**The Limited Partnership Agreement**

by SunsetNCamden

**Summary**

Chloe enlists Marinette to scheme to get Adrien over his crush on Ladybug.

"He’s taken this crush beyond being just a fan. He really thinks he’s in love with her, seriously,” Chloe stressed. “And, it’s not healthy. It’s preventing him from dating anyone else.”

“Like you,” Marinette pointed out.

“And you, too.” Chloe reminded her. “Do you really think you would have any chance with him up against Ladybug? I think not.”

“So this is mutually beneficial?” the aspiring fashion designer quirked an eyebrow.

Chloe nodded. “And, beneficial to Adrikens, too. He has to realize that a relationship with Ladybug is completely unrealistic.”

**Notes**
I wrote the first two chapters back in December. Playing around with it again as a break from my larger work. Inspired by a supposed season 2 spoiler that we have yet to see in which Chloe and Marinette team up to help Adrien. The reason is completely different in the fanfic, but I still thought it an interesting pairing. Please let me know if you like the idea or not. If so, I will continue. Thanks!
The Pitch

The blonde girl scanned the students loitering at the picnic benches trying to find her target. When her dark blue eyes latched onto the twin tailed, raven-haired girl sitting alone with her sketchbook, she flicked her high pony tail in defiance and strode over.

“I need your help,” Chloe stated, although it hurt her to say these particular words to her rival.

Marinette put her pencil down and regarded the class bully skeptically. “Why on earth would I help you?” she asked.

“Because…I know you have a crush on him,” Chloe’s eyes darted to a blonde, handsome boy sitting in the middle of a large crowd a few tables over. Marinette followed Chloe’s gaze to find Adrien Agreste, who indeed she had been in love with for the entire school year, but continued to be unable to confess her feelings to him.

“And so, I know you’ll help me,” Chloe crossed her arms in satisfaction.

Marinette’s eyes widen in fear, but her mouth curled in defiance. “Or what? You’ll tell Adrien that I like him? Go right ahead. I can just deny it.” It wasn’t a great plan, but it was far better than helping Chloe.

“What? Don’t be ridiculous!” Chloe scoffed. “I’m not going to tell him!” She waved the air dismissively. That was the last thing she wanted to do. That’s all she needed was for Adrien to find out, feel flattered, and start liking Marinette back.

Marinette shrugged her shoulders and shook her head not understanding what Chloe wanted or why she should be disposed to help.

“I want you to help me help Adrien to get over his crush on Ladybug,” the spoiled, rich girl explained. “It’s completely unrealistic and unhealthy.”

“Adrien has a crush on…Ladybug?” Marinette squeaked. She had no idea he had feelings of any kind for her superhero alter ego.

“Duh!” Chloe rolled her eyes. “Have you not heard him talk about her? He gushes like a lovesick school girl and he gets this awful puppy dog look on his face. It’s really disgusting!”

Marinette thought about this. Chloe was right in a way. Adrien would talk passionately about and staunchly defend Ladybug. But, didn’t she herself do the same when Chat Noir was discussed? She didn’t have a crush on Chat. Marinette liked her partner, of course, and trusted him with her life, but she did not have those kind of feelings for him. Could Chloe really conclude that Adrien has a crush on Ladybug just based on how he looked and acted when he talked about her?

“Why is this any of your business, Chloe? So what? Adrien likes Ladybug. Who doesn’t? She has lots of fans.”

“It’s my business because I’m Adrien’s oldest friend,” she said it as if it was an award that she had just won. “Besides, he’s taken this crush beyond being just a fan. He really thinks he’s in love with her, seriously,” she stressed. “And, it’s not healthy. It’s preventing him from dating anyone else.”

“Like you.”
“Like you, too.” Chloe reminded her. “Do you really think you would have any chance with him up against Ladybug? I think not.”

“So this is mutually beneficial?” the aspiring fashion designer quirked an eyebrow.

Chloe nodded. “And, beneficial to Adrikens, too. He has to realize that a relationship with Ladybug is completely unrealistic.”

“How exactly?” Marinette felt slightly offended on behalf of her masked self.

“Well, for one they barely know each other and he has very limited chances of ever seeing her much less talking to her. What’s he going to do? Shout ‘how about dinner and a movie?’ as she swings by on her yo-yo during an akuma attack?”

“Two, how can you date someone whose real name and face you don’t know? I mean, where are you going to go on a date? His room? Rooftops? They won’t be able to go out in public. They’ll be mobbed. She’s even more famous than he is.”

