The Vicomte Montfaucon

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The Vicomte Montfaucon

by IACyper9

Summary

To the Ton, Vicomte Adrien-Henri de Montfaucon is an eccentric French aristocrat, an artist, and a man with an inconvenient habit of avoiding society whenever he can. A chance meeting in moonlit gardens leads Benedict Bridgerton down the path of unexpected friendship, and perhaps something more, as he soon discovers there is considerably more than meets the eye to the mysterious Vicomte then his shabby coat, strange humor, and refusal to at least pretend to enjoy society.

After all, there's a reason Adrien is so reluctant to speak of France.

Part 3 of The Tale of Two Artists

Notes

Howdy, first time posting on here, some info on 'Vicomte'. This is crossposted on Ao3/FFN/other places, and technically is part 3 of TToTA, but it's the first part I've written, so eventually I intend to write the rest of the story and post it as well. Uh, beyond that, this is my first attempt at writing romance so I guess we're gonna experience that together. Also I'm about halfway through a reading of Les Mis, and it shows so much. So, let's begin.

Chapter 1: The Vicomte and the Inconvenience of Unplanned Acquaintances

The Vicomte Adrien-Henri de Montfaucon, to the aristocracy of London, was many things. Eccentric. Quiet. Skittish. Other. The Vicomte had not attended high society's balls for over three months, by this point, and frankly would have continued that trend, had the weather not been so extraordinarily fine. This, perhaps, is not the reason most men of status would be present, that being connection, but it is Adrien's. Fine weather, and a pond practically begging to be put to paper. He had no desire for connection, socialization, or anything that would require beyond the base necessity of interactions.

The garden with the pond was well kept, in bloom and teeming with life. The pond itself was shining, the moon reflecting off the water, partially hidden by the hanging boughs of the trees surrounding it. Lanterns, strung across the walkways, cast a golden glow across the water. There were flowers, though Adrien would not have been able to say for certain what kind, other than that their scent was pleasant, and mingled well with the fresh air and the faint sound of music drifting over the breeze. The garden with the pond was considerably more pleasant than the ball itself, there was no doubt.

The Vicomte sat against a low stone wall, sketchbook propped against his knee, looking out at the sight. He had removed his coat, draping it over the portion of the wall he leaned against. It was a ragged, battered thing, blue worn to almost slate in some places, frayed and patched and about twenty years out of fashion. This, coupled with his overall wrinkled appearance, shirt clearly in need of an iron and trousers nearly acceptable (if one did not look to closely at the knees), plus a wellworn navy waistcoat with tarnished silver buttons, spoke for his care, or lack thereof, regarding acceptable fashion. His slate cravat, an overhand 'knot' and no more, tied with such simplicity that it appeared almost an act of rebellion against those strangling the gentlemen inside. His oxblood hair, shaggy, tinged with the beginnings of grey, clearly having escaped whatever attempts, if any, had been made to tame it. Adrien had stopped caring about fashion sometime in '93, if he ever had cared to start.

The Ton, to its credit, had stopped caring about his lack of caring sometime in the early 1800's. To them, he was an enigma, but a familiar one. At first, they regarded him with fascination, then suspicion (though that did not last long), then amusement. He was French. He was clearly of aristocratic birth. He was an artist. And he was awfully silent whenever the political state of France was spoken of.

Adrien dipped his pencil into the tin of graphite dust beside him, cocked his head like a quizzical beagle, and added another line to the pond. It wasn't particularly hard to draw, no, this was downright child's play. But nowadays, simple was best. Simple kept his mind from wandering. Simple was safe.

The sounds of the ball, of idle chatter and dancing and music and whatever else entertained the highborn masses trickled out. Adrien ignored it, focused solely on the paper in front of him. Another line. A pause. Another line. He was so focused, he nearly missed the crunch of

leaves and grass and sticks coming up behind him. Nearly.

Upon looking up, Adrien noted the newcomer with mildly detached interest. The man was tall and lean in build. Hair tousled in the way that framed fine features. Eyes maybe blue, maybe grey, hard to tell in the lighting of the fading dusk. Had the blues of his clothes not rather neatly blurred his silhouette against the dusk, Adrien might have missed his presence altogether.

As it were, Adrien set his pencil down, sliding his spectacles on, clearly making a show of acknowledging his observer before, “May I help you, Monsieur?”.

A moment’s pause before, “I beg your pardon, I did not mean to stare.”, a pause before the stranger pushed on, “You’ve left out the lanterns.”

“I have. And the drawing is better for it.” Adrien responded, “If I were a wagering man, there’s something else that’s drawn you here.”

There’s a minute, probably less, but time has a way of moving slower when answers are expected. This was one of those moments. “I was curious.”

“About the art?”

“And the artist.” The stranger’s answer is honest, at the very least. Adrien appreciates that much, though catching anyone’s interest was decidedly not on his checklist, now or ever again. Clearly the universe had other opinions. “Generally, one attends society balls to socialize, make connections… You appear to do the opposite.”

Adrien hums slightly, “Astute observations, Monsieur-?” he fishes for the man’s name, one of the rare times he intentionally intends to continue a conversation.

“Benedict. Benedict Bridgerton.”

Adrien hums again, “One of the brood.” His words, though they might seem overtly aggressive or negative, contain a tone of amusement, perhaps joviality. Adrien stands, knees cracking slightly,
“Vicomte Adrien-Henri de Montfaucon.” A hand extended, “What curiosities can an old Frank satisfy?”.

The stranger, Benedict, Adrien reminds himself, seems to run through a list of dozens of questions, settling on the most important for the time, “Why are you outside?”. The question is simple, yes, but rather loaded.

Adrien takes a moment, glancing around, “I prefer the outside compared to-” here he pauses, almost as if looking for the right words.

“To the ball?” Benedict offers, and though Adrien nods, something in his steel eyes state otherwise.

“To an embarrassing degree.”

“And the drawing?”

“Landscapes are peaceful.”

“Peaceful?”

Here Adrien stalls, humming slightly, “Nature is hard to misinterpret. She can be fierce, no doubt, but likewise her beauty and calmness is hard to miss. People…. Not so much.” Silence falls for a moment, “And that makes three.” Adrien closes his sketchbook, setting it down, reaching for the ragged blue coat, “I fear you’ve exhausted your allowance for questions one evening.”

Benedict blinked, “My allowance?” he asks, watching Adrien shrug on the coat.

“Three.”

“What happens after three?”

Adrien’s mouth twitches, not quite a smile, but the movements towards one, “You will have to wait until our next interaction to learn more.” The smirk, for that’s what the grin is most certainly growing into, “Three is a perfectly polite number for riddles.” He picks up his sketchbook, tucks it under one arm, nods to Benedict, and begins to walk past, “Good night, Monsieur Bridgerton.”

It was only after Adrien was well on his way home when it struck him that he had intentionally invited the Englishman to speak more. Certainly, the punchline writes itself.

Chapter 2: The Inconvenience Becomes Persistent

By the time Adrien had returned to his small studio, located in the quieter part of London (though, cities are, by nature, never truly silent), he had replayed the conversation over multiple times in his head. Something, he wasn't quite sure what, but something regarding it was sitting…. Odd.

Adrien was, by nature, a quieter man. He didn't seek out attention, not anymore at least, and was particularly wary of those who came bearing questions. Questions mostly regarding his time before he became the permanent fixture the Ton now knew him as. Before the quiet painter, before, before, before. But Benedict Bridgerton, it seemed, was different in that aspect. Adrien hummed curiously, unlocking his door and entering.

The studio itself was quaint. A simple two-floor building, the first floor an open space with plenty of windows for lighting. That empty space was, naturally, taken up by several canvases in various states of completion. Paintings, drawings, supplies, equipment spread out on the two tables pressed together. And notably, a canvas (or at least, one would assume) hung on the wall, covered by a fine cloth sheet, one which blocks the viewer from seeing what lay beneath. This was, naturally, Adrien's Magnum Opus, and perhaps the work he was both least and most proud of.

If one were to continue past the unfinished work and clutter, a small set of wooden stairs would lead up to a set of rooms. One, a bedroom with a small wooden frame and flock mattress, the bedding itself rather unkept and certainly not properly made up. Adrien never cared for the obsession of making beds look as though they weren't made to sleep in. A writing desk stood across from it. The other room acted as a sitting room, though it could be used for other things if the situation called for it.

In the back of the studio, a small kitchen area, one which also doubled as a place to launder his already beaten clothing if needed, contained a simple place to wash up, and a hearth for cooking.
Overall, the studio was small, and Adrien liked it that way.

Adrien set his sketchbook somewhat haphazardly on a stack of papers. Drawings, attempts, that lay piled and abandoned. He made his way up the stairs, untying his cravat with one hand as his mind raced. Ultimately, cravat shed, collar unbuttoned, battered blue jacket hung with the most care he'd shown anything that evening upon a peg in the bedroom, Adrien decided upon the reason. Artist recognized artist. He may not know each Bridgerton specifically, and though Adrien tended to steer clear of the idle gossip of the upper classes when he could, he was well aware of the family's reputation, and the reputation of its individuals.

It certainly was new, and didn't hurt Benedict's rankings in 'People Adrien is willing to socialize with' that the man didn't inquire into the locked basement of Adrien's history. That, in particular, had been the fascination of the Ton, some twenty years prior. True, after it

became increasingly obvious that Adrien would not be airing his secrets for another nation's high society to spread, embellish, and ultimately make theirs, they stopped. Adrien did what he never had before, and melted into the background. Present, but not there.

