

**(and we'll die in) the class we were born**

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/5643019) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/5643019>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Mature</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Categories:	<a href="#">Gen</a> , <a href="#">Multi</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">Hamilton - Miranda</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Alexander Hamilton/John Laurens</a>
Characters:	<a href="#">Alexander Hamilton</a> , <a href="#">Angelica Schuyler</a> , <a href="#">John Laurens</a> , <a href="#">George Washington</a> , <a href="#">Gilbert du Motier Marquis de Lafayette</a> , <a href="#">Elizabeth "Eliza" Schuyler</a> , <a href="#">Martha Washington</a> , <a href="#">Thomas Jefferson</a> , <a href="#">Charles Lee</a> , <a href="#">George III of the United Kingdom</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Alternate Universe - Modern Setting</a> , <a href="#">Politics</a> , <a href="#">Racism</a> , <a href="#">Xenophobia</a> , <a href="#">Local Politics</a> , <a href="#">New York City</a> , <a href="#">Is there anything more exciting than a mayoral election?</a> , <a href="#">i didn't think so</a> , <a href="#">Corruption</a> , <a href="#">Smoking</a> , <a href="#">Class Issues</a> , <a href="#">gentrification</a> , <a href="#">Mental Health Issues</a> , <a href="#">adult relationships are hard</a> , <a href="#">Hurt/Comfort</a> , <a href="#">Social Media</a> , <a href="#">Police Brutality</a> , <a href="#">Character(s) of Color</a> , <a href="#">Fluff and Angst</a>
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of <a href="#">cause i got the right (to make it look as if i'm doing something with my life)</a>
Stats:	Published: 2016-01-05 Completed: 2016-05-14 Words: 41,413 Chapters: 15/15

# (and we'll die in) the class we were born

by [Quietbang](#)

## Summary

Alexander Hamilton is an orphan, immigrant, decorated war vet -- and the director of communications for George Washington's mayoral campaign. It's the last one that seems to be causing him the most trouble.

## Notes

So, I'm writing about local government and politics as someone who is deeply embedded in it-- 100% of the money I have made since I was 16 has come from contracting communications and ultimately managing campaigns.

However, I am not from New York, and *because* I've done so much work in politics I know that 99.9% of it relates to hyper-specific local issues revolving around 33 year old ethnic grievances. I can't tell you the number of times I have been yelled at by a constituent for zoning decisions made before I was born. Because I'm not a New Yorker, I try to research these as much as I can, but I will fuck up.

When picturing the characters picture the cast of the musical, not the historical figures. The only exception to this is Alex, who is biracial and of Haitian-Dominican descent. There's a pervasive rumor in the Caribbean that Rachel Faucett was mixed race, and although there's nothing concrete to back it up it is an interesting element to include in the backstory. One of the main things that made him indispensable Washington was his ability to write quickly in French, and so I have given him a Haitian background as the major Francophone country left in the Caribbean.

Also: politics is bloody and mean. People say terrible things about other people, and other people are brutally honest about some things. Even those of us who are in it to help our communities often find ourselves saying terrible things about said community. This does not reflect the author's opinions, and it probably doesn't reflect the character's opinions outside of an 18 hour campaign day.

I also cannot *for the life of me* find the rules on campaign length for NYC mayoral elections. I'm saying it's around 75 days, as I just worked a 75 day election and it *broke me*. I don't think I can inflict a longer campaign than that on anyone, even fictional characters.

E-Day -65

*Bzzz*

*Bzzz*

*Bzzz*

"Alex? Answer your fucking phone," John groaned and swatted him with his hand. "'S too early."

Alex groaned and tried to bury his face further into his pillow, but that only caused the volume of the vibration to increase.

*"Alex"*

Fumbling with the phone in the dark, Alex finally managed to press it to his ear. "H'lo?"

"Alex," Angelica somehow sounded put together, even at - Alex checked his phone- 4:14 in the morning. "We're in the news."

Alex frowned, his voice heavy with sleep and confusion. "S'point of having a media person, Ange. We're always in the news."

"No, I mean -- you are. You and Washington. It's not -- not great."

Alex sat up, suddenly wide awake. John made a grumpy noise and attempted to burrow in closer to his side. "What do you mean, me and Washington?"

She sighed. "It's on the cover of the *Post* this morning. They're saying your his son. In considerably stronger language than that."

*"Ai, cogerme."*

"Quite."

He rubbed his free hand over his face, stomach twisting. "Where did they even get that from? I'm nobody, they can't have just pulled that out of thin air."

Angie makes a frustrated noise into the line. "Trust me, that's what I've been trying to find out. They-- they went back to your neighborhood, Alex. They're trying to spin it as George being a deadbeat dad in addition to the insinuation he cheated on Martha."

"General Washington would make a terrible deadbeat dad. That's an insult to my *actual* deadbeat dad as well as deadbeat dads everywhere."

The silence on the line made him wince. "Not funny?"

She sighed. "It's gonna be a goddamn nightmare today once the story hits peoples doorsteps. I need you guys to come in here." A pause. "Have the trains even started running again yet?"

Alex snorted a laugh into the phone. "You're my favorite rich girl, Angelica. How do you think everyone gets to work?"

An embarrassed silence filled the line as he untangled himself from Jack and Marco, the latter bounding out of bed in excitement at the prospect of an impromptu late-night walk.

As he filled the coffee maker and set it to "On" he couldn't help one last jab, "S'okay, Ange. I'll be your bit of rough any day."

"You're taking this better than I thought you would."

"It's four in the goddamn morning, Angelica, I'll deal with the wound to my honor once I have some damn pants on."

"Well, put them on and drag John out of bed. We need a strategy on this before we contact the candidate."

"We haven't told him yet?"

"Christ, no, Alex, can you imagine? He'd want to sit in on the strategy meeting, which is precisely the *opposite* of what we need."

"We'll be in as soon as possible." He hung up the phone without waiting for a response, and went to wake up Jack.

Alex spent the ride down to Fulton chewing on his lower lip and thinking.

There wasn't a good way to spin this. It wasn't true -- but unfortunately anyone who could attest to that was either dead, in another country, didn't speak English -- or all three. The campaign couldn't issue a statement -- that would give the rumors credence -- and they also couldn't issue a denial. It had to be the fucking *Post*, too -- deliberately targeting the white working class voters the campaign had had to work so hard to win over.

If they denied it, the Post would accuse them of lying. It would give the story legs. They might demand that they take a DNA test -- either way, it would make a one day story into one that stretched the entire campaign.

But they couldn't ignore it. Most of the reporters from the more respected news outlets wouldn't bring it up, but the tabloids and the constituents would feel no such qualms.

And, fuck, what would this do to his fucking *career*? Alex had worked hard to get where he was, he wasn't a fucking pity hire, he wasn't a diversity hire, he wasn't-- no matter what he did, now, his name would always be followed by "you know, the bastard."

He wasn't *ashamed* of his mother, his brilliant, beautiful mother. In a perfect world, he would feel no compunctions about being publicly linked with his family, with his neighborhood. He had risen above his motherfucking station and was proud of it. Regardless of what John thought, he wasn't ashamed.

In this world. though -- this would come up whenever you googled his name, and any runs he might take at candidacy for anything would be slightly tarnished by his immigrant status, by his dead single mother, by, by, by -- it just wasn't fucking fair.

The thing was , they couldn't deny it -- but it wasn't *true*, either, and they couldn't be allowed to say it was.

John squeezed his wrist, and he looked down to realise that he was methodically shredding his own sleeve cuff from a single loose thread.

"You're quiet this morning."

Alex nodded.

"Thought of a strategy yet?"

Alex snorted and took another sip from his travel mug, taking comfort from the warmth of John's hand on his arm. "No. You?"

John snorted back. "Hey, you're the communications guy. They just keep me around for my good looks and because none of y'all can figure out how to work excel."

"Those are your most sterling qualities," Alex said solemnly.

John elbowed him in the ribs, causing Alex to spill a spot of coffee on his jeans. He had a suit in the office -- they all did, for emergencies or meetings that came up suddenly -- and so had dressed in his customary workday outfit of clean, well-kept jeans, a button-down, and a blazer. Even if he had to speak to the media, he would look like the very model of a studious young man -- not the ghetto rat they were no doubt hoping for.

In a perfect world it wouldn't matter, but in this world Alex wanted to *win*.

On the walk to the campaign office, his phone buzzes.

5:02 AM

*Double-time, boys. The general is here..*

"*Carjo*," Alex muttered.

They reached the campaign office quickly, swinging open the double-doors of the former strip mall salon. (The equipment had all been removed, but a pervasive smell of hairspray clung to the carpet.)

Angelica met them at the door, her white skirtsuit miraculously unwrinkled and her makeup flawless. Alex immediately scratched at a spot on his chin which he had missed in his rushed morning shave.

"We're meeting in the back. We need a plan of attack."

They pushed past the blue plastic curtains that separated the front of the office from the back, where the campaign staff were all sitting on metal folding chairs around the plastic table in various states of sleepiness or disarray. Aside from Angelica, Alex would say that he, Lafayette, and the general were in the best shape -- but then, they had had plenty of experience with dressing in a rush.

Eliza wore a long sleeved white blouse over a white tank top, her face clean of makeup and her hair out of its normal professional bun. Jefferson wore his customary flashy brogues and bespoke suit, but his buttons were in disarray and he hadn't quite managed to shave. In his thick hoodie over creased jeans, John looked like nothing so much as a sleepy college student.

"Well if it isn't the bastard himself," Jefferson said jovially.

Alex rolled his eyes. "Yes, Thomas, that is indeed a hilarious and original joke. I have definitely never heard it before. I congratulate you on your quick wit and your way with words."

He refilled his travel mug from the coffee pot in the corner before sitting in one of the uncomfortable metal chairs. "This is some bullshit, just for the record."

Angelica snorted.

Lafayette groaned wearily. "Yes, Alex, we know. Thank you for your input. Any strategies to put forward?"

Alex frowned. "Well, after an hour of thinking I can pretty comprehensively list what we *can't* do."

"Deny it," Eliza said from her chair.

"Affirm it," Jefferson said from his.

"Ignore it," John contributed glumly.

Alex frowned, chewing on his bottom lip as he looked at Angelica. "We have to own it, then. Change the narrative."

She nodded.

"We change it from a story about the general's supposed vices to a story about -- fuck, I don't know. Do we know what the cover is, yet? Is it just a scary picture of Soundview?"

"Worse," Angelica said grimly as she spun around her ipad to face him.

Alex blinked in shock. It was a picture from a church event, the clothes dating the photo pretty conclusively in the mid-nineties. A hand-painted banner read "Bienvenue à New York - Bienvenido a Nueva York - Welcome to New York". A too-thin teenage boy with shadowed eyes and a too-big red t-shirt smiled bashfully for the camera.

"Christ," Alex swore. "Have they decided what my link with the general is? Or at least have they decided which country to be racist about?"

John snorted and elbowed Alex in the side. "It's the *Post*, Alex -- I'm sure they can manage to find ethnic slurs to encompass Latinos *and* Haitians all at the same time."

"Super." Alex said flatly.

"It's all very tragic, actually. They seem to have decided that it's better to paint you as a hard luck story and the general as a deadbeat than to talk too much about your immigration status. There's even a poem you wrote as a kid."

Alex felt the knot in his stomach grow larger. "From the -- from DR?"

Angelica nodded.

"That was in Spanish."

"Amazingly, you and John are not the only people that speak Spanish in the city."

She pursed her lips. "It talks about Haiti, too, a little bit. Then it goes into your refugee status, just anything that could make your upbringing sound as Dickensian as possible, really. It's all to paint the general as someone who chose to abandon you to tragedy." She paused. "I mean, they didn't have to work too hard. The facts seem pretty Dickensian by themselves."

Eliza smacked her sister on the shoulder. "Angelica, that isn't how you talk to human beings. Remember empathy? That little thing?"

"Super." Alex said flatly, ignoring the Schuyler sisters' antics. "This was exactly what I wanted to show up every time you googled my name for the next fifty years. It's ok, I didn't want a career in politics anyway."

"Alexander," the General said in his low, deep voice. "This will all blow over eventually. It's not going to define either of us."

Alex felt a spike of unaccountable fury. "No, General. It's not going to define *you*. In ten days, the news cycle will have moved on -- you're a war hero, the Washington name is on half the buildings in this damn city -- but this will still be all that comes up when you google me. I don't have your name, general. And so I have had to work damn hard to be a different person than in that picture. I have been *shot* for my country, I have lived here longer than I have lived anywhere, but because of this any story ever written about me is going to start with the words "refugee". Which doesn't exactly bode well for my career in politics, wouldn't you say?"

He pushed himself up from his chair roughly. "I'm going to go for a smoke."

He didn't storm out the back door, but he wanted to. He leaned against the outside wall and took a shaky drag of his cigarette. He shouldn't have snapped, but it was true. They didn't have any idea -- except now they *did*, or they thought they did, and fuck, *John* didn't have any idea about most of that. The Post must have gone digging and found the profile the parish wrote about him when they were trying to raise funds to sponsor refugees after the hurricane.

The back door opened and Lafayette stepped out. For a moment the two men occupied themselves with their cigarettes, until --

"It will be ok, you know," Lafayette said.

Alex flinched in surprise. "You say that, Laf, but."

"This isn't going to ruin you. Nobody's going to say "don't vote for Hamilton, he was a child refugee"."

"Not explicitly, maybe," Alex said softly. "But implicitly-- they'll congratulate me on rising above my circumstances, always reminding everyone that I'm not one of them, implying that I was or am a drain on the state, on the economy, whatever. It's not fair."

"No, it is not," Lafayette said quietly. "Mais la monde n'est pas juste. Quelqu'un ne le sait pas que toi."

Alex let out a weary laugh. "Yeah, I guess. It's just -- it's not fair on my mother, or on my abuela, or on the Mulligans, even. I wasn't alone! I wasn't abandoned. My mother wanted us to go to DR and find my father's family, improve ourselves, until the hurricane. And she tried to protect me, and I honoured her fucking wishes because *that's what you do*. So I went to DR by myself and tried to find my dad's family, and I succeeded, and they didn't want anything to do with me. I'd have died in a ditch if Abuela Rosa hadn't taken me in. There was another hurricane, I wrote my way out of it and into New York. I taught myself English, I became a citizen, I served my country, all on my own merits -- isn't that the American fucking dream? What more do they want, blood?"

Lafayette looks at him, an idea dawning on his face. "That's how we change the story."

Alex's eyes widen, catching onto his train of thought immediately. "You're right. We make it a story about -- about the American dream as it is today, in this city. The New York dream, if you will. I'm sure they mentioned my neighborhood in a snide way, so we say -- this neighborhood full of immigrants, look at what they've contributed, look at how they are not being served by the current mayor. You've seen pictures, now look at how Hanover's plans will make everything worse. That's what we say."

Lafayette smiled, his teeth blindingly white. "Good. Go write, we have a press conference at 10:00.

Alex wrote feverishly at his laptop as Angelica wrangled the media and everyone else jumped on the phones as they began to ring off the hook. There were a surprising number of requests to interview Alex, which Angelica diplomatically declined on his behalf until after the election.



At 9:30, Alex handed his final draft to Washington.

At 10:00, the General stood in front of the campaign office, back straight.

He stared out into the waiting cameras for a moment before he went completely off script.

"This morning the New York Post published vile and baseless accusations regarding myself and a member of my staff, Alexander Hamilton. These accusations are not vile because of the implication that Mr Hamilton is my son -- Alexander is a decorated war veteran, possesses a keen sense of justice, and is truly committed to making his city and his country a better place. He is the kind of New Yorker -- the kind of American -- that this town needs a whole lot more of.

"The accusations are vile because they imply that, were Alexander my son, I would abandon him to fate and then attempt to hide out connection. I would do nothing of the sort. Alexander Hamilton is a man I am proud to call a friend. Any father would be truly lucky to claim him as his son.

"They are also cruel in their language not just about Mr Hamilton, but about the people who have cared for him and others like him."

Alex felt himself begin to hyperventilate.

"My friend Alexander Hamilton was born in Haiti and raised by a remarkable woman whose profound wish was that her son would go on to great things. Prior to her premature death, she saved and scraped to try and ensure her son had the best possible start in life. Any parent is familiar with the feeling. They applied to enter the United States as refugees and were turned down. Later that year, Alex's mother passed away from a preventable illness.

"Alex's path to the United States was more fraught than many, coming as he did after a hurricane hit his home in the Dominican Republic. Still, he came because he believed that New York offered a more promising home than the one he left behind. It is, in and of its essence, the American dream.

"Once here, he excelled at school. At 18 he was fluently trilingual, and despite having lived here for most of his adolescence, was not yet an American citizen. He enlisted in our Army anyway, which is where I had the privilege of meeting him. He was wounded fighting for our country, a country which had not yet embraced him as he had fully embraced it. His citizenship ceremony took place two years ago -- a full year *after* he was seriously wounded in action.

"Everyone in this city came from somewhere else. With the exception of Native Americans, we are a nation of immigrants. The attempts to shame me for my association with a good man will not work, especially given the insinuation that it is the circumstances of his birth rather than the content of his character that should concern me.

"I am far more concerned that it took an orphaned refugee boy with a sponsoring family 6 years to obtain citizenship. I am concerned that the schools in our city are so overwhelmed

that Alex and children like him were put into mainstream classes to sink or swim, despite having little to no formal English education. Alex was able to swim, but far too many sink.

"Our city relies on immigrants. They fill the ranks of every job at every rung of the ladder. That there is stigma associated with immigration status is shameful. As Alex has said to other members of my staff -- he had to pass a test. We were just born here.

"We cannot allow ourselves to be distracted from the true issues by this smear campaign. Instead we must use it to galvanise our commitment to supporting full ESL instruction in every public school in the city; to raise limitations on non-citizens' eligibility for municipal aid programs; to create a New York which is fair and free for all of our descendants.

"I never met Alex's mother, but I think we owe her that much. Thank you."

Alex was stunned. That was -- not what he had written. Well, some of it was, but -- he hadn't been expecting the general to eulogise his mother, for one thing. He turned to John, eyes wide. They had been watching the conference live on the local PBS affiliate while Lafayette and Angelica attended the conference in person.

"I didn't write that," he said softly.

"No," a soft voice from behind said, "I did. The General helped."

Alex reeled at Eliza's words, but managed to shoot back. "We don't let the General write his own speeches. C'mon, that's communications officer 101."

"Hmm?" Eliza assumed an innocent expression. "I'm sorry, Alex, I wouldn't know. I'm only the *assistant* communications officer, after all."

Alex gawped. "So you guys let me spend my morning writing a speech you weren't even gonna use? Do you know how much other work I have to do?"

"We used it," Eliza said patiently. "We just added things. The bones were all yours, and the last 2 minutes were all you as well. We just top-loaded it with some emotion. The press will eat it up, suddenly it's a story about how all-american you are and how the campaign represents a new kind of traditional american, they run with it for two days and then we're done."

Alex felt his jaw drop. "Remind me never to piss you off," he said slowly.

"She's like Macchiavelli in a tank top," John murmured sagely.

## Chapter Summary

Alexander Hamilton: exhausted pragmatist.

## Chapter Notes

A friend read this chapter this afternoon and informed me that my class resentment was showing, so, you know. Take that as you will.

Also, the more I thought about it, the more I realised how *absolutely terrible* Thomas Jefferson would be to work on a campaign team with. His flowery ideals that were still predicated on a slave society (make no mistake, his agrarian utopian vision for America did not involve abolition) aside, he really wouldn't react well to being told that x or y couldn't happen for y or z practical reason.

Also, there's a lot of smoking in this fic. This is because even well-heeled politicians actually smoke more than my working class ethnic dad. Political staffers smoke even more. They also drink a lot more. On the last campaign I worked on, the senior campaign manager kept a bottle of bourbon in his desk and as the exit polls started coming in on election night we all did shots out of paper cups. Politics: the least healthy profession in the world that isn't gold mining.

E – 60

“Ladies and gentlemen, we're two months out from the election. What have we got to show for it?”

The General sits against the back wall of the office, poking listlessly at a styrofoam container of takeout kebab.

“An almost sex scandal,” Jefferson threw out from his position in the right of the room. “That was exciting.”

“Fuck off,” Alex said lazily from his corner desk, head obscured by the screen of his dusty laptop.

“Aside from that, gentlemen,” the General said sternly. His tone was somewhat belied by the dollop of tzatziki on his chin.

“Well, we're announcing our education platform tonight,” Jefferson said brightly.

“No we're not!” Alex shouted from the corner.

Jefferson turned to scowl at him. “Why the hell not?”

“Because it's not costed yet,” Alex said in a sing-song voice as he turned back to his computer.

“What do you mean it's not costed? It doesn't have to be finalised when we put it out.”

“Yes it does.”

“Do you have something against the education plan, Hamilton?” Jefferson snapped.

“Aside from the fact that it still allows for charter schools? We can't release any social programming that isn't fully costed, or our opponents will tear it apart. We already look like tax-and-spend liberals, which – shush, I *know* that's not a bad thing – but unfortunately for you, to win the damn election we have to convince people to vote for us who aren't 35 year old graphic designers from Williamsburg named Jeremy. So we're going to make it very clear how we are going to pay for all of our plans; we are not losing because you wanted to rush ahead to assuage your fucking class guilt or something.”

“We have to release something.”

“Oh, sorry, Thomas, I thought that I was the one who directed what we release to the press. We are going to wait for John to cost the education platform, then we release it. In the meantime, we're sending the General to an afterschool program in Jackson Heights, have him play nicely with the little middle class white kids for Herc to photograph, then this evening we're doing a fundraiser at the Dominican Cultural Centre in Elmhurst. Tomorrow morning he's foot canvassing in Schuylerville accompanied by Antonio Zamprogna, making nice with the old Italian ladies. Then maybe -- *maybe* -- we'll release the education platform at P.S 93 in front of some cute little brown kids.” Alexander ran his hands through his thick hair, pulling it into an unruly ponytail. “That's what we're doing.”

“That's cynical even for you, Hamilton,” Jefferson said.

“Cynics survive, Jefferson,” Alex said quietly. “John is working on the numbers right now. What do you think we should cut? Infrastructure? Community outreach? Libraries? Public health? Which of those things isn't important? Which of those is the easy one to lose? The reality is that if we want to preserve existing programming as well as revamp our education and literacy plans we're gonna have to raise property taxes, and we're not *campaigning* on a tax hike! We're going to have to do it, but let's not rub their faces in it just yet.”

“Oh, we're going to punish people for owning their homes now?”

“Literally decide if you're a revolutionary communist or someone's drunk republican uncle, Jefferson. The mixed vibe you've got going on now is confusing. What we're going to do – what John is in the basement right now trying to figure out what to do – is go through the whole budget, line by line, deciding what items to keep and what items to cut. But those are

people's lives. The city isn't spending money on things willy-nilly – every time we rob Peter to pay Paul, there's a price. You're smart enough to know that.”

“I hate to say it,” Lafayette said in a soft voice from his desk in the middle of the room. “Because Lord knows he doesn't need a bigger head than he has, but Alex is right. We're not releasing a half-finished platform, and a platform isn't finished until it's costed.” Seeing Jefferson open his mouth to rebut, he continued. “I'm shutting this down, now. Remember who signs your paychecks, gentlemen. Alexander, you go downstairs to see how we can frame the cuts to the media. Jefferson, Burr wants you by his side for the Friends of the MoMA fundraiser this afternoon.” His face softened. “George, take a nap. There's no point in putting you out canvassing for the half-hour we have before we leave for Jackson Heights.”

Alex and Jefferson both pouted in Lafayette's general direction, but the man's face clearly telegraphed that he wasn't joking.

Alex pushed himself up from his desk, unplugged his laptop, and grabbed a small thing of tabouleh salad to take down to John.

In the basement, John had the slightly manic air of a man who has been going through an entire municipal budget line-by-line for three weeks. There were 18 different tabs open in his browser, his MacBook whirring plaintively as it struggled to keep up with the six different Excel worksheets he was flipping back and forth between. Alex clutched the plastic shell of his Toshiba and winced. It was a good thing he was a writer -- he didn't have the processing power for budget analysis.

“Why am I doing this, Alex?” John asked from somewhere beneath the four policy binders open on his lap.

“Um. A strong sense of civic duty and a belief that everyone is entitled to basic rights and protections, regardless of citizenship?”

John flapped his hand dismissively, and Alex took the opportunity to shove the salad into his hand.

“No, I meant, why am I doing this and not an actual accountant? Although I am genuinely pleased to learn that you've been listening to me when I rant.”

“Um, because the big money is behind Hanover and we'd have to actually pay an accountant? Also, we *met* at a No One is Illegal protest, it's not like you've changed much.”

“They pay me,” John said indignantly, ignoring the latter half of the sentence. “Wait -- Alex, they do pay me, right?”

“Yeah, but they'd have to pay the accountant above minimum wage. We make, like, significantly below that as contractors. Laf has informed me that the first rule of being campaign staff is not to calculate your hourly wage.”

John snorted. “I'm so glad we're against labor abuse, except for our own employees. It's not even that difficult work, but there's just so much of it.”

“Would it help if I groveled?” Alex asked, dropping to his knees on the stained carpet. “Jack, my beautiful, sweet Jack, an angel sent on high to explain how excel works to baffled arts majors--”

“--Yeah, yeah, alright,” John said, nudging him with his knee. “I just -- I hate this. These are people’s lives we’re dealing with, you know? Even where there’s a clear excess, like here --” he points at a line on the screen “--- eliminating it will mean civil servants lose their jobs, their family’s lose their support, it’s just -- it’s all a bit much.”

Alex nodded and rested his head against John’s knee. “I know. I was telling Jefferson that much fifteen minutes ago. He wants to launch our education platform today.”

“What?” John snapped, finally looking up from the computer screen. “We’re not doing that.”

“No, we’re not. The General is going out to a photo op in Jackson Heights, and then we’re sending him to the Queens office to meet up with Rico before he and Lafayette escort him to the fundraiser at the DCC.”

“Thank God.”

“I told you, Jack, you don’t have to call me God -- hey, don’t kick me!” He rubbed his shin, an exaggeratedly wounded expression on his face.

“Want to help me break the backs of the poor?”

“C’mon, the civil servants will be fine, they have a union and healthy severance packages. You sound like Jefferson.”

“He’s not *always* wrong, Alex.”

“Yeah, except that his grand plans for equality and justice always seem to rely on denying undocumented people municipal aid and protections.”

“I mean, there is that.”

