Sure,” André said, stepping back to let him into the apartment. “I wasn't aware you were on the case.”

“I was put on this morning. The whole thing’s gotten too messy.”

He handed him the file, and André set it down on the table and sat down, examining the documents. He recognised most of them - he’d written most of them. “So what is you want me to do?” he asked, not bothering to turn and look at Tallmadge.

“Well, for a start-“ there was the unmistakeable sound of the click of a gun right behind his head, and André froze. “-You can put your hands on your head and not make any sudden movements.”
André swallowed, rapidly assessing his options and concluding he didn't have many. “Ben-“

“Save it.” Tallmadge just sounded tired. “It’s over, John.”

---

He was floating. At least it felt like he was floating. No, that couldn't be right, what could he possibly be floating in right now? Laf tried to twitch his fingers, and realised he couldn't even feel his fingers or the rest of his body for that matter. Assuming he still had a body that was. This could be inconvenient. He tried again, and this time recognised the haze of the really good drugs, the ones the hospitals only cracked out if it was really bad. *Huh.*

Awareness came slowly to Lafayette, both the feeling of his body and his surroundings in general. As far as he could work out, he was lying on a bed while something nearby beeped. Combine that with the hundred tiny little smells and sounds he was aware of but couldn't yet identify, and it added up to hospital. That couldn't be good. He tried to remember what had happened but it was difficult, like trying to think through soup. He focused, and got a flash of a dark room, of pain and bitter fear on his tongue, and decided he didn't want to know right this second. Only after testing his fingers again (this time they twitched on demand, thank God) did he open his eyes.

He had ben right to guess hospital. His bed was in a small private room, and he didn't even want to think about the mess of plumbing that was his arm, with wires and tubes attached all over the place. Instead he looked around the rest of the room slowly, and realised he wasn't alone.

“Hey,” he muttered.

“Hey yourself,” Herc replied, face splitting into a relieved grin, and Laf wondered what he had done to deserve such a smile. “How do you feel?”

“Stuffed full of cotton wool.”

“That would be the drugs. They got you on the hard stuff.”

“That explains it. What-?”

“Hey, no questions now. Don’t worry about a thing, you just need to rest and get yourself better okay?”

“Okay” he agreed mildly, feeling his eyes beginning to close of their own accord.

“You’re safe, Laf, I promise.”

What a weird thing to say. “Of course I’m safe.” he replied as sleep took him once more. “You’re here.”

The next time, Laf didn't stay awake for very long either, but it was decidedly less pleasant. For one thing, he remembered everything. For another, the weightless feeling of being drugged to the gills had worn off, and he could feel the bruising on his ribs every time he took a breath. But worst of all, the chair where Herc had sat was empty.

He got the story in bits and pieces over the next few days (was it days? It was hard to keep track of
time when you were bed-bound). No-one seemed to want to talk about what had happened, but he had to know.

It was Alex who had told him about the bomb between shaking breaths while John held his hand. No-one had been killed, thank God, and no-one’s injuries looked set to be life threatening but God… Laff had almost thrown up when they’d told him about how hurt Washington had been, how he’d plead the 25th and handed over power. The man didn't deserve to go through that on his behalf.

“And you had to work under Adams?” he’d asked.

“It was terrible.” John replied solemnly.

“You know, I think I was better off in that warehouse.” The attempt at humour fell flat. It seemed he wasn't quite ready to joke about it yet, but Alex and John were kind enough to pretend not to notice.

The President himself came to see him soon after, arm in a sling and bruising still visible on half his face. Laff knew it was no use trying to stand up when he walked in but tried to sit up anyway. That failed too, and Washington had only smiled.

“Mr President. You are the President again, I presume?”

“You think I’d let Adams mess up my Oval Office for a second longer than I had to?”

“Glad to hear it, Sir. It’s good to see you.”

“Yes. It really is. Don’t you ever do that again, understand?”

Washington’s eyes had been shining throughout the whole time he was there, which was more than a little unnerving, but at least he did better than Eliza, who managed to look at him for a whole three seconds before bursting into tears and running over to give him a hug.

“Easy, Eliza.” he smiled. “Broken ribs?”

“Oh right, sorry.” she said apologetically, and pulled away hurriedly. “It’s just…”

“Yeah.” Laff agreed. “I know. And don’t fret yourself, I have probably cried more than you.”

“Yeah, that doesn't surprise me.”

