

Deleted Scene from MY DEAR HAMILTON: Questioning Nathaniel Pendleton
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The Grange

...The clatter of hooves upon the driveway startles me out of my spiraling thoughts. I drop the quill I hadn't realized I still hold and wipe away the visible evidence of my grief with a lace handkerchief. I am barely composed before a knock falls upon the door.

One of the few remaining servants I am able to maintain rushes past the study door to answer, and I recognize my visitor's voice immediately as he presents himself. Nathaniel Pendleton, a judge and Alexander's friend. More importantly, now, he is also the man who stood as my husband's second in the early morning haze at Weehawken.

In a rush of black taffeta, I stand, my instincts erupting in chaos to see Mr. Pendleton again. For he is the keeper of Alexander's final lucid moments and an eye-witness to his fall, and therefore the *only remaining connection* I have to that part of my dear husband. But he is also the man who should have—

"Mrs. Hamilton, ma'am?" Molly curtsies in the doorway, the expression on her brown face uncertain, or perhaps reflecting my own uncertainty. "Mr. Pendleton to see you. Are you receiving?"

"Yes, Molly. Thank you. Would you bring us some tea, please?"

With another curtsy, she goes, and I step onto the black-and-white patterned oil cloth covering the floor of the foyer. "My good sir."

"Mrs. Hamilton," he says, bowing his head to me. He is the same height as Alexander, but his dark hair and eyes are a welcome departure. His face is sharper, more angled, too, and he has a relaxed air to his demeanor and a southern lilt to his speech even after nearly a decade having elapsed since he resided in Georgia. It's only been a few weeks since I saw him, since we both sat in a state of suspended grief around my husband's death bed, but by the weary lines on his face I would not have been surprised if a much greater time had passed.

An awkward silence fills the space between us. Mr. Pendleton glances to the side, and his vision must catch on the marble bust of Alexander positioned upon a pedestal, because his breath

catches as he looks a second time. The Italian sculptor Giuseppe Ceracchi set to work on the bust while Alexander was Secretary of the Treasury, and Alex's likeness in the style of a Roman Senator has been with us for so many years that I barely pay it any note. But now, after long last, I do. I see it. I see *him*, and I clutch at the silk bag filled with his words and his love and his good-byes.

"Why have you come, Mr. Pendleton?"

His gaze returns to me, and he appears as stricken as I feel. Maybe more. "I...I wished to...inquire as to your health. And that of your father."

This man who has been one of my husband's longest friends, one of his *first* friends, who has been my guest and dined at my table so many times, is now so painfully nervous in front of me that I become embarrassed at my lack of manners. "Won't you come in?" I gesture toward the light spilling from the parlor, an effect of the afternoon sun pouring through the tall windows and reflecting off the bright yellow paint and the floor-to-ceiling mirrored doors.

"Thank you," he says, relief clear in the way his shoulders relax and the tight line of his mouth softens. We enter the parlor as Molly does, carrying a silver tray laden with tea and biscuits. She places it on one of the tables and prepares our cups as we settle into the green-damask-upholstered Louis XVI-style chairs. I choose a seat that makes it easiest to avoid looking at the pianoforte my sister Angelica bought as a gift for my daughter, her namesake, the pianoforte where Alexander and our young Angelica played duets many an evening, until my son Philip's death sent her into a melancholy from which she has still never recovered.

Fly to the bosom of your God to be comforted.

I'm trying, Alexander. Oh, how I'm trying. But when I recount all the losses of recent years—my sister, Peggy, my dear Philip, my mother, my husband—it is hard to keep from screaming to the heavens that my ledger must now be balanced. It is true that I had a double share of blessings in my happiness with Alexander, but has that happiness not yet been repaid many times over in grief?

I accept the porcelain into shaking hands, appreciating the heat against fingers cold despite the warmth of the summer breeze coming through the open windows. "To answer your question," I say, taking a sip of the strong, sweet tea as I gather my wits. "Papa is...declining. He never complains, but he spends more and more time abed. I will be returning to Albany this week."

“I am very sorry. Your father is a great man, his contributions to our young nation both numerous and significant.” I appreciate the sentiment, as I always do when someone speaks so highly of Papa, but the words only prick at the fear I feel about his condition. Mr. Pendleton makes a distraction of stirring his tea, then finally lays down the spoon. “Please, Mrs. Hamilton, is there...anything I can do for you? Any service I can provide?”

