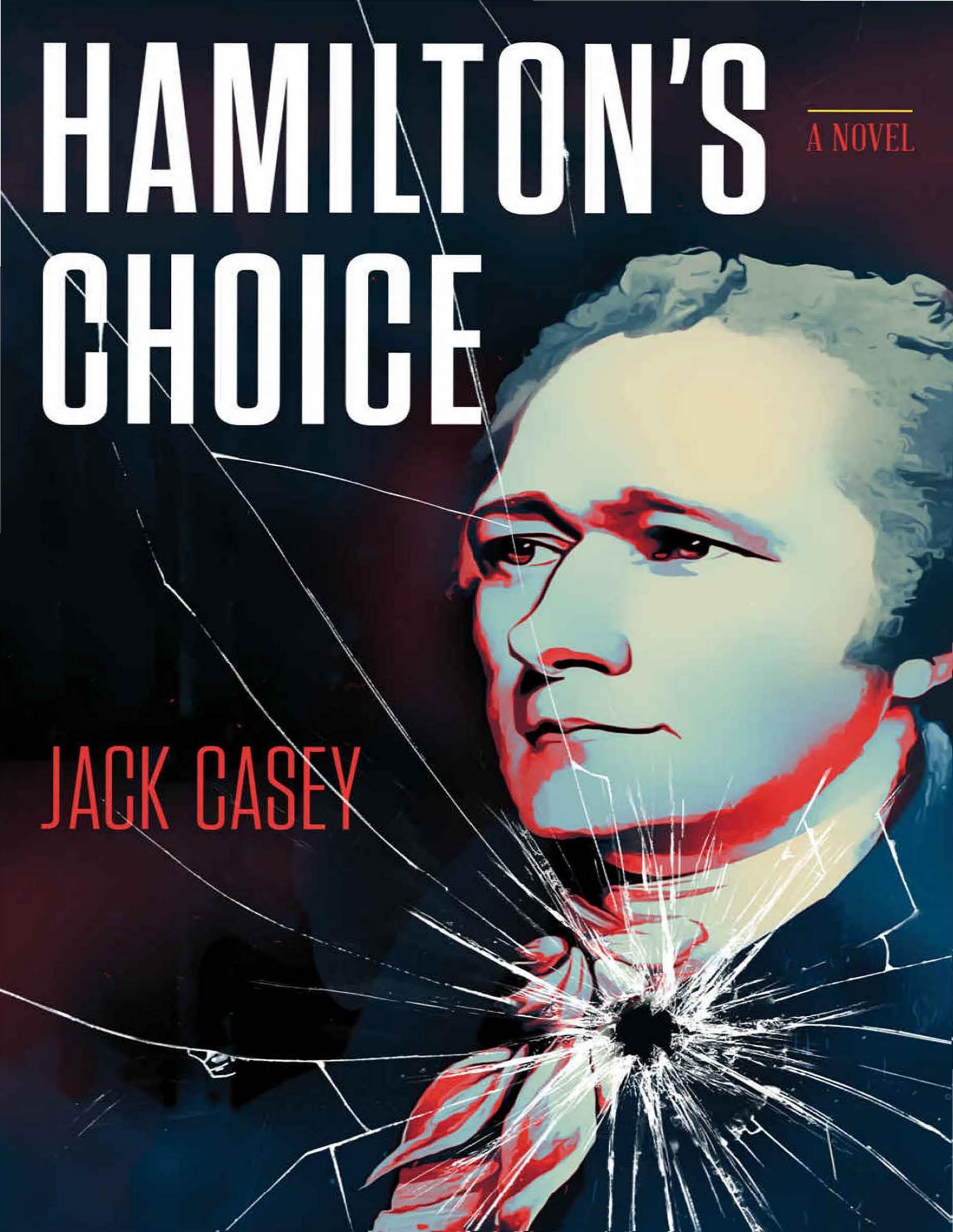


HAMILTON'S CHOICE

A NOVEL

JACK CASEY



HAMILTON'S A NOVEL
CHOICE

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CASEY

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BOOK I - Portrait of Philip Hamilton (posthumous, c. 1802), from
The Intimate Life of Alexander Hamilton, by his nephew
Allan MacLane Hamilton, p. 210 (1910).

BOOK II: Portrait of Aaron Burr, Courtesy, Library of Congress
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EPILOGUE: Portrait of Eliza Schuyler Hamilton by James Sharples (c. 1795)

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FOR MY BEAUTIFUL

VICTORIA,

WISE MUSE, PATIENT WIFE, AND
LOVE OF MY LIFE



PHILIP HAMILTON

BOOK I

PHILIP

Rockets burst high over Manhattan and church bells are pealing from every steeple. Sudden flashes of light turn night into day, and loud blasts shake the ground, then roll away like thunder. Thousands of New Yorkers clog the waterfront to cheer the climbing rockets, the deafening explosions, then moan as sparkles shimmer down through the rigging of ships from many lands.

Now and then long muzzles of cannon shoot orange flame from the Battery out over the black water. Dogs are barking and children wailing. Gnarled veterans scowl at the explosions and the stink of gunpowder. They are recalling the incessant pounding of British warships. But this is no siege. It's the first Independence Day in the reign of Thomas Jefferson. A quarter century ago, Jefferson dipped his quill and scribbled, "All men are created equal." Now he is president. The age of the common man has dawned.

Two lads, loose as greyhounds, amble up Broadway, admiring the young ladies. When one spins her parasol or dips an eye, the boys laugh and shove each other. They're in the silly stage of intoxication.

"There's a saucy one for you, Phil!"

"Tad plump for me, Ricky, but be my guest."

"Did you see her eyes, though? It's always in the eyes."

"Ah, buck up! You'll have a new sweetheart by next week."

Down Broadway a bugle blows reveille. The boys watch a company of militia fall in, then step off smartly in ruddy torchlight to a snare drum and

fife. As the bursting fireworks throw belfries and steeples into silhouette, the parade approaches and continues up Broadway. The boys follow in the trailing crowd to Brick Church, where the soldiers stop and mark time until the commander barks: “Company, halt!” The crowd cheers as Edward Livingston, New York City’s new mayor, steps to a rostrum on the church steps, unrolls a scroll and with the flourish of a frilled cuff, calls:

“When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another ...”

The taller boy, Philip Hamilton, listens reverently.

“... a decent respect to the opinion of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation ...”

But the speech bores Ricky Price, and he looks around.

“Listen!” Hamilton urges. He’s transported by cadences of the Declaration of Independence. Price rolls his eyes and falls quiet.

As the mayor finishes, “... that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States ...” Price pulls at Hamilton’s sleeve, “Come on. Let’s go. I’m thirsty. ”

“Sure,” Hamilton says, but as they move away, a second speaker replaces the mayor and launches into a passionate tirade. “Wait a minute.”

“Not another speech!”

“He just mentioned my father.”

The tall, dark-haired orator is sweating and gesticulating in the light from torches: “... even as we celebrate our freedom tonight, Alexander Hamilton drills his New Army in secret, plotting a military coup.” The orator pulls a sheaf of papers from his breast pocket and waves it high. “I hold here documents intercepted from a spy that prove Hamilton is colluding with the British. Soon he will march upon Washington City, take President Jefferson prisoner and raise himself up as king!”

“No!” the crowd cries.

“Stop it!” Philip Hamilton shouts. “Stop your lies!”

The speaker’s fists are pumping the air. “Alexander Hamilton is a monarchist! A British sympathizer! An adulterer! A fraud!”

“No!” the crowd cries.

“Stop it!” Philip calls. “Stop it right now!”

Price pulls his sleeve. “Let it go, Phil. Come on.”

“I can’t listen to this!” Hamilton throws off Price’s grip and elbows his way to the front of the crowd: “Liar!” He cups his hands and shouts, “Liar!”

The speaker stops and looks down. Hamilton climbs the spokes of a wheel onto the bed of a wagon: “People!” He spreads his arms over the crowd, “Don’t listen to these lies! General Hamilton is a patriot. He’s not plotting to overthrow the government. He’s working in his law office tonight, only blocks from here. He’s my father. I just left him!”

“And we should believe his son?” The orator laughs and shakes his sheaf of papers. “Here is written proof that Hamilton corresponds with British spies!”

“No!” the crowd calls.

“Stop your lies, or I’ll stop you!” Hamilton jumps from the wagon and begins shoving through the crowd. He doesn’t get far, though, when a large man seizes him by the shoulders.

“Let’s call it a night, shall we, lad?” A smile spreads across the man’s broad face and gleams in his pale blue eyes.

“Let me go!” Hamilton struggles.

“I smell the son of a monarchist,” the orator cries from the church steps, and he pinches his nostrils to the laughter of the crowd, “a boy by the name of Hamilton!”

“Listen to that!” Philip pleads to the large man restraining him.

“Nothing good can come of this now. Come along and I’ll stand you a drink.”

“Let me go!” Hamilton breaks the grip on his coat and faces the man. He’s startled by the man’s colorful dress: a coat of red plaid, canary yellow vest, and maroon breeches. A battered old top hat is pulled low over long, greasy locks. “I won’t allow this scoundrel to spread his lies!”

“Sticks and stones, lad. Let it ride.” With a strong grip on his elbow the big man escorts Hamilton away from the crowd. “I knew your daddy when he was a slip of a lad like you, and it’s an honor to meet his heir apparent. Come along.” Philip motions to Price, then looks back.

From the church steps the speaker taunts: “Run home to papa, little man!” and he continues his rant in the torchlight, lit by the rosy light of rockets flashing off the steeple.

Price catches up and the big man guides them along the cobblestones for three blocks, then up a mud alley to a tavern where lively fiddle music pours through an open window. Inside the swinging doors there’s dancing, and a hoarse woman is singing “The Rose of Tralee.”

A massive ginger barmaid swaggers over with a tray. “Usual, Mulligan?”

“Aye, Margie, and get my young friends a drink as well. This here’s Marge, boys.” He slaps her bottom.

“Show some respect, bucko, or I’ll see you die of thirst.” Marge is missing her front teeth. “What’ll it be, boys?”

“Cherry bounce,” Price says.

“Not on my watch!” Mulligan says. “When you drink with Hercules Mulligan, you drink as men!” To Marge: “Extra gill of rum, Marjorie darling, and blackstraps all around.” He leads the boys to a table near the wall.

“Why did you stop me back there?” Philip protests.

“Get you out of harm’s way. Give you some advice. Aye, but first things first.” He tips back the crushed top hat and sticks out his hand. “Hercules Mulligan at your service. Your daddy’s spoken of me, I’m sure.”

“Hercules? No. I would’ve remembered that.”

“Why, I gave him his start when he first arrived in New York.”

“Never heard of you.” Hamilton shakes Mulligan’s fleshy hand. “I am Philip, Philip Hamilton, and this is Richard Price.”

“Sit down, boys, sit down.”

The barmaid’s back. She hoists three foaming tankards off her tray and sets them on the table. Mulligan and the boys clink the pewter mugs together and drink deeply. The ale-and-molasses concoction is sweet, frothy, and strong. Mulligan groans with pleasure as he’s swallowing, then slams down his tankard and sighs with satisfaction. He removes his hat, wipes his forehead with a kerchief, and raises his index finger to dispatch a word of wisdom.

“You got to pick your battles better, lad.”

“He called my father a traitor!”

“Free country, free speech.” Mulligan points his thumb at his chest. “Now, I was born in the Land of Ire, and I spat fire at your age, too, so let me pose you a riddle. How can you spot a well-balanced Irishman?”

“Don’t flatter yourself,” Marge says.

“He’s the one with a chip on both shoulders.” Mulligan laughs at his own joke and takes another deep swig. “Look at this face! This busted jaw and flattened nose taught me to fight only battles I can win. Georgie Eacker’s a sight bigger, older, and stronger than you.”

“I can hold my own. I’ll meet him anytime, anywhere.”

“Aye, you got the old man’s spunk, but Eacker’s one mean customer. Runs with the crew that loaf about Brom Martling’s dive. Pack of rabid Republicans and nasty drinkers. Eacker’s a lawyer, but he don’t play by any rules I know. His daddy was one of Burr’s crooks up in Albany. Watch yourself around him. Say the wrong word, you’ll be staring down the barrel of a pistol.”

“Is that supposed to frighten me?”

“Well, it scares the shite out of me.” Mulligan lets out a great belly laugh. “I’ve become rather fond of this life.” He gives the barmaid a squeeze and

clinks down three coins. “Only one they give us, eh, Marge?”

“And you’re none too shy about sharing yours.” She swats him affectionately and picks up the coins.

Mulligan leans in and winks and bunches up his big hands. “Now, fists don’t do much harm, and they can settle any grudge.”

“On a question of honor?” Philip is offended.

“Honor? Georgie Eacker?” Mulligan shakes his head and laughs. “Burr surrounds himself with vicious curs, and honor ain’t what gets ’em up in the morning. Besides, your daddy can defend himself. Never was shy that way.”

Hamilton looks sullen and suspicious. “You say you met my father during the war?”

“Met him? He lived with me for a spell. You sure he never mentioned me?”

Philip shakes his head and motions to Price. “No, he didn’t, sir, but we appreciate the drink.”

Mulligan sighs in mock disgust. “Now, ain’t that the way of the world?”

“You can tell us more next time we meet,” Philip says, and he stands up. “We’ll be on our way now.”

Price nods and joins him.

“Well, tell your da you met old Hercules. Our paths don’t cross much these days since he’s risen so high, but I’m proud of what he’s become, and I’ll do him any service I can.” Mulligan stands and grabs their hands. “Damned glad to meet you boys.”

“Thanks for the drink.”

He winks. “Be careful, both of you!”

Philip and Price push out of the ale house into the humid summer evening.

“Nice fellow,” Price observes.

“Meddlesome Irishman,” Hamilton says. “Why’d he pull me away?”

Hamilton looks down the street to the empty church steps. A warm breeze, smelling of the sea, blows up from the docks, and the last of the fireworks fizzles in the sky. “George Eacker has not heard the last of me.”

Fourth of July was Saturday. Monday morning, Philip enters the mayhem of Tontine's Coffee House. Stock trading is underway with brokers shouting bids through the smoky air, and a fat man working the chalkboard. Waiters hustle back and forth with pots of coffee and steamed milk on long handles. Hamilton goes to the rack where newspapers hang on rods.

"You're his kid, ain't you?" A sour old miser laughs and slaps a newspaper on a stick against Philip's chest. "Read all about your daddy."

Philip doesn't know the man—a Republican, no doubt—and he's unsettled by the open scorn. He glances at the first few paragraphs. It's Eacker's Fourth of July speech in print. Philip sits at a table, reads the speech in full, then rips the page from the paper, crams it into his pocket and hurries to his father's law office.

Two fat merchants are concluding a consultation. Their round pink faces bask in the glow of having just retained Alexander Hamilton, the most able and well-connected attorney in New York City. General Hamilton doesn't share their delight, though, and he hides his impatience with excessive charm.

Alexander Hamilton is not a big man. He's slender and boyish and alert, and he moves with military snap. His skin is as pink and smooth as a maiden's, and he's pulled his strawberry blond hair back and tied it with a black ribbon. Under his pronounced brow, his eyes are intense, deep blue, indigo in certain lights, and they sparkle with intelligence and mirth. When

he speaks, he moves his sharp nose this way and that, quickly, like a fox. He sees Philip and he smiles broadly and steps forward.

“Why, here’s my pride and joy!” Hamilton embraces the boy and turns him. “Meet my son Philip, gentlemen.” The men shake Philip’s hand.

“The boy must favor his mother.”

“Far better looking than you, General.”

“He has his mother’s eyes,” Hamilton musses Philip’s hair, “and her dark mane.” Philip ducks and smiles. He’s an inch or two taller than his dad and pretends he doesn’t enjoy the attention.

“Phil just finished at Columbia,” the father says proudly, “top of his class. He’s reading law in Nate Pendleton’s office.”

“Perhaps we should hire him instead?”

“He’d give you good value,” Hamilton brags.

“Stay with my dad,” Philip says, “till I know what I’m doing.”

“Admire your candor,” the other merchant says as they depart.

Hamilton embraces Philip again and claps him on the back. “What a delight! Come in, come on in.”

Phil greets his father’s scrivener, Judah Hammond, perched on a high bench, and then follows his father into the office. Walls of gray, unpainted plaster are lined with bookcases of raw lumber and rough-cast brick. A rug covers the wide planks of the floor. The window, open in hope of a breeze, lets in dust and the jangle of carriages from the street. Hamilton’s desk is a simple pine table, his quill and inkpot in front, law books neatly stacked to the left and right, parchment deeds with red wax seals and ribbons he’s comparing, and a roll of foolscap on which he’s been writing.

“We missed you at dinner yesterday.” He gestures toward the two client chairs.

Philip takes the folded newspaper from his pocket and sits down. “Have you seen this?” He unfolds the page and hands it to his father.

Hamilton looks it over, nods. “Yes, Coleman showed me this morning.”

“I was at Brick Church Saturday night when this Eacker character delivered his rant. I tried to stop him, but some old fellow named Mulligan stopped me.”

“Hercules Mulligan?” Hamilton smiles and hands back the clipping.

“Himself. In multicolored splendor.”

“Yes! Always decked out like Chanticleer.”

“He hauled me away from Eacker and into a saloon. He claims he gave you your start. I was going to confront—”

“Mulligan’s a good man. Always nursed a healthy Irish hatred of the British. He taught me many things.”

Philip slaps the newspaper. “How can we stop this, Papa?”

“Don’t take the bait. Don’t engage.”

“Eacker calls you a military dictator, a traitor, and there’s nothing we can do?”

Hamilton shrugs. “It’s just politics. I’ve endured such lies and insults my whole life. We could sue for defamation, I suppose, but the new Republican judges would laugh us out of court.”

“But it’s not right!”

The general’s features soften. “It’s good you’re getting a feel for this now, Phil. This is the other side of politics. It’s great to be in office, giving speeches and running things, but when you’re out of power, ah, then your enemies swarm up like hornets from an upturned nest, and you must endure their stings. Worst thing you can do is respond. If you find it too distressing, we’ll apprentice you to Uncle John and you can make yourself a handsome fortune.”

“I’m not interested in money, Papa. I want to do what you do, but I want these Republicans to be fair, and truthful, too!”

“Good luck!” Hamilton laughs and shakes his head. “This is how men

behave around power. None of us is rational, and when power is at stake, things get personal and dangerous very quickly. You're reading law now. Bring these practical lessons to your studies. If you always seek a legal solution, you can't go wrong."

"But doesn't this infuriate you?"

"Of course. I'd like to see Eacker publicly flogged. That's what we did in the army, but it doesn't work in civilian life. Be careful around him. His father was involved with Aaron Burr in dubious land speculations out west, and it blew up in a scandal two years ago. Uncle John accused Burr of bribery, and Burr challenged him to a duel. They rowed across the river, and we were all worried how it would turn out. Mercifully, no one was hurt. Show restraint around these Republicans."

"Why? They don't around us."

"We'll have our own newspaper soon: *The New York Evening Post*. Varick, Troup, and Gracie have raised the capital, and I just hired Bill Coleman as our editor. We ordered a modern English press and we'll be printing by fall. That's where we fight them, Phil, in the court of public opinion. Never let it get personal and you can have a long and happy life in politics."

"Ignore blatant lies?" Philip's still frustrated and angry.

Hamilton nods slowly. "Yes, and their plots and their insults, too. Men are beasts. The sooner you learn that the better. They're beasts to each other, to their women, to their children, and especially to their slaves. If not constrained to be good, men invariably turn out bad, especially around power."

"So what can we do about it?"

"Work to advance the law. Law is how we control men's passions. Study hard and someday you will shape our law for the good of all." Hamilton smiles. "But enough from doddering old Polonius. How stand matters with the lovely Emily?"

“Alas,” Phil sighs, “she’s being replaced. Which is why I missed dinner last night.”

“Your mother was hoping Emily might be the one.”

“I’m nineteen, Papa! Mama wants me married off?”

Hamilton’s blue eyes are mirthful. “She wants you settled down, yes, but choosing one rather limits your options, doesn’t it?”

Philip nods and grins broadly.

“So, keep everyone guessing, but be careful.” Hamilton gives him a serious look. “You know what I mean. Never compromise a woman’s honor, or yours either, and someday you will rule this nation. Jefferson and the Republicans won’t last beyond this term, and we’ll be back in power. I have very little to pass on to you and your brothers except my good name, and I hope that will help you.”

Philip nods solemnly. “It does, Papa. It means everything to me.” He stands, folds the newspaper page, and reaches for his father’s hand. His father pulls him into a hug.

“Your mother and I are so proud of you. Will you come to dinner next Sunday?”

“Yes, of course.”

The following morning a small, slender woman in a yellow sunbonnet steps into the gravel alley behind her town house. A closed wicker basket hangs from her arm. The bonnet rides loosely on her luxuriant curls. She crosses the busy thoroughfare of Broadway, then plunges into a maze of streets near Columbia College. Her dark eyes flash as she approaches her destination, and a smile spreads across her pale lips: Eliza Hamilton is hurrying to her son's lodging to catch him before he leaves for work.

Among her seven children, Eliza feels a special bond with her eldest. She grew up as a tomboy, hiking and climbing and shooting with her brothers, and she often rode as her father's sidekick on his trips among the Iroquois. Philip's birth showed her, though, that motherhood was her true calling. Philip arrived in a time of war and devastation. The British had burned her family's summer home near Saratoga, Mohawks invaded her Albany home, and her father and husband were both away fighting much of the time. As she nurtured her happy baby, he became the gravitational center of her world, and even now that he is grown, she can't let him go.

It rained last night, and birds are singing in the clean air. Philip lodges with Ricky Price, a fellow student when they attended Columbia. They still occupy a three-room suite on the second floor of a town house near the college's great hall. Eliza takes the stairs two-by-two and raps on his door.

"Just a minute!" Philip calls. Eliza hears a brief scuffle and a minute later

Philip opens the door. He has a towel draped over his lean, bare shoulders and shaving soap on his cheeks. "Mother!" he cries, surprised, and they both start laughing. "Come in."

Eliza's eye sweeps the shabby bachelors' apartment. "Am I interrupting?"

"No, of course not. Come in." He stands aside.

She looks curiously at him. She's never seen him shave, but he's old enough, and he would need to by now, wouldn't he? She resists the urge to hug him. Philip has inherited her lush dark ringlets and smoldering brown eyes. They could pass for brother and sister.

"Is someone here?"

"Ricky's home."

"Can I wish him a good morning?"

"Uh, well, Mother," Philip whispers, "he's not alone."

"I see."

"I'll just be a minute." Philip retreats to his small bedroom and closes the door. Eliza puts down her basket, unties the ribbon of her bonnet, and slides it off. Her expression changes when she hears whispering in Philip's room. She notices a scarlet ribbon and a wine bottle on the floor near the hearth.

"There!" Philip emerges in a loose white shirt, carefully closing the door behind him. He holds out his arms and embraces her.

"You missed a spot," Eliza says, and wipes shaving soap from behind his ear. He's taller than his father and leaner, too. He burns with the same intense energy, but his gaze lingers a bit longer, he's more introspective. Too sensitive, Eliza believes, and she fears this makes him vulnerable.

"You look tired, Phil, and thin. Are you taking care of yourself?"

"Of course!" He smiles. The dark curls stray down his forehead and accentuate his eyes. "And I'm sure you brought me something delicious."

She turns toward the basket. "I did." She lifts the lid and removes a quartered roast chicken, a wedge of cheese, a pan of cornbread, and half a

mincemeat pie. “We miss you when you don’t come to Sunday dinner.”

“Pendleton works me pretty hard. Sunday’s my only day off, and I like to hunt or fish when the weather’s nice.” He glances toward his bedroom door.

“Do I smell coffee?”

“Yes, the landlady’s girl just brought up a pot. Would you like some?”

“That would be lovely.”

Philip reaches into a cupboard and polishes a cup and saucer with the tail of his shirt.

“That’s your dish towel?”

Philip laughs and motions her to a chair by the fireplace. He goes into his bedroom again and emerges with a ceramic coffee pot.

“Let’s have a slice of my cornbread,” Eliza suggests.

“Well, I really should be getting to work, but if you’re hungry—”

“Yes.”

Philip brings a cup and plate and a knife and sits beside her. “Here’s a napkin,” he says. “Don’t worry, it’s clean.”

She smooths it in her lap. “Your father tells me you and Emily broke up.”

Philip continues to smile but is visibly impatient and looks at the mantel clock.

“Ah, the lovely Emily. Alas, yes, we have parted.”

“Whose decision was it?”

“Mutual,” he says, but he avoids her gaze.

“Breakups are never mutual, Philip.”

“Well, then, it was my fault. I take full responsibility.” He again glances toward his bedroom door.

“Why did you break up?”

“It wasn’t fun anymore, Mother. All she ever talked about was getting married and having children. I told her I needed my law license before I could even think of marrying, and she told me her father’s money would float

the boat.” Philip laughs and shakes his head. “I doubt she even asked him first.”

“You two were perfect together. The Treadwells are a first-rate family. Your father and Amos Treadwell have spoken once or twice about the alliance, you know.”

“This is America, Mother! Parents don’t arrange marriages. Besides, the Treadwells are merchants,” Philip says with distaste. “They have ships at sea, and wharves and warehouses and a counting house along their pier. I don’t want to marry some spoiled heiress, and I sure don’t want to get married for a long time.”

“Marriage would center you. This bachelor life,” she waves her hand at the ribbon and wine bottle on the floor behind a chair, “has too many temptations. You can make a mistake that will follow you forever. Won’t you give Emily another chance? Perhaps next Sunday you could bring her to dinner? Your brothers and your sisters all like her.”

“Oh, Mother, Emily bores me. I want a wife who understands politics, like you, a wife who can help me as you help Papa, as inseparable to my work as you are to his.” Eliza frowns. Does he think flattery will distract her? “Anyway, I’m not ready to settle down.”

“Is that what caused the break? Another girl?”

Philip shrugs and doesn’t answer. His knee jiggles with impatience and his gaze remains on the carpet.

“I see,” Eliza nods. Another look around the messy apartment heightens her distaste. “How long do you intend to live like this?”

“Like what, Mother? A free man? I don’t know. Why?”

“You’d enjoy being more settled, with a routine and a well-kept home. And a young wife to care for you. Responsibility builds character, and you’ll need stability if law and politics are to be your vocations.”

“I worked so hard through college. I want to have some fun.”

“We raised you to be a gentleman, Philip, to consider how your actions

affect others. Sometimes you're so impetuous!"

"Emily was not right for me. I want to begin my political life, and I need someone who can live with all that chaos."

"I understand politics is what you want, and what your father wants for you, too, but it's such a heart break. A principled man is always sailing into a headwind. Look at the battles your father must constantly fight. Why not use your charm to go into business like Uncle John? He provides a wonderful life for my sister and your cousins."

"But you think Aunt Angelica is vain and shallow!"

"Well, she certainly enjoys her beautiful home and her clothes and her jewels. Look at what your grandfather did with his station in Albany. Having wealth and leisure to pursue one's interests is a fine thing."

Philip is unconvinced. "Grandpapa used his wealth to influence politics, yes, but Papa never needed wealth. He designed a nation, ran the national treasury, invented the coast guard and he's still leading the military. I want to follow him."

"But Uncle John sleeps at night. Your father's always up fretting about someone unraveling something beyond his control. Don't you want a life that's more tranquil?"

"Tranquil?" Philip laughs. "You married him in the middle of a war!"

There's a thud and a muffled exclamation from Philip's bedroom. The voice is female.

"Who's in there, Phil?"

He smiles with embarrassment. "The landlady's daughter. I told you she brought the coffee up."

"You're fooling around with a serving girl?"

"We weren't doing anything."

"Ricky Price isn't here, is he?"

Philip drops his eyes. "Uh, no."

“So you lied to me, and you’re hiding a girl in your bedroom! How does that look?”

“I didn’t know you were coming.”

“That’s not the point. Bring her out. I want to meet her.”

“No, Mother, please! Let’s not make her uncomfortable.” The door opens and Philip is pale. In the doorway stands a pretty redhead of sixteen years.

Philip stands to make the introduction. “Mother, this is Sally Maguire.” The young woman curtsseys and bows her head.

“How do you do, mum?”

Eliza bows to acknowledge her.

“Mrs. Maguire lets us these rooms, and Sally cleans and runs errands for us.”

“We wasn’t doing nothin’, mum. I swear.” The girl traces a cross over her heart.

Eliza stands and gathers her basket and bonnet.

“You don’t have to go,” Philip pleads. “It’s not what it seems.”

“I’m very disappointed in you, Philip.” She turns to the young woman. “You should know even at your age, Sally, how heavily a woman pays for this sort of foolishness. You could ruin your life with a single bad decision.”

“We’re not ... involved,” Philip offers.

“I’m not like that, mum. I’m a good girl. I really am.”

“I hope so.” Eliza looks at Philip. “And I hope my son is a gentleman.”

“He is,” the young woman pleads. “He always is. Please don’t go!”

Eliza pulls on her bonnet and lets herself out. Quickly she descends the stairs and emerges into the beautiful summer morning.

“Like his father in all things,” Eliza mutters, and as she ties on the bonnet, a deep old shame flares up within her.

Philip crosses to the bow window and watches his mother walking up the

street. Sally comes up behind him, turns him around, and nuzzles her face into his neck.

“Kiss me, Phil.”

He disentangles himself. “I have to get to work.”

“Very well, then.” The chambermaid is suddenly all business. She retrieves the tray with the coffeepot and leaves as Philip holds the door.

That evening, with her other children in bed, Eliza informs Hamilton. “He was hiding a chambermaid in his bedroom! He broke up with Emily to chase an Irish chambermaid?”

“I doubt that was the reason. Let him have his fun.”

“If we indulge him in this, he will take it as assent, and he’ll continue such bad behavior into a hasty marriage.”

“I will speak with him about it.”

“You might share with him your experience.”

The air between them grows tense. Hamilton sidesteps the accusation. “Please, Eliza, he’s just a boy.”

“Which is why we need to watch him closely.”

“We’ve instilled good values in him. He needs our trust and the freedom to make his own mistakes. That’s how he learns.”

“One mistake will ruin his life.”

“I will talk with him.”

If he ever intended to speak with Philip about the chambermaid, Hamilton forgot, or else changed his mind. Eliza never visited her son again unannounced.

Four months later, on a windy November night, Philip Hamilton and Ricky Price are enjoying buttered rum punch before the roaring hearth in a taproom, while outside the Golden Boar's sign creaks in a high wind off the river. After a long week of reading law, the two consider their evening's amusement.

"I say the theater," Price suggests.

"Oh, no! Not one of your tragedies."

"Well, not a love story either." Price has just ended another flirtation with a young lady from a fine family, and he is drinking heavily.

"A comedy, then."

"Fine." Price goes to a wall rack and returns with a handbill. "The Park is running a farce tonight, *The West Indian*. The troupe over there is good. Perhaps it's about your father?"

"The general hates the Caribbean."

"He's never returned?"

"No. He calls it a sweltering archipelago of pestilence and slavery."

"Yet there are 'fortunes to be made in sugar,'" Price reads with irony from the advertisement.

"Fortunes beaten out of slaves," Philip says. "Papa hates all that."

"Well, the play's about a young West Indian planter, Balcour, who returns to London seeking his father's approval to marry the sweet Louisa.

He's 'a rake and a scapegrace,'" Price quotes with a theatrical flair. "I love him already. 'Fresh from the tropics where he owns rum and sugar enough to turn the Thames into punch.'" Price raises his mug toward Philip. "He's 'a libertine with generous instincts, which prevail in the end.' One of us, eh? What do you say?"

"Sure, let's go."

As they leave the tavern, the biting wind lashes them, whistling through chimney tops and banging shutters up an alley. They hold down their hats and slip and slide out to a row of shops. Merchant signs creak and bang in the wind, a milliner from Paris, a butcher from Germany, a vintner from Madrid. Flames in two enormous whale oil lamps light the theater's entrance into a vestibule where women are removing bonnets and men their scarves and tricorns. Hamilton buys two general admission tickets, and they enter through heavy velvet curtains.

A skinny stagehand is igniting lime footlights along the edge of the stage while a small orchestra—violin, clarinet, French horn, bass viol and drums—plays a lively number. Soon the band plays a fanfare and a drumroll, and the curtains part. Balcour, greasepaint simulating a tropical suntan, peeks out from the curtains, then hesitantly enters. He's a fop who's stumbled into a fortune as a sugar planter, and now he's returned, a cautious prodigal, to marry Louisa. Unfortunately, his father, a crusty old aristocrat in a bad wig, lusts for Louisa, too.

"The writing is horrible!" Hamilton whispers as the first scene concludes.

"We don't need to stay."

"Agreed." They watch until intermission.

At the curtain and modest applause, they stand. Price grabs Hamilton's forearm. "Don't turn around, Phil, but George Eacker's here. Up in a box. Watching us!"

Hamilton whips around and his eyes lock with Eacker's.

"Let's go, Phil." Price takes Philip's sleeve.

Hamilton throws off Price's hand. He hurries up the aisle, into the hallway and up the stairs, then bursts into Eacker's box. Eacker turns slowly from the railing. Another man and two young women are startled, afraid, but Eacker leans back, haughty and disdainful, and sneers to his wife, "Why, look, Matty, it's the son of our own bastard West Indian, playing the toff, the aristocrat tonight."

Hamilton's eyes narrow. "You accused my father of treason last July. What has come of your slanders?"

"Get out of here, junior, before my patience wears off." Eacker points his thumb toward the door.

Price appears behind Philip. "Come on, Phil."

"You and your friend, get out!"

"When I get an apology."

"An apology?" Eacker stands up and shoves Hamilton. "I said, get out!"

Hamilton pushes back. "Get your hands off me!"

"Please, George," Matty says softly, taking Eacker's arm. From the floor below, members of the audience turn to watch.

"I demand an apology," Hamilton says, "and a retraction."

"A retraction?" Eacker laughs loudly.

"In the newspaper. You, sir, are a liar, and I demand you admit it!"

"Please, George, don't make a scene," Matty begs.

"I'll see you in the lobby, Hamilton." He points to the door. As Hamilton and Price turn to leave, Eacker mutters, "It's too abominable to be publicly insulted by a set of rascals."

Hamilton spins about and lunges at Eacker. "Who are you calling rascals?" Eacker stumbles back to the railing and nearly pitches over. Spectators below gasp and cry out. Eacker catches his balance and springs forward.

"You!" Eacker is half a head taller. He grabs Philip by the lapels and

pulls him up. "How dare you insult me? I am not your inferior."

"You're not?" Hamilton sneers.

"You insolent little pup!" With the entire theater now watching, Eacker shoves Hamilton through the door. "Get out! I'll see you in the lobby!" He turns to his wife. "Don't worry, darling. I'll make light work of these two."

In the lobby, more angry words are exchanged, but an usher is ringing the bell for the second act.

"We're off to the Boar," Hamilton says.

"I will meet you," Eacker sputters and returns to his box for his coat and hat.

Back out in the windy night, Hamilton and Price are nearly run down by a passing sleigh. Once inside the Golden Boar, they head toward the fire.

"Think he'll show?" Price is rattled.

"He'll be here."

Soon Eacker and his friend James Randolph enter with a gust of wind.

"Shut the door!" men call from the bar. Eacker finds them at the hearth.

"So your father sends you out to do his dirty work?"

"My father has nothing to do with this. This is between you and me. I read your lies in the newspaper, and I demand a retraction."

Eacker spits in the sawdust. "There's your retraction."

"You call us rascals?" Price shouts and starts forward. Randolph grabs him.

"Yes!" Eacker says. "Damned rascals! Both of you!"

"Take it back!" Price shoves Eacker.

"I will not. It's the truth."

"Gentlemen, please," Randolph says. "Don't say tonight what you'll regret tomorrow. We've all made our points. The ladies await our return, Georgie."

Eacker is glaring at Hamilton. Philip glares back and lisps, "Yes, Georgie,

the ladies await your return.”

“I’m not done with you, Hamilton.” Eacker points his finger at Hamilton’s nose, then at Price. “I expect to hear from you, both of you.”

“You will!” Hamilton and Price say in unison.

Eacker brushes himself off and accompanies Randolph out of the bar. The door closes.

“Whew!” Price slumps into a chair. “Do I need a drink after that!”

Clenching and unclenching his fists, Hamilton orders a bowl of hot punch. He and Price sit by the fire and pass the bowl back and forth. “You know this Randolph? He travels with the vice president.”

“Sure. Burr’s Richmond Hill crew!”

Hamilton nods. “Burr claims my father cost him the presidency last winter. That’s what this is all about.”

“Well, he absolutely did!” Price nods. “And thank God he did.”

“George Eacker is Burr’s hatchet man.”

“What a nasty puss on him!”

“Doesn’t scare me.”

As they drink in silence, Hamilton hears his mother’s words: “You’re so impetuous.” She’s only a woman, what can she know about honor?

“Well,” Price says, “are we going to let it slide?”

“Not on your life. He called us rascals and pups! We’ll accept his challenge.” Hamilton calls for paper and a pencil, and he writes a note to Eacker. Price signs it, too. They dispatch a young waiter to the theater, and the boy returns in fifteen minutes with a response.

Price reads it and when he looks up, he’s pale. “Eacker will meet us across the river. Me on Sunday, and you on Monday. We are to choose the weapons.” Price’s lower lip trembles. “Why does he call me out first?”

“How should I know?” Hamilton’s face burns. Impetuous, is he? He will show everyone. He will protect his honor!

“Well, what do we do?”

“Uncle John!” Phil says. “He’s an expert on dueling. He has a set of pistols, too.”

“I think we need your father’s advice.”

“Not on your life,” Philip says. “Completely out of the question.”

“But you were defending his honor!”

“Eacker has called us out. If we tell the general, he’ll step in and stop it. We’re grown men, Ricky, so we’ll answer as men.” Philip calls the waiter back and scribbles a note, accepting the challenge.

“My God, Phil! A duel?”

“We’ll meet this Eacker and put him to the test.”

“He must be thirty years old!”

“It’s not a matter of age, it’s a matter of honor ... and courage.” Hamilton gives the waiter the note and sends him off. “I know where Uncle John will be tonight. He’s an expert on *code duello* and he’ll give us his guns.”

John Barker Church, a plump ginger Englishman with a bulbous nose, is winning at faro in his private Kensington Club. Hamilton and Price hustle the doorman to allow them into the gaming room, and when Church sees the boys, their distress is so apparent he cashes in his chips.

“Whoever told those Jacobin bastards they can play cards?” Church mutters in a thick East End accent as his pudgy fingers scoop up his winnings. “What’s the matter with you, boys? You look like you’ve gazed into hell.”

“We need your guns, Uncle John,” Philip says.

“Oh, is that all?” Church chortles. “Let’s have a drink. I always think better with a whiskey in my hand.”

They order drinks in the bar and sit comfortably before the fire.

“So, my fine young Philip, who are you planning to assassinate?”

Philip looks miserable. His eyes shift as he considers. “First, Uncle John, I must pledge you to secrecy. Upon your honor as a gentleman, will you hold this matter in the strictest confidence? Even from my father and mother?”

“If that is your wish.” Church’s smile fades. Step by step Philip relates his encounter with Eacker, concluding, “So he challenged us,” his voice goes high and reedy, “and we need to borrow your guns. Ricky for Sunday, and me on Monday.”

“Hmmm, I see.” Church exhales slowly. “First, though, we must

consult the general. This affair has deep political implications.”

“No!” Phil says. “My father mustn’t know about this till it’s over.”

“Not a sparrow falls from the sky but the general hears of it. We absolutely must bring him into this, Philip.”

“No, Uncle John, you agreed.”

“But you are defending his honor, son.”

“No! It’s *our* honor, and *you* promised, on *your* honor.”

“Eacker called you ‘rascals’ and ‘pups’? Have you tried to make accommodations?”

“Accommodations?” Philip is outraged. “Eacker called my father a traitor, circulated his lies in print, and now he insults me to my face? What accommodations are possible?”

“His insults are intolerable!” Price adds.

Church stares into the fire and sips his drink.

“Please, Uncle John!” Despite his efforts, Philip’s voice cracks.

“I need another drink.” Church holds up his glass to the barman. “Join me, boys?”

“I’m fine.”

“Very well. Come by the house in the morning, and I’ll give you the pistols.”

Hamilton nods and Price frowns. Things are moving rapidly.

At eight the next morning, the boys are at Church’s large stone mansion on Robinson Street. Philip, a favorite with the maids, sneaks in through the mud room facing the carriage house, and he and Price tiptoe down the hallway to his uncle’s office. Church enters five minutes later with bloodshot eyes. He’s ruffled, grouchy, and painfully hungover.

“Now, what’s this all about, young man?”

“We told you last night. George Eacker has called Ricky out for tomorrow and me on Monday. We are to supply the weapons.”

“Well, you’re not going. That’s final. We will make accommodations.”

“Last night you agreed we must meet him. It’s a matter of honor.”

“I did?”

“Yes, and you said we could use your pistols.” Philip’s eyes dart about.

“Who are your seconds?” The boys look at each other. “*Code duello* requires that you have seconds. A second’s role is to talk this through, to negotiate a compromise. Do you have seconds?”

The boys shake their heads. They never thought this far ahead.

“Well, I will put your cousin Philip in touch with Eacker’s second and we will see what accommodations can be made. Who is Eacker’s second?”

Hamilton shrugs. “Not sure. James Randolph? He was with him last night.”

Church summons a servant with the bell pull. “Tell Master Philip to join us.” The servant bows out.

“Can we see the guns?” Hamilton asks.

“Not so fast. Let’s see if my Philip can resolve this to everyone’s satisfaction.”

“Well, give us the guns now so if he can’t, we won’t need to bother you again.”

“You don’t know what you’re getting into.” Church stands, crosses to a bookcase, and bends down to unlock a cabinet. He pulls out a large wooden case and lays it on a table between them. “Open that.”

Philip opens the box. He and Price gasp. The elegantly tooled pistols lay nestled barrel-to-handle in blue velvet. They are works of art with walnut stocks, tooled brass, and gold fittings, and they’re ready for use.

“These pistols have done some deadly work, boys. Let’s see if we can resolve your situation amicably and keep you safe.”

The door opens to Church’s eldest son, also named Philip after their common grandfather, General Schuyler. Philip Church is four years older

than Hamilton, tall with a full head of red curls. Looking around at their glum faces, he asks pleasantly, “Whose funeral?”

“Hopefully, no one’s,” his father answers. “These lads have a situation, Phil. Do you know James Randolph or George Eacker?”

“I’ve met Randolph.”

“Eacker called them out last night, and they think Randolph will be his second.” Church waves his hand above the pistols. “I want you to act as their second, and before any guns go popping off, negotiate a resolution acceptable to everyone’s honor. If you can’t, well, I suppose you’ll have to cross the river with them, Price tomorrow, and Phil Monday.”

Philip Church nods. “From what I’ve heard about Eacker, he’s an awful hothead.”

“Perhaps Randolph can talk sense into him. See what you can do.” John Church turns to Price. “What time tomorrow?”

“We need to leave by two.”

“You’ve got a full day to figure this out, Phil. Find Randolph and let’s resolve this now.”

The four of them stand. Philip Hamilton picks up the pistol case.

“Leave that here.”

“It’s all right, Uncle John. This way we won’t need to bother you again.”

Church shrugs.

“Tell me the insults, the exact words,” Philip Church says as they leave the office and walk down the hall. Hamilton is telling his cousin how Eacker called him “an insolent pup” when his aunt suddenly emerges from a sitting room. Angelica Church is a tall, statuesque lady with twinkling blue eyes and reddish-blond hair. Her face lights up when she sees her nephew.

Hamilton passes the pistol case to Price.

“What a pleasure, Phil!” Angelica touches her cheek to his. “How are your dear parents?”

“Fine. Everyone’s fine. This is my friend Ricky Price. Ricky? Aunt Angelica.”

Price takes her hand and bows. Angelica notices the pistol case and looks quickly into her nephew’s eyes, then at her son. “What devilry are you boys up to?”

Philip Hamilton can hardly mumble an answer.

“Don’t ask, Mama,” Philip Church says. “It’s all under control.”

Angelica frowns. “Tell me, Philip!”

“Well, if you must know, ask Papa. Mr. Price needs the irons tomorrow. Target practice.”

“Please be careful, boys.”

“We will,” Hamilton, Church, and Price say in unison, and they’re out the side door of the mansion, up the drive, and along Robinson Street to Broadway. Hamilton and Price go east to their lodgings with the pistol case. Church goes south to hunt for Randolph.

Angelica Schuyler Church glides down the hallway, her sapphire gown rustling. When she enters her husband’s study, Church looks up. He’s pouring himself a shot of brandy.

“Really, John!” Her arms are folded. “Giving your guns to children?”

“Don’t fret, my darling! It’s only for show. They’re just itching to be men. Our Philip will calm everyone down and get it all sorted.”

“They lied to me. They said it was for target practice. What’s the dispute?”

“Please don’t ask, my dear. The less you know, the better.”

“Have you told Hamilton? Or Eliza?”

Church crosses his heart and raises his hand with an ironic smile. “I’m sworn to secrecy.” He tosses off the brandy.

Angelica shakes her head in dismay, “Men!” she sighs, and she glides out, leaving him to his ledger books and decanter.

At two o'clock the following day, an elegant coach-and-four careens out of the Church driveway and around the corner of Robinson Street onto the hard clay of Broadway. The driver whips his horses into a gallop.

Inside the swaying coach, John Barker Church clasps his silver flask and intermittently raps the ceiling with the knob of his cane, "Faster, damn it!" After four back-and-forth passes, his son Philip just returned with word that Eacker won't be appeased with anything less than an "interview." Philip Church and Richard Price have just left for the docks to row across the choppy river to New Jersey.

A dozen blocks down Broadway the driver takes the corner on two wheels, the leather springs creaking, pedestrians scattering, and he pulls to a bone-rattling halt at 69 Stone Street. Before his driver can roll down the passenger step, Church bursts from the coach and leaps to the ground. He hustles his bulk up the stairs to a door where a simple brass plate reads, "A. Hamilton, Attorney at Law." Church raps the head of his cane on the door. "Hamilton? Hamilton!" He looks this way and that and knocks harder. "Hamilton!"

The door opens slowly and Alexander Hamilton blinks, still deep in thought. It's Sunday and he's come to the office to work in silence, free of clients and interruptions. He squints to focus. "John? What is it?"

"Blast it, man, were you sleeping?" Church brushes past him.

“No.” Hamilton smiles, amused at his brother-in-law’s bluster. “What’s got you so riled?” He follows Church through the anteroom into his office.

Church turns and jabs a forefinger at Hamilton’s chest. “Your son! That’s what!”

“Philip?” Hamilton’s brow knits. “What’s the matter with Philip?”

“He’s been called out!”

Hamilton’s eyes widen and he snaps awake. “An interview?”

“Yes, damn it! And we have to think this through.” Church’s eyes are bugging out. He folds his hands behind his back and goes up and down on his toes. “Philip and his friend Price came to my club Friday night. They were in some altercation at the theater with a lawyer named Eacker.”

Hamilton closes his eyes and pinches his nose with his thumb and forefinger.

“I sent my Philip to negotiate a resolution, and they went back and forth, but he just returned in distress. Eacker won’t budge, and they have my guns! Your Philip made me promise not to tell you,” he throws out his arms, “but here I am. How in blazes do I get myself in the middle of these things? You and your damned politics!”

Church’s gaze fixes on a decanter of brandy on the sideboard. Hamilton notices, pours him a glass, and hands it to him. Hamilton’s face has gone pale.

“Does Angelica know?”

“Only about Price, not about Philip.”

“So Eliza doesn’t know. That’s good.” Hamilton begins to pace.

Church squeezes his bulk into a wing chair. He waves his arm around the room. “How can you work in these conditions? Let me send you my old mahogany desk and get you some drapes. Good God, man! When clients come in here they should be thinking one thing: ‘This is going to cost me a lot of money.’”

“The office is fine.”

“You had better field offices during the war.”

“So we can’t reach an accommodation?”

“I sent my Philip to Randolph, Eacker’s second, but he had no luck. Eacker demands an interview. Even if Philip were to apologize—”

“Out of the question!” Hamilton turns to him, his face set. “No apologies. The political overtones of this allow no apology. Eacker is one of Burr’s crew. Any show of cowardice will ruin Philip’s name and his chance to hold office. No, John, this is the first test of Phil’s courage, and he must pass it. The Republicans are waiting to see if he runs to me for protection, or if he stands on his own.”

Church lifts his glass and rolls his eyes. “Bravo!”

Hamilton paces as he thinks. “Eacker publicly called me a traitor in July. That is my affair. I ignored it. Phil’s error was in confronting him about it so long after the fact. I don’t want Philip fighting my battles, but I can’t fight his either. Still, we don’t want him shooting Eacker. The Republicans would label Phil a murderer, and he’d forfeit any future in politics.”

“When my Philip came back just now, the boys were speaking about throwing away their shot.”

“*Delope*?” Hamilton shakes his head. “Firing at the ground or into the sky? That’s not good. It dishonors the code, and is damn risky, too, because it gives your opponent a clear, open shot.” Hamilton fixes Church with a stare. “I wish you’d come to me sooner.”

“You’re lucky I came at all. I gave that little scamp my word!”

“When do they cross the river?”

“Price is on the river as we speak. Philip shoves off tomorrow.”

Hamilton looks intent. “Price spoke of *delope*? You heard that?”

“He doesn’t want blood on his hands. Yes, he said he will throw away his shot.”

Suddenly Hamilton brightens and claps his hands. “Well, there’s our answer, John! If Price returns in one piece, we’ll know that this is only a bluff and Philip can waste his shot tomorrow.”

“And if Price does not return?”

“Let’s not get that far ahead. Price’s interview will inform us. We’ll know soon enough.”

Church nods and toasts. “Brilliant, General. Here, here!”

“Yes, we’ll know very soon.” Despite his brave words, though, Hamilton grimaces and puts his hand on Church’s shoulder. “Inform me how Price fares as soon as you know, and not a word to anyone. Eliza must not learn of this.”

“Of course.”

As Church lets himself out, Hamilton stands motionless, gazing into the fire. For long minutes he examines the situation from every angle, watching low blue flames dance over the coals. Little Eliza, his youngest, turned two yesterday and they were to have her cake at dinner tonight. He needs to stay here, though, until he knows the outcome of Price’s interview. He scribbles a note and sends the livery stable boy along to Eliza to postpone festivities until tomorrow night. He tries to resume the maritime case he was working on when John interrupted him, but he can’t concentrate. He glances repeatedly at the clock.

The weak light fades and dread hangs over him like a shadow. He trims the candles and banks the coals in his grate. Another long, dark winter is blowing in. Each year, as the days shorten, memories of the horrors of Valley Forge return. Snow pelts his windowpane. It must be treacherous on the river. He can’t go home to Eliza and supper with the children until he knows.

At ten minutes to six, a harness jingles in the street. Church’s groom calls, “Whoa!” and then there’s a muffled curse and a hard knock. Hamilton opens the door. Church is well-oiled and jubilant. He holds out his arms for an embrace.

“They did it, General! Two rounds apiece and no injury.”

“Did Eacker throw away his shot?”

Church smiles. “How can anyone miss at that range?”

“Come in, man, get out of the cold!” Hamilton closes the door behind Church and takes his hat and coat. “Tell me everything.”

John chuckles drunkenly. The stress that weighed on him is gone. “Our sons brought Price to me as soon as he landed. They were all beaming! Chilled to the bone, mind you, the river’s choppy and snow squalls are blowing, but your Phil was waiting at the dock and they were all embracing and laughing and dancing for joy. Price recounted every detail. Oh, he’s quite the man of the world now!”

“Facing death does focus one.” Hamilton pours Church a brandy.

“Price tells how my Philip called, ‘Ready,’ and ‘Present,’ how his hand trembled with the weight of the gun. Not fear, mind you, oh, no, not fear.” Church chortles, then squints to dramatize. “Price glared at Eacker, raised up his gun,” he imitates the move, “daring Eacker to raise his pistol as well. Eacker responded, raised his gun and his shot went wide. No one hurt! Then they reloaded and did the same again.” Church toasts him. “We played our hand perfectly, General! Honor was satisfied. I left your Philip practicing his stance, summoning his courage. My Phil is now an authority on dueling, far more than you or I will ever be.”

Hamilton scowls. “Actually, John, I’ve never fought a duel.”

“Really? All that time in the army? All those scoundrels in Washington’s cabinet? No jealous husbands? What about that Reynolds character?”

“I’ve served as a second three times, and have been personally summoned seven, but I’ve always talked my way out. Are you sure there is no place for compromise now?”

“After this exhilaration?” Church laughs, shakes his head. “Your son won’t be outdone by Ricky Price. You were young once.”

“But Philip’s no soldier. He’s his mother’s son, and Eliza’s so protective.

We have such big plans for him.”

“Yes, of course. ‘President Hamilton’ the year he turns thirty-five.”

Hamilton nods. “And so his honor must remain above reproach. What time is Philip’s interview tomorrow?”

“Four.”

“It’s nearly dark by then. But if Philip repeats Price’s strategy, can we trust Eacker to do the same?” He slowly shakes his head. “I am skeptical of trusting Eacker with anything. There’s little comfort in the whim of a scoundrel.”

“All will be well,” Church says, and raises his glass. “I’m sure of it.”

It's a long, windy, sleepless night. Strong gusts rise and fall, rattling windowpanes and banging shutters. As he lays awake listening to Eliza's soft breathing, Hamilton tosses and worries. The bells in Trinity Church ring the hour until midnight. Why must he leave the matter in Philip's hands? Why doesn't he intervene, take control, call it off? He'd betray John's confidence and humiliate Philip, but he could avert a calamity. Over and over he imagines Philip, wide-eyed, downy-faced, raising his gun, then Eacker raising his, both gritting their teeth, aiming down their barrels. He strives to hear the back-to-back explosions, to foresee who falls and who is left standing.

The church bells awaken him at six. He must do something. It's still dark as he pulls back the woolen blankets.

"No! Please, don't leave me!" Eliza moans and reaches for him. "It's too cold! Come back and warm me up."

Hamilton pulls the covers up and holds Eliza as she nuzzles into him. She's so small and delicate. Even with her eyes closed he marvels at her beauty. Three months along with their eighth child, and she's glowingly pregnant. Hamilton recalls her first pregnancy with Philip, and he suddenly needs assurance that Philip will be safe. The mantel clock is ticking.

"Were you awake all night?" she murmurs without opening her eyes.

"I need very little sleep. You know that." His breath is vapor in the dark

air.

“What’s the matter, darling?” Eliza lifts her head from his shoulder. “Dare I ask?” Eliza has beautiful dark eyes, and her gaze is steady and forceful.

Hamilton smiles to put her off. “Wicked case.”

She sees through his usual ruse. “It’s not Philip, is it?”

He pauses, narrows his eyes. “Why would you think that?”

“You were late, and he skipped Sunday dinner. It is Philip, isn’t it? He hasn’t got that girl in trouble, has he?”

Hamilton laughs and grips her belly. “You’re the only pregnant lass I know! And you’re a beautiful young mother ... again!”

Eliza laughs and pushes him away. “Tell me, Hamilton!”

“It’s the newspaper. So much that needs my attention. I must delegate more.”

“Don’t you have enough pressure in your law office?”

“Exactly.” He’s up then, white nightshirt in the dark, feet on the cold boards. He pulls on his breeches. “I’m going over to the paper. Coleman needs me to approve a column before he goes to press.”

The first edition of *The New York Evening Post* appeared a week ago with high-flying promises about objectivity and divergent points of view.

“Don’t forget Eliza’s cake and candles tonight.”

He winces. Philip’s interview is at four.

“I’ll be home by six.”

“We’ll eat at six-thirty, then. If you see Philip ...”

Hamilton leans down and kisses Eliza as her large dark eyes stare up. Does she suspect anything? His duplicity troubles him. If anything happened to Philip, how could he face those eyes?

“I’ll send him a note.”

Hamilton’s down the stairs and out the door before the children are up.

Wall Street is frosty and clogged with Monday morning traffic and horses' steaming breath. The bells of Trinity Church ring the quarter hour, and the coffee houses are open with chalkboards on the sidewalk. Dressed smartly in a trim blue wool coat and tricorne, Hamilton walks straight to Philip's lodging near the college.

Price opens at his knock and stands back, surprised. "Why, General Hamilton!"

"May I see Philip?"

"Of course, of course. Come in."

Hamilton steps in, looks around at the wine bottles, guttered candles, and scattered clothing. When he hears a young woman giggle in one of the bedrooms, he thanks Price and tells him he'll wait on the landing.

Two minutes later, Philip emerges, smoothing down his hair and pulling on his coat. "What is it, Papa?" His eyes are keen, expectant. As Hamilton hugs him, Philip holds back.

"Everything all right?"

"Fine."

"Let's get coffee." They go down the stairs and into the chilly gray morning. "Your mother wants me to remind you about Eliza's cake and candles tonight."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Papa. I forgot. I, uh, I've made other plans."

They walk awkwardly in silence. Hamilton hesitates to breach Church's confidence. "You have?"

Philip glances at his father. "You know, don't you?"

"Not much escapes the gossip mill in this town."

Philip clenches his jaw and blushes. "Uncle John! Damn him! I knew he'd run to you!"

Hamilton stops and faces him. "Don't blame your uncle, Phil. We're concerned about you. There must be a way to avoid this interview."

“Sure. The coward’s way. I can apologize.”

“What prompted it?”

“Eacker’s speech about you.”

“That was four months ago!” Hamilton’s exasperated. “Why now?”

“Price and I went to the theater Friday night and saw Eacker. He called us ‘rascals’ and ‘pups,’ so we responded.”

“Yes?”

“And in case you haven’t heard, Price met him yesterday. They exchanged fire, but no one was hit.” Philip’s voice rises high and breaks. “I will meet him today.”

Hamilton can feel his palpable fear and wants to soothe it away. “You have a brilliant future, Phil. Everyone sees it.”

“And so I cannot allow any blemish to my honor.”

“But is it your honor or mine you’re defending? You could credibly say your father can defend his own honor and send Eacker to me.”

“And then Ricky Price shows he has the courage to meet Eacker, but Philip Hamilton hides behind his famous father?”

“Do you realize how much political capital Eacker would win by eliminating you?”

“Of course. He’s a Republican attack dog, and I am your son.”

“I wrestled with this all night, Phil. You are in a lose-lose situation. Eacker had no incentive to shoot Price, but he has a great incentive to shoot you, and if he shoots you, he could injure or ... or kill you. If you shoot Eacker, the Republicans will charge you with assault, or even murder.”

“Don’t you think I don’t see it all, Papa?” Philip moans.

They arrive at Tontine’s and climb the stairs. Men are talking and posturing, their breath visible in the frosty air. Hamilton and Philip enter the smoky corridor that leads into the large steamy room. As agents and brokers follow them in, the deep baritone of men gearing up for business drowns their

words. They find a booth in the back. A waiter takes their order and Hamilton faces his son. Philip cannot hold his steady gaze and looks away. He behaves like a small boy who's done something wrong.

"I know you're worried, Papa, but I need to do this." His knee is bouncing up and down—all his bravado's fled. "I got myself into this and I must get myself out. Otherwise—"

He looks away and wipes the tears from his eyes.

Hamilton's heart aches for his son, but he knows deference and respect will go farther than any attempt to rescue him. "You're a grown man, so I can't stop you, but have you thought about what you will do once upon the dueling ground?"

Philip nods. His mouth twitches and his eyes again fill with tears. He closes his eyes and Hamilton sees that he's imagining the climactic moment, pistol to pistol. Philip bites his lip, wipes his nose on his sleeve, and avoids his father's gaze. "I will throw away my shot, as Price did."

"You know *delope* violates the code and is considered dishonorable?"

"Really?"

"'Rule 13. No dumb shooting or firing in the air.' *Delope* is only permitted when you consider your opponent too inferior to merit a bullet. Did Eacker throw away his shot or did he miss Ricky Price?"

"They each fired twice. How can you miss at that range? Twice?"

"Anything can happen on the dueling ground."

The waiter is back, and he pours two mugs of coffee and tops them with steamed milk from a long-handled copper pitcher. Father and son crumble in cubes of brown sugar and stir.

"I know Price threw away his shot, but I'm not certain about Eacker." Philip sips, looks at his father, and puts down his cup. "I'd like to put a bullet in his traitorous heart, Papa. How can he publish such scurrilous lies about you? And when I confront him, he turns me into the aggressor? Calls me 'toff' and 'aristocrat'? I could kill him easily at that distance ..."

“What if you just wound him?”

Philip squints. “Shoot him, Papa?”

“You’re a good shot. You could wing him, or hobble him.”

“But if he sees me aiming to shoot him,” Philip pauses for a breath and swallows hard, “he could shoot to kill. If I aim at the sky, he might see me do that and do the same.”

“Wounding him is risky, but not as risky as giving him a clear shot.” Hamilton leans closer. “Eacker challenged you, Phil. He deserves a bullet for that alone. Think about this. When the signal’s given, raise your pistol to his thigh and shoot. He’ll fall, his shot will go wide and you’ll be safe.”

“But Price threw away his shot and came back a hero.”

“You won’t do much harm if you aim low.”

Philip takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. “All right, Papa. I’ll do that.”

“You will do what?”

“Shoot him in the leg.” Tears spill down his cheeks and he wipes them angrily away.

“Good.” Hamilton clasps Philip’s hand. “We both agree that a scoundrel like Eacker cannot ruin your future. A leg wound will heal in a couple of months. Draw first blood and you’ll earn respect.”