Laff hadn’t noticed anyone else come in the room because he was a little pre-occupied getting attack-hugged by Eliza, but now he looked up to see Angelica, Burr and Theodosia standing in the doorway. Angelica was smiling warmly, Burr looked mildly horrified and Theo just looked uncomfortable, as if she wasn’t quite sure she should be here. He smiled at them. “You’re so rude to me, Church. Doesn’t this let me off the hook for a week or two?”

“You’d have thought.” she said, dropped a quick kiss on his forehead and turned to the wall of machines and monitors he was plugged into. “You know, I have no idea what any of this shit is. Fancy explaining it to me, just so I know they’re not secretly trying to kill him?”

Theo began talking both the girls through the various bits of machine and drugs, and Laff turned to Burr. “Do I get a kiss from you as well?”

“Not a chance.”

“Ugh. You’re the worst, Burr.”
Twenty minutes later, and they were all sitting on his bed, eating their way through the mountain of chocolates he’d been sent, and filling him in on everything that had happened. He still couldn't believe what they were saying about John André. Benjamin Tallmadge had broken that bit of news a while back, when he was being interviewed by the FBI about what he’d gone through, and he couldn't deny it made a horrible kind of sense. He’d never trusted the spymaster, but nor had he ever imagined the man might be capable of something like this. And to think he’d let Herc get so close to him…

“Where is Hercules?” he asked casually.

“He hasn't been here?”

“Maybe once, when I first woke up…” Laf allowed, although he still wasn't sure if he’d imagined that, and he definitely hadn't seen his friend since. “But I am feeling most neglected, it is very rude of him, non?”

Eliza just smiled, the gesture not reaching her eyes. “I have no idea, Laf.”

--

“So I was talking to Angelica earlier today,”

Aaron looked up, surprised that Washington had spoken. George Washington had never been one for idle small talk, at least not with Aaron. The two of them were in the Oval Office, long after anyone else had left the West Wing either to go home or visit Lafayette (he was pretty sure it was Alexander and Eliza over their tonight) while he and the President carried on working through the mess that a temporary change of President caused. He smiled thinly.

“That’s always dangerous, Sir. She didn't convince you we were dating again did she?”

“She did not. Besides, I know a certain young lady who would be rather put out if you started dating Angelica Church.”

“Yeah, Theo would probably kill me.”

“Have you ever considered getting yourself chipped? At least that way we might stand a chance of finding the body.”

Washington was joking, Aaron knew, and usually he’d be amazed and more than a little pleased that the President was teasing him. Instead, he only shivered. Washington hadn't been there when Eliza played them the André tape, hadn't listened in horror as a man Aaron had once trusted had joked about finding Lafayette’s body. He knew they should tell the President, but he didn't see what good it would do. The FBI had everything they needed to convict André, and all it would accomplish would be to pile more guilt and horror onto his shoulders. Far better that Washington never know about all the details - it wasn't like any of them were short on nightmare fodder at the moment.

This was what the West Wing does, he realised. Protect the President and the office he holds at all costs, even from the things he doesn't want protecting from. And as Chief of Staff, that was Aaron’s job most of all. Washington didn't have to like him, but he could trust him to do his job.

“What were you talking to Angelica about?”
“We were discussing our unfortunate lodger—” (it looked like the nickname Alexander had come up with for Adams was here to stay) “and she was explaining all the steps that were taken to keep this office on a steady track in the face of total chaos.”

“Total chaos about sums it up, yes Sir.”

“It was funny, there was one thing that kept coming up again and again. You.”

Aaron blinked. “Me?”

“Yes. You kept the ship sailing when everything was going to hell around you, and I should probably say thank you.”

“I was just doing my job. The staff—“

“Have all made me proud this week. You included.”

“Mr President—“

Washington rolled his eyes. “Just accept the praise and move on would you? This is getting uncomfortable.”

Aaron nodded, and Washington sighed, clearly relieved to have that over with. “Right then. Burr, do me a favour and close the door would you?” This, at least, was familiar. Washington was kicking him out to get on with something on his own, and— “I need you to go through these foreign office reports with me, make sure I don’t accidentally sign off on a war or something. Can you do that?”

Washington looked at him expectantly.

“Yes, Sir.” Aaron said, biting back a smile. “I can do that.”

--

John André looked smaller somehow, sitting in the FBI interview room with his wrists handcuffed to the table. Good, Herc thought viciously as he watched him through a two-way mirror, I hope he feels small. After everything this man had done to them, done to Laf he deserved nothing.