For a moment, the question freezes me. All the things I want are outside of everyone’s command, everyone but God. But, perhaps, Mr. Pendleton can offer something I *need*.

“I am desirous...” My cup trembles. “I am desirous of knowing about my husband’s interview with Colonel Burr. Every...every detail. Everything you saw. Everything my dear beloved husband said...*after*. All of it.” The rightness of the question fills me with a vigor I haven’t felt in longer than I can say.

He blanches. “Oh, dear lady. I don’t think—”

“Mr. Pendleton, I have tended men bearing injuries fresh from battle, nursed starving soldiers wracked with illness in a winter encampment, and seen my own son and husband die from wounds inflicted by shot. Whatever you have to say, I can bear it. What I cannot bear is the unknown. And you, good sir, are the only one who can help me.” Having now before me the possibility of such knowledge, I find I suddenly cannot live without it.

He gives a single, clipped nod, his jaw ticking, and his lips press once again into a tight line. For a long moment, he says nothing, and I am sure he is not going to satisfy my request. “Have you read the published statements?” he finally asks.

Obsessively. “I have, but I must have it all straight from you because you were with him during and after that most disastrous event befell us.” I return the cup and saucer to the table lest their rattling together reveal how badly I am shaking.

He meets my gaze. “We arrived at Weehawken a little before seven by barge—”

I shake my head. “Start from the beginning,” I rasp. “How long had the meeting been planned?”

Mr. Pendleton pales upon hearing one of the questions that has plagued me. How long did Alexander know that he’d made plans that could take him away from his wife and children? How many meals had we had, how many smiles had he given me, how many nights had we spent apart, him at our abode downtown and me settling our country home, while he *knew*? Maybe I

should feel ashamed for forcing this courteous, dignified man to reveal all his secrets, but I do not.

“The date was set on June the twenty-seventh.” He lets the answer hang there, because what else can he do? June the twenty-seventh. Alexander had known for more than two weeks.

A chill rushes over my skin. “Why...why...” I have *too many* questions, so none can find voice. But Mr. Pendleton seems to know what I’m asking.

“He delayed because he wished to have time to put all his affairs in order, and because he had cases pending before the final session of the Supreme Court on July the sixth.”

So like my husband, his nature as defined by his sense of duty as it was by his extreme candor and his inability to suppress his sentiments about public men and measures. But still, there was so much time to avoid the catastrophe, so much time that the man sitting before me might have used to do just that. “Why did you not talk him out of it then? All that time—”

“He would not listen,” Mr. Pendleton says, voice full of urgency and regret. “I remonstrated against the interview itself, against ceasing negotiations, against the general’s determination to throw away his fire. Over and over. But he became possessed by the notion and would not let it go.” He shook his head, his dark eyes wild. “Please trust when I say that I suffer a keen anguish from the agency I had in this. Besides the love, admiration, and respect I always had for the man, for his amiable qualities, sublime talents, and generous spirit, I was under particular obligations to him for kindnesses paid and confidences kept. When he would not quit the idea, there was naught I could do but...keep his confidence in return. And be his second.”

The sincerity of his words is undeniable, and I know as well as anyone—perhaps *better* than anyone—that Alexander could become fixed on ideas he was then unable to let go, particularly in matters of honor. For this was not the first duel he had participated in or called for—but the fifth. His first was as a second to John Laurens, his second and third challenges against Dr. William Gordon and Commodore James Nicholson for insults, and his fourth a challenge against Major James Monroe over a betrayal the Virginian has still to this day never made right. And, oh, to think that if that last had taken place, Burr would’ve stood as Monroe’s second! Is this, too, part of God’s plan? The way all these threads weave together across our lives?

“Go on, please,” I say. Not an acceptance, but also not another accusation.

“As you wish,” Mr. Pendleton says. “At the dueling grounds, the choice of order and giving the word to present both fell to our side. The general and colonel marked off their paces, loaded their weapons, and took their stations. The general then requested a delay to don his spectacles—”

“Why?” I ask. Murmurings about my husband’s use of his glasses, and his taking the time to sight his pistol while wearing them, had reached me even in Albany. “Why if he intended to throw away his fire?”

“My dear madam, to ensure he didn’t hit Colonel Burr. I am sure of it. He repeated to me over and again that a religious scruple had his purpose definitely fixed in that regard.” I nodded, well familiar with Alexander’s strong opposition to the idea of shedding the blood of a fellow creature, and he continued. “Their pistols fired at nearly the same time, the colonel’s shot striking the general in the side. And as your husband was later insensible of having fired his weapon at all, warning the boatman during our return to the city to be careful of the cocked pistol that could go off and do mischief, it is clear that General Hamilton’s shot happened not from intention, but from an involuntary exertion of the muscles after having been struck.”