Benedict Bridgerton however, asked about none of those things, and that intrigued the Frenchman. Curiosity is natural, yet curiosity without ulterior motive was much rarer.

Adrien pulled a stool up to his writing desk, fishing a piece of paper out, picking out a well worn quill, and uncapping the inkwell. Then he stopped, twisting the feathered writing utensil in his hand, as if deciding what to write. Or, perhaps, to whom. Instead of waiting any longer, he sits up, dips the quill into the pot, and puts it to paper.

~~*Dear Amelie,*~~

~~*I met somebody today.*~~

He crosses the sentence out. Too ridiculous.

~~*Dear Amelie,*~~

~~*There was a man at the ball today.*~~

He paused. Better. Less conversational. She would hate it. Cross it out and try again. And again. And again.

By the time the moon was high and Luna's reflection filtered in through the window, there were several attempts at this, scrawled over the paper. Eventually, a hiss of air escaping, the quill returned to its drawer, and the paper tossed haphazardly to a pile on the side. 'Dear Amelie' falling gently atop several more of the same sort. Covering a multitude of 'Dear Amelie', 'Dear Georges', 'Dear Louis-Antoine'. Possibly other names, and dates as well. Letters never sent, or perhaps never intended to be sent.

Adrien takes his spectacles, letting them drop to the desk, before standing, unbuttoning his waistcoat in preparation for sleep. Clearly, the conversation in the garden weighed on him more than he expected. This played in his mind throughout the rest of his nightly routine.

By the time Adrien had extinguished the lamp and gone to bed, he had reached the particularly inconvenient conclusion that Benedict Bridgerton was interesting. More inconvenient so was that he was interested in seeing whether the Bridgerton remained so.

Chapter 3: In Which the Vicomte Realizes the Inconvenience Makes Pleasant Company

The next morning brought clear skies and the fresh urge to go… somewhere. And so, not one to leave work unfinished, except when the muse demanded, which was rather more often then he appreciated (hence the many half-done works lying forgotten). That is how Adrien found himself back in the garden from the night before, a fresh page opened to, and once more against the stone wall.

The drawing itself, perhaps, was not the only reason for returning to this specific scene, though it is the reason Adrien allows himself to consider.

The pond itself had not changed all that much since his last visit here. Boughs still hanging, flowers still in bloom, the smell aromatic. Adrien's mind, though partly focusing on his work, wandered while his hand moved. His eyes fixed on the pond itself, not necessarily looking *at* the pond, but rather at the reflections shining back at him. The important part about this fact being, the reflections allowed Adrien to see the happenings behind him. It was this purposeful positioning that allowed Adrien to see when a figure, blurred in the shifting water, began to approach. It seemed, against all odds (though, frankly, looking back the odds were not very strong to begin with), that the man plaguing Adrien's thoughts had returned.

"Monsuier Bridgerton. How pleasant to see you again." Adrien's voice was dry, perhaps a mite deadpan, but the twitch in his lips betrayed both the speaker and observer.

The figure paused, and for a brief moment Adrien wondered whether he had misidentified the blur in the water. Just a moment, however, and his assumption was proved correct when the figure spoke,
"And you, Vicomte." A slight pause before, "Is the pond such a muse that calls to you?"

Adrien set his pencil down, turning ever so slightly as to bring Benedict into view,
"Something of the sort. I suppose I did extend the invitation, didn't I." His attention, turned back towards the pond, seems to forget he is addressing the other, "How curious…"

At this point, Benedict had taken the initiative to not stand conspicuously behind the other artist, coming around the stone wall and taking a seat next to the Vicomte. Tucked under his arm, a sketchbook of his own.

Adrien cocked an eyebrow, watching the younger man flip open to a page already well worked on. The same scene, near mirrored on Adrien's own paper. The pond, the boughs, the moon shining off the water's surface. Near mirrored. Where Adrien's lacked any sign of humanity, no lanterns or silhouetted people in the distance, no sign of any manmade interference, Benedict's view of the same scene contained just that. The reflections of the lanterns on the water, illuminating the dusky scene, and off in the distance, just noticeable enough, the attendees of the past night's ball. Dancing, talking, and existing.

“You added the lanterns.” Adrien noted, looking back at his own work, void of any hint of people. A conscious choice.

Benedict took his time in responding, “I did. I rather like them.”

“They obscure the water.” Adrien hums, adding some shading to the trees, “Though I suppose that is more accurate to reality.”

“You don’t draw people, do you? As if all the world is empty?” Benedict asks, noting the distinct lack of society in Adrien’s work.

Adrien cocks his head, looking at his own before he answers, “Perhaps I prefer it that way.”

“Perhaps.” Benedict takes some time, scratching away on his own paper before pressing on, “That makes two. I get one more question, best make it count.” he grins at the Frenchman next to him. And for once, Adrien is not opposed to the expression.

Adrien lets his lips twitch upwards, not necessarily a full smile, but better than the smirk that haunted so many of his earlier years. The expression did not reach his eyes in full, “One more indeed.”

Benedict did not ask his third question immediately, instead turning back to his own work. Adrien, under the guise of examining the scenery, takes a long look in the younger’s direction. There were,
Adrien suspected, more than three questions behind those eyes. It was, it seemed, more of a question on how many meetings such as this would it take for all those questions to be answered, and how many meetings Adrien would allow.

Then, after much deliberation, “What do you paint?”. Oddly simple, all things considered, though Adrien wondered if Benedict realized the answer was more complicated than the answer he was going to give.

“Landscapes, mostly.” Adrien took a long look at his drawing.

“Mostly?”

“People, once.”

“Why did you stop?” Benedict’s eyes flickered to the empty scene.

Adrien paused, pencil hovering where it was, “That,” he gave a moment’s pause, “is a fourth question.”

Chapter 4: In Which a Question Is Asked, An Answer is Given, and the Vicomte Realizes He May Have Revealed Too Much

The immediate aftermath of Adrien's statement was silent. Benedict didn't seem bothered by his abruptness in shutting down that particular line of questioning. Benedict also didn't seem urged to point out that, technically, that was question five. Whether because he had not realized this, or because he did not want to wait until they crossed paths again, though it seemed increasingly likely to happen sooner rather than later, we cannot be certain.

The silence was intermittently broken by Adrien humming softly, punctuating the occasional stroke of his pencil on paper. Benedict, to his credit, did not immediately pursue any other line of questioning, content to pencil in his view of the pond alongside the older Artist.

Adrien doesn't look up from his work, "Your technique is good." He pauses after that, and it is clear to both that there's more Adrien wants to say.

Benedict frowns slightly, "I sense there is a 'but' coming.", his voice is light, but it doesn't take perfect sight to see that the comment, or the looming insinuation, bothered the Bridgerton.

"However, there is a 'however' coming." Adrien says, eyes flicking over, "Your technique is good, not perfect, but that comes with time. However, you focus on too many things. It's… crowded."

"Crowded how, exactly?"

Adrien's eyes flicker again, and his teeth run across his bottom lip quickly, as he clearly seems to be searching for the right way, the most passive way, to respond. "What, in this scene, is supposed to draw your eye?" He waits a half-second before continuing, "The pond, ideally. But here you have three subjects. The pond, the lanterns, and the people. Now, there's nothing *wrong*, per se, but it detracts from the whole image." Adrien stops, seemingly losing what words were to follow. Instead, he eventually settles, "It's not incorrect. Art can't be objectively incorrect, but it's worth asking yourself what you are trying to say in your art." Adrien finishes his monologue, not entirely unakin to that of Professors at the Royal Academy.

Benedict lets the criticism steep for a few minutes before he breaks the silence, which is just teetering on awkward, "Then why do you paint? What is your art trying to say?" he risks asking a sixth question. Adrien didn't call him on the extra two he'd asked, until he'd asked why he'd stopped. Perhaps one more would not be amiss? Newsflash, sometimes things that seem innocent may, in fact, be more telling than either speaker originally realized.

Adrien hums, "It is easier to remember, when there is something physical to look at."

It didn't take a genius to know that Adrien was not referring to remembering a pond.

“Remember what?” Benedict pushes lightly, hesitantly, as if approaching a rabbit or squirrel. The comparison is amusing, and not entirely wrong when labeled against the Vicomte.

And like a squirrel, hearing the snap of leaves and twigs in the woods, Adrien stills. He exhales sharply, like a dragon puffing smoke from its nostrils, and hums. He does not answer, instead clearly replaying the conversation, lips tilting downwards. “That…. Is not important. Not to anyone but myself.” he finally forces out, voice almost monotone, a sharp contrast to the original light and bookish tone from before. Clearly, a nerve has been struck.

Benedict doesn’t apologize, but he’s smart enough to know when to backpedal, “Of course.” He accepts the answer, not continuing down that particular conversation.

Silence falls again. There is a slight tension in the air, but it seems to fade away before Benedict’s eyes, and the balance is restored. And, as seems to be the norm, the pair go back to drawing. Until, inevitably, Benedict becomes brave again. And when people become brave, they tend to make rather reckless in regard to impulsive decisions.

“There are better gardens at Bridgerton House.”

Adrien looked up, a flash of genuine surprise making itself known before reverting back to his usual bored expression, “And you are inviting me to come paint them?”.

“That is what I implied, yes.” Though anyone with half a brain could see beyond that. Fortunantly though, our pair of artists remained very, very blind.

Adrien hums, “Well then, Monsieur Bridgerton, I accept.”

The Vicomte de Montfaucon had agreed to paint the gardens and surroundings of Bridgerton House. He had not agreed to become closely acquainted with the rest of the Bridgerton Brood. This distinction, he would discover, was largely theoretical.