Alex stayed like that until late in the afternoon, leaning against John’s leg and writing remarks in Spanish for Washington to give at the fundraising dinner that evening. Finally, John shifted.

“I need to get out of here. Go for a walk for a few minutes.”

Alex frowned. “You do that, I’m just in the middle of something-- hey! How do you know you didn’t just ruin my work?”

John rolled his eyes as he set Alex’s laptop on the side of his desk on top of one of the policy binders. “You love the cloud more than anyone I know, Alex. Tell me you don’t have copies of that backed up in Google Drive *and* your external harddrive.”

Alex glared at him. “What if I was having an off-day?”

“Then there would only be one copy backed up, not three.” He stretched his arms above his head, his spine popping audibly. “C’mon, let’s go take our federally-mandated 15 minute break.”

“Well, actually, those regulations don’t apply to us because of--”

--Sh. Alex. Joke.”

“Right.”

They stopped by Alex’s desk so he could grab his wallet and keys. The General and Laf were already out at the fundraiser, Herc was there photographing it, Ange would be wrangling the media for a little while yet -- Eliza could do most of her job from anywhere, since her primary responsibility was for the Facebook, Twitter, and e-mail accounts.

Jefferson sat at his desk, frowning and muttering to himself as he tapped at his keyboard. He looked up when Alex opened the drawer of his desk, the metal squeaking as he did so.

“Oh, good, you’re done pillaging from poor ghetto children then. Is my plan costed then?”

“Shut up, Jefferson.” Alex scowled as he re-tied his ponytail. “You couldn’t find the ghetto with a map. You called *Brooklyn Heights* “up-and-coming” the other day.”

“Don’t hate, *Alexandre*, we can’t all be Little Orphan Annie.”

Alex looked at John. “Please tell me I can punch him.”

John looked deeply torn. “You need to not be fired.”

“Right.” Alex chewed his lip for a second. “Can we pay next month’s rent, and then I can punch him?”

“Not unless you’ve picked up, like, a dozen more tutoring clients while I wasn’t looking.”

“Fine,” Alex glanced at Thomas. “We’re going for a walk. We’ll have your money by 6 am tomorrow at the latest. Call me when you’ve decided to stop being patronizing as fuck.”

They brushed past him to go out the back door, and Alex felt John’s hand squeeze his arm tightly and usher him out the door when Jefferson muttered “*Creole bastard*”.

Once it had swung shut, Alex drew away, his hands shaking as he fumbled with his cigarette package. “You really should have let me punch him. Hell, I’m surprised *you* didn’t punch him.”

“Washington needs us. If we get fired, *Jefferson* will get your job, and nobody wants that.”

“Eliza would get my job,” he mumbled around his cigarette.

“Finish that so we can go grab some food,” John said, ignoring him.

“What kind of city doesn’t let you smoke walking down the sidewalk, I ask you.” Alex said, affecting a wounded posture.

“A city with a robust public health policy not run entirely to your whims, Alex.”

“Well, that’s a damn shame,” he grumbled as he ground the butt out beneath his shoe. “I honestly don’t know how any anti-smoking legislation ever gets written, the way politicians smoke. Can you imagine being the person who had to tell all the aides that you’re not allowed to smoke in bars anymore?”

“Every second I spend talking to you I do.”

“Hey!”

They picked up a double order of curried chicken and roti before wandering to the park to eat. Alex figured that John could tell something was bothering him when John didn’t even give his customary complaint about the other man’s stubborn refusal to use a fork.

“Penny for your thoughts? You don’t usually let him get to you like that. Well, not as much, anyhow.”

Alex rolled his eyes. “My thoughts are worth at least \$9/hour, the governor said so.”

“Alex.”

“You never met my mother, how on earth do you manage to sound just like her?”

“My abuela raised me well. Now, spit.”

Alex scooped some of the chicken into his mouth, chewing slowly. “I-- I won’t be the weak link in this campaign. We aren’t gonna lose, aren’t gonna let go a chance to make history, because I didn’t do my job properly. And Thomas-- he believes some really pretty things, but he’s never had someone say *no* to him.” He paused and drank deeply from his soda. “That’s not fair, I guess. I’d imagine he heard some pretty shitty things in the course of his \$360 000 grade school education, but-- he just doesn’t listen! I want to shake him by the neck and tell him that, yeah, beautiful words and thoughts but you haven’t considered how it affects this group and that group, and you haven’t thought about how we’re going to pay for it! No offense, but this is why we can’t let rich people run things -- they think money grows on trees!”

He took a deep breath and tore at his roti anxiously. “And he told me I speak french wrong.”

John snorted. “Seriously?”

“Seriously.”

“Did you regale him with your two hour lecture on colonialism and the difference between a dialect and an accent?”

“Laf made me stop after minute 22.”



“That’s unfortunate.” Jack’s smile crinkled his eyes. “You’re not forgetting to take your medication, right?”

“Yes, *doctor*, the alarm in my phone works just as well as it always has.” Alex rolled his eyes. “It’s not anxiety if they’re actually out to get you, you know.”

“Not a doctor yet,” John said as he stretched his arms above his head, the summer twilight casting shadows across his skin. “Won’t ever be if I keep taking sabbaticals to help my boyfriend run himself into the ground on election campaigns.”

“That would be terrible,” Alex said seriously. “I have very important plans for your medical degree, most of which revolve around being your kept boy.”

John burst out laughing. “Alex, you practically hissed at the General when he tried to buy you dinner the other night. You would be the worst kept boy ever!”

“I’m willing to learn,” Alex grinned, going for saucy and missing by a mile.

“I’m sure you are,” John said. Then -- “I’m sorry for being patronising, earlier. This campaign has me running on fumes, too. I hate being the one who has to tell y’all that, no, you can’t promise to fix this school or that road. I fucking hate it.”

Alex squeezed his hand in solidarity. “I know you do. Unfortunately, you’re the only science major in a room full of arts students, so we need you. None of us ever learned how to use Excel, our resumes just say we do.”

“It’s really not that hard.”

“You say that, and yet, I don’t believe you.” Alex stood up, brushing crumbs off his lap. “Let’s go finish a draft of the education proposal, I’ll run it by Laff, and you can head home and walk the dog. I’ll head home as soon as I have a publication-worthy draft.”

John gave him a knowing look. “You will head home as soon as you have a publication-worthy draft *or* it’s 1:00 am, whichever comes first.”

Alex pouted.

“That face doesn’t work on me. I’m immune, our dog is much cuter than you.”

“Are you going to break up with me and run away with our dog?”

“Oh, absolutely,” John said seriously. He paused, turned to face Alex fully. “It’ll be ok, you know? I promise.”

“Yeah,” Alex said, squeezing his hand despite the churning in his gut. “I know.”

He loved John, but rich boys never knew how fragile everything was.

### Chapter Summary

Alexander Hamilton: speechwriter, human disaster, infectious disease vector.  
Or: in which the author relives some of her least treasured memories on the campaign trail, and we all get a glimpse of how the sausage gets made.

### Chapter Notes

There are large sections of this chapter written in French within the narrative, but because I didn't want to set non-speakers paragraphs of french, especially colloquial french and creole, it's just written in italics. If you speak French, feel free to translate it in your mind, like a special little francophone easter egg.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The heat was stifling in the back of the office, but Alex was still cold.

He shivered, coughed, then shook himself a couple times before the dizziness became overwhelming and he had to rest his head against the edge of his desk.

A sharp poke between his shoulder blades roused him.

“Go home, Alex. You look awful.”

Alex raised his head slightly from its spot to frown at Eliza. “Thanks, ‘Liza. And here I was about to tell you that you looked so pretty today, too.”

She scowled, but a flush rose on her cheeks. “Nice try. Go on, get. There’s nothing here for you that I can’t do.”

“Not true,” Alex mumbled, his words muffled slightly by the particleboard surface. “We have debate prep this evening.”

“It’s 8:00 am, you can go home until debate prep. Heck, you could Skype in for debate prep from your bed if you wanted to.”

“Yeah I’m not gonna do that, thanks. Besides there’s a new group of canvassers coming in at 9:00, Peggy's uptown training the new volunteer coordinator in that office, and Peggy asked Angelica to show these ones the ropes in her stead. Then she told me to do it, so.”

Eliza snorted. "Were they at volunteer training on Saturday?"

"Yeah, but--"

"--But nothing, but then I can do it. If nothing else go catch a couple hours rest in the basement. Angelica left her yoga mat here the other day, it's pretty cushy."

Alex groaned, but he couldn't find it in him to resist when Eliza gently closed the lid to his computer. "Forty-five minutes. I'll be back up for when the new canvassers come in."

"It's literally not your job, Alex."

"It's not my fault Peggy's training the trainers." Alex groaned and pushed himself up from the desk.

"I want you to know I'm only acquiescing cuz you're cute."

"You are terrible and need to sleep," Eliza said pointedly, escorting him to the back stairwell.

In the basement, Alex curled up on the thin yoga mat and tried to breathe slowly. He wasn't going to sleep, he was going to get his phone out and start drafting the remarks for the \$1000 a plate fundraising dinner Washington had on Friday, but his arms were heavy and he fell into a fitful sleep.

He was awoken by the sound of the door closing, and he jerked up suddenly, wincing as the motion wrenched his bad shoulder.

"John?" Alex was confused, his head was heavy with fever, but that wasn't right. John wasn't supposed to be there. He was -- he was -- somewhere else. Doing something.

"I got subbed out at the last minute," the other man jokes as he runs his hands through sweat-damp curls. "Jefferson is filling in."

"What?" Alex frowned in confusion. "Aren't you supposed to be at -- at -- that --"

John takes mercy on him. "The meet and greet with the Dean of Studies at Columbia, yeah. I wasn't helping, to be honest."

Alex raised an eyebrow. "Why did we send you to the meet and greet in the first place? You are inexplicably incredibly bad at talking to rich people, and everyone knows that those events are fundraisers in disguise."

John rolled his eyes. "Aaron thought that we could use my connections. I apparently wasn't clear enough when I informed him that my 'connections' were all five years out of date and mired in scandal.

"How are you so bad at schmoozing?" Alex flopped back onto the yoga mat. "It honestly defies all logical sense. Those events aren't even that bad -- remember that lady at the last one? Elena Rosenbaum? She told me how well brought up I was." He grinned.

“I mean look we’re just gonna ignore that little microaggression, but I guess -- I don’t know. I am not really circumspect enough to schmooze, and frankly I’ve sent too much of my life being *fucking* circumspect.”

Alex ran a supportive hand along the other man’s back, who frowned and placed the back of his hand on his forehead.

“Alex, you’re burning up.”

“It’s just campaign flu.”

John sighed, and rearranged their bodies on the carpet until Alex was resting mostly in his lap. “Have you taken anything?”

“Ibuprofen when we left this morning. It’s honestly fine, I’ve done a lot more with a lot worse.”

“Yeah, but you have the most skewed fucking scale any human could have,” John muttered. “So pardon me if that’s not super convincing.”

Alex shrugged, and coughed deeply.

“Right,” John said decisively. “I’m going to go buy you some mucinex, then I’m gonna bring your laptop down and you can do whatever it is you need to do until the General arrives for debate prep. At which point you are going to hand your list of notes to Angelica, trust that she is significantly better at media training than you, and go home and get at least six hours of sleep.”

Alex saluted lazily. “I never defy a man with a plan.”

“That’s a lie,” John said coolly. “Go back to sleep for a few minutes and I’ll be right back.”

It felt like Alex had only just closed his eyes before he was being gently shaken awake. “I’m about to hand you a mug.”

A mug was summarily shoved into his hands.

“Sit up, drink it, take the pills I’m about to give you.”

Alex followed suit, and frowned in recognition as he took a sip. “Where’d you get kowosol down here?”

“Your desk. I’m wise to your tea hiding habits.” John snorted. “Between the tea and the plantain chips I’m not entirely convinced you don’t have the entire contents of our pantry stashed somewhere.

“Right,” His voice sounded terrible. “Thank you.” He would have to find a new place for his stash, though.

“You’re so much more polite when you’re sick, I swear to God.”

Alex pouted at that. “I’m always polite.”

“Maybe to Elena Rosenbaum,” John teased. “I have to live with you, I know all your secrets.”

Alex felt his smile twist, and quickly laughed. “Most of them, anyway.”

“I don’t want to know what that means.” He stood up, frowning. “Eliza had to step out for a few minutes, so I’m heading back upstairs to run some of the new phone canvassers through their paces. Text me if you need anything.”

Alex nodded blearily, and pulled his ancient Toshiba on to his lap, careful not to spill the tea.

Pulling up a Google Doc, he began to type.

Opening Statement: 3 Minutes

GENERALLY: positive tone, stay calm and collected (want to give overall impression of contrast. with fear and division of Hanover’s cmpn.)

SPECIFICALLY: “Before we begin I would like to thank Mr Rose for moderating this debate, and I would also like to thank all of you for taking the time out of your busy lives to engage in issues that matter to you. It is an honour to meet you every day and hear all of your stories: it is you, the people, who make this city great.

I am not naive to the challenges facing this city, or indeed this world. In my time serving my country as a General in the armed forces, I have had the opportunity to meet young men and women from across the world who have expressed to me a common emotion: fear. I understand this fear, but our response to this **fear cannot be hate, it cannot be division, it cannot be mob rule.** (BOLD: upwards intonation, hit final word hard on down-beat.)

I believe that our city can be great. A place where we can be proud to raise our children, a place where a healthy public education can be received at any school in the city from the Bronx to Staten Island and everywhere in between. A place where every parent on every block can be assured that when they send their child out to play that they will come back, alive and in one piece.

My driving belief as a public servant has always been that as leaders in this city, we owe you the people our respect, owe you the people our deference, and owe you the people our obedience. We have a chance to make history, and to ensure that your voices are heard, loudly and clearly, in our efforts not just in this city but at the state and national level. I will always fight for the people’s interests, because it is the people’s interests that are New York’s interest. I hope you will join me. //( Final line soft, calm and collected, contrast with building of volume and passion over last two paragraphs, ending on interest. )

POINTS ON // AGAINST

**Housing**

sustainable development of upper manhattan -- regulation that all new buildings over 3 stories contain at least 5% rent controlled housing

tighten zoning laws so that a community's best interests must be proven in each rezoning case after consultation with community and an urban planner (ref. policy doc 3 for details)

re:above : if given chance to speak, this is where anecdotes from campaign trail go. The abuela and her 4 grandchildren in Inwood who were moving further and further uptown as their rents doubled. The school by the waterfront redevelopment site that is covered in a fine layer of gravel because they're downwind from the destruction of shale rock. The average New Yorker spends between 60 and 70% of their income on rent: policy document from Wesley Urban Ministries shows that this is huge contributor to homelessness.

The more able elderly New Yorkers are to stay in their homes, the less pressure there will be on the public health system, shelters, and nursing homes. Same for disabled residents and low income residents.

Plan is fully costed and is available for inspection on the website. Main source of revenue for project will come from scrapping disastrous and costly remodification of MSG.

### **Health Care & Seniors Issues**

Repeat above point re: rent fixing and making it harder for seniors to be forced out of their homes.

Strike committee to review provision of subsidised home nursing care to families with income Veterans Issues

Again, homelessness, increased rents, overwhelmed va and shelters

Collaboration between VA and city to increase number of beds available in shelters, including some earmarked for veterans.

### **Education**

Property taxes will still fund neighborhood schools, but 50% of the money previously going to the school in the property's zone will go into a central fund to be distributed amongst all public schools in the city according to enrollment and demonstrated need. (This has a line in the budget. I can't find it. Trust me.)

*This will help diminish the gap between the rich and the poor and help ensure that everyone is able to get an excellent public education.*

### **Taxation**

*we are gonna be very quiet and hope that this isn't the main issue they try and attack us on, but it totally will be. Emphasise that any tax increases are a last resort, but that we are not willing to rule them out. Point out that Hanover has run up a massive deficit, has raised sales taxes twice, and has still failed to fulfill any of his 2012 campaign promises. Get very critical if necessary, but remain calm.*

### ***Infrastrucure***

*Invest in bridges so we don't all die. That would be bad.*

### ***Public Transit***

*Strike committee to investigate possibility of LRT connecting the boroughs to the downtown. Commute would be reduced, commuters would feel more able to live in the outer boroughs, vacancy rates would increase and rents decrease downtown relative to how they are. Increase property values dramatically around track. Everyone loves a train.*

With a groan, Alex rubbed at his burning eyes and hit print. He coughed deeply as he finished his now-cold tea and made his way upstairs, debate prep clutched in his hands like a talisman.

He was shocked to see that the General was already back -- was it 8 o'clock already? -- and so made his way slowly over to hand him the remarks, feeling the hot weight of his head but keeping his back straight and chin held high.

Washington took the remarks, and immediately began to peruse them. After about a minute he stopped, and looked up, and for the first time seemed to take in Alexander's exhausted countenance. "Hamilton," he said slowly. "Are you aware about half of these remarks are in French, and a good portion in Spanish? Was that intentional?"

Alex blinked. "What ? Uh -- no, sir. Sorry, I'll fix that, sir."

"No you won't," the General said sternly. "Lafayette can make any translations or corrections if need be. Save those chops for the debate on Univision, alright, son." He squinted at Alex.

"You look terrible. How long have you been here?"

"Just since this morning, sir," Alex answered, before coughing into his elbow.

"You should go home," Washington said. "You're no use to me in a hospital. We're not even halfway through the campaign."

"I'm fine," Alex insisted. "I've worked through worse."

"I keep telling him that's not a high standard," John muttered from his spot by the phones. Angelica and Eliza both voiced their agreement.

"Sorry, Alex. You're cute, but I'm not getting near you with a ten foot pole until you stop having the plague," Angelica said when Alex looked at her pleadingly.

"Laurens, take him home," Washington said. "Don't let him come back until he doesn't look like he should be in the CDC somewhere for testing."

"But--" Alex interjected. He was *fine*, it was a cold, everyone worked through illness during an election. It wasn't like taking a sick day from a normal job -- which Alex had never done, but the point stands -- they were on a very real and present deadline and they had to work as fast as they could, they were running out of time.

“Go home, Alexander,” Washington said sternly. “That’s an order from your commander.”

## Chapter End Notes

Everything Alex does in this chapter I have done. The most important part of any campaign office is the napping spot. All campaign offices are gross unless you work for like, the central campaign headquarters for the country -- campaign offices are short-term leases, meaning you are nearly always in a strip mall. However, I strongly endorse offices with scary basements, because you can go down there with a balled-up hoodie and sleep on the floor in the cool darkness. After a few 18 hours days, a musty dark basement is goddamned bliss.

I spent the most recent national election night coordinating our get-out-the-vote blitz, and I had a fever of 103 and almost no voice. That night I did like 9 shots of tequila and then slept for a day. Politics is bad for you.

Also, kowosol is soursop, and it's a fucking amazing tea. The ward I work in has a significant Haitian population, and when I got bronchitis in the middle of the mayoral race this little Haitian grandmother brought me a bag of tensyon tea, which is mostly kowosol but also has citronelle (lemon myrtle, I think) and ... something else. Maybe ginger? I don't know, google it, kids. The point is that it has some genuinely magical medicinal qualities. Sometimes we all need some tensyon tea.



Chapter Summary

A mid-campaign day off.  
Martha Washington is better than you.

Chapter Notes

In case anyone was looking for a more specific timeline - So elections for mayor take place usually in the first or second week of November, so figure that the first section of this story took place in mid-September and it is now mid-October. I realize that this does not matter to anyone who is not me, but it was genuinely bothering me not to make that clear, especially given how un-helpful the weather can be in telling the audience the season when you're talking about Central and Eastern North America.

Also! I'm gong to continue to update this regularly, but because I have just committed myself to working a by-election for a friend running for city council, it might not be every day like it has been.

Also, I need to stop agreeing to do additional jobs. Particularly free additional jobs. I feel a deep spiritual kinship with A.Ham.

E-35

Lafayette frowned as thunder crackled across the sky. "Peggy, who do we have canvassing?"

"The Patel sisters, but they just texted me to let me know they're coming back. Uzma and Robin were supposed to start at two, but I don't know if the rain is going to let up."

Lafayette nodded and ran his fingers through his hair. "Good. Call Uzma and let her know that we will not be canvassing this afternoon. Too risky."

"Should I put her on phones? We don't have anyone coming in, just Mrs Feinman doing it remotely."

Lafayette shook his head. "No, there is no purpose to that. It is Tuesday, there is no point in phone canvassing until at least 4 pm."

Peggy murmured her agreement as she pulled out her phone and began to call.

Lafayette wandered over to Alexander's desk, where Alex and Angelica were hunched over a laptop. Alex startled slightly when he heard the approach.

"What is so interesting over here?" Lafayette asked neutrally. "*Alexandre*, you are not responding to Facebook comments again, are you?"

"No," Alex said pointedly. It would have had more effect if Angelica had not spoken over him -- "I wouldn't let him. Eliza changed the password to the Facebook page for a reason."

"Ah," Lafayette gave a breathy sigh of delight. "If I were not so in love with my Adrienne I would have married the two of you by now."

Alex grumbled. "We're just checking up on the interview, seeing how well it's doing. Gerry Ryan already retweeted it."

"That is good," Lafayette said slowly. "Why does it take two of you to do this?"

"Someone has to keep Alex on track," Angelica said simply. "Also slow news day."

"We should release our infrastructure plan," Alex said as he rubbed absently at his shoulder. "It's a slow enough news day that they might actually publish a story about bridges."

"Do it," Lafayette said simply. "And then I think we will close up early for the day."

"What?" Alex frowned. "It's not even noon."

"Have you looked outside? It is terrible weather for canvassing, tonight's fundraiser has already been cancelled, and we are unlikely to receive any in-depth media coverage for our release about *bridges*."

"Bridges are very important," Peggy insisted from across the room.

"Bridges are not at all sexy," Angelica shot back.

"Which is why we need to release the plan today."

"Get it done." Lafayette patted Alex on the shoulder, frowning when he saw the younger man suppress a wince. "Are you alright, my friend?"

"Yeah, it's just the weather," Alex said with a frown. "Anything else we can do for you?"

"Send out the release," Lafayette said, "And answer your text messages. Martha has been trying to invite all of us for lunch all morning."

"Did *you* answer it?"

"Yes."

"Eliza? Angelica? Peggy?"

"Yep," Angelica supplied. "Not actually raised in a barn."

"It wasn't a barn!" Alex said indignantly.

"That was a joke, sweetheart"

"Right."

Alex began tapping away at his laptop, Angelica giving pointed commentary every few lines. Peggy finished her phone call before looking around the room. "Um, guys? Who do we have with the General? Weren't he and Angelica supposed to be at the opening of that new playground on 123rd?"

"Change of plans," Lafayette said from his desk where he was frowning at his tablet. "When we saw the weather we sent he and John to the New York Historical Society luncheon. Aaron and Thomas are at the fundraising tea for the new wing of the Children's Hospital."

"Did we send them with lit?" Peggy asked, writing something on the schedule.

"*Non*, Margarita, I have never done this before. Of course we sent them with lit."

"How do you even distribute lit at a fundraising tea?" Alex wondered. "Like, at what point is it socially acceptable to say 'Oh, thanks, pass the cucumber sandwiches, also would you like a pamphlet on our public health reform policy?'"

"I mean, *not like that*," Eliza said with a snort.

"Hey, it's a damn good pamphlet, I'm just not sure at what point in the meal you bring that up."

"No one is maligning your pamphlet-writing skills, Alex. You're just very good at demonstrating why we don't send you to canvass delicate white people." Eliza paused. "Oh, Ange, I'm gonna shoot this your way, but we just had a request from the *Daily News* to embed a reporter on one of our canvass blitzes."

Angelica nodded and bit her lip in thought. "We can do that. They've been pretty good to us in the past. Plus it'll piss off *The Post*, and they're still on my official shit list."

"Speaking of," Alex said from behind his computer screen, "What was our ultimate decision about keeping them on the shit list? I've got this release finished and I'm just wondering if we should be sending it to them or not."

Angelica frowned. "I'mma say yes, just because we don't need to feed their martyr complex anymore than we already are. They probably won't publish it, but at least they can't accuse us of bias."

"I, for one, am super biased," Alex muttered.

Angelica flicked him in the ear. "Yes, darling, but we all have to pretend we're not. You know that."

The jingling of bells at the front door announced the entrance of John and the General both dripping wet.

Lafayette handed them each a towel. "You are back early."

"We had canvassing time built into the schedule," Peggy said. "I'm going out on a limb and saying y'all decided to exercise your better judgement?"

"They teach you not to canvass in the lightning in general school," Washington said seriously. "Also, Martha wants y'all to come for brunch."

A cheer went up throughout the office.

"Alexandre, have you sent the press release? Yes? Good, then we are closing up. I am officially declaring this a half day." Lafayette said seriously. "*Vite, vite*. I am hungry."

--

Martha Washington was a brilliant writer, a well-respected lecturer at NYU, and a committed activist for arts education in the inner city. However, all things being equal, she was most beloved by the campaign team for her macaroni and cheese.

"Not that we don't appreciate and respect you as a person," John assured her, nudging Alexander with his elbow. "Right, Alex?"

Alex swallowed quickly, hot mac and cheese scalding him slightly as it went down. "Er. Right, ma'am."

Martha laughed. "Don't dissemble, boys. I've spent my adult life with that one --" she pointed her chin at George Washington "-- I know which of my skills are most valued in the political arena."

"You mean your writing, of course, ma'am." Alexander said with a smile.

"Right." She laughed, warm brown eyes flashing. "Speaking of, how have your classes been going, dear?"

"Oh, uh," Alex suddenly became very interested in his fork. "I took the fall term off to work the campaign, ma'am."

"But you intend to go back in the winter?"

He fiddled with his noodles. "I think right now it will actually have to be the spring term, ma'am? I have to appeal the decision, but taking the term off messed up my program status."

Martha tutted. Alexander flushed. "Let me know if there's anything we can do to help. I know these things can be difficult to navigate."

"Yes ma'am," Alex said politely. "Thank you."

She waved him off. "Don't mention it. Even if you do all insist on indulging my husband in his cocamamie schemes."

"Hey!" the General said, sounding deeply wounded. "I thought you told that reporter from the *Times* that you admired my commitment to public service!"

"Given that I was one for several years, baby, you know that I know better than to tell the truth to reporters," she smiled.

"No respect," George said gravely. "No respect in my own home."

"You get too much of it outside your home," she shot back teasingly. "The rest of us have to knock you down a bit or you'd never fit through the door, your head would get so big."

Martha sent Alex and John home with a firm hug and several tupperware containers full of mac and cheese.

