

CHAPTER 7: THE LOVESICK COLONEL aka “A Winter’s Ball”/ “Helpless”

This chapter goes back and forth between how happy Hamilton was about Eliza, and how sad he was about the war and everything else that wasn’t Eliza. So we’ll have to jump around a bit.

Another miserable winter, probably worse than the last. TWENTY EIGHT SNOWSTORMS. WHAT. The New York Bay aka The Hudson River was so frozen that you could wheel artillery across it. GOOD GRIEF, CHARLIE BROWN.

Congress couldn’t tax states or have credit so Washington couldn’t have some supplies.

Washington didn’t let Ham join Laurens in the South and Ham got really, really depressed over it. He wrote, “I have no other wish than as soon as possible to make a brilliant exit.” - one of the first suicide references :(

Even though there was a Revolution happening, Ham still had an active social life. And he was a good dancer, apparently! There were “camp ladies” aka Revolution groupies. More like Band-Aids? Who knows.

Ham started to think about marriage and was really concerned about finding the right woman. He wrote Laurens a letter with his criteria: young, pretty, at least a little smart, well bred, she must not cheat, and she has to be generous. Her politics didn’t matter because he’d be able to convince her to agree with him (ha, of course). Moderately religious. Should have a lot of money.

ENTER ELIZABETH SCHUYLER:

She went to Morristown to stay with relatives. HAM WAS SMITTEN. He was totally delighted and distracted. He forgot the password back into camp and was barred by the sentinel. He sometimes called her Betsey.

Ham wrote love letters and poems. Read from 132.

Until now, she was never part of the narrative in other biographies about Hamilton. Even back when this was all happening she did everything she could to keep the spotlight on him.

Basically, she was awesome. Kind, charming, understanding, a rock for Ham. Determined. Not dainty or a pampered heiress. Energetic. Tomboy.

Eliza really looked up to Martha Washington. They had a mother-daughter bond. Sound familiar? *cough!* WashingtonandHamilton *cough!*

Eliza was well versed in public affairs, but wasn’t the most educated person in the world. Her sisters were probably better writers but who cares?

When she was 13, she went to a conclave of Indian chiefs with her father and they gave her an Indian name meaning “one of us.” HOW FREAKING COOL IS THAT? Answer: SO FREAKING COOL.

Ham and Eliza decided to get married a month after meeting. Ham wrote Peggy a letter to gush about Eliza. It’s basically the letter he wrote to Laurens about what he wants in a wife, only gushing about Eliza.

Ham’s grandfather, Alexander Hamilton, also married an Elizabeth.

Schuylers: Sons John, Phillip, Rennselaer, and daughters Angelica, Eliza, Margarita (Peggy), Cornelia, and Catherine who wasn't born yet. All the daughters were smart, beautiful, and each played a different instrument. They all charmed the hell out of everyone they met. They all eloped except for Eliza.

He didn't mention Eliza AT ALL in a letters to Laurens. Hmmmm. When he finally did he really downplayed his affection for Eliza, saying "she's not a genius, she has the good sense to be agreeable." Ugh. Shut up, Ham. "Though not a beauty, she has fine black eyes and the requisite exterior to make a lover happy." Seriously, Ham. Shut up.

He wrote, "In spite of Schuyler's black eyes, I still have a part for the public and another for you." Chernow says he was explaining that their friendship/relationship/whatever won't change now that he's married. Okay.

Angelica. He called her and Eliza "my dear brunettes." The two of them combined would be his perfect woman. Eliza had a sense of purpose, was moral, and determined. Angelica was charming and great in social situations.

People assumed Ham and Angelica were together, that's how obvious they were about how they felt. He probably would've proposed to her, but she was off the market. They were obvious in letters, too, even to Eliza. It actually made her proud. If they weren't sisters, it would've been very different.

Ham got along really well with Philip Schuyler, even though Phil was super aware of status. Ham still asked for permission to marry Eliza. It all happened via very formal, business-like letters but it was a love fest all around. They were all super happy and felt really lucky to be family. Phil and Ham agreed on politics and this friendship was great for Ham's career. Mrs. Schuyler probably wasn't the best. Stern and intimidating. Phillip was a lot nicer when she wasn't around.

This marriage gave him support of New York blue ribbon families.

BACK TO THE WAR:

On the money front, things were getting worse. At one point 1779, the dollar lost half its value in three weeks. Madison wrote to Jefferson saying he was worried about it.