“All right. That’s what I’ll do.” Philip squeezes his father’s hand. “Thank you, Papa.”

They turn to more pleasant topics: Philip’s work in Pendleton’s law office, his array of clients, his first trip to the mayor’s court. After they finish their coffee, they walk back to Philip’s lodging. Philip offers his father a handshake, but Hamilton embraces him, holds him as long as he can, and kisses him on the neck. In the embrace he can feel Philip’s trembling, and then his resolve. Hamilton still needs reassurance.

“Now what’s the plan?”

“As soon as the signal’s given, I shoot him in the leg.”

“That’s it.”

“I’ll be home as quickly as I can, but don’t hold Eliza’s cake and candles for me.”

“Be well.” Hamilton clasps his son’s arms and looks him in the eye. “Be safe.”

Philip nods. Hamilton leaves quickly to avoid showing any worry. He wipes tears from his eyes as he walks the six blocks to *The Post* offices at 40 Chestnut Street.

Stiff winds are blowing off the dunes of New Jersey as a heavy barge bucks and rolls in the choppy river. Four men struggle with the oars, rowing into the wind. Waves slap the sides of the boat and salt spray shoots high over the gunwales. As Hercules Mulligan throws his brawn into one of the oars, he launches into a sea chanty.

Philip Hamilton lies back in the bow, arms folded, ankles crossed, feet resting on the pistol case. He looks grimly at his cousin. Above the wind and slapping waves, Philip Church calls to him in encouragement.

“You all right?”

“Yeah.”

“Just do what Ricky did and we all go home.”

Philip Hamilton nods, but he promised his father he’d wound Eacker in the leg. He’s hunted for years—squirrels, possum, deer, fox—but he’s never shot a man. Can it be very different? Despite the bravado and Mulligan’s bold song, Philip turns and vomits over the side. He and his cousin exchange looks. This is it, facing your fear, becoming a man. Hamilton sits upright, dips his handkerchief in the river, and wipes his face.

Seagulls wheel and screech above a low hump of sand as the barge scrapes to a halt. Eacker and Randolph are already in place. Mulligan leaps into the water and drags the barge up the sandbar, then helps Hamilton out.

“Steady, son,” Mulligan whispers and grips his hand. Philip looks into the

Irishman's fat face and worries his fear is showing.

Climbing up the sand dune, Philip Hamilton removes his coat and hat. He stretches his arms in the gusts of wind and ignores the nausea and the urge in his bowels. His head clears as he stares out over the broad gray Hudson, back toward the low roofs and steeples of Manhattan. He looks at Eacker, tall, smiling, cocky, and decides he can shoot this man, he will shoot him. The wind ruffles his white blouse and dark hair.

Church and Randolph toss a coin. Church wins. He and Randolph measure out ten paces, and then Church opens the pistol case and methodically, face-to-face, he and Randolph load the pistols with wadding and balls. They push the balls down with the ramrod, sprinkle black powder into the pans from a powder horn, and cock back the flintlocks. Church hands his cousin a pistol, then steps away. The gun is heavy as Philip hefts it. Randolph hands Eacker the other.

"Nice iron," Eacker sneers, then looks at Philip. His dark eyes spook Philip, who turns sideways to give Eacker the smallest possible target. He feels his hand twitching and he hates himself for showing fear

"Ready?" Church calls into the wind. Eacker nods and Hamilton nods. "Present!" The combatants stare at each other. Neither man raises his gun. Eacker's stare is domineering, hypnotic, evil. Slowly Hamilton raises his pistol and aims at Eacker's knee, but he can't pull the trigger. When he sees the sneer of hatred on Eacker's face, he panics and jerks his pistol higher, exposing his torso.

Eacker calmly raises his gun and pulls the trigger. It explodes with a tongue of flame and a cloud of smoke.

A searing hot pain rips into Philip's side. As he jerks up on one foot, his finger squeezes the trigger, the gun fires and his shot goes wide. He spins and falls, groaning through clenched teeth, "Noooooo!"

His cousin is running across the sand. "Phil! My God! Phil!"

Eacker sneers at Hamilton crumpled on the ground. "Here!" He throws

the gun toward the wooden case. “Be careful.” Randolph yanks on Eacker’s arm and they hurry down to their barge and shove it into the waves. Immediately their oars are splashing back toward Manhattan.

Philip Hamilton looks up into his cousin’s face. Tears are streaming down his cheeks and his lips are trembling. His hand, holding the abdominal wound, is wet and sticky with blood when he pulls it away. “Is it bad?”

“We’ve got to get you home.” Church covers Hamilton with his coat. Mulligan is running up the beach with the other oarsmen. Mulligan barks orders, lifts Philip by the arms, and directs two others to take his legs. They carry him down to the water’s edge. As Church returns for his father’s pistols, the boatmen gently lay Hamilton in the barge on his folded coat. It’s nearly dark and the gray November wind rips at them. Whitecaps are foaming as they shove the barge into the churning river and row back to Manhattan.

Peggy McGinty and Kate Ahearn gossip as they work in the basement kitchen of the Hamilton town house. Peggy, who arrived this summer from Cork, turns the spit while Kate bastes the goose. Grease spatters and hisses on the coals. Kate lays her large spoon down and opens the oven to remove a pair of cake pans.

“Here you go, Peggy-O. I’ll finish the goose if you ice the cake. I hate the icing part. The family makes such a fuss over the children’s birthdays. Two days now the lass has pestered her mama for a cake.”

“Such a kind, loving mama,” Peggy says. She has a round, red, innocent face and large blue eyes. “How the general dotes on her! I pray someday a man will love me like that.”

“You’re daft!” the aunt scolds her. “He’s put her through a world of heartache with his roving eye. You must see that.”

“I don’t believe a word.”

“Aye, and he’s much too friendly with Mrs. Hamilton’s sister, too, though I’m not one to carry tales. He don’t deserve the missus, is all I’m saying.”

“But they love each other so! I see the devotion in his eyes.”

“You don’t see the sorrow in hers because she don’t show it. That’s breeding. But it sure cost her heavy four years back. News of an old affair blazed up, and the general admitted everything. Publicly! In print! Wrote a pamphlet how he consorted with some whore in Philadelphia, and her

husband blackmailed him! A wife never recovers from that shame. The poor missus fled with the younger ones up to her parents' home in Albany, and we thought she'd never come back."

"Aye, but the general's so handsome! And young Philip! Those dark eyes!"

"Wouldn't put it past either of them to give you a tumble. Keep your skirts down, girly, and you won't be dismissed with a bastard at your breast."

"Never worry, Aunt Kate. I'm not going to lose this station."

"Summon the family now. You can ice the cake whilst they're eating."

Peggy climbs the stairs ruminating about "the missus," and finds her in the nursery, sitting on the floor with Willie and the birthday girl. Eliza, now in the first trimester of her eighth pregnancy, is finishing Aesop's fable "The Fox and the Grapes." The toddlers gaze at their mother in rapt attention. "And that is why," Eliza gently closes the book, and kisses the top of each little head, "we say someone has sour grapes."

"Hooray!" Little Eliza claps her hands.

"Another, Mama?" Willie asks. "Please?"

Eliza looks up at Peggy and smiles.

"Dinner in a quarter hour, mum."

"Take the birthday girl down, Peggy. I'll fetch the general."

Peggy speaks excitedly to the children as Eliza descends the steep stairway to her husband's study on the first floor. She taps gently and opens the door. Hamilton looks up. Worry lines crease his face as he strives to smile.

"What's wrong, darling?"

He laughs dismissively. "This deuced admiralty case." He waves at the open books and pages of foolscap covered in his handwriting.

She scowls. "Is there something I need to know?"

"Yes, our little girl just turned two."

She kisses his forehead and helps him out of the chair. “I love birthdays. Come along and let’s get dinner started. Have you seen Philip?”

Hamilton moves toward the door, avoiding her eyes. “John told me the boys might go deer hunting today above the Bowery.”

“Surely he remembers Eliza’s birthday!”

“I sent Judah along with a note. I’m sure he’ll be by later.”

“I worry, darling, when my family’s not all together.”

Hamilton turns and hugs Eliza.

“What’s that for?”

“Everything will be all right.”

“Well, I should hope so!” She smiles tentatively. “Is everything all right?”

“Fine, my darling. Everything is fine.”

He leads her into the dining room. Peggy is seating little Eliza at the table, but when the baby sees her father she squeals, “Papa!” and runs across the floor to be swept up and held aloft, laughing as her father jiggles her above his face.

“How’s the birthday girl? Two years old!”

“No, Papa! Don’t tickle me!” she protests, laughing with delight.

The other children cluster around, and Hamilton tells them to take their places. Dreamy Angelica, a willowy seventeen-year-old named after her aunt, sits to his left. Around the table are Alexander, taller at fifteen than his dad; James, thirteen, lean, dark-eyed and mischievous; John Church, ten, plump, named after his uncle; Willy, five; and Little Eliza dressed in a sparkling party dress and crowned with a rhinestone tiara.

“Where’s Phil?” Angelica asks. She has her father’s luminous blue eyes.

“Hunting with his cousins, apparently.” Eliza glances toward her husband. “He will be along later.” Hamilton nods but still avoids her eyes.

When all are seated, Eliza rings the bell and Kate carries in the large

silver platter with the goose surrounded by roasted potatoes and carrots.

Hamilton busies himself sharpening the carving knife on a whetstone: “Uncle John says the boys went deer hunting. Wouldn’t a haunch of venison be welcome?” He begins carving. “It’s been dark awhile. I am sure he’ll be along soon.” Hamilton expertly severs the legs and the wings and begins slicing white meat from the breast.

As he hands the third plate to Alexander, there’s a loud knock on the door. Visibly startled, he stops carving. “I’ll see who that is.”

“Peggy can answer the door,” Eliza says. Now she’s concerned.

Hamilton returns to his carving but is glancing toward the door when a deep voice says: “I need to see the general. Now.”

Hamilton recognizes the voice. He hands the carving knife to Alexander and, avoiding Eliza’s eyes, leaves the dining room. Peggy is standing at the front door, flustered, and a big man is just outside, his breath steaming.

“General!” the rough character calls around the maid. He wears a long leather coat and his unkempt hair flows from under a crushed top hat.

“Mulligan? My God, man, how long has it been? It’s all right, Peggy. I will see him.” Hamilton looks back and sees Eliza in the dining room doorway, so he steps into the dark and cold and quickly closes the door behind him. “What’s the news?”

“Not good, General.” Mulligan shakes his head and looks down. “You must come at once.”

Hamilton is staggered and he grips the railing for balance. “Tell me.” He steps down the stairs to make sure Eliza will not hear.

“Your boy asked me to hire some lads and row him to a sandbar off Paulus Hook. I saw everything. Philip threw away his shot,” Mulligan sighs, “but Eacker shot to kill.”

Hamilton can barely control himself. He told Philip to wound Eacker, but he disobeyed! Philip’s been coddled his whole life. He wasn’t ready for the dueling ground. Now he’s hurt.

“Where was he hit?”

“Gut wound, General. Nasty.”

Hamilton’s heart sinks and he feels light-headed. “Do you consider it—?”
He grabs the railing to steady himself.

“Fatal, sir? Can’t say for sure.” Mulligan’s face says otherwise. “Sorry, General.”

“I’ll fetch the doctor.”

“They’ve sent for doctors.”

“Hosack?”

“I don’t know.”

Hamilton fights to keep his breathing even. “Where’d you take him?”

“Church’s house.”

“What can I tell his mother?”

At that moment the door opens, and Eliza’s silhouette is framed by yellow candlelight from the hall and dining room behind. “Is everything all right?”

Hamilton is nauseous with fear. He’s seen too many young men wounded by bullets, and he wants to spare Eliza. “Philip’s been injured.”

“How?”

He tries to cover his fear, but his voice betrays him. “Apparently, he was shot. He’s at Angelica’s. It doesn’t appear to be bad. I’ll ride over and see.”

“Let me come with you.” She gathers her skirts.

Hamilton must get control of this. He climbs the stairs, gently pushes her inside, and closes the door behind him. “No, darling, don’t ruin Eliza’s birthday party. Have your supper and your birthday cake. I’ll send word if we need you.” He embraces her. “He’ll be all right. I’m sure it’s not serious.”

Eliza tries to suppress her worry. “Send word as soon as you know anything. Please, darling.” Her gaze searches his face and he meets it as best he can.

“I will. Of course I will.” He takes his riding coat and hat from the peg and goes out. Mulligan accompanies him to the stable and helps him saddle his horse. They lead the horse out to the alley.

“Sorry for your trouble, General.”

“It’s not your fault.” He takes Mulligan’s hand. “Thank you, old friend.”

“Anything I can do. You know that.”

Hamilton leaps into the saddle and canters up the deserted street. Pelting snow stings his face as he kicks the horse into a gallop.

A light is shining in Hosack's window. Hamilton pulls to a stop, dismounts, takes the stairs two-by-two, and pounds on the door. "David! David!" Through a side window he sees a maid coming with a candle, then above him the shutters swing open.

"Who's there?"

"Hamilton."

"What is it, General?"

"My Philip. He's been injured. Can you come at once?"

"I'll be right down."

The maid opens the door. Hamilton enters the hallway but keeps his hat on. The maid leads him into a warm parlor, where coals are glowing in the grate. Hosack clomps noisily down the stairs.

"How was he injured?"

"Shot."

"How?"

He can't answer. Fear for Philip's life and guilt for not stopping the duel make him dizzy. He gropes for the nearest chair and collapses.

"Quick, Betsy," Hosack says, "fetch the brandy."

Hosack squats at the side of the chair and rubs Hamilton's hands to stimulate circulation.

"Duelling?" Hosack asks. "Was he duelling?"

Hamilton opens his eyes. "Help me, David."

"Where was he wounded?"

"Abdomen."

Hosack's face is stony with disapproval. "Savage custom! Barbaric!" He stands. The maid hands Hamilton a glass of brandy and he gulps it. "Where is he?"

"I'll take you."

"No, sit here. Collect yourself."

"They took him to Church's."

"I'll go at once." Hosack's tone is cold. "You know I don't approve of dueling, General."

"Philip swore Church to secrecy when he borrowed the guns." Hamilton's voice cracks, adding, "He didn't want his parents to know." Hosack nods, and his stern look of rebuke alerts Hamilton to all he could lose tonight: his son, his legacy, Eliza's love. "Save him, David! Please."

"I'll do what I can."

The maid pours him a second brandy. Hosack retrieves his medical bag from the office and passes through the parlor with his coat and hat.

"Compose yourself, General, and rest awhile. It could be a long night."

Hamilton nods and leans forward, resting both elbows on his thighs to hold his head in his hands. Hosack closes the door.

Hosack is the finest surgeon in New York, Hamilton tells himself. He will save Philip. True, gut wounds are usually fatal, but if no vital organs were hit and the bullet passed through, he could fully recover. Maybe Phil's wound is not so grave, maybe it only appeared bad because of the bleeding. Mulligan's no doctor. Hamilton prays as he's not prayed for years. He tries to have faith and hope, but his guilt overwhelms him. Why didn't he order Philip to stay home?

Soon Hamilton is composed enough to ride. He thanks the maid as she

helps him into his long leather coat, and he goes outside to his horse. The cold air braces him for what lies ahead. Perhaps it won't be as bad as he fears. Surely, Hosack will save him. Above all, he must remain calm. He pulls himself up into the saddle, takes the reins and nudges his horse into a trot.

John Church's massive stone mansion rises three stories above Robinson Street. A full moon casts silver light on the granite facade as snow flurries swirl above. High in the sky the wind is shredding clouds into rags. Hamilton dismounts and ties his horse to the wrought iron fence. The front door opens, and Angelica rushes out.

"My God, Hamilton!" She flings herself into his arms and he holds her as she sobs. "Our poor, poor Philip!" Her face is streaked with tears. "I'm so afraid!"

"Let's go inside."

"John gave him the pistols! My God! John knew! He knew and gave him the guns and sent him to a duel but wouldn't tell you! A duel! And he sent our Philip along with him too. They're only boys!"

"I asked David Hosack to come."

"He's here, but he can't do anything."

Hamilton breaks Angelica's embrace to hold her at arm's length and hand her his handkerchief. "Here. Please." He will be strong for her, and this will help him as well.

She shakes her head. "You're not prepared for this."

"I fought a war."

"But it's Philip!"

He has no patience for her histrionics. "Please take me to him."

Angelica leads him inside, through the grand foyer, up the curved, sweeping staircase, and down a hallway. Two maids rush from a doorway with armloads of bloody sheets. Suddenly, Philip howls in pain. Hamilton stops at the threshold and peers inside. He feels again the nausea he felt at

amputations in surgical tents during the war.

A dozen candles and oil lamps light the scene. On a bed without curtains Philip is thrashing, his frilled blouse soaked with blood. Hosack has cut the waistband of his breeches to expose a gory wound in the white flesh just above his hip. Two male servants hold Philip down as the doctor probes for the ball. Again Philip howls and jerks up as Hosack cuts into him. When he opens his eyes, he sees his father. “Papa?” he calls and struggles to sit up. “Papa!” Tears and mucus are running down his face.

Hamilton sits on the bed and takes his hand. “I’m here, Phil.” He kisses Philip’s sweaty forehead and wipes his face with his sleeve. “Tell me, Doctor.”

Hosack shakes his head. “The bullet ruptured his spleen. I can’t stop the bleeding.”

“I’m sorry!” the boy sobs. “Oh, Papa! I’m so sorry! I wanted to make you proud of me, but I couldn’t—”

“I am proud of you, Philip,” Hamilton interrupts. He wipes away his own tears and puts his hand on the doctor’s shoulder. “Can you save him, David?”

Hosack does not answer.

“Where’s Mama?”

With a sinking heart Hamilton knows he can’t hide this from Eliza any longer. He asks Angelica, “Will you send for Eliza?”

Angelica nods. “I’ll dispatch the coach.”

Eliza and pale Angelica are waiting in riding habits as the coach halts before their house. The coachman gets down to help them, and he bows in greeting.

“How was my son shot?” Eliza asks. Her dark eyes bore for truth in the man’s dull expression.

“Gen’l says you should come at once,” the man mutters.

Eliza concludes from his evasion that the news is dire. She gently leads her daughter to the coach. The driver helps them up with no emotion, but when he takes the reins, he whips the horses into a full gallop. Inside the swaying coach, Eliza wonders why men must “protect” women from harsh realities when women surely cope much better with birth and death, and all the heartache between.

As they skid to a halt before the Church mansion, Angelica rushes out to meet her sister and her niece, and she escorts them inside. Snow blows in as she closes the door and helps them with their cloaks.

“What happened?” Eliza asks, her steady dark eyes searching her sister’s.

More composed now, Angelica reaches for her namesake. “Perhaps this is not something our delicate Angel should witness.”

“She is worried about her brother,” Eliza says evenly. “I promised I would bring her. How is he?”

“Not good. Abdominal wound.”

“How was he shot?”

“Dueling.”

Eliza’s eyes go hard. So this is what Hamilton was hiding from her!

“He used John’s pistols,” Angelica continues. “Our Philip attended as his second. I should have guessed it when I saw them leaving John’s office Saturday morning, but they told me it was the other boy’s affair. Richard Price.”

Eliza’s voice is hoarse as they quickly move toward the stairs. “Did his father know?”

“No,” Angelica says. “I asked John. Philip swore John to secrecy.”

“Really.”

They’re up the stairs and gliding down the hallway when a piercing scream freezes them. With her eyes open wide Eliza picks up her skirts and races down the hall. Her sister calls after her, “Prepare yourself!” but no mother could be prepared for this. Candles light the scene like some unholy rite. Eliza sees her firstborn splayed across the bed like a half-slaughtered animal. Blood is spattered everywhere, his clothes, the mattress, and the pillows. Hamilton is bent over their son and doesn’t see her enter. Two maids are sobbing by the mantelpiece, holding each other as Hosack closes his medical bag and shakes his head.

“I’m afraid there’s nothing more I can do.”

The aunt leads her niece closer, but young Angelica shrinks back, whimpering. As Philip rises up and suddenly screams, his sister faints. John Church, obviously drunk, stumbles over to Eliza. “He wanted the guns. Swore me to secrecy. What could I do?”

“Please, John,” Angelica says, “help me with our dear Angel.” John takes his niece’s other arm, and Eliza glares at him, pressing her lips together until they’re white.

“Let’s get her to bed,” Angelica says as she and her husband half drag and half carry the young woman out of the room.

Eliza is numb with shock. She goes to Hamilton and puts her hand on his

shoulder. He turns toward her, and she feels his despair. She reaches down for his hand and squeezes it until he bends and kisses hers. “Eliza!”

“We must have faith,” she whispers. He nods. She drops his hand, lifts her skirts, and climbs into the bed.

Philip feels her and opens his eyes. “Mama?”

“I’m here, Phil.” Eliza kisses him and reaches out to comfort him. His blood stains her dress, and the amount of blood, the severity of the wound overwhelm her. She cannot get enough air into her lungs.

“Oh, Mama!” he sobs. “It hurts so bad!” Eliza gathers him into her arms. Hamilton watches a moment, then circles to the other side of the bed and he gets in. The boy turns. “Papa?” His teeth are chattering.

“I’m here, Phil.”

“It’s so cold.”

“We’ll warm you.”

Hamilton and Eliza move closer. Their eyes lock. The boy is sobbing between them. “I wanted to make you proud, Papa.”

“I am always proud of you, Phil, so very proud.”

Eliza wonders how they can think of pride just now. “We are here, Philip, and we won’t leave you.”

Soon Eliza’s lips are moving silently in prayer as the maids blow out the candles and bank coals in the low fire in the hearth.

Half-asleep in the dark, Hamilton remembers another deathbed on a hot, sticky Caribbean night in a narrow upstairs room. He was thirteen and his mother was dying. He lay on a straw tick alongside her, both of them sick with dysentery, vomiting, diarrhea. He lapsed in and out of sleep, and when he awoke, the smell! “Mama?” He shook his mother. She did not move. Her eyes were empty, glassy, gazing at the ceiling. His heart was breaking and despair overwhelmed him, alone in the dark. Nothing would ever be the same, he knew as he lay next to his mother’s body, exhausted, sick, helpless, wondering what would happen when the sun rose. His fear and despair are as

deep and as keen tonight.

Hours later, a shaft of cold gray light awakens him. On the other side of Philip, he sees Eliza staring at him, unblinking. He searches her face for suspicion or blame but sees only shock and sorrow. He looks at Philip's open eyes, feels his cold hand, and knows he is dead. Eliza nods imperceptibly and closes her eyes. He knows she is praying. Hamilton closes his eyes as well, speechless in his agony.

After closing Philip's eyes and gently pulling a sheet over his face, Hamilton helps Eliza out of the bed. She moves slowly and her eyes are vacant with shock. He thanks Angelica Church and in the coach he takes Eliza and their quiet, bewildered daughter home. Eliza leads Angel upstairs, while Hamilton breaks the news to the other children. He is numb with misery and guilt as his children stare at him, confused and horrified, unable to comprehend why they will never see their brother again. When Eliza comes downstairs, he tells her he has to attend to some things. He hugs each of the boys and kisses little Eliza who's curled in her mother's arms, and he leaves for the refuge of his law office.

About ten-thirty, Bill Coleman stops by.

"I apologize for bothering you, General, but everyone's speculating about Philip's death. We should print something in tomorrow's edition to preempt rumors. How shall I play it?"

"It was murder." Hamilton's voice is flat. "Eacker challenged him. Philip borrowed his uncle's guns and pledged him to secrecy."

Coleman looks up from his shorthand. "He never told you?"

Hamilton meets Coleman's steady green eyes and shakes his head. He has thought this over and realizes he cannot admit foreknowledge. Although he's not spoken with Church, Church told Angelica that Philip pledged him to secrecy. Full disclosure would help nothing and could make him complicit.

Coleman nods. If he suspects the truth, he says nothing. “Be sure to put in how he was amiable and well-liked,” Hamilton adds, “and conclude with a condemnation of dueling, along with a plea for legislation to outlaw it.”

“As if that will ever stop it.” Coleman finishes scrawling his notes. “Let me see if I can get it in today’s edition. They say Burr’s ‘Little Band’ was celebrating at Martling’s last night, toast after toast to Eacker, who’s now their hero. Our party men are looking for your guidance.”

Hamilton’s anger is visceral, but he controls his expression. Republicans are dancing on Philip’s grave and gloating over his cataclysmic sorrow. “After the funeral I’m off to the country. I need to be with my family, Bill. I can’t think about politics now.”

“Understood.” Coleman extends his hand. “My deepest condolences.”

Hamilton shakes his hand. “Thank you, Bill.”

The news story runs Tuesday afternoon, and Hamilton spends Wednesday in the charged quiet of his home while over at the Church mansion David Hosack and the servants prepare the body and Angelica makes the funeral arrangements. Eliza stays in bed all day, hardly able to speak in her grief. Young Angelica sits in her garret room, holding a rag doll from her childhood, staring at the wall and mumbling to herself. Quarrels break out among the younger children, and finally Little Eliza, picking up the mood but unable to comprehend its cause, climbs into his lap and wails. Hamilton holds her to his shoulder and rocks her slowly and sings her a lullaby.

In freezing rain next morning, a gravedigger hacks with a pickax, and two others stab the earth with shovels. Frost has hardened the ground of Trinity churchyard. The men struggle to dig the hole before it is needed.

“General’s destroyed, everyone says,” one of them observes. “I was with him at Valley Forge, you know. Good man. The best. He’d always come ’round to the sick and wounded with a pot of soup and a kind word.”

“Aye,” says the one with the pickax, “I served with him at Yorktown. Canny one, there. Marched us back and forth just out of range of the Brits’ guns, taunting them to draw their fire and waste their shot. When the time come for the charge, he swings his sword up high, brandishes it around, and rallies us into a battle fury. Up he goes then, first one over the battlement, and we all follow. Aye, we would have followed him into hell!” He nods in emphasis. “A good commander never sends his men where he won’t go himself.”

“Grooming his lad to be president, they say,” the third observes. “That had the Republicans worried. I hoisted a tankard over at Martling’s not long back, and I heard them talking. The kid was smart and handsome, chip off the old block, and they feared how quick he’d rise. Eacker’s their hero now.” This gravedigger wears a knit cap with no brim, and rain runs down through the stubble of his cheeks as if he is weeping. “Terrible what he done.”

The bell in Trinity’s steeple begins to toll. For the last hour it has been

silent while inside the church Bishop Benjamin Moore read scripture and offered platitudes to help family and friends fit this senseless death into God's divine plan. In the front pew, Hamilton remembers why he finds clergy intolerable. He sits with his three eldest sons and his pale Angel, who insisted on seeing her brother one last time. The two younger children stayed home with Eliza, who could not muster strength enough to attend the funeral. Hamilton's worried she might miscarry, but he keeps this fear to himself.

The church is filled this dark, rainy morning with friends from Revolutionary days, peg-legged Gouverneur Morris most conspicuous among them. In the last pew Hercules Mulligan slides in late with some of his rough-and-tumble Sons of Liberty.

In a loose white surplice Bishop Moore floats down from the altar, blesses the coffin, and leads the procession down the aisle. Philip's brothers, James, John, and Alexander, have gone forward to join the other pallbearers, Philip Church and Phil's friends Davey Jones and Ricky Price. With Bishop Moore leading, a line of black umbrellas trails into the rainy churchyard toward the wet, gaping hole. Hamilton follows despondently. No sorrow for the hundreds of young soldiers he buried during the war can compare with today. Flesh of his flesh. Watching handsome Philip rise into adulthood, Hamilton found new purpose and joy: a Hamilton dynasty. Now that's all extinguished. As he falters, Angelica and John Barker Church catch him and help him regain his footing.

The crowd assembles around the grave, and Bishop Moore intones a final prayer in the freezing rain.

“Remember, O man, thou art dust and unto dust thou shalt return.”

Using two long woven belts beneath the coffin, the pallbearers lower it into the clay hole, where it slaps the bottom in a puddle of yellow water. Angelica Hamilton screams and is about to leap into the grave after her brother. Hamilton and the Churches restrain her but cannot calm her down. She's screaming and her eyes are wild as she's led away. A few mourners

toss clods upon the wooden coffin, and after the bishop thanks everyone, the umbrellas all move off.

Angelica Church has invited everyone to her home for a reception. Hamilton escorts his children to the coach and asks Angelica to take charge of his poor Angel while he spends a moment alone. “I need to go back. I’ll walk over in a bit.”

“Are you all right?”

He doubts he will ever be all right. “The air helps.”

“At least take this,” Angelica hands him an umbrella, and the coach creaks into motion, hooves slopping through the mud of Broadway.

Hamilton walks back into the churchyard, using the umbrella as a cane. The gravediggers are filling up the hole, and he hears the earth sliding off their shovels and thudding on the box. One sees him and elbows the others. They pause.

“General,” one ventures, removing his hat. Hamilton gives him a slight bow. “You won’t remember me, but I was with you at Valley Forge.”

Hamilton nods. “We lost many good lads there.”

“Aye,” the other says, “and I was under your command at Yorktown when we charged Cornwallis.”

“We changed the world that day. And now,” Hamilton waves at the hole, “it changes again.” He is clearly struggling to control his grief, and the men are uncomfortable. They move a few steps away. The general’s characteristic military bearing has left him, and he is hunched over like a man twice his age. He goes to the edge of the hole and stands alone in the rain. It’s all over, he knows, Philip’s life, as well as the purpose of his own. The comfort and joy he took in Philip redeeming the curse of his illegitimacy lives no more. Worse still, he can never hold him or joke with him or delight in his happy disposition.

“—my little boy,” he sobs, “my beautiful little boy. Oh, my God!”

With tears streaming down his face, Hamilton raises his face to the

clouds. He removes his tricorne and lets the rain pelt his hair and run down his face. He breathes deeply to quell the sobs. He loses all sense of time until he hears one of the gravediggers: "General? Shall we come back later?"

Hamilton straightens up, clears his throat, and replaces his hat before turning to the men. "No. No, I'm fine."

"We can return later."

"No, no, I must be going. Sorry to keep you waiting in the rain. I thank you for your service this morning." He fishes for a coin in his pocket.

"No," they all say in unison with their hands up.

"Make yourselves merry, gentlemen." He forces a gold coin on them and glances at the grave. "Life is too short, and all too soon it's ... gone."

"Happy to be of service," one says with a tip of his hat.

"The world needs young men like your boy," another says.

"It does," Hamilton agrees and turns away. "Yes," he shakes his head, "yes, it does."

The previous summer, Hamilton bought thirty-five acres in the wilds of northern Manhattan. The land is cleared and fallow with patches of virgin forest, rock outcroppings, and burbling streams. It is crowned by a hill overlooking the Hudson to the west and the Harlem and East Rivers to the north and east. Here Hamilton is building an elegant country seat, a symbol of his status and prosperity, though the cost has plunged him heavily into debt.

Last autumn, Eliza's father, General Philip Schuyler, sent a sloop of beams and milled windowsills and molding and floor planks from his Saratoga sawmill for the builders to fashion into this Federalist showplace. A farmer's team of oxen hauled the lumber over the snow and construction began this past summer. Hamilton's builder, Ezra Weeks, is working diligently and hopes to complete the home by next summer. Weeks owes Hamilton an enormous debt because Hamilton, along with co-counsel Aaron Burr, won an acquittal for his brother Levi in the sensational Manhattan Well murder case.

Hamilton has named his property the Grange after his family's ancestral seat near Glasgow, Scotland, and also after an uncle's plantation in St. Croix. Until the new home is completed, the family stays in an old farmhouse on the property. The children enjoy the easy, rustic life, so Hamilton has sent them, with their mother and the two Irish maids, north for a change of scenery in

the Churches' coach. After making a quick appearance at the funeral reception, he rides his horse to meet them.

Nine miles of muddy, rutted road lead north from the tip of Manhattan. It is a bleak, sloppy journey in the rain, and takes an hour and a half. Mile after mile he is grateful to be out of the city. He believes the distance will insulate his family from the city's noise and confusion so they can return to normalcy. As he approaches the farmhouse, well-lit and cozy in the gray drizzle, he hopes Eliza has rallied. He stables his wet horse with a dry blanket and a bucket of oats, and enters through the kitchen. Kate and Peggy have the farmhouse warm and welcoming, and the children are glad at his arrival. Eliza is not present and Alexander, now the eldest son, takes his father aside.

"Mother went upstairs. She can't stop crying, Papa. I'm worried about her and about Angel, too. She won't talk to anyone."

"Thank you, Alex." Alex's face is twitching with sorrow and Hamilton hugs him before climbing the stairs.

As Hamilton approaches the bedroom, he fears again that Eliza might miscarry. He quietly opens the door and finds her sleeping. Since Eliza has always been steady and stoic in any crisis, her inability to cope with Philip's death intensifies his own despair. If he'd only intervened, his conscience whispers, Philip would be alive today, yet he pushes guilt from his mind and vows to be strong for his family. It's not yet dark and the children have been shut up all day, so Hamilton gathers them in front of the hearth.

"It's cold and rainy outside, but we're soldiers, aren't we?" The children give half-hearted assent. "What do you say to a tramp through the woods?"

The boys brighten and agree, but pale Angelica is withdrawn and distracted after her outburst at the grave and Little Eliza wants to stay home with her toys. Alex, James, John, and even little Willie run to get their jackets and hats and soon are outdoors with their father. As they hike in the cold, dripping air, Hamilton breathes deeply. At first this helps to ease his sorrow, but every turn in the path, every view of the rivers brings sharp, clear

memories of exploring this land with Philip.

“Here’s where Phil put a rabbit snare.” James points beneath a massive oak.

“I helped him skin one,” Johnny says proudly.

“He gave me the pelt,” says little Willie.

“Let’s go,” Hamilton urges.

The maids make a great fuss at their return, but to Hamilton it feels hollow and forced. Kate has managed to get Eliza downstairs. She’s seated at the kitchen table, but she looks tired and disheveled, wrapped loosely in an old woolen robe, her hair unkempt. She is staring blankly into the fire, and does not acknowledge or even notice their boisterous return. This troubles him. Still, the table is set and three roasted chickens steam on the sideboard, so as he carves, he keeps up a patter with the children. “Here’s a drumstick for Jimmy. And Willie, you like white meat, don’t you?” The intermittent silences lengthen awkwardly.

“The chicken’s delicious, Kate,” he says, and turns toward Eliza for agreement, but she doesn’t look up from her plate. “Do you like it, Angel?” he asks his daughter, but she just nods and picks at her food.

After supper, Hamilton lures Angelica to an old pianoforte, but her playing is wooden and perfunctory. Hamilton makes a fuss to cover her errors. “When did our piano get so out of tune? We need to attend to that.” He puts his arm around her. “A fine player needs a worthy instrument!”

He feels relieved when at last it’s time for bed, and the children climb the ladder to the loft. The servants roll out bedding near the kitchen hearth, and he retires upstairs to the main bedroom with Eliza. He tries to be normal because he doesn’t want to acknowledge how far she’s retreated since Philip’s death.

“I think the boys enjoyed our walk,” he says brightly. “It was good to get them out in the fresh air. If tomorrow is nice, we should go out again and you and the girls can join us. What do you say, darling?”

Eliza doesn't respond, but walks to the bed in a trance. Without removing her robe, she slips under the covers to lie unmoving, staring at the ceiling. He hears her murmuring softly, "So cold! Poor Philip is alone, shivering in the cold, cold ground!"

Hamilton changes into his nightshirt. He sits beside her, raises her into his arms, and rocks her gently. It's like holding a limp rag doll, though. As he loosens his hold, she slumps upon her pillow. He smooths her hair. "Remember your faith, Eliza. Philip is in heaven with our dear Peggy." For a moment her eyes focus on him, then look away, frightened and filled with despair.

"Why don't we pray together? For Philip. In heaven. With our Lord."

"Yes, let's pray," she says indifferently.

As soon as he seizes on this idea, he abandons it, and he takes up her hand and pleads: "We are all hurting, but we need you, darling. Our new baby needs you."

She holds her midriff. "Our baby." She looks at him blankly. "What kind of a world am I bringing this child into?"

He holds her again, gently pats her back, strokes her hair, and makes soothing sounds while she weeps.

"Philip was so kind, so gentle. How could this happen?"

"He was drinking, and he lost his temper."

Eliza pulls away to face him, her eyes empty and her nose running. "My sister tells me Philip swore John to secrecy?"

"Yes." Hamilton holds his breath, fearing the next question.

"Did he come to you?"

"John?"

"No, Philip."

Hamilton fears she senses his half-truth. "He didn't want me to know, Eliza. He wanted to be his own man, to stand up to Eacker on his own."

“But he was defending your honor. Didn’t he even tell you?”

“He made John swear not to tell me.”

Eliza searches his eyes. Hamilton meets her gaze to cover his lie, telling himself there can be too much honesty in a marriage. He learned that lesson four years ago when he published the pamphlet about his Mariah Reynolds affair. Eliza reacted poorly. At first she was enraged, and fled to her parents’ home in Albany. When she finally returned eight weeks later he knew their marriage would never be the same. If she suspects he knew of the duel and failed to stop it, this rupture would be far worse. Adultery is one thing, a child’s death quite another.

“Try to sleep, darling.”

“I can’t stop thinking of our poor Philip, freezing in the cold ground.”

“His soul is basking in the warmth of God’s love.” He hears the words, but his tone is unconvincing. “He’s safe in heaven.” She nods sadly and he feels like a hypocrite as he kisses her forehead and smooths her hair again. Then he blows out the candle and settles into bed next to her. “Good night, my darling.”

“Good night.”

In the darkness the wild wind blows, and the old farmhouse creaks like a ship at sea. Hamilton tries to hold her, but she moans and recoils from his touch. He moves closer and nuzzles her neck, but just as she gently pushes him away, a light appears in the crack beneath their door. It grows steadily brighter and he hears a soft tread upon the stairs. Eliza stiffens and whispers, “Who’s up at this hour?”

Hamilton gets out of bed and goes to the door to listen. He watches the latch lift. The door opens slowly, and a hand with a candle reaches in. The hand is followed by the long, pale face of their daughter Angelica. “Philip? Philip? Are you in here?” Her eyes are wide, searching right and left.

Hamilton looks at Eliza in horror. She pulls the bedclothes up to her chin and shivers. In her long white nightdress Angelica floats into the room like a

ghost. She holds the candle high, looking to and fro. “Philip? Why are you hiding from me?” She stamps her bare foot. “It isn’t fair!”

Hamilton touches her shoulder. “Angel?”

“Papa?” she blinks. “Tell Phil not to hide from me! He’s so mean!”

“He’s not here, Angel.”

“Yes, he is! Of course he is. I hear him laughing at me, mocking me.”

“She’s sleepwalking,” he whispers and he turns her around. “Let’s get you back to bed, Angel. We’ve all had a long day.”

“No, Papa!” she whimpers and stamps her foot again. “Please! I must find Phil!”

“Philip is gone, darling. He’s gone to heaven.”

“No, no, he’s not! He’s hiding from me and it’s not fair.”

“Come. We’ll get you back to bed.”

As Hamilton leads his daughter from the room, Eliza falls back against the pillows, closes her eyes and gasps, “Oh, my God!” Sobs wrack her body, and tears flow down her cheeks.

Gray morning light filters into the bedroom. The hearth coals are now ash and Hamilton's breath steams in the chill. Eliza is turned away from him, softly sleeping. He hears the maids and the children stirring in the kitchen below. He waits to see if Eliza will awaken, then cautiously lifts the quilt and slides from the bed. As he dresses, he watches her for a sign of life, but she does not stir.

"Papa!" Little Eliza greets him when he enters the kitchen. He lifts the baby high and she laughs, happily oblivious to the great sorrow that burdens the other children around the table. As she prattles on, he answers her, using her joy as a shield against the boys' sorrowful faces. Angelica must still be in bed, where he tucked her after her sleepwalking. Peggy serves porridge and tea while Kate cuts large slices of bread from a loaf and spears them with tongs to toast in the fire. When the toast is golden brown, she spreads butter and jam and passes it around to the children.

"Where's Mama?" Little Eliza asks. The others turn to their father, the same question in their eyes. He aches when he sees their imploring looks. Eliza is the family's gravitational center, and she is needed now more than ever.

"Sleeping," he whispers.

"I wake her up, Papa!" Little Eliza wriggles for her father to let her down, and she toddles up the stairs to the bedroom. Hamilton waits a moment, then

follows her.

“Mama! Wake up, Mama!” The baby tugs her mother’s hand. “Time for breakfast!”

Eliza’s eyes are open but she says nothing. As he enters, she focuses on him, then looks away. Her look devastates Hamilton, so different from the look of love he’s used to seeing in her eyes. Eliza’s dark curls are unkempt and snarled where they spill across the pillow. He walks to her, smiling in the hope she will smile up at him.

“Time for breakfast, Mama!” The baby tugs her hand again. Eliza gives her daughter a warm smile, but the warmth fades when she glances at him. Hamilton sits on the bed and picks up her limp hand, but she doesn’t respond. He lays the hand on her breast and pulls up the quilt. He places his hand gently on her forehead. She does not feel feverish.

“Will you join us?”

She continues to look at him but says nothing. He has a momentary feeling that she doesn’t see him.

“Eliza?”

She turns her head away. “Let me sleep. Please.”

He withers inside. Was that annoyance in her voice? Does she suspect he’s lying? Is she refusing to come down because she doesn’t want to be around him? He leans down and kisses her cheek. She accepts the kiss but doesn’t look at him. He picks up the baby and leaves the room, gently closing the door behind him.

By noon Eliza has still not emerged. Yesterday’s storm has intensified with cold rain and sleet, so the children must stay indoors. The maids have a good fire blazing in the parlor, and the children busy themselves with books and games. At one o’clock, Hamilton sends Kate to check on her mistress. The maid returns quickly, looking frightened. “She doesn’t answer, sir. She only stares at me!”

Hamilton knows he must act. Surely, she’ll respond to her sister.

Hamilton takes his gangly fifteen-year-old Alexander aside.

“Ride into town and tell Aunt Angelica that Mama needs her.”

Alex nods at the gravity in his father’s face. In ten minutes he has saddled a horse and is galloping toward the city.

Hamilton returns to the bedroom and sits next to Eliza. “I sent Alex to bring Angelica for a visit,” he says in a soft voice. “She will be here soon.” Again he lays his hand on her forehead and strokes her hair. Eliza pushes his hand away, and as she darts a look at him, her eyes flash with hostility. “Everything will be all right,” he says with no conviction. Her demeanor unsettles him, so again he escapes from the room.

Downstairs in the living room the children’s depression is tangible. Little Willy and Eliza are arguing over a toy horse. Silent Angelica squints into the fire as if she can conjure Philip up in the flames. The others are trying to read.

Three slow hours pass. With his customary impatience, Hamilton checks on Eliza twice, but she maintains her silence and can’t be persuaded to leave her bed. The bleak afternoon becomes murky, and light is fading when he hears the jingle of a harness on the Bloomingdale Road. Out the window he sees a groom driving the Church cabriolet. Under its lowered top, Angelica Church is bundled in a carriage blanket. Alex rides behind. The cabriolet pulls up to the door, and Angelica gets out and climbs the three steps to the stoop. Hamilton meets her in the hallway.

“Thank you for coming right out,” he says, taking her coat.

“I’m soaked,” she says with a laugh.

“So sorry to call you out like this, but I fear she will miscarry.”

Angelica puts her hand on his cheek and frowns. “No, my amiable, I am sorry for all you’re going through. Please tell the maids to bring some towels and dry clothes for my groom. He will bring in my luggage.”

“Of course, right away.”

The children, anxious for any distraction, cluster about their aunt, who kisses and hugs them, tousling the boys’ hair. Angelica wears an elegant

gown of emerald green, and her complexion is rosy from the journey.

“She hasn’t been out of bed all day,” Hamilton says, leading her through the kitchen.

“Leave her to me.”

He climbs the stairs ahead of Angelica and pushes the door open. Angelica greets Eliza cheerfully, “Hey, little sister! What are you doing still in bed?”

Eliza doesn’t even turn at the sound of her sister’s voice. She’s gazing out the dark window. Angelica sits on the bed and lifts Eliza’s arm, rubbing her hand to stimulate circulation.

“Angelica?” Eliza’s voice is hoarse from not speaking all day. She tries to focus. “Where did you come from?”

“We’re all worried about you, my darling,” Angelica says. She strokes her fingers through Eliza’s thick, tangled hair, and kisses her on the forehead.

“I’m all right,” Eliza says vacantly. She turns Hamilton’s way but looks right through him.

“Please send up one of the maids,” Angelica says, “and tell the other to heat water for a bath. We are going to give Miss Eliza a bath and shampoo.”

“But it’s winter,” Eliza says listlessly.

Angelica responds with a laugh. “Yes! And I am the eldest, so you’ll do as I say.” She stands and walks Hamilton to the door. “Go, tell one to heat the water and send the other up to me.” Putting her hand on his chest, she gently pushes him out of the room.

Downstairs, Hamilton instructs Kate and Peggy to follow Angelica’s orders. Feeling useless, he pulls on his coat and hat and escapes out the back door before the children notice.

Angelica’s arrival has lessened his worst fear about the new baby, but dark recriminations about Philip’s death now well up inside him and he must get away. He walks quickly along the split-rail fence, up the rutted dirt road and the steep hill, and he emerges into a meadow. Above him, like a massive

ruin, the unfinished skeleton of his new home juts into the sky. Rain and sleet pelt the beams that stick upward at odd angles. His gorge rises at the site of the unfinished home, at the deep sickening feeling that his life is destroyed.

Phil accosted Eacker Friday night. Eacker shot Phil Monday. Phil died Tuesday. They buried Phil Thursday. Today is Friday, only a week since the challenge! Hamilton struggles to control his emotion. He marches with manic energy up the hill toward his half-finished house. This grandiose effort seems entirely futile now with Philip in the ground, his hope for a dynasty buried with him. The exercise helps, though, and he is winded at the top of the hill. "Perfect location for an emplacement," he told Eliza the first time they picnicked here as they scanned the clouds, hills, forests, and rivers, the dramatic interplay of light and shadow. Now he sucks in the wet autumn wind and looks at the flat, darkening sky where crows are circling like carrion birds over a battlefield.

"Why didn't I see it? It was a trap! My beautiful boy! Eacker called Price out first and purposely missed to trick Philip into throwing away his shot! Why couldn't I see it? Oh, my God!" He falls to his knees, slumps over, and gasps until he cannot fight the spasms anymore. He's on all fours like a beast, retching. "I sent you to die, Philip, and I can't even tell your mother!" The spasms intensify and Hamilton dry-heaves until he rolls over, empty and groaning. He's flat against the cold ground, his eyes open to the spitting sky.

Crows caw and circle above him as black clouds sweep along in the damp wind. He breathes deeply to calm himself and a clear memory returns, a sunny afternoon a dozen summers ago when he took Philip fishing. It was a blistering afternoon, so they stripped to their drawers and dove in the water and swam to a rock in the current, then hauled themselves onto its warm, flat surface. Philip, a lad of seven, was smiling, his wet hair pasted to his head.

"Where does the river come from, Papa?"

"From the Adirondacks, mountains up near Grandpa's house."

"Can we visit Grandpa this summer?"

“Yes. We’ll sail upriver in a sloop and stay with him and Grandma this July. It’s good to be out of the city in July when so many get the fever.”

“I miss Grandpa.”

“Your grandfather is a great man, and you carry his name, ‘Philip.’ Someday you will be even greater than he is.”

“I want to be like you, Papa.”

Hamilton was surprised at how earnest Philip was, how mature and serious he looked even so young. He reached over and stroked his head. “You will rise much higher than I have, Phil. Someday, you will be president. Everyone will love you and admire you and look to you for guidance.”

The little boy’s brow wrinkled. “How, Papa? How can I do that?”

“I will show you.” Hamilton reached out and held the little boy’s shoulders in both hands. They were eye-to-eye. “I will help you.”

Philip smiled. Because Papa said so, it would come to pass. Hamilton embraced his son then, and closed his eyes and felt the river flow upon his legs and the summer wind soft upon his cheek, and he was completely happy.

A year ago, when Eliza wrote him that Philip was very sick, Hamilton rushed home from Hartford, galloping much of the way, fearing Philip would die before he arrived. David Hosack was at his bedside then, and Hamilton took over Philip’s care, spooning medicine and laying cold compresses on his forehead. He paced the room, sick with worry, until the fever broke. So much dread over an illness! Yet when a duel threatens Philip’s life, he allows him—no, *sends* him across the river to face the pistol of a murderous Republican! His perfect little boy!

As strong gusts of wind muscle clouds eastward over the Sound, Hamilton sucks the cold, clean air deep into his lungs. His head clears. He sits up and then he stands. Looking down from the eminence of his new home, he clenches his fists and vows to atone to his family, and to Philip. Surely, no penance can ever compensate for this loss, but he will shoulder this pain alone. He will hide his culpability from Eliza and take this secret to

his grave. Church knows, of course, but Church hasn't said a word and likely will not.

He vows also to be more attentive to Eliza. He will make it up to her without her ever knowing. In Philip's honor, he will work even harder for his family, supporting and guiding his other sons and he will give politics a wide berth. Yes, that's what he will do, and deriving strength from this penitential vow, Hamilton slowly makes his way back to the farmhouse.

Coming downstairs into the kitchen, Eliza is pale and weak. When she asks about the children, she learns that Angelica sent the four brothers into the barn to play in the hayloft. Her poor distracted namesake, young Angelica, sits by the window holding her rag doll, watching for her dead brother Phil to come strolling up the lane. Little Eliza plays with the cat.

"Be careful, Eliza. Ginger scratches."

"She loves me, Mama, and I love her too." Little Eliza picks up the orange tabby.

Eliza shuffles into the kitchen and sits at the table

"Now, we're all going to pamper you," Angelica says happily, and she works to get the worst of the snarls from her sister's hair. Eliza winces but submits, and when her hair is brushed, she cleans her teeth as the maids prepare a bath. Angelica lays out clothes for afterward, and upstairs Peggy makes up the bed with clean sheets. Kate pours large kettles of boiling water into the copper tub for Eliza's bath while Peggy adds cold water from the well bucket. Towels are warming by the fire.

Angelica keeps up a line of chatter as Eliza submits to being undressed, her pregnancy just beginning to show, and she gently steps into the hot water. Angelica has brought fragrant lemon soap and French shampoo from home, and now bathes her "dear girl," and washes her long dark hair. Slowly Eliza awakens, focusing on the bubbles and scents and the brush Angelica uses on her back to stimulate circulation. When Eliza finally looks up into her sister's

kind face, she relaxes and allows herself to be bathed and comforted.

“I can’t believe he’s gone,” Eliza says. “I held him as he died.” She makes a fist at her abdomen.

“He’s with Peggy,” Angelica says, and she talks soothingly as she bathes her sister with the soapy cloth.

“How can men shoot each other over such trifles?”

“I’ll never understand,” Angelica says.

“They plot these affairs and keep their plans hidden from us.”

“John is the worst offender,” Angelica says. “I’m furious with him for giving Phil the pistols. I’m glad to get out of the house for a while.”

After a thorough toweling, Eliza is dressed in clean, warm undergarments and a loose shift. Angelica gives her warm broth to sip from a mug while she and the maids work to dry her hair, toweling and combing and brushing by the fire until it is dry enough for Angelica to pin it up. They wrap her in a warm shawl and help her upstairs.

Night is full and the fire in the bedroom has been stoked into a blaze. Angelica lights candles and has hot tea brought up. Eliza feels more alert and asks about the children. After Angelica assures her they are busy downstairs, the tea arrives and they settle down to talk.

“Are you feeling better?”

“Yes, thank you.” She looks at her sister with tears in her eyes. “I know I must go on for the children, and for the new baby, but right now I have no heart for it.”

“You are strong, my dearest, the strongest of our family.”

“You were the beautiful, vivacious one that everyone loved. I was just the quiet tomboy.”

“You were Papa’s favorite! He always took you when he went among the Six Nations!”

“Twice. Maybe three times.”

“Remember the day you scaled the cliff at Cohoes Falls? All the boys were afraid to climb that cliff, and up you went in your summer frock, climbing like a monkey.”

“I was so young and foolish.”

“But it shows your strength, Eliza! I know it feels impossible just now, but this sorrow will pass. You will get through it and soon you’ll have a new baby to love.”

Eliza looks sideways over her teacup. “Know what troubles me most?”

“Tell me.”

“I don’t believe him.” She looks into her sister’s eyes with a plea for assurance.

“You don’t believe ... whom?”

“Hamilton. I think he knew about Phil’s duel beforehand.”

“But John told me that Philip swore him to silence.”

“Nothing happens in New York without Hamilton’s knowledge.” Eliza shakes her head. “I sensed something afoot the night of Eliza’s birthday party. Hamilton was agitated. For no reason he hugged me and blurted out that things would be all right, and then he jumped at the knock on the door.” Her eyes narrow, remembering. “I think he approved of Philip’s duel. I think he sent Philip to his death.”

“But Philip swore John to keep the duel secret so he could be his own man.”

Eliza fixes her with a sad, resigned look. “Men lie, Angelica. They all lie. They treat us like fools. We bear their babies and keep their homes and comfort and console them in times of difficulty. And they blunder on with their other women and their wild business ventures and their political intrigues without a thought about our well-being or our feelings. Hamilton’s lying to me now as he lied to me about that Reynolds woman. I hate myself for thinking so, and I know he’s suffering, too. Philip was his favorite, his heir apparent to all that political nonsense. But I can’t help it, Angelica. If he

was complicit in Philip's death, I want to know, and I despise myself for my suspicion."

"Keep these dark thoughts to yourself. They will do no one any good."

She shivers. "Yet I shudder when he touches me."

"You must forgive him, Eliza! Even if he did know, imagine what he is going through."

"If he brought this on our family, he deserves every bit of his pain. But we don't! I don't." Eliza is sobbing again. "I will never put this behind me, Angelica, never!"

"But you must. You owe it to this new child and to your other children."

"What of our poor Angelica? Her mind has snapped forever."

"Don't upset yourself. Time will heal everything. You must be patient, and have faith. You know Philip is with God."

Eliza nods slowly and stares into midair. "What would I do without you?"

Hamilton returns from his walk and when he goes upstairs, he is glad to find the sisters sitting together over tea. Angelica stands up. "I will leave you alone."

"No," he says, "I'm not staying. Enjoy your visit."

Angelica shakes her head. "Let me look after the children," and she glides from the room. The silence between Hamilton and Eliza is awkward. Hamilton sits and faces her.

"How are you feeling?"

"Better. Better."

"Good."

She looks intently at him. "I have been thinking about many things, darling, and I think we need to make some changes."

He nods. "Yes, with the new house we probably should."

"I want you ..." she pauses, sighs, then continues, "well, I think you should leave politics."

Hamilton nods pensively. "I actually was thinking the same thing on my walk just now."

"You were?"

He nods. "Yes, Eliza. Everything has changed. Jefferson ushered in a new era. With his rabble running things, men of principle are obsolete, so I need to concentrate on our family and my law practice." He pauses. "Only, I do need to stay with the newspaper. We just began publishing and I can't abandon the investors."

"That sounds wonderful, darling." She takes his hand. "Stay with the paper, but get out of the rest." She looks into his eyes to gauge his sincerity. "I doubt an editorial could ever turn deadly."

"Depends on who takes offense."

"You can always shield yourself behind Bill Coleman."

"It's not in my nature to hide, darling. You know that."

Eliza looks at him steadily, tears welling in her eyes. "I just need to know my family is safe. You are our provider, darling. What if anything happened to you? Promise me you'll get out of politics and you'll never put yourself at risk. We have lost too much to these political battles. We can't afford to lose anything more."

He moves closer to her, takes up her hand and kisses it. "I understand, and I agree changes need to be made. We'll move up here to the country this summer and be out of the city. It will be much healthier for all of us."

He produces a handkerchief and wipes her eyes.

"It will take time," he murmurs, "but this will pass eventually. I know it."

"No," she says after a pause. "I don't think it ever will."

Winter blows in, the river freezes, and low roofs of Manhattan slumber for weeks under blankets of snow. As occasional ships hove into the icy port, only wisps of smoke suggest life ashore.

The Hamilton family huddles together in its town house, coping with its loss as the sun spirals lower in the southern sky. Eliza stays in bed much of the time to assure the new baby will arrive healthy. Hamilton attends her with great affection and care, but their dealings are stilted and awkward. He worries that she's suspicious, and she worries he's made a vow he may be unable to keep.

As the spring sun circles higher in the southern sky, ice groans and splits along the docks. Large white ice floes drift down the Hudson, into the harbor, past Staten Island, through the Narrows, and out to sea. Warmth and new green life return to the small garden near the privy behind the Hamilton town house, and little Eliza squeals with delight when she sees a robin pulling worms. Eliza expects their eighth child in late May or early June. Secretly, she hopes it will be a girl and she knows it will be their last.

Although he has officially left politics, Hamilton consults daily with Bill Coleman about the editorial content of *The Evening Post*. Work on the family's new home is underway and Hamilton anticipates his showplace will be finished by late summer. Toward the end of May, Hamilton expects a shipment of clapboard from the Schuyler sawmill near Saratoga. Once the

Grange is sheathed in white oak and painted a muted cream color with sparkling white trim and balustrades, the family can move into its country seat for a new beginning. Still he must pay for it all out of his law practice, and so he works long hours and takes on many new cases.

Hamilton is at work in his office one sunny afternoon in late May when he hears a deep raspy voice, “May I interrupt you, General?”

The voice is familiar but out of context. When he looks up, he’s startled to see the long nose, bushy hair, and twinkling brown eye of Philip Schuyler peering around his door jamb.

“General!” Hamilton exclaims and stands and comes from behind the desk to embrace the taller man. “You didn’t write you were coming!”

“Our journey was not planned. As *The Saratoga* was casting off, Kitty and I just leapt aboard to keep our lumber company.” He smiles. “We want to be with Eliza for her lying in.”

“Mrs. Schuyler is with you?”

“Yes, dear boy, and we will stay through the christening. But don’t worry, we’re lodged with John and Angelica, so we won’t be underfoot in that cramped town house of yours. We docked our sloop at Bixby’s this morning and took the Bloomingdale stagecoach into town. My God, New York grows by leaps and bounds. Two years since my last visit, and I see new docks and wharves and warehouses, factories and tanneries, breweries and tenements thrown up everywhere. We had to pick our way through stacks of lumber and brick and dressed stone in the street. And it’s all your fault, my boy! You unleashed such a furious engine for prosperity, we won’t recognize this place in five years. Your law business must be growing amidst all this bustle!”

“Keeps me occupied.” Hamilton smiles. “Your gout is better?”

Schuyler grimaces. “My constant companion? I ignore it.”

They are silent a moment and just look at each other.

“Eliza has improved greatly since ...” Hamilton trails off. It is their first

eye-to-eye meeting since Philip's death. They leave much of it unspoken. Schuyler nods his shaggy head. "But our poor Angel, I fear she will never return completely."

"I hope that's not the case. She is so talented."

"We try everything to help put this behind her."

"Yes." Schuyler rubs his chin and looks at him sideways. "Church tells us Philip swore him to secrecy when he took the pistols."

"He did." Hamilton meets his father-in-law's penetrating gaze. The deliberate omission stings Hamilton's conscience, for he's never kept a secret from his father-in-law, his political confidant. Schuyler, a canny old warrior and politician, watches him and waits. Hamilton worries that he suspects the truth and that his own complexion, prone to blushing, will betray him.

Schuyler nods, accepting the explanation: "It's a pity you didn't learn of it until afterward. Church was the wrong one to consult. He fights duels as we go on picnics. You've always been able to talk your way out of interviews."

"Yes." With an effort Hamilton controls his breathing. He hopes Schuyler will drop the subject, but not yet.

"I can't help thinking that if you'd only learned of Philip's interview beforehand, you would have averted it."

"Possibly." Hamilton feels cornered. Does Schuyler share Eliza's suspicion? Have they discussed it?

"Ah," the old man breathes heavily. "What's done is done." His brow smooths. "Now, thank God, we have a new life coming into the family."

"Yes," Hamilton relaxes, "I feared for the baby's health. Angelica has been such a great help, and over these past six months I've assumed more duties in the household. Completing the Grange and changing our surroundings will be good for Eliza. The town house is too crowded, and the Grange will have gardens and orchards and forest."

"A splendid investment, my boy!"

"Thank you for the lumber."

“Happy to do what I can. You know that. So, I came by to see if you can knock off work early today. John and Angelica are hosting a supper for us at four, and Kitty has gone to fetch Eliza.” He pauses. “How is she doing?”

Hamilton meets Schuyler’s gaze. “She’s asked me to leave politics and I am presently extricating myself.”

“What? You?”

Hamilton nods.

“Let me speak with her.”

“I wish you wouldn’t. In view of our move to the country, I am easing out of it, and frankly, I owe it to the other children to leave politics so I can earn more money.”

Schuyler’s eyes blaze. “But we can’t lose you as our leader!”

Hamilton tries humility. “Well, no one is indispensable, and I appreciate the sentiment, but that is our decision. Now, we should be getting along to the Churches, shouldn’t we?” A gesture at the clock shifts Schuyler’s attention. Hamilton takes his hat from a peg and they go together through the scrivener’s anteroom to exit into the bustling street.

As a maid holds the door, Kitty Schuyler tiptoes into the room where Eliza is reclining in bed. Kitty is approaching seventy, but her beauty and liveliness suggest a woman twenty years younger.

“Aren’t you getting up at all today?” she whispers in Eliza’s ear.

“Mama?!” Eliza cries and turns with amazement. “What are you doing here?”