"You're too thin, both of you," she said severely. "None of you get to kill yourselves over this campaign, you understand me? It's only a damned election."

Alex opened his mouth to object, but shut it with a small squeak when John stamped on his foot. Martha smiled at the interaction.

"Good, I like that one," she said, gesturing at John. "Now if only I thought you would keep each other out of trouble instead of encouraging it."

"The General made us promise not to get arrested during the campaign," John said seriously. "It's actually in our contracts."

She laughed, delighted. "I'm sure it is, honey. You just call me if that happens instead, alright? We just won't tell George."

"Won't tell George what?" The General emerged from the kitchen, tea towel draped over his left shoulder. "Martha, are you corrupting my men? Gentlemen, are you corrupting my wife?"

"No sir," Alexander said seriously. "But we are going to run away together, sir."

George sighed and shook his head. "I knew this day would come. You treat each other right, you hear?" He laughed and lightly pushed on Alex's good shoulder. "Are you guys sure you don't want a ride?"

"We'll be fine, thanks," Alex said. "The subway stop is less than a block away from our apartment. Besides, you should enjoy your day off, sir."

He nodded, looking unconvinced. "Uh-huh. You too. Get some sleep, for Christ's sake. I don't want to see either of you boys in the office before 9:00 tomorrow morning, understand."

"Respectfully sir, technically Laff is my boss in that regard." Alex said seriously.

"Whatever the general said, I concur!" Came a heavily-accented voice from the back of the brownstone.

"He said you needed to give us all a raise!" John shouted.

"Nonsense, the General would never do such a thing! Go home, children!"

They all laughed, and Alex and John began to make their way through the rain down to the subway.

John chewed on his thumbnail for a minute as they watched the walls of the subway tunnels fly by. "I'm surprised you told Martha about your aid falling through."

Alex shrugged.

"You barely told *me* about your aid falling through." Not until John had walked in on him pacing the length of the apartment and arguing with the woman from the Registrar's Office on the phone, before hanging up and cursing loudly in Spanish.

"I didn't want you to worry. Besides, Martha Washington is impossible to lie to. This is a genuine problem in my life."

John snorted. "Fair." A minute went by, and Alex leaned his head very gently against Jack's shoulder. He didn't want to admit it, but he was exhausted.

The other boy adjusted to give Alex a more comfortable resting space, and then spoke again. "You know, I could ask my dad to --"

"--No."

"You don't even know what I was going to say."

"Didn't have to."

John was quiet for another minute. "What if I asked my *mom* if she would co-sign a loan with you, would that be ok?"

Alex sighed. "Can we just -- not ? Like can we just not make your family even more aware of how incredibly out of my league you are? Seeing them is awkward enough without giving them even more reason to think that I'm the scum of the earth."

"My mom wouldn't think that. She loves you."

"No, your *abuela* loves me. Your mom tolerates me because she is scared of your abuela."

"And rightly so," John murmured.

The braked screeched, and he nudged Alex in his good shoulder. "C'mon, this is our stop. Let's go and you can sleep in an actual bed."

"What does an actual bed look like?" Alex asked wonderingly. "I can't remember."

"With any luck, not like our dog has ripped apart your pillow in vengeance for our neglect."

Alex eyed John with concern. "Has that happened?"

"Did you miss the couch cushions? What am I saying, of course you did. That's why we started getting Devonne to walk him during the day, remember?"

Alex wracked his brain. "Jack, I have no idea what you're talking about."

John shook his head in exasperation. "Sorry, I forgot I am temporarily dating an election robot. May I speak to human Alex, please?"

Alex sulked for the next block. "How is Devonne walking Marco? Doesn't she have to take care of Tania?"

"You can take babies outside, Alex."

"I'm sure you can, but *should* you?"

John shoved him lightly. "Stop being an ass."

They unlocked the front door to their building, and Alex took the opportunity to shake the water droplets out of his curls, splashing John as he did so.

"Sorry, what was that?" he asked with a grin. "Stop being a what, now?"

"You are the worst," John said seriously as he opened their mailbox. "Careful or I'll make you spend the night outside."

Alex swallowed down the reflexive curl of anxiety in his stomach. "You wouldn't do that."

"Watch me."

The dog bounded at them as they opened the door, and Alex braced himself in the doorway for the twenty pounds of dog that came flying at him.

He dropped down into a crouch and started petting Marco, ignoring the way his hands were shaking slightly. "It's really cold in here."

"You'd be significantly less cold if you put dry clothes on," John shouted from the bedroom. "Because it is actually, as is always the case, hot as balls in here."

Alex stood up, letting out an involuntary gasp of pain.

"You okay?" John called from their bedroom. "C'mon, if you don't get in here I'll start without you."

Alex walked into the bedroom. "Start what without me?"

"Heckling," John said from his place on the bed. He had changed into worn flannel pyjama pants and his old Columbia Med sweater, and his hair was drying into a cloud of fluffiness.

ringlets. "Ted Cruz was on Charlie Rose last night."

"Well then," Alex said, trying to keep the frown off his face as he unbuttoned his shirt. "I would hate to miss that."

John raised an eyebrow. "You ok, babe?"

"Fine," Alex said. "Just sore."

"Shoulder?"

At his nod, John moved over and brushed his hands out of the way. Ignoring Alex's shout of protest, he efficiently unbuttoned the shirt, held it up for Alex to shrug off, and pulled his fleece hoodie over his arms.

Alex refused to give him the satisfaction of a thank you, so he hummed a vaguely positive sound instead. He then pulled on his own pyjama bottoms and flopped back onto the bed, pulling the bedding up around himself.

Despite his best efforts, he was still shivering.

"You still cold?" John asked, looking at the laptop screen as he queued up *Charlie Rose*.

Alex nodded.

"I'mma assume that was a nod," his eyes still had not left the screen. "You know it isn't actually cold in here, right?"

"Yeah."

John nodded decisively, before springing out of bed and walking to the kitchen. Alex frowned, and focused his attentions on remaking the bed from where Ned had clearly dug a small nest in it during the day.

He returned with an extra quilt and a steaming mug in one arm, bottle of ibuprofen in the other. "Here," he tossed the ibuprofen at him. "Wrap yourself in this, take that, and drink this."

Alex laughed despite himself. "You are a very efficient nurse, John."

"That's because I'm an almost-doctor. They don't select us for our bedside manner."

Despite his harsh words, he waited until Alex had taken the ibuprofen before he pulled the quilt and bedsheets around Alex and slipped underneath them himself.

He pulled the smaller man against his chest and rubbed small circles into the back of his neck. "I have it on good authority I'm an excellent space heater, though."

Alex laughed softly, and Marco jumped up onto the bed and burrowed into his lap. As the familiar saxophone of the Charlie Rose theme song began, he let out a sigh as he finally began to warm up.





### Chapter Notes

This chapter contains repeated references to police brutality and racialised violence. It centres on the outcome of a police attack on an unarmed civilian, and how the campaign responds.

There's also a lot of drinking, because that is how political staffers deal with stress and feelings.

Once again, almost everything in this chapter has happened to me or a friend on a campaign. It's a delicate fucking balance to walk at the best of times.

I also want to very specifically note that I do not agree with the way the campaign responds, and it's not how I would respond nor how any campaign I would willingly work on would respond. But it *is* how many, if not most, mainstream Democratic campaigns would and do respond. This is not an endorsement.

#BlackLivesMatter, and as long as we live in a world where they don't, to our police and politicians — burn it all down.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

#### *E-Day -20*

They were riding on the high of the Univision debate -- a clear win for Washington -- when it all went to hell.

Claudia Greenwood had been walking home from school on the Upper East Side when an unidentified Latino man had accosted her. Miss Greenwood had promptly maced him and run away, returning to her home where she gave a statement to the police. The police, greased liberally by Mr Greenwood's influence, immediately began a manhunt throughout the neighbourhood.

By 7pm that night, an unarmed and apparently disturbed Mexican man had been shot and killed by police.

In the span of four hours, the city was aflame, with angry op-eds about the rising crime rates in the city and the threat of "illegals" battling with angry twitter rants about police brutality.

At 9pm Claudia gave an interview to Cable 14 where she said that, while she hadn't been injured, she was sure that he must have been acting "crazy" for the situation to escalate in that manner. She thanked the officers of the NYPD for doing their jobs, and smiled a \$10,000 smile straight into camera.

At 9:15, the Washington core team headed into the basement of the office to strategise.

At 9:16, Lafayette grimly plunked a bottle of tequila and a stack of paper cups down between them. "Drink. The General is safely tucked into bed, and the initial statement will last them some hours, we have time to plan."

Eliza tossed back her shot quickly. "Did he hurt her? The last time I got a look at a news site they weren't clear, and Alex and I have just been stalling all night."

Angelica shook her head, curls bouncing. "It doesn't look like it. None of the statements mention any injuries, or even if he touched her. It looks more like she got scared and Steve Greenwood misunderstood the situation from her level of panic. There are a few deleted tweets that were screenshotted and are going around the internet from right after the internet - it looks like she told her friends that, quote, "a crazy homeless guy" tried to grab her arm." She sighed. "Poor kid. It's not her fault, that's a scary situation for anyone."

"Poor kid?" Alex said in an outraged tone. "She ain't the one that's dead, Ange."

She frowned and pursed her lips, but before she could reply was interrupted by Burr.

"Sorry, I'll collect this one. Alex, it occur to you that that would be a little bit terrifying for *you*, and that she isn't a fully grown man? She's probably had it drilled into her head since she was a little kid that you don't talk to strangers, that's how you get raped -- and now this guy *touches* her? It'd freak anyone out." Aaron refilled his paper cup and sipped it.

Alex opened his mouth to argue. John gave him a quelling look, and he closed it again.

"Anyway," Thomas said, not looking up from his phone. "People seem pretty polarized. Lot of tweets about illegals and gangbangers on my feed."

"You follow the worst people," Alex muttered. "Ok, ok, I'll stop ragging on the pretty white girl who almost got mugged maybe. What's the angle? I'd play the police brutality angle pretty hard if I wasn't convinced that the police union would come break our legs."

"I don't think that happens in American politics, Alex darling," Jefferson said his tone dripping with false affection. "You've been off the boat a long time now."

"Go fuck yourself."

Laurens was rapidly shaking his head. "Seriously, Jefferson, do you not know this? The police unions are like. Hardcore Klan members, a bunch of them, and even the ones who aren't you do not want to fuck with. One of my friends growing up had a dad who said something critical in his run for Senate and for weeks a cruiser followed me and him as we walked to school. It's scary as shit."

Burr spoke up. "Alex, you and John have pretty decent contacts on the activist side of things, don't you?"

Alex nodded and took another shot.

"Why don't we take five and you can collect the biggest grievances and watch some of the footage, and Jefferson can do the same. We're going to have to split this hair really finely, so

discarding the blatant racists and the actual anarchists first is probably a good idea."

"Oh, but we're gonna pay attention to the subtle racists?"

Burr laughed. "Alex, we're trying to get a Black man elected mayor. If we can't make peace with the subtle racists we don't have a shot in hell."

"I hate it when you're right," Alex said seriously.

Lafayette nodded and clapped his hands. "Ok, that sounds like a strategy for now. Eliza and Angelica, I suspect that all of your tweeters are sane and will have a measured reaction. That is not what we need right now. You and I, we will try and collect any actual information anyone has on this damned thing. "

John and Alex hunched over their laptops, tapping out DMs and screenshotting anything particularly important.

"Shit, twelve times?" John whistled. "That can't possibly be reasonable force, right?"

"As the only *actual* lawyer in the room, I can confirm that it's unlikely," Burr said absently as he scrolled through his iPhone. "Whether they'll be charged or not is another matter."

"They're not releasing the officer's name, but it's been caught on video. CNN has it up on their website." Angelica called out from behind her MacBook.

Alex's eyes were flicking back and forth between his battered computer and his Blackberry which he was attempting to type on with one hand. "Nobody's come forth to identify the victim yet, but the word is that he was known to the community. Speculating that his family isn't documented so they don't want to go to the police." He snorted. "Or, I mean, they're just understandably touchy about the fact that their loved one was just *murdered*."

"The Greenwoods have released an official statement thanking the public for their support in this difficult time," Eliza said slowly. "Wait, Angelica, didn't we go to school with the Greenwoods? Dad in finance, Mom went to Duke with Mom?"

Angelica frowned. "I was definitely at prep school with a few Greenwoods, but I think that most of them would just be cousins -- wait, weren't you on the rowing team with Rachel Greenwood?"

Eliza nodded.

"She's the older sister, it says so right here. You ever talk to her?"

"Sometimes she posts in the Facebook group, but we're not super close. Last time we talked one-on-one she tried to set me up with her brother."

"Ok, I mean, that's gross, but I need you to call her. Offer your sympathy and ask if there's anything you can do."

"By which you mean pump her for information?"

"Damn right. And do it with a smile."

Eliza left to make the call, and Thomas snapped "John, delete that tweet."

"You're not my boss, Thomas."

"What does it say, Thomas?" Lafayette asked, not pausing in his typing.

"@NYPD if a Latino or a Black guy shot someone in 'self-defense' 12 times you'd call it murder." Thomas read out. "Man, post that shit on your tumblr."

"Delete it, John," Lafayette ordered. "Wait, Thomas, does the NYPD have a tumblr?"

Eliza returned from her call and refilled everyone's cups. "Well, that was deeply awkward, but the upshot of it is that Claudia is fine, if shaken, and that it's really Steve Greenwood who's pushing the whole thing. Apparently he got the Comissionor on the phone and basically strong-armed them into the full man-hunt situation" She threw herself down on the floor. "I hate this. We're going to have to make a statement about mental health, isn't it? That's all we're ever allowed to say."

"It *would* be the safest option," Burr said slowly.

"It's not gonna be enough," Alex said. "It's getting crazy out there. We're gonna have to address the issue directly."

"A call for fucking calm, right?" John said bitterly.

"That's politics," Alex said hollowly.

"Man, fuck this," John said, standing up and swaying slightly. "I'm gonna go buy a coffee and clear my head. Anyone want one?"

Everyone nodded, and John left.

"I've already tweeted that our hearts and prayers are with everyone affected tonight," Angelica said. "Should I follow that up with a plea for calm?"

"We might actually burn in hell, but I think so," Alex said slowly. "Can we be slightly more nuanced than that? Our police force should defend our citizens, something like that?"

Lafayette made a hesitant noise. "I was thinking more -- Claudia Greenwood was right to call the police, and they were right to take her complaint seriously. We do not know all of the details at this time, but from an outsider's perspective it would appear that the force used to subdue her unknown assailant was far in excess of reasonable force."

"The *Sun*'s going to accuse us of starting a race war," Burr said.

"*We* didn't fucking start it," Alex muttered. "Ok, then -- a plea for calm, our thoughts and prayers are with everyone, the system worked until it didn't, there is no war in ba seng se, etc.?"

Eliza frowned. "Angelica's going to give the statement, right?"

"Initially," Lafayette said. "We'll probably have the General on the breakfast news, but the 24 hours channels will get the lovely elder Ms Schulyer."

"So, let's play the woman card," Eliza said matter-of-factly. " Say that it is completely reasonable for a young woman to be frightened of a strange man approaching her in the street, and commend her on her bravery and clear head. Then reference the SPLC statement and say that it seems to have resulted in a clear excess of reasonable force, and finish with a plea for a meaningful and calm dialogue."

"Sounds good," Lafayette said after a minute. "You and Alex write it, and we'll start arranging the press. Burr, Jefferson, you should go home. We have the breakfast fundraiser tomorrow, and I'm going to need you both in her by 5:30 to brief for it. If you rush you can maybe get a full four hours of sleep."

By midnight, John had returned with the coffees, having calmed substantially. "Do we have a statement?"

"Very nearly," Alex said. "Eliza's a genius."

"Well, we knew that," John said, resting his head on Alex's good shoulder and allowing the warmth of his body to lull him to sleep.

## Chapter End Notes

Have you all read the Colorlines interview where Anthony mentions that he told Lin he thought that he (Anthony) "talked too ghetto" and Lin told him that it didn't matter how he talked as long he could make people understand him? As someone who has a quite strong working class accent, it meant so fucking much to me. I may have cried. (I def cried.)

### Chapter Summary

The aftermath.

### Chapter Notes

This chapter deals with the fallout from the events of the previous day, so there are mentions of police brutality and racism.

Sometimes the hairs don't split the way you want them to.

There's also what could probably be described as dissociative behaviour. As always, Alexander Hamilton is an unreliable narrator.

The sound of a loud banging on the glass startled Alex out of sleep, his body responding by jumping up into a standing position before his mind caught up with what he was doing. A sharp elbow to the face indicated that John had done the same, and for a moment the two stared at each other.

“Campaign office?” Alex asked suspiciously, eyes darting around the room.

“Campaign office.” John confirmed after a moment, taking a deep breath. “Sorry about your face.”

“Thanks. My headache didn’t need *help*, asshole.”

There was another bang on the glass.

“We should go see what that is.” Alex said. “By which I mean you should see what that is while I try and find Jefferson’s Advil stash.”

John fixed him with an unimpressed look. “Nice try, dear. One of us is wearing pants, and it isn’t me.”

Alex looked down at their legs. That was undeniably true, although Alex’s normally impeccably pressed chinos were wrinkled beyond belief.

“Find the Advil,” he grouched. “And put some damn pants on.”

Alex rolled his shoulders, wincing as they cracked, then went to investigate the noise.

The clock in the public entrance of the campaign office read 6:22, and Alex's eyes slid from its face to the disapproving one of Martha Washington outside the locked glass door. He swore and quickly unlocked and opened it, apologising rapidly as he did so.

-- I am so sorry, I just--

--Alexander." Martha frowned at him, and although they were of a height Alex felt himself get smaller. "Did you sleep here?"

Alex blushed and quickly ushered her into the office, shutting the door behind her carefully.

Er-- yes? I think everybody did, save the General."

"George isn't allowed to sleep in places that aren't beds, it was in our wedding vows. He's done his time on the ground."

"Yes ma'am."

She narrowed her eyes at him. "I would think that would be doubly true for you."

Alex shrugged uneasily, suppressing a wince.

"Anyway." Martha said briskly. "I brought coffees. Lafayette showed up on our doorstep at 5:00 am this morning, I thought I'd try and beat him back to the office. Where is he?"

Alex frowned. "Er-- I suspect he and the General are still doing press, ma'am. Breakfast radio, y'know?"

She sighed, and for a moment her obvious exhaustion showed on her face. "Is it just you here, then?"

"No, Jack's in the back -- and the girls were here too, I don't know where they've gone."

He frowned and glanced at the clock again. "Nevermind, I just realised how late it is -- they'll be doing a paper review. They probably went out to pick up the dailies and stopped for a coffee on the way."

Even though most papers published their daily issue online at midnight, there were often enough differences between the web version and the paper one to warrant comparison. It was important to get an idea of what people were actually reading, before they read it and started tweeting.

"Jack?" he called. "Are you decent? Mrs Washington is here."

Alex gestured towards his own desk chair. "Sit, I'm sure that everyone will be back soon." Martha sat, placing the tray of coffees on the desk. "Help yourself. They're all white except the one on the far right, and there's sugar in the front two."

Alex grabbed a cup of coffee from the front row and gulped it gratefully, blinking as his mouth was slightly scalded from the heat. "How do you have our coffee orders memorised? I barely have our coffee orders memorised -- the only thing I can ever remember is that



Jefferson takes his black, presumably because he is a robot sent from the future to destroy us all.”

Martha raised her eyebrows disapprovingly. “Alexander.”

“Sorry, ma’am,” Alex said quickly. “I’m gonna put some bagels on for Jack and I, would you like one?”

“How long have they been in the office for?”

Alex shrugged. “I don’t know, but I’m gonna toast them so it doesn’t really matter. No food sticks around here long enough to get moldy.”

“Then I would love one. Thank you, Alex.” She sipped her coffee delicately as she scrolled through her emails one-handed.

“Jack!” Alex called down the stairs. “Get off the internet and come eat a bagel.”

John shuffle up the stairs with a look of consternation on his face. “Babe, have you been on twitter?”

“No,” Alex said flatly. “And I am going to wait until I have finished this coffee and eaten a blueberry bagel like a goddamn adult. There is an upper limit on how long I am willing to go on tequila and coffee and we passed it like six hours ago.”

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but you should really get on twitter. I’ll take the bagels.”

Alex rolled his eyes. “Did you tweet something inflammatory again?”

“Do you mean, did I tweet something *true*?” At Alex’s glare he relented. “No, but that’s not really the problem.”

John pulled the bag of bagels out from the bottom drawer of the filing cabinet alongside a serrated knife.

Alex shrugged and glanced at Martha, who had been watching the exchange silently. “Any idea what he’s talking about?”

She glanced up from her phone. “Hmm? No, I don’t have Twitter. I just got a text from George, though. They’re heading back to the office in about half an hour.”

Alex nodded absently as he attempted to unlock his phone, only to find that it was completely dead. He cursed softly and began to boot up his laptop, planting himself on top of Jefferson’s desk and nearly spilling the jar of sprouted pumpkin seeds the man kept next to his computer.

He had 158 notifications on his personal account. The campaign account had over 1300.

“Why is this happening to me?” Alex wondered out loud. “I’m a good person.”

“Right?” John asked as he gave the slightly burnt bagels a liberal schmear of cream cheese.

“Do you ever think that God might have it out for you, specifically?”

“Ouch,” Alex said. “I mean, fair, but ouch. That’s a low blow, man.”

John flushed. “You know I didn’t mean it like that, babe.” He reddened further as he realised that he had just used a pet name -- *twice* -- in front of Martha Washington.

“How is everyone angry at us?! We spent an entire night crafting a response to ensure that nobody could reasonably be angry at us!” Alex said with despair in his voice “How did that end up with everybody being angry at us?”

“I hate to say I told you so, but...” John said, shoving a bagel at Alex.

“--But you’ll struggle through,” Alex glowered as he took another bite of the bagel. “Like can I @ every single person who tweeted at us and be like ‘Yeah, you can say that as an individual, we’re a campaign and have a platform and very much can be sued for defamation?’”

“No, you can’t,” Martha said from the background. “In lieu of Lafayette I feel the need to remind you both that there is a reason neither of you is allowed unfettered access to the campaign twitter account.”

Alex’s retort was thankfully overshadowed by the sound of the door being swung open violently.

“Fuck all of you,” Angelica said as she stormed in, a lock of hair having escaped from her bun.

“Why is this fucking happening?”

“You’ve been on Twitter, then?” John asked.

“What? No,” she said distractedly as Eliza pushed in behind her, arms laden down with grease-stained paper bags. “I’m on Youtube.”

Alex whipped his head around. “Why exactly are you on Youtube?”

“It was kinda brilliant,” Eliza said as she began unpacking breakfast burritos and small tubs of hashbrowns. “This white guy cut us in line and when we called him on it he said some -- well, some really inappropriate shit -- and Angelica reamed him out. It was a thing of beauty except it got Periscoped and also recorded and uploaded to Youtube like immediately.”

“Fuck,” John said. “I mean that’s fucking awesome Ange, but also fuck. We did not need this today. Literally everyone in the office is hungover and everyone in the world is mad at us.”

“I read the editorials,” Eliza said grimly as Angelica disappeared into the basement. Her long dark hair was hanging loose over her lightly wrinkled buttbutton. It made her look very young.

“I don’t know what we’re supposed to do, though. Not saying anything isn’t helping.”

“Oh, fuck off,” Alex spat at his computer screen. “There’s a post on microdot accusing the General of betraying ‘his people’. Which fucking people, internet? You’re gonna have to be more specific so I know how quickly I have to shove your macbook through your smug fucking face.”

There was a beat of silence.

“Sorry.”

“Right, so there’s that,” Eliza continued brightly. “But from the other side there are a half-dozen editorials accusing us of race-baiting. So I don’t even know.”

John sat down on the floor, running his hands through his increasingly erratic hair. “We need -- I don’t know what we need, this isn’t really my field of expertise.”

“We need to address the issues, but the General shouldn’t do it by himself. Also, none of us should do it. If we’re trying to skirt those accusations any of us by his side is entirely too much melanin for the journos to handle.” Angelica said as she emerged from the basement, looking as flawless as ever.

Eliza wrinkled her brow. “Are you saying we need a token White dude?”

Angelica frowned. “Of course not.”

“Good.”

“I was saying we need a token White *lady*.”

“Oh, that’s much better,” Eliza said. “Except not.”

Alex’s eyes hadn’t left his screen. “I’m with you, but won’t a White woman be as vulnerable to charges of bias as a person of color?”

“Not if it’s Abigail Adams, and not if she condemns the police’s actions. Maybe work in the phrase “this is not about race” in there somewhere.”

“It’s totally about race!” John exploded from his patch of carpet.

“Not the police brutality angle, John,” she said, sounding put-upon. “The concern for police brutality angle. Abby can make it sound like it’s ludicrous for White people *not* to be upset, everyone is endangered when we can’t trust the justice system, etc.”

“Abigail Adams hates me,” Alex volunteered from his spot on Jefferson’s desk. He shifted to face Angelica and knocked over an antique barometer. “I’ll write for her, but I’m hiding when she gets here.”

“Abigail Adams hates you because you’re *rude*,” Angelica said.

“No, Abigail Adams hates me because she thinks I’m not fit to lick the bottom of her shoes,” he said bitterly.

“I don’t care how much shit she talks about you, Alex. She’s a nationally syndicated columnist, her articles for Salon frequently exceed 2 million hits, and she’s pretty much universally respected. People -- especially women, especially *White women* -- listen when she speaks.”

Alex grumbled his agreement, and then -- “How are we gonna get her? It’s best if we don’t reach out directly -- she’ll be more favourable if she thinks it’s her idea.”

There was silence. Then, from the corner, sounding pained, John said “Dad knows her husband. They were roommates at Harvard and they go golfing together whenever he’s in New York. It would be great, he’s not directly associated with the campaign, it’ll seem a lot less cynical...” he drifted off and resumed running his hands through his now decidedly messy hair.

Alex turned his head to face him so quickly everyone heard his neck crack. “*John? You sure about this? You want me to call your mom, or maybe your sister? They could do it.*”

John shook his head, his mouth set. “*I’m not making mom call her ex for me, and Henry still likes Martha. I don’t want to fuck that up. I’ll just tell him that -- if he does this, I’ll owe him a favor.*”

“*You don’t owe that bastard anything.*” Alex said sharply.