Hercules hadn't been able to bring himself to go and visit Lafayette in hospital, not since he had been transferred from London back to D.C. Well, that wasn't strictly true. He’d dropped in a couple of times now, at hours he knew Laf would be asleep and he wouldn't run into anyone else. It was cowardly, he knew, but he couldn't quite bring himself to talk through what had happened to the Frenchman, have to live through it all again. He didn't want to make Laf live through it all again.

And then there was the kiss. Herc would be lying if he said he hadn't thought about it… okay it was more accurate to say that he hadn't been able to stop thinking about it. It hadn't exactly been the ideal situation for a first kiss, and he had no way of knowing what had been going through Laf’s head at the time. He had been delirious, confused, completely out of control of his actions. There was no way he could have meant to kiss him, was there?

But what if he had?

The situation was maddening. Not least because he found his mind wandering to the taste of his
friend’s lips at the most random of moments. Feeling the fantom brush of long, cleaver fingers on his thigh when he was trying to sleep. Wondering just how true all of Laf’s ridiculous claims about his performance in bed had been. The weird thing was, Herc had always assumed he was straight, and he was pretty sure nothing had changed. It wasn't like he suddenly found himself ogling guys on the subway or anything. Maybe it wasn't guys at all. Maybe it was just… Laf.

But all this was moot anyway if his friend hadn't meant to kiss him. There was no way he could make assumptions without talking to him, and there was no way he could put that kind of pressure on him right now. At least that was what he told himself as he continued to stay well away from G.W. hospital.

Right now he had a bigger problem, a problem named André.

“Still nothing?” a voice asked behind him, and Herc turned to see Tallmadge walking into the observation room, file in hand. Herc shook his head. “Not a peep. Congratulations, by the way.”

Tallmadge waved his hand dismissively. He had been named Washington’s spymaster for the time being, and Herc was sure the appointment would eventually be permanent.

“Would you be willing to talk to him?”

“Me?” Herc asked.

“We reckon he might be more co-operative if it was you on the other side of the table. Of course, there’s no obligation on your part, you’ve done more than enough, but if we really want to convict him-“

“I’ll do it,” he said immediately, taking the file from Tallmadge’s hands as he went.

André looked amused, although not exactly surprised to see him. He smirked as Herc took a seat across the desk. “Mulligan. I was wondering if I’d get the privilege. Tell me, how is our dear ambassador doing?”

“He’ll live.” Herc said shortly, not willing to bring even the idea of Laf into this place. “I’d be a lot more worried about how I was doing, if I were you. You are aware just how precarious your position is, Mr André?”

“Oh yes. I’m quite screwed. What was my mistake, by the way?”

“You underestimated the White House Staff.”

He chuckled. “You always were an irritating bunch.”

“I have a few questions about the planning of this attack-“

“Shouldn’t you be asking Adrienne these questions?”

A muscle in Herc’s jaw flicked in annoyance. Adrienne. They’d never found her, the police he’d anonymously tipped off of her whereabouts. She’d given them the slip, disappeared, and it was all his fault. “The whereabouts of Miss Noailles are currently unknown, but seeing as she was working for you, I’m far more interested in what you have to say.”

André looked at him blankly for a moment, then laughed. He threw back his head, like some absurd cartoon villain and roared in amusement. Eventually, between gasping breaths he managed “And here I was thinking you were the smart one. You got played Mulligan. We all got played.”
“What are you talking about?” Herc asked wearily, fear building in his throat.

“She wasn't working for me, idiot. I was working for her.”

_And I all but let her go_, Herc thought in shock. How had not seen it? He thought he’d been so smart, working out her deception and outmanoeuvring her, but it had been the other way around. Which meant he’d only found his friend because she wanted him found. Which meant…

_Laf._

He all but ran out of the interview room, André’s renewed laughter echoing behind him.

---

It had been another car journey of strained silence, and all Alex wanted to do was get home and crawl into bed. It almost made it worse somehow, going to visit Laf at the hospital. It was hard to focus on the fact that he was alive and back with them when he was still hooked up to at least four different machines and could barely leave his bed. They pulled up outside his flat, and Alex was half way out the car when John said “Wait.”

He sat back down apprehensively. “We need to talk, Alex.” John said.

“You think now’s the time?”

“I don’t see why not.” John sighed, then, when Alex refused to look at him, just kept on staring straight ahead he said “You’re not making this easy, you know.”

“You want to talk about making things easy?”

“I guess not.” A beat of silence, and then, “Alex, I am so sorry for leaving. I wasn't thinking straight, I was scared, I was angry… It’s not an excuse, I know, but I fucked up so badly, and I need you to tell me how to fix it.”