Kitty sits beside her, kisses her, and holds her face in both hands. “Your father suggested we surprise you, so we sailed with this last of the lumber, and we’ll stay in New York until you and this new baby are safe.” She pats Eliza’s protruding midsection.

Eliza presses her face into her mother’s bosom and sobs with joy. “Oh, thank you!”

For a long, happy hour mother and daughter talk and laugh and grieve over Philip, and during the discussion Eliza tentatively relates, “With this move to the country, I have asked Hamilton to leave politics.”

“He will never do that. You can’t expect him to.”

“Yes,” Eliza says, “he has agreed.”

“I wonder what your father will say.”

“Father had better not try to interfere!”

“No telling what those two won’t cook up when they get together.”

Eventually, Kitty helps Eliza dress for the celebratory dinner at the Church mansion. Eliza has not been outdoors in weeks, and the crisp sunny afternoon cheers her. She wears her yellow bonnet as the coachman drives them along crowded Broadway. Angelica is waiting for them, and she fusses over her mother and sister, comfortably settling them in the sunroom, where they are sitting when Hamilton and Schuyler arrive.

John Church is in his office when he hears the men’s voices, and he emerges to greet “his generals,” instructing a servant to tap a butt of Rhenish. After an hour of conversation and wine, Angelica links arms with Eliza and leads the family into her dining room. The table is resplendent with crystal and silver flatware sparkling in the candlelight. Angelica seats Eliza at the foot of the table and her father at the head.

Eliza is radiant with happiness. Her family is together once again, smiling, laughing, and reminiscing, on her account to honor the new baby. Philip Schuyler presides over the gathering. He’s always prided himself on his hospitality, opening his gracious Albany mansion to luminaries of America and Europe: George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Burgoyne, Marquis de Lafayette, Horatio Gates, Benedict Arnold, William Johnson, and sachems from the six Iroquois nations. Schuyler appreciates the Churches’ hospitality tonight, and before he sits, he proposes a toast:

“Gentlemen, but more particularly, ladies,” he bows. “Fathering beautiful daughters poses a challenge for every man. When I first met Mr. Church here

...” he clears his throat theatrically, “or Mr. John *Carter*, as he called himself then,” a twinge of tension dissolves into laughter and Church bows respectfully, “I didn’t trust him with my eldest, and he knew it. I certainly was not pleased when late one night he propped a ladder against my wall and eloped with our dear Angelica. But never could I have imagined things would turn out so favorably.” Schuyler waves his glass about the lavish candlelit room.

“Here! Here!” they call.

“Next, young Mr. Hamilton came calling. He said he needed three regiments of foot soldiers for General Washington, but I always suspected he really only wanted one of my daughters.” Schuyler dips his head and gives Hamilton a mischievous wink. “Which one I was never quite sure.” They all laugh. “But he came to me man-to-man and asked for the hand of our dear Eliza.”

Grossly pregnant, Eliza smiles as all eyes turn upon her. She sees Hamilton is beaming. He always basks in her father’s attention, and she wonders if they’ve discussed his vow to leave politics. She’s uncomfortable being the center of attention, but she returns their smiles until Schuyler continues:

“As much as I regretted losing the boon companion of my journeys among the Iroquois, I have long seen the wisdom of allowing women to do what they wish.” He bows to Kitty.

“Took me decades to teach him that!” Kitty proclaims to loud laughter.

Eliza looks askance at Hamilton. He’s flushed and joyful tonight, but when he looks at her, she drops her eyes. It has been a long time since they’ve been intimate.

“Of course women do as they wish anyway,” Schuyler opens his arms with candor, “so why not endorse their choice? Such is the path to domestic felicity.”

Schuyler’s humor is working. Hamilton reaches over and squeezes

Eliza's hand. She doesn't recoil from his touch, but she doesn't squeeze back.

“So, let us now honor this new babe who will soon join our family. Whether son or daughter, we are sure of one thing, the child will be loved. In both war and in peace we have fought many battles and overcome many hardships together. Often men measure their wealth in money or in power, but we,” he holds up his glass and pauses to look around the table at each of them, “we treasure family above all. To family!”

“To family!”

“Here! Here!”

“The greatest gift of all!”

They all clink their crystal goblets. Hamilton clinks his with Angelica, with Church and Schuyler and Kitty, and lastly with Eliza. She looks from her husband to her father. Yes, she concludes, they have discussed his vow, and she expects her father will undermine it. Just when she was feeling safe. Schuyler has always lived vicariously through his son-in-law, and they can't give up their passion for meddling in the affairs of state.

Eliza goes into labor early on the morning of June 1. Hamilton sends the children to Angelica's, and tells Alex to return with Angelica and Kitty so they can attend the birth. Dr. Hosack is summoned, and when he arrives and is closeted upstairs with the women, Hamilton sits with General Schuyler over coffee in the dining room.

"I've been thinking much about the vow Eliza extracted that you withdraw from public life," Schuyler frowns. "She can't demand that. She can't even expect that."

"Well, she does, and I plan to do so."

"You'll go mad being out of the fray! Watching these horses' asses bungle everything?" Schuyler scoffs.

"I gave her my word," Hamilton says quietly.

"Humor me, my boy. Keep your powder dry. Our Federalists, and I daresay our nation, cannot get along without you."

"I still have *The Post*."

"That's watching politics, not working it!" Schuyler thinks a moment. "It's a sad, sorry time with Jefferson in the presidency. The massive weight of Washington's character kept everyone pulling together, but since he's gone, all sorts of vermin has come crawling into the public arena. These Republicans lack principle while Jefferson, that colossal fraud, is working his games in the dark." Schuyler touches Hamilton on the wrist. "It's not healthy

for the nation.”

“Jefferson’s dangerous all right.”

“Precisely why we need your steady hand at the helm, dear boy. What happened to our Philip happened, and we can’t reverse that. An unimaginable tragedy, but we can’t allow it to eclipse your value to the country. Great ability brings great sacrifice. You must honor your duty to our nation regardless of what my daughter wants. You know this, Eliza knows this, and I daresay Philip knew this. He would surely have risen to the presidency, and gave his life to keep his reputation clear.”

“I marked him for leadership long ago.” Hamilton sadly shakes his head. “I was training him. He was a natural with great instincts.”

“Yes, a Hamilton dynasty to lead our nation for generations to come. But you are still a young man. You could do it yourself, and I daresay some of your sons will be public men.”

“I fear my plans are in ashes now.”

“Never give up, my boy. During the darkest days of Valley Forge, did we relinquish our dream?”

“My hope was fading.”

“But after losing so many battles, through all the death and privation and insurmountable obstacles, did Washington falter?”

Hamilton gives a sad smile. “Yes, he did. Often. I witnessed his tirades daily. We all faltered.”

Schuyler nods pensively. “Yes, I suppose we all did! Look what I endured, relieved of my command, disgraced, compelled to demand a court-martial in order to clear my name. But the point is, no matter how tough it got, we never abandoned the cause! We persisted. This is what we fought for—self-determination and liberty. Now we must protect the nation from Jefferson’s rabble. The common man! Bah! Give me men of intellect and principle!” Schuyler raises his veined fist. “You have four more sons, and perhaps a fifth being born upstairs as we speak, and they must carry on our

vision.”

Hamilton smiles. “Even with their mother dead set against it?”

Schuyler winks. “Perhaps their mother won’t yield to you, my boy, but she will yield to me. Patience. Let me speak with her.”

“She is headstrong.”

“Yes.” Schuyler’s eyes are twinkling. “She’s my daughter.”

“In every respect.” Hamilton looks at Schuyler admiringly.

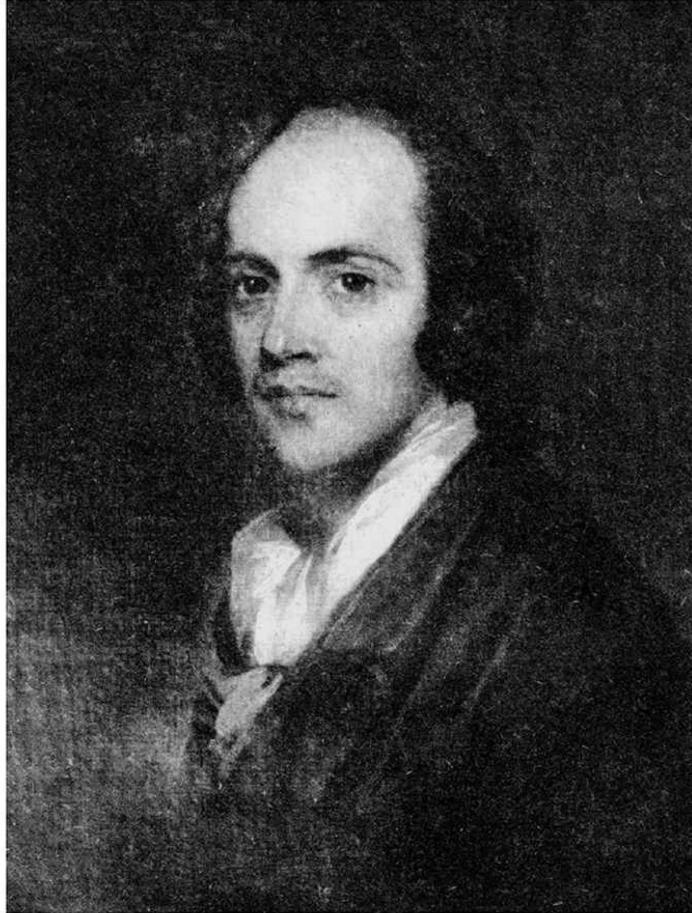
Just then David Hosack appears in the doorway. He’s smiling and holding an armful of blankets. “You have a healthy son, General.” Both men stand up. Hamilton takes the bundle and peers into the newborn’s face. The tiny eyes blink and fix upon him, and the little fists move randomly in the air. Hamilton tries to suppress it, but he is suddenly so overcome with emotion, tears flow from his eyes. He gently kisses the baby’s forehead, then looks at his father-in-law, whose eyes are glistening too.

“Here, General.” Hamilton holds out the baby. “I was hoping for a boy, and Eliza and I discussed what his name will be. Say hello to our newest Philip.”

Schuyler is choked up. He takes the infant and gently rocks him. “Philip? Again? You do me great honor, son.” He holds the newborn and leans down to hug him. Hamilton looks at them with great admiration and love. Now that the child is born, Hamilton hopes Eliza will respond to his love once more. Their physical union, so long put off, will surely help them heal.

“He will carry your name as proudly as his brother did, and accomplish all he sets out to do.”

“Yes,” Schuyler says, smiling upon the baby. “May our newest Philip follow where destiny leads.”



VICE PRESIDENT AARON BURR

BOOK II

THE VICE PRESIDENT

Aaron Burr sits at a mirrored dressing table in soft candlelight. He's a small, delicate man with a large forehead, larger still from the receding hairline. He leans his head back, raises a glass pipette, and releases a drop of brown liquid into his left eye.

"Yeow! Damn it!" He jerks forward, blinking, dabbing tears with a handkerchief, and he reaches unsteadily for his goblet to gulp a mouthful of wine. "Good God!"

"What are you doing there, sir?" Alexis, Burr's massive black slave, looms up behind him in the mirror. Alexis is dressed in a long black coat, formal if a bit shabby, and he lifts Burr's elegant swallowtail coat off a chair to brush it.

"Belladonna, and it scalds like a bitch!"

"Why you do it, then?"

Burr smiles. "It opens the pupils and makes the eye more ... *seductive!*"

"Last thing you need! Fish always be jumping in your boat."

Burr blinks to focus his smarting eye. He tilts his head and takes pleasure in his reflection as the image in the mirror softens. His eyes now move as slowly and craftily as a lizard's. He sucks another small quantity of the poison into the pipette, bends back, and doses his right eye. "Ahhhhh! Sweet Jesus!" He sucks air noisily through his teeth, slaps his free hand on the table, closes his eyes, and wipes away the tears. "What price beauty, eh?" He

shakes his head back and forth, gropes again for his wine, takes a long gulp, and gags. “Good Lord, Alexis! You’re poisoning me with this horse piss. Can’t you lay in a decent wine?”

“Merchants won’t deliver till we settle our accounts.”

“No credit for the vice president? What use is a title if one can’t trade on it?”

“Mr. Martling, he sent over a keg for the party.”

“Brom Martling wouldn’t know a wine cask from a *pissoir*.” Burr takes another sip, gargles and swallows, then tilts his head toward his chamber door. “Hark! I hear music!” He sways his finger to the tempo and smiles. In the ballroom below, a motley band is playing a polka: accordion, bass, banjo, fiddle, trombone, and tuba. “Sounds like they’ve tapped the beer keg. What sort of wenches do they array for me tonight?”

“Sweet, sir, and lively. Shall I set two places for breakfast?”

“Hope springs eternal,” Burr sighs deeply, “but it gets so tedious. Wit is essential and so hard to find. Too many come into my bed only to snore and fart all night, so I must dismiss them when their work is done.” He stands, extends his arms, and flutters his ruffled sleeves. “Yet who can resist this charm?”

“They’ll be swarming all over you, sir!”

“Well, let us bring in the New Year properly, good man Friday, and may aught-three be an improvement over dull, weary, debt-ridden aught-two!”

While Alexis holds the vice president’s coat, Burr drains the rest of his wine, grimaces in the mirror, and slides his arms into the sleeves.

“Twenty-seven years ago tonight, my loyal slave, we attacked Quebec. Six weeks on a starving trek through the forests of Maine and Acadia with our finest patriot Benedict Arnold, and then New Year’s Eve, we charged up the frosted rock to the citadel. Ah, the arrogance of youth! Snowing like a pestilence. After the guardhouse blew, we poured onto the Plains of Abraham, guns exploding everywhere. When Montgomery fell, I tried to drag

that tub-o-guts from the field, but a butchered ox would slide easier. I had to leave his carcass and escape into the blizzard.” Burr raises an instructive finger. “And I thereby learned what has become the governing rule of my life.”

Alexis adjusts the simple black ribbon that ties Burr’s Republican queue, and he stands back. “What’s that, sir?”

“Live to fight another day.” Burr opens his palms and grins at his reflection in the mirror. “Behold! Your next president! Five years hence, when Jefferson’s branch begins to droop, A.B. will pluck the golden apple.” He kisses his thumb and forefinger. “Sweet ambition! Mmmwah! Motivating men in the best of all possible ways!” He pumps his fists at his reflection. “And tonight I debut a new slogan: ‘Power to the people.’ Only in America. I promise power to the unwashed poor, and they love me for it and will lift me high above their shoulders.”

“They do love you, sir!” Alexis takes up a thick wooden staff, opens the door, and leads the way down the hall. The roar of the crowd grows louder as they descend to a landing and look over the riotous ballroom.

Mayhem reigns below. Three hundred teamsters, carpenters, coopers, blacksmiths and wainwrights, barmaids, seamstresses, scullery girls and whores swarm like rats over long tables of food. Burr’s “unwashed poor” gulp ale from pewter tankards and swill the bitter burgundy from goblets. Out on the dance floor, they prance in the polka, clapping and spinning and leaning back, hollering in delight.

At the vice president’s nudge, Alexis bangs his staff three times on the hardwood floor. The musicians pause. All eyes look up.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Alexis calls in an impressive baritone, “the next president of the United States! Aaron Burr!”

“Aar-on Burr! Aar-on Burr!” the assembled chant and stomp and clap, “Aar-on Burr!”

Burr’s enlarged pupils drink in hazy images of their wild applause, and he

motions for more. These are his Sons of Tammany, a quirky drinking club with faux-Native American rituals he's adopted and forged into a political juggernaut that regularly trounces Hamilton's Federalists. He has given these nobodies identity and self-esteem, and they adore him for it. They congregate biweekly in the great room of Brom Martling's tavern, which they dub "The Wigwam." They pin deer tails to their hats and call themselves "Bucktails." Now, like a small, reigning Caesar, Burr descends into the maelstrom, showing a shapely calf, graciously bowing to their adulation. He is their hero and patron saint, a penniless aristocrat who warmly embraces the common man.

As he reaches the floor, the music resumes with drums and trombone, rousing the crowd again to its chant: "Aar-on Burr! Aar-on Burr!" Burr waves both arms over his head to encourage his ragged Bucktails, who have donned their finest costumes tonight: top hats, slouch hats and tricorns, threadbare jerkins and jagged coats, scuffed shoes and filthy work boots. The women, too, are decked out in bedraggled bonnets, worn slippers, and limp old lace, and they join in the cheering, all of them pressed together, braying in candlelight from his chandeliers: "Aar-on Burr! Aar-on Burr!"

"Welcome to Richmond Hill!" he shouts and thrusts a fist high in the air. "Power to the people!"

"Power to the people!" they scream with wild joy and abandon. The drum beats harder and faster. "Power to the people!" Men wave flagons and cuts of meat and wings of poultry while women spin their bonnets on ribbons: "Whoo-hoo!" The music picks up, and the dancing, too.

As Burr plunges into the crowd, an elderly woman with a profusion of chins elbows her way forward. "Oh, Mr. Burr! I've so longed to meet you."

He gently paddles her chins. "Business or pleasure, my lovely?"

She blushes and smiles, unable to hide the bad teeth. "Why not a bit of both?"

He lifts her jeweled hand to his lips and kisses it. "Why not, indeed?"

With her other hand, she presses a paper into his hand. “My husband’s children are contesting his will. Naturally, he left everything to me. Can you help?”

“Call upon me in a day or two. For a sizeable retainer, I will do what needs to be done ... on all fronts.”

“Of course.” She bats her eyes. “Thank you.”

Burr bows graciously, hands the note to Alexis, and glides away. His movements are as fluid as a ballet dancer. When he stops to speak to various guests, his enlarged pupils subtly scan the room, looking for what lies ahead.

An extremely tall actress from the Park Theater presses his face into her bosom. Accepting her request to dance, Burr strikes poses and stomps his high-heeled boots as a flamenco dancer once taught him on holiday in the Florida jungle. The crowd presses forward to form a circle as he dances, clapping and stomping in admiration. His wild partner shakes and shimmies, her hair flying, and he responds to her every move. “Aa-ron Burr! Aa-ron Burr!”

The dancing flushes his cheeks, and when the song finishes, he downs another glass of wine. The actress leans toward him and whispers about later. He smiles but won’t commit, and he moves on. A waltz is playing now, and he skips, one-two-three, one-two-three, finger-to-thumb, like an orchestra conductor, until a pair of twins blocks his path.

“No, no, impossible! I am still too sober to be seeing double.”

“You don’t remember us?” one of them giggles.

Burr pretends consternation. “Perfection’s very looking glass!” He takes their hands and moves them to the music, ring-around-the-rosy. They throw back their supple white throats and laugh.

“We’re just back from Paris,” the other says.

“Ah, ha!” he points in triumph. “The Stafford twins. Skinny, toothy girls when you sailed, what, two years ago?” His eyes take in their ripe bosoms.

“Nearly three!” the other says. “From Philadelphia.”

“Well, Dame Nature has liberally bestowed her graces!”

“Father called you ‘the king-maker’ when you came to Philadelphia with New York’s electoral votes. He told us your Tammany men won the New York Assembly for you by one seat, and you bartered those New York votes for a place on Jefferson’s ticket.”

“Intelligent girls! Remarkable girls! Happy days, those.”

“I am Harriet and this is Melanie.”

“Of course you are.” He bows and slips an arm around each waist to squire them through the crowd. “So what brings you to New York?”

“We’ve come seeking our fortune.”

“*Au contraire!* I suspect your fortune is seeking you. Let me assure you, my fine protégés, I am most resourceful. Knock and it shall be opened.”

“Father told us to present ourselves to you, so we invaded your party tonight.”

“Good Lord! Barbarians at my gate! Let us confer in private when they pack up the fiddles.”

“*Ménage à trois!*” Harriet exclaims. “What fun!” They both giggle as Burr leads them out to dance.

The band plays a breezy number and the vice president shows them how to dance in a troika. Large, rough men step out of their way, but leer down with boozy breath and rotten teeth. Women laugh as Burr capers with his maidens, holding their delicate wrists high, bouncing their curls. When the music ends, a tall, dour-looking fellow looms into their path. Burr gives him a menacing grin and clutches his escorts protectively. “No, no, my good man, I most emphatically will not share!”

The young man doesn’t smile. “I’m married,” he says flatly, then extends his hand. “George Eacker, Mr. Burr. Father sends his best.”

“Dispatched any Federalists lately?”

“They keep their distance.”

“Ah, ha! I’m sure they do! Ladies, Mr. Eacker rids us of political opponents in a most effective manner.” Burr makes a pistol with his thumb and forefinger. “He shoots them.”

“How exciting!” Melanie gushes. “We attended a dawn interview in Le Jardin des Tuileries. A count and his wife’s lover.”

Eacker scowls. “That Hamilton kid had it coming. Not content to insult me in front of my wife, he insults me on the dueling ground too.”

“How does one manage that?”

“He violated *code duello*.”

“Refresh my recollection?”

“No dumb shooting or firing in the air.”

“Ah, yes! Damned impertinent of him, but the apple didn’t fall far from the tree.” Burr grabs Eacker by the shoulder. “And, single-handedly, you have saved our nation from the tedium of a Hamilton dynasty. You should be decorated by Congress!”

Eacker cracks a smile. “Well, I gave him false hope the day before when I missed his boyfriend.” He laughs.

“Deception! Misdirection! You have a future in politics, sir.” Burr claps him on the back. “Give me men with a future before them, and women,” he squeezes the twins’ bottoms, “with a past behind.” They all laugh. “How is your dear old dad? When he served with me in the Assembly, he gave me his vote so I could consummate a land grab out west. I had to buy all the others.” Again, they laugh. “And they weren’t cheap!”

“Father brags how he helped you charter your bank.”

“Yes, yes! Please give him my regards. Since Washington left for the eternal flames, Federalists are a dying breed. And with heroes like you, they’ll soon be extinct.”

“Count on my support, sir, whenever you need it.”

As Burr leads the young women away, he whispers, “That’s the secret of

politics, guard what you have, always grab for more ...” he squeezes their rumps again, and they giggle, “... and never, ever let anyone know what you’re thinking!”

“We know what you’re thinking!”

Three bleary hours later, the vice president leads two yawning Stafford twins into his bedchamber. Alexis has worked magic. Candlelight flickers in mirrors, embers glow like rubies in the grate of his marble hearth, and the canopy bed is turned down with perfumed sheets and pillows. The young women are tipsy. Melanie is informing Burr of their exploits in salons, where an orchestra conductor befriended them. “He insisted we call him ‘Conductor.’ He named me ‘Melody’ and my sister ‘Harmony.’”

“Who kept tempo?” Burr is removing his long coat.

“We took turns,” Harriet laughs.

“*Pot de chambre?*” Melanie asks.

“Alexis,” Burr calls as he nuzzles Harriet’s neck, and she shivers in response. “Help her ladyship.”

Alexis leads Melanie behind a screen in the corner of the room, where he lifts the padding of a chair. There is a rustling of fabric.

“Ah,” she sighs, “relief!”

Burr removes his cuff links and cummerbund as Alexis fluffs the pillows.

“I’m next,” Harriet says, hiking her skirts to reveal purple dancing slippers, garters, stockings, and no drawers.

“*Vive la difference!*” Burr toasts her with the bad wine and watches her prance across the cold floorboards with her skirts held high.

Yet while Harriet is moaning in relief, and Melanie slowly moves into his

embrace, a brick crashes through the window. Both young women scream and dive to the floor. The accompanying gust of wind extinguishes most of the candles.

Burr flies to a cabinet, pulls out his pistol, and cocks back the flintlock. He races to the window, knocks out the rest of the pane, and points the pistol down.

“Announce yourselves!”

Below, the ruddy glow of torches lights six or seven thick faces in the courtyard. “Sheriff Morgan, New York County,” a rough voice calls back.

“There’s a knocker on my front door!”

“You ain’t giving us the slip tonight, Burr!”

“Let us be gentlemen, Sheriff. State your mission.”

“I have a warrant for your arrest, signed by Judge Duer. You’re off to Bridewell unless you put five thousand in my hand tonight. Specie or banknotes only.”

“Is that all?” Burr laughs and puts up his gun. “Do come in, Sheriff, my good fellow, and warm your bones. Let me read your papers. If they are in order, I’ll comply at once. Surely the vice president will obey the law!” The sheriff looks suspiciously this way and that. “My man will meet you at the back door.”

Burr returns to the twins, who are sitting on his bed. He takes up a hand from each. “I so looked forward to our frolic.” They are pouting. “I have creditors, though, who wish to trundle me off to debtor’s prison to end my days in darkness and squalor.”

“You’re surrendering?”

“I’m a public official, sworn to uphold the law. Don’t be downhearted. Let us speak to these lawmen. Perhaps they’ll hold you as my sureties?” The girls giggle as he helps them up.

Alexis leads them down through the darkened house, his candelabra casting shadows on the wall of the stairway. Burr’s three other house slaves

are in the ballroom, eating cake and draining half-empty glasses of wine. Burr has sold so many furnishings to keep afloat that the rooms seem barren now that his guests have gone.

“Throw open the door,” he orders Alexis. “Let us welcome Sheriff Morgan as a harbinger of the New Year. The payment of old accounts.”

Alexis passes through the ballroom and into the butler’s pantry. There is a blast of cold air and the noise of men’s boots and deep voices, and half a dozen hulking men are clomping in, blowing into chapped hands. “I left the rest of my detail out front,” Morgan announces. “Nothing funny, Burr!” Up close, the sheriff has very bad skin.

“Well, invite them in, my good man. We’ve laid in the best of wines to welcome the New Year. Throw another log on the fire, Alexis.”

“My men stay put,” Morgan says. Burr signals his slaves to hand around goblets as the sheriff and his men warm themselves at the fire. Morgan looks pleased at his easy success in cornering Burr, and Burr, most gracious of hosts, takes the decanter from his servant and pours wine all around. “Bring more wine,” he calls to Alexis. The weary Stafford twins recline on a sofa, to the delight of the burly deputies.

“Shall I have you shown to a chamber?” Burr asks the twins.

“One more glass,” Melanie holds hers out. She enjoys the men’s eyes on her.

“Me too,” says Harriet.

Burr is bemused. “Perhaps, Sheriff, you’ll take these beauties as sureties?”

“Bah!” The sheriff is caught ogling. He snaps into his official demeanor and removes a scroll from his breast pocket. Burr carries it to a table and unrolls it in the candlelight. “Um-hm,” he says, rubbing his chin, “Um-hm. Yes. Your warrant seems to be in order.” He notes that the warrant is signed by William Duer, a rampant Federalist and member of the Cincinnatus Society. Duer is chummy with the merchants who are Burr’s creditors. “So

Judge Duer has taken office already?”

“Sworn in at midnight, and we come directly over.”

“Ah! I’m so flattered my arrest warrant is his first official act!”

“Quit stalling, Burr. Let’s go.” Morgan seizes him roughly by the shoulder. He’s nearly a foot taller and weighs half again as much.

“No need to get rough, sir!”

“Soon as you’re behind bars, I go home to the wife.”

“Incarceration will not be necessary. I will pay, Sheriff, but while I fetch the necessary coinage, one more glass will hurt nothing. Amuse these young women, whom I’m loath to send to bed alone, and show some concern for your men. They’ve been shivering out in the moonlight. We have a fire and the finest wine in all of New York. I will send each of you home with a bottle. Drink! Drink!” He opens the door and calls down the hallway, “Alexis! Six more bottles of our best.” No answer.

Burr steps to the sideboard. “Have your men finish this cake, too.” He hands Morgan the cake cutter. The sheriff looks at him suspiciously, but slices himself a good wedge and eats it out of his left fist. Burr holds out decanters to the twins. “Here, ladies, will you do the honors?”

The Stafford twins rise and glide around with the decanters.

“While you pour these men another glass, I’ll fetch more bottles.” With all eyes on the slender young women, Burr opens the door to the butler’s pantry and calls again. “Alexis?” He turns apologetically to the men. “Must be downstairs in the kitchen.” The girls are flirting, angling their firm white bosoms to great effect.

Burr taps a secret panel by the chimney and a door swings open. “Wine cellar,” he smiles and shrugs and, taking a candle from the mantel shelf, slips through the opening before Morgan can protest. As the door closes behind him, Burr hastens down the musty brick stairwell. The candle makes his shadow loom large on the narrow walls. At the bottom, he about-faces and races along a passageway. Wooden steps lead upward to a heavy oak

trapdoor, and he pushes up into the stable. Once he's pulled himself out, he slides an iron bar to lock the door behind him. The large stable is warm and fragrant with his horses. Apollo, a huge white gelding, snorts and whinnies.

"Oh, yes, big boy, we are off on a midnight adventure!" Burr throws a saddle on the horse's back and tightens the cinch. He grabs a bridle from the tack room along with his stable boy's coat and hat, his scarf and fingerless gloves. The sheriff is now shouting up through the trapdoor, "Burr, damn you! Open this door!" He pounds against it with his fists, but the bar holds.

Burr opens the creaking stable door into the paddock and looks out. The pond and open fields stretch away in the soft light from a quarter moon. No one blocks his way, and the great starry dome beckons him to freedom. He vaults into the saddle.

"Giddy-up!" He kicks his heels, and Apollo's iron shoes clatter on the cobblestones of the circular drive. As he dashes by the front of his house, Burr leans forward, his head down upon his horse's neck. Two of the sheriff's men jump up, shouting, "He's getting away!"

"Stop!" A shot is fired, but the vice president keeps low, his fingers knotted in Apollo's mane. He gallops hard out the gate and down the road, into the sleeping city toward the docks.

Ten minutes later, the vice president is rousing the Jersey ferryman, asleep by the embers of his cabin stove. The river streams by in the moonlight, ice floes from up north passing in weird ghostly sculptures, soon to melt in the warmer sea.

The groggy ferryman boards the vice president and his horse, and shoves off toward New Jersey. Under the starry dome, Burr stands at the rail, watching the low roofs of Manhattan recede as a donkey churns the treadmill paddle. The vice president imagines the look on Morgan's face, and he laughs aloud that this rube of a sheriff and his men, pecking like crows at his leftovers, ever dreamt they could bed the Stafford twins.

The road through New Jersey's Pine Barrens is frozen and slick. Burr is in no hurry. Richmond Hill may be seized and auctioned off before his return, his slaves gaveled away too, unless Billy Van Ness can work his magic. Burr has no money, but as Jefferson's likely successor, he enjoys vast political capital. Shoring up his claim to the throne are personal attributes: a quick, penetrating intellect, a penchant for intrigue and a solid blueblood pedigree. On his mother's side, he's grandson of theologian Jonathan Edwards, and his father, Rev. Aaron Burr, was president of Princeton. Burr also rests his claim on precedent. Both vice presidents before him, Adams and Jefferson, ascended to the presidency, and, by simple deduction, so will he. In politics, perception is everything. This will be Van Ness's sales pitch, of course, to persuade Burr's creditors that patience and forbearance with his illustrious client will increase chances of collecting in full.

Along the post road from New York to Washington, the penniless vice president brings the latest in political gossip and intrigue to the great estates and households. He's feted, pampered, and heartily loved by women of all classes. His sparkling wit spices up the humdrum lives of mansion dwellers through the sandy pines of New Jersey's Dutch and English townships, across the river into trim Quaker farmlands of Pennsylvania and the tidy Swedish towns of Delaware, then over the Mason-Dixon line into old Catholic strongholds of Lord Baltimore and "Bloody" Queen Mary. Since his

New York creditors have no reach beyond the Hudson, he takes his time and enjoys himself.

Burr is the perfect house guest. Orphaned at two, he depended upon stingy relatives for survival and thus learned how to exploit the wants and weaknesses of others. He values power above all because a man with power never needs to beg and, since politics is the means to power, it is Burr's driving passion. Mercifully, this raw new country tolerates no ruling class, so power is always up for grabs, and elections can be rigged.

When the Electoral College tied in '01 and the vote went to the House, Burr came within a hair's breadth of the presidency. He and Jefferson, both Republicans, were tied through thirty-five torturous ballots. Only after Hamilton intervened, persuading a Burr supporter to abstain on the thirty-sixth ballot, did Jefferson carry the vote. Many Republicans still consider Burr a would-be usurper, but in his mind this strategy marked him as Jefferson's likely successor. Now he must bide his time until Jefferson's popularity fades, and then elbow other Virginians, Madison and Monroe, aside.

Until Jefferson's star dims, Burr's sole duty in Washington is to preside over the Senate. His charm, intelligence, and wit serve him well in this very public role, and he gracefully advances bills, records the votes, and rules on points of order. As he re-convenes the Senate after the Christmas break to finish out the seventh Congress, his dear friend Billy Van Ness makes the rounds to his creditors back home and, robbing Peter to pay Paul, vacates the warrant of civil arrest, and the judgment, and he staves off foreclosure. Burr rides home after the March 3 adjournment to conduct some legal work, skim some much-needed money from his Manhattan bank, and fire up his Tammany crew with rage against the wealthy. Then he repeats his commute in April.

Apple blossoms are falling like snowflakes in orchards along the Potomac. Burr is enchanted as he crosses on the horse ferry. The low hills are

still being cleared with axe and crosscut saw, stumps sticking out at odd angles, and great pools of water lay here and there, soon to engender mosquitos that bring the dreaded yellow fever. Like milk teeth in the gums of this infant nation, new public buildings protrude startlingly white from the mud—the President’s House, the House of Representatives, and the Senate. Visionary architect Pierre L’Enfant opened a quarry forty miles downriver in order to erect his American Paris, and his overseers whip crews of black slaves to cut massive blocks of white sandstone with picks, sledge hammers, and chisels, then load them on barges to float up the Potomac.

Burr rides Apollo down the muddy streets of the new capital, a conquering hero through pecking chickens and rooting swine, to Mrs. Jewett’s rooming house. After settling in, he grandly sends out notices that the vice president is back in town and will be receiving visitors. Mrs. Jewett gladly keeps these rooms for him because she believes that he will ascend, and it gives her bragging rights.

As he unpacks, Burr admires himself in the mirror. Surely, he will be the most handsome president the nation has ever known. How long can Jefferson last? Another term? In 1808, Burr will be just over fifty, young and vigorous, as Jefferson rides back home to Monticello to breed with his slave harem.

Speaking of which, dreams of a rosy future are lovely, but first things must come first. After his long ride Burr needs to “clean the whistle” with a visit to Fanny Philo’s House of Assignment, where an enterprising Cockney madam keeps six “lady boarders.” Chirping like a songbird and tapping tempo with his walking stick, Burr ambles along the plank sidewalk to a whitewashed clapboard shrine to Venus, and he returns two hours later, calm and smiling, to take tea in the parlor with the unsuspecting Mrs. Jewett and her other guests.

“It’s good to be back,” he acknowledges when Mrs. Jewett warbles that he is her favorite guest, meaning, of course, highest in Washington’s pecking order.

As he retires that night, happy his travels have ceased for a time, Burr again maps his path to power. He must remain on the national ticket next year at all costs. That will require some finesse because Jefferson despises him for not stepping back in '01. Jefferson is sneaky, and would rather see Burr politically, if not actually, dead. The feeling is mutual, of course, for if Jefferson died, Burr would ascend without the annoyance of an election. Yet if lightning does not strike, Burr must remain patient and deferential. Three days after his arrival, his patience pays off. A messenger brings the coveted invitation. The president requests the honor of his presence for dinner.

The rains have set in. Rather than get his horse out of livery, Burr walks three muddy blocks to the President's House and knocks on the door. A beautiful young woman of mixed blood answers and ushers him into the unfinished dining room. This house is in worse condition than Richmond Hill. The walls are plastered but not painted, a half-finished staircase hangs in mid-air, unframed doorways glare like empty eye sockets, and large draperies of sailcloth are pinned up to keep brick dust and plaster out of the soup tureen. Somewhere in the dusty labyrinth, a violin is screeching.

"Music relaxes him," the woman explains in a soft, honeysuckle voice with the hint of a drawl. Her brown eyes are deep and knowledgeable. "The unseen hand," Burr murmurs. She bows away to fetch the president. Abruptly the music stops and, in a moment, Jefferson fills up the doorway in a dressing gown and slippers. His tall, lean frame is in a perpetual hunch, and his fine reddish hair floats about his skull like a halo. Jefferson reminds Burr of an awkward bird, a whooping crane or a stork stepping about in the shallows. He avoids the handshake Burr offers by folding his arms and bowing. He hates being touched.

"Thank you for coming, Mr. Burr."

"Honored, Mr. President." Burr bows too and clicks his heels and gazes at him with unblinking, mirthful eyes.

"I trust you like lamb?"

“Sacrificial?”

Jefferson doesn't even crack a smile. “It is just we two tonight. I have a delicate matter to discuss, which I must insist you hold in strictest confidence.”

“Of course.”

“Glass of wine?”

“Yes, please.”

Jefferson motions, and out of the shadows the young woman appears with a decanter. They sit together in the candlelight, president and vice president. Jefferson sits sideways, hooking his long left leg over the armrest, smiling as if they were the oldest, most intimate of chums. They gossip about intra-party matters, who's doing what to whom, while three other servants parade out of the kitchen with covered dishes. The lamb is impeccably roasted and seasoned, served with potatoes and carrots.

“You have a gifted chef, Mr. President.”

“I imported Marcel from Versailles. As we construct our Paris on the Potomac, surely we can eat *Parisienne*.” He straightens his posture. “Now, to the delicate matter at hand. Last month, I dispatched Monroe to join Livingston in Paris.”

“Lucky envoys.”

“Indeed. Last week, I received a surprising message on a matter that soon may require your finesse on the Senate floor.”

“I stand ready to assist in every way, Mr. President.”

“You recall my confidential communique in January for the House to appropriate a small stipend for a western expedition?”

“Your man Lewis, wasn't it?”

“And William Clark, yes, to explore the possibility of trading posts with the Indian tribes?”

“You hired them to scout Indian encampments and to see if there is a

water route to the Pacific?”

“Yes. Lewis is currently in Pittsburgh constructing a large keel boat. This summer, he will recruit the crew he needs and launch it on the Ohio.”

“Won’t the French consider that an invasion? If his expedition were captured, there could be an international stir.”

Jefferson folds his hands behind his neck. “The Mississippi,” he gazes at the ceiling, “is a vast artery that drains most of our continent, but until our separation from England, it was only fit for Jesuits and savages. Nowadays, ignoring Spanish ownership, our brave American pioneers have carved out homesteads where they produce hearty surpluses. For the last dozen years they’ve shipped their produce, livestock, and lumber down the river, off-loading at New Orleans. Until now we’ve only been able to use that island city as an export transfer point with a ‘right of deposit.’ You’ll recall the Spanish rescinded that right in ’97, but we renegotiated and paid a stipend to get it back? Everything, of course, has its price.” Jefferson raises an eyebrow.

“Indeed.”

“When I learned Bonaparte had secretly secured the return of New Orleans from the Spanish king, I dispatched Livingston to see if we might purchase the island city to obtain a perpetual security for our trade. I am happy to report, again in the strictest confidence, that Napoleon has responded most favorably.”

“He needs gold for his wars.”

“Precisely. My timing was opportune.” The president smiles and lifts his glass in the candlelight, toasting himself. “Not only is he willing to sell New Orleans, Mr. Burr, but we find, to our delight, that Napoleon’s willing to part with all of Louisiana. Because of the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue, he has abandoned any hope of an American empire. He will convey to us all lands drained by the Mississippi, from Lake Superior to the Gulf of Mexico.”

Burr’s eyes widen. “Extraordinary!” He quickly calculates the political benefit. If this comes to pass, immeasurable wealth will accrue to the nation,

and Jefferson's second term will be guaranteed. "At what price, pray tell?"

"We were willing to pay ten million for New Orleans alone. Napoleon will cede all right, title, and interest to the river and all the lands it drains for five million more." Jefferson sits back, smiles, and folds his arms with satisfaction. "Fifteen million dollars."

"Who could oppose that?"

"The addition of Louisiana will immediately double the size of our nation. My only issue is how to consummate this acquisition, given the constraints of our Constitution. We completely overlooked the issue of acquiring new lands in Philadelphia, and I have scruples."

"You do?" Burr smiles. Again, Jefferson ignores him.

"It is my belief that the federal government can claim only those powers expressly granted by the Constitution. Since there is no grant of power to purchase territory, an amendment of the Constitution seems necessary."

Burr frowns. "An amendment would take two years or more, and by then the fish will be out of the net."

"Yes, and I might be out of office."

"Indeed, we both might." Burr muses. "Why not consider the purchase and sale a sort of treaty? As executive, you negotiate treaties with foreign nations, subject only to Senate ratification."

"But we have no dispute with France to prompt a treaty."

Burr smiles. "It is always easier to seek forgiveness than permission. Just do it!"

Jefferson claps his hands. "You are prescient, Mr. Burr! Monroe and Livingston have already signed such a treaty."

"True patriots."

"But, as you say, a treaty requires ratification by the Senate and that's where I will need your help. I will announce our acquisition this Independence Day. As the Senate will not be in session, you should make

arrangements to be here to show support for the cause.”

“Of course.”

“Your thinking on the matter, Mr. Burr, comports with my own. I called you here tonight to ask that you shepherd this treaty through the Senate expeditiously.”

“Never question my loyalty, sir.”

Jefferson searches Burr’s eyes for a long moment.

“You will overrule any objection, constitutional or otherwise, and allow such a resolution to be read and passed during ordinary session?”

“It will be my honor.” Burr pretends humility. “We want the land, we need the land, so let’s take it while we can.”

“I cannot stress the importance of keeping this confidential.”

“Of course.” Burr nods.

Just then Jefferson’s beautiful slave approaches with a tea tray. She pours the tea gracefully, and as she passes behind the president, Burr observes her dignity and proprietary pride. Jefferson registers nothing. The comely woman is now behind Burr and she extends her arm to place a cup and saucer before him. As she withdraws it, Burr gently takes her hand and holds it up to admire her narrow wrist and long, delicate fingers.

“Could this be the famed Sally Hemmings?”

“The names of my slaves,” Jefferson snaps with annoyance, “are known only to myself.”

“Discretion, in all things, of course.” Burr kisses the slender hand, then relinquishes Jefferson’s property. “We’ve had our differences, Mr. President,” Burr says in a conciliatory tone, “but that is all in the past. You may rely upon me today and tomorrow and, indeed, next year during our re-election.”

“Let us consummate this purchase,” Jefferson snaps. “That is the matter at hand. Let aught-four take care of itself.”

“As you say, sir.” Burr smiles unctuously to thaw the sudden chill. Is Jefferson annoyed by mention of his mistress’s name? The kiss of her hand? The reference to next year’s election? Impossible as always to guess his thinking.

Jefferson stands abruptly, signaling Burr to leave without finishing his tea. As the beautiful servant sways back to the kitchen with her tray, Burr mutters an excuse and bows from the table to find his hat, cloak, and walking stick on an armchair by the front door.

Out in the rainy April night, Burr pauses and turns to look at the great dark mansion. Why can’t Jefferson just be civil? The man is so unpredictable! Jefferson prides himself on keeping people off balance with his so-called “unseen hand.” As he walks away, Burr needs something to dispel his uneasiness at the abrupt ending to an evening that seemed to be going so well. A visit to Fanny Philo’s lady boarders would be just the thing. Turning once again to look at the enormous, dark President’s House, he thinks, “Let Jefferson suffer through the nuisance of construction. In five years this will all be mine, and God help the man who gets in my way.”

In the year and a half since Philip's death, Hamilton's daily life has slowed and quieted. Last summer he moved his family north to the Grange, and also moved his law office to 12 Garden Street. He still maintains the house at 58 Partition for nights that he must stay in town, but in good weather he enjoys traveling from the city to his country seat. The nine-mile ride takes him an hour and a half, and gives him time to think.

During his commute, Hamilton conceives an ambitious project much larger in scope than *The Federalist Papers*, which he published last year to great public acclaim. Eliza helped immeasurably in editing the work for publication, and he consults her now about the new encyclopedia that he's formulating to analyze the effects of government and politics on all human endeavor—morals, religion, liberty, and justice.

In this quieter life, Hamilton has more time to reflect. Philip's death and Angelica's madness weigh heavily upon him. This past March, Eliza's mother, Kitty, suffered a stroke and died up in Albany. Because river navigation was still closed, Eliza went by stagecoach with the younger children to console her father. Hamilton remained at the Grange with poor mad Angelica and the older boys, riding back and forth to his office three days a week. Eliza's absence was difficult for him. Without her sweet domesticity presiding over the household, Hamilton found the maids annoying, and his political inaction made him irritable as he watched looming

national and international crises grow.

On the other hand, his legal career has never been so profitable. Without the distraction of politics, he enjoys many successes in the courts, and is now the most sought-after attorney in New York. Even undercharging his clients, Hamilton earns a handsome living, but he still prefers cases with a political dimension, and he relishes any means to expose and goad Jefferson's hypocrisy. Recently, General Schuyler wrote him about a case in Hudson, New York. Acting as a covert agent for Jefferson, New York Attorney General Ambrose Spencer arrested Harry Croswell, editor of *The Wasp*, and indicted him for seditious libel because he published an editorial critical of Jefferson. Hamilton was too busy in Manhattan to travel the hundred and fifty miles north to defend Croswell *pro bono*, but as a newspaperman he watched the case closely. On the afternoon he hears of Croswell's conviction, Hamilton calls at the print shop of *The New York Evening Post*.

Coleman sits on a high stool, setting type with nimble, blackened fingers. His team of skinny printer's devils lifts clean folio sheets onto the press bed, then they ink the platen with sheepskin dabbers, and pull the huge lever to press an imprint onto the paper. Coleman typesets the final page of today's edition and listens to Hamilton talk as he paces.

"Jefferson is abolishing freedom of the press. Fear of a prison sentence now hangs over any editor who publishes what the president doesn't like. My father-in-law writes me that I should handle the appeal."

"You should, sir. And God bless Croswell for keeping up the fight." Coleman is an attorney, too, originally from Massachusetts. He briefly practiced law with Aaron Burr upon arriving in New York until Burr's creative bookkeeping and erratic ways caused him to seek a government job.

"But will any judge have the backbone to defy the president?" Hamilton muses. "The deck was stacked against Croswell. The only question submitted to the jury was whether he printed the editorial or not. The truth or falsity of the matter was not even considered, nor was Croswell's intent. A felony,

Bill? How can a man's opinion in a free country be criminal? Ever?"

"Jefferson doesn't like it."

"Oh, he's a fine one. What's next? Policing our thoughts? If we don't get this case reversed, every newspaperman in the country will be an easy target."

"So, Croswell needs you," Coleman says. He calls to one of his workers, and together they carry the bed of type to the press. He returns to Hamilton, wiping his stained hands on a rag. "This is the case, sir. We need you on this appeal."

Hamilton nods to himself, stands a moment watching them print the final page of the day's edition, then he leaves for his law office to respond to his father-in-law that he will come.

Two weeks later, on the morning of July 4, 1803, Jefferson's minions carry notices of the Louisiana Purchase to newspapers in major cities up and down the Atlantic seaboard. One of Coleman's ink-stained printer's devils appears at Hamilton's office with a note. Hamilton scribbles a response, dispatches the boy, and then pauses to consider the enormity of this acquisition. Nine years ago he marched with Washington west of the Alleghenies to put down the Whiskey Rebellion. The virgin land and rich river valleys seemed limitless, and who knows what lies beyond the Mississippi? His mind reels with the enormity of the wealth this acquisition will bring to the nation.

At dusk, Coleman walks to Hamilton's law office, making his way through streets roaring with drunks, flashing and exploding with fireworks.

"Our party men have pestered me all day, General, to learn your opinion of this acquisition."

"My opinion?" Hamilton looks at him intensely. "Jefferson is the luckiest politician who ever drew the breath of life. This great prize fell into his lap."

"Well, our New England brethren oppose it. Vigorously."

“How good is your source?”

“My former law partner from Greenfield sits in Congress. He docked this morning and immediately sought me out. He’s close to Pickering, who is lining up New England Federalists to block it in the Senate.”

“How could any sane man oppose this? Timothy Pickering’s a sour one, all right. Didn’t his ancestors burn witches in Salem? We need New Orleans for passage down the Mississippi, and this purchase will double the size of our nation! Who can hate it?”

“Well, Pickering’s been leading our party since you stepped aside, but our New York party men still want your guidance. We should run a piece in *The Post* tomorrow. Should they side with Pickering and oppose the purchase, or cross party lines and side with Jefferson?”

“That’s simple! We must support what’s best for the country regardless of who takes the credit.” Hamilton stands and begins to pace. Coleman removes a roll of foolscap from his briefcase and sharpens a pencil with his pen knife. As Coleman scribbles shorthand, Hamilton recounts the history of New Orleans’ passing from France to Spain and back again, how American troops could have seized the island city recently, and how such a conquest would have saved time and a great deal of money. He describes the great benefit New Orleans will bring in assuring safe navigation on the Mississippi, but wonders how Jefferson will pay for it. He concludes that the acquisition will provide America with myriad benefits and few liabilities, so all reasonable men should support it.

“I’d love to see Pickering reading this,” Coleman says as he packs up his satchel.

Hamilton scowls. “We used to be the party of principle and vision.”

“When you led us, yes. These New Englanders think with their purses. They fear Louisiana will diminish the value of their ports, Boston, Providence, New Haven, as well as their land holdings in western New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.”

Hamilton sighs. “No one can hate like a son of old Salem.”

“We need you back, General. Our party’s a rudderless ship.”

“I can’t, Bill.” Hamilton raises his hands as if defending himself from an assault. “I gave my word.”

“Won’t you consider it, at least? The Republicans are destroying us.”

“It’s not my battle now.”

“Of course it is, and I shudder to think what we stand to lose.”

“Thanks for coming by.” Hamilton puts a hand around Coleman’s back and ushers him to the door.

After attending Jefferson's July 4 Louisiana Purchase announcement, Aaron Burr sails with good winds south to Charleston to visit his daughter, his only child, his only legitimate child, that is. He named her "Theodosia" after her mother, who's been gone these nine years. Through the murk of his cynicism, power lust and lechery, his love for this daughter lances like a ray of sunlight. From the moment he first held Theo, blinking and cooing in swaddling clothes, his love for her has been unconditional, and it is reciprocated. Theo writes him at one point that she worships him as if he were a god, and would rather not live if she could not be his daughter.

Unique among his peers, Burr believes that females are intellectually equal or even superior to males. He hangs a portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft in his study and introduces a bill in the New York Legislature to give women the right to vote. To save Theo from a life of needlepoint and gossip in tedious drawing rooms, he teaches her to ride and to shoot, and he provides her an education exclusively reserved for boys: grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, and languages—Greek, French, and Latin. Theo blooms under his cultivation, and since her mother's death she has been his sole confidante, even though she lives so far away. Seeking a political alliance with a wealthy southern family, Burr married her at seventeen to Joseph Alston, son of a South Carolina planter and slave owner, so now she lives in far-off Charleston. Burr writes Theo nearly every day and yearns for her letters in

response. He sends her books and fruit and even a parakeet. He shares news with her, political gossip, and even seeks her advice about his many love affairs. When he first learned of young Hamilton's death, he wrote:

Philadelphia, November 26, 1801

THEODOSIA:

Your letter of the 7th of November, is pretty and lively and indicates health, content, and cheerfulness, which is much better than if you had told me so, for then I should not have believed a word of it.

You have learned from the newspapers (which you never read) of the death of Philip Hamilton. Shot in a duel with Eacker, the lawyer. Some dispute at a theatre, arising, it is said, out of politics. The story is variously related; I will give you a concise summary of the facts, in fifteen sheets of paper, with comments, and moral and sentimental reflections. To this I take the liberty of referring you.

A.B.

Burr enjoys his sarcasm folding the single page, dripping red sealing wax, and pressing down the vice presidential seal ring he's had specially cast. Since that letter a year and a half ago, Burr has often reflected that while he might lose Theo in childbirth, he will never lose her in a duel.

As his ship docks near the slave market and auction block in Charleston's humid port, Burr sends word and his son-in-law meets him with the Alston family coach and two strong slaves in livery. Joseph Alston is plump and somewhat simple, and now serves in the South Carolina House of Representatives. With higher political ambitions that can only benefit from his family connection to the vice president, Alston advances hefty "loans" to his father-in-law every time he's asked.

"I thought Theo would want to come to greet her papa with our little heir," Burr says to the dull young man.

Alston hangs his head. “Alas, sir, Theo refuses to complain to you or to anyone else, but since the baby’s birth she has not been in good health.”

“It’s this stifling weather.” Burr is unwinding his neck linen. “No doubt she misses the breezy summers of New York. Let me take her home and I’ll restore her health.”

Alston shakes his head in dismay. “No, sir, it’s some female ailment, the doctor informs us. I’m afraid we cannot give our little Aaron a brother or sister.”

“Nonsense! I’ll have her up and dancing by Saturday.”

They proceed to the Alston mansion, and after greeting Alston’s parents, the vice president accompanies his son-in-law upstairs to Theo’s room.

“Could you please leave us?” Burr asks sweetly.

“Of course.” Joseph bows out.

As Burr advances to the bedside, Theo smiles. She is pale and weak and her voice is shaky as she reaches up her hands and sighs, “Papa!”

“It’s too late in the day to still be abed!”

Theo smiles faintly. “I am not well.”

“Nonsense! My Theo was never one for female airs and ailments!”

She clasps his hand and whispers, “The doctor says my womb is prolapsed from childbirth, and the injury cannot be repaired.”

Burr places his hand upon her forehead and she smiles up at him as she did when a little girl. “A voyage to New York would do you good.”

“Have you met your grandson?”

“He’s napping. Your heat here is stifling!”

“I miss you, Papa.” Theo sighs. “Joseph and his family are kind to me, but life here is so tedious and dull! They gave us an old shack near the beach with four slaves to manage it, but we stay in town mostly to be near my doctor. Joseph brags about you to all his political friends, says you’re the brains behind Jefferson and that you will succeed him as president.”

“Shhh!” Burr winks and puts his finger to his lips. “Don’t let the cat out of the bag!”

This brings a smile to Theo’s dark features. “As if anyone didn’t suspect!”

Burr squeezes his daughter’s arm. “I miss my strategist. Have you read your Machiavelli lately?”

“Last November, after the elections. Joseph can be naïve, and I try to help him.”

“I need you with me now. Jefferson’s deviousness knows no limit.”

The door opens and Joseph enters carrying his one-year-old son. Burr stands and throws out his arms. He looks with amazement and joy at the baby, and then at his daughter before taking his grandson from Alston.

“What a beautiful boy!” Burr exclaims.

“Worthy to carry your name, sir?” Alston asks.

“Aaron Burr Alston!” Burr bounces him in the air. “I’m your proud old grampy!”

“Gampy!” the child tries to say the word.

“Yes,” Theo says with pride. “He’s beginning to talk in sentences.”

“Gampy it is, then,” the vice president says with delight, and he nuzzles the infant. “Gampy, Gampy, Gampy!”

“Gampy,” the child repeats, and lays back his head and laughs.

“Bright lad! Amazing lad! Look at those cheeks! You’re a credit to your boarding house, Gampy!”

“Gampy,” the child says and reaches to squeeze his grandfather’s face.

“We’ve got great plans for you, Gampy!” Burr hugs the little boy and beams with pride and love.

“Let me have him, Papa. I’m sure he’s hungry after his nap.”

As Theo nurses the baby, Burr accompanies his son-in-law downstairs. In half an hour, because her father’s in town, Theo joins the family for dinner

and she even plays a few pieces for them on the pianoforte.

Over the next week the charming, persuasive vice president tours the Alston cotton and rice plantations. Using flattery and promises of political endorsements, he taps his wealthy son-in-law for another sizeable “loan.” Theo’s improvement during Burr’s visit is so dramatic that Joseph consents to allow her and the baby to visit New York for the rest of the summer. They sail with good winds and dock in the East River.

Back in New York, Burr uses some of Alston’s loan to pay his most rabid creditors, and then three generations of Burrs board a gracious river sloop for a sail up the Hudson to Albany. From there they bounce overland by stagecoach to Ballston Spa, where Theodosia takes the carbonated waters. After a week in Ballston, they roll by wagon through fragrant pine forests to High Rock Spring, a stalagmite cone fizzing with healing waters once sacred to the Mohawks. Father, daughter, and grandson spend pleasant evenings on the rustic verandah of Van Dam’s rooming house in Saratoga, gazing north toward the blue Adirondacks.

When Jefferson calls the Eighth Congress back into session, the Burr family returns to New York and sails to Georgetown. Burr takes a room near the harbor for their last night together. He is helping little Gampy learn to walk.

“Thank you for rescuing us, Papa,” Theodosia says. Her health has vastly improved with the cooler weather and the activity. “We’ve had such a wonderful summer.”

“Plan on coming north next year as well. You say Joseph enjoyed the falls at Niagara on your honeymoon?”

“Oh, yes! It was sublime.”

“Well, we’ll all go west next year!”

“I’m afraid his plantations and his politics keep him busy.”

“Then you two join me! Gampy will be reading and writing by then.”

“But you’ll be campaigning for re-election.”

“I suppose so.” He kisses Theo on the forehead, and then he kisses little Gampy. “Take care of our boy!”

“He’s so much like you!” Her eyes sparkle with pride and joy.

“And he’s got the most wonderful mama! Be safe, Theo! And write me every day. I live for your letters.”

“And I for yours.”

The next morning, Burr helps Theo and little Gampy up the ramp to the ship for Charleston, and after their last farewells, he returns to his rooms at Mrs. Jewett’s.

It has been three months since the announcement of the Louisiana Purchase, and Washington City’s taverns and rooming houses are buzzing in anticipation of the legislative act that will finalize the acquisition. Burr parades through restaurants, hotels, and public houses, basking in the universal acclaim. After all, he’s “president” of the Senate and soon he’ll be the hero of the hour for ratifying the acquisition “treaty” as well as the funding bill authorizing Jefferson to send troops and build forts to secure America’s new territory.

Opponents of the acquisition are seething. Burr is greatly amused by Puritan rantings in the newspapers. These are his people by blood, and they are making asses of themselves. One notable New England bigot, William Cunningham, observes: “Our progenitors were choice scions from the best English stock. Their ‘natural wants’ did not force them here for subsistence, like the wild Irish and sour Germans in Pennsylvania.” No, Burr muses, they came to worship a humorless, vindictive deity and to impose an abstentious moral code on all others: witch hunts, shunning, blue laws, taboos, the stocks, and public flogging. Burr has always taken pride in his unrepentant licentiousness, and how it scorns his grandfather’s famous sermon, “Sinners in the hands of an angry God.”

Just before the senate reconvenes, Timothy Pickering, senator from Massachusetts and de facto leader of the Federalists, sends his card to Burr,

requesting a meeting. Burr summons him the evening before the ratification vote. As Mrs. Jewett shows him upstairs, Pickering stalks into the parlor, tall and haughty, his beady eyes glaring out from under heavy brows on either side of a large hook nose.

“Glass of wine?” Burr is pouring one for himself.

Pickering purses his lips. “I don’t imbibe.”

“Pity.” Burr swirls the wine under his nose, inhales the bouquet, and sips. Small talk surely would be wasted on the man, so Burr says, “Sit down, Pickering, sit down. You can’t seriously oppose this acquisition?”

Pickering sits. “The addition of Louisiana will ruin our nation.”

Burr smiles. “Please, enlighten me.” He holds Pickering’s gaze a moment. “If I am a man farming a dozen acres, and suddenly my holding doubles, how does that bring about my ruin?”

“It’s not the land, Burr, it’s the people. Negroes, Hispanics, Injuns and everything in between will instantly become full citizens! We can’t have that! In order to confer citizenship and all rights pertaining upon a new population, there must be an express constitutional grant of authority. Jefferson needs a constitutional amendment and ratification by two-thirds of the states, which will take him two years. Napoleon can’t wait for his gold, so Jefferson simply calls it a treaty and arrogates a new power to the presidency, granting citizenship to undesirables! And he’ll expend fifteen million dollars for no possible benefit to our nation.”

“Well, actually, there is. Even your cautious Hamilton approves the acquisition, so long as Napoleon honors the treaty.”

“Treaty?” Pickering sputters. “This is not a treaty, man, it is an outright land grab, and a risky one, at that. France’s title is questionable, Spain can swoop in at any moment and assert the priority of her claim, which would surely spark a war, all to serve Jefferson’s monstrous vanity and assure his re-election. Mark my words,” Pickering wags a long cautionary finger, “if this transaction is consummated, Negroes, Cajuns, and French and Spanish

Papists will swarm into our nation, claiming full rights of citizenship. They will steal the treasures of liberty you and I won on the battlefield, and in all our years of political wrangling.”

Burr smiles and spreads his hands. “I’m from New York, Senator. We welcome everyone.”

“Oh yes, Manhattan! I’ve been to your Gomorrah, your cesspool,” Pickering’s face twists with disgust. “Narrow, filthy streets teeming with foreigners, laundry hanging everywhere. One hardly hears English spoken. And the smells! Smoke, spices, excrement! I will not stand by while we turn this nation into a land of savages, mulattos, and Catholics.”

“Again, sir, your own leader, the great Hamilton favors it.” Burr smiles amiably. “It was in *The Post*, so it must be true.”

“Hamilton deserted the Federalist cause two years ago, and we’re better off without him.”

“Hamilton and I have had our differences,” Burr muses, “but I generally find his analysis sound. Nor do I ever let a personal animus interfere with my political opinions.”

“No?” Pickering glares at him.

Burr shakes his head. “It’s bad policy to take things personally.”

“Well, perhaps you won’t take it personally when Jefferson leaves you at the starting gate next year. I am trying to help you, Burr, but you won’t help yourself.”