Chapter 5: In The Gardens

Adrien hunched slightly, laser-focused on the scene in front of him. The grounds were, in fact, far better than his previous subjects. He would not admit this aloud. He also, initially, did not intend to admit that he was unsurprised to find the grounds more fruitful to paint, because he had seen this same image before, so very long ago.

This was, perhaps important to note, not the first time Adrien had been to Bridgerton House, though it should be considered that there were certainly fewer children running about. This particular factoid was brought to the forefront near immediately upon arriving, in the form of one Violet Bridgerton, who upon seeing the man, had greeted him with surprising warmth and remarked that he looked well. The ragged clothes and general air of unkemptness aside, he supposed he did look remarkably better than he did in 1797. The general state of wretchedness was gone, the anger quelled, the fire quenched. Yes, he was remarkably well, all things considered.

Adrien had ignored Benedict’s questioning look following that particular interaction, instead motioning for the younger artist to lead the way.

That was how he found himself in front of an easel, brush in one hand, capturing the image of a gazebo, wreathed in flowers, the sun hitting at just the right angle to cast the perfect shadow. Benedict was a few feet away, similarly set in front of canvas, brush angled, capturing some other scene. That other scene being the gazebo, with the inclusion of Adrien himself. A painting of a painter painting a painting. How alliterate.

Adrien was, for all accounts, fully engrossed in his work. Ragged blue jacket hung over a bench, sleeves rolled up to his elbows, cravat loosened ever so slightly, though not nearly enough to be considered indecent. Spectacles pushed firmly up on the bridge of his nose. A spare brush stuck behind one ear, and Adrien bore an expression of pure concentration. He was content.

It was because of that contentness, that when the sound of footfalls began to reach hearing distance, he did not initially look up to examine the newcomer.

The young man was unmistakably a Bridgerton. Brown hair, blue eyes, fair skin, and the sort of symmetrical features that made portraitists' lives considerably easier. He had Benedict's coloring, though little of his brother's particular expression, where Benedict often looked as though he knew a joke no one else had been told, this one looked as though he was genuinely interested in hearing it. There was something remarkably open about his face, made more so by the easy smile upon seeing the two artists. Yes, he was unmistakably a Bridgerton.

The newcomer did not immediately address Adrien, instead sauntering over to Benedict and peering over his brother’s shoulder. There was a brief moment of silence until, “Interesting painting.”, the man’s expression, one of glee, gave it away that he was not interested in the gazebo on the page.

Benedict turned his head slowly, “Colin.”

Adrien, finally tearing his attention from the oils and brushes and canvas, turns at the sound, finally noticing (or, more explicitly, finally taking a good look at) the newest addition to the garden. Colin Bridgerton, he filed the name away to match the face.

Adrien placed his tools down carefully, wiping his hands on a rag, paint-stained and clearly not the color of its creation, that hung from his pocket. Benedict, spurred by etiquette trained into the three of them, steps between them, “Colin, meet Vicomte Adrien-Henri de Montfaucon. Vicomte, this is my brother Colin.” he introduces the pair.

Adrien extends a hand, “The pleasure is mine, Monsieur.” He shook the younger Bridgerton’s hand firmly, but released it soon after.

“Vicomte… French, clearly. Where are you from in France, if you don’t mind the question.” Colin asks, tone quizzical, but clearly interested. “I have been to Paris, and Marseille, but I don’t recall meeting anyone by the name Montfaucon.” He’s fishing for information, clearly.

Adrien, pausing, takes a moment to answer, as if weighing the correct response. He had to give an answer, it was only polite, but what version of the answer was almost just as important as giving one.
Eventually, “I spent most of my youth in Paris, though my family had a number of estates dotted around the country.” A short pause, “No, you wouldn’t have met anyone by the name of Montfaucon. None living, at least.” There’s an expected moment of silence at the answer, as both Bridgerton’s go through that loop of ‘how to respond’, before Adrien takes mercy on the poor English Aristocrats and continues, “Do not worry about finding a polite response, it was long ago, and a long time coming.” He goes back to his painting, unbothered by the flash of wide-eyed astonishment.

Colin, emboldened by the seemingly unbothered response, forges on, “I did come across the name though.”

“Pardon?” Adrien turns, setting his brush down and fully entering the conversation at this point, “In what context.”. His sudden interest in something other than the gazebo takes both Bridgerton boys by surprise.

Colin blinks before responding, “There was a gallery I attended, and one of the paintings on display was titled ‘Montfaucon at the Scaffold’-”

He doesn’t get to finish his sentence before Adrien stills, like a spooked deer, and interrupts, “That one… Tends to be embellished with every recreation.” Adrien hums, “It is shoddy work.”

Colin is confused. Benedict is confused. The only person not in this state of bewilderment is Adrien himself, who is very much aware of why the response elicits such bewilderment. Eventually, Benedict, who has sat through Adrien’s art lectures at this point, breaks the silence, “Why?”

Adrien huffs, eyes locked on the gazebo, hand painting with the finesse of decades of experience. Then he answers, “It’s inaccurate. It’s biased. It doesn’t tell the full story. The coat is the wrong shade of blue. Take your pick. It is shoddy work.”

Benedict responds almost immediately, “You said yesterday that art couldn’t be incorrect. Why is this piece any different?” Then, “It bears your name, you don’t like that, I assume that you are the subject.” He trails off.

Adrien hums, but doesn’t confirm nor deny the fact, rather he starts down another path, “It was… a bloody time. Year 2 was not a pleasant time in France’s history.” Adrien eventually answers, brush strokes becoming harsher, wider. Benedict can see his grip on the handle tighten.

Benedict watched Adrien, hand movements restrained, but tense. The strokes had become heavier, less deliberate, the careful precision replaced by something almost violent. Whatever ‘Montfaucon at the Scaffold’ depicted, it had not merely embarrassed the man beside him, it had hurt him.

“If you intend to stare, Monsieur Bridgerton, at least do so at the painting.” Adrien directs at the second son.

Benedict did just that. Colin had the expression of someone who had realized that he had stumbled upon something that he was not supposed to know. Adrien continued painting. And for once, no questions were asked. Small mercies, perhaps, for everyone involved.

Chapter 6: In Which the Vicomte Makes an Effort, Society Takes Notice, And Two Artists Commit the Scandalous Act of Dancing

The awkwardness of that particular meeting did not stop them from happening again in the future. Adrien would arrive, set up somewhere on the grounds, and paint the day away with Benedict. Mostly uninterrupted, Adrien had seen neither hide nor hair of Colin, nor any other Bridgerton besides Benedict and Violet, since the first meeting. Regardless, there was no sense of unwelcomeness present, and Adrien found himself looking forward to these weekly, sometimes more often than that, meetings. Rarely were words spoken beyond those relating to art, and never did those words relate to years gone by. This in particular, was something Adrien found particularly pleasant about the younger man.

This was, of course, how Adrien found himself attending the next of Society's little soirees.

Adrien, in his studio, stood in front of the mirror in the sitting room. Blue worn waistcoat swapped out for a brown one, new, or at least made within the last few years. Slate cravat tied deftly, the linen wrapped around his neck before the ends were arranged in a restrained bow. It was a style heavily favoured by those he surrounded himself with in his youth, though Adrien himself had never been one for propriety, even then. His shirt, ironed and free of creases, the ivory coloring not burdened by paint stains or whatnaught. Shoes shining with more than a base wipedown with a rag. An oxblood jacket, the same color as his hair, still older in style but much less worn, compared to the blue one, completes the outfit.

It was, perhaps, worth noting that Adrien had not tied his cravat like this in years. It was also perhaps worth noting that Benedict Bridgerton was the reason he was attending the ball at all. Adrien, naturally, noted neither.

Adrien stares. He hasn't looked this put together in years. A hand drifts up, brushing the bow-tied cravat, ghosting over the fabric. The last time he had worn it like this, it was his 18th birthday, and hands that were not his own were solemnly tying it. One last parting gift before eternal separation. The memory surfaces, and is immediately Adrien pushes it away. Pushes away the memory of men long dead.

Adrien hesitated before the mirror. His hair, normally left to do as it pleased, was another matter entirely. He dipped his fingers into the small pot of pomatum and worked it through the unruly strands, combing them neatly back and to one side. The result was almost unnervingly orderly. The familiar wildness was gone, replaced by something that looked considerably more like the young man who had once moved through Paris and beyond. He did what he could to not think about the silver starting to peek through at his temples.

It was odd, seeing this version of himself again. This version, which he had tried so hard to tamp down, to forget. He gazed at his reflection critically, a small frown forming. The hair was neat, the cravat tied accordingly, the clothes clean and pressed and prim. He looked, by all accounts, completely presentable. This was, naturally, the desired outcome. Why it was the desired outcome, however, was a question Adrien had decided not to investigate.

Adrien sighed, turned, and made his way out to the street.

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Society, upon seeing the eccentric Vicomte de Montfaucon enter the ballroom, collectively experienced what could only be described as confusion of the highest caliber. Vicomte de Montfaucon was present. He was interacting with those who greeted him. He was well dressed. Vicomte de Montfaucon was here. And most alarming of all? The Vicomte de Montfaucon appeared to be actively looking for someone.

There was a noticeable pause, though quickly remedied, from those in sight of the entrance upon Adrien's arrival. Adrien, for his part, either did not notice or did not care enough to address it. He beelined for a glass, some light champagne that did little more than wet the lips, if beeline can be the correct term, while avoiding the many bodies crowding the hall. Then he, from his vantage in the corner, scanned the room, eyes settling on his target.