There was a dry lump in his throat, and Alex swallowed, still not meeting John’s eyes. “When you left… it hurt me John, hurt me bad. Everyone leaves, sooner or later, and I couldn't work out what had gone wrong. I…” He shut up abruptly. He wasn't going to talk about the snowballing need to write one more page, the way he would throw back coffee terrified of falling asleep because as soon as he closed his eyes there would be rain and darkness and John’s voice getting fainter. He was terrified of going through that again.

But here was John, looking at him with such sorrow in his eyes. The first thing he had done when he found out what had happened was drop everything and run to D.C. and he hadn't left Alex’s side since. Alex had spent this whole week thinking he had lost someone. He wasn't about to loose John again, not when he suddenly had him back. But he had to know…

“South Carolina?”

John’s face twisted. “If you think I’m going back there again… Or anywhere for that matter. I’m here, Alex, and if you want me, I’m here to stay.”

Alex hesitated. And took his hand. And somewhere between John’s relieved intake of breath and
and the warmth sparking from their intertwined figures, someone was singing *forgiveness*.

---

Herc burst into the hospital room with no idea what to expect but ready for anything, and was met with… nothing. There was nothing wrong, the room in silence except from the beeping of machines and his friend’s steady breathing, telling him he was asleep. He forced himself to take a breath. He had been so sure, terrified out of his mind that somehow Adrienne would come for Laf, that he needed to be here to protect his friend, but as far as he could tell there was no danger whatsoever. That couldn't be right, could it? Herc realised that he had his gun out, and put the thing hastily back in his pocket. He was going mad, jumping at shadows. Maybe London had left more scars than the ones that criss-crossed Laf’s torso. He should go. Herc turned to leave, and he wasn't sure what came first: the realisation that Laf’s steady breathing had stopped, or the voice that asked “Hercules? Is that you?”

He turned to see the Frenchman peering at him, confused, through the dark of the room.

“Hey man. Yeah, it’s me. Sorry for waking you up.”

“Not that I don’t appreciate the visit, but it’s the middle of the night, non? What are you doing here?”

“Making sure you were okay.” he admitted, crossing to sit in the chair beside Laf’s bed.

“You know there are daylight hours for that, right? Why haven't you been to see me?”

Herc took a deep breath. “Because I was scared. Laf… what do you remember?”

“I remember that you saved my life, and you haven't given me the chance to say thank you.”

“You’d have done the same for me.”

“But-“

He held up his hands. He hated the idea that Laf felt somehow in his debt. “Consider it payback for all the rounds of drinks and fancy meals, okay? Can we drop it?”

“If you wish,” Laf said after a pause. “But that doesn't tell me where you’ve been. The others say you haven't showing up at work…”

“I’ve been at Langley, trying to get some answers out of André.”

“So is this you now? Special Agent Mulligan?”

He made a face. “I don’t think so. After this is over… It’s not for me, and I’ve got Hugh to think about as well. Let’s face it, I’d make a pretty crappy action hero.”

“Whereas I make a fantastic damsel in distress.”

“I don’t know.” Herc grinned. “You sure you could pull off the dress?”

“You know I could.” Laf shuffled over. “Now come here, for God’s sakes.”

“What?”
“I know you too well, Herc. You’re going to stay here and do your guard dog routine all night, and that chair will be murder on your neck.”

“The nurses won’t be happy,” Herc warned, as if that was the reason for his hesitation.

“Who cares? They’ll already be pissed if they find you here after hours. Don’t you trust me?”

Hospital beds, as it turns out, aren’t designed for two people. Herc slid off his shoes and climbed awkwardly on, terrified he was going to re-break a rib or tear one of Laf’s stitches or something. He eventually managed to manœuvre himself onto his side, facing Laf, in a position he hoped wasn’t taking up too much space. Even so, there was hardly room to move and the two men were pressed close together in an effort not to fall out.

“This can’t be comfortable for you,” he said.

“I’m fine.” Laf replied, and Herc tried not to tense at the tickle of breath on his skin. It was dark in the hospital room, so much so that he could barely see his friend, which at least meant that Laf probably couldn’t see the blush spreading furiously across his cheeks. For a while neither spoke, just lay side by side and Herc tried to sort out his thoughts, to get a hold of himself. Then, Laf said “Herc? You know I promised I wouldn’t say thank you?”

“Yeah?”