“You know my limited authority in the Senate. I can only rule on matters of procedure, and I can only cast a vote to break a tie.”

Pickering leans forward and growls, “Use the power of your gavel, man. Break with Jefferson. Show your independence.”

Burr leans back to avoid Pickering’s foul breath. “He is the president and leader of my party. What about loyalty?”

“Any loyalty to Jefferson is wasted. Even if he acknowledged his debt to you, your refusal to step back during the House vote in ’01 incurred his

eternal wrath and fury. Everyone's whispering he will dump you as his running mate next year."

"How can he if I serve him loyally?"

"He holds all the cards. You are a pure-bred New Englander and he's a filthy Virginia slaver. Defend your birthright, man! Join us to oppose these Virginians and we may soon have a big role for a man who shows uncommon strength and leadership."

Burr chuckles. "Oh, your Federalists certainly love me!"

"You'd make a far better president than this slave-sticking fraud." Pickering's jaws clench and veins in his temple stand out. "Show some backbone, Burr. Honor the Puritan blood that flows in your veins. Use your gavel while you can still grip it."

"What would you have me do?"

"When the resolution is reported, rule favorably on my motion to table."

"You don't have the votes."

"Well, you have parliamentary tricks to delay a vote, or avoid it altogether. Appoint me as chair of some select committee to inquire into the constitutionality of this so-called 'treaty,' and we'll hold it indefinitely."

"And defy public sentiment? I'd never win office again."

"Well, at least give me the last word. Let me close debate."

Burr nods and sips his wine. "I can do that."

Pickering stands. His eyes glitter. "Someday, very soon, Jefferson will toss you from the coach, and that day I will remind you of this conversation."

"I am sure we will have many dealings, Senator. Let us never take our differences personally."

Pickering jerks his head in the semblance of a nod and departs. Burr hears his boots clomping down the stairs. As hoof beats recede up the road, Burr pours himself another glass of wine. His large hazel eyes reflect the firelight as he thinks. Pickering, the Federalist leader, is far more appreciative of his

attributes than anyone in his own party. Jefferson, the Clintons, and the Livingstons all hate him. If Pickering's prediction comes true and he is tossed from the coach, perhaps he will have somewhere to land.

It's October in Washington City and the leaves are blazing yellow, orange, and scarlet. Stark white lines of the Senate building jut up sharply from the mud. A wooden tunnel connects the Senate with the House, which is still under construction, and wooden cranes hoist and swing massive blocks of white sandstone high above clay littered with timbers and wood shavings.

Inside the Senate chamber, elegant scallops of maroon velvet with gold tassels drape the high windows. Thirty-two desks form a semicircle around the high mahogany rostrum where Vice President Aaron Burr stands with his gavel poised. Satisfied that a quorum is present, he hammers three times. "The Senate will come to order!" There's rustling as the senators take their seats and shuffle paper: "The clerk will read the resolution."

From a lower rostrum the clerk reads: "Resolved, two-thirds of the senators present concurring therein, that the Senate do advise and consent to the ratification of the treaty made and concluded at Paris the 10th day of Floréal in the 11th year of the French Republic, or the 30th day of April, 1803, between the United States and the said French Republic."

A hand goes up.

"The chair recognizes Mr. Pickering of Massachusetts."

"Move to table the resolution."

"Mr. Pickering's motion is to lay upon the table. Voice vote. Ayes?"

"Aye!"

“Nays?”

“Nay!”

“The nays have it. Motion to table is defeated. The resolution is before the house. Debate?”

Hands shoot up throughout the chamber. The clerk scribbles names and gives the list up to Burr. Burr recognizes the senators one by one, alternating between proponents and opponents. Debate rages all afternoon. Those in favor extol the wealth and opportunities for expansion and settlement. New England Federalists argue that the purchase is unconstitutional, that France lacks clear title, and that these new lands will encourage the spread of slavery. The autumn sun is setting, and Senate pages are lighting whale oil lamps with tapers when Burr recognizes Pickering again.

“With no other senator wishing to be heard, Senator Pickering to close debate.”

The craggy old New Englander pulls himself up to his full height, and his public voice, the baritone of an Old Testament prophet, reverberates from the chamber walls:

“I will be bound to ratify any treaty made by the president with any nation on earth, except one that compels me to violate my oath to uphold the Constitution.” Pickering leans forward, plants his fists on his desk, and glares around the chamber with lowered brows. “In commercial houses, we require the consent of each member when we wish to admit a new partner. Shall not the assent of every state be necessary for such an indispensable amendment as this? Because this so-called treaty guarantees full citizenship to inhabitants of the region, any grant of rights to non-Americans should require the unanimous consent of all sixteen states.”

In detail Pickering pleads for proponents to reconsider, to move cautiously, and to scrutinize the attributes of anyone seeking citizenship. He also warns of a swindle. Because Spain ceded the territory to France on the express condition that France not alienate it, Spain could rescind Napoleon’s

sale to America and declare itself still in title.

“We are purchasing a war, gentlemen! Spain tenaciously asserts her right to this territory, and will use violence against anyone who interferes. We can never possess what we’re purporting to buy. Our nation is being robbed of fifteen million dollars to finance Napoleon’s wars and to gratify this president’s craving for power.” Pickering raises his long right index finger. “Mark my words, gentlemen! If you don’t desist in this madness, you will rue the day that you passed this measure!”

Pickering’s passion and logic have done their work. Proponents know they cannot refute his arguments, and opponents know they can do no better.

“Any other senator wishing to be heard?” Burr scans the body, then bangs the gavel: “Seeing no one, the secretary will call the roll, record the negatives, and announce the results.”

The men quickly cast their votes, and the secretary calls: “Ayes, twenty-four; nays seven: Hillhouse, Olcott, Pickering, Plumer, Tracy, Wells, and White.”

“The resolution is adopted. The treaty is ratified.”

Applause goes off like a gunshot. Observers in the gallery are cheering, leaning over the railing, and the twenty-four Republicans leap up to clap and turn this way and that, congratulating each other and accepting the gallery’s applause. Pickering and his six Federalists gather in a knot below the desk, brows lowered and arms folded in defeat.

“With no more business to come before us,” Burr hammers his gavel, “the Senate stands adjourned.”

Outside, it is a crisp autumn night. High over the hills, celebratory fireworks explode and the sounds of church bells and gunfire volleys fill the air. Burr walks down Pennsylvania Avenue alone. He has just smoothly completed the purchase that will guarantee Jefferson’s re-election and, hopefully, his own place on the ballot. But what if Pickering is right? With his usefulness to Jefferson over, Jefferson can drop him now without

consequence. One of Burr's favorite personal maxims is "Never do today what can be put off till tomorrow. Delay may give a clearer light as to what is best to be done." He makes up his mind not to worry.

The President's House is lit like a Japanese lantern. As he did for his July announcement, Jefferson has again employed Dolley Madison to host a levee in celebration of the vote. Burr walks up the steps of the south portico. Although Jefferson did not invite his vice president, surely they'll not turn him away. The porch is crowded with happy politicians in lively discussion, hugging and slapping each other on the back. The door to the mansion stands wide open despite the autumn chill.

A servant takes Burr's cape, top hat, and stick, and the vice president saunters into the oval reception room. Senator Anderson from Tennessee has brought along fiddlers and a troupe of square dancers. Jefferson's lively gatherings for Native Americans and buckskinned farmers contrast sharply with Federalist soirees of minuets, hoopskirts, and periwigs.

No one greets Burr as he enters. Surely, protocol dictates that he should be announced, even applauded for his good work, but the informality and raucous energy of the celebration are focused on Jefferson alone. A few senators greet Burr perfunctorily but quickly turn away. He feels the chill. Jefferson's unseen hand has marked him as a pariah.

Burr stands for a quarter hour, sipping punch and admiring the young women. The contrast between east and west is stark: young women from the seaboard states glide past in the shiny sheaths with imperial waistlines popularized by Empress Josephine; frontier women dance in homespun, hair in wild braids, their men spinning and capering awkwardly, scraggly hair and beards, boots clomping on the hardwood floor.

Across the room, Jefferson speaks in whispers with the New York delegation, DeWitt Clinton and Henry Livingston, tall men, all of them, laughing loudly at their tall tales, happy in their power. Next to the punch bowl, Burr feels invisible, the orphan yet again. He watches as John

Breckinridge of Kentucky joins the men, another burly giant.

DeWitt Clinton is here tonight to bid adieu. He's been appointed by his uncle George, the New York governor, to serve as mayor of New York City, and he will grow rich on commissions from every ship that sails through the Narrows. Burr envies Clinton's return to New York. Until he can make his move, he must remain Jefferson's lackey, sunk to his chin in this Potomac fen.

Burr determines that he must cross the room and insert himself into the knot of powerful men. If he simply turns tail and leaves, he will admit defeat. On the other hand, if he walks over and the tall men ignore him and talk over his head, it will be an unendurable humiliation. Burr mentally choreographs his approach and, at the next bout of laughter, he makes his move. When Breckinridge, the lowest in esteem, has the floor, Burr ambles up and taps DeWitt Clinton on the arm:

"So you're leaving us?"

Clinton is as tall as Jefferson, but broad-chested with a great head of dark, unruly curls. His penetrating blue eyes turn to look down at Burr as he would a cockroach.

"Oh, Burr, it's you. Yes, I sail tomorrow." There's an awkward pause.

Burr tries again. "You're to be our new mayor?"

Clinton nods: "Yes, poor Livingston has his troubles."

Indeed. Edward Livingston, brother to the man who just negotiated the "treaty" with France, has been adjudged personally liable for the defalcation of a corrupt tax collector. Livingston has surrendered all of his personal property to answer the judgment and was only awaiting this vote to relocate to New Orleans, where he will organize the new government and rewrite Code Napoleon into the law of Louisiana.

Breckinridge speaks: "Clinton's been telling us about his canal proposal. Fascinating idea to scratch a four-foot ditch from Albany to Lake Erie, fill it with water, and float everything back and forth."

“Ah, yes, the canal,” Burr says. “Washington tried something of the kind.”

“The Potomac Canal Company was doomed from the start,” Clinton observes. “The grade is too steep here in Virginia. Our Mohawk Valley is the only path into the heartland, as you well know, Burr. Tell them.”

The men all turn to the vice president, and he’s suddenly the center of attention. “As our new mayor says, the Mohawk Valley is the only break in the Appalachian range from Tennessee to Maine.”

Clinton adds, “Our vice president can also vouch for the fertility of those lands. You invested rather heavily out there, didn’t you, Burr?” This is a gibe. Burr lost fortunes on these land speculations, and was accused of bribery into the bargain.

Burr attempts humor. “My effort to lure foreign investment cost me a button off my coat.” They wait expectantly. “Hamilton’s brother-in-law shot it off in a duel.” Hoping for a laugh, the anecdote falls flat.

“Nature herself supports my canal project,” Clinton asserts grandly. “New York has the world’s finest deep harbor, and the Hudson has a tide to propel boats all the way to Albany, where the canal will commence. When my canal is open, New York will siphon all Great Lakes commerce away from both the St. Lawrence and the Mississippi. The Hudson, gentlemen, not the Mississippi, will be our major artery of commerce, and New York City will soon rise up as the financial capital of the continent.”

Just feet away, the president slowly turns. He’s been eavesdropping. “Ah, yes, internal improvements!” Instead of jubilation, though, Jefferson appears worried and burdened by his recent triumph. Burr suspects his gravitas is false humility. “Let us build our nation up from within,” Jefferson says, his languid hand dangling. He looks over Burr’s head, refusing to acknowledge him.

“We have the skill and the means,” Clinton agrees, “and, most importantly, the political will to pledge public funds for this work.”

Jefferson lays his hand on Clinton's shoulder and turns him away. "Would you excuse us?" he says to Breckinridge, and off they walk, not a word to Burr for shepherding the resolution through the Senate.

"What great topic requires such secrecy?" Burr asks.

Breckinridge squints at him in disbelief. "You're joking! You don't know?"

"No, I don't."

"Your successor."

Burr's solar plexus clenches and he gasps. "I b-b-beg your pardon?"

"Jefferson is taking DeWitt Clinton's uncle as his running mate next year. That's what they were discussing when you came over. Clinton is about to return to New York to watch over the family interests, and next year his uncle will come to Washington to preside over the Senate in your place."

"George Clinton?" Burr is stupefied. "He constantly whines about the burdens of office."

"As New York governor, yes, but how onerous is the office of vice president? You know. There is nothing to it. The president realizes he needs New York's electoral votes, as you proved last time. Old Clinton will bring them next year."

Burr strains to keep a poker face. George Clinton? That great lumbering fool! He snickers and shrugs, pretending he already knew, but he feels light-headed and queasy now that his doubts are confirmed. Breckinridge continues to drawl on about how the Kentucky bluegrass makes horses' bones stronger, but Burr needs air. To be passed over without even an interview! He's wasted four years in servitude to this heartless buffoon in order to succeed him. Now he must find his own path to the presidency.

Burr scans the room while Breckinridge chatters on. All of the powerful men have left. The fiddlers are packing up while the Tennessee dancers drain the punch bowl and scavenge from the sideboard. Burr excuses himself, walks unsteadily up the hall, takes his hat and cloak and stick from the butler,

and is soon out in a stiff wind blowing off the Potomac. He breathes deeply and the cool, dark wind brings him around. He turns back to look at the presidential mansion, the public rooms still lit by candlelight from within. Again, he's on the outside looking in. He lashes at a tree with his walking stick.

“Dismiss me, will you? Insult me?” Burr's ironic veneer is gone and he can't control his rage. “Not one syllable of disloyalty has left my lips! And you treat me like a whipping boy? You trifle with the wrong man, Jefferson! You all do! You will pay, by God! You will pay!”

As his anger ebbs, Burr knows a surefire way to restore his equilibrium. He walks directly to the clapboard whorehouse, where a silver dollar will buy him titillation and temporary respite. Unlike the political whores now streaming out of the President's House, Fanny Philo's tarts give him his money's worth. He hopes Lilemar is available tonight. He's been saving that little Nordic blondie for a special occasion.

An hour later, the vice president is shaken from a detumescent nap. He's sprawled across an iron bed in a room redolent of cheap perfume and the chamber pot. The skinny Swede with a boyish torso is tugging at his arm.

“Time ees up, sir! Time ees up!”

But Burr doesn't want to awaken. He aches in deeper places tonight than he has in years, places inside himself that he avoids with his sophisticated disdain and wit. It is over. Four years of servile labor and false humility, playing Jefferson's dupe and jester, and just like that, he's out of the limelight, shunted into the wings, his strategy a smoldering ruin. Like the failed attack on Quebec, and so many other lost battles, like all his wild land speculations and get-rich-quick schemes which soured and ran him cataclysmically into debt, his most cherished hope has come to naught. But despite the heartbreaking disappointment, the failures, and betrayal of his own party, he will not give up. He will live to fight another day. He will be president, damn it! He belongs in the seat of power. His current situation

simply requires a new strategy and a different direction. As Lilemar tugs at his arm, he feels a renewed stirring. That, at least, is a good sign.

“Not so fast!” The vice president wrestles the doxy into a supine position. “You won’t begrudge your vice president a second term, will you?” He sees her anger and it fuels his lust. He pins her down, turns her over, and slaps her buttocks hard.

“Pay, sir! You gotta pay!” she whines, face down, kicking her feet.

He turns her over again. She should be compliant, but she persists in nagging, “You gotta pay, sir.”

He slaps her across the face and growls, “I always pay!”

She spits at him and wriggles to get away. Her hatred and anger excite him. He laughs out loud, pries open her thighs, and takes her by force as she yelps and sinks her teeth into his shoulder.

On his overland ride back to New York, Aaron Burr wears an old slouch hat to disguise himself. He puts up in stagecoach hotels and inns, avoiding the wealthy estates with their lavish parties and dramatic affairs of the heart. After Jefferson's rejection, he wants to remain incognito. Without a political future, he lacks the rosy promise so helpful in seducing women and staving off creditors. After '04, he won't even draw a salary.

Back home in New York, the agents of his lenders are numerous and crafty. Alexis has his instructions to turn them away from Richmond Hill, to threaten them with trespass, and to brandish a pistol if need be, but still Burr must go into town occasionally. As he slinks down busy thoroughfares, the vice president of the United States scans the sidewalks in order to avoid creditors and process servers, always worried that the great iron jaws of debtors' prison will yaw wide, then clang shut and swallow him whole.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, so Burr kites checks and floats bad notes to his less aggressive creditors, then covers his ears so that he won't hear the explosions. He conveys another handful of building lots to John Jacob Astor. Astor is making a fortune by scratching crude streets and alleys in the clay and hammering together rickety frame tenements offsite, then sliding them onto fieldstone foundations with great log rollers. Burr uses the funds from selling his land to pay off his most aggressive creditors. He avoids another threatened foreclosure of Richmond Hill, but as soon as it's

refinanced, he writes additional new mortgages to himself from his Manhattan Bank. He fears he's four hooves in the air and the carrion birds are circling when, late one Friday night, alone in bed, a vision breaks like the sun through a heavy cloud cover. A new source of capital! The next morning, he drives his gig and quarter horse nine miles north to the spanking new home of his old brother-in-arms, co-counsel and colleague at the bar, Alexander Hamilton.

As the crisp, bold lines of the Grange swing into view, Burr pauses on a knoll to take in the magnificence of the cream clapboards and white trim, startling and pure as a Federalist wedding cake against the gray December wood. He envies Hamilton this elegant home with a steadfast wife, a cluster of happy, intelligent children, and the well-bred horses and dogs, the orchards and gardens and surrounding forests and creeks. This is exactly how he envisioned Richmond Hill. What a poor, sad ghost of his vision remains!

Hamilton and his family are at breakfast in the bow window of their dining room when Peggy, obviously perplexed, stammers:

"Uh, excuse me, General, sir, but there's a man at the door who, uh, says he needs to see you in person, but won't give me his name."

Eliza frowns. "I thought we were safe from callers."

"I will see who it is." Hamilton bunches his napkin and goes down the hall. When he opens the door, he's shocked to see Aaron Burr, standing and smiling on his porch.

"Why, Mr. Vice President!"

"Magnificent, General!" Burr sweeps his arms over the frosted landscape to the north where the rivers are flowing blue and sparkling. "Splendid!"

"Come in, come in, it's cold." Hamilton welcomes him into the foyer.

"I fear I'm intruding. It's early, but I couldn't sleep."

"Have you had your breakfast?" Hamilton smiles.

"I couldn't possibly."

Little Eliza and Willie have left their places and now peer around the door jamb at the caller. Hamilton shoos them back to the table. He clasps Burr's right hand in both of his. "You look good, sir."

"As do you."

"Come and greet my family."

"Please, General," his eyes shift, "I am on a rather private and confidential errand."

Hamilton ignores his protest and leads him by the hand into the dining room. "Children, this is the vice president of the United States. Say hello to Mr. Burr."

"Hello, Mr. Burr," they call happily.

Burr smiles and bows and then crosses to Eliza, sitting among her children. She takes his offered hand, and he raises hers to kiss.

"I apologize for the intrusion, Mrs. Hamilton. You are indeed blessed."

"How is your dear Theodosia? She and our Philip were good friends."

"Yes! Well, she's healthy, happy, and wise. She has blessed me with a grandson just about this little fellow's age." Burr gently musses Little Phil's golden curls.

"Won't you join us?"

"I couldn't possibly."

"Come along, then," Hamilton says, "my study is just over here."

"Say good-bye, children," Eliza prompts them.

"Good-bye, Mr. Burr!"

Hamilton escorts him into his study and motions him to a chair. "So, what brings a man of your prestige out into the country this fine morning?"

"I find myself," Burr puts his index finger to his lips, "in a rather embarrassing situation. I'm in debt, General, which is not uncommon, but as I tossed and turned in the dark last night, I had a thunderous vision. Since I have already tapped every man and woman I can call 'friend,'" Burr's eyes

glitter with charm and irony, “I asked why not tap my enemies? That will give me a far bigger pond to fish.”

“I am not your enemy, sir,” Hamilton protests with a warm smile. “We are gentlemen and colleagues. We simply see the world from different perspectives.”

“Most kind of you to say,” Burr bows and then waits for an answer.

“I should like to be of help, but this home ...”

“Understood,” Burr smiles with admiration. “Solid investment, though. Weeks has done fine work.”

“Yes, he wrote off much of his work to pay his brother’s legal fee.”

“It was an honor to work with you on that case, and the proof, as they say, was in the pudding. Without our help, the mob would have hung poor Levi from a tree.”

“This home has eliminated any financial surplus I might otherwise enjoy.”

“I do know the cost of public service to an honest man!”

“Few appreciate our sacrifice. Public office is a thankless pursuit. Since I retired, my fortunes have measurably improved, but I’m afraid I’m not where I need to be. Do you plan to stay in public life?”

“Oh, the president and I are on the best of terms. He admires my skill with, shall we say, the lower orders, and I absolutely swoon at his poetical flights and flutterings.”

Hamilton can’t help smiling at Burr’s straight-faced irony.

“I heard your name advanced for governor next spring.”

“No, General. I will remain on the second rung until I can thrust my way to the top. You, though, should stand for governor. You would surely win. Come out of retirement. Lead your party against the dastardly Clintons and the Livingstons, who cause me endless grief. Shake things up. Your Federalists are so dispirited these days that my Republicans have little to

motivate us.”

Hamilton averts his gaze. “I am afraid my days of seeking office are over. Domestic felicity suits me well.”

“What a handsome family!”

“Thank you. I’d like to be helpful to you, though, especially since you’ve driven all the way out here. How do things stand between you and Church?”

Burr shrugs, raises his eyebrows. “Fine, I gather. We both walked away from our interview intact in life and limb. It is my cardinal rule to keep such disagreements from ever becoming personal. His accusations of bribery were most unfortunate.” Burr smiles. “Accurate, of course, but they came at a bad time. I needed to clear my name so I might once again stand for office.”

“Church is a man of the world. I doubt that he took your challenge personally. I will be happy to call on him Monday and intercede on your behalf. He’s a generous man, with vast resources and many wealthy friends.”

Burr frowns. “No doubt I owe many of them, already.”

“No matter. Stop by my office Monday afternoon and I’ll give you Church’s response.”

The men stand and clasp hands.

“Thank you, General, thank you. You’ve always been a true gentleman.”

“Well, no promises, but if I can help, I will.” Still looking bewildered, Hamilton holds the door as the vice president descends the stairs, climbs into his gig, waves, then flicks the reins and drives away.

When Hamilton returns to the breakfast table, Eliza asks, “What could Mr. Burr possibly want from you?”

“A loan.”

“Surely, you declined.”

“I told him that I’d approach John. He and John are old friends.”

“Friends? They nearly killed each other not four years ago!” Eliza shakes her head. “I confess, I don’t understand politics. Your enemies are your

friends and your friends are your enemies. Burr has opposed you and Papa at every turn of the road and now you'll find him a loan?"

"I've known Burr since we were soldiers together. When the British took New York, he helped me and my men escape. I never disliked him personally, only his politics."

"He stole Papa's Senate seat!"

Hamilton ignores her remark. "A gentleman should help a fellow gentleman, whenever he's able. We'd all do well to keep politics separate from our personal feelings."

"You're too soft-hearted."

He reaches for her hand, "Especially where you're concerned, my dear."

"And I love that about you, but when we moved out of the city I thought we'd be free from such interruptions. What cheek to drive up here on a Saturday morning!"

"Well, he was most complimentary to us. I hope the drive proves worth his while."

The next afternoon a cold wind scatters dead leaves across the ground. In an old tricorne and ragged coat, General Alexander Hamilton, architect of the union and New York's preeminent attorney, rakes through corn stubble on a windy hill. He gathers the brown leaves and bleached vines and white cornstalks and thrusts them into a bonfire that spits and crackles in the northeast corner of his garden.

The clouds and the dark, swollen sky were like this the day Philip rowed across the river and he waited impatiently for news. It's been two years since Philip's duel and he feels hollow and empty and dead when he remembers. Where did his sweet, precious boy go? His sister plaintively seeks him still. Hamilton leans on his rake, gazes into the dark, swelling clouds, listens to flocks of crows cawing from the barren trees, and he remembers—

—the black January night when a midwife placed little newborn Philip in his arms. How his world lit up! Until then, with Eliza grotesquely pregnant, the notion of fatherhood was an unwelcome curiosity, like the curiosity before battle: How will I feel? Will I respond with courage and honor? The delivery was long and bloody, Eliza screaming and thrashing and sweating and biting on a leather strap. But after the pain and danger pass and he holds the gurgling little boy, he is jolted by strong emotions and a mystery greater than any he's ever imagined. The midwife tends to Eliza, giving her sips of water, mopping her brow. Hamilton carries the newborn to the window and

looks down over the snowy Dutch gables of Albany in the moonlight.

The horrors of war have given way to this sweet new worry, the utter helplessness of his only begotten son, eyes blinking and little fists impotently punching the air. Hamilton holds the baby tightly, closes his eyes, and vows that he will make no mistakes. His father, James Hamilton, fourth son of a Scottish laird, abandoned him. Now Hamilton sees his chance to wipe all of that away because he knows the ugly, sinking, unmoored shame of fatherlessness, of abandonment, of feeling unworthy of love. He kisses his baby's soft head, swearing to keep this little boy safe no matter the cost. He is a father! And together, father and son, they will found a dynasty to lead this nation, enlighten this broken world, and dispel the shadow of his bastardy.

Eliza smiles at him from the bed, exhausted but radiant. Hamilton returns to sit with her as the midwife bundles away the bloody sheets. Lovers before, now mother and father, they talk in low voices, looking into each other's eyes. They whisper his name: "Philip," after her father. He hands her the baby to nurse, and marvels at the Madonna-and-child tableau as she suckles their son.

During those first windy nights, Philip sleeps in a cradle at the foot of their bed. All night, January gales rip down from the Helderbergs. When the child's whimpering awakens him from half-sleep, Hamilton rises in his nightshirt and lifts the little bundle to hold him, nuzzle him, and change him, all the while cooing baby talk, before laying him next to Eliza to be fed. Hamilton delights in the struggle of the baby's arms and legs against him. He positions himself so that Philip can see him as he nurses. One dark little eye watches him, drinking in the image of his father while drawing warm milk from his mother's breast; then the eye closes slowly, the lips relax, happily sated. Hamilton knows unconditional love. His life has a sacred purpose, and he'd give it willingly for this child.

When the babe is full, Hamilton stands and places him on his shoulder to rub his back until he belches. Then he wipes the little pink lips as Philip's

eyes roll back and he sleeps. Hamilton paces the floor for quarter of an hour to feel this fragile, breathing miracle on his shoulder, and he gives thanks to whatever force may be listening that out of so much carnage and death, this little presence has mystically entered his world in the Schuyler mansion. When he holds Philip over the silver baptismal bowl in Albany's North Church so the Reverend Bassett may pour water on his forehead, Hamilton recalls the minister's "light of the world" Christmas sermon because indeed, Philip's birth illuminates his world.

Now, leaning on his rake over the burning weeds, Hamilton cannot believe that twenty-one years have floated away like so much smoke. He watches the dark clouds toss on the wind. The first time he saw Eliza nurse little Philip, the tiny jaw suckling, the eye looking steadily at him, Hamilton never imagined the horror of Philip thrashing and bleeding and screaming in pain between them. Hamilton pokes the fire with his rake. The sweet memories help, but the horror of that night never leaves him. "I vowed to keep you safe," he murmurs. "How could I send you to your death?"

Eliza watches her husband work in his garden. Never has she seen him more relaxed and at peace. Dark clouds rip across the sky and stray crows reel and bank. Occasionally he looks up as if in prayer. Often, watching him like this, she imagines he's an older, wiser Adam tending his Eden, and today, as she watches, the serpent slithers in. The serpent is a tall, lean rider with a hook nose who ambles his horse up the road, dismounts, and ties the reins to the picket fence. His leather riding coat is covered in dust. He removes his tricorne to wipe his forehead on a sleeve, then bows to Hamilton, who leans on his rake, tips back his hat, and waves in acknowledgment. Eliza has dreaded this moment. It's Timothy Pickering and he's tempting Hamilton back into politics.

"General!" Pickering raises his hand in greeting and opens the gate to step into the garden. "Your new life suits you. Cincinnatus back to his plow." Pickering sweeps his arm north toward the sparkling river. "Magnificent

perspective.”

Hamilton’s face is set, his eyes narrow. “How are you enjoying leadership?”

“You can have it back if you want.” Pickering smiles, but his eyes shift. He advances and holds out his hand.

“No, you can keep it.” Hamilton reluctantly shakes his hand. “What’s knocked you so far from your orbit today?”

“I come seeking your support for a bold, new initiative.” Pickering clears his throat. In Hamilton’s steady gaze he’s caught off guard. “It’s an audacious plan, worthy of you, General, and I have canvassed many of our old friends. They only await your approval before joining me.”

“Tell me.”

Pickering looks to the north as if he will find the right words in the sky. “You perceive how our Virginians annex Louisiana to expand slavery in their cotton and cane plantations? Our friends in Boston and Providence and Hartford have devised a solution to this dilemma.” Pickering looks into Hamilton’s eyes and he falters. “I came to you first.”

“Tell me.”

“Secession,” Pickering whispers.

“Secession?” Hamilton asks in disbelief. “You would break the union?”

“It’s necessary, General, for our survival.”

“It’s treason. You read my editorial on the Louisiana matter.”

“I did, but there is another side to the argument. After forcing us to grant citizenship to whatever crawls out of those Louisiana swamps, the Virginians give us no other choice. We have secretly set up correspondence committees in all five New England states, and if I may attach your name to this effort, we will effectuate it immediately.”

Hamilton glares at him. “Do you honestly believe I’d entertain such a plot? Split our nation and you destroy it.”

“When in the course of human affairs—”

Hamilton raises his gloved hand. “Hold it there. Did Massachusetts ratify the Constitution?”

“Yes. Proudly. Sixth state. You know that, but—”

“Then Massachusetts took a blood oath. The union cannot be broken.”

Pickering shakes his head. “Not true, General, not true at all. Each state participates in the union by consent, not by compulsion. Each state chooses to remain in the union or to withdraw from the union as it wishes. New England, New York, New Jersey, and perhaps Pennsylvania have ample justification to leave the South and form their own new nation.”

“There’s no justification for treason.”

“The Virginians force us into a slavocracy! You must side with us, man! You were the first to oppose slavery in New York! What is your objection?”

Hamilton removes his glove. “Look here, Pickering. My fingers are separate, yet when I need them, they come together to grip, or to make a fist. Amputate half my fingers and I am crippled. I can hardly grasp, and I cannot fight. This is your proposal. Amputation would leave both north and the south weak and defenseless. The union is our proudest achievement and no circumstance can justify breaking it.”

“Surely each state has a right to self-determination.”

“Can children secede from your precious Puritan bloodlines?”

“This is politics, man!” Pickering struggles to keep his composure.

“No, Pickering, it is far more than politics. We fought a war at impossible odds, then spent six years framing and ratifying the Constitution. Through both war and peace our single guiding principle has been the union of our various states.”

“But these Republicans violate core principles of our Constitution! They want us to give full rights of citizenship to all manner of mulattos, Injuns, Cajuns and freed Negroes, put them on a footing with men who fought and built this country, who have unassailable pedigrees.”

Hamilton stiffens. “You know my pedigree. You know John Adams called me ‘the bastard son of a Creole camp girl’?”

Pickering shuffles uncomfortably. “Of course I don’t include you! You fought for this nation and guided the Constitution to ratification. You have earned the respect of all. But surely we cannot entrust what we’ve built to the care of lesser creatures forced upon us by Jefferson’s fiat. On principle you oppose the abomination of slavery! This annexation will only spread its poison. We must amputate—your word, sir—Virginia and Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee along with Louisiana like diseased limbs. We’ll be well rid of them, and we can build our commerce and industry to a better advantage and profit.”

Hamilton puts up both his hands. “I oppose slavery as so many do, but that is another matter. You do not throw the baby out with the dirty bathwater. I will never support any scheme that threatens our union. Our friendship is over, sir. The union must persevere at all costs, and I will oppose you and your conspirators with everything I have. Now kindly get off my land.”

“Pardon me?”

“You’re trespassing, sir. Turn around, walk through that gate, and get off my land.”

Pickering is incredulous. “You can’t be serious?”

Hamilton points. “Go.”

“All right, Hamilton. Rake your garden.” Pickering spits on the ground. “Cower here with your little wife in retirement as the world moves on. I was wrong to think you had the courage and the vision to adapt to new times, to protect the values we both know must prevail.”

“You will fail in this, sir. I will see to it personally.”

Pickering gives him a withering look. “We won’t fail. We will rid ourselves of the Virginians, and Louisiana, and slavery just as we rid ourselves of you.” Pickering walks to his horse, jerks the reins off the fence,

pulls himself up into the saddle, and trots away.

From her window Eliza sees it all. Wrapping herself in a shawl, she hurries out. Hamilton's face is flushed and he's struggling to control his rage.

"Why didn't he meet you in your office?"

"Let's go in. It's getting dark." He puts his arm around her shoulders. "Don't fret, Eliza, he's gone and he won't return."

She nods and puts her arm around his waist, but she knows. Soon Hamilton will be back in the fray. Despite his promises and his best intentions, she and the children can never be sufficient for him, and this knowledge makes her unspeakably sad.

Hours later, the children are in bed. Hamilton rocks in his chair and stares into the fire. He's been brooding all evening. Eliza comes in and sits on the floor in front of him. She rests the side of her head on his knee.

"We moved out of town to be free from interruptions. Why don't these men meet you in your office?"

"Must be the nature of their requests."

"Little Burr wanted a loan, I understand. What did Pickering want?"

"My involvement in a mad intrigue." Hamilton briefly explains the secession plot. "So he rode out here today to get my support to split the nation in half. Me! The architect and champion of federalism. He wants to rip apart everything we bled for, died for, and forged into a magnificent whole. The crowning insult is that my own party men are joining him in his madness." They sit for a minute listening to the fire crackle.

Eliza shifts on the floor to face him. "So what will you do?"

"I don't know." He looks at her. She notices that his eyes are especially blue tonight. "You always give good advice. What should I do?"

"Stay out of it," she says firmly. "Pickering can't possibly succeed, and nothing good will come of it for you," she pauses, "or for us."

"But what if he wins followers?"

“Pickering’s a malcontent, a fool. His plan will only embarrass him.”

“That’s what George III said about Washington.” He looks steadily at her and again she marvels at how blue his eyes are tonight. “Evil prevails when good men do nothing, Eliza. It’s like splitting up a family. Our union is our proudest achievement. This conspiracy threatens our existence as a nation, and it must be stopped.”

Eliza gets up from the floor and sits beside him in the other rocking chair. “Please don’t go back, darling. It will bring nothing but heartache and trouble.”

He sighs. “But if I don’t stop them, who will?”

“You liken the nation to a family. What about our family?”

“The survival of the union is a much larger question.”

“No, it isn’t. Our family is far more important than politics. Many others can serve their country. Let them. Men without families should worry about the nation.”

Hamilton sees how the wind is blowing. Next she will bring up Philip’s death, and that will carry them into troubled waters. “Do not fear, Eliza,” his voice is flat, dutiful, “I will honor my vow. Of course I will.” He returns to his book, but he cannot read. His face burns. “So this is domestic tranquility,” he thinks as he and Eliza each rock silently in their separate chairs.

In anticipation of a good-sized loan, Burr spends Sunday shoring up his political fortunes. Jefferson is dropping him, but he's vice president till the end of next year. "Politicians are like mackerel," he often observes, "a day out of water they begin to stink." If he acts quickly, maybe he can parley his name into another elected post.

Old George Clinton just announced that he won't be standing for reelection as New York governor. As rumored, he will be Jefferson's running mate in '04 and will bring with him New York's electoral votes. With the Louisiana Purchase accomplished, Jefferson won't just be reelected, he'll be canonized by a grateful nation. Burr's most obvious path is to step into the governorship behind George Clinton, build a solid base in New York, and then set his national sights beyond Jefferson's tenure, four years hence.

Theodosia writes him often about the antics of his little namesake, and Burr chuckles to see himself in miniature, the little cherub's brow furrowed, his foot stamping in wild tantrums. He fondly remembers the little chap climbing into his Gampy's lap to kiss him with pure little lips. Let his creditors and opponents go to the devil. Theodosia will be happy to spend the summer in New York again this year, and they will have a lovely time together, sailing upriver and bouncing through pine forests from spa to spa.

With the possibility of a loan, courtesy of General Hamilton's intercession, Burr drives his gig into town Monday morning to rub elbows

and pick up the latest gossip. He is dressed in shabby clothes and his slouch hat to avoid process servers. It's a chilly morning, sunny, but too early for Martling's, so Burr heads to Tontine's for a mug of strong coffee and a glance at the newspapers. He dodges men arguing loudly on the street, and ascends the steps and pushes through the door, waving at many who recognize and greet their vice president. He slaps a back here and shakes a hand there as he passes through the smoky room, and, toward the back, he notices an unlikely customer sitting alone with a long face. Elbows on the table, scowling over Hamilton's editorial in *The Post*, Timothy Pickering appears to be cornered and hiding.

Burr approaches quietly, leans against the booth above him, and whispers: "What brings yon pale Puritan into our dark Gomorrah?"

Pickering is startled, enraged until he spins and recognizes him. "Burr!" He stands and shakes his hand warmly. "I didn't recognize you, dressed like that."

"Don't speak my name too loudly." Burr rolls his eyes, and puts his finger to his lips. "My creditors are lurking everywhere."

"Aren't we a pair of exiles, though?" Pickering sits back down, motions for Burr to join him. "Strangers in a strange land."

"I rather enjoy being incognito." Burr sits across from him as a lad brings his usual coffee with a froth of milk. "Buck up, Pickering. My creditors will be casting lots for my robe this afternoon, foreclosure notices are tacked to my every fence post, and my slaves have prepared manumission papers for my scrawl, but the sun is out and fair weather is upon us!"

"I often wonder if you're not quite mad."

Burr spreads his arms in resignation. "Isn't life itself sheer madness? Consider how we enter," he reaches out and pats the bottom of a passing scullery wench, "and then how we leave." He imitates hanging from a noose.

Pickering laughs. "Our country is up in flames, and you're here fiddling!"

"Ah, Pickering," Burr heaves a theatrical sigh, "doom and gloom serve no

one. Plenty of room in the churchyard, and we'll both have an eternity to rest there."

As they catch up on the news, they are continually interrupted by political acquaintances who cluster about the table to greet Burr, including many good lads from Martling's. Burr introduces them to the prim, fussy Federalist and he watches Pickering's reaction. No charm at all. He is judgmental and irritable, and he makes no effort to hide his distaste for their clothing, bad teeth, and bad manners. Burr chides him:

"These are good boys, Senator. Spare them a wink and they'll take a bullet for you."

Pickering says nothing, but looks as if he smells a foul odor.

Finally Burr asks: "So what brings you into the city you hate so much?"

Pickering looks suspiciously, wondering if he can trust Burr.

"Yesterday I rode far into the wilderness to speak with Hamilton and get his approval face-to-face on a plan of mine. I missed the Boston packet and had to pass the night in some flea-bitten hellhole down by the water. Today, I'm itching all over and I think I have a rash."

"Why, I was out to see Hamilton on Saturday. How did he receive you?"

"Like a dose of the pox."

"He can be prickly. He was fine with me, though. I'm meeting him later today. He's doing me a kindness."

"I never met a man so cocksure of himself."

"It's all facade. The emperor has no clothes. I see right through him." Burr sips his coffee and licks milk foam from his lip.

"John Adams could never get beyond Hamilton's bastardy," Pickering says. "I suppose I now agree. He's a bastard, all right."

"But don't most of our saviors arise from humble origins?" Burr cackles. "He preens and struts and dresses like a dandy to mask his low birth," Burr leans in, "which is also why he never shuts up. Without Schuyler and

Washington, he'd be a counting house clerk."

Stockbrokers begin trading, as they did in fairer weather outside beneath the buttonwood tree. More acquaintances stop by, and jokes rise in eddies of tobacco smoke. The men who stop by are wearing ragged caps and mittens, but their faces come alive and they smile and laugh under the vice president's charm.

"All the young men!" Pickering says. "They quite adore you."

Burr waves it off. "They admire my defiance. A common failing of youth."

"Now that Jefferson's kicked you to the side, how will you come back?"

Burr drains his cup. "Perhaps we should have this conversation in private. What time does your ship sail?"

"I am booked on the noon packet to Boston, but I could catch the four o'clock."

"My gig is nearby, rickety but serviceable. Let us drive out to Richmond Hill, where I think my hens are still laying. I will give you breakfast, and you can witness firsthand the cost of public service."

In a jaunty spirit they climb into Burr's gig and set out. After a mile, the tightly packed streets of town houses and tenements give way to meadows, pastures, barns, and old farmhouses. Soon the grand pediment and columns of Richmond Hill come into view. As the trotting horse draws closer, the need for a coat of paint and a missing shutter give the old house an air of desolation.

"Lovely country seat," Pickering says as Burr pulls up to the portico.

"Mortgaged to the chimneys."

"I was here when it was Washington's headquarters. And Adams held a few cabinet meetings when he lived here."

"Ah, yes. Richmond Hill survived the great fire. It survived the war. It survived the British, and even Abigail Adams, but it won't survive me. I've sold twenty-two of its twenty-six acres, and now Astor's tenements are

nipping at me like your fleas and bedbugs last night.” Burr leads him up rotting stairs, through the creaking door, and into the vast, dank rooms.

Pickering gets a nose full of mold. “You need a new roof, Burr.”

“My man keeps a fire lit upstairs,” Burr says cheerfully, and leads Pickering up the stairs, stopping on the landing to call, “Alexis!” He sweeps his hand over the empty ballroom. “Perceive, Pickering, a man at the brink. I’ve sold my paintings and half my furniture and most of my lands to stay out of Bridewell, but each morning the mail brings me a fresh bouquet of bills.” Burr calls again, “Alexis!” and when the slave appears, “Yes, sir?” Burr orders ham and eggs. Soon, Burr and Pickering are sitting before the hearth in Burr’s study, with mugs of hot coffee and bread on toasting forks.

“So, as we were discussing, what office will you seek next?”

“Surely, your Federalists miss me.”

“You are a gifted politician and a realist. You preside over the Senate flawlessly. If we could turn you into an ally, you and your band of Tammany lads would be most useful to our purpose. I say, it was an ingenious tactic to turn a drinking club into your political brigade! Brilliant.”

“They are good lads, rock solid, but, to answer your question, I should like to stand for governor of New York in the spring. That post would give me a suitable platform for my next lunge. There is a vacancy, of course, with George Clinton retiring, but his nephew blocks my rise.”

“DeWitt Clinton wants to be governor?”

“Oh, no!” Burr laughs. “It would cost him too much. He’s sucking like a happy babe on the public teat, clasping at port commissions and selling judgeships and appointments to all his cronies. Besides, who wants to live in Albany? But he blocks my return to power.”

“Why? You’re in the same party.”

“He knows I’m my own man and that I loathe him. He wants a lackey he can control on the Council of Appointment. He’s snubbed me so often, no doubt he fears retribution. But,” Burr smiles and opens his arms with sweet

candor, “I am not a vengeful man.”

“We all have our snapping point, Burr. Adams sure found mine.”

“Well, my dear Pickering, I always turn the other cheek. And Clinton is not my only obstacle to the governorship. The prolific Livingston clan also shuns me. They show nepotism worthy of medieval cardinals! The Livingstons fear I will rip their gums from the public pap as well. No, sir, I am a man without a party. I have only my Tammany boys and this moldy old house.” He waves his arm about the empty room. “Alas, I doubt my Tammany boys can ever lift me over the hump.”

“Well, seek Federalist backing then!”

Burr shakes his head. “Hamilton always blocks me. You recall! He elected Jefferson president over yours truly with his noxious epigram: ‘Better a man with bad principles than one with no principles at all.’ How harsh! Cut me and I bleed!”

Pickering grunts with contempt. “I tell you, Hamilton’s irrelevant. The strutting, prideful, vainglorious little fool.”

“He still has *The Post*. And when he whispers into certain ears, people listen.”

Pickering considers, then looks fully into Burr’s eyes. “Let me bring you into my circle, Burr, and see if we might not find common ground.”

Burr toasts him with the mug. “I am all ears.”

“Presently, I am mounting a secret effort to secede from the union.”

Burr’s eyes sparkle: “Ah, yes! I caught wind of something like that. The Empire of Massachusetts? I can see the sign in Boston’s Back Bay: ‘Welcome to Lilliput!’”

“Listen to me, Burr. I’ve canvassed all five New England states. Our best men favor secession. Our keenest legal minds are drawing up articles of confederation.”

Just then Alexis brings two plates of ham and eggs along with cutlery. The men remove their toast from the fire.

“How could New England ever survive on its own?” Burr asks.

“That is not the question. The tougher question is how will the south survive without our ports and markets and factories? Freeing New England from the slavery-ridden South will be like lopping off a gangrenous leg. Boston and Providence are adequate ports, and Salem welcomes ships with shallow draft. If we could get New York, though! Our confederacy would boast the finest harbor on the continent.” He stares intently at Burr. “And it’s commonly thought that westward expansion will proceed up the Mohawk Valley. There’s talk of a canal. You’ve traversed those western lands.”

“Ah, yes. I escorted a group of investors from Holland through the old Iroquois territory, and I passed a law allowing foreigners to purchase land.”

“Consider our confederacy, then. If we could add New York as a sixth state, and possibly New Jersey and even Pennsylvania, we could run our southern border from the mouth of the Susquehanna west to the vanishing point.” Pickering looks intently at Burr. “Yesterday I rode out to ask if Hamilton would support the venture, and he threw me off his land. You are a man of far greater vision, and if you succeed as governor, you could bring New York along with us.”

Burr scoffs. “Your Federalists would never embrace me.”

“You’re wrong, there! Many admire you, and the rest will embrace you if you show leadership in this. The blood of Puritan ministers flows in your veins, man! You’re far worthier to carry our Federalist standard than that bastard immigrant Hamilton. Embrace my Federalists and they will embrace you! We can attribute your Republicanism to youthful folly.”

“Hah! My Tammany lads say ‘Federalist’ is something you scrape off your shoe. If I accept your support, what would you have me do?”

“Exactly what you’re planning to do. Stand for governor, defy the Clintons, the Livingstons, and even Jefferson himself. I will pledge you our Federalist backing, and, with those votes added to what your Tammany boys can bring, you will win handily. Once in office, you can spring up like a jack-

in-the-box and bring New York into our Northern Confederacy!”

Burr claps his hands. “Federalists backing Burr for governor so New York will secede? *Et tu, Brute!*” He spreads his hands and looks into the air. “I’m not a vengeful man, Pickering, but methinks I see a dagger before me.”

“I’m telling you, Burr, as DeWitt Clinton promotes his plan to dig a canal from Albany to the Great Lakes, many think it is feasible. Our confederacy would then roll westward into Ohio, all the way to Fort Dearborn and Detroit. Hardworking Yankees are carving homesteads from the wilderness, and they will need an artery of travel to ship their produce. Once the port of New York is joined to the Great Lakes, there will be no limit to the wealth our confederacy will generate. And city landowners will embrace secession if we promise the old Dutch families that the capital will never leave New York.”

“A lovely vision, Pickering! Say for argument’s sake I take this leap, how much Federalist support could I count on?”

“All of it.”

“Why?”

“Why are you so wary, man? Power is what we want and, working together, we can win it back. Adams and Hamilton bungled everything, so the Virginians stole in like thieves in the night. Single-handedly, you can pull Puritan America back from the brink.”

Burr’s eyes widen with charm as if he’s seducing a woman. “And when we form our confederacy, what will be my role?”

“Why, president, of course.”

“That’s a bona fide offer?”

“Under seal, Mr. President. Who else has the skills?”

“Indeed!” Burr stands, leans down, and shakes Pickering’s hand. “I am your man.” He turns and calls, “Alexis!” When his slave appears, Burr orders the best bottle in the house. “Let us celebrate.”

“Apologies, Burr, you know I don’t imbibe.”

“Well, I will drink for both of us.” Alexis brings wine and pours a full goblet that Burr raises in a toast. “To the Northern Confederacy, Aaron Burr, president, Timothy Pickering, kingmaker!”

“Hip, hip!” Pickering touches his knuckles to Burr’s glass.

Burr drinks and tries not to wince at the foul taste. “Now I have the delicate task of announcing this small change of plans to my Tammany boys. Ha, ha! Aaron Burr for governor, with Federalist backing.”

“Avoid being cynical. Be straightforward. Workingmen don’t care a fig about political alliances, and your men clearly adore you.” Pickering raises a cautionary finger. “But remember, not a word about secession until you’re sworn into office.”

“A secret in politics? How delicious! But I take your point.”

Over their empty breakfast plates they work on the details of secession with the enthusiasm of school chums: who knows, who doesn’t, the timetable, writing in cipher and so forth. Burr then drives Pickering in his gig the two miles to the crowded dock to see him off. Despite a brittle coat of ice on puddles and a threat of snow in the air, the docks are busy. Through the frosty harbor the Boston mail packet glides into its berth. Sailors scamper and toss lines, and masts are swaying with the gentle waves.

“I’ll be in touch,” Pickering says as the gangplank thuds down on the wharf.

“Safe travels.” Burr shakes his hand.

Pickering’s stern face cracks into a smile. “I will write very soon.”

Even as he waves good-bye to his new ally, Burr envisions an easy double-cross. He owes the Federalists nothing. Once elected governor, he need not secede. A split union would separate him from Theo and her wealthy husband, and it could tarnish the Burr name for little Gampy when he comes of age in Carolina. There is a more subtle play. Once in office, he can use the threat of secession to leverage his way into a full presidency of the United States, since he will then be the only man who can unify the

nation. Perfect! And this is precisely how, in four years, he will elbow Jefferson offstage. Revenge is a dish to be enjoyed slowly. And if the presidency of the United States is denied him, then secession will be his backup plan.

Burr drives excitedly through the crowded streets. From a lose-lose-lose position, he's fallen into a win-win-win! And the secrecy of it, the irony and the intrigue are so delectable. Hamilton's Federalists carrying A.B. into power, a lift so extraordinary that a vision of the Tammany wigwam will appear in the sky, *In hoc signo vinces!* In this sign you will conquer! Elated by his prospects, Burr drives over to Hamilton's office to see about his loan.

Dusk has set in and the lamplighter is lighting whale oil lamps up the street. Hamilton answers Burr's brisk knock on his office door.

"Why, Mr. Vice President, do come in."

"General!" Burr follows Hamilton through the anteroom and into his office. "I apologize for troubling you last Saturday, but necessity makes wantons of us all."

"Happy to help."

"Your wife is charming and your children precocious. I envy you, sir."

"They keep me busy, and centered. Now, I did speak with my brother-in-law and he is disposed to help you. 'Let bygones be bygones,' he said. He's arranged favorable terms for a rather large loan from a merchant friend with ships at sea. Sit down, please."

"Ahhh!" Burr looks in disbelief at Hamilton's furniture. "Not one for luxury, are you?"

"Keep the overhead low," Hamilton says. "The secret to a successful practice." He sits behind his desk. "Church's friend will need sureties, of course, and a personal guaranty."

"Happily, I anticipate my difficulties resolving soon."

"News since Saturday?"

Burr nods. "Things change so quickly in our peculiar calling. Contrary to what I told you over the weekend, I have decided on a gubernatorial bid.

With George Clinton's departure, I will bring stability to our state, and sanity to the Council of Appointment." Burr nods and smiles. "Yes! I have handicapped the race, and my chances are excellent."

Hamilton feels his breath catch and tries to seem nonchalant. Has Burr gotten wind of the secession conspiracy?

Burr continues: "Candidly, I've long been an admirer of yours, General. You'd make a great jurist. When I control the Council of Appointment, I could make you my first appointment to the New York Supreme Court."

Hamilton smiles. "Didn't you trim the governor's power of appointment when you ran the constitutional convention back in '01?"

"Yes," Burr nods and grins. "I make the rules so I can break the rules. There are many ways to skin the cat, and I'm sure that you and your lovely wife would enjoy the security and tranquility of a judgeship."

"Justice of the Supreme Court. You flatter me."

"Not at all. Shall we say chief judge?"

"Most kind of you, Colonel, but you saw my brood having breakfast. How could I support them on a judge's salary?"

Burr lifts his palms. "We'll double it. You can leave off toiling for ungrateful clients, and tolerating those arrogant jurists, and devote yourself to pure questions of law."

Hamilton bows. "Let's first see how the election turns out, shall we?"

Burr is smiling broadly. "You will be my first appointment, sir." He raises his index finger. "As the grand Florentine says, 'The wisdom of the prince shall be known by the quality of his ministers.'"

Hamilton shakes his head and can't help but smile. How he would welcome such an appointment, presiding over the court, writing decisions, dedicating himself to the abstract questions of law, but this is classic Burr. His lively eyes sparkle and dance, "like a dog on the scent," Hamilton thinks. Here sits a not-so-contrite bankrupt, desperate to avoid debtor's prison, seeking a loan from John Barker Church, a man he nearly shot in 1799, and

he's dangling a judicial appointment he has no intention of making.

"Well, sir, it grows late, and I'm sure you have more pressing concerns than my future."

Burr smiles broadly at Hamilton's humility. "So, I may approach Church directly, then?"

"He's expecting you to call tomorrow morning at his counting house by the Beekman wharf."

"I'll go directly over. Thank you so much, General, I am deeply in your debt."

As Hamilton stands to walk him out, Burr remembers something. He turns and clasps Hamilton's forearm, and his eyes open with great emotion. "On Saturday, I fear I was insensitive, General. As I drove away, I realized that I'd neglected to convey my deepest condolences, and I fear it may be untimely now. Your Philip was the flower of our American youth, and a dear, dear friend of my Theodosia."

"Thank you, Colonel, thank you." Hamilton bows his head at Burr's expression of sympathy.

"Power, wealth and fame, all are passing vanities. Only family endures." Again, Burr clasps Hamilton's forearm. "I am deeply sorry for your loss, and most grateful for your friendship."

"Thank you, Colonel. Best of luck with the creditors, and should you perhaps require my help with a foreclosure ... ?"

They both smile. After watching Burr get into his gig, Hamilton closes the door and returns to his pine table and his stack of law books. Burr is not such a bad sort, he muses.

The Yule holidays at the Grange should be more joyful this year with the grief of Philip's death fading. On St. Nicholas's Eve, the younger children, Eliza, Willie, and Little Phil, set out wooden shoes on the hearth in order to get apples and walnuts from the good saint. The older Hamilton boys, James and Alexander, are due back from their New Jersey boarding school on the twenty-second. Eliza and the maids have decorated the house with holly and evergreen, and are busy baking *kandijkoeken* and *Sinterklaas* cookies, as well as pies and tarts in the old Dutch tradition.

As Christmas approaches, Hamilton works around the clock to complete necessary legal work so he can stay home after Thursday. Over the weekend, they will have sleighing and skating parties on the hills and pond. They will have bonfires and snowball fights, and in the evening, they'll feast on roast beef and ham and turkey, then play music and parlor games long into the night. Eliza is happy to have her family together, and with the new baby talking this year, she has thrown herself into the celebrations with renewed joy.

Hamilton gives his scrivener Judah Hammond the afternoon off. Embers are burning low in his grate as he concentrates on finishing a brief, when suddenly the outside door bursts open without the benefit of a knock. Hamilton is startled by the noise and a blast of cold air and the sharp percussion of a wooden leg on the floorboards.

He calls into his anteroom, "Do I hear my Uncle Morris?" The office door squeals open, and the doorframe is filled by Gouverneur Morris in a long beaver coat dusted white with snow. The big man is huffing and puffing, supporting his considerable weight with his hands on the doorjamb.

"You look like Father Christmas!" Hamilton laughs. "Come in, come in!"

"I've half a mind to grab my savings and head for Georgia."

"You have savings?" Hamilton's up from behind the desk, crossing the room to embrace his old friend. "Sit down, old man."

"Never thought I'd say this, General, but I'd welcome back those evil days when we fought the Brits." Morris throws off the heavy fur coat and groans loudly as he lets his weight collapse into the chair. "At least we knew our enemies by their red coats. Nowadays, everyone's a double agent."

"Pickering's conspiracy?"

"Indeed." Morris nods. Hamilton tries to look him in the eyes and to avoid staring at the red eruptions of his bulbous nose. "Our friends are roaring in delight about his visit to your country seat. You threw that old phony off your farm?"

"He came hat in hand, asking my help to dismember the union! Me!"

They laugh at the absurdity.

"Well, it's that very crisis which brings me here today."

"You're not supporting him?"

"Bite your tongue!" Morris turns and spits into the fire. "I oppose it more vigorously than you. I came here to seek your help." Morris leans forward on his cane and shakes his enormous, shaggy head. "This world's gone berserk, Hamilton! New England Federalists clamoring to secede. Pickering skulking about to bring New York and New Jersey into his plot."

"Surely, none of our men are listening?"

"Yes, why, yes, they are. Your brother-in-law, Van Rensselaer, heeds the call!"

“Van Rensselaer?”

“And word has it that Pickering has found a gubernatorial candidate who will bring New York into his confederacy. It’s all very secret now.”

“Not Burr?”

Morris nods. “Himself.”

Hamilton’s eyes narrow and he looks about, assessing this news. “Burr was in here last week, unctuous and smiling. My new best friend.” He stands and begins to pace, his hands behind his back. “How can Pickering ever convince our men to support Burr?”

“By promising that Burr will free us from the Virginians. What could be worse, you ask? Oh, it screws down farther. Pickering’s promised Burr the presidency of his new confederacy.”

“That explains a lot.” Hamilton stops and suddenly he’s very still. “Burr offered me a judgeship, state Supreme Court, but he knew better than to mention Pickering’s conspiracy.”

Morris nods solemnly. “Yes, Burr’s quite the little reptile. Chameleon. He says and does whatever serves him in the moment. We are entering dangerous waters here, General, and we need you back.”

“How could our glorious union ever sink this low?”

Morris shrugs. “Human nature. No one can ever see beyond his nose.” Hamilton smiles, looking at Morris’s red, bulbous nose. Why does Morris of all people use this metaphor? “No one has principles anymore—no one, that is, but you and me.”

“No, I don’t agree. Everyone’s not depraved. Most men, like Pickering, are blinded by fear and frustration.” Hamilton looks steadily at Morris. “Burr is different, though. He has no principles, no beliefs. Ambition consumes him. He will stop at nothing to win power, and he’s expert in exploiting the weaknesses of others.”

“Yes, since Jefferson’s dumped him, Burr is a desperate man. If he doesn’t win an office soon, his creditors will fling him into Bridewell. We

need you to fight this battle!”

Hamilton drops his eyes. “Unfortunately, I can’t get involved.”

“Not involved? My God, man! This is no time to quail. You’re our leader! What’s the impediment?”

“I promised Eliza.”

“Your wife?” Morris sputters. “You can’t control your wife?”

“It’s not like that. I gave her my word. When Philip died.”

“Well, rescind it! She’s a sensible girl. She’ll understand. It’s only for a short while.”

“I’m afraid I cannot. The night I threw Pickering off my land, Eliza and I discussed secession and my possible return to halt it. She blames politics for Philip’s death, and fears some new, unnamed catastrophe will happen if I return.”

“For God’s sake! One grieving mother cannot cost us the union! Think of all the grieving mothers there will be if civil war breaks out!”

“I’m sorry, Uncle, but I must honor my vow.”

Morris shakes his head in disbelief. “Pickering will cleave our nation in half and Burr will rise as president of a northern confederacy while you’re home planting potatoes?” Morris’s jowls quiver. “This is not the man of action I once knew.”

“I can’t bring any more sorrow into her life.”

“But what about you? Your wishes? Have you abandoned the cause?”

“Of course not. I’m still involved at *The Post*. Pickering and Burr must be stopped, of course, but I lost so much when Philip fell. I can’t risk losing Eliza.”

“She puts that on the line?” Morris is out of patience. “For God’s sake, man, have the sister speak with her. Mrs. Church is a cut above, smart and worldly-wise. She’ll persuade your wife, if you can’t.”

Hamilton is queasy at the thought. His throat is tight as he imagines the

gossip circulating that his wife keeps him home. “Let me think on it, Uncle.”

“Well, don’t think too long. These things rise like summer squalls. Before you know it, the ship’s keeled over and we’re all drowning.”

The men stand and face each other.

“Do you have time for a rum punch down the street?”

“Sorry, Uncle, I’m off to the country now.” As he shakes Morris’s hand, the big man grabs him into an embrace.

“Come back to us, Hamilton! We need you!”

“Thank you for stopping in. I will give your request some thought.”

“The time for thinking’s over, man. The battle is breaking all around us.”

Hamilton feels light-headed, short of breath. He must get back in the fray! As Morris waits, he dons his hat and coat, tosses his saddlebags back on his shoulder, and blows out the lamps, then leads Morris out of the office.

Gentle snow fills the street, cushioning and muting the hoof beats of passing sleighs. After wishing each other a happy Christmas, Hamilton walks to the livery stable, where the stable boy helps him saddle his horse.

He climbs into the saddle and walks his horse up the snowy street. He must keep his vow to Eliza and stay out of this. Yet, with Morris’s dire predictions ringing in his ear, he turns off Broadway at Robinson Street and trots toward the Church mansion.

A maid ushers Hamilton into the parlor. Angelica rises to meet him, smiling warmly, her white arms reaching from a gown of sapphire blue.

“My amiable! You look terrible!” She clasps his hands and kisses him on each cheek, then guides him toward a sofa before a crackling fire. “Weight of the world? Sit down, please.” She pats the sofa next to her.