John shrugged. “*Didn’t say I was gonna let him actually cash him in, did I?*”

Reverting to English, John looked at Angelica. “I’ll make the call.” He pushed himself off the floor and went out back to make the call in the relative quiet of the loading zone at 7 am.

Alex’s stomach churned. He knew John, knew his history, knew that his overdeveloped sense of honor and pride meant there would be no talking him out of this. It was such a classic “John” thing to do that it would make Alex smile if he wasn’t so worried.

He took a deep breath and smiled at Eliza. “Let’s get to work, then.”

Alex had many flaws. He would never deny this. Some he didn’t really think of as flaws -- his work ethic, his sense of honor and justice -- but he had enough insight to acknowledge that some of them were traits he should have left behind alongside Abuela Rosa’s bloated body and the smell of rotted wood. He was overly suspicious -- some might have said paranoid. He was impulsive. He had a hair-trigger temper and an inability to back down from an argument. He might -- possibly -- have had trouble with perspective.

But he was very good in a crisis.

A flip switched in his brain, and suddenly he was cut off from all of the pesky emotions and considerations that would only inhibit his response. He began writing immediately, drafted sample remarks in less time than it normally took him to write a paragraph, and shoved his computer at Eliza. “Make any revisions you think are necessary,” he said shortly.

He called Burr and Jefferson and left messages on their voicemails to come in as soon as possible, and called the managers of the other campaign offices to let them know the situation. Then he called Peggy and let her know that she was going to need to send an e-mail blast to the volunteers giving them the official line on the previous day's events, and to remind them to give any press the number for head office rather than answering their questions themselves. He went downstairs -- where Angelica was now on the phone with Abigail Adams, chatting like they were old friends -- to pull out the General's spare suit and left it hanging in a garment bag by his desk. He made a short list of media outlets to contact, and once Angelica gave it the go-ahead he began making calls and writing e-mails to producers as though they were old friends.

By the time the General and Lafayette arrived at quarter to 8, a press-conference had been scheduled, a group of appropriately multi-ethnic volunteers had been roped in to stand behind the General, and talking points had been written for both the General and Abigail Adams, who had agreed to speak with the General on the Today Show at 9.

He relayed all of this to Lafayette in a calm, measured tone. The other man nodded his approval.

"Good job, robo-Alex," Lafayette said seriously. "I'll take it from here. Go have a smoke with your boyfriend and see if you cannot bring us back real Alex for the rest of the day, yes?"

Alex frowned. He had the vague feeling that he should be offended at that, but he shrugged.

"Yes, sir," he said vaguely, and went out the back door.

## E-16

### Chapter Summary

Political staffers are not functional human beings, and everyone is feeling the strain.

Also, there's a fundraiser.

### Chapter Notes

A note on terminology: it should be obvious from the context, but 'making the ask' means asking for donations flat out. It is bizarrely the most effective way of fundraising, particularly from the very wealthy.

Also: I'm not 100% on the campaign financing laws for municipal elections in New York, so if you are sitting there going "You can't have a line of credit for election spending!" then I am very sorry. I did a cursory google search before I reminded myself that I was not actually managing a NYC mayoral campaign and that becoming fluent in the byzantine financing rules for another place entirely from where I live and work is a bit much even for me.

[This](#) is Eliza's dress.

## E-17

It was 4:00 in the morning, and Alex was still awake. John was sprawled out over most of the mattress, with Marco's head resting on John's left calf and his paws pressed against Alex's naked torso.

Outside, the October wind howled, and Alex tried to focus on his breathing.

Everything would be fine. He was ok, John was ok, the campaign would be ok, he could sleep and everything would be fine.

Except he couldn't, there was a restless anxiety thrumming through his tendons and he had to think, had to plan, but the act of planning seemed to be beyond him at that moment.

He pushed himself out of bed, wincing at the tightness in his muscles. After he had drafted remarks for Abigail Adams and the General, Lafayette had sent him home.

Sent *them* home, rather, Alex whose sharp edges became razor blades when he perceived an attack and John who was withdrawn, the constant fire inside him banked by whatever gifts he had had to promise to call in a favour with his father.

Alex had arrived at their apartment and was immediately struck with a terrible sense of claustrophobia. He had leashed Marco, and together they had run ten miles in total, enough that Marco was sleeping like the dead and Alex had muscle aches in places he had previously forgotten existed.

He had returned to the apartment, showered, and curled himself around John, who was lying in their bed staring at nothing. It had been way too early to go to bed, but Alex had been unsure of what else to do. It had been as though some circuit had gone awry and he was caught in a terrible biomechanical feedback loop, stress feeding exhaustion feeding numbness feeding stress.

He had lain there all night, listening to John's even breathing and watching the occasional phantom twitch in Marco's paws.

He wasn't going to sleep.

He had to think.

He had to *plan*.

They had scraped through the disaster, just barely.

It helped that the traditional news outlets respected and feared Abigail Adams in equal measure. It helped more that one of Hanover's staffers tweeted something really quite undeniably racist in response to a New York Times profile of the Washington campaign. His twitter profile was deleted within the hour, but not before Alex had managed to screenshot and backup as many deeply questionable tweets as possible.

It was always good to have a bit of ammunition in your back pocket.

All of those things helped, but if Alexander was being honest he would admit that they were simply the beneficiaries of the news cycle and the cold uncaring eye of the press. The campaign account still received dozens of tweets from activists and the public, but now Eliza could respond with a link to the video of the General and Abigail Adams on *The Today Show* and the campaign email address along with an entreaty to contact the campaign personally if they had any particular concerns.

It had undeniably damaged them, though. Hanover was now leading by five points -- a completely surmountable lead, but losing their lead was not at all satisfying. Alex repeated -- out loud, to the press, and also inside his mind -- that poll results are meaningless, that they only include people with a permanent address and a landline telephone connection, that the communities which polls ignored were also the communities in which Washington found much of his support.

It was true, but it wasn't enough to shift the feeling of restlessness that had stolen over his being. They were accumulating debt -- monetary and otherwise -- and an alarming rate. They owed favors to Abigail Adams, to Henry Laurens, to the editor of BuzzFeed Politics and the news editor at New York Daily News.

The money was technically not his problem -- John was the official agent and Burr the lead fundraiser, but they needed to do another media buy, and their line of credit was almost maxed out, and all things considered it was all Alex could do not to scream.

He felt like he was going to shake apart.

It would be fine. It would be fine. Jefferson and Burr had scheduled a major fundraising dinner for that week anyway -- with the added pressure they had shanghaied Eliza and Angelica into ransacking their contacts, and it looked like they would have at least 500 wealthy Democrats at the Liberty Warehouse that night, with their chequebooks on them.

They would be fine. Alex didn't have to go if he didn't want to -- fundraising was so far outside his job description he couldn't find it with a map -- but even if he got roped into it, he would be fine. It would be fine. He would go and put on his best bootstraps smile and charm old ladies into paying for another radio buy.

He had been terrible at fundraising, in the beginning. The truly wealthy are blunt about money in a way that Alex has never quite managed to ape, and a direct ask produced far better results than a subtle inference.

Alex hated making the ask. It felt too much like begging.

He breathed deeply and gave up on sleeping as a bad job, untangling himself from the mess of limbs and twisted sheets. Pulling his phone off of its charger, he winced. 4:35. They had to be awake in half an hour anyways.

He wandered into the kitchen, wincing at the empty takeout containers and stained mugs that were scattered across the counter. They hadn't really been home enough to clean, and when they had been home it had only been to fall into bed in an exhausted heap. They hadn't cleaned the bathroom in a month. They hadn't had sex in almost a month and a half. They only had clean laundry because there was a laundromat next door to the office.

He rummaged through the cupboard, looking for his favourite travel mug, only to remember that it, like half of his pants and all of his Oxfords, was at the office.

He ran his head under the cold tap, scrubbing at his face with the heels of his hands. He cracked the window and leaned against the countertop, listening to the sounds of the city waking up. Alex was often awake at 4 am -- insomnia or an early morning or both -- and he had always loved that between 4 and 8 the city belonged to students and shift workers, the sing-song patter of kids waiting to bus across town mixing with the sounds of grates being pulled up from the front of shops to form a nostalgic beat.

He startled at the sound of the bedroom door opening, followed by the soft padding of footsteps.

"You don't have to be awake yet," Alex said softly. "You can go back to sleep for another fifteen minutes. I'll wake you."

John shook his head. His hair was a tangled birds nest and his eyes were shadowed with dark circles.



He blinked sleepily. "M up. Besides if I went back to bed now I'd have to move Marco."

"You're only dating me for my dog, aren't you?" Alex said. "Sit down, there's coffee."

John flopped heavily onto a rickety wooden chair. Alex winced at the squeak the joints of the chair made in protest.

Alex poured the coffee and passed one of the mugs to John. "I'm going to grab a shower."

He went to leave, but stopped at the hand on his wrist. "Don't. Sit with me for a second."

He shrugged, and did as he was told.

After a few moments of silence, John spoke. "Is it terrible that I don't want to go in today?"

Alex drank deeply from his mug. "I guess that depends on why you don't want to go in. If it's because you've had some kind of quarter-life Republican awakening..." he drifted off as he realised that his humor wasn't having it's intended effect.

"I just -- if I'm going to lose sleep over a job, I'd like it to actually matter."

Alex felt a flash of rage wash over him. "It matters."

John waved a hand. "Yeah, it matters *if we get elected*, and even then -- it's not going to change anything. Not really."

"You don't believe that."

John shrugged. "I do today."

"Stop trying to pick a fight," Alex said, frustrated. "You're tired, I'm tired. You're burnt out, I'm burnt out. But don't you dare say that the thing I am devoting my life to doesn't fucking matter, ok?" He stood up. "I'm going to shower."

John grabbed his wrist again, and Alex resisted the impulse to break away. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it -- well, I did mean it, but I didn't mean it like that. It's been a long week."

Alex smiled grimly. "It isn't over yet."

He pulled away, and this time, John let him.

In a rare stroke of good luck, the office was nearly empty that day.

Aaron, Eliza, and Angelica were all at the venue for the night's fundraiser. Peggy and a team of volunteers were phone canvassing, their chatter making a pleasant background hum as he drafted remarks for Washington to give at the dinner.

John retreated to the basement to make calls and fill out purchase orders, only appearing upstairs to refill his coffee cup.

Around 4pm, Eliza and Angelica re-appeared at the office, looking harried but triumphant. The purchase orders had gone through, they'd confirmed the event insurance, and double-checked on the manufacturers of the linens and promo material they were using for the night. Everything was up to par, nobody was going to sue them, and the group of wealthy Democrats and progressives would probably thoroughly enjoy themselves.

"Is there going to be a cash bar?" Alex asked absently. He could really use a drink.

Angelica shook her head. "Open bar. We'll recoup the added costs easily, people donate more when they're tipsy."

Alex nodded.

"You're coming, aren't you, Alex?" Eliza asked. "We're closing the office anyway."

He shrugged. "You're better at fundraising than me anyway."

Angelica rolled her eyes. "You a perfectly adequate fundraiser, Alex. Stop trying to get us to stroke your ego."

"Ouch."

Eliza laughed and extended a hand towards Angelica for a high five. "Harsh, Ange. Harsh but fair."

Between the cajoling of Eliza and the sharp directions of Angelica, Alex found himself agreeing to the proposition.

8pm that night found him hugging the exposed brick of the Liberty Warehouse, hand latched firmly onto John's elbow.

He watched in awe as Eliza and Angelica worked the room, smiling and laughing, with no sign that they were asking for money. Alex frowned and glanced at John.

"They're not making the ask."

John shook his head. "Not yet. Now you make them feel important, pretend you remember their kids' names and listen to whatever nonsensical opinions they want to spout at you as though it were handed down the mountain by Moses himself." He scowled and took a deep drink of his wine. "I hate that I know that, by the way."

"At least it's for a good cause."

"No, it's manipulative bullshit that I thought I had gotten away from," John muttered.

"Jack, c'mon," Alex muttered. "Let's just -- try and do our jobs, ok?"

John shook his head.

They watched the crowd in silence. From across the room they could hear Jefferson laugh loudly -- and apparently in earnest -- at something that was being said.

"I'm not a fuck up," John said after a while.

"I know," Alex said, trying to tamp down on his frustration. Jack was hurting, and he ached for him, sure, but -- it was hard. How was he supposed to sympathise with someone for knowing the language of a world that he was never invited to?

Alex had forced his way into the room on the strength of his words and his wits, and every moment he was there he had to keep his guard up. No matter how much John fucked up in the eyes of his father and his peers, he would still be welcome in this room.

Alex only had the one shot.

"Is there anyone you know here?" Alex asked, hoping that conversation might draw John out of this strange, spiky mood.

John scanned the crowd. "Only by reputation, it looks like. Some of them I've met at functions, but nobody who is really close with my family. We're too Dixiecrat for these guys." John smiled at that, some private joke or memory that Alex wasn't privy to.

"You should circulate," John said after a minute. "This is a really good opportunity for you."

Alex nodded and swallowed. "I should."

Sensing his hesitation, John seemed to shake himself out of his mood. "I'll make introductions, if you want."

The final clause was tacked on at the end, an afterthought borne from the early days of their relationship where the only true fights they had had were over John's occasional slide into paternalism.

Alex appreciated it, nonetheless. It made it seem like a choice and not a necessity.

"Let's go," he said with a smile.

John nodded and straightened his back. "Ok, so you remember the Pickneys, right? That woman over there is Charlie's ex-wife, I've played tennis with her a couple of times." He steered Alex deftly through the crowd, hand on his elbow. "Ariella, how *are* you?"

The woman -- a striking blonde with a soft bob -- smiled widely. "Johnny, look at you! You look so grown up! I haven't seen you since -- was it three years ago?"

"That Christmas party at the Maidstone, I think. Have you met Alexander? He's our Director of Communications on the campaign."

Alex smiled and extended his hand. "A pleasure to meet you, Ms...?" He trailed off expectantly.

"Oh, call me Ariella, darling. Communications, hm? How do you get into *that*?"

Alex smiled. "My degree is in journalism, actually, but I served under the General as well as our campaign manager."

He felt a slight squeeze of approval on his elbow, and he ignored the small flash of annoyance.

"Thank you for your service," Ariella said brightly. "I'm being summoned--" she gestured wryly at a waving woman across the room "--but you must meet my husband at some point this evening, I'm sure you would have a lot to talk about. John, lovely to see you, darling. Bring this boy to the Hamptons this summer, won't you?" She walked off without waiting for a response.

Alex looked at John with wide eyes. "Wow."

John smirked. "I need another drink."

Suitably refreshed, they continued their circuit. It soon became apparent that even those people who John didn't know personally knew *him* by reputation, or at least knew his name. Alex hadn't been invited to any of the smaller upscale fundraisers Jefferson had organised -- although he'd been a hit at the teachers union barbecue and at the JCC Manhattan luncheon. John had, however, and he also had a remarkable capacity with names.

Soon, a theme began to emerge.

John would greet the individual like they were old friends, introduce Alex with his title. Alex would smile and extend his hand, and the other person would shake it while they looked him up and down, trying to place him.

More than one person asked if they knew him from somewhere.

Alex tried not to flinch at that. He wasn't famous, didn't know any of these people from a stranger -- but his face had been on the cover of a major newspaper not long ago, and it was still on Gawker.

Nobody mentioned it explicitly, though. Most of them probably didn't even realise that that was where they recognised him from, and those who did were far too well mannered to bring it up.

It would be fine. It was just talking to people. Alex was good at talking.

The night wore on and the drinks flowed, and by 10 everyone was some degree of buzzed. Alex was listening with what he hoped was a suitably attentive face to a financier explain how important it was to put a cap on the cost of private school tuition when a slim hand grabbed his arm. He flinched in surprise and made his excuses, turning to see Eliza, who pulled him off to the side.

"You can start making the ask now," she said softly. "Washington is gladhanding as we speak, and it's always best to grab them right after they meet the candidate."

She delicately straightened the skirt of her fuchsia lace dress as she added "Also, most of them are drunk."

Alex smothered a snort with a cough. "Will do."

He circulated the room, his guard still up as he smiled at young women and charmed older ones. He listened attentively and laughed in all the right places, but he couldn't seal the deal. He tried to bookend it with natural conversation, he tried asking outright, but he wasn't making nearly as much as he had at previous events.

He'd attended fundraisers before, he wasn't completely green. What had changed?

His stomach dropped as the pieces clicked together in his head. Spying John across the room, he went and liberated him from a one-sided conversation with an older white woman about ISIS.

"What's wrong?" John asked.

"Maybe I was just doing you a favour," Alex said coolly.

"Don't play that shit, Alex," John said. "I'm tired, and so are you."

"How are you doing? Fundraising wise, I mean?"

"I'm killing it. So was Angelica, last time I talked to her. Why?"

"Yeah," Alex said quietly. "That's what I thought. I'm heading home."

John frowned. "What?"

"I've made us \$400 in an hour, Jack. That's less than I could make on the phones in the same time if I really pushed it."

John frowned. "What are you saying? Are you insulting their children or something?"

Alex rolled his eyes. "Jack, think about it for just a second. An ask from me is different than an ask from you."

John wrinkled his nose. "C'mon, Alex, not this again. You were fine at the pre-campaign fundraisers, and you rocked that JCC event."

Alex wanted to scream in frustration, and settled for taking a sip of his wine. "In the intervening time, John, my face has been on the cover of the newspaper."

"Alex, I know you're -- sensitive -- about this stuff, but nobody is refusing to donate to the campaign because of you or your background."

Alex breathed deeply, trying to dispel the tingling in his neck. "I'm sure they don't mean to. I'm not blaming anyone or calling anyone out. All I'm saying is that right now, in this room, an ask from you is political engagement and an ask from me is begging."

John blinked. "You know you're going have to get used to this kind of thing if you want to go into politics."

"I know, John," Alex said evenly. "And I know how this works. And because I know how this works, I am going to let people who can get funds from this crowd get the funds from this crowd. I'll make some calls tomorrow morning if Jefferson and Burr get upset at me for ditching."

John looked at him, really looked at him, and so Alex went against every instinct that he had and tried to let his emotions show on his face.

"Fine," John said quietly. "Let's go."

They arrived back at their apartment building to find a passive-aggressive post-it on their mailbox informing them that until they cleared it out, no new mail could be delivered. John snorted and opened the box, pulling out a sheaf of envelopes and flyers.

"It wouldn't be a problem if our mailboxes were bigger," Alex said.

"It wouldn't be a problem if we were home for more than two waking hours every day."

"That is fair."

"Are you ready?" John opened the door.

Alex sunk into a crouch, and so was prepared for the 20 pounds of excited animal that came running at him. He successfully deflected him away from both of their clothes, and John snuck behind him and threw a greenie into the living room to give them both time to sprint to the bedroom and close the door.

Alex hung up both of their suits, humming to himself. He still felt restless, his thoughts still going at a million miles an hour, but he was exhausted. It would be good to --

"Alex?" John interrupted his thoughts. "There's mail here that got returned to sender."

"Hmm?" Alex asked. "What is it?"

"Look," John thrust the envelope into his hands.

Alex felt his heart sink.

"Who's James Hamilton?" John asked softly. "Is that a cousin, or ... ?"

*None of your fucking business*, Alex wanted to say. But that wasn't really true -- John had done a lot for him tonight. He owed him that much, at least.

"My father," he said after a long pause.

John frowned. "I thought your father was dead?"

Alex shrugged. "He was alive the last time I saw him, but. That was a long time ago."

"You said your father was dead."

"I never said that."

"You implied it, and you didn't correct the implication. What the hell, Alex?"

Alex groaned. "Does it really matter? Dead or not, it's not something that comes up a lot."

"Except when you write letters to him." John said flatly.

Alex let out a loud yell of wordless frustration. "I don't 'write letters to him'. I used to -- his family owns a fucking resort, ok, in the Dominican. I went to see them once and they didn't want anything to do with me, but I wouldn't leave until they gave me an address for him." he let out a bitter snort. "Of course, it was in fucking Scotland, so that didn't really help." He took a deep breath, trying to modulate his voice. "I used to write to him, ok? When I was in high school, and a couple of times when I was in the army. I thought he might want to know that I -- that he didn't have to be ashamed of me any more. I hadn't done it in ages, but with the campaign, and the whole thing, I thought I should. So I did."

He glared at John. "Was that enough for you, or would you like me to fucking read it to you?"

John set down his water glass with some force. "This is the kind of thing you tell people when you're in a relationship with them, Alex! You don't let them assume your father is dead! You don't just --"

"--No." Alex said sharply. "No, this is mine. I'm not -- find someone else's tragedies to jerk off to. It's none of your fucking business." He pulled a hoodie on over his undershirt and pyjama bottoms. "I'm going to take the dog for a walk. Don't wait up."

## E-16

### Chapter Summary

In which there is both a literal and a metaphorical storm.

### Chapter Notes

A/N This one is rough, but there's light at the end of the tunnel. Content warnings for panic attacks, vomiting, and dissociative behaviour.

Alex hadn't had a destination in mind when he blew out the door, had only known that he needed to leave, had known in that moment that even though he might have said something unforgivable he didn't have the strength to take it back.

It was almost one in the morning. His initial burst of adrenaline had carried him out of the building and several blocks north, until the exertion and the alcohol pooling in his stomach mixed in a terrible cocktail and he found himself holding onto the edge of a garbage can with his free hand, vomiting harshly.

He coughed as he did so, feeling the acid burn his throat and nose. Tears ran down his face, and even after he had finished emptying the mostly liquid contents of his stomach, he couldn't seem to stop.

He wiped his face on the sleeve of his hoodie and kept running, though now at a more sedate pace.

It was slightly too cold to be out in just a hoodie, and he was slightly too drunk to be running, and the whole situation was all things considered just on the wrong side of catastrophic.

The tears were still collecting in his eyes, and he blinked them away absently. He wasn't that upset -- he wasn't sobbing, and he didn't feel as though he ought to be. He was *mad*, is what he was.

He tightened his grip on Marco's leash, knuckles whitening around the worn nylon.

What the fuck.

His breathing came quicker and quicker, and although he tried to regulate it he kept coughing on his own throat. He stopped abruptly, causing Marco to pull against the leash and yip, and



sat down on the curb.

He squeezed his head between his knees, the pressure on his temples causing his vision to white out at the edges. He had to get himself under control.

What was wrong with him?

Why did he have to prove every uncharitable assumption ever made about him right? If he went into work tomorrow and said that he and John had broken up, Angelica would probably say that John had always been too good for him, and that it had really only been a matter of time. If he didn't go in at all, that would confirm what they had always thought -- that Washington and Lafayette were crazy to trust him, to rely on him, the only thing he had ever shown a hint of promise at was writing and he'd gone and fucked that up too, with their statement on the Greenwood affair. He had stayed up until 3 in the morning choosing words so carefully, crafted this beautiful statement that everyone seemed sure would lower tensions rather than raise them.

Eliza was good at her job. Eliza would be better at his job. His disappearance wouldn't be any great loss to the campaign.

He could just not go home. He could get on a plane or -- his mind skittered away from the completion of the thought, proving that no matter what anyone said he was capable of at least some basic self-preservation.

The rain that had been threatening to fall all evening began to come in earnest, and Marco let out a mournful howl.

"Aw, bébé," Alex muttered absently, pulling him up onto his lap and beneath his hoodie.

Marco whimpered as he pressed his damp fur against the skin of Alex's belly, shaking with cold.

Alex didn't really know how long he sat there for. Time was passing strangely, in jagged jump cuts between scenes and flashes -- the playful shrieks of a group of teenagers returning from the club, the jangling of metal on glass as businesses put out their recycling.

When he came back to himself, his hoodie was completely soaked through, and Marco seemed to have fallen asleep pressed against his chest. The moon was high in the sky and the streets were as quiet as they ever got.

He had left his phone at the apartment.

He had left his *wallet* back at the apartment.

He had to go back. Fuck. He had fucked up.

He stood, joints creaking audibly, his good arm cradling Marco against his chest. The dog woke up, but instead of crawling out onto the ground, he scrabbled against Alex until he had

poked his small head out of the neck hole of the hoodie.

Alex couldn't help himself. He started to laugh, and when Marco gave him a *look* at all the noise he was making, laughed harder.

Fuck.

Fuck.

The wind picked up, blowing the raindrops until they were almost horizontal, and Alex laughed harder. It all seemed so absurd.

Marco nipped at his jaw, and the pain brought him back to himself. He had to get the dog out of the rain. It was too cold for him out there. He was only small, and he didn't like storms.

Swallowing his pride, Alex turned and began slowly walking back the way he had came.

He wasn't in a part of town he recognised. Wasn't sure if he was even still in the Bronx. He'd probably canvassed it before -- he felt like he'd canvassed everything north of 181st at some point, and it was mostly true -- but not at night. Not at night, and not in a storm, and fuck he had really fucked this up hadn't he?

The wind howled, and he winced as bits of dust and debris hit his exposed face. He should probably be running, and he wished that he was the kind of person who could do that and keep their hood up.

It was a futile wish, one that wasn't going to change in the next hour, and Marco needed to go home. He was scared.

Gulping, Alex pulled down his hood, and began running back the way he thought he had come.

He had run farther than he thought, and now that he was deprived of the righteous indignation that had driven him further uptown he noticed his muscles burning. With every pounding step against the pavement, his shoulder cried out in sharp agony.

Fuck, he was stupid. He hadn't even brought his fucking wallet, didn't have his bus pass or change for a cash fare, couldn't even step inside an all-night bodega and grab a coffee to warm himself up with.

Fuck.

It took longer than he had expected, but eventually he found his way back to their building. The sky was lightening to a dull grey, and the rain showed no sign of letting up.

At least he had remembered his keys.

He let himself into their building, wincing as his shoes made a terrible squelching sound against the tile. He looked like someone had dragged him out of the Hudson. Felt a bit like someone had, too.

Marco was shaking again as the warm air hit his skin, and Alex found himself shaking alongside him in sympathy. When he stood in front of their doorway, he found himself shaking in earnest, and he cursed loudly as he tried and failed to get his key in the lock.

The door swung open after his fifth failed attempt. Marco yipped excitedly and scrambled out of Alex's grasp, jumping and yipping for John's attention.

Good. Anything to get it off of himself.

John looked terrible. His face was flushed and puffy with -- something, anger or tears Alex wasn't sure -- and he had dark circles under his eyes. He clearly hadn't slept, and Alex winced. It was one thing for him to go 48 hours without sleep, and entirely another for John to do the same.

"I'm sorry," Alex said quickly. "I wasn't thinking and I'm sorry and I'm sorry about tonight and I'm sorry that I got us into this in the first place and I'm sorry that you didn't sleep and --" he shut his mouth to stop the words from overspilling and drowning them both.