“Third, by keeping her identity a secret from him, she’s basically lying to him. How can they form a stable, viable relationship when it’s built on a lie?”

“Wow! You’ve really thought about this, haven’t you?” Marinette asked amazed the self-centered brat had put so much thought into anything other than herself.

“I’m not done. Fourth, and most importantly Adrien has formed this grand delusion for himself. He thinks he can be her knight in shining armor. That’s why he meddled in that akuma attack yesterday.”

Yesterday’s akuma attack was the talk of the school, since their very own Adrien Agreste had single handedly saved Ladybug’s life and he himself had died in the process. Only her Miraculous Ladybug spell had brought him back safe, sound, and very much alive.

Marinette turned to look back at her beloved classmate. With tears pricking in her eyes, she gave a determined nod.

“How can I help?” she asked.
Chloe wrangles the parties involved.

Chloe sat down across from Marinette and leaned in to reveal her plan.

“I need you to tell Adrien that the stunt he pulled yesterday was stupid and reckless and that you don’t approve,”

“I can’t tell him that!” Marinette exclaimed.

“Why not? It’s true,” Chloe argued. “You were the only one besides me that didn’t stand and applaud Adrien when he walked into class this morning. You don’t approve of what he did. You’re scared for him just like I am.”

“I can’t tell him that, though,” Marinette repeated. “It’s hard enough for me to say ‘Good Morning’ to him without turning into a stuttering, blushing mess. I can’t criticize him to his face!”

Chloe’s face scrunched up as if she just ate a whole lemon.

“Besides, even if I tell him that, it won’t make any difference. He won’t listen to me!” Marinette wailed. “My bad opinion of him is not going to change his mind.”

Chloe bit her lower lip. She looked as if she was trying to decide something. She threw up her hands in defeat before choking out, “Ugh! I can’t believe I’m saying this, but…Adrien really values your opinion. He…blah!…admirers you.”

“WHAAAAT?”

“Shh…” Chloe looked around nervously. She caught Adrien’s eye and gave him a tense smile. “You heard me. Don’t make me repeat it,” she spat.

“You’ve got to be kidding? Is this all some kind of joke, Chloe? Are you tricking me somehow?”

“Everything okay here?”

Marinette jumped, “A-adrien!”

“Everything is fine, Adriens! Isn’t it Marinette? We’re just having a nice conversation, right?” Chloe nodded, hoping to get the other girl to agree as well.

“Um…yeah, we’re j-just talking. You know, um girl talk cuz we’re two girls and that’s what we uh do…talk.” Marinette hoped the ground beneath her would open up and swallow her whole.

Inwardly, Chloe groaned. Marinette’s nervousness would botch the whole operation. Outwardly, Chloe nodded as a sweet smile graced her lips.

Adrien quirked an eyebrow. Chloe and Marinette talking, civilly, by choice? That never happened.
“What’s going on here?” he mused.

“Adrien, will you walk me back to class? Lunch is practically over,” Chloe asked standing and grasping Adrien’s arm to escort her.

“Um…sure, Chloe. Marinette, are you coming?” He asked. He held out his other arm to her.

Marinette giggled nervously. “Okay,” she managed to say.

Chloe rolled her eyes. Before she could start a conversation about herself, Adrien spoke up.

“I see you have your sketchbook. I haven’t seen it in a while. Could I persuade you to show it to me tomorrow? I’d love to see your latest designs.”

Marinette panicked, “DID HE JUST ASK ME TO…”

Chloe seized her chance. If she maneuvered this correctly she could convince Marinette of the solidity of her plan and also secure a time when they could lay their trap.

“Of course! Marinette would love to, wouldn’t you? You could discuss it over lunch. I’m sure you two have lots to talk about, right, Marinette?” Chloe interjected. “See, I told you Adrien thinks highly of you, I mean of your designs. She didn’t believe me, Adrikens, can you imagine?”

“Oh! Well, I do…think very highly of you, that is. You’re very talented, but I’ve told you that before. “ Adrien felt puzzled that Marinette wouldn’t believe Chloe when he had told her that himself.

Marinette squeaked, but no words came out. Her face flushed a bright red.

“She’s so modest!” Chloe exclaimed. “And clever! Don’t you think Marinette is clever to come up with so many designs?”

“Yes, I do. You’re very clever, Marinette.” Adrien eyed his oldest friend warily. It was not like Chloe to talk up anyone other than herself, much less the girl with whom she most often argued. “And passionate, too. I envy you. You know what you want to do with your life and you’re not afraid to try for it.”