“You’ve heard about Pickering?”

“Of course.” Each weekend Angelica floats like an elegant swan through New York’s salons, and so she’s heard whispers.

“He’s approached Burr to join him.”

“Nothing surprises me anymore. But why do you worry? It can’t be as dire as you think.”

“Actually, it’s worse.” Hamilton remains standing, pressing his fists together knuckle to knuckle. “I’m ground between two stones—what I should do, and what I must. Our Federalists are supporting Burr, even Van Rensselaer! And Burr supports secession!”

“Let me help. Please sit.”

Hamilton sits on the edge of the sofa. “I should have heeded your advice long ago. It was wrong to retire after Philip ... We’ve had no leadership for two years. The survival of our union rides on this governor’s race, and I’ve been gone so long I’m irrelevant.”

Angelica smiles gently. “Won’t Burr forfeit public opinion by switching

parties?”

“His adherents love him.”

“But Pickering is no leader. Since you left, the Federalists are a flock of lost sheep. Burr’s detested by his own party! He can’t succeed against the combined weight of Jefferson, the Clintons, and the Livingstons.”

Hamilton stands again and paces. “But the Federalists have no other gubernatorial candidate, so Burr will win by default. The only opponent’s name I hear is John Lansing, the chancellor, and nobody likes him.” Hamilton is pale and agitated. “Burr is a dangerous man, Angelica. Don’t underestimate him. When I helped him with the loan from John, he promised me a judgeship. He has an unerring way of divining men’s ambitions, and he uses that self-interest to further his agenda.”

“Burr often miscalculates.” She sits back and smiles in the firelight. “He tried to seduce me once, whispering the most disgusting things in my ear. I asked him point-blank: ‘Do you actually get women with this approach?’ Don’t overestimate him.”

“But every time we underestimate Burr, he surprises us. He slipped his bank by us. He stole your father’s Senate seat. He snatched the Assembly from under our noses to raise Jefferson up, then nearly vaulted over Jefferson into the presidency himself.”

“But you stopped him,” she says. “You always do.”

“I didn’t when he stole your father’s Senate seat. I didn’t when he pledged New York’s electoral votes to Jefferson. But you’re proving my point, Angelica. Without my opposition, he will succeed. He’s got his crew at Martling’s, a vast labor force, and Pickering is seducing propertied New Yorkers, promising that our city will again be the capital of his new confederacy. Their holdings will quintuple in value.”

“Burr is such a little fop. Surely, he can’t win.”

“Anyone can win an election! Good Lord, look at the dolts and buffoons we elect! No, Angelica, as I talk to you I see it. When he commits himself,

Burr politicks as if he's waging war. And Pickering knows what he's doing, too. If they can join Burr's Tammany crew to enough wealthy Federalists, Burr will take it easily."

"Then you must stop him."

"Exactly!" he sighs. "But I gave my word to Eliza."

"Eliza?" Angelica laughs. "Really? She is your impediment? Eliza's so malleable! Has she ever refused you anything?"

"Things are different since Philip's death. I sense she blames me."

Angelica frowns. "Why would she blame you?"

Hamilton shrugs: "Philip was defending my honor?"

"But you didn't know of the duel, and you couldn't read his mind. Surely, you would have stopped him, had you known." Angelica shakes her head. "It was all John's doing. He can be such an oaf. Giving guns to children. He has the conscience of an eight-year-old."

"Eliza's borne up well since my retirement, but she adamantly opposes my return to politics. We talked recently, but now, with Burr in the race, everything has changed."

"Indecision was never your problem before."

"I never lost a son before. I don't want to lose my wife."

Angelica looks down and shakes her head sadly. "How I miss my Hamilton of yore! Yes, Philip's death changed everything. We all mourn him, and nothing will ever be the same, but we the living must go on, my amiable. You came to me for advice, and this is it. This threat to our union demands that you lead us against Pickering and Burr. Our party needs you and our country needs you. You can go back into retirement when the crisis is averted. Eliza will understand."

"I'm not so sure. After Pickering's visit, she was so upset I renewed my pledge."

Angelica takes his right hand in both of hers. "Just tell her the truth. Tell

her you need a brief respite from your vow, only a few months. She'll understand."

"Eliza believes horrible things will befall our family if I return."

Angelica smiles and shakes her head. "That's superstitious nonsense! Nothing can bring Philip back, but his death did not end your mission. Eliza is smart. Lay it out for her. I will back you, and Papa will back you, too. Eliza will come around, and, if you have any difficulty, send her to me."

"Thank you, Angelica." Hamilton squeezes her hands. "Thank you." She stands and Hamilton embraces her. He smells her French perfume. Their eyes meet. The old energy is still there, but their departure kiss is fraternal. He leaves immediately and rides the snowy road home for Christmas with his family.

All through the Christmas weekend Hamilton waits for the opportune moment to speak with Eliza. Monday evening, the day after Christmas, it arrives. The children are upstairs sleeping or reading, and he finds Eliza alone in the parlor, sewing by the fire. He leans down, kisses her on the forehead, and looks into her eyes.

“May I interrupt your sewing a minute?”

“Of course.” She puts her work aside. He sits in the chair next to her, but hesitates. “Let me guess.” She looks at him and smiles. “You’re not happy in retirement.”

“No, I’m very happy. It’s not a question of my happiness.” He feels she is reading his mind, but he can’t read hers. “A storm is breaking all around us, Eliza, and I fear the outcome.”

“Secession?”

“Yes.”

“Pickering’s visit?”

He nods. “Because I declined to join Pickering in his madness, he and the Federalists now support Aaron Burr for governor, and if he wins, Burr will lead New York into the confederacy.”

“But surely Burr can’t win. Does anyone take him seriously?” Eliza has a strange look in her eye which troubles him.

“With Federalist support he can. Burr has an added incentive now. If he

wins the governorship and brings New York along, they will make him president of their confederacy.”

With a thin smile that does not reach her eyes, Eliza puts her sewing into its basket on the floor and closes the lid. “You consider little Burr a serious threat?”

“It’s his last stand. Since Jefferson turned him loose, he’s a desperate man, and desperate men do desperate things. Besides, there’s no Federalist candidate opposing him.”

“Well, who will he run against?”

“Any candidate Jefferson puts up. They are sworn enemies now.”

Eliza winces at the oddity. “Someone from his own party?”

“Yes, and Burr’s now the darling of our Federalists. Even Van Rensselaer supports him.”

“I knew this day would come.” Eliza’s distant, flat demeanor unsettles him.

“You didn’t believe my vow was sincere?”

“Oh, it was sincere when you made it, but you made it out of grief, so I knew it wouldn’t last.”

“It will only be for a short time ...”

Eliza sighs. “Please, Hamilton! If not this conspiracy, there will be another. And after that, another. You can’t be happy in a garden, or in your law office, or even in this beautiful home with your family. You’re only happy when you’re off crusading, hero of the moment.”

He smiles. “I knew you would understand.”

She takes both of his hands in hers and looks intently into his eyes. “You don’t see the real danger here, do you?”

“Of course I do.”

“No, I don’t think you do. Power breeds evil and evil infects everything it touches, even those who fight it.”

“Evil?” He smiles. “You’re becoming metaphysical? No, Eliza, these are concrete issues. The union is our proudest achievement, and unless I stop them, these men will destroy it.”

“I disagree,” she says quietly. “There is a real, palpable evil here, Hamilton, and I fear it will ruin us. Ever since Philip’s death, I have felt evil lurking all about us. Our poor Angel’s madness is a constant reminder. I am afraid. I try to warn you of the danger, but you refuse to see it.” She squeezes both his hands and gazes deeply into his eyes. “Your righteousness breeds pride, my darling, and pride blinds you to the danger.”

He smiles uncertainly. “Well, if politics is so poisonous, what is the antidote?”

“Humility? Faith? Your duties as a father? Above all, love. Have you considered that none of our great men have families? Washington, Madison, Jefferson? They pursue power instead of family. You have this beautiful loving family, the rarest treasure on earth, but you still need to be the great leader, the savior, and so you choose politics over us. I am simply asking you to put your family first.”

“I do. I always have.”

She drops his hands and stands up. “Do as you wish. I should have said nothing.”

“No, no.” He pulls her back down. “Please, Eliza! This decision must be mutual.”

“It will never be mutual. You know how I feel. But what does it matter? You will do what you want anyway. You always do.”

“Please, I only ask that you agree.”

“Your politics took our Philip’s life and has permanently crippled our Angel. We can’t risk anything more.”

“But this is only temporary!” Is she just being stubborn? “I have been away from the scene for two years and everything has fallen apart!”

“You’re not away. You publish your newspaper every day. You are still

very active in the gossip circles.”

“*The Post* is not gossip. We advocate unity, prosperity, justice. We tell the truth and promote the rule of law.”

“Yes, your beloved ideals. But what about your family, darling?”

“I love my family above all else! Look at this new home!”

“This isn’t going to end well.” Again she starts to rise.

Again he pulls her down. “Eliza, please!”

“You made a vow. So long as you honored it, you were safe. We all were safe, but we won’t be if you go back.”

“My duty to the union runs as deep as my duty to this family. You know that! You stood strong by me through all the battles. Now, good people come to me, Coleman, Morris, your sister, begging me to return. They tell me I’m the only one who can win this battle, and you wish to stand in my way?”

“I didn’t know the cost of your politics until we lost Philip ... and our poor Angel. I will not risk anything more. Put your family above all else, or I fear you will lose it.”

Is this a threat? Now he’s annoyed. “What are you saying? I always put my family first, and I always will.”

“Do you, though?” Eliza folds her arms and glares at him with a look that he’s never seen before. It unnerves him.

“Yes,” he says, “always.”

“Answer me one question, then.” Her eyes are blazing with defiance.

“Anything,” he dares her.

“Did you know of Philip’s duel before he crossed the river?”

The question hits him like the kick of a horse. Before he can catch himself, he feels his eyes go wide and lurch away from her penetrating stare. How can she ask such a question after all this time? He struggles to keep his breathing even. His mind races back over the past two years, their deep sorrow, their despair, their laughter, the few times they’ve made love. She’s

harbored this suspicion all these months? His face burns.

“Philip pledged his uncle to secrecy.” Hamilton feels her scrutinizing him, but he presses on, hoping that she’ll accept his dodge as she always has before. “We’ve been through all that.”

Eliza’s composed but insistent. She folds her hands in her lap and quietly murmurs: “Please, Hamilton, just answer my question.”

“What is it you suspect?”

“That you knew of the duel but did nothing to stop it. In fact, I suspect you sent Philip to the dueling ground to protect your honor.”

“John lent him the pistols. John encouraged him to be a man.”

She continues to look at him in the new way. Somehow she knows, but she needs to hear it from his lips. “I ask a question of my husband and he gives me a lawyer’s response. Please, Hamilton, did you know of Philip’s duel before he crossed the river, or not? Just tell me the truth.”

He glares at her and whispers, “The truth.” He swallows, sick with fear at what will happen next. “I did, Eliza. Yes, I did.”

“Did you speak with him about it?”

“I did, but his mind was made up.”

“His mind, Hamilton? He wasn’t twenty years old! His mind? He was a child!”

He sees that she is staggered, her face suddenly drained of color. She looks away. She clenches her fist at her stomach and closes her eyes. She shakes her head violently back and forth. “You spoke to him, and you did not forbid it?” Her voice is rising. She struggles to control her fury. “You did nothing to stop our son’s murder?” She tries to breathe but cannot get air.

“Not an hour has gone by when I haven’t regretted ...” He stops, shamed and humiliated. He reaches out for her.

“Don’t you touch me!” she hisses, thrusts up her palms at him, and shakes her head. “No. Please.” Her lips are quivering, tears spilling from her eyes.

Her hands fidget, then clasp each other, wringing together in her lap. “I trusted you,” she says with a deep, involuntary sob. “Philip trusted you. And the children ... we all *trusted* you ... to protect us.” Her eyes are closed and she turns away from him, sobbing. “Do you ... have ... any idea ... what you cost this family?”

“It was his first test of manhood.”

She whips her head around to look at him and her red eyes glare. “You were his father! Fathers don’t send their children to be slaughtered!”

“You blame me?” Now his voice enters a new register.

“I was his mother! I had a right to know!” Her voice is husky, hoarse. “And if you told me, rest assured I would have stopped it! And Philip ... our dear Philip would be alive today! Alive, Hamilton!” Her eyes narrow and her voice falls into a hiss. “But you knew I would stop it, and that’s why you didn’t tell me! That’s why you hid it, and still hide your complicity!”

“You have no idea how I’ve suffered.”

“How you’ve suffered? Philip is dead! We both held him as he bled and died because of your ineptitude, your failure to protect him. Have you ever thought about *my* suffering? You are not his mother! You didn’t carry him inside of you!” She beats a fist against her stomach. “You didn’t nurse him at your breast! And our poor Angelica? Her mind has snapped and she will never be right. Our two eldest, gone! With a single gunshot! Gone! And it could have been so easily avoided.”

“I never thought—”

“You never thought? It was a duel, Hamilton! Real guns, real bullets! How could you not think he might die?”

Hamilton’s completely undone. “Afterward ... I wanted to tell you ... I needed your comfort, but I couldn’t ...”

“Comfort?” In the midst of her tears, her eyes red and swollen, her face contorts and she grins maniacally. “You kill my baby and you want *me* to comfort *you*?” Hamilton reaches out again. “No! No!” She pushes him away

and beats her fists in the air. “Don’t touch me! Don’t ever touch me again!”

“You can’t blame me, Eliza. His honor was at stake.”

“His life was at stake, Hamilton!” She’s hoarse. “Oh, but I forget! He needed to prove his worth in your corrupt and rotten political world! He needed to protect his honor, and yours, too, and so he is honorable now ... honorably dead! And I have lived this shadow of a life for two bleak years, mincing and tiptoeing around the truth. You lied to me, Hamilton! Your wife! Philip’s mother!”

“I never lied to you.”

“Never?” She glares at him. “Mariah Reynolds? ‘Oh, Eliza, stay with your parents in Albany. I’ll struggle on alone here in Philadelphia.’ Alone?”

“Good God! Not this again.”

“You’re right.” She pulls herself out of the chair. “It is different this time. This is not some sniveling little lie you tell me so you can cavort with another woman’s body while I am home nursing your infants. This is a heartless, cowardly lie that sent our Philip to his grave! I am such a fool! I always make excuses for you. You speak of honor, but you are a liar and a coward! You refuse to take responsibility for your actions, and that’s what poisons everything. And now you want to return to your lying, cowardly world of politics? Well, go!” She shouts and points at the door. “You’re released! Plunge back down into the cesspool. You have all the necessary attributes.”

“Please, Eliza! I tried to protect you ...” He stands and reaches for her.

“No! No! No!” She pushes at his chest. “You weren’t protecting me! You were concealing the truth. What else have you withheld? How many other women? Our marriage is a sham! This grand house in the country, your elegant Grange! It’s haunted by your dead son and your mad daughter and all your lies. You conspired with Church, the man who seduced my sister, to keep this horrible secret.”

“I’ve never spoken to John about it. I’ve carried this burden alone.”

“Well, it’s yours to carry! And John’s, too! He gave Philip his cursed

guns. You men of the world! You both failed our son when he needed you most!”

“I thought you’d understand.”

“Oh, I understand, all right! I am your fool, your dupe, your ninny! I’ve tried to heal the wounds of your horrible childhood, but you don’t know how to be a father. You think only of your reputation, how everyone’s actions reflect on you. You don’t know how a father loves. You can’t. Family is the only good thing on this earth, the only thing worth dying for.” She glares at him. “Honor?” She spits into the fire, “There’s your honor!” She turns away.

“Stop, Eliza! Please, stop!” He reaches for her.

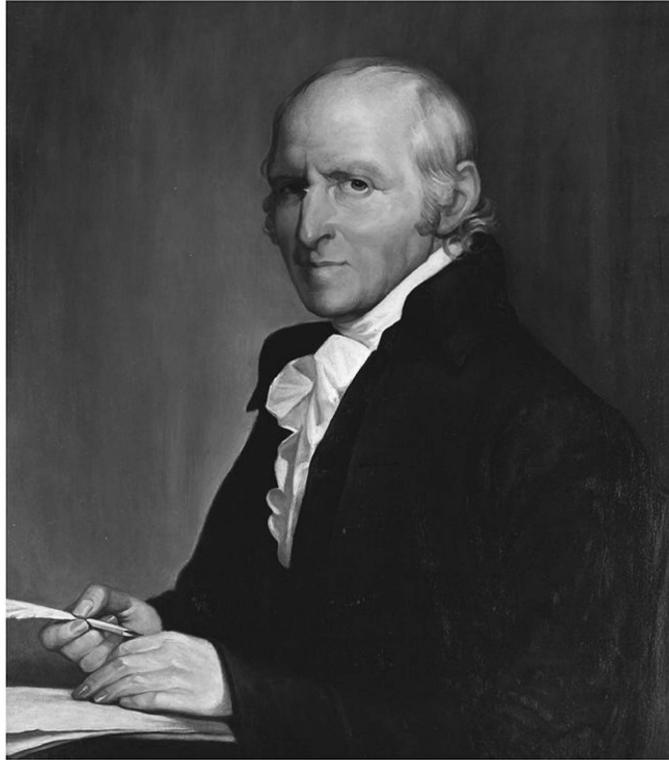
She violently pushes him away. “You need to save the union? Life at home is too dull? I am too dull? Not like my sister, the enthralling, effervescent Angelica? Or your Reynolds whore? Go! There’s the door! I can’t stop loving you, even if it costs me the last measure of my self-respect, but beware.” She goes completely still, and she raises a finger. “You are blinded by pride, Hamilton, and if you don’t curb it, it will destroy you.”

“It’s not pride at all, Eliza, it’s public service. I am saving the union.”

“Well, do a better job with the union than you did with your family.”

He’s incensed. “Philip understood.”

Her voice descends an octave. “And Philip would be so proud of his papa. If he could. If he only could.” Her chest is heaving with sobs, and tears are coursing down her cheeks. “I have no hold on your heart, Hamilton. Nobody does. Nobody ever did. Do whatever you wish ... with anyone you like.” And with that valediction, Eliza spins away and leaves him alone in the room.



SENATOR TIMOTHY PICKERING

BOOK III

THE GOVERNOR'S RACE

Through the slums and groggeries of lower Manhattan, Aaron Burr's Tammany boys prowl before each Election Day to get votes. His Bucktails are salt of the earth: loyal, resourceful, and not overly scrupulous. Many of them can't vote themselves because they don't own realty, but they work night and day to get the necessary votes into the ballot box, legal votes if they can, fraudulent votes if they must.

This year, Burr touts himself as a war hero and a self-made man, and so he believes he naturally appeals to ambitious New Yorkers. Even though the two great Republican families of New York, the Clintons and the Livingstons, openly oppose him, he now has Federalist support from Pickering, so if he can just get Jefferson's endorsement, he will easily prevail. Burr has always been loyal, so he believes Jefferson owes him, and now it's time to collect the marker.

Following his annual riotous New Year's Eve party, Burr rides again to Washington to preside over the close of the 1803-1804 Eighth Congress. Through friendly third parties he finagles a dinner invitation to the President's House for January 26, and at precisely six o'clock he's knocking at the door. Jefferson himself answers. He's dressed as a man of the people in a simple buff jacket, ruffled shirt with cuffs, green corduroy breeches, white stockings, and buckled shoes.

"My dear Burr!" Jefferson warmly takes his hand. "Come in! Come in!"

“Thank you for seeing me, Mr. President.”

“Always good to see old friends.” He claps Burr on the back, but it’s awkward. Jefferson finds touching and being touched distasteful, so he’s forcing it. Burr tries to broach business straight off, but Jefferson guides him from the oval reception room into a small adjoining dining room, swatting away business like an annoying fly.

For half an hour, they both try excessive charm to melt the frosty antipathy. The president pours French wine and ladles a spicy seafood gumbo from a silver tureen, serving Burr himself. After the soup course, servants enter with capons, dressing, mashed potatoes, and green beans. The president will hear no talk of business while they eat, and he bubbles with humor and wit. At last, when the plates are cleared—no sign of the lovely Sally tonight—the president leans back, folds his hands behind his reddish-gold corona and casts his eyes at the ceiling.

“So, tell me, my dear Burr, what I can do for you, and it shall be done. Instantly.”

“I am informed my name will not appear on the ballot this year.”

“Truthfully, I have not yet made that decision,” Jefferson smiles at the ceiling, “but please don’t feel constrained if other opportunities knock.”

“I’ve heard George Clinton mentioned as my successor.”

“One possibility, yes. He would bring the critical New York electoral votes, as you did last time.”

“Well, there certainly is no question of your reelection, Mr. President. With the acquisition of Louisiana, you have done our nation greater service than any past leader, including Washington. The electorate will return you to office, no matter what man the Federalists put up.”

Jefferson bows. “Kind of you to say.”

“If you do select Clinton, though, I am interested in filling the post he vacates.”

“Yes?”

“And from a party perspective, it will help us to keep a loyal ally in the New York governor’s chair.”

“New York is a place of great opportunity.” Jefferson avoids eye contact.

“And so I come tonight to ask a mere trifle of you.”

“You know how I value your service, Burr. And your friendship. Anything at all. Just name it.”

“I hear it whispered about that I am abandoning you and our party in seeking this position. Nothing could be further from the truth.”

“Men will believe what they believe.”

“In the papers all sorts of calumnies circulate about me. Clinton’s man, this editor Cheetham, invents fantastic libels to make me loathsome to voters. Of a most delicate and personal nature, too.”

“I have seen them, yes.” The president’s nodding. “The Federalists open their foul sluices upon me as well. This editor Crosswell up in New York accused me of purchasing Callendar’s silence with a bribe.”

“Indeed,” Burr notes, “Callendar accuses me of staging ‘Negro orgies’ and dubs us the ‘mulatto party.’” Jefferson winces. Surely, Callendar meant the insult for Jefferson. Burr recalls how his cavalier mention of Sally Hemmings ended their last encounter. Jefferson seems irritated again.

“Our newspapermen are out of control, but Callendar paid the ultimate price,” Jefferson observes with a slow shake of his head. Burr nods. After he was summarily fired from *The Recorder*, Callendar stumbled around Richmond for three months, drunk and disoriented, until he was found one Sunday morning face down in the Charles. Some believe it was suicide, but better odds are on murder. “Alas, poor Callendar,” Jefferson says. “A bellyful of river water for his lack of principle.”

Burr squints at Jefferson. Was that sarcasm? Did he have Callendar drowned? To cover his misstep, Burr retreats to self-deprecation. “Terrible, sir, what they rake up. My detractors accuse me of scampering with young virgins and seducing loyal wives.”

“Bilge. Respond to none of it.” Jefferson languidly waves his long fingers. “You only dignify lies when you answer them.”

“Of course, but now the Clintons control Cheetham and I note that, upon occasion, you have been his patron as well. A word from you could stop his putrid torrent like this!” Burr snaps his fingers.

Jefferson frowns. “I notice none of what you complain about.” He reaches for his wine. “Treat it as the passing wind.”

“Well, sir, you effectively silenced Crosswell.”

“That prosecution was initiated by the state attorney general, not a federal man.”

“Ah,” Burr toasts him. “The unseen hand.”

Jefferson finally looks him in the eye, but it is with annoyed impatience. “Please tell me, Burr, you didn’t seek this meeting with me to discuss newspaper editors.”

“No, sir, of course not.” Burr clears his throat. “I shall be departing for New York directly when session breaks, and I should like to return with your mark of favor.”

Jefferson frowns slightly and gazes back at the ceiling. “Mark of favor?”

“A letter perhaps?”

The president raises an eyebrow. “You know I never meddle in local affairs. One at my pinnacle wins nothing from local elections, and loses much with the inevitable conflicting alliances.”

“Well,” Burr winces with embarrassment, “perhaps not a *public* mark of favor, then. Perhaps just a *private* word to the right people.”

Jefferson shakes his head. “Again, Burr, I cannot use the majesty of this office to support or oppose anything local.”

Burr now gives a soft laugh. “Understand me, Mr. President,” he leans closer, “I do not seek your *official* sanction. Perhaps just a whisper to Governor Clinton so he will speak with his nephew to assure their neutrality.

Without the Clintons raising a headwind against me, I should have fair sailing, and you, sir, can use my victory as a show of our party's strength in New York."

Jefferson brushes this aside. "Endorsements are useless. It always astonishes me how men misconstrue them." He raises an instructive finger. "Never put in writing what may be spoken, and never speak when a nod will suffice."

"Words to live by." Burr claps his hands and smiles to cover his impatience. This is his last chance. He's tried flattery, persuasion, informed self-interest, and now abject supplication. Jefferson can't be so obtuse. Could he have heard about Pickering and his Federalist alliance? "But if you will not affirmatively support me, Mr. President, then let it be known—if only privately, sir!—that you don't oppose me."

Jefferson rubs his chin, considering. "Our American democracy—like the sun rising each morning—offers each man his opportunity for greatness. You have hunkered loyally in my shadow far too long, Burr. Your time has come." Jefferson spreads his arms like a bad actor. "Step now into your own radiance. Any word from me would detract from your ultimate success. Rather, let each of us run his race this year, and may we both be victorious." He clenches his fist and awkwardly thrusts it forward, like a milkmaid throwing a punch.

"Well, then, to seek the governorship, I will need our party's nomination. I sense powerful rivals among the Clintons and the Livingstons who fear offending you. If you could but alert them to your thinking on my ascension."

"Tut, tut. You don't need either of those families, nor, in truth, do you need me. There is no man equal to your abilities with the New York Republicans. You have a unique skill, Burr, particularly with the lower orders. Return to New York. Stir up the busy bees of your Tammany Hall. Give your voters something to believe in and they will lift you high." Jefferson gives him a wet smile and pours more wine. "Where is Hamilton in

all this?”

“Hamilton? Why, he’s retired from the scene.”

“That is good for you. Keep his vicious pen sheathed and we will all benefit.”

Burr’s face is hot. It is clear he will not get what he needs tonight. His customary mask of charm is slipping. His shirt collar is too tight. He needs to get out of this room, out of this vast empty house, away from this man, out of this fen of a city. He toys with the cutlery and smiles as he visualizes plunging the carving knife into Jefferson’s heart. He forces himself to breathe deeply and, with a herculean effort, regains a mask of seductive charm. “As you say, sir.”

“You will be fine,” Jefferson concludes.

The two politicians finish their dinner with small talk and more forced pleasantries. Not a word about Pickering and the Northern Confederacy, though surely Jefferson has heard, and that is why he’s unwilling to help.

The vice president is not smiling as he puts on his cloak and hat and ventures out into the frosty January night. The meeting was a disaster, but at least he knows. Jefferson opposes his rise as vigorously as the Clintons and Livingstons, and so he must fight them all. Well, he vows, that’s what he will do with his Tammany men and any help Pickering can garner among the Federalists.

Stars are twinkling in the barren firmament and the moon is full. Burr gingerly treads the walkways of frozen mud. Pagans called this the “Wolf Moon,” he recalls, because hungry wolves crept out of the forest in the long nights of January to forage near villages and farms. Tonight, he is a solitary wolf on the prowl. He owes no one anything in his own party. They have scorned him for the last time, and he will show them their mistake. Once he’s in power, he will destroy anyone who crossed him on his rise. How sweet it will be to lead six or seven bleating states away from the flock, and rule as president of the Northern Confederacy, dictating terms to these smug

Southerners! They have underestimated Aaron Burr for the last time!

When Harry Croswell's appeal comes up in Albany, Philip Schuyler writes his son-in-law to consider arguing the case, and Hamilton agrees to appear *pro bono*. He's a newspaperman after all, and so he is directly interested in the outcome. The high-profile *People v. Croswell* case will cost Hamilton a month away from his law practice and a great sacrifice to his income, but there is a large domestic benefit. He will bring Eliza and the children along to visit her father, and perhaps old Schuyler can help her accept his return to politics.

Early in February, Hamilton packs Eliza and the children into the Churches' coach for the trip upstate. They spend four days in frozen forests and along the barren reaches of the Hudson, struggling through stiff winds and snowdrifts. As the coach bounces along the icy, rutted roads, Hamilton rides his horse alongside. He prefers to be out in the weather because it reminds him of his soldiering days. They put up in Peekskill the first night. At Poughkeepsie, they remove the wheels of the coach and affix sleigh runners to glide over the snow. They spend their second night at the Beekman Arms in Rhinebeck, but only make Kinderhook by the third night because of heavy snowfall.

The blizzard continues the next day as the team pulls from Kinderhook to Bath-on-Hudson, where they cross over to Albany on the ice. Before them the Schuyler mansion rises high on its knoll, its majestic windows dark, save

for a single light on the first floor. The driver “hallos” as they draw near, and he blows his frosty bugle. Old Brock, the Schuyler manservant, peers out with a lantern. Seeing Hamilton on horseback, he goes back in to fetch his master. Soon General Schuyler appears in the doorway, draped in a shawl, leaning on two canes. His long gray hair is mussed and he’s stooped over, but his eyes sparkle, and he greets his son-in-law with a sly smile.

“Good to see you,” he growls and embraces Hamilton and leads him inside. “About time someone’s here who can talk sense.” Eliza enters with the children, and Schuyler holds her for a long moment, then happily reaches for the children’s hugs and kisses.

While Eliza directs servants to feed and settle her family, Schuyler takes his son-in-law into his back office, where hundreds of pigeonholes hold parchment deeds, leases, and receipts from his vast land holdings. He had been resting in a chair by the fire when they arrived, but now he’s animated at the prospect of new battles to be fought. The two generals sit side-by-side before the glowing coals as the wind whistles down the chimney.

“What a sad, sorry time,” Schuyler says with a slow shake of his head. “Our grand age of revolution and heroes has degenerated into this day of villains and cutpurses. Burr will be governor and will split the union we sacrificed so much to create.” He spits into the fire. “Nasty little mongrel!”

“We’re not going to let that happen,” Hamilton says firmly.

“How can we stop him? Even Van Rensselaer supports him!” Schuyler shakes his head. “Since our poor Peggy died, the patroon doesn’t listen to me.”

“I don’t understand. Why would Van Rensselaer support Burr?”

“To revenge himself on the Clintons. He’s still smarting from losing the governor’s race to old George last time, and he believes Burr can beat any candidate the Clintons put up.”

“He may be right.” Hamilton stands to pace in front of the fire. “But he doesn’t know Burr as I do. Burr has allegiance to nothing but his own self-

interest. Once in office, he will betray his supporters to serve his own greed and power lust.”

“Well, Jefferson created the little monster.”

“No, sir, nature created him. Jefferson just opened the door for him, and he slithered in. Now that Jefferson has discarded him, Burr is showing his fangs.”

The men stare into the fire, and in the stillness they hear the children running through the house. “It’s good to hear them laughing,” Schuyler says. “This place has been so ... quiet since my poor Kitty departed.” He reaches for Hamilton’s hand and his face melts in sorrow. “No blessing in life surpasses a good wife, my boy. And you have the best.”

Hamilton nods, but he says nothing about Eliza’s recent scorn.

“Of all my daughters, she’s the most like her mother. My favorite, if I may confess a preference. Angelica was always a bit giddy, and poor Peggy was spoiled, and sickly, leaving us so early. You got the prize, my boy. When Eliza was a girl, we were inseparable. I dressed her as a boy and took her with me on trading expeditions among the Six Nations. Eliza’s seen much. Such a kind and noble heart.”

“A heart I fear I’ve broken.” Hamilton looks for rebuke in the old man’s face, but there is none.

“We do that sometimes,” Schuyler says. “It’s unavoidable, but Eliza’s strong. She forgives. You are not an ordinary man. Allowances must be made.”

“But Philip?”

“Ah, yes, Philip.” Schuyler sighs and shakes his head, looking into the fire. He’s kind enough to say no more. “Pray to God that you leave this earth before Eliza does. Since Kitty’s been gone, I am completely lost. I don’t know what to do with myself all day.”

Hamilton allows Schuyler a moment with his sorrow, then returns to politics: “Pickering came to me with his plot to secede. Has Van Rensselaer

shared his thinking on that little conspiracy with you?”

“Yes. He favors it, sad to say. He believes that the Virginians have run this nation into the ditch and he wants to cut them loose.”

Hamilton stiffens. “Anger and frustration are not reasons to destroy the union! Unity is all we have. If we splinter with petty jealousies, we will lose our presence on the world stage. England and France will foment wars to reclaim us, and we’ll have no strength to resist.”

“Van Rensselaer believes that the differences between north and south are insurmountable, and will rupture the nation, sooner or later.”

“I agree, sir. The differences are stark, but no sectional difference is worth splitting the union. We have more in common than we have separately.”

“Perhaps secession is just a threat to gain leverage,” Schuyler muses.

“For Burr it may be. He’ll play it either way, depending on his advantage.”

“How do you mean?”

“Well, Burr can promise Pickering support for a Northern Confederacy in return for the Federalist endorsement. Because it’s a conspiracy, it must remain secret. Not even a campaign promise. Once he’s governor he can play both ends against the middle. If the Jeffersonians don’t support his presidential ambitions, he’ll throw his lot in with the conspiracy and become president of the northern confederacy. But if Republicans warm to him once he’s back in power, he will tout himself as the leader who averted secession, the great unifier, and he will succeed Jefferson in ’08. This way he has two paths to the presidency. And this is why we must oppose him on this next step.”

“But he has no Federalist opponent. Who are we to support?”

“John Lansing.”

“The chancellor? Why would he leave the bench? Even if he does, he won’t make much of a candidate. He’s one of the weakest, dullest men I

know. He deserted you at the Constitutional Convention.”

“Precisely. But I can support Lansing over Burr precisely because he’s weak. With Lansing in office, our party can only grow stronger. He’ll make mistakes and, next time, we will take the governorship.”

“You could run.”

“I have no wish to hold office.”

“Van Rensselaer told me that Burr has big plans for you.” Schuyler smiles.

“Yes, he offered me a judgeship. Classic Burr.” Hamilton shakes his head. “But he doesn’t understand. I can’t be bribed, and the union is far more important than any ambition I may have. We simply cannot support Burr. He’ll abandon us as soon as he’s in office. I have spoken with Jim Kent. Lansing’s our man, and, by turning our Federalist support toward him, he will beat Burr.”

“Well, Lansing it is, then. We’re meeting Friday night and we can spread that around among our friends.” Schuyler motions to be helped up. “You must be hungry.”

Hamilton pulls the old general to his feet and adjusts the shawl around his bony shoulders. Schuyler lumbers forward on his canes. Hamilton is pained to see the vigorous man so reduced. They enter the large, dark living room, lit by a dozen candles, and the children come racing to hug him, “Grandpa! Grandpa!” Joy shines from Schuyler’s wrinkled face as he reaches out and hugs them one by one, then lifts the youngest, Little Phil, for a kiss.

The maids have laid out a late supper on the dining room table, and the noisy family takes its place with the old general at the head and Eliza at the foot. There’s brewed tea and milk for the little ones. Hamilton cuts slices of ham off the bone and Eliza hacks into a loaf of bread. Schuyler enjoys two glasses of wine which make him merry. After dinner, Eliza herds the children upstairs to prepare for bed while Hamilton and Schuyler return to the study with a bottle of French brandy.

“Thank you for coming up to save the day,” the old man says, and they clink glasses in the candlelight above the glowing embers. “If anyone can win this case, you can.”

Hamilton squats down by the fire and places kindling on the coals and blows softly to produce a flame that flares up and gives a warm light. He laughs and shakes his head. “I doubt my argument will have any effect at all. Jefferson’s got this rigged.”

“But we can’t give up without a fight!” Schuyler makes a bony fist and their eyes meet in a recognition. “I look forward to your argument, my boy. Feel free to rehearse it with me.”

Hamilton stands. “Well, it’s only common sense.”

“Tell me.”

“As a newspaperman I see it from the inside out. We have a duty to print the truth no matter what it holds or whomever it may hurt. Editors can’t be threatened with criminal prosecution based on what we print. It’s antithetical to a free society. Our freedoms will not survive if we lack the right to expose corruption and injustice.”

“Good. Good. Republicans often disguise their true intentions in attractive lies.”

“Yes, and they appeal to emotion, not to reason. Either they are too stupid to see what they are doing, or too cynical to care. Once we expose the failure of their logic—a man can’t be jailed for expressing an opinion, even if it is of the president—it will be plain to all fair-minded men. Opinions and insults are not statements of fact. They can never be actionable in court, civilly or criminally.”

“No, we save that for the dueling ground.”

“Exactly. It’s the *Zenger* case again. Courts cannot try insults.” Hamilton pauses and smiles. “Yes, and speaking of duels, my editor, Bill Coleman, recently dispatched Jefferson’s harbormaster in a duel over a story we published. He shot the man and returned to the print shop as if nothing

happened, putting the paper out only an hour late.”

“Sure and swift justice.” Schuyler raises his brandy.

“Jefferson’s using the criminal court and a threat of jail to silence criticism. That’s perverse and must be stopped. Yet he controls at least two of the judges, Lewis and Livingston. I have Kent, surely, and maybe Thompson, but the even number of judges allows for a tie vote, an impasse.”

Hamilton looks down and sees that Schuyler is nodding off.

“General,” he says, “General?”

“Let us ride together into the breach!” the old man says.

“Time we get some sleep.”

He helps the old man up from his chair, out of the office and along the hallway to his room, where embers cast a ruby light. On the wall facing his bed he’s hung a portrait of Kitty. “Look at that smile, my boy! She’s what I see when I wake up and what I see as I fall asleep. I miss her every single day.”

“We all do,” Hamilton says, considering his current rift with Eliza. He leaves the general and climbs the stairs to the large chamber where his children are sleeping on pallets scattered on the floor.

Eliza lies awake as her husband opens the door. His candle lights the gloom.

“Darling?” he whispers. “Eliza?”

She pretends to be asleep. Hamilton undresses, slides beneath the covers and blows his candle out. He sighs heavily, turns his back to her, and soon he is sleeping. Eliza lies awake, feeling outnumbered, even betrayed by her father in her effort to rid their lives of politics.

Friday evening Hamilton and Schuyler meet with Federalists at the City Tavern and Hamilton lambastes Aaron Burr in an eight-point diatribe. Van Rensselaer is not present, however, so the tirade is in large part wasted. All day Saturday and Sunday, Hamilton retreats to Schuyler's office to prepare and polish his *Croswell* argument. Late Sunday afternoon, Brock brings him a bowl of stew, and the old general visits him to hear it. When Schuyler stumps out, he's smiling broadly and standing a bit taller on his canes.

The case has garnered such interest that five attorneys will argue, three for the defense, two for the prosecution. Hamilton will argue last. All day Monday and most of Tuesday both sides lay out their arguments for the judges. Late Tuesday, February 14, Hamilton is called. In general terms he reiterates the defense position, and as it grows dark and the bailiff's assistants light the whale oil lamps, Chief Judge Morgan Lewis adjourns for the day.

Wednesday morning, Hamilton rises early and dresses in his new black suit. Eliza sits at breakfast between her two generals, both excited over the climax of the impending argument. Hamilton insists on walking to court in the snow, saying this will clear his head. Eliza wishes him luck.

"May justice prevail," she tells him, squeezing his hands in hers.

"Thank you, darling." He leans forward and kisses her on the cheek. Their eyes meet. This visit to her childhood home has worked well.

It's a cold, cloudy morning in Albany and the stepped Dutch gable roofs

are blanketed with snow. Hamilton steps along smartly and soon he's trudging down State Street to the old Stadt Huys, Albany's City Hall, where the legislature and the courts currently sit. A large crowd of legislators files inside, and many greet Hamilton warmly.

"Looking forward to your argument, General."

"Good luck today."

He acknowledges their wishes, then finds a vacant office where he can wait.

Half an hour later, Brock drives General Schuyler over in the cutter. As Schuyler arrives, many in the crowd wave and thank him for bringing their Federalist champion to town. Legislators and journalists are streaming up the steps into the main chamber. The legislators are presently considering a bill on defamation. As Schuyler enters the buzzing courtroom, senators and assemblymen fill the gallery, eager to hear how Hamilton will conclude his address on the issues they are currently debating in fashioning a new law.

A hush passes through the crowd when Hamilton enters. Every eye is trained on his trim figure as he walks with a military bearing, his golden hair shining like a halo against the drab woodwork and burgundy drapes. His eyes glitter as he slowly surveys his battlefield. He gives a reserved, dignified acknowledgment to his opponent, Attorney General Ambrose Spencer, also in a black suit but wearing a powdered wig. For his loyalty to Jefferson, Spencer was just appointed to this court by George Clinton, but he has not yet taken his seat. He prosecuted this case, and so he wants to be heard on the appeal.

A loud knock sounds and the bailiff calls, "All rise!" Everyone stands as four black-robed judges emerge and file along the bench. All of the judges are Hamilton's friends and colleagues. Jim Kent is the only Federalist. The three Republican judges are Morgan Lewis, Smith Thompson and Brockholst Livingston. Lewis is married to Eliza's girlhood friend Gertrude Livingston, and Brockholst Livingston, her cousin, helped Hamilton and Burr win Levi

Weeks' acquittal in the Manhattan Well murder case. Thompson studied law in Kent's office and usually sides with him, and so Hamilton can count on at least two votes. The four judges take their seats in the cold wintry light from the high windows.

"The People of the State of New York versus Harry Croswell," cries the bailiff. "Please resume, Mr. Hamilton," Kent says.

Hamilton walks to the rostrum, without any notes. He bows. "May it please the Court ..." and continues his argument from yesterday in a soft, unassuming voice. The high pitch of his voice surprises many who haven't heard him before, and his earnest humility forces everyone to lean forward.

"The liberty of the press consists, in my idea, in publishing the truth, from good motives and for justifiable ends, though it reflect badly on the government, on magistrates, or individuals."

Hamilton's delivery is respectful and self-assured. Step by step he leads the entire room, judges, attorneys and spectators, through his argument. He borrows from Blackstone and English precedent, from Roman law and even from scripture. He reasons from principle and then fits the facts of Croswell's case into a flawless stream of logic, relying on two irrefutable principles: truth of the assertion must always be a consideration in a libel case, and the jury always has the right to assess a defendant's intent. Using understated hand gestures, Hamilton animates concepts of liberty, tyranny, and freedom of the press for all to see. Old Schuyler listens with his eyes closed, nodding in agreement and approval.

Hamilton's voice rises in pitch as he proclaims that law, if properly followed, is the only safeguard to protect liberty, the most sacred of all human values, from tyrants who would curb or destroy it. Harry Croswell was using freedom of the press for its intended purpose, to guard liberty against infringement by a governmental power, and he was charged and convicted of a crime for merely exercising this right.

"I never considered that truth could be a crime!" Hamilton's sweet tenor

voice rises in indignation. The judges, four grave-looking men of mixed politics, nod slightly in agreement. “I am glad I can be here to argue today because my soul abhors the thought that any free man dare not speak the truth.”

Hamilton highlights the arbitrary nature of Croswell’s prosecution, the harmlessness of the opinion he reprinted, and the injustice of common law seditious libel. He predicts that if unchecked such censorship will not merely shield tyrants but, by establishing precedent, empower evil and ambitious men to do the same, implying Jefferson today and Burr tomorrow.

“We must be ever vigilant against the tyrant no matter what he claims to uphold,” Hamilton cautions. “Watching the progress of such endeavors is the office of a free press: to give us early alarm and put us on our guard against the encroachment of power. This, then, is the right of utmost importance, one for which, instead of yielding it up, we ought, rather, to spill our blood.”

Hamilton goes on for hours, supporting his arguments with favorable legal precedent and distinguishing adverse authority. Around the courtroom, handkerchiefs are out. In a soft, dispassionate voice Hamilton articulates the fondest hope that every one of them holds—Americans must be free to express any and all new ideas without restraint.

“Your honors, any restraint on freedom of the press will destroy our precious liberty,” Hamilton concludes, “and so we appeal to you and ask that Harry Croswell’s conviction be reversed.”

“Thank you, Mr. Hamilton,” Judge Kent says. “Mr. Spencer?”

Spencer, Jefferson’s secret minion who prosecuted Croswell, slowly rises. “Your honors,” he looks over the gallery, “I have just witnessed—I daresay, we all have—the most compelling legal argument of my long career.” He bows. “Mr. Hamilton is the greatest man among us, the greatest mind that this nation has produced, infinitely the superior of even the great Daniel Webster.”

Wild, spontaneous applause breaks out. Men are standing up, cheering

and pumping their fists. Tears stream down old Schuyler's cheeks and he fumbles for a handkerchief. Kent raps his gavel. "Order! Order!" The crowd falls quiet. "Are you urging the court to accept your opponent's argument, Mr. Spencer?" Kent inquires in disbelief.

"I know this venerable court, under the powerful logic of Mr. Hamilton, will do what is right, what is honorable, and what is just."

The room explodes with applause. "Order! Order!" but the assembled hundreds are standing, cheering, venting their pent-up emotions from following Hamilton's logic to its conclusion. Kent raps his gavel. "This court stands adjourned."

The bailiff calls, "All rise," and the judges file out. The courtroom echoes with noisy admiration, and Hamilton is mobbed. Slim and erect in his black suit, he exudes a magnetism and a radiance that draws men to him in awe.

As General Schuyler stands and walks proudly through the crowd, hardly needing his canes today, he is applauded and backslapped. He nods and dries his eyes repeatedly, his heart spilling over with pride and joy. Through the graces of his favorite daughter, Eliza, he has joined this genius to his family tree, more of a son to him than his own boys, and surely they have won the day.

Outside, he waits for Hamilton to emerge. A great crowd surrounds his son-in-law, newspapermen anxious for a quote, legislators shaking his hand, common citizens following him in noisy admiration. Schuyler waves and Hamilton excuses himself. He's glowing from his triumph and he embraces his father-in-law.

"Ride home with me," Schuyler says. Hamilton helps old Schuyler to the cutter, and soon they are merrily gliding back to the mansion to the hoof beats of the horse and the merry jingle of sleigh bells.

“Eliza! Eliza!” Schuyler calls upon entering the house.

She leans over the balustrade. “How did it go?”

“Hamilton won the day!”

Eliza smiles and descends the stairs. “Congratulations.”

Hamilton holds Schuyler’s elbow and helps him remove his tricorn. “He was magnificent! The best legal argument I have ever witnessed. Even his opponent acknowledged it!” Schuyler pounds his son-in-law on the back and Hamilton smiles with satisfaction. The children are running to greet their father. “Today he proved once more that he is the foremost man of our age.”

Hamilton reaches down and lifts Little Eliza and Little Phil as Willy and Johnny congratulate him. Eliza stands to the side. Schuyler goes to her.

“Praise him! Kiss him! Congratulate him, daughter!”

Eliza steps forward. Hamilton leans close to her and kisses her on the cheek. “I am happy for you,” she says. As soon as she can, she ascends the stairs to the bedroom above with Little Phil and Eliza.

“Bravo, my boy!” Schuyler slaps him on the back. “You’ve added five years to my life!”

When Hamilton can escape the family circle, he goes upstairs to change from his formal black suit. Eliza is in their bedroom, combing and braiding Little Eliza’s hair.

“There you are,” she says to the child. “Run along and play with your

brothers.”

As his daughter darts past, Hamilton lifts her again and hugs her and kisses her, then puts her down so she can run downstairs. He removes his coat and his frilled shirt.

“You don’t seem overly happy for me.”

“I am,” Eliza says, “of course I am, but I can’t help but wonder how proud our Philip would have been.”

He scowls. “You have to bring that up now? Can’t I just enjoy the moment?”

“I didn’t mean it like that. Don’t be so sensitive.”

“We must go on, Eliza,” he says without turning around.

“It was not meant like that.”

“All right.” He pulls his blue wool suit from the great *kasten* wardrobe.

“You’re going out?”

“Yes. Your father and I are meeting some men downtown.”

“I see.”

Her tone annoys him. “They’re giving a party in my honor. Is that all right?”

“You’re right back in it, aren’t you? You thrive on combat. You love the adulation.”

“Can’t you appreciate what’s at stake?”

“Better than you do.”

“Please, Eliza. The fate of our nation rides upon this election, and Burr is outmaneuvering us. I must warn Van Rensselaer off. Legions of voters are aroused and marching to his drum, and we must stop him. They say he will be there tonight.”

“I knew this would happen when you and Papa got together.”

“Why can’t you be happy for us? You heard him. It’s added five years to his life. I am invigorated again, too.”

“It’s a dangerous, lethal game. Do you expect me to watch and wait and say nothing?”

“Jim Kent will be there. You like him. Perhaps he will give us a forecast of how the other judges are leaning.”

“Will you be late?”

“Can’t really say. The election’s only ten weeks away. Burr is making the rounds in Manhattan to secure the Republican nomination. We must get behind a candidate very soon, or Burr and Pickering will win by default.”

Downstairs, Schuyler announces he’s exhausted from the day in court and will stay home. Hamilton extricates himself from his family, bids good night to his father-in-law, and soon he’s outside, where it’s dark and snowing.

Brock has the sleigh waiting and Hamilton gets under the bearskin rug. He’s relieved that both the public and the private displays are over, and he looks forward to tonight’s informal gathering, the laughter and conviviality of his jolly good fellows. After the great public show for the gallery, it’s time for some backroom politics. Brock cracks the whip and the horse trots out smartly.

The panes of City Tavern’s bow window are etched with frost and glowing from the candles and whale oil lamps within. The sleigh slides to a halt. Hamilton throws off the bearskin rug. “Thank you, Brock.”

“What time shall I be back for you, General?”

“No need. I’m sure some kind soul will give me a lift.” He slips Brock a shilling.

As Hamilton walks through the door, he is met by a roar from the crowded taproom. Men stand and raise their glasses: “Hip, hip, hooray! Hip, hip, hooray!” The applause lasts a five full minutes. Again and again, Hamilton tries to quiet them, “Please, please!” and finally they stop, but these drinking men are in high spirits and slap him on the back as he passes through the crowd.

Drinks of all kinds are thrust at him, ale, porter, wine, spirits, but he

declines. Someone grabs his arm and hauls him through the crowd to Jim Kent, who's had a few glasses already. Kent's little cheeks are flushed, and he shakes his head with astonishment. "The best, Hamilton, absolutely the best I've ever heard you! Or anyone else."

"Thank you, Judge. Most kind of you to say."

"Look at them." Kent waves his glass. "You own them tonight! You were brilliant."

Hamilton shrugs. "Remember, Jim, I'm a newspaperman, too. I need to get this ruling overturned." He accepts a glass of red wine.

"How many men can reason as you do, from a priori principles? Certainly not Morgan Lewis."

"Did he comment?"

"Oh, yes. He criticized your argument in the robing room. 'Idealistic,' he called it, 'naïve.' But of course he would. He's Jefferson's pawn. I sense pressure from that quarter. Brockholst will vote with him, so it's up to Thompson to side with us."

"Seriously, Jim, what did Croswell do? He called Jefferson a 'dissembling patriot,' and a 'pretended man of the people'? Accused him of hiring Callendar's poison pen with a five hundred dollar bribe, which he did. Jefferson's very much the tyrant here and he's hypersensitive. Breaking Croswell on the rack might work with the Spanish Inquisition, or the British Star Chamber, but in a free republic? We can't punish someone for expressing an opinion. What would be next? Policing our thoughts?"

"Next?" Kent toasts with his wine. "Aaron Burr."

"Ah, yes," Hamilton raises his eyebrows, "the usurper."

"Perhaps you can speak with Van Rensselaer before you launch your attack." Kent nods toward the patroon, who is standing across the room in the center of a circle of men. "He's adamant in his support of Burr."

"Ah, the great man deigns to join us. Pardon me, Jim." Hamilton bows and starts over. Van Rensselaer sees him approaching, halts in mid-sentence,

and lifts his glass.

“Wonderful argument, General! Spellbinding.”

There are pleasant greetings.

“May I have a word with you?” Hamilton takes Van Rensselaer by the elbow and leads him into an alcove. “Schuyler and Kent tell me you’re supporting Burr.”

“That’s correct. I am.”

“You can’t do that, sir.”

“Well, of course I can, Hamilton, and I do.”

“Why?”

“We have no Federalist candidate, and Burr can win. I hear you spoke against him last Friday in this very room, called him dangerous and unprincipled.”

“You know of his secession plans?”

“Of course.”

“And you still support him anyway?”

“The question of secession will not be on the ballot. I’ll take a stand, if and when it ever arises. Besides, we have no one else.”

“Why not John Lansing?”

“Lansing’s weak, irresolute.”

“Isn’t that what we want in an enemy?” He gives Van Rensselaer a hard look. “Lansing poses no threat. In the next gubernatorial race we can field a strong candidate and win it back. You could try again. Until then Lansing will be our placeholder, protecting us from secession.”

“Honestly, Hamilton, would secession be such a bad thing?”

Hamilton manages to keep his tone civil, but barely. “Not for the man who owns the Mohawk corridor and Hudson riverbank for a dozen miles along either side. You can only profit from secession, but for the rest of the nation, it would be cataclysmic.”

Van Rensselaer shakes his head. “I disagree. We don’t need Virginia and the Carolinas. The dead weight of their slave economy drags us down, and now they plan to spread their human trafficking into Louisiana. Let us be a nation of thrifty, energetic Yankees who prosper by farming, trade, and hard work.”

“Think internationally, man. Splitting the nation makes us easy prey for foreign powers. No one profits if we get mired in war, or worse, subjugated again. Men listen to you. Retract your support before Burr’s campaign gains any more momentum.”

Van Rensselaer tilts his head. “Do you consider me under some obligation to you?”

“I do, sir, yes. I worked to elect you governor during the last cycle, when Jay retired. You do owe me.”

“But we did not succeed.”

“Not for want of my help. Besides, Pickering is an upstart. I founded the Federalist party upon the principle of a national union.”

Van Rensselaer smiles in triumph. “And you abandoned your post two years ago.”

Hamilton’s eyes narrow. Kent joins them as Hamilton continues: “Secession is anathema to everything we hold dear. If you believe in Federalist principles, desist in your support of Burr, and pledge it to John Lansing—”

“No, not Lansing,” Kent interrupts, shaking his head. “I just heard Lansing’s having second thoughts. He got cold feet when he heard that he was facing Aaron Burr.”

“See?” Van Rensselaer says with a triumphant smile. “Now there is no one else. The Clintons and Livingstons can’t get anyone else to run. We must support Burr.”

“Put your name in now,” Hamilton suggests to Van Rensselaer. “With George Clinton gone, you will take it this time.”

“Why don’t you?” Van Rensselaer asks him. “Hamilton versus Burr has a nice ring to it.”

“My days of seeking office are over.”

“Well, then, you don’t have a horse in the race, do you? I pledged my support to Burr, and I will not dishonor my word.”

“The Republicans are now looking at Morgan Lewis,” Kent says.

“Lewis?” Hamilton says. He looks from one man to the other. “Lewis convicted Harry Crosswell for expressing an opinion! He can’t win!” Hamilton says. “The man’s as aloof as a mountain peak.” A waiter is now banging a gong, to summon them into dinner.

“I have already informed the vice president of my support,” Van Rensselaer says. “We await only Burr’s nomination, for the campaign to begin. Tonight, let us put our heads together and lay out our strategy.”

“You know my thinking on the matter,” Hamilton says abruptly. “Since you ignore it, I will withdraw from the scene. This time for good.”

“Please, General.” Kent places a conciliatory hand on Hamilton’s sleeve.

Hamilton stiffens. “I have spoken, Jim. There is no room for compromise.”

“Don’t be like that,” Van Rensselaer says. “Your wisdom is much valued.”

“Valued?” Hamilton fires back. “But it is not heeded. I will not support Burr under any circumstances. The union must be preserved.”

“Perhaps it’s just a bluff,” Van Rensselaer says.

“It’s no bluff,” Hamilton says. “Lansing’s withdrawal is highly distressing, gentlemen, so I wish you a good night.” He bows.

“For God’s sakes, man,” Kent takes his arm, “at least have dinner with us!”

Hamilton breaks the contact. “Morgan Lewis cannot win. If we don’t find another candidate, Burr will destroy us. I refuse to participate in such a

process. Good night.”

“But you’re our guest of honor!” Kent protests.

“Honor me in absentia,” Hamilton mutters, and he crosses the room, gets his long coat and hat from the closet, and pushes out into the cold.

The streets are empty and still. He walks swiftly to clear his head. Now and then a sleigh passes with bells jingling and hooves softly beating the packed snow. The thinnest crescent of moon hangs in the sky, and its soft blue light glows on the white hills. He walks to the Stadt Huys, the scene of his argument earlier today. The building is deserted. He climbs the steps and stands looking down the hill toward the frozen river. He is certain of his position and will not be swayed. Since his own party men now support Aaron Burr, he will work by himself behind the scenes to save the union.

The house is quiet when he arrives home. Hamilton sits for an hour with the old general, who’s waited up for him and wants to know everything. They discuss and evaluate the various men, Kent’s wisdom, Van Rensselaer’s impetuosity, Pickering’s arrogance, and Burr’s cynicism.

“It’s essential I keep my involvement secret,” Hamilton cautions Schuyler. “Regardless of my effort, Burr could win, and who needs that viper as an enemy?”

“Agreed. Besides,” Schuyler smiles, “he promised you a judgeship.”

Hamilton’s not amused. “Just imagine the damage Burr could do with his hand on the Council of Appointment! Yes, I must appear neutral, and when it’s over, we’ll see who’s standing and decide the best course to take.”

“Very wise, my boy! As always, very wise.”

To strategize his campaign, Burr convenes a “Council of War” at Richmond Hill. His back is to the wall now, but he’s never felt more hopeful and energized. He greets his men one by one and thanks them warmly. As they slump on benches, lean in the doorways, and pick through the food that Alexis set out, he beams with pride at his motley crew, loud, raucous, and crude. When the room is full, he snaps to attention and gavels them into session with a wooden mallet. “The Sons of Tammany will come to order!” Laughter and murmuring subside, and he extends his arms and smiles. “Today, gentlemen, right here in New York, we are witnessing a miracle: Pigs can fly!”

The men hoot and holler.

“Federalists are supporting Aaron Burr!”

“Yeee-hah!” Scruffy faces, toothless smiles, hands with fingerless gloves register the absurdity, clapping and cheering.

“Every mother’s son of them but Hamilton!”

“Boooooo!”

“When Chancellor Lansing heard I was running, he lifted his chubby cheeks off the bench, and that’s him you see waddling into yonder hills.”

The men clap, laugh, and nudge each other on the benches.

Burr feels a surge of confidence and joy as he looks around. “Hamilton is all that stands between us and the state payroll. So let us thrash him as we’ve

done many times before.”

“Yee-hah!”

“Recognize, gentlemen, that our pool of voters is smaller this time. Twenty-pound leaseholders could vote in the Assembly race four years ago, but only freeholders can vote for governor. Tell me, Bill,” he calls to Van Ness, “with all my mortgages on this rat trap, can I even vote for myself?”

The men laugh uproariously.

Burr’s eyes narrow and his voice drops to a conspiring whisper. “But we are going to steal this election from Hamilton the same way we stole the Assembly and the presidential electors four years ago. We’ll outwork him.”

“Aar-on Burr! Aar-on Burr!” Van Ness leads the chant.

“And when we win, we will share the wealth!” Burr waves his arms to embrace them all. “I will pack the Council of Appointment and put all of you on the payroll!”

Loud cheers meet this promise.

“So let’s hear it, boys!” Burr pumps his fists and chants. “Power to the people! Share the wealth! Power to the people! Share the wealth!”

“Power to the people! Share the wealth!”

For half a minute, Burr parades about before them, and they laugh and join the chant. Then he pauses and holds up his hands for quiet. “So, this will be our war room! Here, we will have food and drink around the clock. You may sleep on pallets in the back rooms, but please, no fornication, or buggery!”

“Awww!”

“At least not where anyone can see you!” They cheer. “In fact, save all that for Martling’s Pig Pen!” They laugh and holler as Brom Martling stands, removes his porkpie hat, and bows from the waist. Martling holds up his right hand and wiggles his fingers. “I put four new girls on, boys! Four! Fresh off the boat from Denmark. Dollar a toss.” The men applaud.

“Pays to advertise,” Burr shrugs. “Seriously, though, loyal sons of Tammany,” he places his hand over his heart for a solemn exhortation. “I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Let us now dedicate ourselves to this crusade and wrest power from the wealthy and the privileged. Let us fight this battle as we have before, block by block, house by house, vote by vote. And let us win, because we are the party of the people!”

Again the men cheer.

“Your ward captains will keep lists of your progress. And the same incentives apply: free ale at Martling’s for the man who brings in the most committed votes each day, and for the season topper, an all-expense-paid night at Rosie Redbone’s!”

The men cheer wildly. Burr steps down to pass through the rank and file, shaking hands, slapping backs, and affectionately tugging ears and beards, thereby observing one of his favorite maxims: “Touch them. Always touch them. When you touch them, you become real and they remember. Touch them and they are yours.” And as he touches his men, they light up as if his touch ignites a flame within, the possibility of sharing power, of being a “somebody.”

The next day, Burr’s ward heelers fan out through crowded Manhattan tenements to identify and approach freeholders who can qualify to vote in the gubernatorial race. He meets with his inner circle. Alexis has set thirteen chairs around a circular table in a room just off the empty ballroom of Richmond Hill.

“Welcome to Camelot,” Burr says theatrically as the men take their seats. His twinkling smile displays his great love for these political operatives and the game they play so well together. They are cynical, ambitious, experienced, and hardworking, and they’ve been in and out of power, so they know the peaks and valleys, how to be happy and agreeable when they can, and how to be ruthless and nasty when they must. They use the usual tools effectively—puffery, flattery, lies, misdirection, bribery, and fraud. Some in

the river wards resort to fists and clubs and brass knuckles. They register new voters, lock up votes early, bribe merchants and lawyers to give them names of new freeholders, and during the three-day election in April, they will dispense food and drink and cash bribes to encourage their own and “discourage” non-supporters from voting.