John looked at him and swallowed, once. Then he stood away from the door. "Go get changed," he said softly. "I'd rather you not die of hypothermia before I get to yell at you."

Alex blinked, confused. The bedroom suddenly seemed very far away, and he thought that maybe he could tolerate the cold water against his skin forever as long as John didn't make that face again.

John looked at him expectantly. Alex looked back, confused.

Finally, John shook his head. "Alex."

Alex blinked.

John eyed him carefully, before reaching out and slowly grabbing him by the elbow. "Get. changed."

He steered him into their bedroom and onto their bed, sighing in frustration when Alex just blinked.

Everything seemed as though it were happening under water. He had some experience with that.

John scowled. "You are so lucky that I fucking love you," He said sharply. His hands were gentle, though, and once Alex was in dry sweats he stood up. "I'm going to the kitchen. Don't move."

Alex obeyed. Marco was still shaking -- no, that wasn't right, Marco was in the other room, he could hear his claws scrabble against the linoleum.

Alex. Alex was shaking.

Why was he shaking?

John came back into the room with two steaming mugs and two mason jars of hot water, which he stuffed into a wooly sock. He passed him the sock, first. "Sit against the wall and put those under your armpits," he said.

Alex obeyed.

John nodded, swallowed harshly, his Adam's apple bobbing. "Great. That's great." He sat on the bed next to Alex and coughed.

"Drink this," he said, and Alex frowned. His voice was scratchy and thick at the same time -- was John coming down with something?

"I'm still mad at you," John said quietly.

Alex nodded. "I'm--"

"--Please stop apologising," John said wearily. "Let me finish."

He swallowed.

"You didn't take your phone with you."

Alex shook his head.

"I thought you were dead."

Alex frowned. "Why would you think that?"

"Because you left! It was 1 in the goddamned morning and you just left without saying anything, you didn't even take your wallet, and I phoned everyone I knew and nobody had *seen* you, Alex."

John's voice broke.

Oh. Tears. Those were tears in his throat, not a cold.

"I wouldn't have taken Marco to commit suicide," Alex finally said, words thick and clumsy in his mouth. "I wouldn't abandon him like that."

He wouldn't abandon John like that, either, even if sometimes he -- but no, he wouldn't have taken the dog. Wouldn't have told John that he was leaving. He would just have vanished, wouldn't have left a mess for anyone to clean up like that. He knew better.

John let out a shaky laugh. "I wasn't sure you were thinking clearly enough for that."

Alex shook his head. "I'm sorry."

"Please stop apologising," John said again. "I need to -- I need to make some calls. Everyone's very worried about you, Alex."

"I don't want them to be," he said.

"Tough," John snapped. "You run out into the middle of a storm, drunk, after midnight, and you don't get to decide whether or not the people who love you worry about you, Alex."

"I'm sorry." He couldn't seem to stop apologising, even though John had told him not to.

"I'm going to the kitchen," John said after a moment. "Don't move. Drink your tea."

How was he supposed to do both? He frowned at John's retreating back, tremors visible under the thin grey cotton of his pyjama shirt.

Oh. The first imperative had been general rather than specific. That was how he was supposed to do both.

He sipped at his tea. It didn't taste like anything, even though he could tell by the colour that it was one of the blends he favoured.

He sipped diligently nonetheless. He could do this right, at least.

After a few minutes or an hour, John returned, wiping at his eyes.

"Everyone is very glad you're safe," he said after a minute. "We're both under strict orders to take a long weekend. They'll call if there's an emergency."

Alex frowned, opened his mouth, but closed it at a quelling look from John.

"You shouldn't have said that to me," John said quietly. "It wasn't fair."

"I know," Alex said hoarsely. "I'm -- I wish I could promise that it won't happen again."

John shook his head and snorted. "I know you better than that. I need you to try, but-- that wasn't where I was going with that. I wasn't entirely fair either."

Alex frowned. It wasn't John's fault that he was paranoid and reckless, that he said things without thinking, that he kept secrets.

But John kept talking. "I shouldn't have told you how to feel," he said after a moment, "But I also should have noticed that you weren't doing well. Haven't been for a while, I think."

Alex raised his good shoulder in a half-shrug.

"I know this is important to you," John said slowly. "It's important to me, too. But I'm not you. I can't spend my days in a basement filling out purchase orders and still feel like it means something."

Alex nodded.

"So I resigned," John said. "Not from the campaign, but from my post. I'm going to be working in the Bronx office on their GOTV strategy. I guess they've been overrun with ride requests and requests for translators, they don't have the capacity built and it's 15 days till the election."

Alex nodded slowly. Was John breaking up with him?

John must have noticed his expression, because he tried to smile. "I'm doing this so that we don't kill each other by E Day. And because it would be nice if one of us was working human hours. Our kitchen smells like death, we're gonna get roaches."

Alex wrinkled his nose. "Gross."

"Exactly." John said. "Like, I know I'm not a lot better than you, when it comes to the whole working thing. But if we're not in the same office, then -- then I'll have a reason to come home, and you'll have someone to come home to."

Alex nodded. He breathed shakily. "I don't deserve you."

"You don't, but I'm what you got." John smiled, then turned serious. "You really scared me tonight. You scared *us*. Have you ever seen George Washington scared? It was like seeing your mother cry for the first time."

Alex was quiet for a long time, long enough that John reached over and began rubbing the back of Alex's hand with his thumb.

"I hurt you," Alex said finally. "I wasn't thinking, and I hurt you." He breathed slowly, and he felt the pressure on his hand increase. "I-- it's been really hard." His voice cracked on the last word. "And I know -- I have to be better, you know? I have to be twice as good. And it sucks, because I try, and I try, and then -- then something like this happens and I fuck it all up, and now I have to try and be three times as good."

He was crying.

John bit his lip, clearly trying to decide how to say something.

Alex beat him to it. "You're trying to think of a way to ask me if I'm taking my meds without being patronizing."

John smiled sheepishly. "Am I so easy to read?"

"I know how your mind works, Dr Laurens," Alex teased. "And-- no. I haven't."

He saw John's eyes flash with annoyance, and he hurried to continue.

"The election fucked up my insurance. I'm not a full time student, so I don't get coverage under the student health plan. I ran out on the 7th."

It was the 25th.

"Fuck."

"Yeah."

John sighed and laid down on the bed next to him. Alex instinctively leaned in, and John smirked.

"I had this whole speech planned, you know?" John said, staring at the ceiling. "It was good, too."

"You're a good writer," Alex offered.

"I know that's your highest compliment, so I'll take it." John said. "Anyway. I had a speech, but I can't remember it anymore. It was good. There was a lot of yelling, a lot of dramatic tension."

Alex snorted. "I don't think we need help with either of those."

John laughed softly and rolled onto his side, pulling Alex in towards him until Alex's head was pressed just below his heart.

They drifted like that for a while, in the grey and stormy light of dawn, until Alex spoke. "I really am sorry. I don't-- I don't know what's wrong with me sometimes, it's just like -- like I'm going to shake apart. If I stop. Like everything that's ever happened to me is waiting behind me and if I trip and fall it's all over."

"I know," John said softly. "And I -- I shouldn't have talked to you like I did tonight. At the fundraiser. I wasn't in the best space, but -- you're right. I don't know what it's like. I can't know what it's like. And I try to remind myself of that, but I fuck up a lot. I know I do."

"We're not great at this, are we?"

Alex feels rather than hears the puff of laughter from John's chest. "No. But we do alright."

Alex let himself drift away after that, floating on the soft patter of the rain against the windowpane and the solid, steady beat of John's heart.

### Chapter Summary

Breakfast is eaten, feelings are felt, and a wild Hercules appears.

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Alex woke up to a wet tongue in his nose and the sound of laughter.

He cracked his eyes open resentfully “Little help here maybe?”

John shook his head. “He’s missed you, man. We left before he woke up on Thursday morning.”

Alec glared resentfully at the other man, who had braced himself against the doorframe in his laughter. Then, without warning, he quickly rolled over, forcing the dog to run to the other side of the bed or be squished, before sitting up.

Having successfully defended his face from the dog Alex frowned at him. “We literally spent all last night together, you stupid mutt.”

John’s laughter died down. “I’m not sure ‘you having a breakdown’ counts as quality time with your pet, Alex.”

Alex scratched Marco aimlessly behind the ears, laughing as the dog flopped down on the warm patch previously held by Alex’s head. Standing, he stretched, hissing in satisfaction as his back cracked. “I wasn’t having a breakdown.”

John opened his mouth as if to speak, closed it, and then opened it again. “Yeah, uh -- nope, we are not having this conversation right now, we are going to act like *adults* and have breakfast first.”

Alex paused from his hunt for clean socks to raise his eyebrows at John. “If you’re implying that you are the responsible adult in this relationship I have some sad, sad news, man. I’ve been taking care of myself since I was 13, and I’m *pretty* sure you didn’t know how to do laundry before you went to college.”

John blushed with his whole body, and it was with genuine glee that Alex watched the red rapidly flush from his cheeks and through his neck and chest.

“Oh my god, you didn’t!” Alex said gleefully. “This is the greatest day of my life.”



“You are a strange and sad man,” John said with great dignity. “However, I love you or something, and therefore I am going to make us breakfast. You should come start the coffee, I’ll fuck it up.”

Alex grunted, gave up on finding a shirt as a bad job, and followed him through into the main room of the apartment.

In the bright daylight of mid-morning, it looked particularly bad. He cautiously picked up a mug from the windowsill and promptly put it down when he saw the mold on the surface.

The coffeemaker was clean, at least, and Alexander busied himself measuring and pouring while John opened and closed the cupboards in quick succession.

“Well,” he said, voice false-bright, “It looks like our options are porridge or porridge.”

Alex made a face. “Is there still takeout in the fridge? I feel like you didn’t finish your dinner on ... Tuesday? I think?”

John opened the fridge and coughed. “I don’t think it’s wise to eat anything from this fridge, to be honest.”

Alex rolled his eyes. “Don’t be such a princess -- oh, no, you’re right, that does smell pretty bad. I think it’s mostly salvageable.”

John frowned. “Maybe? Anyway, the takeout chow mein is here, but it is suspiciously slimy. I can’t promise it wouldn’t kill you.” He sighed. “I’m sorry, man. I wanted to do a nice thing for you, you know?”

Alex blinked at him incredulously. “Jack. I was an *asshole* yesterday, you don’t have to --”

--I wanted to,” Jack said patiently. “I like taking care of people. It makes me feel useful. Sorry.”

“Stop apologising,” Alex said absently. “Why don’t you go pick up some bagels or something, and I’ll see if I can contain this.”

John looked torn. “I don’t really want to leave you alone.”

Alex did his best to breathe through the annoyance that caused. It was kindly meant, no matter how much it made him want to flinch away and hiss. “I’m not suicidal, Jack,” he said as patiently as he could. “We can switch jobs if you want, but I figured you’d rather not get up close and personal with the mold spores.”

If he *was* suicidal, he wouldn’t do it in the apartment. He’d been on the wrong side of that clean-up job.

Somehow, he didn’t think saying that would alleviate Jack’s worry.

After a long moment, John nodded. “I’ll go to that bakery you like and get something. I shouldn’t be long.”

“Jack, please go and buy us breakfast before one or both of us fades away.”

“You are the worst,” John muttered, as he grabbed his keys and hoodie from the back of the door.

Alone in the apartment, Alex let himself breathe. It was strange, being alone in the quiet. The sky was that kind of deep blue you only got on a sunny day after a storm, and for a moment he let himself look out the window and release some of the tension he hadn’t really realised he’d been holding.

He didn’t really want to eat breakfast, to be honest. He never had much appetite after an -- *episode* -- and he wasn’t particularly looking forward to breaking the calm silence of morning. On the other side of that silence lay conversations he didn’t really want to have. He grabbed a garbage bag and opened the fridge. It wasn’t really as bad as John had made out -- there was some cheese that could definitely be salvaged, a handful of wilted spinach that wasn’t too slimy, and half a lemon.

The takeout containers went into the garbage, and he stopped and surveyed the kitchen area. A very happy colony of fruit flies had set up camp in the back corner, and when Alex went to investigate he saw two blackened plantains, one of which had little white maggots wriggling in its flesh.

Alex caught a whiff of the sickly-sweet scent and gagged, running to the bathroom to brace himself over the toilet. Thankfully, the nausea passed, and after a moment of breathing heavily he splashed some water on his face and went back into the kitchen.

They were probably salvageable as long as he cut -- no, nope, he wasn’t doing that. He was doing rather well for himself, and ‘not eating things maggots have touched’ was just one of the many fringe benefits associated with that. He caught a whiff of the smell again and blinked, the scene momentarily overlaid with the feeling of warm hands guiding his as they peeled the black flesh off the boiled fruit and mashed them up carefully.

Blinking, Alex bit his lip and looked at the fruit for longer than he should have, before scooping them into the trash.

By the time John got back, Alex had finished wiping down the counters and was sitting on the couch, laptop balanced precariously on his knees.

He glanced up when John threw himself down on the couch next to him, causing a small dust cloud that left both men coughing.

They glanced at each other.

“That’s gross,” John said.

“I’ll bang the slipcover against the fire escape later,” Alex said absently, frowning at his screen. The poll numbers were -- fine -- they were still within the margin of error, but not great. Not what he’d like them to be. Not--

“Hey!” he shouted as John closed the lid on his computer. “I was looking at that!”

“You are literally on a mandatory vacation,” John reminded him. “Also I got cuernos, eat with me.”

“Fine,” Alex said, scrunching up his nose. “I wasn’t raised to look a gift bread in the mouth.”

“That is 100% not the expression,” John said as he bit into his bread.

“I know,” Alex said.

They ate in silence, sunlight streaming in through the windows.

“I’m surprised Marco hasn’t asked to go out,” Alex said.

“I took him this morning,” John said. “I was up before you.”

Alex raised an eyebrow. It was 9:30, and they’d been up for at least an hour. Jack didn’t get out of bed before 8:00 unless something was on fire or Alex made him.

“Did you sleep at all?” He asked for a moment, careful not to look at the other man.

“Yeah? I’m not you,” John said.

Alex rolled his eyes. “Did you sleep for longer than, say, an hour? We couldn’t have gone to bed before 4.”

Silence.

“*John.*”

“I was worried about you.”

“Well, now I’m worried about you!”

John snorted and got up to get refill his coffee. “I was looking online to see if there was a way we could get you your pills.”

Alex felt like a bucket of ice water was poured over him. “Man, that’s not necessary. Don’t lose sleep over that.”

“No, you’re right, I should forget about it until the next time you vanish into the middle of a storm, that’s the plan that makes sense here.”

“It’s not your job to take care of me!”

“No! It isn’t my *job*, you complete asshole, it’s something I do because I care about you. You do the same for me!”

“That’s different,” Alex said mullishly.

"It isn't, and you know it." John came back and sat down. "Look, I don't want to fight with you.

It's exhausting and it never goes anywhere. I just -- I want you to be ok."

Alex swallowed. "I don't want to have this conversation."

"Life's hard."

"No shit," Alex drained his coffee. "I didn't -- that wasn't because I haven't had my pills."

"Right, that was a completely normal and healthy reaction to stress, I see."

He put down his mug with more force than was probably necessary, and turned to face the other man. "I didn't say that."

He swallowed, trying to think of the right words. It wasn't usually so hard. "I hate fundraising."

John raised an eyebrow. "Ok?"

Alex scowled. Was that not enough? "It feels like begging."  
"Ok?"

Alex exhaled through his teeth. "You're not getting it. I've done enough begging in my life. I won't have anyone look at me like that again."

John looked at him, a frown creasing his brow. "Like what?"

"Like I'm a charity case, or -- even after I came to the states the church used to use me in all their fundraising pamphlets, you know? Picture of me next to all my achievements with the heavy implication that without them I'd be rotting in a ditch somewhere." Alex spat. "I fucking wouldn't be. It just would have taken me longer, that's all."

John raised his hands calmly. "Ok, it's ok, Alex. Nobody is saying that."  
"Not to my face, maybe," Alex said, already feeling stupid for the outburst.

Jack was quiet for a long time. "Can you do me a favour?"

"Probably," Alex said arranging his body so that his head was on John's chest, his legs draped over the armrest of the sofa.

"Oh, hello there," Jack said amusedly. "Anyway. Could you maybe just -- walk me through what you were thinking last night? When you left, I mean?"

Alex exhaled sharply. "I wasn't really thinking anything. I was just -- I had to leave, I couldn't -- it wasn't safe."

"What wasn't safe?" John had his doctor voice on, neutral and compassionate, and Alex felt another spark of annoyance.

“I don’t know. It made sense at the time. Look, I was just tired, it had been a long day, I hadn’t actually slept since Tuesday--”

“--*What?*”

Fuck.

“It’s not a big deal, it happens sometimes --”

“--Do you not remember that time when you were in first year? This is literally why you are on medication, Alex.”

Alex scowled at the ceiling. “I know, but I can’t actually just magic some up out of thin air. Well, I probably could, but I think that would be a really shitty idea.”

“I could ask my mom--”

“--Nope.” Alex said flatly. “End of discussion. You can ask your mom to pay for whatever of your stuff you want, but you are not calling her and asking her if she’ll pay so that your boyfriend is *less crazy*. Besides, you have your own -- situation.” Alex waved a hand airily in the air as though to encompass all of the potential meaning of the word.

“It would help my ‘situation’, as you so delicately put it, if I thought I was doing ok taking care of you. I just -- I need to do a good thing for once, ok?”

There was quiet.

“Look,” John said for a moment. “What if I asked my mom for a loan. I won’t say what it’s for, she won’t ask what it’s for, and we can re-pay her later. And one day you and I will be independently wealthy and we will *both* get a lot of therapy, ok?”

Alex was quiet.

“Alex,” John squeezed his shoulder. “I need you to say something.”

Alex swallowed. “Yeah. I guess you can do that.”

“Ok.”

They sat like that for a while, John drawing meaningless shapes on Alex’s ribs with his hand, until Alex heard the telltale vibration of his phone from where John must have plugged it in beside their bed.

He pushed himself up off of John, who let out an indignant squawk. “Watch where you put your elbows!”

Alex rolled his eyes and went to pick up his phone.

He had 14 new voicemails, 22 missed calls, and 57 unread text messages.

Fuck.

He picked it up and brought it back out with him.

“I can’t deal with all of these right now,” he said. “Can you just -- can you look and tell me what the most recent one says?”

John tilted his head consideringly. “I guess. You should go through them later, though.”

Alex nodded quickly. “I will, I will, I just -- I can’t now, ok?”

John stuck out his hand for the phone, and glanced at the screen. “Hercules wants to know if he can stop by.”

Alex winced. “Does he know about the whole --” he waved his hand in the air “--thing?”

John looked at him flatly. “Yeah, I called him.”

“Cool.” Alex said. “Right. I better say yes then, right?”

“That’s up to you,” John said.

Alex rolled his eyes. That was exactly what people said when it wasn’t up to you at all.

“Text him back and tell him sure, I’ll be around all day.”

John raised an eyebrow, but did as he was asked.

At 2:00 in the afternoon Alex was lying in a sunbeam on the ground by the couch, scribbling ideas in a notebook.

He had just written “*District 3: GH home turf, wealthy & white ... garbage strike? transit strike? GH votes prolonged both ... pics/video of rats??*” when the buzzer sounded.

“I’ll let him in, you put a shirt on,” John said from the couch, pausing Netflix.

“You’re so strict,” Alex said with a mock groan, but went and did so anyway.

Hercules smiled when he saw him, held his arms open wide for a hug. Alex gave a theatrical sigh, but leaned in.

“You scared me, kid,” Hercules muttered into his ear.

“I’m sorry,” Alex said helplessly.

“Nope. Don’t be sorry.” He released him, and bent down to scratch Marco behind his ears. “Your dog’s getting fat, kid.”

Alex rolled his eyes. “Don’t fat-shame my dog. D’you want coffee?”

Hercules nodded, and Alex fiddled with the machine, grateful for something to do with his hands.

“So how’s the campaign going?” He asked idly, now scratching Marco’s belly. “That was some shitty business this week.”

“Yeah,” Alex said quietly. “I fucked that one up.”

Hercules frowned. “You know, Alex, of the people who could be said to have fucked up in that whole scene, I’m pretty sure ‘scrawny Caribbean speechwriter’ isn’t on the list.” Alex glared at him. “I’m the Director of Communications, not a speechwriter.”

Hercules raised his eyebrows.

Alex glowered. “It’s an important distinction, ok?”

Hercules shrugged. “Ok, I believe you, it’s your job. My point is, there is nothing you could have done to make that scenario better. Any of you.”

Alex threw himself down into the other kitchen chair. “We were so sure we had a good strategy, though. I must have worded it wrong, or we didn’t send it to the right papers -- we dropped in the polls!”

“Alex,” Hercules said seriously. “If there’s a politician who can profit from the murder of an unarmed citizen, I don’t want to meet them. I bet they’re an asshole.”

Alex snorted.

“Anyway, you went down in the polls because you addressed it, not because what you said was wrong. I know you, man -- you wouldn’t have felt right not addressing it at all. If you lose political points for suggesting that maybe the police shouldn’t shoot an unarmed civilian 12 times, I’mma go out and say that you didn’t want those people’s vote anyway.”

Alex was silent, unwilling to concede the point.

“Anyway, aside from the week from hell, you guys look like you’re doing pretty good. Washington’s old enough money that half the guys who come through my shop say they’re voting for him, anyway.”

Alex nodded, but he was suddenly tired of waiting for the shoe to drop. “Say your piece, Herc. I know that’s why you’re really here.”

“Nope,” he said earnestly, looking him in the eye. “I came to see the closest thing I have to a little brother and remind him that he’s not alone, and that his nieces miss him. And to ask him if he wanted to come pick them up from swimming with me. I promised them ice cream.”

Oh.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to assume--”

Hercules waved his hand, cutting off Alex mid-sentence. “It’s all good, Alex. You’re a grown man, you get to live your own life. Hell, I figure you’ve been a grown man for a lot longer

than me, in the span of things. I just missed you, kid.”

Alex blinked. He was never quite sure what to do in the face of Mulligan’s unbridled and clear affection.

“Now, are you coming to take your nieces out for ice cream, or should I let you stay here and sulk? It’s up to you, but Melissa will make a really sad face if you don’t come and I’ll send you a picture of it.”

Alex smiled. “Let’s go.”

## Chapter End Notes

This may be the most self-indulgent thing I've ever written, I hope you enjoyed 3k of breakfast being eaten.

Also, a note -- Alex is doodling ideas about possible attack ads, and he's 100% right. I don't know why, but literally the only municipal issue that gets a lot of play in wealthy neighbourhoods is garbage pickup. Why? Why are the rich obsessed with trash collection? I can't tell you, but somebody should do an anthropological study. The rich actually seem to care more about garbage pickup than they do about property taxes, and prior to working in politics I would have said that property taxes was the thing rich voters cared the most about.



### Chapter Summary

Can we get back to politics? (Please.)

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Alex walked into the office at 8:00 sharp, having been expressly forbidden from arriving any earlier.

He flipped the lights in the front office on and turned the sign on the door to “Open” before continuing on his way to his desk in the back.

Lafayette was sitting at it, eating a sandwich and drinking from a paper coffee cup. “Don’t you have your own desk?”

Lafayette shrugged wordlessly.

Alex rolled his eyes and went to put a fresh pot of coffee on, wincing at the slightly moldy grounds that had been left in the filter over the weekend. Honestly, he turned his back for a second and the place fell into anarchy.

When he returned, Lafayette had moved to his own desk, leaving sandwich crumbs on Alex’s.

“Gross,” he muttered as he wiped them off. “I don’t like not being the first person in the office.”

“This must be hard for you,” Lafayette said dryly. “But I do not like my staffers having breakdowns, and I am your boss, yes?”

Alex felt the tension headache that had dissipated over the weekend return with a vengeance. “I don’t know what John told you, but--”

Lafayette cut him off. “--It doesn’t matter what he told me. Unless you have a particular desire, we don’t need to talk about this. I was merely alluding to the fact that we have less than two weeks until the election, and thus need everyone in as good a shape as is possible.” He paused. “George and I got massages on the weekend.”

Alex blinked. “That is an unsettling image.”

Lafayette shrugged fluidly. “Be that as it may, you should come sit down. We need to strategize. There is enough in our communication budget to cover a general media buy

alongside a pre-recorded voice message, *or* a targeted media buy alone. I have already consulted with Angelica on this, but I would like your thoughts.”

Alex frowned. “Don’t I technically outrank her on this?”

Lafayette raised his eyebrow pointedly.

“Sorry, sorry,” Alex got up and filled his travel mug, sipping it thoughtfully. “The benefit to a robo-call is we can gauge support and build capacity at the same time, but I think we’re too late in the campaign to be focusing on building capacity. We’re also at the point where an ad that’s just “Hi I’m a war hero, I like kittens and children” isn’t helpful anymore. We’ve sucked that well dry.”

Lafayette nodded. “This is what we discussed, but there are targeted ads running currently. We did a huge internet buy at the beginning of the month, and the results are very effective.” “We do a targeted negative ad buy,” Alex said after a moment. “Nobody’s mind is changed by policy a week and a half out from the election. We don’t need to buy name recognition. We do a targeted negative buy in some of our level 3 and 4 polls, and see what we get. The base is as shored up as it’s ever going to get.”

He wandered over to the large map some poor volunteer had meticulously highlighted and colour-coded, Tapping the orange and yellow areas, he said “So we’re polling between 35 and 45% here, and they correspond almost exactly to where Hanover’s been doing most of his work.”

Lafayette nodded his approval. “He has not put much work into maintaining his base,” he muttered disapprovingly.

“He doesn’t have to,” Alex muttered. “The Republicans don’t eat their young the way we do.”

Lafayette gave a short, sharp snort. “You saw that Governor Clinton is refusing to endorse us?”

Alex rolled his eyes. “I know. It’s like -- sorry that you backed the wrong horse in the primary but are you really prepared to throw this city to *George fucking Hanover* because your buddy was corrupt enough that voters could smell it?”

He sipped his coffee. “Anyway, those polls are mostly mid-to-upper income, university educated, swing voters. That could be fertile ground for us, too, if we play our cards right. Remind them that even though Hanover looks and sounds like them, he’s still the Republican who fucked up the services commission so hard that nobody got any garbage pickup for a month.”

