Le Cordelier en ligne.

by Hedge_witch

Summary

This is set in oubliance’s sublime Oxford Alternate Universe. Essentially, it is an exploration of the utter chaos caused every time Camille posts on his highly contentious blog.

The High Table had been sparsely populated for a Friday night, a circumstance due, in no small part, to Professor Mirabeau’s decision to forgo the dubious pleasure of his colleagues’ company for the chance to deliver a well-lubricated and no doubt highly lucrative lecture in The City. With the absence of the Beacon of Balliol (so named for the incandescent hue his face achieved after a few generous glasses of the college port) the conversation remained rather lacklustre, and Danton had left the SCR at the uncharacteristically early hour of midnight, and, more surprisingly, entirely alone.

As a consequence of this Danton utterly failed to sleep through the shrill music emanating from his phone (Something hideous that Camille had heard in a club no doubt, why did he keep letting him mess around with it?) and was sufficiently compos mentis to recognise the futility of shoving it under a pillow and rolling over.

There was only one person who was not sufficiently accepting of Danton’s habits to refrain from calling him before nine o’clock.

Unfortunately, this person was also one of the few who would keep calling, politely, inexorably,
until Danton picked up.

So, tugging the covers resentfully from over his head and feeling uncharacteristically relieved that there was no disgruntled bedmate to add their complaints to the general noise, Danton did.

“Good morning Max,” he answered wearily, mentally tallying up every sip of whiskey he had taken last night and hoping the peat smoke and amber weren’t seeping out into his voice.

Scrupulous as ever, Max demurred, “I’m afraid it may be a troublesome morning actually. I just woke up and checked my email...There’s an alert, Camille updated his blog at four this morning.”

“Fuck,” Danton swore, feeling Max bristle at the oath through plastic, wire and half a mile of frost-tinged morning air. “That means,” he did a sluggish calculation in his head, “that means it has been up for three-and-a-half hours.”

“Long enough,” Max said grimly.

“Too long,” Danton agreed, grabbing his iPad from the bedside table and indulging in a fleeting, frustrated wish that there was someone, caring and well-balanced, who could bring him a cup of tea and a packet of paracetamol at this point. Brushing the thought aside, he cracked his neck and logged on to the online bear-pit.

Despite it all he smiled, for if you were going to be forced to do more than laze about, wrapped in warm bed-linens and the burble of the radio, on a Saturday morning, it wasn’t the worst of alternatives to be required to do something at which you excelled.

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Max left the situation for a few hours before he intervened, allowing Danton to make his presence felt below the line. Scrolling through the resulting devastation of torpedoed logic and still-smouldering rhetorical tricks, he made a note of the principal combatants, ignoring the more or less considered reactions of those he could easily identify, Professor Mirabeau, Professor Laclos, Dr Suleau. He furrowed his brow over the habitually eccentric contribution from TheBathtub and rolled his eyes a little at MariaStuart’s impassioned defence of the author, but these were distractions from his true goal. Ever since Camille had handed moderating duties over to him, (after he had worked himself into such a state that Max had been forced to cut off their internet connection for three days), he had made a point of being scrupulously fair. So while a more immoderate man, Georges-Jacques say, would have banned Lycurgus1794 as soon as he read his...
first, hostile comment; added at 4.03 am, Max carefully read his way through the threads, which usually degenerated into pitched battles between the aforesaid Spartan and ArcisToreador, which he knew to be Danton’s online nom-de-plume.

Max was always careful to scrupulously note Danton’s virtues and he freely acknowledged that the man had a talent for the visceral exchanges that characterised online debate. Max had also tried to intervene in Camille’s favour in the past, but always found himself floundering in the backwaters of the debate as his carefully considered, structured responses were utterly ignored by those for whom the argument had moved on. He had found that his best contribution in these cases lay in clearing up after the battle.

The clock calmly ticked over into the afternoon and Max glanced up from his desk, down his flat’s spare, truncated hallway. Halfway along it, the coffee cup that he had placed outside the door of the spare room, now utterly appropriated by Camille, sat, its position unchanged and its contents cold. Max was drawn from his seat towards it; if asked he would no doubt have explained that it was a potentially dangerous place to leave it, but he did not bend immediately to retrieve it, instead listening at the door with a familiar guilty tightness in his throat.

Silence, Camille had undoubtedly fallen into that slow-breathed sleep of exhaustion that sometimes claimed him, a slumber that had terrified Max the first time he had seen it, on one of the endless January mornings of their youth, when he had desperately tried to wake Camille before the first lesson of the day. Camille had not responded to his entreaties and his weak attempts at shaking him, made powerless, even then, by fear and tenderness. It had taken one of the prefects; Max couldn’t remember his name, who had been impatient, and prepared to be brutal, eventually emptying a tooth-glass full of water over Camille’s head. Max had left before he had risen, confused and colt-limbed and had avoided him for the rest of that day, dismayed at his own misdirected fury. Camille had been baffled, and Max had never been able to explain to him why, and how all his fear had been born on that terrible night when he had seen the moon-faced, implacable barn owl sitting outside their dormitory window. Max remembered vividly how it had stared down into Camille’s ashen, motionless face, while Max had lain stark and frozen beneath the covers until it had finally flown away.