He did not even realize he’d fired? The thought brought the first sting of tears to my eyes. Because my husband had gone to the duel intending to save both his honor and his once friend, whereas Colonel Burr had borne a lethal intent from the start. A lethal intent against a man with a wife and seven children ages two to twenty. And what was God’s plan for *that* man?

A sudden realization brought a hard gasp from me. “He knew. He sat at my table and received my hospitality and he *knew*.”

Mr. Pendleton sat forward in his chair. “Madam?”

I blink away the memory of Colonel Burr dining at my table the week before the deed. “Never mind,” I say, shaking now from rage, not sorrow, and certainly not fear. “Go on, Mr. Pendleton. I beg of you.”

The words pour from him then. “I called for Dr. Hosack, who was waiting behind the bushes, and he came immediately to attend General Hamilton. I...I held your husband in my arms, and he said, ‘This is a mortal wound, doctor.’”

It was the strain in Mr. Pendleton’s words that cut through my rage, that cast aside the accusations on my tongue. Because I was not the only one drowning in my grief over Alexander Hamilton. No. We were connected by it, two souls with bleeding hearts.

“The general became lifeless as Dr. Hosack examined the wound, so we rushed him to the boat and the doctor tried to revive him. Suddenly, about fifty yards from shore, General Hamilton regained his senses and opened his eyes. When he noticed the open box of pistols, he warned the boatman that the one was undischarged and still cocked, thinking it hadn’t gone off. And then he said, ‘Pendleton knows that I did not intend to fire at him.’” He looks down at his lap, swallowing hard as he collects himself. When he continues, his voice is softer. “He’d lost all feeling in his legs, and when it struck him that it wouldn’t return, he sent for you.” Dark eyes meet hers. “He wanted the event to be gradually broken to you...”

I break our gaze then, not wanting him to see the flash of rage filling me once more. Spasms. They’d told me he had spasms. They’d given me hope. Hours elapsed in the time it took to get word to me here at The Grange, and then for me and the children to travel down to the home of Bank of New York director William Bayard on Jane Street, where they’d taken Alexander. Hours during which I’d held out *hope*.

But there was no hope to be found on Jane Street. Four doctors rendered opinions on him—two Americans, and two French surgeons off of a frigate in the harbor who were much experienced with gunshot wounds. Even in that terrible moment, the French offering their friendship at the end of his life as they had at the beginning, had left a bittersweet brand on my heart. But they’d, too, agreed. It was in God’s hands. God’s alone.

Remember, my Eliza, you are a Christian.

“I returned to Weehawken the next day looking for proof of the events,” he says.

I suck in a breath, recalling my own pilgrimage there, my own search for...something. *Anything*. “What did you find?”

“I hoped to discover some trace of the course of the ball from General Hamilton’s pistol. Finally, we found that the ball had passed through the limb of a cedar tree, about twelve and a half feet off the ground, and four feet wide of where Colonel Burr had stood. We cut the limb and brought it to the city. Mr. Church now possesses it.”

“The proof of Alexander’s honor,” I manage.

“Yes,” he says. “Yes.”

Long after Mr. Pendleton is gone and the sun has set, I sit in the dark of that parlor connecting these new pieces into the puzzle of that day. Again and again I am struck by the way the threads of our lives came together at the end of his life as they had in the beginning. These

men who had helped build Alexander into the great man he became—Pendleton, Burr, Laurens, Monroe, Lafayette—his brothers-in-arms, his first friends. They were all there in some manner in the playing out of his demise.

Pendleton and Burr on the field of death itself.

Laurens and Monroe in inducing Alexander to wish to make use of that field, again and again.

And even Lafayette, or at least the spirit of that great, good man, in the final offer of French friendship.

He has made everything appropriate in its time, He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

The verse comes to me in the darkness, quiet and sharp. Oh, there was so much we did not know in that hopeful beginning, so filled with hubris and pride. And even with all the answers Mr. Pendleton provided, there is still so much more yet to learn. God may be determined for his work not to be known, but I am just as determined that my dear Hamilton's sacrifices *mean something*.

He may be gone, but we can still be the partners in a cause we once were, whispering and acting together to bring down a conspiracy, and *I* can still be the woman I once was, looking for an opportunity to do just that...