Lafayette nodded his approval. “Do you think we should target the red polls at all?” “It’s throwing money into the wind,” Alex said. “I’d rather do a GOTV push in the green and blue polls. Make sure our base actually votes, and give them the tools to know if they’re being obstructed.”

“I don’t know if we can do the latter in an ad,” Lafayette said after a moment, “But the former sounds good.”

“We do a postal walk in the yellow and orange polls with targeted leafleting, then we push the same message with a media buy on tv and the internet. The internet we can geographically target, TV will have to be a bit broader but can still hammer the same message. Then we target the green and blue polls with multilingual GOTV lit and a radio buy.” Alex looked at Lafayette. “Can we afford that?”

“It would have to be our final communications push until election day,” Lafayette said after tapping at his tablet for a moment. “We can do it, but it would put extra pressure on our foot and phone canvassers.”

“To bad for them,” Alex said. “We need this.” He began to pace, chewing on his left fingernail.

“We buy as much as we can and still have some left for E-2 and E-1 targeting. We run hard with this for a week, on E-3 we send the pollcats out to do new polling, and then we reformulate based on that.”

He stopped in his tracks and looked at Lafayette. “That’s my recommendation.”

Lafayette grinned, his eyes bright. “Welcome back, my friend.”

By mid-afternoon it felt like he had never left, and he smiled to himself as he listened to Angelica harangue a reporter over the phone for a blog post that, in her words “May not have crossed the line into racism, but it sure as hell ran up and took a good long look at it.”

The door jingled, and the General walked in, followed by a slightly red-faced volunteer holding a stack of lit and a clipboard.

“Are you alright?” Peggy asked as she grabbed the clipboard and began flipping through the marks.

“Yes...” the kid wheezed. “Mr Washington ... walks very quickly.” Alex laughed, and Peggy gave him a *look*.

“Alex,” she said sweetly. “Our 3 o’clock canvasser’s babysitter cancelled at the last minute, why don’t you step in for her?”

“Um, because I have a real job?”

Peggy glared and Angelica put her hand over the mouthpiece of her phone. “I’ll call your cell if we hear back from that producer. Get out of here.”

She phrased it like a friendly suggestion, but Alex knew an order when he heard one.

The two of them set off almost immediately, the day warm enough that they cracked the windows as they drove to Long Island.

The radio was quietly blaring classical music, and Alex consciously tried to relax his tight shoulders. It was fine. Nobody else had said anything about it, so maybe the General wouldn't either.

He blinked as they drove past several townhouses with carved pumpkins on their front steps.

"Halloween's coming up," he said, slightly stunned.

"Mmm?" The General said. "Oh, yes -- it's this Friday, isn't it?"

"Wow." Alex said after a moment. "That's -- time flies, doesn't it sir?"

The General laughed. "You're too young to know how true that is, Alexander. I feel like I could sleep for a week."

Alex smiled. "I think that's true for all of us, sir."

Washington was quiet for a long moment, "I was very concerned about you when Mr Laurens texted Martha and I. We both were."

Alex gulped. Shit. "You shouldn't have been. I'm sorry, John shouldn't have bothered you."

"That is *not* my point," Washington said. "My point is that you are someone I depend upon, but I would also hope that you would consider me a friend."

Alex shifted in his seat uneasily. Friend was a strange word, and not necessarily one that encapsulated all of his feelings and opinions on the matter. "Yes, sir."

"I meant what I said to the press," Washington said in an apparent non sequitur.

"Sir?"

"If you were my blood relation I would be proud to say so." he said simply, merging off of the highway.

There wasn't much Alex could say to that.

"That said, I understand why you might not want such rumors associated with you." He smiled slightly. "I am not unfamiliar with the desire to make something of oneself, Alexander."

"I'm surprised you said anything at all, sir," Alex said after a moment. "We had to address it, but *you* didn't need to speak on it personally. Political campaigns are wars of attrition. It would have stuck to my name, but the campaign has enough money and you have enough personal clout that you could have ridden out the storm."

Washington inclined his head. "True. And if I had thought that what was being said was something that you or your reputation could bear, perhaps I would have let it stand. But I am loyal to my friends, Alex. I try not to allow them to be needlessly hurt."

Alex swallowed as an irrational wave of anger washed over him. "Sir."

Washington laughed slightly. "If it makes you feel better, I did it for selfish reasons. I can't function at my best without you at my back. I would have hated for you to quit the campaign at such an early date."

"Sir." Alex acknowledged.

There was quiet for a long moment, and then "Alex, if I win--"

"--*When* you win--" Alex corrected sharply.

"*If* I win, I would like you to consider working in my office. I'll need an assistant, after all."

Alex blinked. "Sir, I--"

"-- Take some time to think about it," The General said quietly. "It's all hypothetical for now, at any rate. Anything can happen in the next twelve days."

It was strange taking the train home alone. He had gotten used to collapsing wearily against John, resting his head on his shoulder as the train made its ascent. Instead, he let his head rest against the wall of the train car as he closed his eyes. They were so close, so close, and this is when it could all fall apart. Whatever they said now, whatever happened now, is what would actually stick in the voters' heads when they got to the polling station. Once more unto the breach, and all that.

He chewed on the inside of his lip, trying to soothe himself. He had been preparing for the conversation with the General ever since John said that he had contacted him on That Night. He had been prepared, and yet it was still fundamentally disquieting, and Alex couldn't parse the way his words had made him flush with pride and yet instinctively want to lash out. He didn't *want* the affection the Washingtons seemed to throw at him as though it were nothing. He wanted to be relied upon because of the quality of his work, not for any messy personal affections. People are fickle, affections rising and falling like the tides, but the quality of his work was a constant.

He had -- lately it seemed as though the careful walls he had constructed between Now and Then had been breached, and it wasn't something he was particularly pleased about. He couldn't win an election campaign under siege.

When he was 10 and the money could only be found for one school uniform, Jamie had agreed with his mother that Alex was the one who should stay on. When they had been left wide eyed and shaken in the wake of the hurricane, it had been agreed that Alex should go to the States. Their church had partnered with an American one, and it was decided that Alex

would benefit the most from sponsorship, the only single man they included in the package of profiles.

The Priest had included one of his poems without telling him, and when it was established that the Americans couldn't sponsor as many as they had hoped, had insisted that Alex be among them.

It -- all along the way, people had died so he could be where he was. People had looked at Alex and thought that his work was worth other people's sacrifice. If he wasn't valued for his work, then those sacrifices were meaningless.

He was still deep in thought when he reached the apartment, and was momentarily surprised to find the lights on.

He glanced at his watch. 11:30. John was home, then.

His suspicion was confirmed when he entered the apartment and saw John and Marco both lounging on the couch, John frowning at his computer screen.

"Well hello there," Alex said. "How long have you been home?"

"Hmm?" John looked up from his computer screen. "Oh, hey yourself. I think I got off at 9ish, so -- maybe an hour and a half? I was just about to order chinese food."

Alex nodded. "Can you get enough for me? I'm going for a run."

John sat up straight, to the vocal displeasure of Marco. "I see."

Alex hastened to correct his impression. "No no no, a normal run, not an -- I'll be back in forty minutes tops, not anything else. The weather's clear and I've been canvassing all evening, I need to shake off some of this excess energy before I do anything else."

John eyed him suspiciously before nodding. "Take Marco with you. I was so tired when I got in I just took him around the block, he could use a run."

"I would never go anywhere without my 20 pound guard dog," Alex said seriously.

He leaned down to scratch Marco behind the ears, and found himself pulled into a kiss. The warmth of skin-on-skin seemed to settle his nerves like a cool glass of water.

He pulled back slightly, and smiled at the expression in John's wide green eyes. "We good?"

John smiled back. "We good."

## Chapter End Notes

Pollcats are paid canvassers usually paid for by the central party. They do both foot and phone canvassing and are the usual providers of internal poll numbers.

Every polling station is responsible for a group of polls. The ultimate goal is to ensure that each polling station is responsible for roughly the same amount of people. Polls themselves are sub-divisions of the community that are based almost purely on population. A poll is usually equivalent to about 500 people, meaning that it can either be several blocks in the suburbs or one apartment building in the city. Nursing homes and group homes are often also their own poll for logistical regions.

When you send out canvassers, they collect results according to poll. The full election results that every party and candidate receives from the previous election is also broken down by poll. Using those together, you can colour-code a map in such a way that you can see where your support is -- not just what districts or wards, but what neighborhoods, what blocks, what buildings. If you have an excess of time and volunteers for some reason (this is not a problem I have ever had) you can also break down those same maps by demographic, ethnic makeup, etc. That information is all gathered from the census which makes it very annoying if, say, your government decides to scrap the longform census because they just hate science *that much*.

Also they totally contrived that situation to send Alex out with GWash. (A) Alex has a real job for which he is being payed and (B) youu don't send experienced canvassers out with the candidate. If you're doing a full-on canvass blitz and everyone is out foot canvassing but the office manager, you still wouldn't send an experienced canvasser with the candidate. The candidate makes up for a lot of sins, so you send the least experienced / least charismatic canvassers out with them in order to compensate. If you have experience and charisma, you can and should be canvassing on your own.

## Chapter Summary

We're in the home stretch now, folks.

“Alex, they’re still coming in.”

Alex sighed and stood up to peer over Eliza’s shoulder. Their ad buy had gone up that morning, and the base wasn’t happy.

That is to say, the base as a whole didn’t give a damn, but the most vocal section of the base was currently engaged in some noble hand-wringing all over the campaign facebook and twitter accounts.

“What do these people want from us?” Eliza asked bitterly. “If you want ideological purity vote Green, but be aware that you won’t actually change anything.”

Alex snorted. “You’ve been spending too much time around me, ‘Liza.”

“I’ve been spending too much time on this damn campaign is what I’ve been doing,” she replied. “Seriously, what do I say to these people?”

Alex shrugged. “Nothing. As much as I would like to reply to each and every one of them and ask them if they would like to win the election or not. Welcome to the present, we’re running a real campaign. Sorry that you’re locked in some weird idealised version of organising in the ‘60s.”

Eliza snorted. “Right? It’s as though they didn’t pay any attention at all in school. I’m pretty sure that our campaign didn’t invent Marshall McLuhan and modern campaign strategy.”

Alex laughed. “While we’re talking about things we definitely can’t respond with, every time I talk to some grandfather about how things were better in the old days, I want to say ‘Didn’t people get kneecapped by the teamsters union in the old days? Are you sure you don’t just think it was better because it was whiter?’”

Eliza smirked, and looked down at her screen. “So I’m hiding anything that seems actually offensive or which uses curse words. They’ll still see it, but nobody else will. Everything else I guess I’m just leaving, but there are a two or three positive comments we all need to like to make sure they get to the top of the thread.”

Alex nodded. “Great. Fire off a couple texts to the satellite offices and make sure all their workers like them too.”



He turned back to his computer, frowning as he sorted through emails and press requests. It was too close to the election to fuck this up. He couldn't fuck this up.

He felt himself starting to sieze up, and he very carefully relaxed his shoulders. This was important, and he couldn't win if he had another -- episode.

Alex sipped tea from his thermos and breathed slowly before he returned to the emails. If he was lucky they could get enough press attention from releasing their housing platform that they wouldn't have to spend money on a general media buy.

The housing platform would be released that day in front of NYCHA housing in the Bronx, and if they played it right it would be on the front page of Gothamist and New York magazine's sites for at least 24 hours. It wasn't a particularly radical platform, but the language in the press release could be sufficiently strong in order to shock news editors into giving it high priority in the running order. They wouldn't lie exactly, and the actual text of the platform demonstrated how it would be fully costed -- meaning that when the campaign office was called for the inevitable comment from conservative publications they could refer to the economic soundness of the plan. They'd scheduled a radio interview after the press conference, and the platform itself had been translated into three different languages and sent to the smaller ethnic papers that were usually ignored but were nonetheless read by thousands of people every day.

The General was charming on TV, and so a light-hearted appearance on the Today Show couldn't hurt at all. Putting a candidate on the Daily Show was usually political suicide, but Washington had a certain moral authority that meant he was able to avoid many of the usual traps. He sent a text to Angelica asking her to set something up with them -- she'd gone to Harvard with several of the producers.

In the meantime he worked the phones for their targeted media blitz, approving questions for the *Times* interview later that night, scheduling radio interviews right up until the E -1. The final debate was on E -4, and Alex knew it would be easier to get a spot on news and talk shows in the immediate aftermath.

He was in his element, and the day slid by as he wrote and scheduled and texted and tweeted. By the end of the day the General's media calendar was nearly full, they were just waiting on confirmation of a couple radio interviews.

They could win this. They could really win this. He had to not fuck it up.

His phone buzzed, an alarm reminding him that it was 7 pm and he needed to "eat something you weirdo", as Hercules had programmed into his phone when they were at the park on the weekend. Herc was not above using his toddlers as bribery. Alex could respect that.

He looked around the office. The phone bank was going strong, and according to the chart on the wall they had 5 groups of foot canvassers out throughout Brooklyn. The chart next to it helpfully displayed the canvasser schedules from the satellite offices. They had foot canvassers out all through lower Manhattan as well as in Queens, although they would have to be brought back in soon. It was bad manners to canvass in the dark.

Eliza was still tapping away at her computer, fighting the good fight against people with nothing better to do than rail against realpolitik. Alex tapped her on the shoulder, and she jumped, startled.

“Want to go grab some dinner?” he asked, “You should get out of the office, you’ve been in here all day.”

Eliza’s brow wrinkled. “You are aware of the irony of you saying that, right?”

“Hey, I never claimed that I follow my own advice. Doesn’t mean it’s not good.”

She rolled her eyes fondly. “Alright, let’s go grab some food.”

They ordered takeout burritos, and Alex easily acquiesced when Eliza suggested they take a walk rather than return to the office right away.

It was twilight, and there was just enough bite in the air that they shivered when the wind blew off the East River. It was deceptively peaceful, the regular traffic and pedestrian noises forming a kind of background music to the night.

“So how are you doing, Alex?” Eliza asked as she took a large bite of her burrito.

“Like I’d be a lot better if people stopped asking me that,” Alex said. “I’m fine.”

Eliza rolled her eyes. “You’re right, people caring about you is terrible and cannot be trusted.”

Alex huffed. She was joking, but she had no idea how true that was. Didn’t understand -- maybe *couldn’t* understand -- the house of cards that was in danger of falling at any moment without a safety net to catch it.

“How are *you* doing, ‘Liza?” Alex asked. “It’s been a long campaign.”

Eliza laughed. “It’s been a marathon, if we’re honest. I don’t do anything except come to the office, work, go home, sleep. Repeat until you lose your tiny lizard mind.”

Alex laughed in surprise. “Yeah, that sounds about right. You’re applying to grad school, right?”

She shrugged fluidly. “I was going to apply for spring entry, but at this point I’m so tired that I think I might just take the time off. Volunteer, build my resume a bit. Actually help people, instead of just learning about it in books.”

She glanced up at him, biting her lip nervously. “You’re going into third year, right?”

Alex felt a small kernel of shame form in his chest. The shame mixed with uncertainty, because what if they won? Would he ever go back to school then? Would he just take the job offer, rely on Washington’s generosity to smooth the cracks? It rankled something deep within him.

“Uh-- yeah,” Alex said, realising that Eliza was waiting for an answer. “I was supposed to be, anyway. Taking the term off messed up my programme status, which messed up my internship opportunities, which means I can’t complete my requirements this year -- it’s a bit of a mess, really.”

Eliza nodded slowly. “Do you have a plan for the Winter term, then?”

Alex shrugged, wishing that idle conversation wasn’t filled with traps and tricks. “Working, I guess. I put in my notice at the cafe to work on this campaign, hopefully I can get my job back. If not, there’s always a ton of seasonal retail stuff I can pick up as a stop gap.”

“Sorry, I just realised I was being nosy,” Eliza said.

Alex laughed out loud. “You’re related to Angelica Schuyler, if you weren’t at least a little nosy I’d be worried you were some kind of alien.”

They tossed the wrappers from their burritos into the garbage, and continued to walk aimlessly.

“I’m so tired,” Eliza said. “It’s so much sometimes, you know?”

“I think I’m familiar with the feeling, yes.” Alex said.

Eliza smiled, but it was half-hearted at best. “I just -- do you think it really matters? I spent all day today battling hundreds of people who seem to think it doesn’t matter at all. And I *know* that it’s wrong for them to say that there’s no difference between us and Hanover, because that’s foolishness. But the others -- when they say that it doesn’t really matter, that all politicians are corrupt and it doesn’t make a difference who is in charge or from which party. Sometimes it’s hard not to agree with them.”

“It matters,” Alex said, surprised to find himself struggling for words. “It matters because -- people who say it doesn’t matter, it probably doesn’t matter to, if that makes sense. Their main interaction with the local government is garbage pickup. Maybe they take the metro sometimes. They only notice that anything is going on when there’s some kind of public sector strike.

“They don’t get rent assistance, or SNAP, or WIC, or burial assistance. They don’t have to worry that they won’t have somewhere to live next winter because the government decides that they aren’t disabled anymore. They don’t have to navigate a system that is designed to trap them, in a language they don’t speak. The library offers the ability to sign out wifi routers now, did you know that? People can apply for jobs, they can do school work -- heck, they can watch videos of cats falling down, as is their right as Americans.”

He paused, realising that he had started to raise his voice. People were staring.

“Sorry,” he said, clearing his throat. “It just -- it bothers me when people think that the government doesn’t have a role to play just because they don’t need the services that are being on offer. It’s basic social contract stuff. It’s not hard.”

Eliza was red in the face. “I-- I’m sorry, I didn’t --”

Fuck. “No, Eliza, that wasn’t directed at you, at all. You just happened to be in the vicinity while I yelled at a strawman rich liberal I had created in my imagination. It has nothing to do with you. We all have doubts.”

Eliza swallowed and nodded, reaching out to squeeze Alex on the arm. “You’re very passionate about this, aren’t you?”

Alex shrugged. “I guess.”

“It’s funny,” Eliza said after a minute, as they walked back to the office. “You’re the cynical one, right? But that little speech you just gave was one of the most idealistic things I’ve ever heard.”

Alex flushed and looked at the ground. “I wouldn’t call it idealistic, exactly. More pissed off.”

“No,” Eliza said firmly. “You think that the proper amount of ambition and care on our part can change people’s lives for the better. That’s kind of the definition of idealistic, Alex.”

Alex rolled his eyes as they approached the office door.

Just before they opened it, he said, “I’m not an idealist. I just want people to shut up and pay their fucking taxes.”

### Chapter Summary

The last English-language debate. Gossip from the smokers pit. Drinking.

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

#### E-4

The last English-language debate was on Hanover's home turf, something which was painfully apparent to Alex as he and Angelica skulked near the back of a large ballroom on the Upper East Side.

He checked his watch. 15 minutes until the advertised start time. The pair of them had been banished to the back to keep an eye on how everything was playing to the weeds with strict orders to text Lafayette every couple minutes or whenever anything particularly urgent was happening. He himself would be in the front row where he could signal adjustments to Washington as necessary.

Angelica made a noise of bitten-off frustration as she tapped at her phone. Alex craned his neck to peek at her screen, and quickly smothered a laugh when he saw that she was glaring at particularly taxing level of Candy Crush.

She shot him a look.

"I'm not judging," he said quietly. "I just assumed you were doing something, you know, important."

She stepped on his foot and smiled. "I'm a senator's daughter, Alex. First thing they teach you in deportment is how to look like you're engaged in the room."

"I'm almost certain that's not true," Alex said equally quietly. "Also, Jesus, you took *deportment*?"

"You have no idea," she murmured back. "The other moms were not happy about Senator Schuyler's daughters in the same classes as precious little Tarragon and Chives."

Alex smothered a laugh. "Nobody named their daughters Tarragon and Chives, Angelica, I can tell when you're playing 'trick the immigrant' by now. "

"I'm dead serious," she returned. "I'll pull them up on Facebook right now. The weirdest names in the city are in restricted buildings on 71st and Park."

"Restricted?"

"They might have taken down the actual signs that say "no Blacks, Jews, or Irish" but they definitely haven't updated their actual rental agreements," Angelica said dryly. "Standard Oil execs and members of the DAR, also known as half of Hanover's donor base."

"Aren't you a member of the DAR?" Alex said dryly.

"Only because of the principle of the thing." Angelica said. "Anyway, that's not important. Shouldn't we starting soon?"

Alex checked his watch again. "Yes, but I heard one of the AV guys complaining that Hanover missed his soundcheck. Probably still getting set up if that's the case." He stretched. "I'm gonna go grab a smoke."

Angelica shot him a disapproving glare. "We're about to start. And that stuff will kill you."

"Trust me," Alex said loftily. "I'll be right back."

By the time he slipped back into the ballroom, the opening statements had begun. He touched Angelica on the arm to let her know that he was there, before leaning back against the wall with studied nonchalance.

"You reek," Angelica whispered. "Could you really not wait?"

Alex shrugged. "I could have, but then I would have missed the golden opportunity to chat with some of Hanover's staff."

Angelica raised her eyebrows, but remained facing the stage. "Shouldn't they have been in here, too?"

"His media people are doing the same thing we are," he replied. "Which means that was their last chance to grab a smoke for the next two and a half hours."

Angelica nodded and cocked her head at something in Hanover's opening statement. "He's good," she said begrudgingly. "He might think he's born to rule, but that attitude works in this room."

Alex nodded, chewing on his lower lip. "People like a winner. But do you wanna know what I heard?"

"Of course."

"The campaign is in the hole, like, badly. Their most recent ad buy set them back a couple million, which would explain why his smug-ass face is all over the internet every time I turn on my computer. Hanover remortgaged his house to cover the interest payments on their line of credit. "

"Is that legal?"

Alex shrugged. "I dunno. I'm gonna run it by Burr, it's the kind of thing he'd know. My gut says 'no', but my head says that it will take more than 7 days for the accusations to be investigated by the elections board and that we'd be better off keeping that in our back pocket in case we lose."

Angelica nodded. "I agree."

The moderator read out the first question, one on tax policy that the team had gone over several times during exam prep.

"C'mon, George," Angelica muttered as he began his answer.

"He needs to slow down," Alex said. "I can't believe I'm saying that, but he loses the moral authority as soon as he sounds hyped up in any way."

Angelica nodded, and winced as Hanover interjected something in his high-pitched hyena laugh. "Especially compared with *that*."

Washington parried the attack easily, and Alex sent Lafayette a quick 'S' for 'slow down'. Sitting in the front row, Lafayette smoothed his hair with his right hand. Washington immediately slowed down, his speech falling into the reassuring rhythms that the voters responded to best.

The next question was on veterans affairs, and Alex relaxed slightly. That was their home turf, and it would be hard for it to go wrong for them.

He was wrong.

"Shit, is he attacking his war record? What the hell?" Angelica hissed. "Fuck you, you asshole."

Alex was in shock. "Did Hanover even serve?"

Angelica tapped at her phone. "He was a student during the tail-end of the draft, managed to miss it completely. What the hell, dude? I promise you that a 25 year old Lieutenant wasn't responsible for the first gulf war being a shitshow."

"He needs to respond to that," Alex said. "He can't let that slide."

"He will," Angelica said confidently. "His pride wouldn't let it."

Sure enough, Washington responded with measured dignity with an underlying steel, and Alex relaxed again.

"This will be the death of me, I swear to God." he muttered.

The rest of the moderator's questions were uneventful, and the public began to line up at the microphone to ask questions of the candidates.

"How many did you manage to plant?" Angelica asked conversationally.

"Four. Two on transit, one on seniors issues, one on municipal services. It's that kinda crowd."

Angelica snorted. "It's not really inspiring stuff, is it?"

"You know as well as I do that we can't bring up our immigration or housing policies in this room, we'd be destroyed. If they haven't planted a few questions on those issues I'd be shocked."

"It's what I'd have done," Angelica said in agreement. "We'll see. Eliza's still monitoring twitter, right?"

"Yeah, and the Gawker liveblog. They're really into "Washington basically caused the First Gulf War" as a narrative."

"Fuck Gawker." Angelica muttered. "Honestly."

Alex continued scrolling through his phone, when he felt a squeeze on his bad shoulder and cursed. "Angelica, what the fuck?"

She was pale, her eyes wide. "You missed that, didn't you?"

"Missed what?"

"That voter just got George to admit that we'll be raising property taxes by 4%."

"*Fuck..*"

As soon as the debate was over, they rushed to the General's side. He looked drained, and the concealer he had on couldn't cover up the deep circles under his eyes.

"God damn it." he said quietly. "I shouldn't have done that."

Angelica flinched. It was so rare to hear that General swear, that even the most mild of curses was shocking beyond belief.

"We'll fix it, sir," Alex said calmly. "Don't worry about it."

Washington wrinkled his eyebrows. "Don't worry about it? That could have just torpedoed the entire campaign."

Alex shook his head. "No, it's going to be fine. Don't say anything to the press, we'll get out in front of it somehow. Maybe we should play up the fact that he basically accused you of causing the First Gulf War."

Washington snorted, unbuttoning his collar so an aide could unclip his microphone. "Hanover wouldn't know military strategy if it bit him on the ass. His campaign manager Howe, however... I served with him, you know."



"I know, sir," Alex said quietly. "We're going to fix this. There's still almost a week until E Day. Anything can happen."

Angelica frowned, scrolling through her notes on her iPad. "He really went hard on the illegal immigration angle, didn't he?"

"Of course he did," Alex snorted. "We're on the Upper East Side and his opponent is campaigning on turning New York into a sanctuary city."

"Have we checked out his staff yet?" she asked.

"Hmm? What do you mean?"

"His children's nanny, his cleaning staff, you know -- is all of it above board?"

Alex frowned. "I'll look into it."

A thought occurred to him and his stomach clenched. He looked at the General. "Are yours, sir?"

"Pardon?" Washington asked. "Are all my what?"

"Your staff," he continued doggedly. "Do they all have papers, are they earning minimum wage, et cetera?"

Washington shrugged. "We get them through an agency. I don't have any contact with them directly."

"That's a no, then," Alex muttered under his breath. "For Christ's sake. "

Angelica cursed in frustration. "Didn't they vet that before the nomination?"

"No, because they don't actually care," Alex said. "It's not like undocumented people can *vote*."

He felt a strange twisting in his stomach that he told himself firmly wasn't disappointment. He didn't idolise the General, it wasn't a matter of being let down. He didn't owe him anything. He just wanted to *win*.