Benedict stood surrounded by, seemingly, about half the complete force of Bridgertons. His mother, Violet, was there, standing next to a woman Adrien assumed Eloise, if Benedict's descriptions were anything to go by. Beside Benedict, Colin, and one more of the Bridgerton men. Based on the third being clearly older than Benedict, Adrien assumed (correctly) that this must be Anthony.

Adrien locked eyes with Benedict, who had, up until this point, been speaking with his family rather animatedly. This ended abruptly, and Benedict's mouth hung open for just a second before he regained control of his expression.

Adrien took this as a cue. He approached, moving with a purpose, rather than meandering as if he did not know exactly who he intended to speak with. He approaches the group, inclining his head to the men, half bowing, hand at his waist, to the women, "Mesdames, Messuiers." His accent came thicker than usual as he turned to Benedict, "Monsieur Bridgerton. Might I borrow you?"

It was a perfectly respectable request. There was no reason whatsoever for anyone to interpret it otherwise. Several members of the Bridgerton family, unfortunately, possessed eyes.

Benedict, not gracing his family with a response to their questioning, or in some cases teasing, glances, he responds with a simple, "Of course, Vicomte."

Adrien offered a small smile, with Benedict following almost in an instant. Towards the outside, away from prying eyes and listening ears and the majority of high society. And more specifically, towards that very same pond that the two had made their first meeting a few weeks prior.

Though the two have been walking in silence for the majority of the trek, Benedict, looking Adrien up and down, taking in the more put-together appearance, breaks it, "You dressed nice." he offers out.

Adrien, facing away as he was a few steps ahead of the other, answers simply, "The occasion

called for it.” he pauses, “It was only proper.”

“Proper- I would not expect you to care for propriety.” Benedict's tone in light, and the statement, though not inherently funny, brings a genuine chuckle from the other man.

“Just because I do not enjoy the tripes and contrivances and rules of our station, does not mean I cannot follow them when the situation demands.” A pause follows, “And when the situation demands, well, I would be a fool to ignore such calls.” he finishes, just as the pair reach the pond where they had made each other’s acquaintance.

The scene was unchanged, except perhaps a few more flowers were in bloom, and there was the faint scent of moss mixed in. The moon hung overhead, her reflecting rays shining bright off the pond’s silver surface, and bathing the entire scene in just enough light to see. The faint sound of music floating over the silent air.

“We appear to be missing the dancing.” Benedict notes, and Adrien cocks his head to listen to the faint sound of instruments drifting over the wind.

“I have never been the fondest of dancing.” Adrien responded, ear still tilted to the wind.

“Why?”

Adrien hums before responding, as if thinking about the answer before, “Too many people knew my reputation, and that was far more alluring than anything the man underneath could provide.”

Benedict pauses for a second before, in what can only be described as a fit of foolish bravery, extends his hand to Adrien and says, “Well then, to the man underneath?”.

And, against all good sense, Adrien put his hand in the other’s.

And they danced. Slowly, swaying under the moonlight.

Neither of our intrepid artists, naturally, noticed the significance of this. This was fortunate, for had they possessed the good sense to recognize it, this story might have progressed considerably faster. Here’s to the oblivious pair.

Chapter 7: In Which the Vicomte Writes to the Dead and Paints the Living, All While Failing to Solve the Problem at Hand

Adrien, quite frankly, does not remember much in the in-between of dancing with Benedict, leaving, and returning to his studio. When memory does start up again, he has stripped off the jacket, hung it with care, untied the bow cravat, and found himself seated at his writing desk. A fresh sheet of paper on the desk, quill and ink located, penknife present should he need.

Adrien shakes out a hand, grasps the quill, dips it in the pot, and places the tip of the feathered writing instrument to paper.

Dear Amelie,

I pray this letter reaches you well, or I suppose that is what I would say if I intended to send this. We both know communication is not my forte. But, I suppose you always knew me better than even I knew myself. I suspect that was why you stayed, even with the slander that followed. You always deserved better.

I attended another one of society's balls today. The horror, I know. But at least these English soirees are much more pleasant to endure. There is no need for facades long past their usefulness. The English seem content to let me exist, much appreciated, all things considered.

Except one. One Benedict Bridgerton. I wrote to you a few weeks ago, after our first meeting. Highlight first, because it seems to have become a routine occurrence. It's, well, it's odd.

I'm sure you would have some words of wisdom to share, were I not so much a coward to avoid contact. But, alas, there are some lines I daren't cross, even for a friend such as you. I swore before that I would not put you in any more danger, never again.

~~*I remain, as ever, your obedient servant,*~~
~~*A. de Montfaucon*~~

Adrien crosses out the signature. Too formal for what he and she were, once.

I remain, as ever, your devoted friend,
Adrien

Adrien dated the letter, signing and resigning, before letting the letter flutter to the stack of other unsent correspondence. He hummed a quiet, resigned sound, slumping in his chair and rubbing his face.

This was beginning to become more than a mite inconvenient.

Adrien stood abruptly, hands twitching at his sides, and, in a blink, found himself in the

studio proper. Hearth burning brightly, casting a glow across most of the room. The other half, not fully illuminated, is lit partially by the moonlight that seeps in through the window, escaping the cloud cover that's taken the sky as the night progresses.

Adrien, seemingly possessed by the urge to create, put brush to canvas, and let that urge take control. Perhaps it would rid him of this strange….. Problem. A problem that was beginning to affect the Vicomte on a deeper level than just how he chooses to spend his afternoons. A problem, it seems, that was beginning to take shape on the canvas in front of him.

The canvas had started out as a simple landscape. The garden under the moonlight. Then, a figure began to take shape. The sweep of a shoulder, the angle of a head turned to moonlight, the faintest trace of a hand extending forward, like it is reaching off the page, towards the artist. Then, a line of the jaw, the curve of a cheek. Brown hair catching the silver moonlight. The eyes came last, and for a mere moment, his hand stalled, brush hovering over the canvas for the briefest of moments.

Blue. Adrien had seen those eyes enough by now to know.

The mouth finished the image, the ghost of a smile softening the expression, as if the wearer had discovered some source of amusement and had not yet decided whether to share with the class. It was the same expression he'd adopted when Adrien had taken his hand, letting him pull the man into a slow waltz under the stars.

Adrien paused, staring at the finished work. He had not intended to paint a portrait. Not at all. He frowned. The problem, it turns out, was not solved by creation.

Adrien set down his brush. He began to pace. He had spent years, decades, painting people he loved, people he lost, people whose faces now only existed in memory. Everyone in his paintings were people long dead. He had never painted someone, still alive and well, simply because he could. And that, dear reader, was becoming more of a problem then Adrien wanted to admit.

Chapter 8: Of Pasts Revealed, Sort Of

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next day, upon meeting Benedict on Bridgerton Grounds, there was certainly a different feel in the air, though what in particular Adrien could not name. Perhaps it was simply the warmer weather of summer, perhaps the mild humidity left behind by an overnight rainstorm, perhaps, perhaps, perhaps. Of course, the answer of what's changed is painfully obvious, but it is not an answer our dear Vicomte intends to consider.

Certainly, he was there to paint, and nothing more. Which was why in the time since arrival, he had done little more than start an outline, and instead spent the time staring unblinking at the other artist. Eventually, it got to a point where it could no longer be ignored.

"Something on your mind, Vicomte?" Benedict asked, voice light, but also very aware of his companions' unbroken gaze.

Adrien hummed, chin resting on his hand from where he sat, leaned against a trunk, outline on one knee. "Who are you, Benedict Bridgerton?" He eventually asks.

The question catches Benedict by surprise, "Pardon?"

"Who are you?" Adrien asks again, still staring, still resting his head on his fist, more like a curious schoolboy than the man he was.

"I don't quite under-"

"I know who you are on paper. Public knowledge shared by the whole of the Ton. Farther perhaps. Artist. Second son. Unburdened by commitment to your station. But-" Here Adrien stands, stalking forward, and for a moment it seems the passive, eccentric Artist is gone, replaced by someone more calculating, more cunning, more alive. Panther-like. Pacing. He seems uninterested in the frankly bewildered expression painting Benedict's face. "I can't get you out of my head, and that, my dear, is just the problem." And just as quickly, the Vicomte is back with a hum, and that other, whatever it was, is gone, and Adrien returns. He stops his pacing, "You are an enigma, Benedict Bridgerton, and you are an enigma I intend to demystify." He lets himself sit back down with a thump, back against the tree.

Benedict is frozen. Frozen, flattered, a mite bit concerned because *who was that because that wasn't Adrien the Artist*. But whatever it was, it was gone, and regular old Vicomte de Montfaucon had replaced it. Barring the staring, that was new. New, but not, perhaps, unwelcome.

Finally, after what felt like ages, but probably really was only a few minutes or so, Adrien breaks the silence, "When's your birthday?".

Tonal whiplash aside, it did surprise the other enough to knock him out of the stupor he'd been in for a good while. Benedict, blinking, brain finally processing the last ten to fifteen minutes, finally registered the question. Face mildly warm, he managed to stammer out a "Pardon?".

"When is your birthday?" Adrien asked again, as if it were the most normal thing in the world after his…. Monologue…. twenty minutes prior.

Brain still not firing on all cylinders quite yet, Benedict manages to stammer out a quick, "June. 19th. 1787. And yours?"

"10 Therm-" Adrien stops himself, "July 28th, 1776." he stumbles over the date ever so slightly, as if the Gregorian Calendar is not the one he is most experienced with.

"A week away, do you have plans?" Benedict asks, part of him still frazzled at the day's conversation, but most of his senses regained.

