Cognac

by DM (altilis)

Summary

Sydney aches, and copes, in more ways than one.

Sydney enjoyed his drink, his food, his women with equal love and adoration, but the cause of his gross sensuality was a matter he loved even more. His heart and mind were consumed with infatuation and heartache, both of which could only be momentarily subdued by the hot burn of expensive French cognac and the trifle pleasures from the house around the corner.

The last drop of drink lingered on the bottom of the bottle, unbeknownst to Mr. Carton. He had been here for more than a couple of hours; the waitresses paid him no mind, and it seemed he had passed out not long before. His head rested on a pillow of his arms, sprawled over the scarred oak surface of the tavern table, with his dark brown hair, though tied back, loosened from the green ribbon.

The clock chimed just under a dozen, though Sydney paid it no mind. But when came the screech of wood-on-stone, so familiar to a tavern-goer like himself yet so startling, he awakened from his drunken doze. He did not move just yet, but his green eyes blinked open, so he could watch the flickering flames of the fireplace dance on the opposite wall.

“Mr. Carton.”

Sydney nearly laughed, recognizing that ridiculous French accent with both desire and repulsion. He lifted his head and pushed himself to sit up in his chair, lounging back and regarding the Frenchman. The differences between the two same-looking men were startling; how unkempt yet clean, drunken yet sober, anguished yet pleased—Carton yet Darnay.
“Eh, look at you…” He drawled drunkenly, keeping his eyes on Darnay as he slumped further in his chair, propping his right arm on the chair rest so his hand kind of lingered in mid air, cocked back like some smarmy aristocrat. “You don’t look like a whore, much—but it will do—”

Darnay’s fine features were tarnished with a look of slight disgust, a frown settling on his lips but otherwise no other show of discomfort or anger. His cane was propped against the table, the edge barely peaking up so that Sydney could see its golden top. Darnay’s hands were folded, neatly, on the table.

“Carton—” From Darnay, his name sounded so odd, so French. “Your vulgarity—”

Before he was rudely interrupted by Sydney’s vulgarity; the lawyer shifted in his seat, leaning forward with an almost manic grin. “Now see here, Mr. Darnay, you can’t fool me, you criminal, you bastard, you wench—”

The last word was the last straw for Darnay. He stood from his chair, to reach over the table separating them and backhand him across the face, throwing Sydney back into his chair, slightly hunched over the left arm rest, resting heavily on his left elbow as the sting settled. Darnay sat back into his own chair.

“Carton,” Darnay started again, much calmer, and resuming his position from before, hands folded and eyes watching him, as Sydney slumped back in his seat, and looked back at him, ignoring his now-red cheek and the slight ache in his jaw. “Lucie and I…we are worried…”

“All right,” Darnay acknowledged his lie; Sydney’s blood ran cold through his heart, and his stomach slowly started to twist itself into a knot. “Lucie does not realize yet…though I am worried. About you.”

“Of course!” He hissed, expression and tone souring as he called Darnay’s bluff. “A waste of a man—you would not cast a corpse a second glance, why me? Your care is flattering, but false.”

Sickened by these obvious fabrications, Sydney pushed himself to his feet, knocking over the brandy snifter and the bottle of cognac. The bottle rolled off the edge and shattered on the floor, while Sydney did his best to stumble away from the table. He took one, two, three stumbling, and tripping over his own self-pity to hit the rough stone floor.

Darnay rushed to his side. Sydney felt the Frenchman’s hand on his arm, to help him up, to check if he was okay; Sydney already pushing himself up, shrugged—shoved—him away with a scowl.

“I’m fine—fine, dammit! Darnay…!” He started to bat him away, still trying to get up. Darnay watch him collapse again, his eyes rolling back and breath slowing as the fatigue and cognac caught up with him.

* * *

Maybe he wanted to hear it so badly that his ears betrayed his mind to secure his heart.

“Carton.”
He didn’t know if he really wanted to see Darnay, but the name, his voice echoed like a canyon inside his head, accompanied by the dull crackle and pop of a fire far off on the other side of the room.

“Carton.”

He can’t fake it much longer; he can hear in Darnay’s voice that he is annoyed with his charade. Sydney blinks his eyes open with sleep and is immediately confronted with a stern, yet worried look of the Frenchman hovering over him. His eyes are narrow and his jaw is set. He draws back, slowly, to sit straight in his seat at the side of the bed. The glow of the fireplace casts odd shadows over his face, mimicking the memories within him.

He is the first to speak, in that calm, gentle, accented voice that aches Sydney’s heart to hear. “You were cut by the glass,” He says. His eyes shift down to Sydney’s chest, where he realizes it is exposed and wrapped in a thin layer of itchy bandages (probably of the Doctor’s possession). “Your shirt is stained…I will get you a new one later.”

“Later?” Sydney smiles and smirks; Darnay’s uneasiness next to his nonchalance is contrasts so clearly. “Ah, Darnay, I can stumble my way home bare just as fine—”

“No!” He cuts Sydney off, leaving him speechless. Darnay wrestles in silence for his next words, until he starts again: “Lucie would not accept it if I let you…”

“No—!” The word is not as sweet from Sydney’s lips as his. “You cannot tell her, Darnay. You mustn’t.”

“Why not?” Darnay still appears flustered, eyes narrowing at his request. “She is my wife, and she will be back to-morrow—”

“She worries,” Sydney explain simply, leaning back upon the multitude of soft pillows at his back; his eyes are leveled with Darnay’s. Once caught, he cannot pull away. “She will be better without worries; you know just as well as I. I will be fine and away before she arrives, at which time, it will not matter.”

“Fine,” Darnay grudgingly agrees, and stands, casting a large and ominous shadow on the far wall. The fire crackles away, unaffected by the tension between them. “I will be in the next room, Carton.” Not that there is anyone in the house, or anywhere else to go. “Wake me for your shirt, later.”

“Later. Of course.”

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