"We need to redouble our GOTV efforts," he said. "Or we're sunk. We just lost a lot of the soft conservative vote. We should get Jefferson and Burr out in Williamsburg, shaking the pockets of the rich liberals, see if we can fund another ad buy. I don't know what our capacity is like in the other boroughs, but we need as many 1s and 2s identified as possible in the next two days. Ideally I want taxi chits too, but I'll have to talk to Jefferson about that. Make sure they can actually get to the polls."

"That doesn't help us right now," Angelica said pointedly. "We can't campaign on a tax hike, we've said so since the beginning."

"It was in the platform, if anyone had ever bothered to actually read it," Alex said miserably. "Honestly, if reporters would do their due diligence we could have addressed this two weeks ago and everyone would have forgotten by E-Day."

"I think we need to go harder on the offensive," Angelica said. "I know the base will be livid, but --"

-- I honestly don't care what they think anymore. We'll play nice again once we can afford to. Are you out of friends we can throw bones too?"

"I'm out of bones to throw," Angelica said dryly. "Nobody really wants a hot scoop on how we're changing the building code, you know?"

"Let's plant as much as we can in all the college papers. I'll write it, then we can submit it using a volunteer's student number. That's something, anyway."

Angelica nodded and pressed her lips together. "Do you want to go for a smoke, Alex?"

Alex raised his eyebrows. "You don't smoke, Angelica."

"There's a lot you don't know about me. Come on."

She dragged him bodily out of the hotel until they were in a back alley.

Alex lit a cigarette and offered it to her, and she waved a hand. "Ew, no, I don't smoke."

"Then why are we here?" He took a long drag.

"Because I didn't want to say what I'm about to in front of Washington. Seriously, dude, what the fuck! Who doesn't know if their staff is legal or not? Who outright says, in a room full of Republicans, that we're going to raise property taxes? What the fuck?"

Alex swallowed against a rising tide of defensiveness. "We should have prepped him better."

Angelica shook her head. "No, that's nonsense. We don't have to fall on this sword, Alex."

Alex shrugged and puffed on his cigarette. "I don't know what you want me to say."

"I don't want you to say anything, I want us to fix this."

Alex's phone vibrated in his pocket. Pulling it out, he saw a text from Lafayette at the top ordering the two of them to go straight home without heading to the office first.

It was only 10pm, and Alex rolled his eyes. "Want to come up to our place for dinner? We can strategise."

"You're buying," Angelica said primly.

After dinner, they sat around their rickety wooden table drinking large glasses of cheap wine.

"If we lose, I'm going to be so pissed off," Alex said, his tongue feeling thick. "My entire political career is with Washington."

Angelica snorted and finished her glass. Pouring another, she said "I know what you mean. He promised me position in his coms department if he wins, so I turned down an offer from a redtop."

"You didn't," Alex gasped. "Angelica, what the hell? That's such an amazing opportunity."

"Excuse me for wanting to work for the good guys instead of writing about which celeb od'd at a rave in the east village."

"I don't think people go to raves anymore." John contributed from his place on the couch. He was sober.

"I owe him a lot," Alex said after a moment. His voice was quiet, and he quickly gulped down some more wine. "I don't want to think about where I'd be without him, and I hate that."

Angelica nodded sympathetically. "You'd be fine. Probably."

"Probably?"

"Eh, you might be dead in a ditch somewhere, but as long as you were alive I'm pretty sure that you'd find your way eventually. Might just have to take the long way round."

"Fuck, if this isn't the long way round then I don't want to see what *is*," he said after a moment's thought. "It's not fair."

"We're good at our jobs, Alex," Angelica said seriously. "It's not -- We've worked fucking hard for this."

Alex waved a hand drunkenly. "No, no, no. That's not how it works. You don't -- you don't work for a set period and rest on your laurels, things just happen. You work hard and hopefully things go your way, but you have to keep working or it will go away again. And that's presuming a moral and caring universe, about which I am doubtful."

"You are the most formal drunk I have ever met," Angelica said, her eyes bright.

Alex laughed. "Yeah, I know. When I first got here my accent would get really strong when I drank, so I trained it out of myself. The only difference between drunk and sober Alex is impulse control."

"That's debatable," John said.

"Oh, you shush, nobody asked for your input," Alex said.

John stood up, wincing as his knees cracked. "All right, drunks, I'm putting you both to bed now. Any longer and that one will start to get maudlin, and trust me Ange you don't want to see that. It's not pretty."

Alex scowled, but he let John drag him up out of his chair. "I don't get maudlin."

"Mm," John said skeptically. "Angelica, are you good on the couch? Blankets and an extra pillow are in the closet with the towels outside the bathroom."

"I got it," she waved confidently. "Go sleep, you two. Be good!" She winked exaggeratedly.

"Please don't," John said gravely, as he dragged Alex into the bedroom.

Alex hummed to himself, pleasantly buzzed as he undressed and brushed his teeth. The sharpness of his emotions was blunted by the alcohol.

He collapsed on the bed, eyelids heavy. After a moment, he felt the mattress bounce as John joined him, shoving him until their bodies were arranged around each other.

"I talked to my mom today," John murmured.

Alex felt himself grow wide awake, and he determinedly kept his eyes closed. "Mmm?"

"She sent me the money. You need to get yourself down to the clinic and get a new script."

"After the election."

"Alex...." John said warningly. "That sounds like a terrible idea."

"After the election." He rolled over so that they were facing each other, and cracked open his eyelids. "I need to be able to work. I don't have time to sleep right now."

John frowned. "I repeat, that sounds like a terrible idea."

"It's my body, John," Alex said stubbornly. "My body, my brain, my life. Tomorrow's E-3, right now hypomania is basically a superpower."

John snorted.

"Trust me. Please?" Alex was aware that he sounded pathetic, but he needed this. Needed to know that his boyfriend didn't think he was an overgrown child who needed someone else to tell him what was best for him.

"Always," John said after a moment, and Alex wriggled until he got the message and wrapped him securely in his arms.

"I love you," Alex whispered into his chest.

"You too. Now sleep, or I'll let Marco sleep on your pillow again."

The DAR are the Daughters of the American Revolution and, as the name implies, consist of women who can trace their ancestry in America back to the Revolutionary War. They only started allowing women who trace their ancestry back to Black and Native soldiers into the organisation in like the 1980s, which I think we can all agree is depressingly recently.

(On the opposite side of the Revolutionary War are the United Empire Loyalists, who had similar restrictions on membership until depressingly recently. We have collectively been very bad at recognizing the existence and sacrifices of Black and Native soldiers on both sides of the conflict. If you've got a second and want to be angry, check out how the British completely fucked over native troops who fought on their side by granting land in Canada to UELs and not them despite promising it. It's also really interesting to look at Laurens' proposed plan for freeing black slaves who fought for the rebels, because that was one of the few things that the UK did hold up their end of the bargain on and black loyalists became freemen and were granted land in Canada. There are Black people in Ontario who can trace their ancestry to the 1780s which is kinda cool.) A "restricted building" or a "good building" is a dogwhistle for a wealthy co-op which restricts its membership to white gentiles. The history of luxury apartments in NYC is (a) fascinating and (b) hella depressing. If you're at all into that kind of thing, or if you just enjoy feeling schadenfreude about ludicrous rich ppl I recommend *740 Park* by Michael Gross.

A sanctuary city is one that makes active efforts to have municipal services available to all regardless of immigration status, and which usually prevents its police officers from inquiring into the immigration status of arrestees. It will surprise nobody to know that this is not terribly popular amongst most state and federal officials.

Incidentally, NYC is currently a sanctuary city, although there has been substantial evidence that the NYPD do not necessarily comply with this rule.

[Here](#) is a list of sanctuary cities in the US and Canada. If your city is not already on the list, contact your local immigration justice groups to find out about efforts in your area to make it happen. Depending on where you live, it can be changed with a bill in city hall or it may have to go to referendum, in which case you will need to submit a petition. It took activists in my city a long time, but it can be done and it does make a difference.

# E-1

## Chapter Summary

The day before voting day.

Nobody is their best self, and caffeine tablets are very #important.

## Chapter Notes

I figure that I should warn for stimulant use, because it occurs to me that the use and abuse of caffeine pills might be triggering for some people. So that's there.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Alex swallowed a caffeine pill with a swig of cranberry red bull, and winced. It was 6 in the morning on E-1, and he had slept for 4 of the previous 24 hours.

His stomach gave a telltale roil at the combination and his heartbeat got louder. Good. That meant they were working.

They had scrounged up the money to do another ad buy in Brooklyn, and although they had lost a lot of the soft Republican vote following the last debate, they had managed to shore up the rich liberals in Brooklyn.

*(Vectors of gentrification, John called them, and Alex had snorted and asked and exactly what are you, rich boy? and for a moment it had been like everything was normal.)*

Money was literally walking into the Brooklyn office, apparently, and so at least now Alex had something to work with.

He needed to write an acceptance speech, and a concession speech, and the e-mail to supporters pulling the vote, and the new script for phone canvassers the next day, and sort out what was happening with their translated GOTV lit -- he stopped, breathed deeply, made a list. They had this, they just had to stick the landing.

He pushed himself up from his desk, bounced on his toes as he waited for the coffeemaker to warm up. The soft grey of dawn cast an almost peaceful atmosphere on the room, and for a moment he breathed, attempting to dispel the buzzing in his veins.

The moment passed, and he shook his head, leaning into the buzzing. They had this.

The coffeemaker finished, and Alex poured himself a cup before wincing when he realised that someone had finished the cream and had replaced it with liquid nondairy creamer in the

minifridge.

Honestly.

He returned to his desk with his (black, gross) coffee and pulled out his computer.

*Friends*

-- he stopped. Too informal?

~~*Friends*~~ Ladies and gentlemen

-- no. This was an email, not the fucking Oscars.

*Friends,*

*It has been an honour meeting all of you over the past months.*

-- Shit. Was that too fake? To political? Lord knows it had only been an honour to meet *some* of them, and in fact the entire campaign was now aware of some addresses that were never to be canvassed again. Daisy Dukes Grandpa, as Angelica had nicknamed him, was now the stuff of legends.

*Friends,*

*I know that you will agree with me when I say that it has been a long and difficult race. When I had the honour of being selected as your candidate, I couldn't have dreamed about the places this election would take me.*

Very much true, strictly speaking. Alex would forever treasure the memory of Washington's forehead wrinkled in consternation as he attempted to hula hoop with a group of six year olds at the Hindu cultural centre in Bushwick.

*I have heard thousands of stories from you. Stories of hope and of struggle. Stories of great losses and great joys. Your generosity of spirit has moved me greatly. I want to thank you for that.*

Basically meaningless, but a good emotional connection. He could work with that, anyway.

~~*My staff would kill me if I didn't mention*~~ *As you are no doubt aware, today is the big day. I urge you to ensure that you vote. If you are having any issues getting to the polls, or if you need a ride, call my office at the number below. If you feel that you are experiencing harassment or discrimination at the polls, Henry Knox is offering free consultations by phone. His number is linked below.*

*After the polls close, please join us at LiUNA House to share drinks and appetisers with your fellow voters and volunteers.*

*Once again, thank you. This campaign is nothing without you.*

*Best,*

*Insert signature stamp here*

Not his best work, but it would be enough. It would have to be enough.

Even if it sounded like such a politician's letter. It *was* a politician's letter, and it was E-1 and he hadn't slept enough to worry about subtleties of phrase.

Especially since most people wouldn't read it before dragging it to their junk folder, anyway.

The door to the office flew open with a bang, and Peggy stomped in, brushing raindrops off her coat. She scowled at Alex, stalked over to his desk and picked up the bottle of caffeine tablets sitting next to his laptop.

Swiping a hand through her damp curls, she knocked two of the bright pink tablets into her palm and then her mouth, chewing them.

Alex made a face, and she glared at him.

"Don't fucking judge me. I have almost a thousand GOTV packages that need to be printed and assembled, our 10 o'clock canvasser broke her arm, and the printer in the uptown office has died a noble death. Unless you're going to offer to go to Kinkos for me, you should stay out of my way."

Alex raised his hands in supplication. "You're right, you're right, I'm sorry. Where are your sisters?"

"Angelica will be with Washington all morning, he's got interviews scheduled right until noon. Eliza went to buy bagels."

Alex nodded. "You've got him canvassing all afternoon, right? We need to shoot something for the youtube channel before he goes, then."

Peggy wrinkled her forehead. "Nobody actually watches the youtube videos, though."

Alex rolled his eyes. "I know, I know, but that's not my fault. Besides they might actually watch this one, it'll drop the morning of the election."

"By which you mean tomorrow."

"By which I mean tomorrow, sweet Christ," he said exhaustedly. He finished his cranberry red bull and crushed the can absently against the desk. "I'm going out for a smoke."

"It's not even 8 am," Peggy said distastefully.

"I used to know a lady who had her first cigarette at 5 in the morning and her last at midnight, both in bed," Alex said. "98, she was. Kept her young."

"And did she die of lung cancer?"

"No," Alex said. "I think she probably drowned. I don't know. She might still be alive, I guess."

Peggy raised an eyebrow at him, but mercifully let it go without comment.

On the back stoop, Alex lit his cigarette and pulled on it anxiously as he tried to shelter himself from the rain using his windbreaker. His stomach hurt, but that was probably the combination of the red bull and caffeine tablets.



He chewed on the end of his cigarette as he smoked it, a gross habit he had mostly left behind in his adolescence, as he tried to corral his mind from following all sixteen of his different thoughts down their respective avenues. Focus. He had to focus.

The tips of his fingers trembled slightly. It was going to be a long day.

They had to win. They could win. He believed it.

Fuck, if they lost -- Alex's entire career in party politics was tied to Washington, if they fucked this one up, what did that say about his judgment? Would anyone want to hire him again?

Fuck.

He finished his cigarette and blew lightly on his fingers to warm them.

When he ducked back inside, he saw that Eliza and Lafayette had arrived, both looking exhausted. Eliza's heavy dark circles stood out against her pale skin, and Lafayette had missed a strip of stubble on his jawline during his morning shave.

"Morning," he said, sliding back into his seat and drumming his hands against his desk. "How are you two doing this morning?"

Lafayette glared at him. "If you have to ask the question, then you are clearly not doing your job, my friend."

Even though he knew the comment was meant as a good-natured jab, Alex felt his stomach clench. "Aren't we cheerful this morning," he said waspishly.

Eliza threw something at him. "Alex, think fast."

He caught it with his good arm, smiling when he saw that it was a bagel wrapped in wax paper. "You are a goddess amongst women," he said seriously.

She flushed slightly, but rolled her eyes. "You say that to all the girls."

"All the girls who bring me food, maybe," Alex said.

"Stop," Lafayette said flatly. "I am not paying either of you to flirt."

"Chill, Laf, I was just thanking her," Alex said hastily. He scowled back at him.

They both settled down after that, the office quiet but for the sound of typing and the clink of mugs against desks.

Around 10:30, Alex found himself blinking away sleep every few seconds, and sighed before pulling out another can of red bull from his stash below the desk, which he used to swallow another dose of caffeine tablets. As he did so, Martha Washington opened the door to the office, made eye contact with Alex as he downed the pills with an energy drink, and slowly backed out again.

Alex flushed and ignored her. “Anyone else for Wake-Ups?” he asked the office in general. Grunts in assent from Jefferson and Eliza, and he tossed the bottle their way before turning back to his laptop, pretending to be deeply occupied when Martha Washington re-entered.

“Alex, did I just see you swallow a caffeine tablet with an energy drink? Didn’t George sign some petition saying he was a heart-healthy candidate, or something?”

“It was the Heart and Stroke Foundation petition,” Thomas said from his computer. “We didn’t let their reps too far into the campaign office.”

Martha shook her head. “I’m just going to leave that there, then. Have you heard from George? He’s supposed to get a haircut at 1:30, and he hasn’t answered my texts confirming it.”

Eliza picked up her phone and tapped at its screen. “Angelica says she will personally escort him to the barber’s,” she said after a moment. “I thought you were teaching today, ma’am?”

She shook her head, displeasure evident on her face. “The party decided that it would look bad if I wasn’t standing by my man on election day, so to speak.”

“They were right,” Alex said briefly, and then shouted when a thrown pen made contact with his forehead. “What was that for?”

Eliza glared at him. “You know what that was for.”

Alex raised his hands in surrender and turned back to his computer.

At 12:00 Alex had to briefly excuse himself so he could hyperventilate in the basement, his heart beating a shattering rhythm in his chest. His hands were shaking, and he leaned his forehead against the bathroom mirror, breathing deeply in the dark. It would be fine. It was just politics.

There was no such thing as just politics. Politics was everything and everything was politics, and Alex’s heart might beat out of his chest and he might curl up on the ground and cry but they had to stick the landing on this one. It was a winnable fucking campaign, which meant that they had to win it.

He used the voice commands on his phone to text John, then splashed water on his face and went back upstairs, stuffing his hands in his pockets to avoid the shaking.

His inbox dinged with the confirmation that they would be embedding a few reporters in the campaign office throughout the afternoon, and Alex groaned. It was necessary, but fucking hell.

Lafayette spent most of the afternoon going out back to make phone calls or muttering to himself in French, before he announced exhaustedly at three “I fixed it, everyone.” Alex looked over his shoulder. “Fixed what?”

“They aren’t running with the story on the Washingtons’ staff.”

Alex scowled, his stomach turning. John had been furious at the news that the Washingtons

had never looked into the backgrounds of the workers the agency had sent over, and Alex had shrugged quietly. “Most people don’t.”

“I know,” John had said snappishly. “But most people should be better.”

It had been impossible to argue with that, because it was true, but this was life and this was politics and you couldn’t let the perfect become the enemy of the good.

He sighed. He was -- they were -- all so tired.

“I’m glad to hear it,” he said after a moment, just as Eliza said “They probably should be.”

There was silence in the office after that, because they were both right in a sense but that didn’t make any of it any easier.

At 6 a reporter came by and took pictures of them pretending to answer calls in the office, and Alex took one real call only for him to have to cut it short and run outside when he remembered he shouldn’t yell at people in front of reporters.

At 7 Alex knocked another 3 caffeine tablets into his mouth and chewed them, wincing at the bitter taste and the chalky pink paste that stuck in the grooves of his teeth.

At 8 their printer broke, and Peggy cried actual real tears.

9:30 found Alex in a 24-hour Kinkos twelve blocks away, shivering and trying not to make eye contact with any of the other patrons, all of whom were the kind of people that you find in a 24 hour kinkos.

Then again, given the involuntary muscle twitches and his disheveled hair, he *also* looked like someone you would find in a 24 hour Kinkos.

At 1:30 in the morning, they were finally done. Speeches were written, emails were written and scheduled to send, their final video had been recorded and edited. E-Day packages had been made up for all of their volunteers, and Lafayette had had a conference call with the office managers of all the satellite campaign offices to confirm that they were similarly prepared.

At 2:00, he stumbled into bed, pressing his body against John’s.

“Alex?” John mumbled, rolling over. “I didn’t think you were coming home.”

Alex let out a shaky breath. “Me neither, but here I am.” He tried to breathe more deeply, to regulate his heartbeat.

Sensing his distress, John pushed himself up on his elbows and frowned at him blearily. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Alex said unconvincingly, then at a glare from John, “I probably had too much caffeine, that’s all.”

John nodded, frowning slightly. "You're exhausted, though. I can tell."

Alex snorted, a half-choked whimper of a sound. "You could say that, I guess."

"C'mere," John said, arranging their bodies until Alex was half on top of him. He drew patterns on Alex's bare chest, absently. "Your heart is beating way too fast."

Alex coughed. "Yeah."

"Are you freaking out?"

"No."

Silence.

"Maybe a bit."

John sighed and pulled him closer. "Everyone's freaking out. At least this time it's not just you."

Alex winced at the unintentional blow, but John was too close to sleep to realise what he had said. "It's really important to me."

"It's important to all of us. You going to be ok if we lose?"

Alex thought for a moment. "No," he said honestly. "Are you?"

"No, but I held out hope that you might have a healthier perspective than I do," John said after a minute, causing Alex to laugh out loud.

"Hey, I'm an optimist," John said, causing Alex to laugh even harder. "I believe the best in people."

"Stop right now, John Laurens," Alex said between snorts. "You're going to make me sick."

John smirked, and began to rub soothing circles into his chest.

"Close your eyes and count your breaths, man," he said.

Alex rolled his eyes. "That doesn't work on me. Besides, if I sleep with all this caffeine in my system I'll have crazy nightmares."

"Better some sleep than no sleep," John said with the ease of someone who didn't know the contrary to be true.

Alex nodded, and humoured him.

In the end, he only managed three hours worth, punctuated by vivid and suffocating dreams, but John had been right - it was better than nothing.

## Chapter End Notes

Wake-Ups are small and pink, contain 100 mg of caffeine, and come in packaging with a red and blue rooster on the front. I, like Alex, have swallowed a small handful with a cranberry redbull because I, like Alex, should not be in charge of my own life and health decisions.

Also, sorry for the delay -- I was off doing Actual Politics because it was our party convention, and I'm also in the middle of exams. Also our party convention was #lit and I slept maybe 6 hours cumulatively during the 4 day period and I am still so hungover tbh.

I figure that I'll go over the actual structure of an election day campaign in the next chapter, I don't think there was anything too confusing in this one and I'm honestly really sleepy. The only thing I will add is that the Martha/Alex conversation in the middle here is a verbatim quote of a conversation I had with the candidate on the first campaign I got paid to work on, at the tender age of 16, when she saw me swallow a caffeine tablet with half a mug of cold coffee. Don't do this, kids. It's bad for you.

# E-Day

## Chapter Summary

The big day arrives.  
Everyone is very tired.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

E-Day

[4:30 AM]

Alex perched on the edge of the kitchen counter, drumming his legs with the palms of his hands. He listened to the sounds of the shower running and tried to breathe, to centre himself. He failed, and after the second attempt ending in a bitten-off catching of breath, he shook himself slightly and poured himself a cup of coffee.

He opened his laptop and pulled up the MailChimp account, double and triple checking the spelling and grammar of the scheduled communication going out at 8:30. It was fine. It was good. There was nothing to be gained by picking at it anymore.

Grabbing a granola bar and stuffing it into the pocket of his hoodie, he attached the leash to Marco's harness and went for a run around the block, his chest straining in the damp cool morning air. It was good. This was where he wanted to be, where he'd worked so hard to be, they were going to win and nobody could take that away from him.

Reporters were going to be embedded in the office all day, and Alex shuddered at the thought of them witnessing a defeat.

It was that simple, then. They couldn't be embarrassed on camera, and so they had to win.

He showered and dressed in his best suit -- his only suit -- before he kissed John firmly, the pair of them holding each other so tightly you would have thought each was afraid the other would fly away.

Wide hazel eyes met his own black ones, and Alex could see his own terror and swirling anger reflected back at him.

"It's going to be ok," he said after a moment.

John snorted, his smile twitching. "You don't actually mean that."

"No, but I'm going to pretend I do," Alex said.

John laughed out loud. "I guess that's fair. I'll see you tonight, right? At the victory party."

He squeezed Alex one more time. “C’mon, man. Let’s go change the world.”

The subway car he found himself in was mercifully, blissfully empty, and Alex did not slump into his seat -- he didn’t want to wrinkle his jacket -- but he allowed himself to rest his head gently against the window and breathe slowly. The worst thing that could happen was that they lost, and that was bad in so many ways but - he stopped. He couldn’t do it, couldn’t convince himself to minimise the importance of the thing he had spent the last months working towards with every ounce of his strength and his sanity.

He walked into the office and grabbed a donut from the table out front that was laden with food for the GOTV volunteers, before he pushed his way into the backroom.

Angelica was sitting at the side of the office, her head in her hands as Eliza rubbed circles into the back of her neck.

“Everything all right?” Alex asked as he dropped his things down at his desk.

Angelica grunted. “What’s your backup plan if we lose, Alex?”

Alex gave a half-strangled laugh. “I don’t know. I’ve been trying not to think about it.”

He had contingency plans, ways out and around and above the problem, that was how his brain worked -- but to voice any of them too early was to jinx his chances completely.

He sat down on the other side of her and leaned against her side. “What will you do if we lose?”

Angelica snorted. “I don’t know. I turned down offers so I could do this job -- I guess I go back to the hiring committee at the Daily News and beg on bended knee for them to reissue their offer.”

Alex nodded and tried not to sigh.

“That’s nonsense,” Eliza said after a moment. “If we lose, then we take a day. Maybe two. Be sad and regroup. Then you get up and keep fighting. The problems we tried to address with this campaign -- they don’t disappear because we took our toys and went home. So we keep fighting.”

She was right, Alex knew she was right, but -- they couldn’t lose. They couldn’t. Alex agreed, but, God almighty, sometimes he was sick of fighting.

The trio sat like that for a minute, contemplating Eliza’s words in a haze of sleep deprivation.

Then Angelica straightened her back, looked at the two of them. “All right,” she said. “Showtime.”

[08:00 AM]

Volunteers were starting to pour in the front door, munching on donuts and bagels and

sipping styrofoam cups of coffee as Peggy stood on a chair in front of them, clipboard in hand.

“Partisan shit stays here if you’re going to a polling station to scrutineer, that includes coloured shirts and scarves, I don’t make the rules.” she said briskly, before she continued,

“You all have the data coordinator’s number on the bottom of your packages, so as soon as they have a final count for one of your polls, call in and report it so we can put it up on the wall. Raise a hand if you’re on transport duty?”

A few hands went up.

“Great, so we’ve got a few people sharing vehicles from the same rental place, if you look in your package you should see our schedule and the number off the person taking the car after you. Thanks so much, guys. We’ve only got so many taxi chits, and we’re reserving 20 back for people who will inevitably call during the day, so if you can make sure that the chit only goes to the voter written on your sheet, that would be amazing.

“Hands up if you’re pulling the vote. Great. You’ve got supporters listed there by voter id number, when you make contact and they confirm that they have voted you can cross them off your list and report back to the office so we don’t keep calling them. Don’t cross off anyone who says they’re planning to vote, circle back in a couple hours to see if they actually did it. Call me if there’s any problems, and don’t forget to drop off your packages before you head to the victory party tonight. Thanks.”

She hopped off the chair, no less imposing for the three feet of height she had lost.

“Showtime, friends.”

[10:00 AM]

Alex sat at his computer, one eye on the muted CNN coverage coming from the TV in the corner, as he tried to compose a concession speech.

It wasn’t in him, really -- for all that the worst case scenario was a distinct possibility, fatalism wasn’t in his constitution. Reckless optimism, perhaps -- which sometimes produced the same results, but wasn’t the same thing.

A scrolling headline caught his interest.