“Yes, a very admirable quality. What else do you admire about Marinette, Adrien?” Chloe asked as they continued walking down the hall toward their classroom.

Adrien did a double take at the blonde girl. He idly wondered if she had been akumatized, but instead of turning her evil it had the opposite effect and turned her good.

“Well…Marinette, you are a very good friend. You’re kind and thoughtful. You really care about people and you aren’t afraid to stand up for them. I admire how you always try to help.”

The only reason Marinette didn’t faint was because she was holding onto Adrien’s arm.

“Thanks,” the lovesick girl managed to say to her crush. She cast her eyes downward, too overcome with happiness to look at him. It would have been like trying to look at the sun.

“I have a wonderful idea!” Chloe exclaimed just as the bell rang indicating the 5-minute warning before classes would resume. “Let’s have lunch together tomorrow.”

“You mean…all of us?” Marinette clarified, surprised that she would be included.
“Of course, silly. We can have lunch in my suite at Daddy’s hotel. I’ll have Chef Marlena prepare something sumptuous.”

“Oh…I dunno,” Marinette hesitated to accept. It just didn’t feel right. Chloe was up to something.

“You can bring your sketchbook…” Chloe persisted.

“Please, Marinette? I’d really like to see your latest designs,” Adrien implored.

“O-okay,” the raven-haired girl stammered. She couldn’t resist a special request from her crush.

“Wonderful!” Chloe squealed. All was going perfectly to plan.
Chapter Summary

Marinette and Chloe negotiate and a deal is struck.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“See? I wasn’t lying,” Chloe said as she sidled up to Marinette in the locker room. “Adrien will listen to you.”

Marinette’s face flushed at the kind words Adrien had said to her and a small smile pulled at her mouth. “I suppose so…”

“So? You’ll help me then?”

Marinette hesitated. She still felt this could be some kind of trick. Chloe was not the most trustworthy person in school. She had a habit of doing something awful and then blaming someone else for it. The most recent example was when Marinette’s father presented a cooking demonstration in front of their class. Chloe pulled the fire alarm and then tried to blame Marinette for it.

“Look, I don’t like this anymore than you do,” Chloe continued, “but, I’m willing to make certain sacrifices, like talking to you, appearing with you in public, even pretending to be your friend, all for Adrien’s sake.” Her hand came to rest over her heart, as if she was pledging allegiance to the model.

Marinette ground her teeth in anger at the blonde diva’s condescending words.

“If you really like him as much as everyone says that you do, then I would think you would be more than happy to help, but maybe I misjudged you,” Her dark blue eyes tracked up and down as she silently judged the other girl. “Maybe I should ask Lila…” Chloe tapped her chin in thought.

“No! No! Don’t do that!” Marinette quickly interjected. The last thing she wanted was to have that lying, conniving manipulator around Adrien. Bad enough Adrien had forgiven Lila for lying to him about her “friendship” with Ladybug, she didn’t want to give her the opportunity to make herself look good in front of him by showing concern for him.

The raven-haired girl’s shoulders slumped as she gave in, “Alright, I’ll help you, but only for Adrien. This doesn’t mean we’re friends,” she stipulated.

Chloe laughed, “Of course not! Who would want to be friends with you?”

Marinette growled, “If this is going to work, you’re going to have to behave.”

“Whatsoever do you mean?” Chloe asked, feigning innocence.

“I mean, you are going to have to be nice. No name calling, no tricks, and no laughing at me,” Marinette counted off on her fingers.

“Alright,” Chloe replied as she leaned into Marinette’s face, “but you have to behave, too.”
“Me? I’m always nice!”

Chloe shook her head, “Not when you get jealous, which you do…a lot!”

“Jealous? I don’t have a jealous bone in my body.”

Chloe huffed in response and rolled her eyes. She knew exactly how agitated her rival got each time she flirted with Adrien. Half the fun of flirting with him was seeing Marinette work herself up into a lather.

“Well, if you don’t want me to be jealous, which I’m not saying I am, then you have to stop flirting with Adrien,” Marinette stressed. “No latching onto his arm, holding his hand, tackling him into a hug, and no calling him ‘Adrikens’.” Marinette especially hated that term of endearment. Every time she heard it, it made her skin crawl.

The blonde’s face turned a bright shade of red, but she relented, “Fine. Neither one of us will go after Adrien while we do this,” Chloe clarified.

“And, neither of us will disparage the other to Adrien or anyone else,” Marinette added, hoping that this would prevent any of the blonde’s notorious trickery.

