

Deleted Scene from MY DEAR HAMILTON: Eliza at Weehawken

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Weehawken, New Jersey

Who killed my dear Hamilton?

This is the question that echoes with every splash of dark river water against the oars, as the ferryman rows me—sick with grief and heat—across the Hudson. Clinging with lace-gloved hands to the side of the bobbing wooden boat, I reflect that it’s the same wearying journey my husband made only days ago, over these same black waves of fathomless depth, to fight a duel with pistols and honor.

He looked back, our friend Nathaniel Pendleton said.

As my husband was rowed to the fateful moment of doom at Weehawken, he looked back over the river at the city behind him. The hustling, bustling city of New York that once defied the British crown so that enterprising young men of any means could now find their fortunes and decide their own fates. As New York grew around us with the new nation we brought into being, the city celebrated my husband and Alexander cherished it in return, for amidst all its soot and disorder and teeming crowds, it was a city making and seizing opportunities and striving for greatness, just like he did every day of his life.

Until the last one...

He looked back.

So I look back too, past the burly arms of the straining oarsman and over the rippling water to the city that I believe mourns with me. The ships in the harbor have lowered their colors to half-mast. Draped as they are in funereal cloth, the very faces of the buildings seem to mimic my despair. And even now, the procession bearing Alexander’s body to its final resting place winds through streets paved with women’s tears and men’s sorrow, people standing on rooftops and hanging from windows to catch a final glimpse of their fallen leader.

“We can still go back if you’ve changed your mind, Mrs. Hamilton,” the boatman says, glistening with sweat and exhaustion after having already rowed the better part of an hour. The air hangs thick and oppressive under the hazy noon-day sun.

I can still go back. I can turn back from this journey to expose the truth about what has happened to my love and to my life. I can simply accept what I've been told, as I've accepted everything I've been told all my life. Because I'm the sensible one--the saintly one--my sisters all said. Whilst my sisters all eloped against my father's wishes, I was the one who believed that God had a plan for my life and I was meant to accept.

But I am a general's daughter. I'm also a general's wife.

Alexander Hamilton's wife. Or, at least, his widow.

And I will not simply accept.

Without meeting the boatman's worrying, disapproving gaze, I shake my head. "I assure you I haven't changed my mind," I say, even though I feel a pang of sympathy for his troubles. Four oarsmen rowed my husband across the river to meet his fate. But this boat is a smaller vessel, for I have no need of a leather pistol case, a surgeon, or a second. Only one oarsman is needed to carry a grieving widow across the misty expanse to the very place her husband was shot. Still, in the summer heat he looks quite miserable at his task.

Perhaps he fears I will leap over the side into the impenetrable depths of this river and drown. It would be so easy, so familiar, to let the Hudson take me on that final passage, as this same river has taken me on every journey of my life. But what use would it do to drown and die when I fear I am already dead? I think my spirit died with my husband. I feel his loss in my bones, in my flesh, as if the very heart of me has been violently rent asunder. The hollow, jagged agony of the loss brings to mind the amputation of soldier's limb but without the benefit of knowing my sacrifice was made in the service of a greater good. Which is why I have begged our friends to pray for my body's death so that I might join Alexander.

But denied that grace from God, I now go in search of my Hamilton beneath the sheer, unforgiving cliffs of the Palisades. Which makes my oarsman my very own Charon, ferrying dead souls across the Styx.

Remember, my Eliza, you are a Christian.

Given my pagan thoughts, these words resound like a remonstrance from beyond, but they keep echoing in my head even after the boatman lands ashore. For these were the last words Alexander spoke to me.

The first time he said it, pale and aware of his impending death, I believed he was offering me consolation, beseeching me to find comfort in my religion. But when his precious blood had

soaked through the bandages and the mattress to pool upon the floor beneath the bed and Bishop Moore finally consented to give my husband communion, my Hamilton declared, "I have no ill will against Colonel Burr. I forgive all that happened."

Then he said again to me: *Remember, my Eliza, you are a Christian.*

I knew then that it was a plea not for my comfort but for my forgiveness.

And I nodded my head, eager to give him what he wanted and needed before I could give him nothing else. But in that crucial moment, I also turned and fled the room, because I knew I had told my dying husband a lie. After all, how can one forgive what one doesn't understand?

As if in a dream, I rise to my feet, the boat unsteady as I move to climb out onto the muddy bit of shore.

"Watch your step, please," the man says, his voice jarring me from my memories. Disapproval hangs about him like a cloak. He does not realize that I know this river as well as he does--maybe better. So I don't take his proffered hand, but rather grasp the gunwale of the boat. My feet sink into the muck, as if the earth itself tries to hold me back from this inquiry. At the edge of the beach, I hesitate, my gaze tracing the narrow path that winds steeply upward through a shadowed forest to the place where two men met at twenty paces.

"Mrs. Hamilton, can I assist you?" asks the boatman.

I must look a madwoman to him, dragging my skirts—the hems of which are wet—as I peer up the forested path beneath a sheer cliff on the very day of my husband's funeral. Perhaps he thinks I should be with my children, but the girls and babies are safe with my sister Angelica. Perhaps he thinks I should be with my husband.

But Alexander Hamilton is not to be found in the city behind me.

"No," I say, waving the boatman off. "I only ask that you wait."

Stepping into the shade of the tree's canopy, I trudge my way upward, grasping at saplings and branches to assist in my labored ascent. And in the quiet and the gloom, all I have are memories.

This morning, after the church bells rang and the colors were lowered to half-mast and the somber crowds gathered along the streets, a military procession wearing black arm bands came to accompany my husband's body to the church. With my youngest children at my knees, and my sister Angelica's hand clasped tight in mine, we watched the pall bearers lift the mahogany

casket topped with my husband's hat and sword. Two black servants in turbans followed with a dappled gray horse bearing my husband's empty boots and spurs in the stirrups.