Sitting at Burr’s right side is Billy Van Ness. He has brought along his young protégé, Martin Van Buren from Kinderhook, newly admitted to the bar. Van Ness has the legal skills to register questionable freeholders, and he has a Republican judge at his beck and call to give favorable rulings if there are challenges.

The Irving brothers, who write and publish Burr’s *Morning Chronicle*, are also at the table. Burr’s editor Peter Irving and his kid brother Washington keep *The Chronicle* literary and high-brow by refraining from personal attacks. They assure that praise is heaped daily upon the vice president, a self-made man, an exemplary leader and a man of the people. The younger brother, “Wash,” supplies humor and entertainment that draws in readers, and now Burr jousts with him.

“So, you tarry no longer in Tarrytown?” Wash is not yet twenty. The men groan at the pun.

“Not since I removed the burr from my saddle,” Irving replies. Another groan.

“Brother Wash is new to campaigning,” the elder Irving explains. “I had to yank him off mounds of moldering parchment in the basement of City Hall.”

“Trying to legitimize his birth?”

“Please, our poor mother! No, sir! He’s writing a comic epic about our Dutch forefathers.”

“How delightful!” Burr waves toward his attorneys. “Put Van Ness and Van Buren in it.”

“And he’s renamed Manhattan.” Peter Irving slings an arm around his kid

brother. “He’s dubs our fair city ‘Gotham,’ or ‘Goat-Town’ as it’s pronounced in Old English.”

“Gotham?” Burr says.

“Yes!” the younger Irving says. “Gotham is a mythical place where men feign madness to trick the king and avoid taxes.”

“But our madness is never feigned!” Burr calls out. “And we don’t pay taxes! Welcome to Gotham!” The men cheer and laugh. “Before we begin, a warm welcome to Matty Van Buren, the proverbial red-haired stepchild.” More cheers. Van Buren stands and waves. “Matty Van hails from a little sheep-sticking hamlet upstate named Kinderhook, but he’s quickly proving as sophisticated in getting votes as any of you Manhattan toffs. Start us off, Billy.”

Van Ness pulls a paper from his valise. “First order of business, Mr. Vice President, is to get you nominated. We’ve reserved the Wigwam at Martling’s for the formalities, and our boys are working the wards tonight to assure we have enough delegates—”

“It’s a beautiful thing!” Burr interrupts. “Morgan Lewis now claims our Republican line because he married a Livingston cow. Ever seen Gerty, boys? Beef to the heels. That’s his only hold on power, the landed gentry. We do it the old-fashioned way, approach loyal party men one by one, then hold a plebiscite to win the nomination fairly and squarely.”

“You heard that Hamilton spoke against you at a gathering in Albany the other night?” Van Ness asks.

“No one listens to him anymore,” Burr observes.

“That’s right,” says Peter Irving. “Van Rensselaer, his own brother-in-law, supports us! They nearly came to blows over your candidacy.”

“Let Hamilton chatter on. This election isn’t a battle of words, it’s a battle of votes! After my nomination here in the city, we will convene a caucus up in Albany, yes? Tontine’s has a nice new establishment there, too, and Van Rensselaer will chair that meeting for us.” Burr looks around. “It would be

good if some of you get up there, so we have the necessary numbers. Let's see hands."

The men are nodding, raising their hands to volunteer. Irving scribbles names with a pencil.

"Van Rensselaer has loyal freeholders, merchants, and tradesmen beholden to him. That should cancel any advantage Lewis might enjoy among the Livingstons' farmers. Clearly, we'll take Gotham by storm," Burr bows to the younger Irving, "as well as Westchester, Orange, Suffolk, and Albany. And so it will be a neck-and-neck horse race moving into the western counties."

Van Ness raises his hand: "I don't want to be the wet blanket ..."

"Then don't!"

Some of the men boo.

"... but if we're to be credible, we need a lieutenant governor candidate, and we need him now."

"Well, one of you," Burr motions at two or three. "Stand and be counted!"

"To be taken seriously, I mean," Van Ness says. "We're claiming that we have broad support in our Republican base, so we need a well-known man. Preferably someone upstate who can bring along the yokels and rubes."

"Well, find us a fine, self-made man like A.B." Burr places his hand over his heart. "Jefferson, the Clintons, and the Livingston are not true Republicans. The landed gentry cares nothing for the farmer or the workingman, only for his vote. I am the valiant underdog pitted against inherited wealth."

"Too true! We'll teach them a lesson!"

"Soon they will see!"

"Got anything to drink?"

"Beer, Alexis!" Burr calls. "Bring in the beer." Alexis appears with a

small keg that he places heavily on the table, and he taps in a spigot with Burr's wooden mallet. Other slaves bring in tankards they've "borrowed" from Martling's and once refreshment is flowing, the meeting grows livelier. The men discuss running mates and suggest allies up the Hudson Valley and out through Mohawk country.

At last Van Ness regains the floor. "Other than the lack of candidate for lieutenant governor, our biggest issue so far is how thinly we're stretched. Only sixteen souls turned out for our Kingston caucus, and some of them took the stagecoach from the city. Those same men have traveled out to different counties to nominate us, and the newspapers are getting suspicious."

"The Clintons are behind that," Burr observes. "Their vast patronage network of sheriffs, bailiffs, and clerks are turning men out to nominate Lewis in every county."

"That's not fair!"

"But we're getting the job done," Peter Irving says. "Clinton's newspaper calls us 'travelers, jugglers and strolling players.'"

Burr places his wrist on his hip. "Is that supposed to hurt my feelings?" The men laugh. His eyes flash. "Who the hell cares what they call me now, boys? In ten weeks DeWitt Clinton will be calling me 'Governor,' but only after he kisses my royal arse on Broadway."

"Beer's flat," someone calls.

"Well, that's no good! Politics is damned thirsty work!" Burr claps his hands. "Let's march down to Martling's and pump up our troops back from the wars!"

The meeting adjourns to Martling's to welcome the ward heelers returning from their first night of canvassing.

As Burr enters Martling's Wigwam, flanked by Van Ness, Van Buren, and the Irvings, a crowd of men in shabby clothes surges forward. Burr smiles radiantly and greets his supporters, shaking each hand, slapping many backs, and calling each of them by name. "Always remember their names," is

another of his political maxims. “Their mamas gave them to ’em, so show ’em you love ’em, too.”

A variety show’s playing on the stage behind the bar, some buttery colleen holding out her arms and warbling about the Emerald Isle and the clean west winds that blow. Along the bar, drunken Irishmen wave their tankards and wipe their bleary eyes. After she has their attention, she kicks into a dance, raising her petticoats to display her thick calves and freckled thighs as she performs a hefty, comical jig to scratchy fiddles, a penny whistle, and a tambourine. Many in the crowd join in the dancing. Burr jumps in. He’s a mad dancer, clapping and snapping his fingers above his head, his eyes darting this way and that. He loves this hilarity, this misrule, and the men love him for his spontaneity, so unlike all the other pompous asses who seek office.

As the party proceeds, Tammany boys from all over the city arrive to turn in lists of voters, drink ale, and bask in the glow of being part of Burr’s “Little Band.” When the room is full to bursting, the musicians pause and Brom Martling steps forward: “Listen, all you welshers and horse thieves, I have an announcement.”

They laugh and stomp their boots and clang their pewter mugs on the tables.

“We love our vice president here ...” loud and affectionate catcalls, “and because that slave-sticking fraud of a president won’t put him on the national ticket, we’ll make him governor by going up the back way!” He pumps his fist high in the air. The place goes berserk. Burr steps forward to calm the raging sea.

“Gentlemen,” Burr calls, “gentlemen, and,” he puts his arm around the fat Irish songstress, “our fair lady here, brother Brom is correct. I seek the office of governor of this great state of New York for one reason and one reason only.” He looks both ways slyly. “No one else wants the job!”

The room explodes.

“Hamilton can’t get a Federalist to run. Lansing’s shanks shook and dribbled when he heard I jumped in the race. So now it’s stuffy old Morgan Lewis we need to skewer and roast.” Burr reaches down and holds up a rusty, dented spittoon encrusted with brown tobacco juice. “You boys be the judges! This cuspidor has more personality than Morgan Lewis! He won’t win his own vote!” Men are laughing and clapping and falling all over each other. Cheers and catcalls echo, and from the stage the colleen beats a tambourine to embellish his points. “We’re going to win, my lads! This election is ours! Next year at this time,” he sweeps his arm around the room, “you’re all on my payroll!”

“Aar-on Burr! Aar-on Burr!”

As Schuyler himself observed, Hamilton's presence in the governor's race brings the old man back to life. Again he's a crusader on a sacred mission, and he can scheme and plot and share the ups and downs with his son-in-law. On Saturday night he endures Eliza's warning about over-imbibing and accompanies Hamilton to a gathering at Judge John Tayler's house at the foot of State Street.

"Haven't felt this good since Kitty died," Schuyler remarks, his breath steaming in the cold air as they glide through the Albany streets in his cutter. He bunches a fist. "A good fight always gets the blood pumping."

"Burr never disappoints us there," Hamilton says. "Hopefully after this battle, we'll be through with him forever."

"I know you want to appear neutral, my boy, but Tayler asks that you speak candidly to his Republican friends about Burr tonight as you did to our Federalists last week. Tayler supports Lewis, and is urging all of his loyal Republicans to do the same."

"I'll be direct," Hamilton promises. "And I won't mince words about Van Rensselaer's alliance. It's a disgrace that Federalists stoop to support our most adept enemy. Burr always amazes with his talent for playing to men's passions."

Fires are blazing in Tayler's hearths as they arrive and shake the snow from their cloaks. Men call greetings from the other room, and low talk and

laughter rumble in the candlelight. Tayler conducts Schuyler and Hamilton into his spacious parlor and leads them among old friends. Tayler introduces Dr. Charles Cooper, husband of his adopted daughter, to Hamilton.

“Longtime admirer, sir,” Cooper says. “I was honored to witness your argument in Supreme Court. Most inspiring.”

“Thank you, Doctor.”

“The doctor has taken a great interest in politics recently,” Tayler says proudly.

“My deepest sympathy,” Hamilton jests.

“We’ll seat him close to you so he can catch some pearls of wisdom.” Tayler guides Hamilton and Schuyler over to Judge Kent.

“Thompson is leaning our way in *Croswell*,” Kent informs them, “but Livingston will vote Jefferson’s way. Lewis is holding out.”

Hamilton nods. “Yes, Lewis wants to curry favor with Jefferson. If the president supports him, he could win the governorship.” Hamilton sighs. “And Jefferson is twisted enough to barter his support for a guilty verdict. This is dark, Jim. Even my bold Coleman grows cautious about what to print in *The Post*.”

Tayler’s granddaughters entertain on harp and violin while the men sip wine and socialize. The young women play charmingly, but as the wine takes hold, the buzz of politics rises to dominate the room. When a servant announces dinner, there’s a scramble to sit near the center with Kent, Hamilton, and Schuyler. As promised, Tayler seats his son-in-law, Cooper, across from Hamilton. He and Kent carry their spirited discussion to the table. As the first course is served, Stephen Van Rensselaer expounds from the head of the table about Aaron Burr’s executive skills. Hamilton challenges him:

“Burr’s always teetering on bankruptcy. He’s never managed anything larger than a law office. What qualifies him to run New York State?”

“He can win,” Van Rensselaer says. “That’s the only qualification he

needs.”

“A couple of months ago, Burr came to me to borrow money. He told me he was so destitute, he was even tapping his enemies for loans. Everything with him is a joke. The man has no shame. If he wins, he’ll loot our public fisc to pay his debts, and when he splits the union, he’ll laugh in our faces. We used to hang traitors, not elect them.”

“Lewis can’t win,” Van Rensselaer says. “Not even with Jefferson’s help. It will be Burr.”

All faces turn toward Hamilton, and with everyone’s attention, he thoughtfully responds. “I’ve known our little colonel in both war and peace. He’s highly resourceful, with a singular intelligence that always veers toward intrigue. Personal power is his goal. He’s a brilliant attorney, yes, and his reasoning is seductive. But appetites, not principles, animate him. When Burr returned from the debacle of Quebec, he asked me for an appointment to Washington’s ‘family.’ I approached the general on his behalf, but the general told me, ‘I don’t like his face.’ I noted that a man can hardly be held accountable for his face and Washington answered, ‘He smiles too much. Beware the smiler.’” Hamilton looks around the table. “Beware the smiler, gentlemen. Washington’s instincts were infallible. If you’ve met Burr, then you know. He has the eye of a snake and he’s always smiling, amused by some private joke. His success is based on an unerring, diabolical skill in exploiting men’s weaknesses.”

“Burr claims you are friends,” Tayler says.

“We are when it benefits him. During the last presidential election, when the House was tied between Burr and Jefferson, I threw my support to Jefferson. That’s what defeated Burr and elevated the president. I said it then and I reaffirm it now. I’d rather have a leader with wrong principles than a leader with no principles.”

“Burr was a good soldier, a hero at Quebec,” Van Rensselaer offers.

“Quebec was a disaster and he eventually resigned his commission,

claiming he was ill. His only malady was not being promoted quickly enough. What loyal soldier retires during a war? While I was writing the Federalist essays to urge ratification, he publicly opposed the Constitution, saying it was both ‘too strong and too weak.’ To this day, I have no idea what that means, but it sums up the man: an equivocator, empty of substance and principle. He promises what pleases you at the moment, but he immediately embraces the opposite side when he needs to please another. No, gentleman, we must not support him. He is a dangerous man and ought not to be trusted with the reins of power.”

“Don’t mince words, General,” Kent says with a wink and a tip of his glass. “Tell us what you really think.”

Van Rensselaer clears his throat. “Well, I disagree.” All eyes turn to the patroon. “Burr is a victim of personal slander and libel. Clinton’s editor, that Cheetham fellow, makes scurrilous attacks on Burr’s personal life to discredit him among the puritanical Federalists. All that seduction business should be kept private. It only inflames people.”

“It’s meant to,” Hamilton says. “The Clintons want to destroy him.”

“Worst *ad hominem* attacks I’ve ever seen,” Tayler agrees. “Cheetham prints that Burr seduces maidens, steals men’s wives, holds slave orgies at Richmond Hill and his strolling players get far too friendly with each other. What do you make of these scurrilous accusations, General?”

Hamilton rubs his chin. “Deplorable! Yet at least Cheetham censored the worst from the list.”

“He did?” Tayler asks, scowling.

Hamilton’s eyes gleam with mirth. “Colonel Burr’s discovered a new use for sheep.”

Men around the table lean forward.

“He has? What is it?”

“Wool,” Hamilton says.

The table explodes with laughter and men raise their glasses and cheer.

Hapless Charles Cooper can't believe his ears. "You don't mean?" he asks his father-in-law. "Can it be true?"

"What?"

"Burr is a sodomite? Bestiality too?"

"Please! Gentlemen!" Van Rensselaer reins them in. "We're all men of the world here. Such talk demeans us."

"Well, regardless of what he does in private," Hamilton says, "we must keep Burr away from power. We need to shake Judge Lewis out of his torpor and get him out campaigning."

"Good luck, there," Kent says. "In politics I've never met a more arrogant and complacent man," and he steers talk toward the exploration of the new lands in the Louisiana Purchase.

On the way home, Schuyler says, "I thought you wanted to appear neutral."

"I do."

"Well, you certainly showed your hand tonight."

"We were among friends."

"But you gave Van Rensselaer an earful, and it will all get back to Burr."

"He needed to hear it, but I doubt he'll change his mind."

"We'll proceed without him, then."

The lights are out in the Pastures, and everyone's asleep. Brock and Hamilton help old Schuyler from the sleigh, and a maidservant lights them into the house. Inside the front door, Schuyler takes Hamilton's hand.

"Thank you for such a memorable evening."

"We did some good work tonight, General. From now on, though, I will be more discreet and keep out of sight."

"My lips are sealed."

Hamilton and Brock help Schuyler to his room. As he watches his father-in-law struggle, Hamilton imagines he'll be thus in thirty years, ailing, feeble,

living on former glory. As the candlelight illuminates Schuyler's room, Kitty's portrait looks down from the wall opposite his bed. They had an unusually happy marriage, and Hamilton can feel her presence still lingering in this room. Surely, Kitty beckons Schuyler to join her in his dreams, and he will be with her soon enough. Eliza will be a shade for him like this someday too, he muses, if he outlives her.

After putting his father-in-law to bed, Hamilton walks through the darkened house. Tonight it seems haunted by kind spirits. Washington, Franklin, Burgoyne, Lafayette, all of them supped and slept here. Over dinner they discussed war and peace with General Schuyler, and made decisions critical to the young nation. Angelica and Eliza were children here, and bloomed from a fancy young priss and toothy tomboy into beautiful, accomplished young women, now wives and mothers. The down-to-earth Kitty didn't inflate them with the aristocratic airs and the indolence of the English, but rather, instilled virtues of a Dutch *vrouw*: thrift, industry, household management, and child rearing, even as their father set an example of fierce loyalty and military service to the nation.

Hamilton catalogs the trappings of this aristocratic home: portraits, draperies, heavy Dutch cupboards, and *kasten*. He recalls his own mother, a woman of small means, banned from remarriage, bearing him out of wedlock on the humid, sweltering isle of Nevis. The steep volcanic cone of his birthplace, much like his origin, was always shrouded in clouds. As he reflects on the Schuyler pedigree, he regrets that his hope for a dynasty perished with Philip. Now Philip is a shade too, floating beyond the veil with his grandmother Kitty and his aunt Peggy. Soon the old general will join them.

As Hamilton enters the chamber where Eliza's sleeping, his candle flickers. She has the two babies sleeping with her, one in each arm, and he smiles as he undresses and pulls on his nightshirt. We, the living. He blows out the candle and slides in beside her. Little Phil, almost two, is between

them, his little sleeping face like an angel's. The little boy senses his father and turns, sleepily cracking his eyelids, opening and closing his lips, and he brushes his father's lips with his hand. Hamilton kisses the little hand and returns it to warmth beneath the bedclothes, and he settles in to sleep.

Eliza is collecting the children while Hamilton sits for a last chat with her father. For a month she has held her tongue, watching with sadness as her two grown men scheme and plot like schoolboys. Papa's gout gets worse by the month and he's lost so much of his spark since Mama died. His excitement over politics seems rather pathetic and inept. Perhaps Hamilton believes he will never see the general alive again, and that is why he can't seem to leave.

At last Hamilton comes out to the coach, wiping away tears. Eliza goes back inside and hurries the children along. Stooped in his chair, Schuyler lifts his small grandchildren, Eliza and Little Phil, growling and nuzzling them until they giggle. Finally, he motions Eliza over to say good-bye. She looks in his eyes, touches his cheek, and helps him up. She senses it now. At most he has another year. Schuyler leads Eliza into the front room, where the morning sun is streaming in from the wooded hills across the river. The children follow.

"Your mother called this her 'Blue Room.' I remember your wedding as if it happened this morning."

"Oh, Papa! We will miss you terribly, but we'll be together again soon, I promise. Early this summer."

Hamilton returns, his riding boots echoing on the hall floor. It's time to go. He embraces Schuyler, who clasps him by the arms, looks intently into

his eyes, and whispers something. They part with an embrace.

Suddenly, Eliza is overwhelmed. She does not want to return to Manhattan. Hamilton's renewed interest in politics displeases her so much she'd be content to let him go back alone. He will be busy until the April election is over. She wants to stay here, nurse her papa till the end, and raise her children as she was raised in this gracious home. She wants to place flowers on Mama's grave Sunday mornings and gaze downriver to the misty blue Catskills.

The horses are snorting and pawing the stone of the drive. The children, enthusiastic for anything new, race out of the house and climb into the coach.

"Thanks for a lovely visit," old Schuyler tells her. His voice is husky.

"I love you, Papa!" She hugs and kisses him. Tears are flowing down her cheeks.

"It will be all right," he says gruffly. "Write when you get home."

"I will. I will, Papa." Eliza pulls herself away from him. In a blur she finds herself in her coat, hat, and gloves, and then she's outside in the coach. Before she realizes it, they're waving from the window as the coach creaks and rolls forward.

"Good-bye, Papa!"

"Good-bye, Grandpa!"

The old man stands in a shawl, waving, "Good-bye!"

Hamilton rides ahead on his horse. Eliza turns to look back once more, dabbing at her tears. On the lawn, near the orchard, she sees her first robin. There will be crocuses soon. She fumbles in her reticule for a handkerchief, hoping that the children don't notice her tears.

On the fourth day of their journey, they learn that the ice of the Harlem River is melting, so they wait for the ferry to cross them, then bump along five miles of rutted, ice-crusting road to the Grange. Kate and Peggy soon have fires blazing. As Eliza unpacks, Hamilton says, "I have to ride into

town.”

“Must you?” she pleads. “We’ve been away so long, darling.” She knows she’s lost the battle, her father subverting her wishes, but she doesn’t want to surrender yet. “Can’t it wait till tomorrow?”

“I really need to be there first thing in the morning. I need to speak with Coleman. I don’t know what has happened while I’ve been away. If I stayed tonight, I wouldn’t be very good company.”

“Please come home as soon as you can.”

“Of course.” He embraces her perfunctorily and then hurries out the door. Eliza stands at the window. Hamilton was edgy and impatient as they stopped in country inns on the trip south. He’s just spent a month with his family and has ridden a hundred and fifty miles, but rather than rest, he wants to lunge back into the fray. Perhaps a week or two of work will be his antidote, away from them, but it saddens Eliza to watch him ride away.

Hamilton's awake when a shaft of the rising sun penetrates his apartment. He rises and stands at his window and looks out over the rooftops down to the East River, where masts of tall ships rise above the chimneys and weathervanes. It is good to be back in town and focused on the looming battle. He knows Burr and he knows himself: his right-thinking must prevail over Burr's cynicism. The distractions, the annoyances of family life must not distract him from combat.

He dresses and walks to Tontine's. Since he's been in Albany, the winter pall has lifted and the streets are bustling. Along the waterfront, square-riggers are readying to brave the seas for Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean, and river sloops to sail upriver on the tide to Poughkeepsie and Kingston, Hudson and Albany. Piles of brick and stone and stacks of lumber are scattered here and there in the streets for new buildings. Bricklayers, stone masons, and carpenters are starting their day's work, hammering, chiseling, and sawing on scaffolding along rows of shops and tenements. The vernal equinox is still ten days away, but Manhattanites are out enjoying the weather, ambling down narrow streets to the piers. The snow has melted, but huge cakes of ice from the north still float by to melt in the warmer sea.

Hamilton enjoys the bustle of the city, but he sees ominous signs, too. A new, rambunctious spirit fills lower Manhattan, a swagger, a vitality and defiance personified by Burr's campaign. Burr's "Little Band" has pasted

broad­sides and handbills every­where on brick alley walls and wooden fences. These signs proclaim Burr to be “a plain and unostentatious citizen unaided by the power of innumerable family connections,” a clear swipe at Lewis. Hamilton is surprised, even flattered, by one of Burr’s boasts that he is “a lawyer on a par with Hamilton in point of sound argument, polished shafts and manly eloquence, impressive and convincing reasoning.”

Tontine’s is filled and clamorous. Hamilton takes *The Post* on its stick from the rack and reads the news. Burr has finally chosen Oliver Phelps as his running mate. Phelps, a congressman and land speculator in western New York, insisted that the Iroquois forfeited their lands by siding with the British, and so he evicted the Cayuga and Seneca, taking title for himself to vast tracts around the Finger Lakes. Freeholders in Ontario County who obtained their lands from him owe him their votes, and his name on the ticket could very well lift Burr into the governor’s office.

Hamilton grudgingly accepts that Burr will carry New York City because his Tammany boys are so skilled and hardworking. The rest of the state will be the battleground. If only Van Rensselaer listened to reason! As he handicaps the race, the swing factor will be the Clintons. Both old George Clinton and his nephew DeWitt fear a Lewis win, since Lewis will use the Council of Appointment to pack state payrolls with Livingston relatives instead of Clinton loyalists. If the Clintons oppose Lewis more vigorously than they do Burr, or simply remain neutral, Burr will win.

Lewis finally issues his decision in *People v. Croswell*. The court is tied, two for affirming the conviction, and two for reversal and a new trial. This is both good news and bad: Harry Croswell remains under indictment, still charged with a felony, but at least he’s free. Ambrose Spencer must determine whether he will prosecute again, but he’s impatient to take his seat on the New York Supreme Court. Lewis’s decision ingratiates him to Jefferson, and the president could very well persuade the Clintons to support Lewis, but Jefferson seems to be neutral, informing both factions of the

Democratic-Republican Party that anyone criticizing him or the national party will forfeit all of his support. As for freedom of the press, Coleman observes in an aside, “Our arses are still hanging out the coach window, General. The court never reached the issue.” Despite Hamilton’s transcendent argument in state Supreme Court, freedom of the press remains a fond dream until the legislature can act.

As the three days set aside for the election, April 24-26, draw closer, Hamilton stays downtown in his pied-à-terre on Partition Street, away from Eliza and the children. He takes his meals with political friends in chop and oyster houses. He works at his law office by night so he can call on influential Federalists during the day to caution them against Burr and Pickering. He extracts a pledge from every man he speaks with that he will hold the conversation in confidence to avoid becoming a target for Burr’s wrath, should he win.

In early April, Peter Irving prints a broadside, “Plain Truth,” that compares the salaries of Livingston and Clinton supporters on the public payroll: \$53,550 for the Clintons and \$33,950 for the Livingstons. Burr argues that this proves the entrenched and vested interests of these two powerful families unduly burden the public treasury. A Burr victory, presumably, will blow a cleansing wind through the halls of government. In response, the Clinton-Lewis interest, which is now coalescing into a team with Jefferson’s approval and secret guidance, puts out its own broadside that claims that the Clinton-Lewis-Livingston families together earn only \$34,458 and that Burr and his affiliates earn more, \$35,250.

Hamilton visits dozens of merchants, lawyers, and doctors, but procrastinates with one particular interview as long as he can: Morgan Lewis himself. When the election is only two weeks away, he knows he can delay no longer, so he sends a calling card and arrives at Lewis’s mansion at mid-morning. A dusky-skinned butler in a turban ushers him into a lavish parlor, where Lewis is sipping sherry with a small dog in his lap.

“Come in, General, do come in.” Lewis motions to him, not bothering with even a pretense of standing. “Glass of sherry?”

“No, thank you.” Hamilton bows and takes the offered chair.

“I enjoy a small glass in the morning to get the blood pumping.”

“How is Trudy?” Hamilton asks after Lewis’s wife. Eliza and she were friends growing up.

“Well, sir, she is well. Thank you for asking. And please remember her to your lovely wife, uh ...”

“Eliza.”

“Yes, Eliza, quite!” Lewis smacks his lips on the sherry. “Is this about Croswell? I never congratulated you on your argument.” Lewis has jowls and he likes to shake them for emphasis. “Most persuasive, yes, and eloquent. How I struggled with that case, but at the end of the day ...”

“No, Judge, it isn’t about the case. I am here about your election.”

“Well, I do hope you’ll vote for me.” Lewis chortles.

“Yes, I will. Of course I will.”

“Well then, that’s that.” Lewis smiles as if he’s said something clever.

“But you will need other votes as well.”

“Ah, yes, since your Federalists support the usurper.”

“Well, I don’t.”

“Yes, yes. Pickering and his secession plot. What infects these men as they draw closer to power? They become lunatics!”

“Secession must be avoided at all costs.”

“Well, prevail on your Federalists to support me! No doubt some of them still listen to you.”

“I’m doing all I can, sir, which brings me here today.” Hamilton shifts his position in the chair. “Do you think you could get out of the house and meet some voters?”

Lewis’s eyes narrow as if he’s been insulted. “Campaigning is unseemly

to a man of my stature, Hamilton. I am a judge! A justice of the Supreme Court must never stoop to politics! Out of the question. I'm afraid not. No."

Hamilton's complexion reddens. Lewis has shamelessly whored himself to Jefferson with his decision in *Croswell* to win presidential favor, but he refuses to ask ordinary voters to support him?

"It may be unseemly, Judge, but it is still the best way to get elected."

"I'll be all right. The votes will be there."

"I admire your confidence. Can you share with me its source?"

Lewis blinks, frowns, and shakes his head. He lifts his left palm. "The voters know Burr's character," then he lifts his right, "and they know mine. There is really no contest. You needn't concern yourself, General. It has been handled." Lewis smiles slyly, again mistaking Hamilton's purpose. "Precedent constrained me to rule against you in *Croswell*. You understand that?"

"The two matters are not connected," Hamilton says.

Lewis smiles. "And yet the president was most pleased when *Croswell* was not acquitted. He cares not a fig about the man, of course, but he's very concerned about precedent. Since my decision was favorable, the election is over."

"Respectfully, Judge, the worst mistake in politics is underestimating one's opponent. I have underestimated Burr before, to my peril."

Lewis pours himself another glass of sherry. "I have Mr. Jefferson's full support and so the Clintons will follow, reluctantly perhaps, but they will. And my in-laws will be there for me, of course. I am not much concerned about little Burr," he dangles his wrist, "and his strolling players."

"It might be helpful to publish letters of support in my *Evening Post*. Can you ask some men of substance to write them?"

"Really, General, I cannot be perceived as groveling. I appreciate your concern, but it's unnecessary. Now, I'm afraid that I must bid you good day." Lewis squints, presses his lips together, and nods. "Thank you for stopping."

“Best of luck, your honor.”

“This is not about luck, Hamilton.” He shakes his head. “You, of all people!”

Hamilton exits into the blustery April wind and walks away from Lewis’s house with a hollow, sinking feeling. Lewis violated the Constitution and ignored binding precedent and even common sense in *Croswell* to secure Jefferson’s support, but his smug superiority may be his undoing. Burr could win a stunning upset victory, as he did with the Assembly races in 1800. A large Republican vote in two weeks will bring his delicate union crashing down.

Burr handicaps the race in much the same way, smugly concluding that he will win. Having carefully tallied his street-by-street canvass of voters, he will surely take the city, and he already struts around Manhattan as its conquering hero. In taverns and coffeehouses, the people cry out and stand and applaud as he enters. He delivers speeches on street corners with the grandiosity of Shakespearean soliloquies, and he seizes the fists of passersby and asks for their votes. He greets storekeepers, squeezes hands and slaps backs, always touching them, remembering their names, asking about their children, and looking into their eyes for a split second to plant his message: "I need your vote in this race. Vote for me and I will be there when you need me."

Even so, applause and kind words are not votes, and adulation by the common man can bring only limited results this year because, unlike electors in the Assembly races, only owners of real estate worth a hundred pounds, unencumbered, can vote for governor. Burr jumps to the challenge. Each day his Bucktails report for duty, take lists prepared overnight, and swarm through the city in teams of two or three to knock on the doors of merchants and professional men. They visit offices and gracious homes and ride into the country among orchards and pastureland where prosperous yeomen who resent the gentry will be glad to vote for the champion of the common man. Burr's men work in shifts, four to six hours, then return to report progress to

team captains, who in turn compile the information and give it to Burr. The vice president analyzes the daily results and instructs his heelers on how to push the undecideds, follow up on the favorably inclined, and discourage those who oppose him from voting at all.

Burr has never been more exhilarated. Alexis drives him north of Water Street in a borrowed gig—he sold his buggy to raise money for the campaign, since when he wins, he'll have a coach-and-four at state expense—to stop at crossroads, where he stands on milestones and horse troughs to exhort the passing throngs. The crowds clearly love him, but how many of them can vote?

Burr opens a second headquarters on John Street, to be closer to the action. Tradesmen mark him as the victor, so butchers, dairymen, and bakers deliver all manner of food, gratis, for his hungry crew, now working around the clock as time winds down. The enthusiasm of these young men is energizing. Not sprung from a leisure class, these boys are used to hard work, and it's far easier to gather votes than to unload ships or sweep chimneys.

Every morning the Irving brothers' print shop cranks out favorable articles and editorials in *The Morning Chronicle*, and once the paper is out, they print broadsides to be posted on fences and walls by workers with brushes and paste buckets. River navigation is open and Burr dispatches emissaries with crates of pamphlets upriver on sloops to "paper" upstate river towns. He sends wagons of campaign literature north into crossroad villages of Westchester and Dutchess and Ulster counties. When these big wagons roll into town, burly teamsters belly up to the bars of taverns and stagecoach inns where the locals gather over tankards of ale to discuss Burr's attributes, press the flesh, and hand out the pamphlets seeking votes for Burr. While all of this is happening, Morgan Lewis sits at home, sipping sherry with his lapdog.

As the three days of voting approach, Burr's workers visit enrolled freeholders a second time, and then a third, to confirm their votes and make

sure that they know where their polling places are located. Enthusiasm for his Tammany club continues to spread. Nothing succeeds like success, and his adherents predict that he will handily carry this race. Burr's "strollers" hear around town that Hamilton's worried, and Billy Van Ness brings this welcome news to Burr.

"We got him, Mr. Vice President!"

"Democracy!" Burr's had some wine and he snorts loudly. "You can smell it, Billy! We toss power to the people like loaves and fishes, and they respond with grateful votes." Burr smiles. "And the secret to my success is so simple—hatred."

"Come again?"

"Hatred." Burr nods and takes another sip. "Hate is the most powerful motivator, second only to lust. Think about it! Love and affection never spur men to act half as well as hatred. And here's my reasoning to them: 'We fought a war to get the boots of the Brits off our necks—'"

"I've heard it, sir."

"—so the people, *all* the people, not just some elite aristocrats, can govern themselves. The wealthy treat us as badly as the Brits did, so we need to fight them!' You should see their eyes light up! Each man is a lantern in the fog when I strike the match."

"They believe you'll share power with them!"

"Imbeciles!" Burr laughs. "Why would I? The poor will always be with us, always on the outside looking in." He sniffs deeply. "Ah, the sweet promise of liberty! Americans will never be slaves! Soon not even our slaves will be slaves. That's my secret, Billy. Work up their envy and class hatred, and you have them in the palm of your hand."

"Brilliant, sir!"

"And you, Billy, you will be my first appointment. Lord Chamberlain, the fluffer of my pillows."

"Whatever I can do, sir."

Although he misses his family, Hamilton remains in town. He worries that even a weekend at the Grange could cost votes crucial to defeat Burr. The thought of a split union terrifies him, and he's enraged by cynical Federalists who dare entertain the thought of secession. But beneath the political schism, he's troubled by a dark, nagging emptiness that awakens him in the dead of night. He feels split, divided against himself. Since Philip's death he's lost all joy in winning. His impetus now is just dull, aching duty.

Indeed, this latest political contest is just another distraction from the cataclysmic despair he's fought his whole life. For two sweet decades after the war, he found solace in assembling the nation, and in starting his family on a course to preeminence. Philip's death ended all that. The mad dog of his lifelong despair has raged back, growling and baring its teeth. To the outside world, he appears urbane, sophisticated, an expert in his profession of law, even reasonably wealthy and secure, but inside, he's consumed with dread. His life is a sham, and it's unraveling. No matter how many accolades he receives, how many new political constructs he invents, how many lawsuits he wins, a deep part of him will always be the bastard orphan boy adrift in a foreign land.

As the campaign reaches its climax, Hamilton receives a strange letter from his father-in-law. Schuyler writes that Dr. Cooper, that odd duck who sat across from them at John Tayler's table, wrote a letter to a friend

mentioning that Hamilton called Burr a dangerous man who ought not to be trusted with the reins of power. Cooper now claims that his letter was stolen out of the mail and published, without permission, in the Albany paper. Since Hamilton wishes his opposition to Burr remain secret, Schuyler worries that Cooper's letter now exposes his son-in-law's active opposition. To cover up this revelation, Schuyler encloses a letter that he wrote to refute Cooper's claim, averring that Hamilton is not involved in the election and so Cooper must be mistaken. Schuyler suggests that Hamilton print both letters in *The Post*. Seeing no harm and possibly a benefit, Hamilton passes them along to Coleman the night before voting begins, and Coleman sets them in type and prints them in the Wednesday, April 25 edition.

During the midweek three-day voting period, April 24 to 26, the weather turns foul. Heavy rain pelts New York and fog drifts through the streets night and day. Hamilton is all over Manhattan, flattering and cajoling his friends and associates and clients to vote for Lewis. He personally escorts old war veterans to the polls, and contacts any and all qualified voters with his sense of urgency and doom. When the polls finally close at eleven o'clock Thursday night, he returns to his apartment, utterly exhausted. Burr will carry Manhattan, that is a given, but the margin is critical. Hamilton will remain in town until he knows either way in order to avoid pacing and fretting at the Grange, wishing he were still here manning his battle station.

By Monday, votes have been tallied in the New York counties, and Coleman brings results to Hamilton's office.

"Burr carried Manhattan," Coleman says, "but only by a hundred votes, 1,415 to 1,315."

"I thought his margin would be much larger."

Coleman chuckles. "So did he. He lost Kings, Queens, Richmond, and Westchester counties. Kings and Richmond by small margins, but Queens and Westchester with a sixty-forty split. And the stagecoach from Rockland County arrived this morning. Lewis beat him there eighty-nine to eleven

percent!”

“That is good, but Burr will do well in Albany,” Hamilton frets. “Van Rensselaer supports him there and he has great sway among the merchants and freeholders up and down the Hudson Valley. I saw you printed Schuyler’s letter on Wednesday.”

“Yes, along with Cooper’s letter that prompted it. What a strange interchange!”

Hamilton smiles. “Schuyler loves a good fight. Makes him feel young again. Glad we could indulge the old general.”

“Did you hear Cooper published an answer to Schuyler in *The Albany Register*?”

Hamilton frowns. “Why can’t he just let it go?”

“It ran last Tuesday. I meant to bring the clipping with me. Cooper thought Schuyler was calling him a liar, and he lashed out at you, too.”

“Who cares what Cooper thinks? The votes are in, so it’s all moot now. Cooper’s a typical hanger-on: meddlesome, proud, and never shy about showing his ignorance. This is why democracy will never work. Giving power to the people is like giving a gun to children. Amateurs always have the strongest opinions—wrong ones.” Hamilton shakes his head in disgust. “I hope this sixty-forty trend continues, and I’ll be glad when this is over.”

“I am running an editorial tomorrow. I think it’s fair to say that Lewis has won. I want to appear even-handed, so I’ll mourn the vice president’s loss and its effect on his supporters.”

“No, Bill. Hold that a few days. We don’t want to count our chickens before they hatch. Phelps’s popularity out in the Finger Lakes may be strong enough to tip the balance and we won’t see those votes for a day or so.”

“Sure, but I doubt the vote will change. Jefferson and the Clintons have spoken. The foul weather hurt Burr, too. April showers. Federalists are fair-weather voters.”

“Haven’t I learned that the hard way? If Burr loses this election, he is

done in public life.”

“O, happy day!”

“Feel free to write up your editorial, but don’t run it. Remind Lewis that he promised to scourge the Federalists if he won, and he should for betraying their ideals. But we’re such a dying breed in New York, there’s no one left to abuse. And keep me posted.”

The next day, Coleman returns to Hamilton’s office with more numbers and a draft of his editorial.

“Burr carried only four upstate counties, Albany, Delaware, Columbia, and Dutchess. Lewis has won more than twenty counties by healthy margins. A handful of counties in the far west are still out, Genesee, Seneca, Cayuga, Tioga, Steuben. Burr might pick up one or two of them, maybe Ontario, but he can’t catch Lewis now.”

“Never ever underestimate Aaron Burr.”

“Well, don’t overestimate him either. He’s not a magician. Go home to your family and rest. We’ve done all we can.”

Hamilton scrutinizes the tally sheet again, “I suppose you’re right.” He exhales loudly and leans back. “I can hardly believe it, but it appears we have beaten Aaron Burr at his own game. If this trend holds, he can never seek office again.”

Coleman grins. “They say it’s like a funeral over at Martling’s.”

“It is a funeral for Burr’s ambitions and Pickering’s plot. We saved the union, Bill.” He sighs again. “I thought I’d feel more exhilarated, but I’m just exhausted. Go, get your paper out.”

“Great job, sir! Congratulations.”

“Now the real work begins.”

“But isn’t it a relief?”

Hamilton reads the editorial and nods. “This is good. Even-handed. Go ahead and run it.” Coleman stands and Hamilton rises, shakes his hand, and

then embraces him. “We learned a lot this year. Now we must get back to work. We must rebuild our party, without blame or acrimony.”

“Go see your family, sir.”

“Yes, I have neglected them.”

“A small price to preserve the union.”

Hamilton shakes his head. “I hope they agree.”



AARON BURR MORTALLY WOUNDS ALEXANDER HAMILTON IN
A DUEL AT WEEHAWKEN, NEW JERSEY, JULY 11, 1804

BOOK IV

THE DUEL

A hatless rider gallops up the drive to Richmond Hill, leaps from the saddle, and yanks the reins through an iron hitching ring. Taking the steps by twos, he pounds on the door, and impatiently slaps a roll of paper against his thigh.

“I’m coming! I’m coming!” is heard from inside, and Alexis, stiff and formal as always, opens the door with a bow and a deep greeting. “Why, Mr. Van Ness, sir!”

“I need the vice president! Now!”

Van Ness pushes past him and rushes through the ballroom. “Mr. Vice President!”

Burr appears at the top of the stairs. “That you, Billy?”

“Results!” Van Ness waves the paper.

“Ah! At last!” Burr claps his hands together and begins his grand descent.

“We waited to hear from the western counties, as you wished,” Van Ness says, starting up the stairs.

“So I did. Yes.” Burr is smiling, exuberant. “Tell Brom Martling to spare no expense. We’ll shake his rafters tonight. Everyone’s on the payroll from the day I’m sworn.”

“Uh, you should probably read this first.”

Burr scowls and takes the paper. His face darkens. He looks up and glares at Van Ness. “What sick jokester has transposed our names?” Irony, though, can’t hide his shock. He’s bone-weary and a bit tipsy. “I don’t understand,

Billy. We carried the city handily.”

Van Ness bites back a reply. Not quite, but why contradict the vice president, especially now, when it will do no good? Days ago, they knew that he'd won the city, but only by a hundred votes, not by the landslide they expected. When disappointing results trickled in from the river counties of Ulster, Westchester, Dutchess, Orange, and Rockland, Burr left his field office in John Street. Since then he's been home drinking wine and fretting, pretending not to care while awaiting results from the northern and western counties. He pinned his hopes on Van Rensselaer's freeholders in Albany and Rensselaer Counties, and on Oliver Phelps's yeoman out in Cayuga, Seneca, Tioga, and Genesee. Of all the western counties, he carried only Ontario, and that by fewer than four hundred votes. Burr looks up from the tally sheet with a sagging face. “Understandably, Billy, I feel less than festive.”

“We'll get them next time, sir.”

“Give my regrets to the boys.” Burr crumples the paper and tosses it over the banister into the empty ballroom. “Stand them a drink for me, too, if you can find the coinage. Without our gubernatorial plum we have no street money. *C'est la vie*. Tell the boys I'll be back in town in a day or two.”

They embrace and the vice president turns to grip the railing and climb wearily upstairs. Van Ness winces. The loss of power has aged Burr. Glancing at the stripped, empty rooms, Van Ness sighs, descends the stairs, and lets himself out.

Upstairs in his boudoir, Burr sits at his dressing table and stares ahead without seeing. How he could have miscalculated so badly? Dull, arrogant Morgan Lewis didn't even campaign, and he still garnered 8,690 more of the 53,000 votes cast than the sitting vice president! Burr jots a quick calculation. A humiliating sixteen point spread: 58% - 42%. There's no doubt now: he's finished in public life.

For a full hour Burr stares at his reflection in the mirror, trying to intuit his next move. He writes a note to Theo, pretending the election meant

nothing to him, dropping the bad news in offhandedly, between accounts of two new love interests: “The election is lost by a great majority: *tant mieux*.” But alone in his empty house, patrician disdain cannot mask his despair. He’s cornered, bankrupt, out of power, utterly without prospects. He will never be president. And who’s to blame? The Federalists never fully embraced him. By printing salacious details of his sex life, Cheetham alienated him from prim Puritan Yankees. Now he’s a loser, reviled and scorned by both parties. Panic grips him like a bowel disorder.

Burr stays in his room all day, brooding and drinking. When night comes, he walks aimlessly through his echoing, empty house. Forty years and a dozen personas fall away. No longer is he the vice president, the suave, cynical politician, the crafty attorney-at-law, no longer the bold, skilled lover, or the rash young buck of a military colonel, or even the precocious student, brilliant offshoot of prime Puritan stock. Tonight he sheds all such roles like a long gray snakeskin on a sharp rock, and beneath it all is the raw, quivering flesh at his core: an unwanted orphan forced to supplicate resentful relatives for his bed and board. In his dark, empty ballroom he hears again the music, the cheering and laughter from his riotous parties, and afterward the giggles and squeals as he tumbles all manner of women in his bed, on the divans and sofas, even in the stables.

Where are all the happy revelers who helped him push his worries into tomorrow? That cold, gray tomorrow he always feared is now dawning: bills are due, and there’s no one to charm or laugh at his jokes. Always quick to optimism, Burr can no longer summon hope. His lifelong quest for power is over. Tonight not even a brothel will help, since strumpets must be paid and he has no money. Deep in the night, he’s stumbling and beating the few remaining pieces of furniture with his cane, hardly aware that he’s bellowing like a wounded beast. Out in the back and far up under the eaves his slaves hear him and stay safely out of his path.

Four days later, Burr ventures into town, head held high, unflappable, a

man of his breeding and all that. The scorn directed toward him is palpable and falls like acid upon his skin. At Tontine's he sits alone, pretending to be absorbed in the newspaper, waiting for someone to stop by his table and converse. Stock jobbers are trading loudly across the room, and men he knows pass his table without a word. He's invisible. He sees them off to the side, whispering and pointing. He finishes his coffee and leaves.

On the street, it's the same. Men who used to stop him to ask advice on every topic now turn and pretend they don't see him. He passes shops and taverns where proprietors who used to rush out to press his hand are too busy sweeping or wiping windows to nod or wave. The one or two who speak to him do so out of pity. Pity!

Desperate for a friendly face, Burr pushes into Martling's. The sour, hoppy smell greets him, faintly tinged with urine. Ah, ha! The rank smell of his people! A few morning barflies look up and clack their thick tongues.

"What'll it be?" the barman snarls.

"Sherry."

"Let's see some coin."

Burr smiles. "Put it on my house account, Dirk."

"Martling closed that last week."

"Impossible! All the custom I've brought in? Summon him at once."

"He's out of town."

"I'm sure he approves."

Dirk folds his hairy forearms and rests them in front of Burr. "No, sir, Mr. Burr, he don't." He points a thumb. "Between you and me and the wall over there, you should take your custom elsewhere."

"You're joking."

Dirk flicks his head toward the door. "Out."

Burr squints at Dirk's greasy hair and beard and begins to understand. He promised these humble men a share of power. He worked them hard to get

votes, but then he didn't deliver, so now they despise him worse than their overlords. Burr retreats to his empty home and his rotgut wine amid the slaves he can hardly feed. To make things worse, foreclosure is looming.

Night after night Burr sits at his dressing table, staring into the mirror. In the candlelight his eyes appear to him like the dark sockets of a skull. From the chorus of detractors in his head, a fantasy of revenge coalesces. He will ferret out the conspirators, whomever they are, and someone will pay. A.B. is not to be trifled with! A duel, that's what he needs. He will call out some notable or other and show the world he was wronged. That's it! An affair of honor will restore his good name! But alas, he realizes, he's sunk so low, who would respond to his challenge?

One by one, Burr considers possible opponents. Jefferson tops the list, the Philosopher King himself. All that Burr needed was a mark of favor, and his own president denied him that. Sadly, Jefferson is beyond his reach in Washington, and even if he were at hand, he is too cowardly to answer a challenge. Morgan Lewis? The new governor is effete and dismissive, and would ignore him, or claim he lacks grounds. It was an election, after all, and he won it fairly. DeWitt Clinton? Now, that's a turkey worth the buckshot. Clinton paid Cheatham to publish damaging, salacious accounts of his sex life, and when he was befouled from that drag through the gutter, the thin-lipped, prissy Federalists deserted him in droves. How could he get Clinton to accept a challenge? Clinton would just look over his head, as he did at the president's levee last fall.

Pickering? Ah, yes, Pickering! Pickering promised him victory but did not deliver. When that desiccated old racist linked him to a poisonous secession plot, the whispers began. But Burr lacks identifiable grounds to call him out, so Pickering would surely ignore his challenge too.

More imminent than revenge, though, money problems threaten his survival. Burr watched monstrous debt drag down Robert Morris. Morris was rich as Croesus, financier of the Revolution and signer of all three seminal

documents—the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution—but he languished in a Philadelphia debtors’ prison for three years until Congress took pity and passed the bankruptcy law to spring him. Burr feels a strong undertow of debt tugging at his ankles. Scrutinizing his handsome face, once so irresistible to women, he sees wrinkles at the eyes and thin, narrow lips that twist downward with lines of worry. He will flee New York rather than go to prison! The election would have solved all his problems, but powerful enemies arrayed against him, and he lost miserably, so here he is once again, on the outside looking in.

Newspapers afford Burr some fleeting diversion. He is surprised by a June 5 editorial in *The Evening Post* that criticizes Morgan Lewis’s victory as a blow to democracy while accusing the Livingstons and Clintons of creating an aristocracy. Yes! That was precisely his campaign claim! Coleman’s editorial warns Governor Lewis that *The Post* will be watching him so he must not insult democracy by using his office to benefit himself and his family. Strange fare from Hamilton’s man, so Burr doubts its sincerity. Still, Lewis did throw the *Croswell* case in order to win Jefferson’s favor, and surely that infuriated Hamilton.

Aside from his appalling living conditions and lack of amusement, now and then Burr considers the effect of the loss upon his legacy. Theodosia’s love and esteem mean everything to him. How can she be proud of him if he’s flung into debtor’s prison to die among the rats and cockroaches? He’s vice president until the end of the year, so by scrimping and saving, he can live on the salary, but next year... what then? No hope of any political position with Morgan Lewis, who now controls the Council of Appointment. Congress doesn’t reconvene till November 5. While Burr continues to nurse revenge fantasies in the dark hours, he spends his days wracking his brain for ways to raise money. His law practice has dried up entirely. Who would seek advice from him now? Can he tap his son-in-law again? After this defeat even Joseph Alston might think twice, and he lacks strength for a voyage

south to appeal in person.

As his despair darkens, Burr catches brief flashes of a world he once knew, a happy, joyful world where men make pretty profits, ride pretty horses, love pretty women, father pretty children, and go to church and pray to a beneficent God. Though he followed a more oblique path, Burr now covets the ordinary things they have. Why has happiness always eluded him? He searches his looking glass for some visible flaw in his face, some mark of Cain. How could a man of such extraordinary talent fall low enough to envy ordinary men their ordinariness?

“Alexis,” he instructs one morning as his slave sets down a bowl of oatmeal, “bring me my pistol!”

“Oh, no, sir. Please!”

Unshaven and red-eyed, Burr leaps from his chair, pounces on his slave, and breathes sour wine breath into Alexis’s surprised face. “You do what I tell you or you’ll be chopping cane in Georgia. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, uh, yessir, Your Excellency.” Alexis bows humbly out of the room. “Sorry, sir.” Alexis reappears with the pistol, powder horn, wadding, and a ball upon a tray. Burr charges the pistol with the ramrod, sprinkles powder in the pan, cocks back the flintlock, and sights down the barrel at his reflection. He rises slowly before the mirror, as if he’s on the field of honor. He turns sideways to present the narrowest possible target. He raises the pistol and closes one eye to aim. “Now, who do I see before me, floating into my sights?” Burr stares this way for a time, then uncocks the flintlock and gently lays the pistol on the table. He must be patient.

And then his patience is rewarded. Seven weeks after the election, providence speaks! It’s a sunny morning in June, and Alexis brings him an envelope on the little silver tray that used to hold the day’s many calling cards. The weather is fair and warm, but Burr has a cold, so he’s wrapped in scarves and he’s sneezing. It’s Sunday and church bells are pealing over the hills, down toward the sea.

“Who brought this?” he growls.

“A messenger. Left no name.”

“You didn’t ask?”

“No, sir.”

Burr growls and slices the letter open with his penknife. A scrap of newspaper from *The Albany Register* falls out. In the envelope, a card reads: “Thought this might be of interest. A Friend.”

The clipping is a letter to the editor dated April 23, and published the next day. Burr reads the convoluted syntax, and as he reads, a broad smile spreads across his face. He looks up at his shaggy reflection in the mirror and whispers hoarsely: “Hamilton!” He stands and stretches to his full height. “Hamilton!” he says aloud, and then he clenches and raises both fists, closes his eyes, and cries in jubilation: “Hamilton!”

“Alexis!” he calls, slapping the table with his palm. “Alexis!”

Alexis responds with questioning eyes. “Right here, sir.”

“A basin of hot water, shaving soap, and my razor!”

As Alexis leaves, Burr claps his hands and grins at his reflection again. His face appears haggard and his whiskers, tinged with gray, make him look sinister, but the spark is back in his eyes. A brilliant bolt of lightning has flashed like fireworks and illuminated his world. He knows now what he will do, and how he will do it.

Alexis shaves him and applies witch hazel with gentle slaps to pinken his cheeks. Burr orders breakfast, drinks coffee, and reads the published letter again, more slowly this time. He considers its finer points. He must remain calm and detached in order to exploit this opportunity, but he knows the sure way to inveigle Hamilton into a duel and prove the election was rigged. After his eggs and toast, Burr dresses and walks in the sun.

The grounds of Richmond Hill have sadly shrunk to four small acres, but so many memories linger. At the shady pond where Theodosia sailed paper boats, a small boy is fishing. When Burr calls to him, the boy smiles and

waves. He thinks of his Gampy. Yes, there is life after losing an election. One must simply trust in the heavy wheel of fortune, always turning, always grinding the arrogant beneath its iron rim. Hamilton! Burr smiles. He's never been one to harbor grudges, but he saved Hamilton's life when they were boy soldiers retreating to Harlem Heights, and how has that been consistently repaid? A lifetime of scorn and backbiting! Hamilton failed to get him an appointment with Washington. Hamilton knocked him out of the United States Senate so old Schuyler could step back in. Hamilton cost him high office twice, first by supporting Jefferson in 1801, and most recently by secretly opposing Pickering and the wishes of his own Federalists. And he wasn't even man enough to admit it! Hamilton pretended to be retired so he could work behind the scenes until this Cooper fop exposed his machinations.

Burr holds the letter into the light. Hamilton must be taught a lesson in humility in the broad light of day with the whole world watching. The man has no stomach for dueling, never did, but he won't refuse now! He can't! The logic of it makes Burr laugh out loud. Hamilton sent his son to a duel, and his son fell. Hamilton can't possibly decline. He must do at least as much as he required of the kid. Twice before it's come close to a duel between them, but Hamilton talked his way out without a public apology. This time, though, Burr will press the issue, and Hamilton will weaken and crack, and Burr will have an apology to restore his stature. Yes, Burr knows how to bait the hook so Hamilton will bite. And when he does, Burr will reel him in, slowly increasing the tension until Hamilton breaks the surface of the water to spit out his barbed hook, and everyone will see!

Burr returns home, lies on the sofa for a nap in the sunshine, and then dines alone, taking only two glasses of wine. He sends word for Van Ness to call in the morning, and as vesper bells are tolling in the distance, he sits at his desk and crafts a letter to Hamilton. Burr is now master of the situation. His letter is perfect in tone: debonair, simply but elegantly worded, the menace imperceptible. He professes gentlemanly disdain for having to

trouble a colleague about such a trifle, tut-tut, but make no mistake, there will be consequences if this isn't answered.

Van Ness appears at nine.

"You look like a new man, sir. New conquest?"

"I've got him, Billy!"

"Who?"

"Hamilton."

"Hamilton?" Van Ness frowns. "How have you 'got' Hamilton?"

Burr sighs. Can Billy be this obtuse? "He's opposed me for the last time."

"But Hamilton is our avowed enemy, sir. Isn't that his mission?" Van Ness smiles at his irony, but Burr is not amused.

"Hamilton's 'mission,' as you put it, was to fall in line behind Pickering and elect me governor. Now his 'mission' is to apologize to me with all the world watching."

"And why would he do that?"

"Because if he doesn't, we will be in Weehawken."

"A challenge?" Van Ness looks perplexed. "Have you grounds?"

Burr holds up the clipping. "A published insult." Burr's expression is grave as he hands Van Ness the scrap of newsprint. Van Ness reads it, looks up.

"But there is no insult here. How can you call him out over this?"

"It's subtle. Read between the lines."

Van Ness reads it again and looks up. "Sorry, I don't see it, sir."

Burr rolls his eyes in exasperation. "This Dr. Cooper, whoever he is, heard Hamilton utter an 'even more despicable opinion' of me."

"More despicable than what?" Van Ness is incredulous. "Some other opinion? We're all entitled to our opinions, sir. Half a dozen editors print that you are a seducer, a thief, a whoremaster, and a bankrupt, which, pardon me, sir, are assertions of fact. Cooper doesn't even reveal what the 'more

despicable opinion' is. *Code duello* requires specific offensive words or conduct."

"Peer a little deeper."

"I see nothing, sir. Sorry." Van Ness hands back the clipping. "You taught me the law. This is rank hearsay, and as vague as the morning mist. It relies upon Cooper's sensibilities, his opinion of an opinion. Who knows what Cooper considers 'more despicable' or even what he considers 'despicable?' Many men think politicians are despicable by nature." Van Ness looks for agreement, but Burr is dead serious, his mind made up.

"The actual words Hamilton spoke don't matter."

"But the words themselves must be actionable!"

"*Res ipsa loquitur!* The thing speaks for itself. The fact that he said something is enough for me."

"But Hamilton will ignore you or dismiss your challenge as ill-taken, and you will be ridiculed."

"No, Billy, there you are wrong." Burr's face contorts with such intense hatred that Van Ness must look away.

"I'm sorry, sir, but if I were Hamilton, I'd tell you to ask this Cooper what he heard and proceed from there."

"Cooper is irrelevant! He didn't steal an election from me."

"Neither did Hamilton. Eight thousand votes? Really, sir. Hamilton might have induced a few hundred to switch sides, maybe even a thousand, but not eight. The Federalists never supported us, that's clear, and all of the Republican factions were arrayed against us. Jefferson, the Clintons, and the Livingstons refused to share their power with you and Tammany. Sure, Hamilton was lurking out there in the shadows somewhere, but he was not the deciding factor. Challenge him with this nonsense and you will be a laughingstock."

"You don't know him as I do." Burr smiles triumphantly. "Hamilton will accept my challenge." Burr folds the clipping into the letter that he has

written, folds both together, drips wax, and seals it with his vice presidential ring. “Will you serve as my second?”

“If there is an interview, certainly, but—”

“Place this in his hands then, Billy. Draw his attention to the phrase in the clipping ‘more despicable,’ and tell him I require a prompt response.”

“And if he balks?”

Burr’s eyes narrow, and he smiles. “Oh, he’ll balk, all right. Hamilton has never fought a duel, and he never will. He is a strutting, vainglorious little coward who always finds a way to wriggle out. When things got heated between us twice before, he came to me and asked for mercy, and I was magnanimous and accepted his private apology. Not this time. No, no, no. This time I will show everyone the rank coward he is, how he works his game in secret with gossip and innuendo. I will have him on his knees begging for forgiveness. On his knees! But first we must hook him and today we have the advantage of surprise. He’s flying high now, celebrating my defeat and his reemergence at the head of the Federalists. When we blindside him, he will balk and need more time. And when he asks for more time to respond, that is when you set the hook.”

“How, sir?”

“Tell him that the vice president is a patient man and that he may take all the time he needs ... on one condition.”

“Yes?”

Burr leans close to Van Ness and whispers in his ear. Van Ness’s eyes widen in shock. He turns full-face to stare at Burr. “That is dark, sir. Very dark.”

“I try, Billy. And that is why Hamilton will accept my challenge.”

Van Ness looks at Burr with a mixture of awe and dread, and he slowly nods. “Yes, I believe he will.”

“Certainly he will! I know the man. And when he does, then the fun begins. You’ll never see a better cat tease a better mouse.” Burr smiles, raises

his pistol, and cocks back the flintlock. “Now, run along, Billy, and set the hook. And I will meditate on how to proceed once I have him in my grip.”

In the seven weeks since the election, Hamilton has enjoyed a much needed rest. He has slowed the pace in his law office and has spent more time at his country seat with his family. From that safe distance he considers his long-range political options. Pickering's perfidy and the defeat of Burr have restored him as the de facto leader of the Federalists. He's a new man, invigorated, balanced, and with the return of power, he vows to be more mature in wielding it.

Eliza senses this change and it greatly troubles her. When he rescinded his vow to leave politics, he assured her it was a temporary measure to save the union. But now he's enjoying the acclaim of his old cronies, and she knows he will stay in, offering rationales and flimsy pretexts to justify it. He still does not perceive how he is endangering his family. If Philip's death and Angelica's madness do not demonstrate how politics threatens them, what will?

"You promised your return would be brief and for a single purpose," she complains one night. "Won't you give it up now?"

Hamilton smiles patiently, as if he's fielding a question posed by her four-year-old namesake. "Yes, my darling, I did promise, but that was before I sat with your father. We have vanquished Burr, and he is gone, but that tyrant Jefferson still reigns. Pickering demonstrated what poor leadership brings. Someone needs to man the helm."