“Agreed?” Chloe stuck out her hand.

Marinette held her breath as her face scrunched up. Her head screamed at her to walk away because this would only lead to disaster, but her heart was calling the shots. “Agreed,” she replied as she shook her new partner’s hand.

“Come along,” Chloe called as she spun around and headed out of the locker room. “We’ve got work to do.”

Marinette sighed as she closed her locker and turned to follow her, hoping that whatever she had gotten herself into would be worth it in the end.

Chapter End Notes

A short chapter. The next one will be longer, promise.
Chapter Summary

Marinette and Chloe practice for their upcoming lunch with Adrien.

Chapter Notes

I promised a longer chapter and did not want to make you wait too long.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Where are we going?” Marinette asked as she followed the blonde down the front steps of their school.

“Your house, duh!” Chloe replied over her shoulder.

“Um…why are we going to my house?” the raven-haired girl asked, an undercurrent of annoyance mixed with suspicion in her question.

“We need somewhere private to plan, so we can’t do it here,” she said as she threw a thumb over her shoulder at the school.

“Yes, but why not your house, I mean your hotel?”

Chloe did not answer her, but just preceded to walk across the street toward Marinette’s parents’ bakery. The blonde diva barged into the store as if she owned the place, ignoring the greeting of Marinette’s parents, bellowing at a paying customer to get out of her way, striding through the public space toward the back and up the stairs to the private residence. Marinette followed closely, the whole time protesting until she was intercepted by her mother.

“Who’s your friend, dear?”

“Chole, and she’s not a friend,” her daughter replied as she brushed passed her well-meaning mother, eager to intercept the intruder.

“Want me to bring up some cookies?” Sabine asked, sweetly.

“No,” Marinette called over her shoulder as she bounded up the stairs, “she’s not staying!”

“So, that’s ‘The Chloe Bourgeois,’ hmmm?” Sabine mused. “Well, I’ll give her one thing. She doesn’t disappoint.”

“Does Marinette have a new friend?” Tom asked of his wife when he saw her return behind the counter.

“I don’t think so, dear, but you never know…” Sabine hummed. “In any case, she’s not ‘cookie worthy’.”
“Ah!” Tom nodded, understanding the family’s code for “visitor without benefits”. He turned back to the kitchen to resume preparation for tomorrow morning.

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“Chloe!” Marinette chastised. “You shouldn’t be up here.”

“Why not? This is your room, isn’t it?”

“Yes, exactly. My room. I haven’t invited you in,” Marinette frowned. “How did you even know which one it was?”

“Sabrina, she told me.” When Chloe received a questioning eyebrow quirk from the offended girl, she continued, “From the time she visited you at your house and borrowed your journal.”

“You mean, broke into my room and stole my journal because you told her to!” Marinette tapped her foot impatiently, “What? Did Sabrina draw you a map?”

“Uh…yeah! That’s what Sabrina is good for, duh!” Chloe threw her hands up in exasperation. “Now, let’s get on with this, so that I can get out of this hell hole.” She opened her purse.

“You promised no name calling!”

“I didn’t call you a name,” Chloe clarified as she took out her phone. Upon receiving Marinette’s death glare, she amended her statement, “Fine! Let’s get on with it, so that I can out of this hole. Better? Happy?”

Marinette huffed as she sat down hard on her chaise longue. “Why, oh why, did I agree to this? Oh, yeah, Adrien.” The sound of a picture being taken drew her attention.

“Wh-what are you doing?” the raven-haired girl blustered as she jumped back up to her feet.

“Just gathering some evidence,” Chloe smirked.

“Evidence? Of what?”

“Your crush on Adrien. This is quite a collection,” she indicated Marinette’s wall decorated with more than a dozen pictures and posters of the blonde male model. “I didn’t realize you are such a fangirl.”

“Fangirl! I’m not a fangirl,” Marinette protested.

“Could have fooled me. I’m sure Adrikens will agree…”

“How dare you! We had a deal! Neither one is to disparage the other while we’re working together,” the by-the-rules-girl reminded her.

“I know, I know, but, we didn’t say anything about afterwards,” she sing-songed the last word. “I’m sure Adrien will find these very interesting. He doesn’t like fangirls, you know.” Chloe smirked before yanking the phone away from Marinette as she dove for it. “And, before you try to steal my phone again, just know that I already saved these to the cloud.” Chloe beamed with superiority as Marinette kicked herself for being so gullible.