“Thank you.” The words were little more than a whisper, and Herc had no idea how to respond. He couldn't see Laf’s face so had no gauge of the other man’s emotions. And he certainly didn't see the kiss coming.

Laf caught the side of his mouth in the dark, and quickly slid his lips across Herc’s own to correct the mistake. The sudden contact sent a jolt of electricity down Herc’s spine and his breath hitched. Laf’s kiss was tender, nervous even, and Herc paused for a single second before returning it with vigour, trying to communicate what his words had failed to. His body moved closer without waiting for permission from his brain, needing the warmth and proximity. The surprise and relief and want swarming his brain left little room for thought, so it wasn't until they eventually broke apart for breath, foreheads resting against each other, that he could begin to process.

“What is it?” Laf asked, concerned. “Do you not-“

“No. I mean yes. I mean… I wasn’t sure you wanted this, or that you even remembered kissing me. I didn't want to assume anything.”

“Oh Hercules-“ and Herc tried very hard not to think about how amazing his full name sounded on Laf’s lips, low and husky. “-You need to stop your worrying.”

And as it turned out, it was all too easy to let go of his worries with the Frenchman wrapped around him, the two of them slowly exploring each other. Laf’s teeth grazed his bottom lips, just the hint of pressure and Herc wasn’t able to stop the needy moan escaping from his throat. He felt rather than herd Laf’s replying laugh and began to inch his hands downward in retaliation. He was halfway down Laf’s stomach, fingers tracing the scars (every one of which he resolved to kiss later) when Laf caught his wrist.

“Careful. Don’t forget I’m still hooked up to this damn heart monitor. Wouldn’t want to bring the night nurse running in, would be?”

Yeah, that would be a fun one to explain. So sorry to worry you, nurse, don't mind us, I'm just befouling the honour of your patient here. He withdrew his hands reluctantly, and Laf smiled into his
lips. “Don’t fret, *mon cher*. We have all the time in the world.”

Chapter End Notes

Epilogue should be up shortly. I clearly have no patience whatsoever :)

---
Chapter Notes

One last time...

Oh, and I turned on the radio today and You'll Be Back was playing. I live in England, so I'm still kind of confused by they were playing it but I'm going to take that as a sign...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

3 years later

“A toast to the groom.” Angelica said, holding her champagne glass high. “And one to the bride as well.”

Theo smiled back at her looking radiant and as for Aaron, well, she didn't think she'd ever see the man look happier. Their fingers were intertwined on the table-top, and she couldn't help but think of a conversation she’d had a million years ago, when he told her he’d kissed Theo. You got there in the end, idiot, she thought fondly.

They’d all gotten there in the end, one way or another. In just over a month, John Adams would stand on the Capitol steps, put his hand on a bible and swear to serve the people of the United States. And with that, the Washington Administration would come to an end two terms, eight years, and a whole lot of grey hairs after some crazy person had decided it would be a good idea to put them in charge. It was kind of hard to believe that just like that, it would be over. Angelica would miss it, God she would miss it, but she couldn't deny she was a little relieved, a sentiment she knew Washington shared. The man had given everything for his country between the army, the senate and the Oval Office, and no-one could say he didn't deserve his moment of rest.

True, Adams wasn't her first choice for President. He wasn't anyone’s first choice - Alex had nearly had a heart attack when he heard he’d won the nomination - but at least he’d have a good staff to stop him going too far wrong. Eliza was staying on, and Aaron as well, though as a special advisor rather than Chief of Staff. Technically it was a demotion, and a few years ago he would have snubbed the job, but Angelica had a feeling he was actually looking forward to it. Less stress, more free time to spend with Theo, and no more keeping wayward staffers in line.

As for the rest of them, they were going their separate ways. Lafayette was heading back to France to try and fix the mess that was his home politics. Hercules, despite three years of constant wooing from the CIA, FBI, and every other stupidly acronymed espionage organisation on the planet was going off grid for a bit, taking some time off to travel. He’d talked about finding an art course in Europe somewhere, designing some of his own stuff… it sounded liberating, that kind of freedom. Plus he’d be close to his boyfriend. John didn't have any definite plans either yet, but he was talking about running for office again. A campaign somewhere he actually had a hope of winning this time, in a district he could make a real difference in. Angelica wouldn't be surprised if one day, with a bit of learning and a lot of luck, he’d make it back to the White House. And Alex, well, wherever John went, he wouldn't be far behind.
Angelica didn't have a clue what she was going to do herself. She didn't want to stay in D.C, that was for sure - eight years up to her elbows in the dirtiest politics day in day out had left her with a distinct desire to be anywhere else. Where that was, she wasn't sure just yet. Not two weeks ago she’d been offered a job at a non-profit in London, and she couldn't help thinking it might be a good idea. A new challenge, a whole new city to explore, and she would only be a couple of hours away from Paris by train. She couldn't let Laf have all the fun without her, after all.