“But why you, darling? Why us? Haven’t we done enough?”

“I realized, Eliza, sadly, that the others cannot, and that this struggle will never end. The poor attract cynical champions like Burr and Jefferson who promise them power in order to win their votes, and then saddle us with grafters and bad policy. We must put an end to it.”

“Why can’t your role with *The Post* be enough? You wield great power there to influence elections.”

Again, his smile is that of an indulgent parent. She finds his patronizing tenor insulting. “Editors can easily be silenced. Look how Jefferson silenced Harry Crosswell. He’s in Connecticut now, studying for the ministry. Someone needs to walk the ramparts. Liberty is not self-actuating. We must be vigilant to protect it from tyrants.”

Eliza takes a deep breath. She remains soft-spoken but persistent. “Again, I agree, but why you? Why us?”

Hamilton reaches for her hand and looks into her eyes. “This is the man you married. You used to believe our crusade was a sacred one.”

“It’s just that I fear something horrible will happen.”

“Not if we’re vigilant. Trust me. We are older now, and far wiser.”

“I do trust you. I just don’t trust everyone else.”

On Monday morning, June 18, Hamilton kisses Eliza good-bye, lifts Little Eliza and Little Phil up for hugs, then carries out his saddlebags, mounts his horse, and canters away. The morning is resplendent. Lush meadowlands and orchards spread out before him, and he passes like a crowned prince through his domain. The expansive, sunny morning, nearly the longest day of the year, opens his heart and his mind to ever grander possibilities. He is now at the zenith of his power, answerable to no one. His reasoning has been vindicated, his political skills tested like gold in the fire. Men are flocking back to the Federalist Party for his wisdom and leadership. He has saved the union and now he will put his party and the nation’s house in order and win the presidency back from the rabble-rousers.

When finally he sees ships' masts towering high over the city's low rooftops, he feels a deep satisfaction. New York has become a world-class port. Commerce and the prosperity it brings open a door to the future, and the American union fosters prosperity and upward mobility for anyone who is intelligent and works hard. Pickering's xenophobia and Jefferson's promotion of slavery cannot prevail. As he guides his horse into the narrow, twisting streets, Hamilton enjoys the bustle and the rhythms of lower Manhattan. He's found the perfect pitch for this land, and he imagines the sweet summer air catching the vibration from his tuning fork. The future of this nation knows no limit. Giving his horse to the livery stable boy, Hamilton enters his law office by the back door.

Books lay open on his desk where he left them Friday. As he hangs his saddlebags over a client chair, he hears someone in the outer office, and he peers around the doorjamb. Young Van Ness, one of Burr's crew, is speaking with Judah. Hamilton steps into the anteroom.

"Good morning, sir."

"General." Van Ness bows slightly, clicks his heels, and hands him a letter. "The vice president asked me to place this directly into your hands."

"I trust he is well." Hamilton takes the letter.

"He is, and he wishes you the best of health, sir."

"Will you convey to him my warmest regards?"

"Of course." There is an awkward pause. Van Ness inclines his head toward the letter. "He told me to wait for an answer."

"But I am only just arrived."

"Mr. Burr requests that I point out something for your perusal and special attention."

Hamilton breaks the seal and unfolds the letter. A newspaper clipping is folded inside. He reads Burr's letter, then the clipping of Dr. Cooper's letter from *The Albany Register*. He frowns. He recalls Coleman telling him that the Albany paper carried Schuyler's answer, and that Cooper responded

angrily to Schuyler. As he reads Cooper's response, he is perplexed. Then he rereads Burr's cramped handwriting. He looks up. "Yes?"

"Colonel Burr asks that you pay particular attention to this phrase." Van Ness indicates with his finger. "'A more despicable opinion?'"

Hamilton looks at Van Ness. He is not smiling. Is there menace in the man's tone? Hamilton reads it again and looks up.

"I don't understand." He squints at Van Ness. "Colonel Burr asks for 'a prompt and unqualified acknowledgment or denial' of precisely what?"

"The use of the term 'more despicable,' which has been associated with his name."

"Those are Cooper's words, not mine."

"Even so."

Hamilton is exasperated. "Mr. Burr wants me to comment on dinner party chitchat from last winter?"

"Really, sir, his letter speaks for itself."

"So does this." He holds up the clipping. "This is a letter from some Charles Cooper, a letter that is not from me or even addressed to me. It was written in response to General Schuyler, and this is the first that I am seeing it. I signed nothing. I sent nothing," he glares at Van Ness, "and I said nothing."

"How, then, shall I answer the vice president?"

"I am just arrived in my office."

"I am sorry to catch you off guard, sir. How soon could you answer?"

"I will respond by tomorrow."

"Very well, General." Van Ness smiles, clicks his heels again, and bows out of the office.

Judah rolls his eyes. "Cheeky fellow, sir."

"The vice president values that in his minions."

Hamilton goes back into his office and closes the door. His heart is

racing, and he feels queasy. He rereads Burr's demand, then rereads this second letter from Cooper. He recalls that Schuyler answered Cooper's first letter, writing that after Lewis entered the race Hamilton "declared to me he would not interfere," that he'd remain neutral and not oppose Burr. Schuyler was calling Cooper a liar in effect, and so Cooper wrote this second letter to scold Schuyler in print. Hamilton reads Cooper's words slowly:

"The anxiety you revealed about the election induced me to believe you entertained a bad opinion of Mr. Burr, especially when taken in connection with General Hamilton's harangue at the City Tavern; and although I have never suggested you would act on the one side or the other in this election, yet I could not suppose you would support a man whom I had reason to believe, you held in the lowest estimation. . . .

"I have made it an invariable rule of my life, to be circumspect in relating what I may have heard from others; and in this affair, I feel happy to think that I have been unusually cautious, for really, sir, I could detail to you a still more despicable opinion which General Hamilton has expressed of Mr. Burr."

Hamilton scowls, trying to remember what he said, if indeed he said anything. Clearly, he's banished Burr from politics forever, and now Burr wants revenge. Burr's impertinence in this demand is pathetic, but why did that fool Cooper write his first letter? And why did garrulous old Schuyler respond? Hamilton admits he may have promoted this dispute when he sent the first two letters along to Coleman to be printed in *The Post*; but why, oh, why did Cooper need to chastise Schuyler with this?

"More despicable," he whispers, and his facile attorney's mind tosses the phrase about. It's an opinion, damn it! An opinion cannot be proven true or false. That was the issue in *Croswell*. Opinions are simply informed or misinformed. They aren't actionable! They can't be! Men can hold opinions without fearing consequences, and who can define "despicable," let alone "more despicable?" Hamilton snorts. This is just the sort of pettifogging

nonsense Burr would seize upon. A drowning man grasping at straws. Hamilton throws the letter and clipping aside. He sharpens his quill to begin work where he left off Friday. But as he starts to scribble, he can't concentrate.

Hamilton stands and paces. Aaron Burr is politically dead and can never come back. Surely, as leader of the Federalists he should not stoop to respond to a man who's sunk so low. He remembers his prepared remarks at City Tavern, where he labeled Burr a dangerous man, a traitor, a libertine, and a bankrupt. What could be "more despicable" than that?

"I will ignore him," he commands himself. He straightens his shoulders and sits down again and forces himself to work, but his usual powers of concentration desert him and doubts assail him. He's embarrassed and ashamed that Burr has something even this miniscule to hold over him, and he's angry with his father-in-law for prolonging the dispute. Surely, Burr knew Hamilton and Schuyler were working against him! This is preposterous! He has nothing to apologize for. Hamilton racks his memory. He remembers the dinner party, but what did he say? He cannot remember, but neither can he deny the anxiety he feels. This is unmistakably the first salvo of an affair of honor. He must answer it carefully, but with his head held high. His own wife labeled him a "coward" for hiding his involvement in Philip's duel. He will not be intimidated or humiliated by this little scoundrel!

Hamilton recalls Cooper, the pale, gangly man with a large nose and prominent Adam's apple, married to Tayler's adopted daughter. Cooper was excited to be rubbing elbows with "first men." This is merely the petulant letter of a busybody. Hamilton reads it again. What could he have said that Cooper considered "more despicable?" Surely not his comment about sheep? That was a joke! Everybody laughed!

Later, Hamilton enjoys a convivial dinner with friends at the Southwark Chop House, but back at his apartment, he can't sleep. He misses Eliza, aches

to hold her, to look into her dark eyes, smell her fragrance, bask in her wisdom, and simply be enveloped by her love and her goodness and sensibility. She would know what to do. He gets up and writes her a long letter. She's the only one who can calm his anxiety, but then he worries that she would begrudge him comfort because this all arises from politics, as she warned him it would.

The next day is filled with appointments and court appearances, and through all of it Hamilton is dogged by the phrase that reverberates in his mind, "admit or deny ... admit or deny ... admit or deny ..."

On his trips through the streets, he constantly looks up at steeples and cupolas, where the hands of clocks are turning, and he watches as the sun rolls across the cloud-strewn sky, shortening then lengthening the shadows of belfries and weathervanes as if on a sundial. What is it about Burr's demand that spooks him? Suddenly, he notices it is late afternoon. He promised Van Ness an answer and, knowing he'll need at least an hour to craft a response, he walks to Van Ness's home to request more time. Van Ness answers his knock.

"Why, General Hamilton! I am honored," he bows. "Do come in."

"No, thank you. I am here as promised. Colonel Burr requested a prompt and unqualified reply. I told you I would have it today, but I have been preoccupied. I shall require one more day."

With his finger to his lips Van Ness tries to hide his amusement at Burr's prescience. "Indeed. The vice president foresaw this and even provided me a response."

"He did?" Hamilton stiffens. "What is it?"

Still smiling, Van Ness shakes his head. "I'd rather not, sir. You know how sarcastic the vice president can be."

"Tell me."

"Truly, General, it would serve no purpose."

"Enough, Van Ness. Colonel Burr instructed you to tell me something.

Tell me.”

“Very well. The vice president said ‘If Hamilton needs more time, tell him I will be patient so long as he answers me himself—’”

Hamilton scowls. “Well, who else could possibly answer for me?”

“‘Tell him,’ Mr. Burr said, ‘not to send one of his sons.’”

Hamilton’s eyes widen and his cheeks flush red. The breath catches in his throat and his heart is loudly pounding. Van Ness watches the transformation, concerned that Hamilton will strike him.

Hamilton whispers hoarsely: “Burr said that?”

Van Ness feigns embarrassment. “I’m sorry, but those were his very words.”

“You will have my response by morning.”

“I look forward to it, sir.”

Hamilton turns and brusquely walks away. Hard to believe even Burr could stoop so low! To imply he sent Philip to a duel with Eacker because he was too cowardly to go himself! Hamilton vividly recalls Philip on his deathbed, his face contorted, his teeth chattering, his body sweating and shivering, and Eliza’s wide brown eyes in the candlelight as she searched his eyes for an answer. This snide, cynical little man! The effrontery!

Hamilton pushes through crowds on the street, ignoring men who speak his name, tug on his sleeve, and even stand directly in front of him. Do others think this of him too? Perhaps they all do! Again he hears Eliza: *You speak of honor, but you are a liar and a coward! You refuse to take responsibility for your actions, and that’s what poisons everything.* Can people honestly believe he sent Philip to die because he wouldn’t go himself? This is the gauntlet Burr hurls down? Well, now that he knows the game, he will show everyone! He will defend his honor, no matter the cost!

By the time Hamilton enters the refuge of his office, he’s regained his composure and feels only cold determination. Twice before things have reached a critical pitch with Aaron Burr. Both times he humbled himself, and

seeing his submission, Burr was affable and reasonable in return, wanting only that his vanity be appeased. Not this time! Burr's back is to the wall and he wants blood, but he will not placate that vicious little reptile! Surely, Burr can't expect an accommodation now that he's brought Philip into this?

At midnight, Hamilton blows out the candle, but he cannot sleep. He imagines they are all whispering of his cowardice, that he's too flawed to be their leader. Is this the great beam that's been stuck in his eye? At length, he hears the mantel clock strike two. Philip wasn't cowardly. Philip rowed out in choppy November seas to meet Eacker, and he threw away his shot. How can he do any less? No one knows what may happen in the next few years. War with England or France is likely. Civil war, too, if New England secedes. A man cannot lead an army, much less a nation, if his courage is suspect.

Hamilton rises and lights a candle. He rereads Burr's letter, then Cooper's. A hearsay allegation of half-remembered dinner chitchat? Does this even implicate honor? How dare that little snake ask what is more despicable than betraying one's country! To be demeaned by a scoundrel like Burr—it is intolerable and cannot stand! Hamilton will give it the answer it deserves. He sits at his desk and writes furiously, tossing away draft after draft. The sun is rising by the time he is satisfied with his response. He drinks coffee and eats an apple. As soon as it is late enough to call, he delivers his response to Van Ness.

“Thank you, General,” Van Ness says. Despite trying to appear impassive, Van Ness looks so smug that Hamilton must resist a strong urge to slap him across the face. After a long night in a white-hot rage, Hamilton wants to feel satisfaction and release, but oddly, as he turns from Van Ness's door, he regrets his answer. He feels a vague but ominous dread that he may have now given Burr the cause he lacked before.

When Alexis ushers in Van Ness, Burr is at breakfast, a napkin tucked at his chin and he's cracking a soft-boiled egg with a spoon. Van Ness smiles in triumph, and waves Hamilton's letter in his hand. Burr sets his spoon aside, pulls off the napkin, and wipes his fingers. "Why, good morning, Billy! Don't you look bright-eyed and bushy-tailed? What *billet-doux* does my worthy Cupid bring?"

Van Ness hands him the letter. Burr slices through the seal with his butter knife. He unfolds the paper with great flourish and smiles broadly.

"Good news, sir?"

Burr nods. "We've hooked him, Billy!"

"Do tell."

Burr looks up. "I ask a simple question—'admit or deny'—and he flings words at me by the bucketful. The man can never get to the point. I quote: 'Between Gentlemen, despicable and more despicable are not worth the pains of a distinction... I deem it inadmissible, on principle, to consent to be interrogated as to the justness of the inferences which may be drawn by others,' blah, blah, blah! Who in blazes cares what Cooper heard? I ask Hamilton to admit or deny what he said, and he refuses, so it doesn't even matter."

Van Ness frowns. "But if no one remembers, where is the insult?"

"Beneath the surface, Billy." Burr's eyes are keen, as if he's in court,

cross-examining a perjurer and moving in for the kill. “I’m not asking what he said at a party one night. I am asking if he can honestly deny he’s insulted me. He knows he can’t. He’s maligned me so many times to so many men, he can’t remember, and he knows that I know. Yet he blathers and equivocates to wriggle off the hook. But I won’t let him now. I will goad him with hot spikes and watch him twist. Nothing short of a plea for mercy will suffice.”

“You’ll demand satisfaction?”

“Not yet. Let’s watch him suffer a bit more.” Burr taps his index finger on a sealed letter beside him. “This is my either-or. Now if he tries to dissemble and slip away, I will blare his cowardice from the rooftops. I am a reasonable man, Billy, and when he’s contrite, then and only then will I show mercy.”

“He’ll never apologize! You should have seen his outrage.”

“Oh, I think he will. But if he doesn’t,” Burr shrugs, “that’s all right too. The choice is his. Let him make it. Either way I will conquer the arrogant, vainglorious General Hamilton. And everyone will see at last that A.B. has the bollocks they all lack.”

“Perhaps not everyone shares your opinion of him.”

“More do than don’t, Billy. He has many detractors. Even his Federalists grow weary of him. Here is my next epistle.” Burr hands Van Ness the letter. “Please be so good as to deliver this to our fair-haired boy.”

“As you say, sir.” Van Ness bows his way out.

“I had expected a different reply,” Hamilton tells Van Ness, slapping Burr’s second letter. “Certainly a different tone.” He’d been packing his saddlebags to ride home for the weekend when Van Ness was announced. “Mr. Burr expands his inquiry rather than narrowing it.”

Van Ness shrugs. “You know the vice president.”

Hamilton scowls. “He makes several offensive expressions that close the door to all further reply. I am surprised at the direction this is taking.”

“Perhaps, General,” Van Ness suggests, “you might state that you recall uttering nothing that would justify Cooper’s construction of your words. Mr. Burr is not unreasonable.”

“I cannot respond just yet. Give me a couple of hours and I will send you my answer.”

When Van Ness leaves, Hamilton sits motionless for quarter of an hour, examining the matter. If this proceeds further, he’ll need someone to serve as his second. He sends a note to Nate Pendleton, and Pendleton appears within the hour.

“Thank you for coming so quickly, Judge.”

Pendleton reads the correspondence and looks worried. “Tread lightly here, my friend. Burr is baiting you.”

“Of course he is, but I can’t let it pass. Burr lectures me on the meaning of ‘despicable’ as if I were a schoolboy: ‘The question is not whether Cooper understood the meaning of the word, or has used it according to syntax and with grammatical accuracy, but whether you have authorized this application either directly or by uttering expressions derogatory to my honor.’ And then, ‘Your letter has furnished me with new reasons for requiring a definite reply.’ It’s unendurable, Nate! I can’t let this pass!”

“I wish that you’d called me sooner. Don’t respond. Place the matter in my hands.”

“But he demands I swear I’ve never criticized him over twenty years of political contention. He knows I can’t do that!”

“Why answer him at all? Burr is thoroughly disgraced. Treat it as sour grapes after a lost election.”

“He’s vice president of the United States! If I don’t answer, he will label my silence cowardice and broadcast it from the heavens.”

“But he’s not on the same footing as you, General. He cannot tarnish your reputation in anyone’s eye.”

“Men believe what they will, and I won’t give them cause!”

“Surely, you see this is your Philip’s dilemma all over again?”

“Yes, and I cannot respond in any lesser degree than Philip did! Burr makes an impossible demand, then insults and berates me into the bargain? He doesn’t know me very well.”

“I think he knows you quite well.”

“He demands a definite reply? I will give it to him, but not by sifting back over twenty years of political sparring. I will call his bluff.”

“And he will shoot you, just as Eacker shot Philip. Please, General! Think of the risk! The sorrow of Philip’s death will not be a tenth, a hundredth of what your death will bring. Think of Eliza and your children! Your poor daughter! You just saved the union from a fatal schism. Mend our party and lead it to recapture the presidency. Seek the presidency yourself in four years, but don’t stoop to this triviality.”

“Here’s my response.” He hands Nate a letter. “I object to Burr’s indecorous and improper expressions. Let him explain further or challenge me, as he wishes. I’ll not apologize for an insult I never made. If he calls me out, so be it and in that case I will need a second.”

“Please, sir! I implore you.”

“If there is an interview, Nate, will you serve as my second?”

“Only to avert it.”

“Answer me!” Hamilton’s eyes are fierce.

Pendleton bows. “I will, sir, of course, but first I’ll do everything to prevent it.”

“Let me know on Monday.”

Nate Pendleton delivers Hamilton’s letter to Van Ness, and in the morning Van Ness rides out again to Richmond Hill. Burr is amused, triumphant.

“How did he look when he read my letter?”

“Like I’d kicked him in the bollocks.”

“Ah, ha!”

“You’ve touched him deeply, sir. He dismissed me abruptly, then sent Pendleton around with this. Pendleton implores me to intercede with you. He wants you to reconsider.”

“Oh, to hell with Pendleton! I want Hamilton. On his knees!”

“You already have him there.”

Burr rips open the letter and reads. “Ah, yes! Indeed, I do, but now everyone must see the marvel. Think of it, Billy! All of the words that have passed through the man like shite through a goose, and I pin him like a fluttering butterfly, on one vague little adjective—despicable! Let that be the man’s epitaph!”

“What would you have me do now, sir?”

“Enjoy your weekend, as I intend to do.” Burr cracks his knuckles. “We’ll see all this with greater clarity when our weary cocks crow Monday to begin a new week.”

Hamilton spends his weekend at the Grange. He and Eliza will host a lavish dinner party two weeks hence, and preparations are underway. Eliza considers the party a housewarming for their new home, but many in Hamilton's circle see it as a celebration of his return as leader of the Federalist Party, and so invitations are coveted. Women of their circle are curious to see the elegance of the Hamiltons' country seat, and with his star on the rise, men are eager to get close to him socially. Attendance of thirty-five notables and their wives is confirmed. Eliza is pleased, but the shadow of Burr's threat, if Pendleton is unsuccessful, has Hamilton on edge. As much as he tries to hide it, Eliza senses something amiss, but in the bustle of preparations she says nothing.

The maids, Peggy and Kate, have brought in two more Irish lasses along with their young men, a groom and a carpenter, to help Hamilton and his sons Alex, Jimmy and Johnny build a small bandstand in the woods. Weather permitting, the guests will dine *alfresco* in the latest French fashion. Hamilton has hired musicians to play violin, cello, oboe, and flute while his guests stroll along the candlelit paths.

As he works on the party arrangements, the possibility of a duel seems surreal. All day Saturday, simple household rituals remind him how delicious his life is—awakening next to Eliza, eating breakfast on the verandah overlooking his fields, hoeing his vegetable garden, pushing Little Eliza and

Little Phil on the backyard swing, helping the Irish lads with hammers and miter box and saw. In the late afternoon the family has a leisurely supper. Summer breezes flick up the tablecloth and muss the children's hair. Poor, broken Angelica plays with her doll in a wicker chair off to the side. Hamilton tries to engage her in song, but she can't focus and her mind drifts away.

After supper, Hamilton watches Eliza arrange the flowers she's picked. A glow seems to surround her. Now that the anxiety of the election is past, he longs to reestablish their former intimacy, but with politics still between them he feels a chill. When wise old Schuyler praised the value of a good wife and admitted that Eliza was his favorite, Hamilton felt a pang of unworthiness. Now, teetering above a dark chasm, he feels dizzy, fearful, and panicked that a wrong decision will separate him from her forever.

They watch the sunset together from the verandah. When Eliza reaches for his hand and looks into his eyes, to his great surprise, he must suppress a sob. All of this ... this bliss now hangs in the balance, and alone he must shoulder the fear of losing it. He tells himself that Pendleton will surely resolve the controversy. If he informs her now, Eliza's fierce determination would interrupt the affair of honor to his great humiliation and shame. So he holds the secret closely and answers, "Nothing, my darling," when she asks him what is the matter.

The weather is rainy and foul on his Monday ride into town. Wraiths of fog flee eastward across the Hudson River. Above the mist, the angular brown cliffs of New Jersey's Palisades loom over broken rock where the water laps as the tide rolls in.

Hamilton enters the narrow maze of streets and heads to his office, steeling himself to face the week ahead, whatever may be waiting. The livery boy is away, so he feeds and waters his horse before walking up the alley and through his back door. Judah greets him from his scrivener's stool in the anteroom, where he's copying a deed. Hamilton looks around the door, asks about his wife and son, then goes to his desk.

Nothing from Burr. He's relieved but still acutely on edge. He sits and begins to work. An hour later, Nate Pendleton enters and closes the door behind him. He seems to be gripped by a strong emotion, and his movements are as slinky and deliberate as a cat.

"Listen to me, General, enough is enough. We must put an end to this folly."

Hamilton steels himself. He's suddenly short of breath. "Burr has pushed me past the point of return, Nate. He demands I assure him that I have never spoken ill of him, and I cannot honestly do that."

Pendleton begins slowly. "I talked with Van Ness and I wrestled with this all weekend. We may be able to reach an accord. Tell me your most

accommodating position, and I will demand from Van Ness the vice president's. Let's bring you both together."

"I don't see how. Burr has intimidated I sent Philip to his duel because I was afraid to go myself."

"That's preposterous! You weren't challenged! Philip was."

"But Burr's insult must be answered! And I will not be interrogated on inferences that may be drawn by others on what I have said of a political opponent over the course of twenty years!"

"Why do you care about Burr's taunts? No one respects him anymore. He's an utter failure and bitter about it. It's only natural for him to lash out at someone of your stature. Let him howl in the wind. No one will pay any heed to his ravings about you, and he will soon tire of it. You are above all this, General, you are above him! Simply say that you cannot recall what Dr. Cooper alludes to, and respond no further."

"You're back to Cooper's letter?"

"That's what this is all about. If you don't recollect saying anything defamatory, say so. The vice president will be forced to drop it."

Hamilton shakes his head. "You don't know him as I do."

"Can we at least try?"

"Tell him I recall saying nothing that could be construed as despicable."

"Very well. Let's hope for the best."

Pendleton calls on Van Ness and returns in two hours.

"Burr refused our offer. You were right. Burr told Van Ness that a political rivalry does not authorize greater latitude in commenting on a man's character, but rather requires greater delicacy." Pendleton slowly shakes his head. "He demands a disavowal of any intention on your part to be derogatory to his honor. Ever."

Hamilton throws out his hands. "See? Burr's not interested in resolving this! I cannot give him such an assurance, Nate, and he knows I can't."

“Well, how far will you go?”

Hamilton sighs. “If he asks whether I have ever charged him with a particular instance of dishonor, or impeached his private character, I can answer both in the negative. I will also affirm that the discussion Cooper overheard was restricted to politics. I attributed no instance of dishonorable conduct to him, nor did I speak of his private character.”

“Let me try that.”

Pendleton meets with Van Ness, and Van Ness rides out to Richmond Hill. Burr receives this latest response with gravity.

“Perceive how he thrashes,” Burr says. Van Ness admires Burr’s control and wonders how far he will carry his bluff.

“He won’t back down, though,” Van Ness assures him. “You give him no room to bow out. What will you do, sir?”

“I will give his provocation the answer it compels. They tell me Weehawken’s lovely this time of year.”

“Yes?”

“Yes. Hamilton will genuflect and bow his head and admit his slander, or he will row across the river and meet me on the field of honor.”

“He will never admit it.”

“Well, I don’t believe he has the bollocks to cross the river, so let us pose the question once more as an either-or, and await Hamilton’s choice.” Burr’s eyes soften. “I rode out to his fine estate last December, Billy, and you should have seen it. Picture perfect! Lovely little wife at breakfast with six or seven precious little children. Hamilton will never place his privileged, beautiful life on the bloody altar of honor. I know the man. Nor could he ever deprive fallen mankind of his sublime reasoning skills! The arrogance! But just wait. When the fear of annihilation exceeds his fear of disgrace, he will appease me, and my reputation will be restored. Let’s turn up the heat and make him sweat a little more. Why don’t you write back this time?”

“How shall I respond?”

“Tell him that he’s evading the issue and so I must renew my demand for a blanket disavowal. Nothing less will satisfy me, and any refusal invites the alternative.” Van Ness scribbles a note in his pocketbook. “Let us see how he returns this volley.”

The following morning, Pendleton brings a letter to Hamilton.

“It’s from Van Ness, sir.”

“Burr writes me no more?”

“Apparently not. Van Ness told me that the vice president considers your latest proposal an evasion.”

Hamilton opens the letter and his face goes pale.

“What does it say?”

Hamilton reads: “No denial will be satisfactory unless it be general and exclude the idea that rumors derogatory to his honor have originated with you.” Hamilton looks up. “He says my refusal to make a disavowal invites the alternative.”

The two men look at each other for a long moment.

“I can’t respond to this!” Hamilton exclaims, slapping the paper. “A general denial? An inquisition into private conversations? Burr impossibly expands the original inquiry. He shows a predetermined hostility toward me, Nate, and that itself violates *code duello*. I am done with half-measures. Meet with Van Ness and make the necessary arrangements.”

“Please, General! Consider this step and all it portends. Burr is a snake. Men will cheer when you refuse his demand. If you go to an interview and are hurt, the loss to your family, to all of us, will be incalculable. Tell Burr that this Cooper fellow was correct and truth is an absolute defense. He is despicable, and so this is not a proper charge.”

“And what of my honor?”

“You’re not the challenger.”

“He insulted me, Nate, and I will defend my honor. I cannot ignore that

he threw Philip's death in my face. He all but called me a coward! Do what needs to be done, or I will ask another of our circle to serve as my second."

They look at each other for a long moment. Finally Pendleton capitulates.

"As you wish, sir." He's saddened and stung by Hamilton's haughty ingratitude.

The following afternoon, Pendleton returns. "The vice president suggests the usual location at Weehawken and is ready to meet you there at any time."

"The circuit court is in town for ten more days. I require that long to complete my business before it. Mark down our interview for any time after the court adjourns."

"All right. I will inform Van Ness." Pendleton is sullen and dejected, but still secretly hopes that Hamilton will come to his senses. They stare at each other and the long silence is uncomfortable. At last, Pendleton bows and leaves. Hamilton closes his eyes, groans, and pinches the bridge of his nose.

Early the next morning, Hamilton walks up Broadway to the Churches' mansion. He slips in a side door to avoid an encounter with Angelica, and creeps down the hall to John Church's office, where he raps gently on the door. He hears distinct rustling inside, then a woman's giggle.

"One minute!" Church sings merrily. Hamilton hears another door open and close, then Church opens to him. Expecting to see a servant or one of his children, Church is shocked to see his brother-in-law, and he is not pleased. "What in blazes? How did you get in here?"

"I need the guns." Hamilton's voice is hoarse, barely audible. He avoids Church's gaze.

"The guns? What in blazes for?" Church's hair is mussed and he's buttoning his breeches. "You look like hell."

"Give me the guns and I'll go."

Church grabs his arm, pulls him into the room, and closes and locks the door. "What kind of a thing is this to spring on a man first thing in the morning? Who's called you out?"

"Burr."

"Burr?" Church searches for the punch line. "You finished him off in the election!"

"I thought so."

"What are his grounds?"

“Someone wrote that I uttered a despicable opinion about him at a dinner up in Albany.”

“Well, isn’t that horrible! He *is* despicable.”

“This is not time for levity, John. Give me the guns.”

“Sit down, my brother. There’s going to be no more shooting. I will talk him out of it. When will this occur?”

Hamilton remains on his feet. “Truly, John, the less you know about it, the better. Give me the guns.”

Church glares at him, slowly folds his arms, and shakes his head. “You can’t have them.”

“Well, then, I’ll ask Coleman for his.” Hamilton turns to leave.

“Wait!” Church takes his arm and turns him back. “Burr owes me. I arranged a sizeable loan for him, at your urging. Let me speak with his lenders and see if they will adjust the terms, with some of my own money to sweeten things a bit, and I will make it worth his while to forget this madness.”

“Sure. And give him grounds to tell everyone I ignored his challenge? Or that you bought him off? My reputation would be destroyed. No, John. I will meet him.”

“I’ll insist on confidentiality. He’ll listen. Trust me.”

“It’s too late, John. The time and place are set.” Hamilton goes to the door and unlocks the latch. “Coleman’s got a set of pistols. I’ll use his.” Hamilton starts to open the door, but Church lunges, slams it shut, and turns Hamilton around again.

“Think this through, man! You can’t meet Burr.”

“You presume to tell me what I can and cannot do?”

“Yes, I do!” Church’s face is red and he’s breathing heavily. “You owe me that much.”

“I owe you?” Hamilton scowls. “How do I owe you?”

“I saved your reputation.”

“You *what?*” Hamilton snaps, and looks at him in disbelief.

“For two years and more I have shielded you.”

“Shielded me? From what?”

“Responsibility for Philip’s death.”

“What on earth are you talking about?”

“You know very well. I came to you the day before Philip’s duel. I broke my word and breached his confidence so you could intervene and stop it. But you didn’t.”

“How could I stop it? You’d already given them your guns! Price was on the river when you appeared at my door! You only told me to shirk your own responsibility.”

“No,” Church shakes his head. “I told you to give you the chance to stop it. You were his father, and it was your honor he was protecting. It was your place to intervene, not mine.”

“Philip insulted Eacker! It was between those two.”

“Don’t split hairs, man! I gave you the option.”

“How could I stop it?”

“You could have contacted Eacker, blamed it on Philip’s youth, his drunkenness, anything.”

“It would have finished Philip in public life.”

“Maybe, maybe not, but he’d still be alive.” They glare at each other. “But you ignored my warning, sent him over, and instructed him to wound Eacker.”

“When on earth did I do all this?”

Church shakes his head in disgust. “Do you think you’re invisible, man? Don’t you think I know? Philip told his cousin on the way over in the boat. You met with Philip at Tontine’s the morning of the duel!”

Hamilton is staggered. “You knew? All along?”

“Yes, I knew, and I kept your secret and I took all the blame from both my wife and yours. So you owe me.”

“Why? Why did you do that?”

“Philip was dead. What was the point? I pitied you and wanted to save you from humiliation.”

“You pitied me?” Hamilton squints at him. “How could I be humiliated?”

“Are you so blind? You sent your son to a duel to protect your reputation? What kind of a man does that?”

Hamilton’s eyes lurch this way and that. “Is this what you think? Seriously?”

“It’s what everyone would think if I’d told the truth. Instead, I let everyone believe you never knew. It was Philip’s rash act and my bungling, not the great General Hamilton faltering upon a question of honor.”

“Gross mischaracterization, John! I don’t accept it.”

“I lied to protect you. I earned the world’s scorn and my wife’s cold shoulder for my reward, and you’re not even grateful! It’s been two and a half years, and Eliza still looks at me as if I pulled the trigger myself. So, yes, you owe me, and no, you can’t have the guns. You’re not crossing the river. We will find some other way.”

“I never asked you to shield me from anything. I admitted my involvement and I took full responsibility.”

“You did? When?”

“When I told Eliza.”

“Oh, yes, another brilliant move! Your wife was hysterical for days. Angelica had to go into the country to comfort her. Were you mad? Her baby boy? Those are secrets you take to the grave.”

“She asked me. I wasn’t going to lie.”

“And how did she take the news?”

“She called me a liar and a coward. Said that if my involvement were

known, I'd be universally despised."

Church folds his arms and nods with a cold smile. "So Burr sniffed this out and is rubbing your nose in it. He smells men's wounds like a hunting dog. We can't play into his hands."

Hamilton stares at Church for a long moment.

"Right?" Church demands. "You agree?"

Hamilton slowly shakes his head. "You just proved why I must go."

"How?"

"If Philip's death was my fault, I need to make it right. I will meet Burr and do as much as I required of Philip. Come on, give me the guns."

"No!" Church reaches for him.

Hamilton steps back. "Don't touch me, John."

Church lunges again, seizes him, shakes him. "Wake up, man! Burr will kill you."

"What would he gain by doing that?"

"He's so deluded he probably believes your death will revive his political career."

"You met Burr in a duel and he didn't kill you!"

"I didn't rob him of the presidency. Twice. I will send word to him and you will let me resolve it. Burr is always scrounging for money. I will show him how dropping this insanity can pay handsomely."

"And what of Philip? He died in vain?"

"Yes," Church nods, "he died in vain. And you're not going to follow him."

"You're wrong!" Hamilton's complexion is ashen, but he's quiet and calm. "Philip defended his honor, and I will defend mine. That's an end to it."

"I will meet with Burr tomorrow morning and get this madness called off. I'll have my friend cancel his note. Damn it, I'll pay it off myself. Burr owes

close to ten thousand.”

“No, John.” Hamilton shakes his head. His gaze is penetrating and his eyes resolved. “You’re not shielding me any longer. I have accepted Burr’s challenge and a few men in our circle already know. To back out now would validate Burr’s insult. I can’t live with that. I won’t. Give me the guns, or I’ll get Coleman’s.”

Church looks at him for a long moment, then unlocks a cabinet below his bookshelves and pulls out the pistol case. “I won’t say be careful. But I will say, with a clear conscience, that I tried everything to dissuade you.”

“Not a word to your wife.”

Church growls, “How do I get myself into these things?”

Hamilton tucks the case under his arm and as quickly as possible he’s out the door, down the corridor, and into the courtyard to avoid being seen. But as he hastens away, Angelica watches from a second-floor window, and she recognizes the pistol case.

As Van Ness trots up the drive to Richmond Hill yet again, his mount is suddenly spooked by a pistol shot.

“What’s he up to now?” Van Ness mutters as he dismounts. After calming his horse and hitching her securely, he walks around the side of the stables. The vice president is standing in shirtsleeves, facing away, a pistol in each hand. Burr raises the second pistol and aims at a target painted on a board.

“Mr. Vice President?”

Burr wheels around with both pistols leveled at him.

Van Ness’s hands shoot up. “Only me! It’s only me!”

Burr frowns. “Sorry, Billy. I’m a little touchy today.” He puts one of the pistols on a bale of hay, and drinks from a goblet of wine.

“Well, I bring good news. Hamilton’s agreed to the interview.”

“So he’s finally grown a set of stones. Bully for him. But I’ll believe it when it happens.”

“You made the challenge, so he’ll bring the irons, Church’s guns. He needs time to complete some legal work, make arrangements, and so forth, so he begs your indulgence until the circuit court adjourns.”

“Whatever we can do to accommodate the general.” Burr puts his other gun on the bale of hay and pours more wine into the goblet. “I suppose I should prepare the world for A.B.’s absence, too. A bonfire perhaps?”

Hmmm! Actually, love letters from my randy mistresses will combust on their own!" Burr enjoys his witticism. "My creditors' disappointment will be my greatest consolation. How I'd love to witness their dismay! Give Hamilton everything he wants. More time for him to gaze into the abyss." Burr picks up the loaded pistol, lowers it, and squeezes the trigger. There's a deafening explosion and a cloud of gun smoke. The bullet hits the bull's-eye.

"Good shot, sir!"

Burr nods. "Haven't lost my touch." He motions for the letter, takes it, and reads. "Hmm, hmm. The man can never be direct! Listen to him wriggle: 'If the alternative alluded to in the close of the letter is definitively tendered, it must be accepted, the time, place, and manner to be afterwards regulated.'" Burr looks up. "Two dozen words when three will suffice: 'See you there.'"

Van Ness waves at the target. "Do you still think he will back down?"

"I do, but let us be prepared in either case."

Burr reloads both pistols, then turns again to his target and concentrates. He enjoys Van Ness watching.

"Perceive the steady hand of the righteous!" Burr squeezes the trigger and again hits the bull's-eye dead center. He looks at Van Ness and they regard each other.

"I will arrange things with Pendleton."

"Good."

Rather than waste time trying to drag any information from her husband, Angelica Church calls for her brougham that afternoon and rides nine miles north into the country to visit her sister. Eliza hears the hoof beats and waves from her flower garden, then ambles down to the circular drive in her apron and work gloves.

“What a wonderful surprise!” she greets Angelica as she’s stepping down. It’s a clear, crisp morning.

“You’ve planted poplars!” Angelica waves her hand around a circle of trees lining the drive.

Eliza smiles and removes her straw bonnet. “Count them. Thirteen! One for each of the original states. Hamilton!” She shakes her head. “To what do I owe the honor?”

“I have news,” Angelica says, and glances at her driver. “And it’s not good.”

“Come to the verandah.” Eliza takes her arm. “You must be thirsty.”

The sisters pass through the house, and come upon young Angelica looking out the window.

“Say hello to Aunt Angelica,” Eliza says.

“Hello,” the girl says vacantly.

Angelica Church walks over and kisses her namesake on the forehead. The blank gaze she receives in return is discomfiting.

“This is one of her good days,” Eliza smiles. She calls to Peggy and they are soon seated in the shade of the wide porch, sipping lemonade.

“I don’t wish to alarm you,” Angelica begins, “and please keep my visit to yourself, but Hamilton came to the house this morning to borrow John’s pistols.”

Eliza instantly goes rigid. “He did?”

“John wouldn’t tell me if I asked, so I didn’t bother. We can assume he’s involved in an affair of honor.”

“Good God!” Eliza sighs, looking out over the forested hills. “Not again!” She is silent for a few moments, trying to calculate what to make of this information. “After the election it took him a full month to calm down, but recently he’s been on edge again.”

“Maybe he’s acting as a second to some friend?”

“Not likely.” Eliza cannot hide her fear. She’s thinking. “Thank you for telling me. I will find out.”

Angelica takes a deep breath and reaches to clasp Eliza’s hand. “Hopefully, it is nothing, but I thought you should know.”

Eliza bites her lip and squeezes her eyes closed, but tears are rolling down her cheeks. “I’m sorry!” She produces her handkerchief and puts it to her eyes.

“It’s all right.” Angelica leans over to embrace her.

“Brings it all back. How could he? Oh, my God!”

“Perhaps it’s nothing,” Angelica offers.

“We both know what these men are capable of! And our grand housewarming party is ten days away. He could be in the ground by then!”

Eliza stands and embraces her sister. “My God!”

“You must do something.”

“I will.”

Just then the two youngest Hamiltons run up to the balustrade. “Hello,

Aunt Angelica!” Little Eliza calls. Little Phil echoes his sister.

Angelica leans over the banister. “Hello, my dears! When will you come to see me in town? We’ll take you out for a sail in the harbor.”

“Next week,” Little Eliza calls, and Little Phil repeats, “Next week.”

The children run off, laughing and dancing in the summer sun. Eliza says, “Not a thought about me or the children, just his idiotic honor!”

“Be calm,” Angelica says softly. “Don’t jump to conclusions before you know the truth.”

“What can I do? If I mention it, I’m a spy. If I forbid it, I’m a shrew. Either way he’ll disregard my advice.” Eliza shakes her head. “Why do men think they’re such buccaneers, swaggering through the world, caring not a fig for the wreckage they leave behind? Philip’s death was horrible enough. What would become of us all if Hamilton is shot? Crippled or even killed?”

“Look in his eyes, Eliza, and you will know what to do. This affair, if it goes forward, will be very public and the outcome irrevocable. In light of Philip’s death, any thought of a duel is sheer madness.”

“Yes, madness! You can’t do the same thing over again and expect a different result.”

Angelica stands and clasps her hands. “Please let me know how I can help. In view of this development, John and I must decline your invitation to the housewarming. We would find it very awkward.”

“No! Please do come! Make it awkward for him,” Eliza says. “Let him feel the consequences now, before the event.”

“Well ... as you wish. Good luck, my dear, I must get back before John notices I am gone.” Angelica hugs her sister tightly.

“Thank you.”

“Anything I can do. You know that.”

Hamilton rides out to his country seat for the weekend, but he can barely hide his jangled nerves. Time and place are set. Unless he weakens and backs down, the duel will occur July 11. He will be killed or wounded, or he will walk away, but his honor will be intact.

Rounding a bend in the Bloomingdale Road, he pulls up and sits high in the saddle, admiring the home he designed and built. White Federalist banisters outline the square roof against lush green foliage. Massive chimneys, stairs, and piazzas with delicate white balustrades gleam against the soft cream of the clapboards. It is not quite on a par with the brick and stone mansion of Philip Schuyler, but it is a gracious, comfortable home for his peerless wife and happy, intelligent children.

With the duel looming, Hamilton grows philosophical. If he could have envisioned this home and family in his youth, it would have brought him great comfort. It is a crowning achievement to have built such an estate to enjoy now and to pass down to his children. He imagines how his guests will see it next week, much as Burr did last winter. Burr! The thought of the duel twists into him like a blade, and as he looks at his beautiful home, he suddenly realizes all he stands to lose. Twelve days and it will be over. Like the closing of battle lines, it thrills him, but fear and dread eclipse the excitement, pulling him down with suffocating doubt. He must get through this ordeal so all of this prosperity, this elegance and joy, along with his

political power and reputation can be redeemed, and the curse of Philip's death broken. He kicks his horse and gallops down the road and up the rise to the house. Alexander and Jimmy have been waiting for him and run to greet him.

"Papa!" They compete to reach him first and then to take the reins of his horse as he dismounts. Eliza emerges from the house. Hamilton climbs the steps by twos and holds her affectionately.

"Hello, my beautiful lass!"

Eliza feels unnaturally stiff in his arms, her usual smile does not extend to her eyes, and when he gives her his usual kiss of greeting, he feels no response. These unexpected rebuffs catch him off guard, and send him immediately into a familiar spiral of shame and despair. Does she know? How could she know?

"Is everything all right?" he asks.

"We have seventy guests coming to dinner next week," she says.

"Yes! And we will show them our beautiful country seat!"

"With its crushing mortgage."

"What's the matter, darling?"

She glances at the children, who are watching. "We should speak after dinner."

Eliza's ominous, matter-of-fact tone spooks him, and impulsively, he embraces her again. Everything else, the birds calling in the slanting rays of the sun, the river burning red in the west, a pale evening star in the eastern sky, everything seems to be spinning around the gravitational pull of his fear and his despair, and he vows not to show any emotion.

After supper, he sits alone on the piazza, gazing into the forest while Eliza is inside with the children. Lately, he's been thinking much about death, reliving the war—battle lines raked by cannon balls, screaming field hospitals where surgeons in bloody aprons saw off arms and legs, Valley Forge where frozen corpses of starved men with wide eyes are dragged along frosted,

bloody trails to be pitched into a common grave. And always, against his defenses, comes the vivid, horrible, indelible memory of Philip thrashing and bleeding and dying in his arms.

Eliza comes softly out on the porch and sits in a rocking chair beside him.

“I need to ask you something, Hamilton, and I want a truthful response.”

“Of course,” he says.

She searches his eyes unflinchingly and it unnerves him. “I have learned, no matter how, that you may be involved in an affair of honor.”

“Eliza!” He struggles to remain calm.

She touches his hand gently. “Hear me out, please. I know very few of the details, but I need to unburden myself and trust that you will tell me the truth.”

“Of course.” His mind is again racing ahead to find facts he can spin to keep her from full knowledge.

“You know what I suffered, what we all suffered, from Philip’s death.”

“Of course. And what we still suffer!”

“Well, then, you must appreciate the risk another duel would bring.” She reaches for his hand and holds it. “You do, don’t you?”

He feels her warm grip, and as he gazes into her lovely dark eyes, suddenly he’s flooded with relief. “Yes, of course.” The terrible weight of his anxiety lifts and he tells himself he’s not alone, he needn’t run from Eliza’s love. In her eyes he sees deep understanding and acceptance. His love for this woman fills him like a bright wind snapping the sails of a river sloop as it slices through the water. Eliza will show him a way to repudiate Burr’s challenge, and he’ll be on his way, clear sailing!

“Since I heard this rumor, I have relived every moment of Philip’s death, and all of the horrors afterward. So I made up my mind to open my heart and alert you to the risk such an affair of honor would pose to us.”

She squeezes his hand harder and he welcomes her firm grip. He

understands now what he must do, what he will do to avert the interview.

“Your political friends need a champion, and that’s what they consider you. But our children need a father, and I need a husband. This beautiful house has strapped us financially. Your death would leave us destitute. It will be another fifteen years before our mortgage is paid.”

“Please, Eliza!”

“Hear me out. Knight errantry may seem glorious in romances and story books, and the war for freedom was a time for courage in the face of death. But all that is over. This is real life. We both learned how real when we held Philip bleeding and crying in despair. Remember?”

“How could I forget?”

“And poor Angelica?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then ... ?”

She waits for him to say something, but he remains silent to avoid letting her know how close he was to the precipice. Now, looking at her sweet expression, he vows to change his plans as soon as he can, and the sudden decision brings him tremendous relief. She is right, of course: his family must come first. The two years of retirement from politics brought them both such inner peace. Everything else can be dealt with, but avoiding the risk to his life is crucial.

“Thank you, Eliza.” He squeezes her hand, wraps an arm around her shoulders, and says no more.

“I love you, darling.” She lifts the hand she is holding and kisses it. “You are your own worst enemy!”

“And you are my best ally. Thank you,” he says again, and kisses her on the forehead. “Everything is fine. Your fears are unfounded.”

She nods. “Thank God.”

Late in the night, he awakens though, gasping for breath. In his dream

Philip's agonized, tormented face came swimming up from a black gloom. "Please!" Philip groaned. "Please, Papa!" Hamilton tried to soothe him, wanting to answer, "I will make this right," but he could not speak. He mouthed the words, but no sound came out. The more desperately he tried to comfort Philip, the more his throat closed. As Philip receded into the void, he stretched out his hands, "Please, Papa! Please!" and Hamilton reached to him across the dark chasm, desperate to comfort him as Philip disappeared.

Hamilton sits up in the bed, drenched in sweat, his heart pounding. He hears an owl hooting in the forest just beyond the garden. He feels nauseous and gets up to relieve himself and to take a sip of water. When he returns, Eliza's awake, softly weeping. "Philip was just in my dream," she says.

"He was in mine, too."

"I miss him so much! Please, darling, promise me everything will be all right."

"Everything is fine," Hamilton says. He will give John back his guns and nothing further need be said. "Don't worry, Eliza. Everything is fine."

For twenty years Aaron Burr abjured the stuffy Cincinnatus Society in favor of his rollicking Sons of Tammany. But last year, when seeking Federalist support for his gubernatorial bid, he wrote the group's recording secretary that "reasons merely personal" had prevented him from joining till now, and he requested membership. His commission as a colonel in the Continental Army qualified him, despite his resignation and his departure from the war. The secretary consulted with the group's president, General Alexander Hamilton, and Burr was warmly invited to join.

The Cincinnatus Society holds its annual dinner each July 4 at Fraunces Tavern at the tip of lower Manhattan. Former Continental Army officers, now prosperous merchants, doctors, lawyers, and politicians, assemble to drink, joke, strut and preen like prize cocks as they relive their glory days of revolution, and also to usher their sons into what they hope will pass for an American aristocracy. Tonight, waiters hustle to keep glasses filled with wine, gin, and whiskey, while huge silver cups circulate, sloshing with punches of green crème de menthe, pink strawberry delight, and red cherry bounce.

Since his heart-to-heart with Eliza last Friday, Hamilton has found himself backsliding. Upon his return to the city, he realized the difficulty of calling off the duel without suffering a humiliating loss of honor, and he has balked. He hopes Burr will attend tonight and has convinced himself that a

meeting will provide him the opportunity to resolve the dispute. A face-to-face encounter requires more candor and allows far less subterfuge than trading letters through agents. A public meeting will be out in the open and will insulate both of them from slights and insults they might imagine while waiting for the next response. Burr and John Barker Church shook hands and walked away from their duel unharmed. Hamilton hopes he and Burr can look each other in the eye, shake hands and perhaps recapture a whiff of the friendship they've enjoyed as soldiers, law students, and colleagues at the bar. Burr is always so charming in person, Hamilton reflects, so he chivvies himself up with good humor to open a door for reconciliation.

Hamilton wears his general's blue coatee tonight, last tailored when he marched west with General Washington to put down the Whiskey Rebellion. He wears long black riding boots pulled up over white duck trousers, and a wide maroon sash and sword at his hip. As soon as he alights from the coach, he stiffens into a military posture as old friends greet him on the street. They escort him into the old tavern to great applause and fanfare. He has served as president-general of the society in the four years since Washington's death. Accepting a glass of Madeira from a butler, he raises it in a toast to the entire room.

"To liberty, gentlemen! I give you liberty!"

"To liberty!" the men loudly respond, and toss off their libations.

Before the April election, Hamilton visited many of these men in their homes and businesses, begging them to vote against Burr. Now, vindicated by the election and determined to supplant Pickering as leader, he's already selected an inner circle to rebuild the Federalist Party. Men stand four deep waiting to shake his hand and have a word with him. There are murmurs throughout the assemblage about the summer's most coveted invitation, Hamilton's upcoming dinner party next Saturday night at the Grange. But while Hamilton enjoys his acclaim, he cannot be completely at ease because he's scanning the dozens of clamoring faces to find the bald pate of Aaron

Burr.

Burr finally enters late, after most of the men have arrived. Hamilton sees him out of the corner of his eye. Burr does not look his way. It will be a dance all right, Hamilton understands, and since Burr has the upper hand, he must play his part flawlessly to avoid losing face.

Burr is dressed in a drab black coat and breeches, and he keeps his head down and makes his way to the bar. Here or there a man sees him and some nod, but they quickly turn away. Waiting in line for a glass of punch, Burr is fuming. "I'm one breath away from the presidency," he thinks, "and these fools won't even shake my hand?" But then he smirks, "I probably owe them all money!" Burr comforts himself by relishing how differently they will regard him once he brings Hamilton to his knees.

As the wine and spirits do their work, talk and laughter grow louder and more convivial. These powerful, wealthy men of the world, most of them now rotund, recall the privations and horrors of war, but also fondly remember the camaraderie, how they drank and sang before and after battles with the fear of death always hanging over their young heads. The toasts get more and more elaborate and the voices louder as they thrust their glasses higher and laugh raucously. At one point Hamilton decides to notice Burr publicly. He directs his gaze toward the back of the room and, standing alone, Burr nods. Hamilton walks over to him. Cognizant of the recent bitter election, many of the men are watching. Hamilton smiles with great charm, his blue eyes twinkling in the candlelight. Burr's dark eyes are flat and the pupils are dilated, nearly eclipsing his irises. He stares at Hamilton hypnotically. Is he drunk? Hamilton wonders.

"Welcome, Colonel." Hamilton bows slightly. He holds the wine glass in his right hand and does not extend it for a handshake. He's waiting.

Burr returns the bow. "Thank you, General."

"It is good to see you here."

"It is good to be seen."

“If there’s anything at all I can do ... ?” Hamilton is conciliatory, in deference to Eliza, and flashes a warm smile. Their eyes lock, each man searching the other for subtlety. Hamilton holds his breath, waiting. Burr’s lips curl in a smile and he simply shakes his head. For half a minute they are frozen in a stand-off until Hamilton nods and moves away. He takes a long, deep breath, and he chides himself, knowing the moment has passed and that it went very badly.

When a servant bangs the gong, Federalist luminaries escort Hamilton to the head of the long table. Vice President Burr, architect of President Jefferson’s ascension, finds a chair near the foot of the table, down among the members’ sons. Burr tries to bear this ostracism with defiance, as a mark of pride. He’s galled by taking a lower place to inferior men, these loud, laughing fools, yet immediately his native cynicism buoys him. They will see, yes, soon they will all see. He’s especially disgusted by the acclaim they shower on Hamilton. Listening to the young men around him extolling Hamilton’s accomplishments and virtues, Burr wants to gag.

“I see through Hamilton as I see through a glass of water,” he thinks. “Washington’s bootlick, Schuyler’s breeding colt, look at him preen! Always servile and unctuous to men of substance. Without them he’s a whiff of shite in a humid Caribbean wind.”

As the program begins, Burr affects a look of ennui, taking in the speeches with hooded eyes. The tipsy, overfed men guffaw at old Gouverneur Morris’s bumbling jokes, and their laughter sounds like a bass viol: “Haw, haw, haw!” They stomp their feet and pound the tables with their fists when he gets bawdy. Then, Hamilton’s light voice joins in like a breezy clarinet. He laughs, giddy as a girl, his cheeks blushing red, and his words come light and quick in a warbling tenor as he offers another toast. The men’s pleasure at Hamilton’s wit is revolting, and Burr revels in his dark consolation: the more they revere Hamilton tonight, the higher will Burr’s stature rise next week when Hamilton’s cowardice is exposed for all to see.

In honor of the Brits they vanquished, tonight's meal is roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, and it is loudly and robustly eaten. When the dishes are cleared and dessert is served, the speeches begin. Burr leans back and folds his arms, ready for the show. After three or four bombastic offerings, many of the men importune Hamilton to sing. "Ham-il-ton! Ham-il-ton!" they chant, stomping their boots and pounding their fists on the table. Hamilton looks pale and out of sorts, and he declines three or four times, but as they insist more loudly, "Ham-il-ton! Ham-il-ton!" he suddenly leaps onto the table and the room explodes with cheers. He stands high in the candlelight, face flushed with wine, eyes glinting with nervous energy, and he bows and extends his arms to accept their applause. All rise and toast him.

"He's going to sing?" Burr asks a youngster standing beside him.

"He is!" The young man is clapping. Around the room, men are applauding and shouting. Then they begin screaming deliriously as Hamilton, a look of pride and defiance in his eye, unsheathes his sword and brandishes it high in the candlelight. He's acting out his apotheosis at Yorktown, and the men love it and demand more. Hamilton sweeps the room with his gaze, freezes a second when he catches Burr's eye, then glares at him defiantly as if to say, "I have the love of all these!" before he continues to scan the room.

"A grown man, on a table, singing?" Burr thinks, and at his waist he makes a pistol of his thumb and forefinger and aims it at the preening songbird. In his bright tenor Hamilton intones the old drinking song, "How Stands the Glass Around," delighting Burr with the irony of its lyrics:

"O why, soldiers why?
O why should we be melancholy, boys?
O why soldiers why?
Whose business is to die.
What sighing, Fie!
Let's not fear,
Drink and be Jolly, boys,

You and I, through wet, cold or dry.
Our orders are to follow boys
We scorn to fly!

“It is in vain
I mean not to upbraid you, boys
It is in vain
For a soldier to complain,
For the next campaign
We go to him that made us boys
Free from all pain;
But if you should remain
A bottle and kind landlady
Will cure ... all ... a-gain!”

Hamilton finishes with a jig of his riding boots and a slash of his sword and a bow. Applause thunders. He bows again, waves his frilled cuffs to accept their tribute, his blue eyes radiant with joy, and he glances down at Burr. Burr's eyes are sleepy, reptilian, inscrutable. He smirks from his place at the foot of the table. Yes, the wheel of fortune turns slowly sometimes, but in one short week the world will see the fear and cowardice that throbs beneath Hamilton's shallow vanity.

Dull gray clouds roll across the river from New Jersey. Hamilton is moody, depressed, and irritable. Is it a hangover? Last night presented an opportunity to reach accord with Burr and he botched it. Yet if Burr was unwilling, he tells himself, how could he have succeeded? He might have greeted the vice president as he entered, embraced him, announced him to the others, fawned a bit, and whispered at an opportune moment, “We have been friends, Colonel. I am always at your service.” Instead, he allowed Burr to sulk and retreat to the lesser seats, and sink lower in his rage. Not only has he promised Eliza, but he wants to call it off, too.

What can be done now? Tell Pendleton to negotiate a truce with Van Ness? Return the guns to Church and allow him to pay Burr off? The thought that he’ll again need to lie to Eliza tears him up. But Pendleton has booked Mulligan and three other bargemen to row next week, and has asked Dr. David Hosack along “just in case.” All is in readiness, but Hamilton’s nerves are jangled. The battle hymns they sang last night, slinging arms over each other’s shoulders and hoisting great sloshing bowls of punch, brought him another night of horrible dreams: battlefields with artillery exploding, men strewn in bloody heaps outside the surgeon’s tent, dying boys wailing for their mothers, the huts and hovels of starvation at Valley Forge, the long, slow retreat at Washington’s side, crossing the icy Delaware, terrified horses screaming and kicking aboard leaky barges, and then he was awake, gasping,

his solar plexus clenched so tightly he could hardly breathe.

The young serving boy brews coffee, and Hamilton sits in the small dining room, looking out over the roofs behind the town house. This is like no other battle he's ever fought. It's not out in the open, like warfare, or before a judge and jury in a public courtroom. It is not a political contest or newspaper battle waged out of pressrooms in the minds and hearts of voters. This is a hidden, illicit, and possibly fatal battle he wages within himself, and Eliza presents yet another front. Somehow she caught wind of it, and his agony increases by the hour as he imagines her in a widow's veil, his sweet children fatherless. If only he could see through the mists of time into next week! The finality of death numbs him. He recalls the frozen, rainy morning at Philip's funeral, helped from the church so he didn't fall, then standing in Trinity churchyard with the coffin lowered. Surely it won't come to that! What would Burr gain? Revenge, of course, but inflicting severe injury or death could put him behind bars. Burr wants political rehabilitation, not an indictment. He's reckless, but he's not insane. Yet Hamilton realizes he's been wrong about so many things, perhaps he's wrong in this life-and-death gamble. If he repeats Philip's mistake, he'll leave seven children fatherless and penniless. Ah, but that can never happen, he tells himself again. Burr saw his family at breakfast last December. He would never shoot to kill! But what if he does? And back and forth and round and round go his thoughts.

Meanwhile Van Ness visits his principal at Richmond Hill to check on the arrangements.

"How was your banquet?" he asks Burr

"Dull as a tinker's wake. No one celebrates like the Sons of Tammany."

"Any attempt to reconcile?"

"Please!" Slowly Burr raises his palms and shakes his head. "Hamilton was in rare form, vain as a peacock, cordial to me, even cheery. We spoke briefly, but he declined to kiss my arse in front of his friends." Burr chuckles. "At one point he leapt up on the table and entertained us with a song."

“A song?”

“He’s lost his mind, Billy. He put on a show, all right, but he looked haggard and drawn. Something’s eating away at him from within.”

“What could that be?” Van Ness winks. “Have you changed your thinking at all, sir?”

Burr shrugs. “I feel no malice toward the man. Pity, but no malice.”

“Shall I inquire if anything has changed with him?”

“All is arranged. Let him make the first move. I will listen to any fair proposal with an open mind and a forgiving heart.” Burr holds open his arms. “I am a reasonable man, Billy, but he’s a slave to his own vanity. You should have seen him braying out that song! Like a twenty-year-old soldier of fortune with nothing to lose.”

“He better wake up, sir.”

“He better grow up, Billy.”

All Thursday at the office, doubt gnaws at Hamilton. He keeps up appearances by practicing law, but he’s walking a razor’s edge between the “what is” of today and the “what if” of tomorrow. Whenever he imagines the worst, he recalls the camaraderie he’s shared with Burr down through the years. Six months ago he helped Burr get a loan! So why did Burr throw Philip’s death in his face? That went too far, even for Burr.

Hamilton spends Thursday evening preparing an accounting of his finances. Even overestimating his assets and underestimating his debts, it’s clear he has not profited from public service. He pretends on the balance sheet that he’s solvent, but he knows he’s not. The new house has plunged him so deeply into debt it will take at least ten years to pay it off. As Eliza observed, his death would leave his family impoverished, and that intensifies his agony. Until next Wednesday he wants only to be with Eliza, away from all the distractions, to think, to pray, and to ask—he shudders even to think of it—for Philip’s forgiveness. Despite all of the reasons to call off this

“interview,” the need to avenge Philip’s assassination draws him inexorably, hypnotically, toward Weehawken.