“You’ve got a lot nerve pulling this when you are just as guilty!” Marinette accused. When Chloe shrugged with an innocent indifference, Marinette continued, “You’ve got that huge framed poster of Adrien hanging in your bathroom.”
“How did you kn….”

“Sabrina,” Marinette cut in with a smirk. “She told me the last time that you two had a falling out.”

“Well, did she also tell you that Adrien personally autographed it and wrote the most romantic inscription?”

“Yeah, she told me that you tricked him into autographing it and that you added the inscription, which you wrote, after he signed it and without his knowledge,” Marinette crossed her arms, satisfied. “I’m sure Adrien will find that very interesting!”

“You don’t have any proof,” Chloe sniffed with her nose in the air.

“I don’t need any. I can show it to Adrien tomorrow when we have lunch in your suite.”

Chloe blanched. She knew Adrien would be upset at her deception, furthermore she had gone to a lot of trouble on behalf of that poster. First, she had come up with a lie to deceive Adrien and then had gotten Sabrina’s help to back up that lie. Then, there was the selection of the outrageously expensive gold frame followed by having to aggravatingly and repeatedly remind Sabrina to make the delivery and installation arrangements in her suite. Just before it was hung, Sabrina, who had been hit by a hate arrow from the akuma, Dark Cupid, scribbled all over it, adding devil horns, a mustache, and a goatee to Adrien’s angelic face. Despite Ladybug’s miraculous cure fixing everything else, the poster was still marred after the akuma had been beaten, something to this day Chloe still did not understand. It took several specialists three weeks to remove the permanent ink for a sizeable fee. From a certain angle you could still faintly see the outline of the goatee. If Adrien found out about the poster with its false inscription, then he would make her take it down.

“Fine. I’ll delete them!” She pushed a few buttons on her phone.

“And the cloud!” Marinette commanded as she looked over Chloe’s shoulder to confirm that they were truly deleted. For a moment the two girls stood there, silently cursing each other out in their own minds. Chloe broke the silence first, but not with any words. Her hand reached out and peeled one of the Adrien photos from Marinette’s wall.

“Hey! Don’t do that! That’s mine!” The wronged girl cried, protective of that particular photo, which was a head and shoulders shot from his portfolio that she had taken great pains to obtain.

“I’m not going to keep it. We need it…to practice. That’s why we’re here.” Chloe held up the picture in front of her face, so that her visage was replaced by the picture of the male model. “Well?” she asked after waiting longer than she thought reasonable.

“Well, what?” Marinette asked, her patience starting to wear thin.

“Talk to him!” Chloe sighed and shook the picture, indicating the “him” she meant.

“Oh! Um…ok. Hi Adrien,” Marinette began, catching on to what Chloe meant.

“Hi Marinette,” Chloe responded. After an awkward pause of waiting for Marinette to say something more, the blonde diva rolled her eyes and forged ahead, “Did you see yesterday’s akuma battle on the LadyBlog? Wasn’t I heroic?”

“Adrien wouldn’t say that,” Marinette replied, interrupting the skit, which had barely begun. “He doesn’t boast.”

“Fine,” Chloe sighed again. “Just get to it.” She cleared her throat and then repeated her line, “Hi
Marinette.”

“Hi, Adrien.”

Chloe groaned at the epic slowness of the conversation, but Marinette ignored her.

“I um w-watched yesterday’s akuma battle again on the LadyBlog,” she said as she gazed into the green eyes printed on the page being held in front of her. “You looked so very handsome…”

“What? No! Don’t compliment him!” Chloe corrected. Marinette jumped at the sound of Chloe’s harsh voice. For a second, she had forgotten her rival’s presence. “Chastise him! You have to set him straight!”

“Right, right. Ok. Um…A-adrien,” Marinette slammed her fist into her open palm to emphasize her point, “it was very reckless of you to interfere in yesterday’s akuma battle.”

“That’s better,” Chloe encouraged. “Tell him you don’t approve.”

“And, I don’t approve of your behavior,” Marinette shook her head adamantly as her pigtails snapped back and forth. “If anything were to happen to you…I’d be devastated, I mean, we would be devastated, that is, um, all of your friends, all of Paris.” Her hands flapped in the air as she gesticulated, trying to cover for her nervousness.

“Now, get him to promise not to do something like that again,” Chloe prompted.

“Please, Adrien, promise that you won’t try to help Ladybug again. I-I know you mean well, b-but you can’t endanger yourself like that again. It’s too dangerous!”