Back in his flat, with its carpeted floors and the heating turned up against bitter November Max made his way back over to his desk and prepared to ban Lycurgus, along with his predecessors and brothers-in-arms Leonidas, Cincinattus, Cassius. As usual he found that he did not feel moderate, not in the slightest.

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“You’re going to have to have a word with that little shit.” Danton, sprawled out along the sofa, responding to his perennial feeling that he was too large and clumsy for Max’s quiet flat by accentuating these qualities as much as possible.
Max sighed, tapping the teaspoon softly, three times against the coffee cup. “We can’t prove...”

“I know,” Danton cut him off, “I’m not talking about pulling him up in front of some sort of tribunal. I just think you ought to take him aside and tell him it’s not on. I mean, I got the impression that he thought your word was gospel back in the day.”

“I think my influence waned as soon as he walked out of his viva,” Max said, “Antoine’s recent successes have confirmed him in his high opinion of his talents.”

Danton snorted.

“They are by no means negligible,” Max said, chidingly, handing Danton one of his fiddly little coffee cups, the two cubes of sugar set, somehow accusingly, on the edge of the saucer.

“No, but they’re not a patch on Camille’s.”

Max gave one of his wary smiles, “no indeed...Hence, perhaps, his hostility.” He looked embarrassed as soon as he said it, fearful that he had skirted too close to the gossip that most other academics reveled in.

Danton was one of those academics. “That’s one theory,” he said, “though I can’t really see Antoine Saint-Just labouring under an inferiority complex. I always thought it was more personal.”

Max frowned, possibly at the very idea of personal matters playing a role, or maybe at the more specific problem of Danton discussing them, but he did not interrupt, which Danton, as usual, took as tacit permission to continue.

“I always reckoned he was pissed off because you already had a best friend,” Danton watched, with clinical fascination as, without stirring a centimetre, Max somehow gathered his limbs about him and chilled his unsettled green eyes a few crucial degrees. Reckless, Danton pushed on, “In fact, I often wondered if he perhaps thought that you and Camille...”

Danton was later rather relieved that he had been interrupted at this point, as the door of Camille’s room shot open and its inhabitant emerged, resplendent in an antique night-shirt and a pair of
bright pink knee socks.

“Ah speak of Dis and he will ascend, curiously garbed,” Danton drawled from the sofa. “In fact that’s the second horseman isn’t it? The odder than usual choice of clothing? The third is the draining of the coffee pot,” he continued, as Camille took the proffered cup from Max’s hand and subsided onto the sofa, brushing his thin hand in brief thanks against Max’s shoulder as he did so. “And the fourth and final fiery steed,” Danton said, catching Camille’s ankles and swinging them up onto his lap, as he produced Camille’s laptop from behind a cushion, “gallops to the sound of frantic typing.”

“Please stop muddling mythologies and give me that, beloved,” Camille’s voice was still hoarse with sleep but his eyes were bright, near feverish, and he snatched the computer from Danton’s hands.

“How violent precisely is your response going to be?” Max enquired dryly as he sank into his armchair.

“Yes, good question,” Danton paused the idle motion of his thumb over the arch of Camille’s foot, “or more directly, this isn’t going to end up like that situation with Herbert is it?”

“I don’t quite remember that one,” Camille said, his brow furrowing slightly as he typed.

Danton snorted, “no, you wouldn’t. You had the sense to leave the conference dinner before he could collar you. Max and I were not so lucky.”

“You must remember,” Max prompted gently, “it was the evening I came back to our room with wine all down my shirt.”

Camille’s face cleared, “oh yes! And I had gone to bed with a headache. That was an interesting role-reversal.”

“It was a little out of the ordinary way of things,” Max agreed.

Camille shrugged and turned his attention back to the screen, “Herbert’s a louse anyway, and he’s long gone.” He wrinkled his nose, “last I heard he was mouldering away in some backwater.”
“I’m not sure we can call Warwick University a ‘backwater’ Camille, that’s hardly fair.”

“And even if we sent Antoine there, that wouldn’t stop him getting up bright and early to comment on your blog-posts,” Danton pointed out.

Camille smirked, “I’m not sure the twelve plagues of Egypt could prevent him from doing that. Do you suppose he is genuinely awake whenever I post an update? Or do you think he has some kind of alert set up...?”

He trailed off, letting the arch of his eyebrow speak to his suspicions. Danton laughed at the image of Saint-Just leaping feverishly out of his cold, close-cornered bed to the chiming of his phone, hastily mustering up his bitterness and stabbing it out on his keyboard, and, as he glanced over, he saw that even Max was smiling down at his hands.

Grinning and settling himself back into the sofa, Danton flicked Camille’s little toe. “Alright, at the rate you go you’ll have finished by now, tell us what you’ve got.”

Camille leaned forward, and, smiling with the eloquent wickedness of a man planning to ignite his small corner of the internet, began to read.

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