Adrien hums for a moment before answering, "I do not celebrate it." he waits a few seconds before, "At least, not since coming to England."

"Why?"

"The date has an unpleasant history attached. A story for another time." The last sentence is murmured, and Benedict wondered if Adrien had even realized he said it.

Benedict waited, giving Adrien ample time to continue, and when it became clear the Vicomte appeared lost in thought, likely in that unpleasant history, he spoke, "The only way to change the day's connotation is to attach it to pleasant memories, so I vote that it's high time you start celebrating again." He smiles as if that's the answer to all burning questions.

Adrien looks like he's about to say something, pauses, and appears to switch gears. "Favorite book." he asks, finally breaking the silence. As if playing whatever the regency equivalent of twenty questions would take away from the monologue half an hour prior. It doesn't, but sometimes it's kinder to let delusions sit.

Benedict thinks for a minute before responding, "*Pride and Prejudice.*"

Adrien hums, "Austen, good choice." Neither of our two artists seemed to realize exactly how ironic that choice was, but if they had, well, this story would have been over long before this chapter, wouldn't it?

Here, Benedict mirrors the question back, "You have my favorite book, now the same question, what's yours?" He leans back against the tree across from where Adrien is perched, watching the other artist.

Adrien takes a moment, as if cycling through a number of possible answers. He hums, before,

“I am particularly fond of *Organt*.”. He readjusts as he speaks, lacing his hands together and resting his chin on them.

“I… don’t believe I know that one.” Benedict’s expression takes on a quizzical expression.

This draws a warm chuckle from Adrien, “No, no, I can’t imagine you have.” a pause, “I knew the author, and I can’t say he was entirely too happy with teenage-Adrien’s choice of reading material.”
Here Adrien moves his laced hands behind his head, stretching out, and a genuine smile forming.

“You knew the author?” Benedict asks, sensing that there was more to that answer then meets the eye.

Adrien’s smile widened just a fraction, suddenly appearing more boyish, “Personally.”.

“Who was he?”

“Louis-Antoine Saint-Just.”

At this point, dear reader, it would not be unfair to liken Adrien to a man trying to hide from the past, yet constantly leaving a trail of breadcrumbs on the floor pointing to the words ‘Ask me!’, and then being surprised when he gets asked questions. Well, there is a reason that love is said to blind. Not that Adrien would know, because he is, in fact, very very blind regarding that.

Benedict’s brows raise. The name is familiar, though mostly in the way certain names from history were familiar, attached to books, newspapers, and discussions that had little bearing on the life of an English gentleman in 1816. “Saint-Just,” he repeats slowly. “You mean *that* Saint-Just?”

Adrien hums, seemingly pleased by the recognition, “There was only ever one.”
Benedict stares at him for another moment, then laughs softly, shaking his head. “I begin to suspect there is rather more to you than you let on.”

Adrien’s smile falters for the briefest moment. Then, just as quickly, it returns. “Perhaps.”
And, mercifully, he does not elaborate. Benedict, however, is beginning to suspect that “perhaps” may be the closest thing the Vicomte possesses to a confession.

Chapter End Notes

> Gosh darnit Adrien, you can't just let Citizen break free like that, this isn't '93 where that's acceptable-

Chapter 9: The Shovel-Talk, In Which A Viscount and A Vicomte Realize Intimidation is Pointless

Frankly, after the near-confession of the last chapter, Adrien truly should have suspected that there would be consequences. One doesn't reveal personal relations, of any sort, with the heralded "Archangel of Terror" and not expect it to raise eyebrows. Though, of course, there's always some margin of dramatization, or perhaps nuance, when it comes to such monikers. But that's, as always, something to expand upon in another chapter.

Regardless, after the events of the day prior, it should be no surprise to anyone, least of all Adrien, when one Anthony Bridgerton appeared after Benedict, who had been with Adrien in the gardens, had to run inside to get a forgotten… something.

"Monsieur de Montfaucon." the tone is deceptively calm and polite, but the formal usages, well, Adrien hadn't been away from polite society long enough to note that this mean that this was anything but a social call. Very well, two can play this game.

Adrien put his brush down, "Lord Bridgerton." He responds in kind.

Anthony, not at all put off by the reciprocated formality, "I hope you will forgive my speaking plainly, Monsieur de Montfaucon."

"I generally prefer it." Adrien hums, turning fully towards the other man, hands lacing behind his back, "What can I do for you?"

"My brother appears to think very highly of you." Anthony pauses, letting the meaning behind the phrase sink in.

Adrien hummed, "He is a discerning man."

There's a slight pause, where it becomes clear that the usual role of 'Intimidating Older Brother and Viscount' routine is decidedly not going to work in this situation.

"I don't intend to insult you, Vicomte, but I'm sure you understand the concern that comes with the situation." Anthony's drop in a level of formality is not missed, and Adrien offers a small pleasant smile, not necessarily genuine, but not entirely false.

"I gathered that, and I can assure you, I hold no ill intentions towards Benedict, or any of the rest of yours." Adrien pauses, "He is good company. I enjoy it."

"So I've gathered."

"He is intelligent. An excellent artist."

Here, Anthony interrupts the listing of his brother's good virtue to get at the root of his reason

for this particular conversation, “You’ve forgotten handsome.” Throwing that out there, to see what the other will do with it.

He gets his answer when Adrien responds with barely a hesitation, “I had not forgotten.”

A moment of silence follows, as both Viscount and Vicomte process what that particular admission means. Anthony, for having his suspicions confirmed, and Adrien, for finally realizing exactly what the past few weeks have meant, and accepting it, rather than trying to justify his feelings. Shocking, perhaps someone should check to make sure the world hasn’t ended.

Adrien breaks the silence, “I have no intentions of hurting your brother.”

Anthony studies the man for a moment, “Intentions are not always enough.”

“No.” Adrien sighs, “No, they are not.” This is something Adrien is very, very familiar with.

Anthony opens his mouth as if to say something, seems to think for a moment, before, “I remember you.”

Adrien cocks his head slightly, “Pardon?”

“1797. I remember you. I remember the strange French emigre that stayed in Bridgerton house for a few days.” He pauses, “I don’t think Benedict does, but I do.”

Adrien hums, “Yes… Your parents were kind enough to give me a place to stay. Your father funded my studio, the first few months.”

Anthony nods, “You were a different person, then. Now, well, it seems the years have done you good.”

“For all its flaws, England has been welcoming. I can promise that the angry young man you remember is no longer who I am.” Here, Adrien fully locks gazes with the other, “I do not make promises easily, but this is one I can make.”

The statement seems to take a weight off of Anthony’s shoulders, tension leaving, and the air becomes less stiff surrounding them. “I am glad.” Anthony finally says, “But I do ask you to be careful.” He seems genuinely concerned, not just for Benedict at this point, “Though we may be accepting on the subject of love… The rest of England is not.”

Here Adrien interrupts, “I would not wish to subject Benedict to the slander that the press is capable of spewing.” A sharper man would spy the ever so subtle change in inflection in Adrien’s tone. So very small, but present. Something suggesting that the Vicomte had more experience with said press than he let on. “Discretion, of course, is key.”

Anthony nods, and appears to be about to continue when the sound of footsteps begin to echo down, alerting the two towards Benedict’s returning presence.

Benedict, blissfully unaware that he had missed an entire conversation of considerable importance to his future, returned to find the Viscount and Vicomte standing together in what appeared to be a state of mutual civility. This, dear reader, was progress. Whether it was the sort of progress that would survive Benedict opening his mouth remained to be seen.

Chapter 10: In Which The Living Can Begin

Adrien found himself that night seated in front of his writing desk. Quill in hand, fresh sheet of paper dated, pot set next to his hand, hand hovering over the paper, thoughts racing.

Dear Amelie,

No doubt were you here, you would be quite cross. Not because of anything being wrong, per se, in fact, things are more right than they have any right to be. More right than I deserve.

I can see your face, I know what you're thinking. Be kinder to yourself, or something along those lines. I promise, the melancholia of my youth has long since departed.

I believe, after almost twenty-two years, I have fallen in love again. Please, spare me the suffering of your silent judgement. This time, at least, it seems reciprocal. My days of trailing after attractive men like a lost puppy ended the day I left you.

I know you would tell me to take a chance. Of all of those we, I, surrounded myself with, you would probably be the kindest in that regard. Maybe I shall finally heed the words he spoke to me, those decades ago, two days to the day. Maybe, my dear, I shall start to live.

I remain, as ever, your devoted friend,
Adrien

Adrien sat back, looking at the letter, and for once, felt genuinely lighter at the letter. Then, he picked it up and let it flutter to the ground, settling atop the pile of other unsent correspondence. Banished to below eye level, never to be sent. Then, he pulled a fresh sheet, dated it, and began to write.

Dear Camille,

You would, no doubt, find this entire situation impossibly amusing. I cannot agree, but I suppose that would not stop you. It didn't stop you with him, and it wouldn't stop you now. If I were younger, as I was then, I might be aggravated by it. Now, I think I find myself wishing that you were here, to tease and taunt, because, I suppose, that would mean you were still here.

~~*But you're not, and I am at fault.*~~

Adrien stopped, memory flooding in, before he put his quill down, forging on, doing his best to block out the last images he has of the other.

~~*But living in the past is productive for no one*~~

He stops again, hissing out a breath, and all but shoves the paper off of the writing desk,

letting it settle on the pile. Spectacles slid off his nose, tossed to the desk, hands rubbing his face.

Acceptance is hard. Acceptance after twenty-two years of denial is harder. But, perhaps, Adrien-Henri de Montfaucon had finally crossed the first hurdle, and now that living he spoke of? That living could begin.