Hamilton read financial treaties "in his spare time" (uh, okay) and wrote a secret letter to an unidentified congressman and laid out his whole plan. He called himself "James Montague." Of course it was six thousand words. And it had a twelve point program. Basically, Congress should create a central bank - government owns half, private individuals own half. The bank could issue money and make loans. He said we needed a foreign loan of two million dollars to finance the war.

His linkage between military and financial strength informed all of his thinking. He wanted Congress to have supreme power in war, peace, trade, finance, and foreign affairs.

He thought of the Constitutional Convention seven years before it actually happened. He wanted a meeting to revise the articles of the Constitution.

Ham had a knack for being there when historic moments went down. He was there for the Benedict Arnold nonsense. Peggy Arnold faked being insane - she was crying, accusing them of wanting to kill her infant baby, she was hysterical and not making sense. Ham, Wash, and Lafayette all fell for it. Ham probably felt sympathy for the crying woman because he loved a damsel in distress, probably because of what his mother went through. Peggy Arnold told the whole story to Theodosia Prevost. Yes, Burr's Theodosia.

Major John Andre, Benedict Arnold's contact, was killed. Hamilton thought he was just unlucky and should be shot with dignity. Washington thought he was a spy and should be hanged. Washington won. Ham felt really connected to Andre and wrote to Eliza that he wished he could've been more like him. He was jealous of a dude who was just executed. Say what?

WEDDING/WAR STUFF:

Leading up to the wedding, Hamilton was really nervous that Eliza wouldn't dig him anymore. And he was worried about money, "do you soberly relish the pleasure of being a poor man's wife?" (LIN YOU GENIUS STOP IT) He was too proud to take the Schuyler's money.

Ham was still incredibly focused on the war. His wedding was the only time he took leave in five years.

Ham's brother Thomas didn't come to the wedding and neither did his father James. James never met any of the Schuylers or his grandchildren even though Ham begged him to come to America. Poor guy didn't have a single family member at the wedding. Only one person came from the army. Eliza had a huge clan. Sadface. Still, Hamilton finally felt like he belonged.

But in terms of his relationship with Washington, Ham wasn't thrilled. He was sick of his desk job and wanted to be in the field. Lafayette asked Washington if Hamilton could lead a battalion when Lafayette was attacking Staten Island. SPOILER WASHINGTON SAID NO.

When Alexander Scammel resigned as adjunct general, both Lafayette and Nathanael Greene suggested Hammie. Washington AGAIN said no, this time saying Ham was too young. But this was tricky because Washington knew that Hamilton was like a second Washington because he was in his head all the time writing his letters. Plus he could speak French. Cue everything Lafayette says in "Guns and Ships"

To add to the disappointment, Laurens was picked over Ham to go to Versailles with Ben Franklin to talk about a loan. Everyone - including Laurens - thought Ham should go but Congress said no. EVEN THOUGH A FOREIGN LOAN WAS HIS EFFING IDEA.

He was also nominated to be the minister to Russia. Passed over.

Things were only getting worse for the Continental Army. Yet another shitty winter. Washington was always in a bad mood. No supplies. Soldiers were forced to stay even after their three year enlistments were up. Generals were worried that soldiers were thinking about defecting to the British.

Washington wanted to meet with Ham, but Ham kept him waiting at the top of the stairs, so Washington called him out and yelled at him for disrespect. Like ten minutes later he sent someone to go get Ham so they could talk it out and... HAM SAID NO. Gasp!

That's when he quit Washington's staff. He explained to Phil Schuyler that their working relationship had done "violence to his feelings" and he was sick of constantly being passed over. He said Washington was way more temperamental than people thought and he was kind of over it. Then he realized that Washington was actually trying to be friends all along and Hamilton was the one pushing him away. He knew Washington had to stay popular for the sake of the Revolution so he kept their rift a secret.

Chernow says this was a bad move. Ham's ego and pride got in the way and this wouldn't be the last time. Bad judgement and bad timing. Washington offered to make amends but Ham was too sensitive and too insecure. He just HAD to teach George Washington a lesson right smack in the middle of the American Revolution. Way to go, Alex. The way Ham saw it, he was being asked to sacrifice his military ambitions for too long and if you think about it, he was asking for the chance to risk his life for his country.

Still, they eventually realized they were too important to each other - and the Revolution - to through their relationship down the drain. Things were too big now. They had a crazy amount of respect for one another and they agreed on all the important things: we need a national army, centralized power over the states, strong executives, and national unity. It was their political views that always kept them together no matter what. Aw.