But that was all in the future, and right now she was perfectly satisfied to be here with her friends, and celebrate a marriage that had been far too long in the making. She shot a wink in Aaron’s direction as she continued with her speech, making sure to squeeze in every embarrassing story she could think of. Theo choked on her drink when Angelica got to the her-and-Aaron-pretending-to-date bit, and for a moment she was worried it had been a mistake to tell everyone about it at his wedding. It wasn't exactly in the best taste. That was before she realised Theo was laughing.

Theo had wanted to wait to get married, not to have to think about wedding planning until after January when they were out of office. Aaron had talked her round. “Think about it,” he’d said. “Don’t you want to be able to say that the President of the United States gave you away on your wedding day?”

And Washington had, beaming with pride as they made their way down the isle. He was so proud of all his children, and that had included Theo for some time now (they’d adopted her whether she liked it or not.) Angelica hadn’t been able to help but smile at the two of them, although she’d lost $20 there. She’d been betting on Washington to be the best man instead. Alex, of course, had bet on himself along with Laf, and John and Eliza had put their money on Aaron’s friend William Van Ness from the legal team. They’d all been wrong. Aaron had walked into her office on day, looking uncharacteristically tense and said “I’ve got a problem. You’re the only one who can help me.”

“For God’s sakes,” Angelica had said, setting her work down. “What did you do this time?”

“Turns out I need a best man. What about it, Church? Fancy helping me smash some gender roles?”

(She’d later found out that Hercules had made about $200 on that one. The bastard.)

“So yeah, to your union, guys.” she finished, some time later. “And to the hope you provide for the rest of us loners.”

There was a smattering of laughter and Alex shouted hotly “Who are you calling a loner!”, hoisting John’s hand into the air as if he’d just won a boxing match.

Angelica rolled her eyes and amended her statement. “To the hope you provide the rest of us loners, and those two idiots over there. And may you always be satisfied.”

--

“Fancy a dance?” Laf asked, offering his hand in mock chivalry, and Hercules took it with a laugh. Laf had always loved the sound of his laugh and he still had to remind himself sometimes that this amazing man was his. What he had done to deserve him, he had no idea, but he sure as hell wasn't planning on letting him go.

It was hard to believe it had been almost three years now. Somedays, it felt much longer, as if there had never been a time when he couldn't look at Herc and think mine. Somedays, it felt only seconds
since that first, clumsy kiss. But Laf knew just how far they had come since then. It had taken months before he stopped jumping at every shadow, years before Herc stopped answering the door with one hand on a weapon, convinced that Adrienne would turn up and finish the job (no-one had heard so much of a whisper from her since London, which was more than fine by Laf as long as it stayed that way.) There were still nights when one of them would wake up with a scream in his throat. But they both knew the drill by now, exactly what to whisper into the other’s ear until they remembered they were safe. And it worked - they worked.

They made their way onto the dance-floor, where the band was playing some terrible cheesy number. Honestly, Burr had the worst taste in music. They swayed in time to the rhythm, lazy and unhurried. Laf was actually a pretty good dancer - he had his upbringing to thank for that - but as it turned out Hercules was completely flat-footed so they never tried anything more complicated. Not that Laf was complaining, though. There were worse places to be in the world than in his boyfriend’s arms.

“So what did Tallmadge want?” he asked, because he’d seen Herc deep in conversation with the agent earlier that evening.

“The usual. Attractive job offer, huge salary, my chance to be someone big and important in the Pentagon.”

“And?”

“And I told him to stuff it. As always.”

Laf laughed, and there was no denying that part of it was relief. He knew Herc didn't want to be a spy, but he could never shake the feeling that one of the million offers he got would one day be enough, that they would take him away again. Laf didn't want that life for Herc, almost as much as he didn't want to try and live his own without him.

The song switched to a slower number and their movements changed accordingly, the two of them unconsciously sliding closer together. There weren't that many couples on the dance floor at this stage in the night and a fair few guests had already slipped away after waving the bride and groom off. Theo had thrown her bouquet high into the air as she left, they had landed squarely in Herc’s lap, much to his surprise.