Chapter 11: In Which the Vicomte Turns Forty, Celebrates, and Takes The Writing Equivalent of Canister Shot Directly Into the Walls That Hold Back the Past

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

July 28th was a day that Adrien had mixed feelings on. The day of his birth, a happy occasion (depending on who was asked), for seventeen years. The day of his death, metaphorically, of course, on that eighteenth year. The day of his rebirth, on his twenty-second year. And now, on the hour beginning his forty-first year, a day that heralds a new era.

That was how Adrien found himself inside Bridgerton House, surrounded by more than he had initially anticipated.

That was how he had found himself tucked on a chair, facing Benedict, sketchbook in one hand, pencil in the other, drawing the scene before him. Except the sketchbook was new, handed to him prior to entering by Benedict himself, with nigh a word spoken. A sketchbook which now received its christening drawing in the form of the second son himself.

Across the room, Anthony and Colin sit, Anthony sipping from a cup, decidedly not watching the two Artists from afar, totally not, while Colin flipped through a book, though whether he was actually reading was up for debate. Penelope and Eloise, a different corner, Eloise reading select passages through the latest of Lady Whistledown's gossip columns, Penelope, fully aware of the fact that only half of the rooms occupants, those being Eloise and Colin, know of her alter identity, listening to her friend's commentary. The rest, the younger Bridgertons specifically, Hyacinth and Gregory, had at one point been in the drawing room, but had since retreated deeper into the house.

Now, nothing about this specifically screamed 'birthday', but it did not take a genius to put two and two together and get four. From the conversation in the garden a few days prior, and the invitation on this day of all days, and then, of course, the sketchbook itself. Replace the bad memories with good indeed. And, all things considered, the day was going spectacularly well. Which, of course, meant something was almost certainly bound to go wrong at some point.

"Dearest Gentle Reader," Eloise was reading aloud the most recent of Lady Whistledown's publications, fresh off the press this very morning. This would prove to be quite the turning point in this tale, no doubt.

London has long since proven her remarkable talent for overlooking what sits directly before her eyes. This has become nonesomore abundantly clear than in the case of the one Vicomte de Montfaucon. A staple memory ingrained in the younger generation of the Ton, the Vicomte has long since been allowed to wander our most respected drawing rooms with nothing more

than a paintbrush, a ragged appearance, and a personality quite unlike the gentlemen who surround him. It should be considered fortunate, then, that the Vicomte's eccentricity has long been mistaken for innocence.

At this point, Adrien's eyes flicker up from where he sits, observing Benedict, capturing his likeness on paper, in order to observe Eloise, and by extension Penelope, as the young Bridgerton daughter reads the pamphlet. Adrien's expression at hearing his name became very clearly one of interest, though he kept it tamped down for the most part.

The Revolution, as we are all aware, was not so considerate towards those of noble blood. For a family such as the Montfaucon's, this goes double, devoted so as they were to the old order, rather than France's great experiment at liberty. So, dearest reader, how can it be that when the entire Montfaucon family met their fate during the Terror, what was so different about our mysterious Vicomte that he escaped the blade free and unharmed?

Adrien frowns at this, head cocking slightly, ear turning slightly skyward. Something is clearly amiss here.

It appears, dear reader, that the Vicomte's artistic pursuits were not confined to landscapes and the agreeable views of the countryside which now decorate so many of the houses in England, and beyond, if the rumor among collectors are to be believed. In his youth, it seems, our dear Vicomte served as recordkeeper, and later, as pamphleteer and propagandist for causes much less popular in the drawing rooms of London, and men whose name requires no introduction to the well informed. Robespierre. Saint-Just. Architects of Terror.

Adrien fully looked up from his drawing at this point, frown reaching proportions more akin to a scowl, and something odd gleamed in his eye. At this point, nobody bothered trying to hide their interest in the pamphlet, and the Vicomte's reaction to such news.

Finally, dear reader, we get to perhaps the most damning, and most controversial, piece of evidence regarding the enigma that is Vicomte de Montfaucon. The painting, notably not done by the Vicomte, that bears his name. 'Montfaucon at the Scaffold', sometimes titled 'Citizen Montfaucon at the Scaffold', or perhaps 'The Libertine Montfaucon at the Scaffold', is oft considered one of the most important regarding the final days of the Terror. For those familiar with its many incarnations, for several copies, not all carbon copies, have been created by different artists, they will recall the depiction of a young aristocrat, revealed to have been the Vicomte himself after much research, collapsed at the foot of the guillotine, overcome by a grief that some have deemed rather more intimate than friendship ought to permit. Whether such interpretations reveal anything of the subject himself, or merely the appetites of those who have repeated them, is a question this author shall leave to the reader.

Eloise finishes the pamphlet, "And if the Vicomte de Montfaucon has kept such company, and concealed such a past, what might his present companions discover should they look a little closer?".

Silence is expected, but silence is decidedly not what the audience gets.

Adrien stood abruptly, startling the Bridgerton's present. His expression is not the passive, emotionless, uncaring one that they had come to know and expect from him. Rather, what graved his face could only be described as a wolfish snarl, muscles tense, almost as if to leave.

If only things were that simple.

Adrien stalked forward, swiftly and with purpose. His long stride, helped by his usually gangly and awkward seeming proportions, places him in front of Eloise before Anthony could fully rise from where he sat. Speaking of Anthony, the Viscount is half-risen, a poorly concealed look of concern clearly painted on his face. Colin seems not far behind, though his concern is not, Adrien would note, directed at the Vicomte, but rather at Penelope, a few feet from him. Odd.

With a growl, a genuine growl, he plucked the paper from Eloise’s grasp, flipping it around so aggressively that it wrinkled slightly. His eyes, sharp, alive, and decidedly not like the steel eyes of the Vicomte they’ve come to know, skim the paper. He hisses again, “They know nothing of what actually occurred.” His voice is rough, and his breathing heavy. He seems… wilder.

Adrien, from his view, was far from wild. As a matter of fact, his heart had all but dropped into his feet. His pulse felt rapid, his skin clammy, and his throat tight. But even as panicked as he was, he is smart enough to still observe. Eloise’s eyes kept glancing next to her. Colin was under no pretence, instead staring openly at his wife. Anthony looked about two seconds away from putting himself between Adrien and whomever was closest. Benedict. Benedict looked physically unwell, and Adrien could not blame him. Perhaps, had he not been so used to giving, and taking, written slander as such, he too would look the same. Instead, his fear, for Lady Whistledown was, while not fully right, also not necessarily wrong, took the form of anger. Of Defensiveness.

Adrien felt a smile slide onto his face. A smile that most certainly did not reach his eyes. He turned slowly towards Penelope, placing the crinkled paper down next to Eloise on the table, and took a few steps towards the only other member of the group not blood related to the Bridgertons. He directed that shark-smile at her.

“You write well, Mrs. Bridgerton.” He smiled at her, and cleared his throat. Turning to the assembled Bridgerton’s, whatever, whoever had taken the place of the Vicomte de Montfaucon, slid away. “I am afraid I must take my leave early today. It appears something has come up.”

Chapter End Notes

Welp, the official debut of Citizen Montfaucon. We aren't counting when he broke free

in chapter 8, that wasn't supposed to happen.

Chapter 12: A Truth Unveiled

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The following days were a haze of aggressive painting and Adrien decidedly not avoiding society as a whole. Certainly not. He had simply… come down with something, and it would be incredibly impolite to go out and about while that remained an issue. His social recluse had nothing to do with the Whistledown Expose that had neatly annihilated any sense of control he had kept.

And, tragically, unlike in the days of his youth, where he had men, family, to laugh about the latest scandal regarding his name, there was no one to laugh off this.

Adrien had dealt with slander before. He had dealt slander himself, before. Except before, there was always a justification. A reason. A cause. The vitriol he put to page, harmful though it may have been, fatal in some cases, always had a justification. For the Republic. For France. For liberty.

But this is different. There is no political justification. No chance to respond in kind. Because his past, at least, the public perception of his past, had been published as gossip to be read over morning tea. And that, my dear readers, was so incredibly inconvenient.

That was how, after one particular violent brushstroke, Adrien found himself staring at the covered painting in his studio. The room, generally in a state of controlled disarray, was decidedly not so controlled. The blue ragged jacket hung over the back of a chair in the corner seemed to be an object of accusation, rather than the comfort it has been for the past two decades. Adrien himself was somehow even more disheveled than normal as well, if that can be managed. Shirtsleeves stained and spotted with paint and graphite that not even the most dedicated cleaner could ever remove fully, cravat simply nonexistent, hair tousled in a way that suggested frantic fingers had run through it several times over. Waistcoat not buttoned, letting it hang more akin to a vest then the outer layer of clothing it was supposed to be. If Adrien had looked in the mirror, which he had pointedly not been doing the past days, he would have genuinely wondered if the boy from the Jacobin Club had somehow transported himself into the present. The only difference to let him know that was not the case being the spectacles and silver in his hair, rather than the pure oxblood of the past.

Who was he kidding, Adrien knew full well what this was. This avoidance. This self-imposed exile. He had done it before, and here he was, preparing to do so again. An angry hiss. Except where would he go? Back to France? No, there were too many memories there. There, and the rest of continental Europe. To America? Possibly. There, nobody would know the name Montfaucon, and there would be plenty of opportunities to start again. Stay in England? Well, England had not proven a terrible host, and the company was pleasant- Who is he kidding, Adrien knew exactly why he was finding it hard to simply pack up and leave. Damn you, Benedict Bridgerton.