On Friday afternoon, Hamilton rides up Broadway, past the Churches’ mansion on Robinson Street, through Greenwich Village, across the pastures and meadows of the Bowery, and into the orchards and forests of upper Manhattan. If next Wednesday’s events turn out well, this grandiose mixture of fear and elation will seem like melodrama, but today how he suffers! Adrenaline quickens his heart while it weakens his limbs. His vision has a preternatural clarity. As if in a fairy tale, he sees the farmland and forests and streams with mill wheels creaking and splashing, the wayside inns, the small docks and boat liveries along the river’s shore as the sun descends behind the rusted crags of New Jersey’s Palisades. If he must leave this earth, he vows, he will remember it all just this way. For no apparent reason, he finds himself sobbing. Momentarily, he feels as though he’s floating outside the life that hums and throbs all around him, and he realizes with crushing sorrow that it will go on unabated even when he is gone. After a time, his head clears and he berates himself for such emotion. Clearly, Burr will not shoot to kill, he tells himself for the hundredth time. He must face Burr’s pistol, but surely he will be all right! Burr must appreciate that to kill Hamilton would be suicidal for his own political future. No, Hamilton tells himself, he will not seek to wriggle out. He will not weaken. He will gird his loins like a biblical hero, and go forth into battle. He will face Burr on the dueling ground, and he will find some respite and peace because at last Philip’s death will be vindicated.

This feeling of unreality intensifies when he arrives home. Alex, Johnny, Jimmy, and Will, and even Little Phil, are all movement and chatter in the yard. Little Eliza “helps” the maids make pastries in the kitchen, her cheeks dusted with flour. When Eliza greets him, her eyes search his, and he can tell she suspects he has failed to call off the interview. An involuntary shiver runs through him under her knowing gaze. Last weekend she reached out so lovingly to bring him safely back from the precipice, but now she seems

doubtful. Will she ask him again? As they discuss all the work to be done for the party, their communication is unnatural and stilted. Perhaps he is imagining it, though?

Running counter to the silent drama of her questioning gazes, the housewarming party looms like a great wall of water bearing down on them. The antic preparations keep them busy, and Eliza refrains from asking any but practical questions. She supervises readying the chambers for overnight guests, sends one of the new maids to a nearby farm for cream and strawberries, and gives the older boys pans to go to the ridge to pick blueberries. When they finally have a minute alone, Eliza crosses the room to embrace him and look into his eyes. She's waiting for him to tell her. He hopes she does not feel his shudder.

"Can I do anything else for you, darling?" he asks. Eliza's eyes are wide as she searches beneath his words for an assurance, but then one of the maids appears to ask for more instructions, so Eliza flashes a sweet smile and thinks better of opening up the subject.

"Perhaps you could go to Bixby's for the fish?"

Hamilton struggles to keep his mask in place and is incredulous but grateful that Eliza doesn't seem to sense his terror or his duplicity.

"Why don't you take Angelica with you? The poor dear hasn't been out all day."

"I'd love to."

Hamilton finds his silent Angel upstairs, staring out the window, holding her rag doll in the crook of her arm. Her luminous blue eyes stare ahead vacant and unseeing while he ties on her bonnet. He leads her to the stables, where the groom backs a curry-combed horse into the traces of the gig. They are soon trotting toward the river.

"Are you excited about the party?"

"Oh, yes, Papa. What time will Philip be home?"

Hamilton gently touches her hand. "After supper perhaps."

“I miss him, Papa. I miss him so much.”

“So do I, Angel. So do we all.”

They bounce downhill on the rutted road to the broad, shimmering river and the boat livery run by crusty old Tom Bixby. Bixby heaves a wooden ice chest packed with trout, salmon, and eel into the back of the gig, but won't take a cent of payment. This is his donation to the housewarming. When Hamilton insists, old Tom touches his shoulder. “We are all in your debt, General.”

“Nonsense!”

“It's true.”

Bixby's touch jolts Hamilton into a fresh realization that this sleepwalking dream is real, and it soon may be swallowed up and ended. He drives home beside his silent, pale daughter and wonders what her life would have been if only ...

Guests begin arriving on Saturday, just after noon. At three o'clock, the musicians start playing in the new gazebo. Elegantly dressed in a light blue satin coat and breeches, Hamilton moves gracefully among clusters of his guests. Laughter and pleasant chatter rise above the violin music in the arbor as the new American aristocracy relaxes in a French elegance no longer possible on a continent ravaged by Napoleon. As the sun sets, dinner will be served *alfresco*. Ladies wearing the latest metallic Parisian sheaths converse quietly in candlelight. The low laughter of confident, prosperous men pervades the wood as they brag of their deals, and regale each other with jokes and stories.

Hamilton wanders through this candlelit tableau of music and laughter in the woods, which seem enchanted tonight. At one point, gruff old Gouverneur Morris seizes his arm. "Come with me!" Hamilton follows him out to a knoll where, far to the west, the pale blue disk of a new moon hangs above the river. "I hear disturbing news," Morris growls. "You must pull out of this, Hamilton. Burr is a dangerous man. Make peace with him at once, whatever it costs."

"Too late, Uncle."

"Well, boycott the event, avoid him altogether. You can't cross the river. If you do, you won't come back."

"I gave my word."

Morris twitches, looks him in the eye: “And what will become of your family if you’re shot?” He flings out an arm toward the elegant party alight in this forest like a midsummer night’s dream. “Will your pride shield you from a pistol ball?”

“Why, you will care for them, of course.”

“Don’t be flippant, man!” Morris growls. “I’m in earnest!”

“Let’s not spoil the evening,” Hamilton says. “This dark business can wait.”

“No, damn it, it cannot!” Morris clutches his arm and pulls him uncomfortably close to his face. “I tell you, Hamilton, you must end this. I am in earnest!”

“So am I.” Hamilton drops his smiling facade and momentarily lets his old friend see the horror behind it. “Don’t you think I have considered every way to avoid this?”

“Look at you! You’re about to collapse. You should go to bed and sleep for a week.”

“There is no way to avoid it.”

“Of course there is. You have a newspaper! Write it all up and publish it as you did your affair with that godawful woman. Morgan Lewis beat Burr so badly he can never raise his head again, and he calls you out? Who cares what Burr thinks? And the pretext of his challenge? You maligned him with some unspecified slur? Men will see that it is only sour grapes at his loss. Honor is not even invoked.”

“You sang a different tune last winter.” Hamilton is quiet, composed. His eyes blaze at the irony. “I was out of the battle completely, and you ordered me back to the front. Well, here we are.”

“Don’t lay this at my door! I never advocated a duel, much less with a scoundrel like Burr.”

“It is my decision. I need to make this right. Philip went to his duel, and I will go to mine.”

Morris sputters, “The two have nothing to do with each other!”

“Yes, actually they do.” Hamilton holds up his palm. “Please, no more.” The raw agony in Hamilton’s face is a stark contrast to the elegance of his clothing.

“Forgive yourself for what happened to Philip,” Morris says. “Be a husband to your wife and a father to your children.”

“I will face Burr’s pistol, and I will abide the outcome.”

“Well, then, you’d better shoot to kill.”

Hamilton shrugs. “I fully expect to return, but if I do not, promise me you will care for Eliza and the children.”

“How long has it been since you fired a gun?”

“I hunt with my sons and the dogs all the time.”

“Not a long gun, man! A pistol.”

“Fifteen, twenty years?”

“Well, practice. Take him down straight, or your children will grow up orphans.”

“I don’t need to practice. I plan to throw away my shot.”

Morris explodes. “You’re mad! If that’s your intent, apologize immediately. *Delope* is as dishonorable as an apology, and far more dangerous. If you cross that river, you must shoot to kill! Burr has everything to gain and nothing to lose.”

“My mind is made up, Uncle. Please, no more on the subject.”

“Lunacy! Grief over Philip has twisted your mind.”

Walking back into the candlelit dream of violin music and laughter, they appear to be two friends ambling toward dinner discussing Raphael or Da Vinci.

Near the bandstand Hamilton sees Eliza, lovely, happy, and radiant among her guests. As he joins her, she reaches for his hand. He proudly takes it, and they stand together, the happy American couple, prosperous with

many children and a new home, wealthy in friends, accomplishments, and good taste.

“Savor this, my darling,” Eliza whispers to him, and she kisses him on the neck just below his ear. A profound sorrow overtakes him in the sweet violin music. He has not been forthright and she must sense it. Back and forth his mind goes once more. Surely, Burr is only posturing and won’t shoot to kill. But what if he is wrong, as he was so horribly wrong with Philip after Ricky Price returned unscathed? No, the gamble is too dear! He will find a way to call it off! And he stands there smiling, holding Eliza’s hand, surrounded by the affectionate admiration of his closest friends, feeling hollow and sick to his soul.

On Sunday morning, the Hamiltons enjoy a farewell breakfast with their overnight guests. After the coaches and gigs have rolled away, Hamilton collects his family beneath a tree at the verge of the forest and he reads the Episcopal service. He prays fervently for divine assistance and guidance. All that afternoon he wanders the grounds, playing with the children and puttering in his garden. At sunset he sits against a tree in the orchard, folding his hands behind his head. In the distance the sleepy river flows, and farmers’ fields are pale blue and green with oats and corn, and the cicadas are loud in the ripening summer wind. The two youngest find him. Little Eliza and Little Phil climb on him, laughing and kissing him with their innocent lips. They contort his face with their baby hands and laugh when he gives them raspberries. Perfect innocence, perfect joy. Then off they bounce, chasing Phil’s little lamb across the meadow. Despite the warm sun, Hamilton suddenly shivers as he imagines this time and this place without him, his beautiful children forced to wander the world as he did, fatherless. How can he risk ruining their lives?

Monday, Hamilton is up early and writing in his study. Eliza pulls on her robe and goes down, startling him as she enters. She senses his annoyance before he can catch himself, before he smiles and reaches to embrace her. He

has his saddlebags packed, his horse saddled outside, and he's ready to depart for town.

She leans down, takes his face in her hands and stares into his eyes. "Is everything all right?" A piteous expression appears in his face. "Tell me!" she grips his shoulder. "Have you resolved the situation?"

"I am in the process."

"My God, Hamilton!" She encircles his head with her arms and holds him to her breasts. "What does it take? Just refuse the challenge."

"It's more complicated than that."

Eliza releases him. "No, it isn't!" She struggles to modulate her voice. "It's either-or, yes or no. There's no middle ground. What will become of us if you're shot?"

"It will never get to that."

"It will if you don't stop it!" She steps back to face him. "How can you even toy with the possibility? What we went through with Philip! To lose you would be ten times, a hundred times, worse. And all our friends so elegant and happy Saturday night? You'd turn them into mourners?"

Hamilton winces. "Many say Philip died to protect my honor, that I was the coward, that I am a coward." He looks at her for a long moment. "You said it yourself."

"Nonsense!"

"You did."

She softens and clutches his arm. "I was angry! I didn't mean it, darling! You fought a war, you've faced impossible opposition in ratifying the Constitution, in practicing law, in fighting for freedom of the press. Men's opinions must be informed by the principles you uphold. Your accomplishments. Not some barbaric ritual! No duel can alter what you have done or who you are! Who challenged you?"

Hamilton puts his hands on her shoulders. "Please, Eliza, let me resolve this in my own way. Trust me."

Her eyes are fierce and glistening. She has reached her limit. “Well, do it, then! I don’t care who is watching or who will judge you or what your political friends may think. Honor won’t matter if you’re dead! Think of your children! Imagine them stumbling alone through the world without a father’s guidance.”

Hamilton is white now. He reaches to embrace her, but she places her left palm on his chest and holds him away. “Please!” She shakes her head violently, her eyes intensely gleaming, her voice is low and husky. “Come to your senses and resolve this thing, whatever it is! You frighten me, Hamilton. I need to hear that this is over. Over, Hamilton. Please! Now go into town and fix it.”

Beneath her small hand Hamilton’s chest is heaving. They are nearly toe to toe and their eyes lock. Finally Hamilton breaks the gaze.

“Go,” she repeats and points to the door.

“I will,” he says quietly.

“Yes,” she says, “do.”

She removes her other hand from his chest and he picks up his saddlebags and walks out of his study, out of the house, and down the steps to his horse. He climbs into the saddle and canters away.

It's Tuesday night and again he can't sleep. Last night he lay awake in his pied-à-terre, grappling still with how to call off the interview. He planned to summon Pendleton all day yesterday, but found himself fully occupied until the day was gone. All day today it was the same. He has never been a procrastinator, yet somehow he can't seem to act on his promise to Eliza. The dark riptide of Philip's death draws him inexorably out to sea.

Hamilton takes the pistol case from beneath his bed and puts it on the table. He opens it and examines each of the pistols in the candlelight. Which one did Philip hold? Which one shot the lethal ball into his side? Seeing the gleaming filigree and feeling it beneath his fingertips strangely comforts him. Attending this interview will fulfill the promise he made at Philip's grave that rainy, frozen morning. As the rash young officer who once brandished his sword and led his men into battle, he will answer the call. The matter will be tried and decided, as of old, by combat. Burr cannot shoot to kill, he tells himself yet again, sick with repeating it, and so his trepidation and anxiety are unfounded. This is Burr, not Eacker. It's not an either-or. He will go. He will do what is necessary to protect his honor, and he will not fail his family, as Eliza fears. It gives him comfort to make this decision once and for all.

He'll be on the river before sunrise. He's giddy with nerves, as he's always felt the night before battle. "What will be will be," he tells himself, but he cannot shake this intense feeling of dread. He will cross the river,

stand, present, and raise his pistol to the sky, and Burr will do what Burr will do. Surely, seeing his pistol raised out of harm's way, Burr will do likewise. Surely, he will not shoot to kill. But of course Hamilton cannot know for sure. This is the same sickness unto death Philip felt, he knows, and there is comfort in that. He will not cower or quail. He will follow his son's example and win honor. But what of his vow to Eliza? Around and around and around it spins in his mind.

To occupy the rest of his night, Hamilton sits at his desk and writes out a will, and then a statement to be opened in the event of his death. In the statement he asserts that he has no malice toward Burr, that he is morally opposed to dueling, and that he is going only because honor demands it. He states that to avoid harming Burr, he will fire into the air. When he finishes the statement, he writes Eliza a letter to answer her why he has not extricated himself from the duel, and then he writes her a poem, a "hymn" he entitles it. The peace and happiness he feels when he thinks of Eliza buoy him up during this dark hour, but remembering their last farewell, tears come to his eyes. He lies back on the daybed and rests his eyes, hoping that sleep will come.

It's still dark when he awakens. While he dresses, the serving boy brews coffee. He drinks it quickly, slips the boy a coin, then leaves to walk alone through the early morning city with the box under his arm. Shadows are long and the streets are damp and quiet. A pleasant summer wind blows from the west off the river. He passes a tavern keeper sweeping sawdust out his door. Riders trot by as if in slow motion and a cock crows somewhere among the sheds and outhouses.

Hosack and Pendleton are waiting at the dock. Mulligan is talking with the other oarsmen. Hamilton greets the doctor and the judge, then goes over to Mulligan who is brightly dressed in a sky-blue coat and strawberry waistcoat, set off by a green polka-dot bandana around his throat. His expression is stern.

"Have you practiced, General?"

“Practiced?”

“Your aim? With a target?”

Hamilton shakes his head.

“When you hear the signal, you must shoot to kill!”

“I will make that decision on the dueling ground.”

“Listen to me, General, please!” Mulligan grabs both his arms. “I watched Philip throw away his shot, and I had to carry him from the ground. Do not repeat his mistake. Today it’s Burr or you. Shoot to kill.”

“It really is none of your concern, old man,” Hamilton says lightly and starts to turn away. Mulligan pulls him back and Hamilton is startled by the force of his grip.

“What is wrong with you?” Mulligan demands.

“I beg your pardon.”

“You were filled with piss and vinegar as a lad! What’s happened to you? These Republicans shot your son down like a dog, and you did nothing to avenge him. Everyone watched and waited for two years, and you did nothing. If you don’t shoot first today, Burr will shoot you too! Grow a spine!”

“We should be underway.” Hamilton pulls his arm from Mulligan’s grip, gazes out over the river, and moves toward the boat.

Mulligan grabs his arm again and roughly turns him around. “You’re not throwing away your shot! Tell me you’re not!”

“Come along, old friend, let us go.”

“He’ll kill you, Hamilton! Everyone who knows him says so!”

“Not even Burr can be that stupid,” Hamilton says lightly. As they board, Hosack fixes Hamilton with a grim, disapproving look. Hamilton hands the pistol case to Pendleton, and Mulligan sullenly helps him into the barge. The men take their places, lift their oars, and cast off.

Burr awakens stiff and cramped on the sofa in his study. Billy Van Ness

is shaking him gently, and accidentally kicks over a wine bottle on the floor.
“Mr. Vice President!”

Too much wine again last night. How his head aches! It’s still dark, but there’s a pencil line of blue in the eastern sky. Burr groans and stretches like a tomcat.

“Ah, Billy-boy, what a glorious day to die!”

“Please, sir, don’t talk like that.”

“One must face facts. Hamilton was always a crack shot.”

“We could compromise, sir, even at this late hour.”

“I confess, I was certain he would have wriggled out by now. The day is young. Let’s see what the morning brings.”

Burr is cocky as he walks to the river. If Hamilton quails, he will generously consider a compromise, but not without an apology in some public form.

The barge is waiting with four beefy oarsmen. They trade pleasantries as if they’re off on a picnic. Soon they are on the river with the current against them, running out to sea. Burr puts his nose up. A few deep breaths of clean air helps the jangle of his hangover, and he feels rather merry.

Other barges with sweeping oars are moving slowly against the current and a sloop is tacking upriver. Downstream, graceful brigs move on the tide toward Staten Island and the Narrows, and run before the wind to the open sea. Squinting, Burr sees a speck half a mile downriver, Hamilton’s barge, no doubt. Despite his headache and mild nausea, Burr is chatty and energized. He clears his throat and hawks over the side. A big breakfast will be just the ticket when he gets back. If he gets back.

Weehawken, a pebbled beach cleansed by currents of wind and water, is lit gloriously pink by the rising sun. The snubbed bow of Burr’s barge rakes to a stop on the pebbles. Van Ness tells the bargemen, “Stay here unless we summon you,” and he climbs onto dry land, using his black umbrella as a cane. He helps Burr over the gunwale. The two hike up the path through the

brush while birds twitter in the leaves above. The ground is strewn with windfall branches and they kick them clear of the field of honor.

“This shouldn’t take long,” Van Ness says.

“Never does,” Burr says.

Coming from farther downriver, Hamilton watches Burr’s boat land. As in his youth when battle lines closed, a heady fear now quickens his nerves. He feels the old tingling in his arms, in his throat, in his loins, and it’s unsettling, until the clarity comes. All of his senses preternaturally sharpen. He breathes more deeply and looks along the coast of Manhattan. “This will be a great city someday, Mulligan.”

“Already is, General.” Mulligan takes another stroke. “Already goddamn is.”

The other oarsmen row hard, too, their strong backs at work against the stream, and soon they approach the landing place. As Hamilton’s barge grinds to a halt on the pebbled beach, Mulligan jumps into the water, hauls the boat up on the stones, and then helps Pendleton and Hosack ashore. As he helps Hamilton over the side, Mulligan whispers: “Remember, shoot right off, and shoot to kill.”

“Thank you, old friend.” Hamilton’s eyes seem especially blue this morning.

“You should wait here,” Pendleton tells Hosack.

The doctor nods. “Call if you need me.”

Hamilton is pale but calm and collected. He looks into Hosack’s eyes and Hosack’s expression is inscrutable. Pendleton motions for the case and Hosack hands it to him.

“Remember!” Mulligan winks and makes a gun with his thumb and forefinger.

Hamilton nods and starts up the narrow path. His head is clear, his purpose unflinching: when he hears “Present!” he will raise his pistol and throw away his shot. This is the only way he can preserve his honor and not

harm Burr. Perhaps Burr will follow his lead, perhaps not. Hamilton has told Morris, Pendleton, and now Mulligan. He has written it in a farewell letter to Eliza: “rather I should die innocent than live guilty,” but he has not told Burr. He shakes his head—he must remain present and focused here in the moment. It’s a beautiful day, the woods are alive with birds, the mighty river’s flowing and the soft summer breeze feels good upon his skin.

As Van Ness starts back down the path from the ledge, he sees Hamilton and Pendleton climbing up. He dashes back to Burr. “They’re here!”

“Good.” Burr bends three times at the knees and extends his arms out and in, out and in, to limber up.

A moment later, Pendleton emerges from the brush, carrying the pistol case.

“Good morning, Judge,” Burr greets him with a slight bow.

“Mr. Vice President,” Pendleton says.

Hamilton is behind him. “Colonel,” he nods to Burr.

“General,” Burr says.

Both men are dressed in black silk coats, silk being thought to repel pistol balls. Burr wears a top hat, Hamilton a tricorn.

Van Ness and Pendleton measure out ten paces. As they confer, Hamilton looks up to where the foliage parts to show the sky. Sunshine is bursting in the leaves above, and birds are twittering. It occurs to Hamilton that in person Burr has always been charming and affable, never disagreeable.

Burr watches him for a twitch or a tremble, but Hamilton is completely at ease. Their eyes meet. Burr tries to read his expression, asking himself, is he actually going through with this? But Hamilton is completely impassive, holding the moral high ground with a steady eye until Burr looks away.

Twice, Van Ness tosses a coin, once for position, and again for which second will call the shots. Pendleton says “Heads,” and then “Heads” again, and wins both times. An omen. Since Hamilton wins both tosses, he will dictate the terms. Hamilton bows. Burr bows in return. Hamilton might

actually go through with this! Surprising, but so be it.

Pendleton places the pistol case on the ground in the middle of the clearing, opens it, and hands one of the guns to Van Ness. Billy examines it, a work of art with long walnut handles and gold mountings on tooled brass barrels. Pendleton offers him a charge of powder, chamois for wadding, and a ball. The seconds load the pistols in unison, sliding the ramrods down, and then hand the loaded pistols to their principals.

Burr takes the pistol in his right hand. The grip fits comfortably and the balance is pleasing. His bowels grumble and his head clears. It was ever thus riding into battle, the jangling nerves, the shaking limbs, then the warrior's calm. Now it's all coming in a rush, that delicious energy, flooding his chest and limbs. He feels alive and powerful and happy to be once more at the precipice.

Hamilton is composed. He removes his hat and places it on the ground. He hefts his pistol and wonders again if this was the one that Philip held, or is it the one that killed him. He hardly hears Pendleton talking.

Since he won the toss, Hamilton opts for the western position, the higher ground. Pendleton scowls. "Are you sure, General? With the sun glaring on the river?" Hamilton nods. It's an odd choice. The sun, glancing off the river, will be in his eyes. Burr will be backlit, and Hamilton, standing against the rising sun, will be illuminated as if in the lime lights of a stage.

Pendleton speaks: "Gentlemen, I will ask whether you are ready, and when you answer in the affirmative, I will say 'Present,' and you will present. After that, fire when you please. If one fires before the other, the opposite second shall say, 'One, two, three, fire!' and you shall fire then, or lose your shot. Is that clear?" Burr and Hamilton nod. Both men turn sideways to reduce the size of the target. Hamilton squints. Burr is indistinct in the glare. Hamilton holds the heavy pistol in his right hand and points it at the ground.

"Ready?" Pendleton asks.

"Ready," both answer.

“Present,” Pendleton says.

Their eyes lock. Both men hold their pistols down their right legs.

Slowly Burr raises his pistol. Slowly Hamilton raises his. Burr points his gun at Hamilton. Hamilton raises his higher, past his chest, then up over his shoulder. The arrogance of this offends Burr. Why is Hamilton always so cocky? Smug and ridiculous, singing on a tabletop, his gun now aimed above Burr’s head, taunting him with an open target. Burr squeezes his trigger and is startled by the jerk in his hand and the loud report.

There’s a cloud of smoke and Hamilton is hit. His right forefinger clinches and he discharges his gun and rises on his toes. Searing pain roars through him like fire. He spins halfway around, his right arm at an odd angle, drops the pistol and crumples to the ground.

Burr cries out and starts toward him, but Van Ness holds him back.

“No, sir, no! We must leave!” Van Ness grabs the pistol from Burr and throws it toward the pistol case.

Burr shoves Van Ness aside. “I must speak with him! It was never my intent ...”

“No!” Van Ness insists. He grapples with Burr, drags him away.

Pendleton’s on his knees beside Hamilton. “Doctor!” he screams. “Doctor!!!”

At the verge of the trees with Van Ness hauling him away, Burr jerks free to look back. Van Ness opens the black umbrella to hide Burr’s face from Hosack, who’s now barreling up the pathway. They pass him in the brush of the narrow path and hurry to their barge. Van Ness positions the open umbrella so that Hamilton’s bargemen cannot see Burr. Burr’s oarsmen shove off, and soon they’re out on the river.

“You hurt him,” Van Ness said.

“He wouldn’t back down! What could I do? Damn the man! He taunted me! He invited it!” Burr says with disgust. “Of all the stupid stunts!” He points his finger in the air. “*Delope?* What an insult!” Despite his anger Burr

keeps turning back, squinting to see through the foliage of the ledge below the Palisades.

As they row into the current, the splashing oars and waves gently lapping at the boat calm Burr. He breathes slowly, deeply, and closes his eyes. His dull headache still throbs, but it's clearing. His ears are still ringing with gunfire, and he still smells the stink of the black powder. He tries to forget how pitiful Hamilton looked crumpled on the ground, like a pathetic little doll. It truly is a splendid morning. A big breakfast will be just the thing to buck him up.

Pendleton is kneeling at Hamilton's side.

"Do you know me, General?"

Hamilton's eyes open slowly. He nods, reaches for Pendleton's hand. "Nate," he whispers. "My good friend Nate." His grip is weak. He's slipping away. The pain in his side burns worse than anything he's ever felt. He can barely speak and he can't move his legs. Hosack bursts through the underbrush, kneels, and rubs the back of Hamilton's hand.

"Can you feel pain?"

Hamilton nods and looks up. His eyes are startlingly blue in his deathly pale face. "This is a mortal wound, Doctor."

"Oh, my God!" Pendleton stands up and turns this way and that. He clenches his fists and begins to sob.

Hosack squeezes Hamilton's leg. "Can you feel this?"

"No."

"The ball has severed your spine."

Hamilton nods.

Mulligan bursts into the clearing with the other bargemen behind him. When he sees Hamilton on the ground, he brays, "Noooo!" and sprints across the clearing. Hamilton tries to lift his hand in greeting, but his eyes close and he slumps over and cannot speak. He can hear them fussing around him. This

is not as he imagined it, this dying, a pain so intense it's disorienting, but he's detached from it, too, lifted into a delirious realm outside of it, above it. He knows now what Philip felt. Everything slows. The pain welcomes him to a place of peace where there is no fear, no doubt. He feels the dawn of redeeming light and hope, and hears a vague humming. Justice, he thinks, certainty and balance, all waiting for him in that peaceful place with Philip. Philip!

He opens his eyes and sucks in air. Everything seems so slow and far away. Far, far above him, he hears the birds. He watches a breeze stir the leaves in the tree. From some distant place far beyond his pain the beneficent sun is warm and sweet, but everything else is so far away, echoing, fading.

"He's out. Help me get him to the boat," Hosack says. Mulligan lifts Hamilton under the arms, and Hosack and an oarsman each take a leg. Pendleton and the other men collect the pistols and pistol case. They carry Hamilton down the path to the water and lay him gently on his folded coat in the bottom of the barge. As soon as they are all in, Mulligan pushes off toward New York. The sun is climbing into a clear summer sky and seagulls screech, catching the golden light. A soft wind breathes on the water, drifting toward the hills and farms of Manhattan.

Pendleton sits in the prow, sobbing, his face buried in his hands. Hosack kneels beside Hamilton, rubbing hartshorn on his wrists. The fresh breeze awakens Hamilton and he looks around. "My vision is indistinct," he whispers hoarsely.

"Stay with us, General," Hosack says. He gives him a sip from a canteen. The boatmen row in a comforting rhythm, Mulligan pressing his lips together, trying not to curse.

After a time, Hosack uses smelling salts to bring him around again. Hamilton jerks his face away from the stinging salts, and struggles to raise his head. "Take care of my pistol," he says. "I don't know if it fired. It may go off and do mischief."

Pendleton checks both flintlocks and stows the pistols in the wooden case.

“Can you feel anything now?” Hosack asks.

“Not below the waist.”

The oarsmen pull mightily toward Manhattan. Sloops are tacking in the current against the Palisades. Downriver, a tall square-rigger’s sails fill majestically, its pennants fluttering as it glides through the Narrows and out to sea.

As prearranged, the barge heads directly to the riverside mansion of William Bayard, a wealthy merchant. Bayard is waving from his dock, hoping for a happy return. As they near, Bayard calls, “Is everything all right?”

“The general’s been shot,” Pendleton calls.

Bayard rushes up to his house. As the boat nears the dock, Mulligan leaps into waist-deep water and struggles ashore, pulling the boat up to the dock. Pendleton splashes in, too, running up the grass to fetch servants.

Hosack tells Mulligan, “Speak with Bayard and let Mrs. Hamilton be sent for. Let the event be relayed to her gradually. Give her hope.”

“Done,” Mulligan nods.

Bayard’s servants run a cot down to the dock, and with Hosack guiding, they gently lift Hamilton onto it. They carry him through the garden, into the house, and up to a second-story room overlooking the river. Sunshine pours through the room’s high windows and sheer curtains billow in the breeze. The men lay him on the bed, and Hamilton blacks out.

Eliza knows when she hears a coach coming fast up the drive. “No!” she whispers, going to the window. She can’t quite discern William Bayard’s coat of arms on the door of the coach. Her trembling hands fly up to her cheeks, which have gone pale. “No, please, God, no!” She goes out onto the porch.

Bayard’s head groomsman pulls the horses to a stop, climbs down from his seat, then up the steps with a look of embarrassment.

“G’morning, ma’am.”

“How can I help you?”

The man shuffles and looks away. “Begging your pardon, but I am sent to tell you that the general’s been hurt, and you are to come back with me at once.”

“Hurt? How?”

“Uh, ... shot.” The man folds and unfolds his cap, looks off over the meadows, and spins the cap in his hands.

“In a duel?” The man looks down and says nothing. She grasps him fiercely by the shoulders. “Was he shot in a duel?”

The man’s face is bright red as he nods. “Yes’m.” Eliza staggers back and reaches for the porch railing. The man shuffles some more and chews his lip. “Mr. Bayard sent me to fetch you’n the children.”

The children! Angelica’s upstairs in her room, the others are flying about

the orchard, carefree as meadowlarks. She must collect the children and dress them, dress them for what? A deathbed farewell?

“You promised, Hamilton!” she thinks, trying to hold back her rage and sorrow, “You promised!” A prayer for a miracle rises to her lips, then a prayer for mercy, but she knows what awaits her because she’s lived through this before. “Please, God,” she silently begs, “don’t let him die! Please, God, please, don’t take him away!” Tears fill her eyes and she swallows hard before a sob escapes.

“I will call them,” she says to the driver. The sour taste of bile rises in the back of her throat.

In an hour, they’re trotting along the post road in Bayard’s coach with its gilded coat of arms on the door. The older children are quiet, while the younger ones are jolly, thinking they’re on a holiday, going to town to see their papa. Eliza wants to weep, but tries to project calm and strength for the children. Surely, the merciful Lord won’t take Hamilton from her now, in his prime, the union saved, their new home built, and so many happy years, so many lovely decades ahead to watch their children grow, their grandchildren born, the easy companionship of their sunset years ...

The resplendent summer day seems cruelly mocking. The forests and streams, the well-kept farms with cows at pasture, crops in the sun: the ordered, bounteous world that speeds past the coach window is surreal to her. No one out there in that sweet, indifferent world knows the terror and the sorrow she feels. No one cares. What cuts most deeply is his betrayal. He promised, but he went to the duel anyway!

“Mama?” Little Phil asks, his perfect little face twisted with worry. “Why are you crying?”

“I’m fine, Philip. Don’t worry, we’ll be with Papa soon.”

Servants meet them in Bayard’s cobblestone drive to lead them through the gardens, into the great hall, and up the sweeping staircase to the back of the mansion, where tall French windows open onto the river. Eliza gathers

her seven children in the hallway and places Jimmy and Alex in charge of gaunt Angelica and the younger ones. She whispers for them to wait outside and not make a peep while she goes in to speak with Papa. The children are cowed by the lavish surroundings and the bustling servants, but mainly by their mother's unusual demeanor.

Eliza enters the chamber and closes the door behind her. Dr. Hosack's sitting at the bedside, his hand on Hamilton's wrist, taking his pulse. Hamilton is conscious, but is so very white. He's still dressed in his shirt with frilled collar and cuffs, his abdomen soaked with blood. When he sees Eliza, he raises his hand and weakly beckons to her.

"Eliza!" His voice is scratchy. She rushes to the bed and falls on her knees.

"Why?" she asks. He tries to smile, to shrug his shoulders, but he can hardly move. He bites his lip, and tears well up and begin to flow.

"Why, Hamilton?" she pleads, taking his right hand, shaking it. "You promised!" She's sobbing, squeezing his hand. "Who did this to you?"

"The vice president."

"Burr?" she howls. "Why would you answer a challenge from Burr?"

He tries to smile. He pushes away some thought or explanation with his free hand and tries to swallow. "The children?"

"Out in the hall. They're scared to death."

This completely unmans him. His wounded midsection starts to heave with sobs while more tears course down his cheeks.

"My God, Hamilton, if you couldn't think of me, couldn't you think of them?" Eliza clutches his arm. Tears are pouring from her eyes. She pulls out a handkerchief and wipes her eyes and her nose. He looks at her, his eyes now a soft pale blue, begging for forgiveness.

"I did ... think of them. What legacy ... could I leave them? Honor demanded ..." he whispers, as if this is some noble bequest.

"Honor? To be shot in cold blood by a scoundrel?" She fights to control

her rage. This is not going well, and is surely no scene for children to witness. Eliza leaves the bedside to ask one of the servants to take them downstairs, then she returns. Outside the long French windows, the river sparkles as the tide runs in.

Calmer now, she knows it's futile to ask questions. She takes up his right hand, kisses it, and weeps into his palm. She's moaning softly and rocking back and forth when the hall door opens and her sister rushes in. Eliza stands to face Angelica.

"Oh, Eliza! Oh, my God, no!" Angelica wraps her arms around her little sister, tears flowing freely, then she pivots and falls to her knees at the bedside. "Hamilton!" Angelica grasps his hand and looks up at Eliza. "You didn't stop him?" She turns accusingly: "Hamilton! What have you done?" Angelica's sobbing hysterically and Hamilton tries to calm her, his hand cupping her cheek. But Angelica throws off his hand and stands to embrace her sister again. She is enraged.

"You have widowed your wife today, and orphaned your children."

"Please, Mrs. Church!" Dr. Hosack says. "Control yourself or I shall ask you to leave."

"You men! You men and your ... pride ... and your ... your guns!"

Eliza hushes Angelica in low, soothing tones, and asks her to go to the children. After Angelica leaves, the room is quiet and a servant brings a chair for Eliza. She sits beside Hamilton, where she can fan him and wring cool compresses in a basin and place them on his forehead. Every few minutes, a wave of despair rises and washes over her, and she has to pause and cover her sobs.

As the afternoon passes, Hamilton requests the last rites and Bayard sends to Trinity Church for Bishop Moore. Hearing that it is Hamilton who's dying, Moore hurries over. Gouverneur Morris is at the bedside now, and they've dressed Hamilton in a clean linen shirt. As Moore greets him, Hamilton whispers: "I should like to receive communion, Bishop."

“You were wounded in a duel, General. Dueling is a form of self-slaughter and I cannot administer the sacrament to you.”

Hamilton gazes into midair, then closes his eyes and swallows. His voice is soft and raspy. “I went to the field determined not to take his life. I implore you, sir, and pledge that, if I survive, I will repudiate dueling.”

Morris is heard from the corner of the room: “You’d deny a man consolation in his final hour? What kind of religion is this?”

Eliza touches Morris’s hand. “It’s all right.”

“No, it’s not.” Morris stumps over on his peg leg and confronts Moore. “For God’s sake, man, he’s dying. Give him the sacraments!”

Moore kneels at the bedside and the others back away.

“Tell me your confession.”

Hamilton closes his eyes and whispers: “I met Colonel Burr with a fixed resolution not to harm him. I forgive all that has happened to me.”

Eliza does not understand it. If he intended not to harm Burr, why did he go? It defies reason to stand and bluff a man with a loaded weapon in your hand. Surely, Burr believed he would shoot to kill?

After Moore gives absolution and communion, Hamilton relaxes against the pillows. He breathes deeply, allowing the host to dissolve on his tongue. Eliza goes to him. “Grace,” he sighs, “rich grace.” He clasps his hands in prayer, and Eliza folds her small hands over his. The bishop anoints Hamilton’s forehead, murmurs the last rites, and then quietly departs.

As afternoon shadows lengthen into evening, Eliza remains at his bedside, holding his hand. Callers enter and she greets them solemnly, welcoming his friends, giving Hamilton her most loving smile, smoothing his forehead. For the short time left she wants him all to herself, but as always, she shares her time with him so he can say good-bye to his friends. Despite her best efforts, occasionally she breaks down.

The setting sun, fiery red, bathes the room in a crimson light, its flames reflected from the clouds and the flowing river. Soon the sky turns violet, and

then it is dark, and the maids enter with lighted candles.

Callers continue to stream in and out of the room until well after ten. When the last visitor departs, the maids blow out all but two candles. Eliza climbs into the bed next to her husband, and holds him so she can be close to him until the last possible moment. But as the night deepens, she feels his strength ebbing away.

In the morning, twenty people are in the room, most of them kneeling and praying. Eliza has barely slept and she's disoriented, scarcely able to track who is speaking to her. Her eyes are fixed only on her life mate, this exceptional, mercurial, impossible genius she has loved since she first saw him on horseback, alone, riding up the lane to her father's house in the rain.

"Please," Hamilton croaks, his lips cracked and dry. He moves his fingers. Eliza gives him a sip of water. "May I see the children?"

"Cover up the blood," she tells the doctor. She sends a maid to fetch her sister. Hosack, who left to sleep and has now returned, drapes a towel over the bandages that have again soaked through, and he covers the towel with the counterpane.

Angelica enters, whispers, and Eliza goes with her out in the hallway. With dismay she watches her bedraggled children walking down the hallway, solemn and wide-eyed. She arrays them in a semicircle: "Papa is going to heaven," she whispers, "to be with God, and he wants to say good-bye to you."

Even if they'd feared the worse, the older boys are staggered.

"Tell God to let him stay!" Little Phil wails.

"No, my precious lamb." She strokes his hair. "Papa must leave us soon."

"Will he see Philip?" Angelica asks.

"Yes, he will," her mother assures her. "Soon he'll be with Philip and

with Grandma and with Aunt Peggy, too.”

“I want to go with him,” Angelica says. “I want to see Philip!”

“Why won’t God let him stay?” Little Phil asks.

“Hush, now. Come inside and say good-bye.”

Eliza leads the children into the death chamber. They are all afraid and hesitant to approach the bed until their father smiles and waves them forward. They assemble at the foot of the bed. Hamilton smiles at first, but seeing his children arrayed like this, he breaks down, which makes Eliza break down, too. Frightened by the sight of both parents weeping, the children are openly crying, or trying to hide their tears.

Eliza struggles to hold back her anger. Beneath her sorrow and her care for the children, she is furious. Hamilton brought this curse on his family, and now these little ones must grow up without a father. He promised! And it was so avoidable! Hale and healthy Monday morning, look at him by Thursday!

Hamilton motions the children closer and Eliza guides them, giving the little ones a reassuring hand.

“Papa?” Little Phil asks. “Will you take me fishing?”

Hamilton looks away and grimaces. He shakes his head, squeezes his eyes together, but tears are running out and his shoulders move with stifled sobs. The younger children have never seen their father weep, and it frightens them. Pale and somber, the older children know. They look at each other. Alexander and James and even John remember Philip’s death, and, of course, poor Angelica. Little Eliza begins to cry.

“Papa?” she asks, tugging his hand. “Get up and come home! I want to ride my pony. Queen of the Land.”

It’s more than Hamilton can take. He gasps and again closes his eyes. Eliza dries his tears with a handkerchief. “Let us say good-bye to Papa now,” and she leads them forward, one by one, for a final embrace. Her sister helps to hold the smaller ones up for a kiss. Hamilton says each name: Johnny, Jimmy, Eliza, Alexander, Willy, Little Phil, and Angelica. He kisses each

face, smooths each head of hair, and gazes intently into their eyes, imprinting the image of each child in his mind. He squeezes their arms, touches their cheeks. “Be a good boy,” he says, “and mind your mother.”

“Where are you going, Papa?” Little Phil asks.

Everyone’s crying now.

“To heaven,” Hamilton whispers. “I’m going—” he bites his lip and nods, fighting back the tears, “—to heaven.” His breast heaves with sobs.

“Can I come with you?” Little Phil asks, and he looks in panic at his brothers and sisters, who are crying above him. “Please, Papa? Let me come with you!”

Hamilton tries to smile at Little Phil, but he can’t stop his tears.

Ghostly Angelica whispers, “Can you see Philip?”

“Soon, Angel, very soon,” he assures her, “I will be with Philip. Our Philip.” They’re all crying and moaning.

Eliza lines them up at the foot of the bed for a final look. The sight of his seven children, aged twenty years to two, destroys him. “Philip,” he whispers to his missing son, and he gasps and spreads his arms and looks at the ceiling. He closes his eyes, then opens them wide to fix in his mind this portrait of his family. Then he raises his hand and waves them away. Angelica leads the children out, and Eliza goes to hold him. They look at each other, crying fresh tears, and she falls upon his breast, pounding it gently with her fist.

“Why, Hamilton? Why did you do this to us?”

He shakes his head and covers his face and sobs. Everyone in the room is crying, too.

Aunt Angelica ushers the children downstairs and out to the garden, where gouty old Morris joins them. He lets the children rap their knuckles on his wooden leg and he performs card tricks to amuse them. An hour later, Eliza comes down and takes him aside.

“He’s asking if you will give his eulogy, Uncle.”

“Of course.”

“And he gave me a message to pass along to all of your friends.”

“Yes?”

“‘Break this union, and you’ll break my heart.’ On his deathbed! His final admonition!”

Morris nods and reaches out and hugs her.

Eliza returns to the chamber for a final vigil, and at two in the afternoon, Hamilton slips quietly away. The assembled women and men wail and groan. Then all but Eliza and Angelica are escorted out. Finally free to abandon any show of stoicism, Eliza leans on his chest, hysterically pounding and shaking his lifeless body, crying, “No, don’t leave me! Please don’t leave me! O, Hamilton! Why did you do this? You promised!”

She scrambles onto the bed and frantically kisses him all over his face. Finally, she lays full-length on his cold form, as if her warmth could revive him. She sobs for long minutes until they lift her off to sit in the chair, whimpering softly. Soon she stands again and leans over him, places one hand on either side of his head, and kisses him all over his face. Tears and mucus make her face slick against his cold cheek.

Angelica touches her shoulder, and they embrace, moaning and shaking together. Hamilton’s eyes, always so sparkling and blue, now stare lifelessly at the ceiling until Hosack closes the lids and pulls the sheet over his face.

“No!” Eliza cries, struggling free of her sister. “No, please!” She fumbles for the sewing scissors in her bag and pulls the sheet aside. Hamilton is so pale, so cold, so dead. Sniffling, shaking, moaning, Eliza snips off a lock of his golden hair and presses it to her lips.

Returning from his morning jaunt across the river, Burr docks his barge at the foot of Canal Street and walks to Richmond Hill. He is sitting in his library when Alexis announces that his broker, Nathaniel Prime, has arrived to discuss a plan to stave his creditors off a bit longer.

“Set the table for two, Alexis. I will be down shortly.” Burr searches his face in the mirror. He’s deeply confused and upset by what happened at Weehawken. He didn’t row over there to kill his old colleague, but without any show of contrition or humility, what else could he do? Hamilton showed only pride and disdain, and that foolish stunt with aiming at the sky! Hamilton always had a way of getting under one’s skin. But Burr didn’t want to hurt him! He searches his face for vindication but sees only regret. No one lives forever, he tells himself with a shrug. Perhaps the wound is not so bad. He tries to forget the image of Hamilton crumpled on the ground. He seemed so small, so pathetic, like a marionette whose strings were cut. But the duel will surely allow him to reclaim some esteem and approbation.

“Sir?” he hears Alexis.

“I’m coming.”

Burr proceeds downstairs to meet his broker. It’s time to try to repair his finances. Burr is ever the charming host, witty and debonair, and they share a good breakfast. Prime departs at about ten o’clock, and only after he returns to his office on Wall Street do his business partners tell him that the vice

president just shot Alexander Hamilton.

“Impossible!” Prime insists. “Colonel Burr was at home. I just had breakfast with him.” Two partners and three business associates surround him, and insist that Burr fought a duel in the early hours before breakfast, and mortally wounded Hamilton.

“Extraordinary! He never said a word.”

While the streets of Manhattan rage with speculation as to what prompted the duel, how it was orchestrated and carried off, Burr spends a quiet day at Richmond Hill. In the afternoon Van Ness brings him news of hasty funeral plans. Red-nosed, gouty, peg-legged Gouverneur Morris will blather out a eulogy. There will be a parade, naturally. All the puffed-up civic groups, merchants, and the Society of Cincinnatus will suspend business for the day, don their uniforms, and march in gaudy procession. Burr decides he should have a peek at this outpouring of grief so he rides into town Friday the 13th. The city feels foreign to him. He later remarks to Van Ness that he never imagined there was so much black crepe in all of America.

The newspapers print accounts of the lavish funeral arrangements. The Federalists are milking this for all they can. Editors dub Burr “a BASE ASSASSIN,” criticize him for “pre-meditated, fiend-like rancor,” and hypothesize that his heart burns with “cinders raked from the fires of hell.” Burr glazes over it all with his customary irony.

“Hamilton’s ghost is stalking the night, Billy,” he tells Van Ness late Friday. “It’s the Scottish play we’re in. Banquo’s ghost, bleeding and groaning for vengeance. Still, it might behoove me to make myself scarce. Could you possibly tap our friends and collect some notes that I can negotiate abroad?”

“I will raise the necessary coinage, sir.”

“Who knew people loved the bandy rooster so?”

“I can’t understand why,” Van Ness agrees.

Burr writes to Theo’s husband that “malignant Federalists or Tories and

the embittered Clintonians all unite to excite public sympathy for Hamilton's death and indignation against his antagonist. Thousands of absurd falsehoods are circulated with industry."

Burr learns two days later that the coroner is convening a jury to hold an inquest as to whether Hamilton was murdered. Arrest warrants may soon be issued. Although he's in seclusion at Richmond Hill and knows he must leave New York, Burr has lost neither his charm nor his desire. Within a week of the shooting, his notoriety has brought him a new lover, and he glows to Theodosia about how "La G, who shows me a degree of sensibility and attachment," has effectively soothed the pain of his persecution.

The same day that the coroner's jury convenes to investigate the circumstances of Hamilton's death, Van Ness sends word that he will be at Richmond Hill with money. Burr is packing his grip and valise when he arrives.

"Why, good morning, Billy! Don't you look bright-eyed and bushy-tailed."

"I bear funds for the weary pilgrim!" Van Ness hands Burr a fat purse of coins and a fistful of banknotes. "You still have many friends, sir. And he still has many enemies."

"Ah, yes!" Burr gently slaps his cheek. "While it would be most pleasurable to dispute New York's jurisdiction over an event that occurred in New Jersey, bail would be most unlikely, and alas, my creditors would insist on lodging me in Bridewell before the crucifixion. Most inconvenient for a man to defend himself from behind bars. Accordingly, my dear friend, I must bid you adieu."

"When will you be returning?"

"Hmmm." Burr pretends to think. "Never would be too soon. As coincidence would have it, foreclosure proceedings have begun once more to deprive me of my leaky roof." He waves an arm as if the stained ceiling will come crashing down. "You need not bother to save it this time, Billy. Astor

wants it. Let him have it.” Alexis appears in the doorway in a riding jacket and tricorn. “Ready, Alexis?”

“Got my jacket, my hat, and my mouth organ, sir.” The loyal slave flashes a smile at Van Ness. “That’s all I need.”

“Where will you go, sir?”

“Points unknown. It’s a wide country, my boy, and getting wider all the time.” Burr shakes Van Ness’s hand warmly. Van Ness impulsively grabs him in an embrace.

“Good-bye, sir!

“Thank you for your assistance, my friend.” Burr extricates himself from the hug. “I shall write from the road. Just now, though, I am in a bit of a hurry. Our sheriff has a reputation for popping up without warning, and the breezy sea islands of the Carolinas beckon! Ah, the coast! Now there a man can breathe!” Burr has the old zest back, but suddenly he scowls. “I worry about you, Billy. With A.B. missing, they may implicate you as an accessory before and,” he taps the fat purse, “after the fact. I strongly suggest you follow me out of Gomorrah and learn from Lot’s poor wife. Don’t look back!”

“I’ll be fine,” Van Ness assures him.

“Well, then, *au revoir!*” Burr clasps his hand again, slaps his back in affection, then flips the saddlebags over his shoulder and bounds down the back stairs.

Van Ness steps to the window. Two mounts are tied to the hitching post in the stable yard. Van Ness watches Burr boost fat Alexis onto the saddle of a pony, then leap athletically upon his white steed. “Quixote and Sancho, I swear,” Van Ness murmurs with an amused smile and a shake of his head.

Burr looks up and sees him in the window. He lifts off his hat, wipes his forehead on his sleeve, and then waves his hat in farewell. Standing up in the stirrups, he turns in his saddle for a last look at Richmond Hill, then kicks his mount into a canter. With a last flourish of his hat, he pulls it low to hide his

face and bends over the horse's mane. The iron horseshoes clatter on the stones of his drive, and then they're off, master and slave, pounding down the dirt roadway, galloping toward the ferry.



ELIZA SCHUYLER HAMILTON

EPILOGUE

Three days after the funeral, Eliza and her seven children board a river sloop at Bixby's dock to sail upriver and seek refuge with her father in her childhood home. The life she knew is over. Hamilton is gone, and her father is ill and won't survive the winter. She will nurse and comfort him till the end. Hamilton left her destitute and her father's fortune has dwindled. Eliza has no idea how she will support her family.

Aboard the sloop, she stands for hours at the railing, watching mountains and forests and farmland and river towns slide by. The sun and moon and stars wheel through the luminous summer sky. A gentle wind blows from the west, and the sloop tacks gracefully between the shores as the tide runs in and out. All is in flux. The older children read books, play chess, and write in their journals, while the younger children race about the boat. The old salt of a captain perches Little Phil, just turned two, on his lap and lets him steer the ship. The captain puts his cap on the little boy's head, and Philip laughs as he holds the spokes of the great wheel in his chubby little hands.

The family gathers on deck for meals in the open air as the sails luff, snap, and swell with each come about. Eliza had to discharge Peggy and Kate, but before they left, they helped her pack two large hampers with hard-boiled eggs, cheese, loaves of bread, and smoked fish and meat. The younger children live in the moment, only occasionally asking about Papa. They accept that he is in heaven, whatever that means. Wraith-like Angelica keeps to herself, and the older boys are glum and ask few questions. At night, they all sleep in hammocks and straw ticks in a cramped cabin below deck.

The sloop docks briefly at Peekskill, then at Poughkeepsie, Catskill, and Hudson, unloading goods and taking on cargo and passengers before the final glide into Albany. In deference to this large mourning family, the captain

briefly puts in at the Schuyler dock and his men help unload the eight Hamiltons and their luggage. Eliza leads her flock up the dirt lane to the mansion, sending Brock back to collect their baggage in a wagon.

General Schuyler sits in a front window looking over the river. He is feeble and in low spirits. He seems to have aged a decade in the last four months. Upon their entry, he is stooped over but he stands to greet them. When he holds Eliza, he fights to control his tears in front of the children.

“Our poor Hamilton!”

“He carried so much within him,” she whispers. “Especially after Philip.”

“Ah,” the old man groans, “the waste.” His eyes are red, and he hasn’t shaved in a week.

“We are believers, Father. We trust in God’s plan.”

“But the waste!” the old man growls and shakes his head.

Eliza takes control of the household and soon establishes a domestic regimen. The general is so weak, she fears he will follow Hamilton very soon. Instilled with stoic pragmatism, she is firm but loving, and she requires that her family observe a routine of regular meals and regular bedtimes. Every evening she encourages the children to entertain their grandfather with songs and poems and little plays. She ends each day with prayer, but cannot stop the tears when the children recite in their litany of departed loved ones, “... and God bless Philip and God bless Papa.”

When the citizens of Albany learn that Hamilton’s family is at the Pastures, they send cards, bottles of wine, and baskets of food. Governor Morgan Lewis sends his official greetings, while his wife, Eliza’s old friend Gerty Livingston, sends a bouquet of flowers and her personal greetings. Legislative leaders and the mayor and many of the ladies of town seek an audience, but Eliza conveys her regrets and hopes they understand. A seamstress is called to the house to sew mourning clothes for Eliza, Angelica, and Little Eliza. Alexander, now the man of the family at eighteen, leads his brothers to a tailor in town to be fitted for black coats and breeches.

At first they live quietly among the blooming gardens and orchards of the Pastures, only going out as a family to services at the Dutch Reformed Church, where General Schuyler keeps a family pew. During their second week in town, a delegation visits the mansion to inform the family that, in honor of their presence in Albany, Rev. Eliphalet Nott will deliver a eulogy for General Hamilton at the regular service Sunday, July 29. Eliza reflects it's only been three weeks since their elegant party at the Grange.

The morning arrives, insufferably hot and steamy. After dressing the small children in their mourning clothes, Eliza dons her simple black dress and veiled bonnet. The old general's gout is acting up, but he insists on hearing Nott's sermon. The family is ready in the coach when poor Angelica notices she's forgotten her ragdoll. Eliza goes back into the big empty house and fetches it from her room. Brock then drives them up dusty North Pearl Street to the church, and they file into the family pew.

Light glows through the milky stained glass as the congregation sings the entrance hymn. There is an air of expectation. The congregation is honored that the Hamilton family is in attendance and many sneak looks at them. Then Dr. Nott, a lean young minister, takes the pulpit and bows:

“Our great Hamilton needs no eulogy. His work is finished, and death has removed him beyond my censure and above my praise. Alexander Hamilton, a father—a general—a statesman—the very man who stood on an eminence and without a rival among sages and heroes, the future hope of his country—this man, yielding to the influence of a custom which deserves our eternal reprobation, has been brought to an untimely end.”

The minister's candor unsettles Eliza. She bows her head and reaches for her father's hand. In detail Nott recounts Hamilton's many contributions as war hero, statesman, and lawyer, then—

“Wherever Hamilton was, in whatever sphere he moved, the friendless had a friend, the fatherless a father, and the poor man, though unable to reward his kindness, found an advocate. When the rich oppressed the poor,

when the powerful menaced the defenseless, when truth was disregarded or the eternal principles of justice violated—it was on these occasions that Hamilton exerted all his strength. It was on these occasions that he sometimes soared so high and shone with a radiance so transcendent, I had almost said, so ‘heavenly, as filled those around him with awe, and gave to him the force and authority of a prophet.’”

Eliza swells with pride, but sorrow too, as she muses that all these virtues were not enough to save his life. Nott’s voice drops:

“I know he had his failings. I see, on the picture of his life—a picture rendered awful by greatness, and luminous by virtue—some dark shades. On these let the tear that pities human weakness fall and the veil which covers human frailty rest.

“As a hero, as a statesman, as a patriot, he lived nobly: and would to God I could add, nobly he fell. But sadly, he was unwilling or unable to admit his error in responding to a challenge. I see him resisting the threatened interview. I imagine myself present in his chamber. Various reasons, for a time, seem to hold his determination in arrest. His country, which may need his counsels to guide, and his arm to defend, utters her veto.”

Nott gestures toward Eliza and the children. “The partner of his youth intercedes. His babes, stretching out their little hands and pointing to a weeping mother, with eloquence which reaches a parent’s heart, cry out, ‘Stay, dear papa, and live for us!’ But he will not heed any such importuning.”

The children are sniffing and quietly weeping. Eliza holds Little Phil and Little Eliza close to her and dabs her own tears under her veil. Angelica clutches her doll and sways slowly back and forth.

“A short time since, Hamilton stood on an eminence, and glory covered him. From that eminence he has fallen—suddenly, forever fallen. His intercourse with the living world is now ended, and those who would hereafter find him must seek him in the grave.

“There, cold and lifeless, is the heart which just now was the seat of friendship. There, dim and sightless, is the eye whose radiant and enlivening orb beamed with intelligence; and there, closed forever, are those lips on whose persuasive accents the courts and the nation have so often hung with transport.”

Nott scans the congregation.

“I believe that from the darkness of his tomb a light shines forth, a light in which those gaudy objects which men pursue are seen as phantoms. In this light, how dimly shines the splendor of victory. How humble appears the majesty of grandeur. The orb that appears so solid is a bubble burst, and we again see that all below the sun is vanity.”

Eliza bows her head. Alexander reaches across his sister’s lap for his mother’s hand. General Schuyler’s face is stone.

“My brethren! We stand together on the border of an awful gulf which swallows up all things human. Is there, amid this universal wreckage, nothing stable, nothing abiding, nothing immortal, on which poor, frail, dying man can fasten? Ask this hero, this statesman, the great Alexander Hamilton, whose wisdom you have been accustomed to revere, and he will tell you, ‘All you mortals, hastening to the tomb, once the companions of my pilgrimage, take warning and avoid my errors; cultivate the virtues I have recommended; live disinterestedly to serve our God; live for immortality; and if you rescue anything from final dissolution, lay it up in God.’

“Thus he acted during his last sad hours. To the exclusion of every other concern, religion claimed all his thoughts. He desired forgiveness and final communion with his Savior above all. When at last he was disburdened of his sorrows, looking up to God, he exclaimed: ‘Grace, rich grace!’ In token of this reliance, and as an expression of his faith, he received the holy sacrament; and having done this, his mind became tranquil and serene.

“This last act, more than any other, sheds glory on his character. Everything else death effaces. He dies serene and strong in his faith. This

alone enrolls him in the archives of eternity, and makes his name great in heaven.”

Nott pauses, shakes his head. “Do not think that Hamilton’s last act of homage to our Savior resulted from an enfeebled state of mental faculties or from perturbation occasioned by the near approach of death. No! His opinions concerning the divine mission of Jesus Christ and the validity of the Holy Scriptures had long been settled, and settled after laborious investigation and extensive and deep research. These opinions were not concealed. I knew them myself. Some of you, who hear me, knew them; and had his life been spared, it was his determination to have published them to the world, together with the facts and reasons on which they were founded.

“To our catalog of faithful Christians may now be added the name of Alexander Hamilton—a name which raises in the mind the idea of whatever is great, whatever is splendid, whatever is illustrious in human nature. Yes, now we add General Hamilton’s name to a catalog which might be lengthened—and lengthened—and lengthened, with the names of illustrious characters whose lives have blessed society and whose works form a column as high as heaven.

“Thither fly, ye prisoners of hope!—that when earth, air, elements, shall have passed away, secure of existence and felicity, you may join with saints in glory to perpetuate the song which lingered on the faltering tongue of Hamilton, ‘Grace—rich Grace.’ God grant us this honor. Then shall the measure of our joy be full.”

Reverend Nott bows his head, depleted by his effort. His last words of oratory linger in the rich morning sunlight, luminous through the milky glass with emerald and ruby borders. Nott steps from the pulpit, and the service resumes.

Eliza dries her tears and strokes the heads of Little Eliza and Little Phil. The minister’s words have moved her deeply, and she knows now she can let her Hamilton go. As the service ends, Reverend Nott announces that a

baptism will follow for a baby born July 12, the day Hamilton died. As General Schuyler and his family rise to leave, Eliza approaches the altar railing. Reverend Nott comes down to meet her. She lifts her veil and reaches out her hand. “Thank you, sir.”

“Honored,” Nott whispers, and he clasps her hands in both of his. “My deepest sympathy.”

Eliza touches the silver baptismal bowl that rests upon the railing. This is the bowl that Hamilton once held as she cradled Philip, their firstborn, in his christening gown, his smooth infant face looking up as the minister poured holy water on his forehead and his little fists and feet moved and he began to whimper. As she touches the silver bowl, everything around her pauses, and she sighs softly, remembering that happy day.

Eliza barely notices Reverend Nott excusing himself. She returns to the present when Little Phil tugs her dress.

“Mama? Mama?”

She places her hand on his head. “Yes, my precious lamb?” Eliza says, her vision blurring as she thinks, “My precious little orphaned lamb.” She peers up at particles of dust hovering in the air, golden and lovely in the shafts of light, and she imagines Hamilton and Philip together, father and son, with her dear mother Kitty and her sister Peggy, joining hands beside them.

Eliza lifts Little Phil and holds him to her cheek. “Look, Philip, look at the baby.”

“Baby,” he says and watches. The nave and chancel of the Old North Church glow with soft summer light, and the baptism begins, with the parents, grandparents and godparents gathered around. The baby whimpers as water trickles on his forehead.

“Can we go home now, Mama?”

Eliza hugs her little boy and kisses his forehead.

“Yes, my precious lamb, let’s go home.”

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