UNIFORMED NYPD OFFICERS PULLING VOTE FOR GEORGE HANOVER

“What the fuck,” Alex said, turning in his seat to stare at the others. “That has to be illegal, right? Voter intimidation or something?”

“I don’t think they can be in uniform,” Eliza said after a moment. “But if they’re off-duty, it’s their democratic right to support a candidate, and the police union endorsed him so it’s not like they’re going to get in any trouble from that end.”

“No but seriously, how is that not voter intimidation. And they definitely can’t be in uniform, that’s not allowed at all.” Alex said.



Angelica made a noise of frustration from the corner. “Gothamist has an update -- they’re not pulling the vote, they’re providing an escort for safety purposes, apparently. Which is well within their legal right.”

“In uniform, though? And with regular canvassers, not even the candidate? It’s blatant harassment.”

“It is,” Burr said slowly from the corner. “But any complaints lodged with the election board will take at least a week to process. I’d suggest we document it and wait and see, they’ll take it into account when they tally up the fines and such after the count.”

“That should be enough to disqualify you,” Alex sulked. “We should just win by default.”

“That is, unfortunately, not how anything works.” Burr said gravely.

[1:00 PM]

The noxious mix of apple fritters and caffeine tablets finally turned against him, and Alex had to dash to the basement to throw up, startling the volunteer in the basement who had a bluetooth headset in and was muttering to himself as he scrawled numbers onto matrixes.

Having thrown up, he leaned his head against the greasy mirror and sighed. God, they were almost there. They could almost make it.

He needed to be upstairs, needed to be leading the charge, not nauseous and shaking in a closet-sized bathroom amongst the spiders. Angelica was handling almost all of the actual interviews, but he had to *write*.

For a moment, his head was blissfully silent, and he took his first full breath in what felt like hours before plunging back into the fray.

[3:00 PM]

His phone had not stopped buzzing all afternoon, and Alex scowled at it as it went off again as he shook a caffeine tablet into his shaking hands.

“Alexander Hamilton,” he said, picking it up and fumbling it slightly.

“Alex?”

Oh, thank Christ.

“John? What’s wrong? Is something wrong? What can I do?”

“No, dude, chill, it’s good news, honestly. Actually, if you could pass this on to Peggy, that would be awesome.”

“If I interrupt Peggy right now she might stab me.”

“I know, that’s why I called you first. We’ve ran out of GOTV packages. We have people pulling the vote in every poll in the borough.”

Alex blinked. “No.”

“I know, right? Most of them weren’t at training, they’re literally coming in off the street to ask if there’s something they can do, it’s madness, this isn’t supposed to happen!”

“Well, shit.” Alex said. “That’s -- fuck, I don’t know what that means.”

“I don’t either, but I wanna say good news? I want to say it, but that feels like we’re pushing our luck.”

Alex barked a short, sharp, laugh. “I have to go babe, you just keep that positive demeanour to yourself ok?”

“Jerk. Love you.”

“You too. Eat some lunch.”

At John’s muffled squawk of indignation, Alex hung up the phone. He stared at it for a moment in confusion.

“Guys? I have good news.”

[5:30 PM] The delegation from the Jewish Labour Committee arrived with pizzas and greek salad, and Alex nearly started to cry.

He alternated bites of pizza with paragraphs of the concession speech, talking points for all of the high-level staff, and frantic emails with party central assuring them they weren’t completely fucking it all up.

The bell of the front door interrupted his thinking, and a glance around the office showed that the only paid staff still there were himself and Burr.

Weird, but he didn’t have time to take a mental roll call of appointments and interviews because a group of college-aged kids were clustered around the front table, whispering to each other.

“We want to help,” said one, who had clearly been selected as their spokesperson. She fidgeted with a ring on her finger when Alex looked at her in confusion. “The General was on campus today and he said that, um, if we wanted to help out we could stop by the office, so.” Alex swallowed once, nodded. “Um, ok, our volunteer coordinator just stepped out, but I think we can send you to a poll -- wait, shit. Burr, does that count as partisan colours?” Alex gestured at the woman’s dark blue hijab. “It shouldn’t, right?”

Burr chewed on his bottom lip for a moment. “It shouldn’t. If they say it does, call us. That’s a lawsuit if I ever heard one.”

The woman grinned in relief. “Ok, where am I going?”

Alex's eyes widened. This was so not his job.

"Um, just a second--" he stood up, grabbed a manilla envelope from their C priority pile.

"Sorry, I didn't get your name?"

"Sukayna."

"Right, Sukayna, thank you so much for wanting to help out. If you could just write your name and phone number on a yellow sticky, that'd be awesome." She did so, and Alex shifted on his feet, trying to remember the spiel. "So, one of you can scrutineer that poll if you'd like, I'll give you an authorization form. The rest can pull the vote, which means knocking on doors and making sure that our supporters have actually voted. That poll is mostly apartment buildings, but we're totally allowed to be there -- I'll give you another form you can show the super, they have to let you in. I usually just follow in behind someone going into the building, though, to be honest. If someone calls the cops on you show them the form and call the office right away."

"Does that happen a lot?" Sukayna asked nervously.

Alex shrugged. "I suspect it happens a lot more to us than it does to Hanover's campaign."

His mouth twitched. "Anyway, Peggy's the volunteer coordinator, her number is on the bottom there, call her if you have any problems."

He hustled them towards the front door. "Grab a water bottle and some pocket warmers, it's gross out there. Take some food, too."

As if to demonstrate, Alex grabbed a slice of pizza and a 5-hour energy from the flat of them sitting on the table.

Having bid the slightly shell-shocked students out the front door, he swallowed the energy shot and sat back down at his computer. They could do this.

His phone buzzed.

[Eliza]

We went out to actually vote while Angelica speaks with the media. The lines are ridiculous.

[Alex]

You mean an NYC election is poorly planned and uses decaying and decrepit infrastructure? Perish the thought.

[Eliza]

I'm actually kind of worried about all these elderly people outside in the rain. Can we send people out with pocket warmers/ponchos and coffee?

[Alex]

Only if they remove all partisan memorabilia.

[Eliza]

That doesn't mean I couldn't subtly mention that they were our volunteers to a few people on twitter, though.

[Alex]

You're my favourite person. Talk to Peggy and do that.

[7:00 PM]

Alex scowled as he answered the same question for the sixth time in a row. "The General will be watching the results come in with his family. He will stop by the victory party at some point before the night is over to speak to the media. No further comments."

He hung up his phone with slightly more than the necessary force, and cracked his neck, wincing. This was either going to be the best night of his life or -- maybe not the worst, but definitely one of them. Loss is so much harder to take once you've tricked yourself into thinking you deserved a victory.

[10:00 PM]

"There's nothing more we can do here, ladies and gentlemen," Lafayette said. "Data will keep getting called in, but all of our vote-pulling is done and you all have phones. Head over to the victory party as soon as possible, yes? If you are a volunteer you are entitled to a beer on my tab."

"Nothing for your starving staff, Lafayette?" Alex asked as he pushed himself up from his desk, wincing.

"We pay you. You can buy your own beer."

As it happened, Alex didn't pay for his own drinks once that night. Between frequent calls up to the bar for 'important staff meetings' which consisted of shots of tequila or rum, and the seemingly endless stream of volunteers who he had never met but who apparently followed him on twitter offering to buy him a drink, he was more than pleasantly buzzed as he wedged himself into a booth next to John to watch the results come in.

They had made it. Fucking Christ, they had made it.

He leaned his head against John's shoulder, and he patted Alex's knee. "We got this, Alex."

"You think?"

John smiled. "No, but to quote you, I'mma just keep saying it and hope it comes true. It's the 'I do believe in fairies' school of politics."

The rest of the night passed in sort of a drunken haze-- he gave an interview at one point, trying not to laugh as Angelica made outrageous faces from just behind the camera guy. Pulled Eliza into a sort of half-joking celebratory dance every time their numbers went up,

found himself at the bar doing lemon drops with a pulitzer-prize winning political journalist, spent the rest of his time pressed up against John drinking beer and eating stuffed mushrooms as he listened to outrageous anecdotes from the other satellite offices.

(Apparently every office had its own version of Daisy Dukes Man. Alex supported everyone's right to express themselves sartorially right up until he was forced to confront an alien scrotum. That only seemed fair.)

He was snuggled into the corner, Eliza and Angelica collapsed on one side of him, pressed against John on the other, when he heard cheers and screams echo through his brain. He sat up slightly, earning himself a smack when he accidentally elbowed Eliza in the stomach while doing so.

The General and Martha both stood in front of the group, smiling. The strain of the campaign seemed to have fled them, the knowledge that whatever else happened, at least it was *done* providing succor against any slings and arrows.

"You kids look like you've been having fun," Martha said after a moment.

Alex tried to focus on her. "We," he said slowly. "Are *incredibly* tired."

She laughed. "I can see that."

A thought filtered down through his mind. "I thought you weren't coming until they called it?"

"They called it," Washington said with a smile. "We won."

"We won?" Alex blinked, then shook John by the shoulder. "Holy shit, we won!"

The group descended into a cacaphony of cheers before Washington held up his hand. "We won, so I'm just about to give my acceptance speech. I'd like you all to come stand behind me."

"If you can stand up," Martha said dryly.

With a minimum of embarrassing staggering, they made their way over to the staging area where the media were already set up.

Alex blinked and tried to smile as a dozen flashbulbs went off in his face, as the General -- as the *mayor* began speaking Alex's words in his own dulcet, reassuring tones. It -- the lights and the sounds and the strange, suspicious happiness all combined in his chest to nearly short him out, and as soon as the speech was done he swayed slightly on his feet.

The General caught him by the upper arm. "I think we're putting you kids in a cab."

Alex raised an eyebrow, affronted. "We just won you an election. We're not 'kids'."

The General nodded seriously, a smile nipping at the corners of his mouth. "You did. I'm very proud of you all. I also now have even more of a vested interest in none of you guys

dying or ending up in jail, so I'm calling a cab."

Alex tried to push away the warmth he felt at the pride in Washington's tone. He would study it at a later date.

Eventually -- and with only a minimum of arguing -- John and Alex were put into a cab, Washington having prepaid the fare against the protests of both men.

It took several minutes before they successfully opened the locks to their apartment, and Marco proceeded to knock them both to the floor in excitement.

"Our system has failed us," John said seriously.

Alex snorted. "So it would seem."

He made it into the washroom to brush his teeth and wash his face. He focused his eyes on himself in the mirror, blown pupils framed by dark purple bags in a too-thin face. He looked like hell, if he was being honest, and he leaned his head against the mirror and tried not to cry.

He wasn't sad, particularly, but it was all a bit much.

He made it to the bed, tears still stinging at the corner of his eyelids.

"You alright?" John asked, pulling him closer.

"We did it," Alex said, trying out the words. "We actually won."

"Yeah," John said.

"That's pretty amazing."

"Yeah."

"Do you think it was worth it?" There is was, there's the million dollar question, the does it or doesn't it matter question that he had been avoiding for the past several months.

John swatted at his stomach. "Self-doubt in the morning. Sleeping now."

Alex snorted in amusement, and then he obeyed.

## Chapter End Notes

Couple more chapters after this to wrap up a few dangling plot lines.

Also:

yes, calling the election night party a 'victory party' seems like the height of hubris. Why do we do this? I don't know, and I for one think it is tempting the gods, but there we go.

GOTV = "Get out the vote", I just realised that I had been using the acronym all the way

through and assuming everyone knew what it meant. So, that.

This, by the way, is an almost verbatim account of my last election day. As you may have noticed throughout this fic, the police union has an alarming influence over politics and is fucking scary.

Writing this section was very stressful.

# E+1 and Coda

## Chapter Summary

Do you have a clue what happens now?

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Alex woke up to a splitting headache and a wet nose pressed against his ear.

“G’way,” he mumbled, pressing his face defensively into his pillow.

Another snort, followed by a wet intrusion into his ear canal succeeded in convincing him that sleep was, for the moment, a lost cause.

He stretched, left arm thwacking against a warm body which grumbled in response, and pushed himself up on his elbows.

Sunlight was streaming in through the window, the sky clear and blue, and Alex shivered slightly.

He shook his head and winced. He could admire the view more once he’d had some Advil.

He staggered into the main room, frowning at the slightly tacky feeling of the linoleum beneath his feet. He would have to clean that, sooner rather than later.

Maybe he could get John to do it.

Letting the tap run for a minute, he frowned. The world -- his world -- had changed. He should feel more about it. Should feel something other than tired and vaguely nauseous.

“We won,” he said quietly, feeling how the words tasted in his mouth. “Jesus Christ, we actually won.”

Marco nudged at his ankle with his nose, and Alex smiled. “Missed us, did you?”

Marco didn’t reply, but then he never had been the most stunning of conversationalists.

He considered and then disregarded the benefits of using a glass, and instead scooped a handful of water from the tap and drank it deeply. Splashing more water over his face, he sighed before swallowing a handful of ibuprofen.

Once he had the coffee going, he walked back into the bedroom. John was still asleep, a thin line of drool tracing his chin and pooling on the threadbare pillowcase. His hair was a rats



nest of frizzy curls, and as Alex watched with a soft smile he rolled over under the blankets, stretching to take up all four corners of their double bed.

He gave John's shoulder a slight shake. "John."

The figure on the bed groaned. "Sleeping."

He shook him harder. "John, wake up. We won!"

Frowning, and blinking his eyes against the daylight, John pushed himself up on his elbows. "We won?"

"We won," Alex confirmed, letting a smile break across his face. "Can you believe it? I mean it's not over, it's never over, there's a million things to do and we haven't even started on most of them, and the press will be going crazy, I shouldn't have slept this long--"

--Alex," John cut him off with a raised hand. "Can you have your emotional crisis after coffee? Otherwise I'm gonna have to ask you to do that shit in the living room."

Alex pouted. "But--"

-- *Coffee*."

Alex obeyed.

Lured by the smell of coffee, John staggered out into the kitchen, clutching his phone tightly.

"You forgot to plug your phone in last night, didn't you? I've got like six texts from people trying to get in touch with you."

Alex blanched and quickly ran into the bedroom, rifling through piles of dirty laundry and stacks of papers until he found his phone in the pocket of a bathrobe that he didn't remember wearing, completely dead. He plugged it into the wall, and winced when it started to vibrate almost immediately.

"Hey, we made international news," John said in a too-casual voice that failed to disguise how much he, too, was freaking out. "That's kinda cool."

"There's a new mayor in the greatest city in the world, of course we made international news." Alex called back. He swiped through his notifications one-handed as he pulled off his boxers and t-shirt.

"Some of it's surprising, though," Alex said as he frowned at his phone. "We're in Der Spiegel. Do you speak German?"

John came and stood in the doorway, coffee mug clutched in his hands. "What? No, who speaks German?"

"Germans, I'd assume," Alex said, aiming for jocularly and instead coming down just this side of 'tense'.

John smiled at the joke and sat down on the edge of the bed, grunting when Marco took the opportunity to throw himself into the man's lap. "You should shower. I think someone spilled beer in your hair."

"That was you, asshole."

"Oops."

Alex stepped into the shower, groaning when he realised that they were out of shampoo. And conditioner. And his razor was in his desk at the campaign office.

As the hot water blasted his back, his gaze travelled around the bathroom. The weird mold was back in the corner, and the handtowels were definitely dusty. He would have to clean that. He would have to --

God, he was tired.

The adrenaline that had propelled him through the final week of campaigning was gone now, and in its place was a kind of exhausted anxiety, because this was the easy part, everyone would be paying attention now. He'd been offered a job on the staff of a mayor elected by a slim margin in a deeply divided city, a mayor who did not have the support of the police union, a mayor whose every move would be met with twice the scrutiny his predecessors had faced -- it almost didn't bear thinking about.

The hot water was beginning to run low, and Alex took the lukewarm shower as his queue to scrub himself quickly with a bar of irish spring, swiping it once through his hair and wincing as he ran his hand through the wet tangles.

When he made his way back into the bedroom, John was lying on his stomach on the bed, looking at his phone.

He looked up as Alex began to get dressed. "We're invited to the Washingtons for a celebratory brunch. Apparently the invitation was made last night, but Martha correctly assumed that neither of us would remember that. You in?"

Alex shrugged. He normally loved brunch at the Washingtons, the taste of the scrambled eggs laden with cheddar cheese and tomatoes a close second only to the juiciness of the gossip that passed around the table like it was nothing. It was a masterclass in the other side, and Alex relished every minute of it.

But he was so tired.

He wanted to be alone, to sleep, to spend a few hours worrying on their new circumstances until he felt sick -- but that wasn't a good idea.

It's annoying how often what you want and what you need are diametrically opposite things.

The sun was shining through the cold clarity of a crisp November day, and Alex shivered and pulled his scarf a little tighter as he walked hand-in-hand with John to the train station. Moments like this were rare -- either one of them was likely at any given time to be too tired, too stressed, to avoid the instinctive roil of anxiety that came with public displays of affection. They both pretended that they weren't instinctively checking over their shoulders every few minutes, and when Alex caught John casually glancing from side to side, eyes flickering over their fellow pedestrians with a practiced anxiety, he squeezed his hand tightly and then let him go.

John smiled at him sheepishly, and Alex gave him a small nod of understanding. You can't teach an old dog new tricks, and they were both young but they were old enough to understand that some things -- things like caution, things like survival -- are bred into the bone before you are old enough to speak. They were both unwilling experts in survival.

There was media camped in front of the Washington's brownstone, and Alex took a reflexive half-step away from John's side and gave them a cheery wave and a smile. John stood still for a moment, and then rushed ahead to grab Alex by his elbow. Nothing indecent, but too close for colleagues, and Alex felt a rush of pride and admiration for him. At the top of the stairs, John turned and gave the cameras a small half-smile, overpowered by Alex's brilliant grin.

When they were inside and had shed their coats and scarves, Martha led them through to the breakfast nook just off the kitchen. George was sitting at one end of the gleaming pine table, head cradled in his hands as he read the newspaper. He had clearly finished his scheduled media tour for the morning, and his tie was hanging over the back of the chair next to him, his cuffs unbuttoned.

"Good morning, boys," he said in a scratchy throat. "You get home alright?"

"Fine, sir," Alex said. "And yourself?"

"How's it feel to be the mayor?" John added with a grin. "You sick of it yet?"

George groaned. "Have you ever done Good Morning America with a hangover, gentlemen? I don't recommend it."

Alex snorted.

"No, but I've always assumed that the hosts are still drunk from the night before, if that helps at all." John added.

"It doesn't, but thank you for your input." He stood, stretching as his joints popped and cracked audibly. "The Schuylers are on their way, but Lafayette should be around here somewhere."

The slam of the back door alerted them to the arrival of Lafayette, who was shivering in just his shirtsleeves.

"Don't you own a coat?" Alex asked incredulously. "Did we forget to pay you, or something?"

Lafayette glared at him balefully. “We” -- here he pointed between himself and Washington -- “Have not slept yet, so mind yourself. Otherwise we shall have to determine if that sword on the mantle works as it was intended.”

“That was the most complicated death threat I’ve ever received,” Alex said, stunned. “And I have over 20 thousand twitter followers, so that’s impressive.”

Lafayette slumped in one of the chairs, and reached for the Times. Sensing that the rest of the table was about to become very invested in deciphering the crossword, Alex took his leave and wandered back into the main kitchen.

“Can I help you with anything, ma’am?” Alex asked. “It smells great.”

She smiled at him. “There are a dozen cinnamon buns in a bakery box in the fridge, if you wanted to warm them up that would be great.” She poked at the mounds of scrambled egg in the skillet.

Alex found the pastries and did as he was told. Grabbing a refill of his coffee, he leaned against the countertop and watched Martha work.

“So,” she said conversationally. “Have you given any thought to George’s offer?”

Alex blinked. “I -- uh --”

“Are you stammering because you’re surprised that I knew about the offer, or because you’re stalling until you can think of something suitably noncommittal to say?”

“Er-- both, ma’am.”

She nodded decisively, turning the gas burner off and wiping her hands on a tea towel. “Most people would tell you that you’d be crazy not to take the job. Personal assistant isn’t Chief of Staff, but in a few years it could be. Lafayette isn’t going to stick around forever.”

Alex nodded silently. After a moment, he found his courage to speak. “And you, ma’am? You’re hardly ‘most people’.”

She swatted him with a towel. “You’re too charming for your own good, you know that, right? And I would say that what you should do depends on where you want to go. Not to put you on the spot, but what do you see yourself doing in five, ten years time?”

Alex squirmed. “I don’t -- I’m not in the habit of thinking that far ahead. It always seemed to be based on a number of assumptions that I’ve never really been comfortable making.” He immediately flushed when he realised that he had come very close to telling the General’s wife that he had never really intended on living this long.

She nodded slowly, and passed him a knife and a cutting board. “Start on the melon, dear. And it doesn’t necessarily have to be concrete. Who do you *want* to be in five years?”

Someone people listened to. Someone people respected. Someone who was recognised by their achievements and not by their survival.

Someone important.

“I want people to listen to me,” he said after a moment. “I want my opinion to matter.”

Martha nodded, stemming and slicing strawberries with quick, precise movements. “Then I think that it very much depends on whether or not you want to be on the outside throwing rocks, or the inside dodging them.”

“If I quit now, I’ll never go back. I’ll never finish my degree.”

“Lots of people don’t have degrees.”

“Yeah. It’s still important, though. And I’m already twenty five and still getting my undergrad.”

“It’s not a race, dear.” Martha threw the sliced strawberries into a bowl and started on some green grapes.

“It kinda *is*, though.” Alex mirrored her actions with the sliced and cubed melon. Everything was a race. The only difference was whether or not you were willing to acknowledge that fact.

Brunch was a raucous affair -- Peggy and Eliza both still had traces of mascara and eyeliner left from the previous night, and while Angelica looked as flawless as always her voice was hoarse from cheering. Jefferson arrived eventually, and his dark circles had dark circles, while Burr didn’t have a button out of place and his melodious tenor was as clear as ever.

“Are you sure you’re not a robot?” Peggy asked bluntly in a scratchy voice. “Because otherwise you have no right to look so damn good this morning.”

Angelica rolled her eyes. “He’s not a robot, Pegs, he was just bred in a lab dedicated to the creation of the perfect politician. He doesn’t sleep -- he *waits*.”

The entire table laughed as they dug into their food, and Alex felt himself finally, finally, begin to relax just a tad. The ever-present tension in his neck began to ease, and he grabbed John’s hand beneath the table.

They had won.

They were with their family, and everyone was safe and happy.

He squeezed John’s hand, and impulsively gave him a kiss on the cheek, prompting hoots and catcalls from around the table.

“Scoundrels, all of you,” John said fondly, but he didn’t let go of Alex’s hand.

Afterwards, when the dishes had been cleared away and most of the guests were napping on couches or sitting outside in the cool air, Washington came to find Alex. He was sitting on the back stoop, smoking nervously.

“Have you given any more thought to my offer?” He asked gently, wincing as his knees popped as he carefully lowered himself to the ground. “This damp will be the end of me.”

Alex smiled and chewed on the end of his cigarette, before looking at Washington. He had aged since they had first met -- which was only natural, as that was seven years ago and even Alex had changed, growing from an over-eager puppy with more limbs than sense into something else. Something adult. Someone you could rely on.

Washington ran a hand over his close-shaved head and sighed. “I’m not trying to pressure you into anything, but -- I need you, Alex. I can’t imagine doing this job without you beside me.”

Alex gaped at him, his heart in his throat. He searched Washington’s face and found no guile, no manipulation, just pure faith in his actions -- faith in *Alex*.

“Mr Mayor,” Alex said, his voice quiet in the cool air. “It would be my honour to serve at your side again, sir.”

Washington -- *George* -- grinned, looking years younger. “We’re gonna blow them all away, kid.”

--- *January 1st, 2017* ---

“John, if we’re late for the inauguration I’m going to actually murder you, I swear to God.”

“I’m coming!” John shouted from their bedroom. “I can’t find my tie.”

“It’s hanging off the bathroom door,” Alex shouted back. “I’m gonna take Marco around the block. You have five minutes, y’hear me?”

In the lobby of their building, feeling out of place in his clean suit surrounded by grimy walls, Alex stopped and checked the mail, stuffing one letter into the pocket of his wool peacoat before depositing the rest of the flyers and coupons into the trash.

By the time he got back to the apartment, his cheeks were flushed a deep red from the exertion and the cold, and John was very nearly ready.

“You can tie your tie on the train, I swear to God, John,” Alex said, grabbing him by his elbow and yanking him out the door. “We can’t be late to the inauguration, I’ll be fired.”

“Washington wouldn’t fire you,” John said reasonably.

“No, but Lafayette absolutely would.” Alex said.

“Fair enough.”

The front lawn of City Hall was packed with thousands of people, pressed together tightly against the cold winter day. Through judicious use of his elbows, Alex managed to duck through the throngs to get to the side entrance, flashing his new badge at the security before

entering the warren-like corridors. Passing George and Martha Washington in the hallway as they waited patiently for their queues, Alex grinned. “You ready for this, Mr Mayor?”

George grinned. “Once more into the breach, my friend. We’ve got this.”

Alex smiled, and together with John made his way into their assigned seats in the third row on the outdoor stage. They shuffled past a handful of important bureaucrats and dignitaries quickly, and they had barely sat down when a series of horn blasts indicated the arrival of the colour guard, followed by the shuffling of a few dozen teenagers from a Bronx high school choir making their way to the front of the stage for the national anthem.

John and Alex stood, and John leaned in to echo the Mayor’s words. “We got this, Alex.”

Alex smiled, and looked out at the throngs of people gathered in the square. He reached into his pocket to turn off his phone, and his fingers brushed the crumpled envelope he had put there earlier.

It was addressed to a Mr Alexander Hamilton, with the return address as follows:

*J Hamilton  
128B Fintrie Terrace  
Glasgow, Scotland  
ML3 2Y0*

~~fin~~

## Chapter End Notes

Friends, it has been a fuckin' journey. Thank you so much to everyone who commented, bookmarked, and recommended this fic -- it honestly means the world to me. I'm not done telling this story, so rest assured that there will be more fic up soon about politics and daddy issues and politicians with daddy issues.

I don't think I have any other footnotes, except to note that the choir who performed the national anthem at Bill de Blasio's inauguration are hella talented and you can watch the inauguration [here](#). If you're ever on youtube and you come across things like videos of mayoral inaugurations or budget presentations and you're like "Who is this for? Who's watching this?" The answer is me.

Thank you for being wonderful. <3

## End Notes

I'm on tumblr. Follow [atshirtaway](#) for all your class resentment and sad lesbian needs.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!