Attractive aristocrats aside, Adrien didn't particularly fancy having to uproot his entire life again, especially seeing as nobody was actively calling for his arrest and execution this time. Small mercies.

Perhaps his days of running should be put behind him. Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps.

Which was eventually what got the emotionally constipated artist off his stool long enough for Adrien to go upstairs, sit at the writing desk, pull out a paper, and begin to draft an invitation. Perhaps this time, rather than preemptively relocating across an entire ocean, he would not make the decision alone.

Dear Benedict,

The letter, an invitation for Benedict to come to Adrien's studio, something which had been hanging over their friendship for at least half of it (after all, Adrien had been to Benedict's, tit for tat, no?) was written in almost sickeningly formal language, folded, and rather than getting tossed to the stack of other unsent correspondence, mailed quite literally posthaste.

This, of course, did not mean that Adrien did not flinch violently when a knock sounded on the door. In his defence, he had never actually had company prior to this day.

Adrien, still a mite ragged, still jumpy, still on edge, peered out of one of the second floor windows carefully, identified the Bridgerton in question, before making his way down to let the guest in.

On the far to short walk down the stairs and to the door, Adrien ran any possible combination of scenarios through his mind, as well as his responses. Perhaps the distance was too far, come to think of it, because the fluttering feeling in Adrien's gut, a new and unfamiliar feeling that he was not a fan of, was beginning to reach borderline nauseous levels.

He opened the door, not even thinking to bother cleaning himself up, make himself look presentable, because there was one thing on his mind. "You came?" Adrien's tone is one of mild surprise, and perhaps a little confusion, though that gets swept away as soon as it occurs to him the impoliteness of leaving one's guest on the doorstep, "Please, come in, come in. You'll have to excuse the mess-" he steps out of the doorway, letting Benedict enter.

"Are you well?" are the first words to emanate from said Bridgerton, and Adrien, apparently finally realizing that he looks like he's put himself through a miller, looks down and gives himself a once-over.

He hums, "I am fine. When the muse strikes-" he trails off, before running a hand through his hair again, mussing it further, and humming again. "I am… surprised that you came, I admit. In my experience, generally speaking, folks tend to distance themselves from former revolutionaries." Adrien ends the sentence with a chuckle, awkward and a little off kilter, hands wringing themselves behind his back as he watches Benedict look around the open

space. Professionally, of course. Always professional, yes sir.

Benedict turns from where he's been gazing curiously at the only covered canvas in the room, hung on the far wall, "Vico- Adrien, I value your friendship, both as a fellow artist and personally. A column in the Ton's most well known gossip channel is not going to change that. Why would it?" he pauses, before, "Besides, that's just what it is. Gossip and speculation."

A forced laugh frees itself from Adrien, who seems to have adopted the expression of a deer in headlights, not that headlights have been invented yet, but the comparison stands. "Gossip and speculation indeed…" He takes a breath, "About that. There's…. Always some grain of truth to publications such as Whistledown's. Sometimes, oftentimes, it's embellished and overstated but…" he trails off, "not always."

Silence, before, "Not always?".

Adrien, preparing for… something. Rejection? Anger? Fear? He's not quite sure, but he looks at Benedict anyways, and has to blink a few times. None of the three, rather, Benedict has turned from the covered canvas, and closed the distances between the two ever so slightly. And the emotion on his face? Concern. Genuine concern for Adrien, rather than himself.

Adrien took a breath, "Let me preface that I was young. When the Revolution kicked off." Eyes flickered to the canvas, "It's remarkably easy to get… swept away by promises of a better world. And Benedict, what a world it could have been-" Adrien stands from where he was leaning, pacing back and forth, "But, like everything, it fell apart. And I have had twenty-two years to think about it."
Pause, a breath, heavy, "What the Whistledown article exposed. It's true, all of it, but only in the broadest senses of the word. I was involved in the Revolution, that is true. I still believe in those ideals, that is true. But-" here what seemed like Adrien on a roll quickly turns to Adrien searching for the right words, "but now I have had twenty-two years to consider the consequences of my actions, because, Benedict, and while I still wish that what had happened had not happened, I do not regret them." He's rambling, and he knows he's rambling. Everything in Adrien's head makes perfect sense, but hearing them aloud, well, without the full story, he's not going to make any sense.

Benedict, to his credit, simply takes a seat on the abandoned stool, and breaks through the rambling with a simple, "Tell me. The whole story. It's clearly weighing on you, and I will listen. I promise."

That is enough to freeze Adrien where he stands. A breath, an exhale, and Adrien sits on one of the few clear spaces on the table, locking his gaze with Benedict's, preparing to throw that locked basement (metaphorical) of his past wide open.

"I was…. Thirteen? Thirteen when the Revolution started. The only child of the Montfaucon family, raised by tutors and servants and staff, mostly. The usual way of the aristocracy. Normal, but… well, I suppose I'd always been spirited." A hum, "I found myself outside of, and then rather swiftly, inside the Club." a pause, "The Jacobin Club. Though its official name at the time was 'The Society of the Friends of the Constitution'. That changed in '92."

He ran a hand over his face. “I stayed, listened to the rhetoric, the speeches, to the members speak. And over the following weeks, I made myself a permanent fixture. And, well, I wasn’t told to leave, so I took that as permission to keep coming back. Eventually, I started participating. It started simple, I kept records of points, of speeches, of ideas. Eventually, some of them, they noticed my talent for particularly scathing artwork.” Here Adrien chuckled, “I was a teenager, and that came with all the angst expected. It just turns out that that could be… molded… in the right direction, given the right instructions.” Adrien’s eyes flicker back to the covered canvas, before he stood.

Walking to the canvas, “I’m sure you are wondering what’s underneath. Why I hide it. And, I suppose, it’ll also answer why, until recently-” He glances at Benedict, “I did not draw people.”

Adrien grasped the cloth, and in one swift tug, pulled it from the canvas.

The painting itself was remarkably well done, lighting and lining and painted in full, vibrant color. A scene from a room, filled with people. In the background, people hunched over tables or close together in chairs, the light shining in. And centered, four men, with one in particular seemingly wreathed in light. And, almost as an afterthought, off to the side, not focused on but so very very recognizable by anyone with eyes, a younger man, a teenager. Adrien himself. There is no title to give explanation to what Benedict has been shown. But one thing caught Benedict’s eyes. The man in the light bore the same jacket that Adrien himself wore daily, down to the shade of blue. But this jacket, the one in the painting, bears none of the raggedness of the one Adrien is so fond of.

“The Jacobin Club, as it was from the view of a younger, more radical, more naive Adrien. Before everything fell apart.” Adrien let the cloth from his hand fall to the floor, and put the other against the man centered on, “Robespierre. Saint-Just. Danton.” a pause, this time accompanied by a grimace, “Desmoulins.” Adrien dipped his head ever so slightly, “I painted them how I remembered them.
Because I could not bear to remember how things ended.” Adrien stepped back, and Benedict was shocked to see a sheen in his eyes.

Adrien turned away from the painting, as if he could not bear to look at it any longer, “I loved them. They had their differences with each other, differences that the younger Adrien was to blind to see.
Even after those differences sent two of them to their deaths.” Adrien tightens his lips, grimacing hard, as if the next words are difficult to say, “And then a few months later, the rest of my family, my actual family, not my parents, met the same fate after the people they fought for turned on them.”

Adrien sits down abruptly, both hands running over his face and through his hair. He exhaled harshly, “9 Thermidor, Robespierre and Saint-Just, as well as several other of his supporters, were arrested and housed in the Hotel de Villa. I was not among them, I had been elsewhere, drowning my sorrows maybe, I don’t remember. But I remember…” a hitch, but the sheen in his eyes did not spread, “I was not on the list. So I went there. To visit them. I don’t know if, in my mind, maybe, I was hoping for some… something to make the inevitable not so.”
Adrien took a minute to compose himself, “Saint-Just…. Antoine. He pulled me aside. He

fixed my cravat. Gave me this jacket-" Adrien motioned towards the ragged blue jacket on the chair, "his jacket, and he told me to leave. To leave France. To leave… leave them." A shaky breath, "And I did. But not before, on the day I entered adulthood, became a man, I watched the men who raised me, and the man I loved, murdered before a cheering mob."

Adrien's eyes went heavenward for a moment, before turning and facing Benedict fully, the Englishman speechless, "Montfaucon at the Scaffold might have been embellished, but… it is not wrong. I loved them, I loved *him*, but he, Louis-Antoine de Saint-Just, did not love Adrien-Henri de Montfaucon the way that he wanted. He loved him the way he needed. It was a… familial relationship that the grief captured in that painting represented, and society took that and turned it into something that never was." Adrien sighed, and Benedict was struck by just how much it looked as if a weight had been taken from the man.

Looking down, "So, with the tale told, I can fully understand why you may want to distance yourself, for as much of your own safety as mine." Adrien finishes the exposition, and ever so slightly, angles himself to see the other, a mix of emotions unhidden on his face.

A pause, then, "Adrien-" Benedict looked conflicted, though if Adrien were in a calmer, more sensible mood, he would have realized that conflictedness was not about whether to remain in close proximity to the Frank.

Instead, our emotionally constipated artist hopped up from where he sat, began to pace, and began to speak, almost as if he had forgotten that Benedict was even there. "Twenty-two years. I have survived twenty-two years. When something comes up, I pack and go. It's fine, this is just another one of those times-" he's rambling, justifying, because though he can fully admit that he has fallen in love again to a woman who will never read it, actually admitting it to the subject is apparently too complicated.