“What did you do with the flowers?” he asked out of curiosity.

“Oh, I gave them to one of the little bridesmaids. Thought she was going to burst from excitement, the cutie.”

Laf smiled. There was no denying that Herc was good with kids - you just had to look at how well Hugh had turned out, the kid was on course to graduate with full honours - but lately he it had got him thinking. He’d never really imagined that children would be in the picture for him; Adrienne certainly hadn't been mother material and no one else had ever managed to lay a serious claim on his heart, but with Hercules… Well, it was far from the worst thing he could imagine his life turning out to be.

It wasn't the only dream Laf had for the two of them, the only future he’d lie awake at night thinking about. And maybe it was because they were at a wedding, or the excellent champagne he’d been drinking all night, or the fact that Hercules Mulligan could put gods to shame when he wore a tux, but Laf found himself leaning close to whisper in his ear.

“Would we colour co-ordinate our suits, do you think that’s just cheesy?”
“What?”

“Or maybe we could just do the whole thing in jeans and t-shirts and be done with it. A couple of witnesses, get Hugh to carry the rings, go to that Mexican place you like afterwards?”

Herc pulled away to look at him, eyes wide. “What are you asking?”

“You know exactly what I’m asking. How about it, Mulligan? Do you want to call this fabulous bit of ass yours until we’re grumpy old men doing unspeakable things to each other in a rocking chair?”

Herc snorted, and just like that Laf knew they were going to be okay. “You’re impossible, has anyone ever told you that?”

“Is that a yes?”

Herc kissed him, tender and sweet. “Yes,” he breathed into Laf’s lips. “God yes, you idiot.”

--

Eliza sat at one of the round tables, watching the dancers. She’d spent the last half hour chatting to some of Aaron’s friends who were in finance, and she was pretty sure she’d convinced them all to be patrons for her orphanage upstate. It hadn’t been difficult. Amazing what an open bar and a dress with no back could do for child welfare.

On the dance-floor, Laf and Herc were swaying in time to the music. She watched as Laf whispered something in Herc’s ear, and the other man looked at him for a moment before grinning and kissing him. They looked happy, she decided absently, and was debating whether or not to go talk to the guy who was shooting her looks across the room when someone said “I didn’t realise they were together.”

She looked around to see a young woman standing behind her, also watching the dancers. Eliza didn’t recognise her, but there was something vulnerable about the girl that made her instantly want to protect her. Her brown hair was loose, curling down past her shoulders, and she didn’t exactly look dressed for a wedding in a yellow skirt and a jumper that covered her arms.

“Mind if I sit?” she asked, and Eliza pulled out a chair in invitation. She offered her hand.

“Hi. Eliza Schuyler. I work with Aaron.”

“Peggy. I… I Don’t actually know Aaron or Theodosia, to be honest.”

Eliza raised an eyebrow. “No offence, but you don’t look like a wedding crasher.”

“I’m not. Not really.” Peggy picked at her sleeve, pulling it further up her arm. “I’m here to see them actually.” She gestured at Herc and Laf, who had resumed dancing. “We’re old friends, but I haven’t seen either of them for a long time. Didn’t realise they were a them now.”

“Yeah, it took them a while to get their shit together. Do you want me to go get them?”

“Nah, they look like they’re having a moment. Let them be.”

“How do you know Herc and Laf?”
The ghost of a smile crossed Peggy’s face. “They did something for me a long time ago, and I never got a chance to say thank you. I haven’t been back in D.C. since, but I thought it was time to…” she stood abruptly. “I shouldn't have come here, I’m sorry, I’m just going to go, and—“

Eliza grabbed her wrist, sleeve riding up slightly, and she caught sight of a criss-cross of scars on her forearm before Peggy yanked it down again. And everything fell suddenly into place. She was almost certain she knew who this girl really was.

“You’re not really called Peggy, are you?” Eliza asked.

She flinched. “I am now, have been for years. I’m happy as Peggy.”

Eliza silently cursed her lack of tact. “You’re happy?”

“I really am.”

And Eliza believed her. “I’m glad to hear it. And the guys would be as well. Especially Alex.”

She froze. “Alexander’s here?”

“Yeah somewhere.” Eliza glanced around. She was momentarily worried when she realised she couldn't see him, before she noticed that John was nowhere to be found either and decided that actually she didn't want to know what he was up to. “He’d want to know you were okay, after everything.”

Peggy bit her lip. “You’re very kind. But I think I am going to go. Tell them… Tell them thank you, would you? All of them.”