Empty boots, empty saddle, empty hat, empty world.

The sad staccato of drums brought a keening sound from my poor children, all of whom lurched for the casket as if to tear it open and lay eyes upon their father one last time. But not I. I had the absurd thought that the casket, too, was empty.

Alexander Hamilton wasn't there.

Not in the city he loved. Not in the mahogany coffin I chose for him. Not in the empty hat and boots and bed he left behind. If I'll find him anywhere, it's the rocky ledge beneath the cypress trees where he threw away his fire.

Despite the shelter of the trees and gnarled vines from the merciless summer sun, the heat forces me to rest. I stoop to brace against a boulder but before my hand touches the rough surface my gaze lands on a brownish-red smear that for the life of me appears to be blood. And if it is, who else's blood would it be?

"Alexander," I whisper, my voice echoing into the empty wind as I press my palm to the stain. They say they carried him here so that he could rest while they shouted for the doctor. And no sooner had the doctor raced up the path to tend him than did my husband say, *I am a dead man*.

He knew it the moment the bullet struck him. But what else had he known, what had he been thinking when he stood to face Burr? Where did my husband stand? Suddenly I'm frantic to know. I force myself up the last of the path until I finally crest the top.

There isn't much room on this ledge. Just enough to pace and shoot. To one side a sheer cliff blocks escape, like a prison wall. To the other, the water beckons a dive.

I can scarcely believe that I am here in the same place where Alexander was last wholly alive. His loss hits me anew as if the river has risen up in a great wave that swallows and suffocates me. And I cannot understand it. Not any of it. That my dear Hamilton was here and he was alive and his whole life stood before him. Our whole lives. Now shattered.

So why? Why is he now gone? Who is responsible?

There has been a conspiracy. I am sure of it. The same conspiracy that has dogged my husband's heels from the moment he rose to prominence in opposition to the Virginians. I know this, as deeply as I know anything, because I cannot credit that Burr, the charming gentleman

who has so often sat at our table and given little indulgent smiles and treats to our children over the years, should have, without encouragement or inducement, murdered my husband in cold blood. And I know no other name for it but murder when a man stands vulnerable and without defense and you shoot him—

The crack of gunfire rends the peacefulness of this troubled, haunted place. I whirl toward the river, the glare of the sun making me shield my eyes. Did the light shining on the water glare into my Hamilton's eyes as it does into mine? He never meant to fire at Burr. He never aimed his gun at the man. He stood here, waiting, like a lamb to the slaughter.

And I mean to prove it.

My husband's pistol discharged into the woods; I was told it was an involuntary squeeze of the trigger once he was shot—before he fell—so I look for the tree that was struck.

A cypress. I heard his friends say that the bullet hit a cypress.

I mark off the paces and stand where I think my beloved must have stood. Then my eyes survey the tree-line in front of where Burr positioned himself for the kill. For a moment, I imagine Burr's pistol pointed at me, cocked and ready. I want to run. But my husband didn't run, so I keep my feet planted where they are and shiver at the thought of a bullet striking me. Reflexively, my fingers go to my side, just over my ribs, as I imagine the agony of the bullet that shattered my husband's bone and lodged itself in his spine.

I nearly swoon away at the thought of it, but then another sharp crack of gunfire restores me to clarity. And it's at that moment that a gust off the river rustles the tree leaves and I spot the cypress tree with its gnarled branches and needle-shaped, evergreen leaves. Evergreen, everlasting, and all-knowing, I think, rushing to the trunk of the tree to search for the bullet my husband might have fired straight into Colonel Burr's depraved heart, if he had been a lesser man. I take my gloves off and search for the bullet hole with my fingertips, nearly caressing the rough bark beneath my palms. Imagining that there is some essence of my husband here along with the truth.

Then I look up and my despair is complete. For there, nearly twelve feet off the ground, is a fresh wound. Not a wound made by the bullet, but one made with a saw. A jagged edge of freshly splintered wood where a branch once stood out. As splintered and jagged as the remains of my self-composure as I realize it's gone.

Empty field. Empty tree.

The proof of my husband's honor is gone, just like him. The bullet Alexander fired into the trees isn't here. Alexander isn't here. My answers are not here. My beloved sainted husband and my guardian angel is gone and our life together is gone, too. There is no part of him still here in this world. And I cannot be where any part of him may now be.

In the realization of it, I fall weeping against the desecrated tree, which has been violated by some vulture wanting a trophy by which to mark Alexander's fall, just as the truth of my husband's legacy will be chipped away and carted off by his enemies. Until there is nothing left of it. Until they have filled the giant empty void of his life with lies.

I know how it happens. I have seen it before.

Gunfire rings out a third time, but this time the sound gives me strength.

For this has now become a battle. My battle.

They will not get away with this. I will expose the truth and tell the story. Across the shore, at Trinity Church, my husband is being buried with full military honors. The wind and the water has carried the gun salute across the river to me as if God himself needed me to hear it. Gunshots are terrible and powerful. They ended my son's life, and now my husband's. They can be heard across rivers. Indeed, they can be heard around the world just as they were at the start of our revolution.

I know, because I was there. I know the truth of that, too. I know of the glory and true honor of those who founded this country, despite the evil machinations of those who would deny them the laurels they've earned. My father. My husband. History is already busy forgetting my family's sacrifices in founding this nation.

I won't let it.

I rise up to overlook the Hudson, the sparkling dark water a relentless flow of movement and current, like time and memory itself. And I remember a time when this very river flowed with blood and vengeance. 1777. The year that decided it all. The year my father lost his command and his honor, when my family saw its home burned to the ground by the enemy, and when Alexander Hamilton taught me that I could play a part in the story...