"Adrien!" Benedict interjects, stopping the other in his tracks. Adrien turns, hands fiddling behind his back, expression so very nervous, with a hint of…. Earnest? "Adrien. Stop. Please." and he waits until the fiddling, the nervous pacing, "I came here today because you asked me to. So what if you've got some hidden revolutionary past, which is insane, but again I ask, so what?"

Adrien stalls, mouth slightly agape for a moment before he closes it with a snap, but otherwise stays rooted in his place. Clearly, that was not the response he had been expecting.

Taking this silence as the go ahead to continue, "You claim you've up and left time and time again, and if it were so simple, you would have done so again. But it's been a week since the publication, and you are still here. Nobody has come kicking your door down. Society has moved on-" Benedict is on a roll now as well.

"Because they don't know it's true!" Adrien shoots back, pulled out of his stupor by the one thing he does know how to do, and that my dear audience, is argue. Not maliciously, but in the spirit of debate, which in this case could be considered malicious towards himself, but that would require a level of self-reflection that Adrien decidedly does not currently have. "If they did, they would be. Not just for the revolutionary aspect, either. England as a whole still criminalizes-" Adrien waved at himself haphazardly, "so if they" he put emphasis on 'they',

“somehow can’t find enough evidence against Citizen Montfaucon, that is certainly still a very easy path to go down.” he exhales. Benedict opens his mouth to respond, but gets cut off, “And you should be worried about yourself, if not for the danger to your reputation, then for fear of the rope!”

“Then I should be given the choice to decide for myself whether or not I should take that risk!” Finally, Benedict gets a word in, “Has it occurred to you that I am also an adult, with the ability to choose for myself? If I didn’t want to associate with you, why would I still be here, debating with you for my right to take that chance?”

Adrien, seemingly unthinkingly, responds almost immediately, “I cannot be responsible for the destruction of another whom I love-” and then he stops, eyes widening, voice cutting off abruptly, as if he had not meant to voice that particular line out loud. Then, quieter, and to himself, “I love you. And I can’t be responsible for whatever scandal, whatever… hurt, is destined to befall you because of that.”

Silence. The kind of silence where one could hear a pin drop. The kind of silence that is somehow heavy, despite no physical weight being present. Adrien, with that deer in headlights look, tinged with slight betrayal at himself for letting that particular reason slip, Benedict in a similar state of surprise, but notably not as frozen.

Benedict mouths Adrien’s confession to himself, letting the words repeat over in his brain, then, “And so I say again, why not let me choose what risks to my health I take?” He makes the move, stepping closer to Adrien.

Adrien, eyes finally processing that, a confession in of itself, locks his gaze on Benedict’s, as if he could find the answers to life in the other’s eyes. But, he does not attempt to make space between them. If anything, he steps closer, one hand raising ever so slightly, as if to reach out, before stalling, morphing into an open hand, palm facing the Englishman.

“You- Benedict…” Clearly, despite the past as a pamphleteer and propagandist, words have all but abandoned him at this point. He exhales, then, in a fit of courage, or perhaps stupidity, he closes the distance, wraps one hand in Benedict’s cravat, and captures his lips with his own.

And what follows, well, that dear readers, is between Adrien, Benedict, and nobody else.

Chapter End Notes

Gosh, dontcha love when you get worried the slow burn is moving to fast, overcompensate, and overshoot so bad the couple doesn't get together til the last line of the last chapter?

Oops?

Anyways, one more for the epilogue, and then I'll start posting what I have of "Citizen".

Chapter 13: The End of One Story, and the Start of a New One

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The ending of the previous chapter, unsurprisingly, marked the end of one era of Adrien's life, and the beginning of another. For one, he did not pack his bags and hightail it for America. Or any other continent. Second, at least, for a little while, he stayed in England. He did not shy away from society because of the off chance some English aristocrats had enough time to dig into events from twenty years prior. And he, to both his surprise and perhaps the even greater surprise of one Penelope, began a friendship with the woman who not a month prior had nearly sent him packing across the Atlantic Ocean.

There was also the case of Benedict. This relationship was certainly not something Adrien had ever thought he would get to experience, and yet, here it was. He was happy. Even after a second round of vaguely threatening conversation from Anthony was not enough to quench that happiness. Though, it had raised the question of legality. Which was how Adrien and Benedict found themselves outside Adrien's childhood home in Paris, France.

Some context is probably required. Sodomy had been decriminalized in 1791, legalizing same-sex acts between consenting adults. Now, socially, not so much, but the point stands that nobody was going to the noose for it anymore.

That was, ultimately, how the two found themselves standing before the Montfaucon Estate. Just one more astounding revelation in the conga-line of revelations that had come one after the other in the past week or so. Apparently, twenty years is enough for public opinion to change, because nobody has attempted to arrest or execute the former Citizen Montfaucon. The same press that slandered his name now heralded his return. Whoda thunk?

The Monfaucon Estate needed work, that much was true, but it was in shockingly good condition. The grounds were overgrown, but not to the extent that it resembled a jungle. Rather, the fences and some of the more beaten paths had some overgrowth, but the main walkways were remarkably intact.

Upon entering, there was no dust on the bannister, but also nobody else present in the general vicinity. Paintings and portraits of various Montfaucon members lined the walls. The displays were free of grime and the grunge of the passage of time. It was as if Adrien had stepped into a timecapsule.

And so began the lengthy task of renovation, restaffing, and in general making the place liveable again. But, with Benedict by his side, not a task that Adrien dreaded. One more task, and then he can begin to live again.

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Adrien woke to a loud rapping sound emanating from the doorstep. He did not get up immediately, instead groaning and rolling out from under the covers. A muffled grumble, sleep addled and incomprehensible, from Benedict beside him.

Dressing slowly, making his way down the stairs, one hand on the bannister, he runs all the people who knew of his return through his mind. Nobody close enough for a house call this early in the morning.

This was why one Adrien-Henri de Montfaucon experienced the equivalent of a sucker punch when he opened the door and was met with the visage of one Amelie de Montreuil standing in all her glory on the doorstep.

“Twenty-two years.” Her tone is deathly calm as she steps inside, poking a finger into Adrien’s chest. “Twenty-two years with no letters, no contact, not even an obituary to know if you were still breathing or if you had drunk yourself to death.”

Adrien, to his credit, kept his composure, mostly. The scowl on his face was not one of genuine anger, but rather the expression he had always bore when interacting with his old friend. He blinked slowly, banishing the sleep from his eyes, “Good to see you too, Amelie. Missed you. Why are you on my doorstep at six in the morning?”

“Twenty-two years, de Montfaucon. And I had to learn that you returned to France through *newspapers?*”

Adrien shrugged, giving her a helpless shrug, “I have been busy. I was going to get around to it, eventually.” A pause, “I take it you are the reason the Estate was in such good condition upon arrival?”
He cocks his head at her.

The cold anger in her voice seems to melt away at that, “We had no body to bury, nor any promise that you would ever return. It was the closest thing to closure I could get.” She explained, “I missed you, Adrien. I understand why you left, why you had to leave, but exile doesn’t mean cutting contact like you did.”

At this, the scowl turns into a genuine grimace, and Adrien shoots Amelie an apologetic look, “The first few years abroad were…. Not conducive to communication. I did write you, I just… never got around to sending them.”

Amelie laughs at that. Frankly, she probably should have expected that excuse. Even in their youth, he was never good at timely written responses.

“Adrien?” Benedict’s voice drifts down from above as the man himself comes down the stairs. “Who is it?” He’s inquiring about the caller, and thankfully not far enough down the stairs yet to see the despairing glare Adrien shoots Amelie.

Amelie, in response, just raises an eyebrow at him. Adrien stares back, unimpressed, before responding, “Someone I would very much like you to meet.” in a tone that somehow both conveyed pleasure at seeing such an old friend again, and annoyance at the timing of the

encounter.

“Old friend?” The friend in question mouths. That is not graced with a response.

The scene Benedict’s eyes are greeted with is a funny one, and likely a mite concerning, to any who don’t quite know the history clashing here. Adrien, with the expression of an irate ferret, and a woman he’d never seen before, looking between Adrien and Benedict, as if realizing she’s seen this story before, and is most definitely putting events together.

“Benedict, meet Amelie de Montreuil, my ex-fiance and closest friend. Amelie, Benedict Bridgerton-”

Amelie turns between the two before facing Adrien with an unamused expression, “Twenty-two years, no contact, and you come back with an attractive new beau and no courtesy.” A pause, “I can’t blame you, but I do wonder how you of all people managed that.”

Adrien blanched, the irate ferret expression graduating to that of an offended ferret, and went to respond.

“Ex-fiance?” Benedict cocks an eyebrow.

“It was an arranged contract. Anyone with eyes could see it wasn’t-” Adrien starts, but finds himself cut off.

“Anyone with eyes, besides your own, apparently.” She turns to Benedict, “A pleasure to meet the man capable of making Adrien a kept man. Have you discovered his habit of-”

“And that’s enough of that.” Adrien jumps in, before clearing his throat, gathering some semblance of put-togetherness, “Amelie, would you care to join us for a day of perfectly acceptable
conversation, that notably leaves out any particularly egregious childhood stories?” Adrien asks, with almost a theatrical amount of formality.

Smiling properly for the first time in this entire conversation, Amelie responds, eyes alight, “Why, I would love to, *Vicomte* de Montfaucon.”

And that is where this particular story, my dears, ends.

Chapter End Notes

And here's the end, hope y'all have enjoyed. I'll post what I've got of Citizen either later tonight or tomorrow, hope to see you there!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!