“I will.” Eliza promised, and watched her go. Hers hadn’t been the happiest of stories, but she was writing her own chapters now. And if Peggy, or Maria, or whatever she chose to call herself ever needed a friend in D.C., she would know where to find them.

--

“Hey! I was starting to wonder where you’d got to.”

Alex didn't reply, just continued to stand and stare out across the water. He had to hand it to Theo, she was brilliant at this whole wedding planning thing. She’d somehow found an amazing ballroom looking out over the Potomac which she’d twisted a few arms to book. If twisting a few arms meant frog-marching Burr down here to wave the Presidential seal in their faces until they gave in, that was.

“Alex?” the voice asked again, and he realised the speaker was John. He smiled slightly as his boyfriend crossed the empty terrance to come and stand by his side. “Are you okay?”

Alex paused for a moment, then said “Everything’s gonna change now, isn't it? I don’t know why I didn't realise it until now, but we’re gonna wake up in a month’s time and the White House is just gonna be a big old building on the postcards.”

“I don’t think it’ll ever be just that. I thought you didn't want to stay on, anyway?”

“I don’t, not under Adams, and definitely not without half the team. It’s just weird, you know, the change? Not sure I like it.”
“Never had you pegged for a conservative.”

Alex feigned horror. “Take that back, Laurens. I’m insulted.”

It hadn’t always been easy, the two of them. There had been a lot of bridges to build when they decided to give it another go, a lot of trying to work out where they stood with each other. And Alex would be the first to admit that everything that had happened to him, he had more than one unresolved issue to work through. But they’d worked through them together. And now, Alex couldn’t imagine life without the freckled speechwriter by his side.

“You know what I mean. Herc and Laf are going off to Europe, Washington’s going home, and we-“

“We’ll work something out.” John promised. “I thought you were good at making things up as you went along?”

Alex found himself humming in agreement. “That has kind of been our MO for the last eight years.”

For a while, neither man spoke, just looked out across the river at the city lights reflecting in the water with fingers intertwined. Then Alex asked “Are you serious about wanting to run again?”

“I think so. Not right away, but yeah. I mean, I’m not saying it’s going to be easy, but…”

“But it’s what you want.” Alex finished for him. “So that’s what we’ll do.”

“We.” John mused. “You know, I think I’d love you just for that. But I can’t ask you just to turn tail and move to South Carolina.”

“Who says it has to be South Carolina?” Alex asked. “I hear Green’s giving up his seat after this term.”

“John Laurens, New York Senator. I guess that does have a nice ring to it. But that’s two years away, we don’t have to decide anything now. We can take a break.”

“Yeah, I know. But you know I’d move to Alaska if that was where you wanted to be.”

“Alaska?” John raised an eyebrow.

“Sure. They got internet there, right?”

He was rewarded with a smile, the sort of shy grin that still made Alex’s breath catch in his throat, even after all these years. He’d phrased it like a joke, but he was deadly serious. He would follow John anywhere he asked, safe in the knowledge that John would do the same for him. It still wouldn’t be easy for the two for the two of them, all these years later and still trying to turn the world upside down. But there was no one he would rather have by his side when he tried.

The sounds of laughter and music drifted across the evening air. “Come on, let’s go back inside.” John said, with a slight tug of Alex’s sleeve. “Sounds like we’re missing one hell of a party.”

“Just give me one minute.” Alex said, not quite willing to give up the peace of this moment just yet. He glanced back at the ballroom, then turned back to look over the water. Behind him, he felt John shift his weight to stand directly behind him, wrapping his arms around Alex’s slender frame. He planted a soft kiss on the back of his head, then leant down to rest his own on Alex’s shoulder. The two of them stood there for a moment of quiet, a tableau against the distant lights of the city.
“What are you thinking about?” John asked softly.

Alex just smiled. “Tomorrow.”

Chapter End Notes

Well that’s all folks. I’ve had so much fun writing this - it’s the longest thing I’ve ever attempted and I couldn’t have done it without all your lovely comments and encouragement. Seriously, you guys have made my day and motivated me to write the next chapter so many times you have no idea. Come find me on tumblr @hapless-and-hopeless if you want so say hi, and I’ll let y’all know if I end up writing any more - there were about ten different ways I could have taken this so look out for some deleted scenes at some point.

Thank you so much for slogging to the end of this and I love you all.

Stay classy, Santiago. Over and out.

Jess xx

End Notes

Feedback makes a writer's world go round :)

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