Chloe lowered the picture and regarded her partner. “Not bad,” Chloe praised. “Let’s move on to how stupid he is for thinking he could ever be in a relationship with Ladybug,” she raised the picture back into place.

Marinette opened her mouth to begin, but Chloe interjected an order as she dropped the picture down, “And don’t talk with your hands. You could put someone’s eye out. If you don’t know what to do with them, then put them behind your back.”

Marinette shifted her hands and clasped them behind her. She took a breath and opened her mouth, but before she could get the first word out, Chloe lowered the picture again, “And try not to stammer. No one can understand wh-what your s-s-saying.”

Chloe raised the picture again and so did not see Marinette bite her own finger in frustration. It was the only way to keep a slew of curse words from spilling out in a rage at the insensitive bully.

“Will you get going already? Some of us have a life that they’d like to get back to!” The blonde complained from behind the photograph.

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“Okay, I’m done.” Chloe set the photograph of Adrien down on Marinette’s desk. “God, that was exhausting!” She pulled a mirror out of her bag, fluffed her hair and pressed her lips together.

“What are you talking about? You just had to listen! I did all of the talking!” Marinette argued.

“Exactly, I had to listen to you, guide you, correct you…ugh. I’ll be so glad when this is over.” She closed her compact with a quick snap and dropped it in her bag.
“You and me both!” Marinette agreed unhappily.

“See you tomorrow,” Chloe turned to go.

“Wait! I just thought of something. How are we going to bring up the topic of Ladybug?” Marinette asked. Chloe blinked and stared back blankly.

“Just open your mouth and say it.”

“We’re supposed to be looking at my designs. Don’t you think that would be a little…off-topic?”

“Well, show him a Ladybug-inspired design. Once you’re talking about Ladybug, move the conversation to the akuma battle. Easy.” Chloe turned back to the hatch door in the floor and started down the stairs.

“I don’t have any Ladybug-inspired designs.”

“Then, draw one,” Chloe said over her shoulder. Did she have to think of everything?

“The creative process doesn’t work like that, Chloe!” Marinette called from above.

“Make it work!” came the diva’s answer from below, followed by a parting shot. “If you can…”

Marinette sat down hard in her desk chair and pulled her sketch book toward her. “Make it work!” she aped Chloe’s voice as she made a face with her tongue hanging limply out of her mouth and her eyes squinting. Her fingers flipped to a blank page in her book and after a few moments of thinking, the pencil in her hand moved rapidly to capture her vision. The challenge set by her rival sparked her competitive nature and stoked her inner drive to prove herself. As she drew thoughts of helping Adrien receded from her mind in favor of confounding her rival.

Chapter End Notes

If you read my other work, Help Me Break Your Heart, the main conceit of the story is the same: Adrien (untransformed) saves Ladybug during an akuma battle and dies. She saves him, of course, after defeating the akuma, but decides that she has to make Adrien fall out of love with her to keep him safe. In that story she enlists Chat's help. Hilarity, angst, and reveals ensue.

For this story the conceit may be the same, but the character interactions will be different. As such, I'm setting up some rules for the fanfic. I should have done this earlier, but better late than never.

1. Story is limited to the following characters: Marinette, Chloe, and Adrien. I reserve the right to allow Marinette and Adrien to appear as their transformed selves, but no LadyNoir interactions. For LadyNoir see Help Me Break Your Heart. I’d love to incorporate the besties, Alya, Sabrina, and Nino, respectively, but if I do then it has the potential to go on for two parts and 40+ chapters (see These Kids Need Therapy, Parts 1 and 2) and I just don’t have another looong story in me right now.

2. The main relationship of the story is not Adrienette, but Marinette and Chloe. (Is there a 'ship name for these two?) Doesn't necessarily have to be romantic in nature, one-sided and/or platonic is also okay as is frenemies.

3. Does not necessarily have to end in a resolution for Adrien and Marinette and/or Adrien and Chloe, but must include some type of resolution for Chloe and Marinette.
4. Due to #4, does not necessarily have to resolve in a reveal (partial or full), but if there is a reveal, then no accidental reveals or purposefully telling each other. They have to figure it out.

5. Time frame: occurs before Despair Bear. Chloe is awful at the beginning of this.

6. Lovesquare: keeping it canon, there is no MariChat friendship and no romantic relationship established at any of the corners.

7. Obliviousness: very high. Adrien doesn't think Marinette hates or dislikes him. He accepts her nervousness/odd behavior as part of her character without giving it much thought. I think this is actually how it is shown in the show. He sees it, but doesn't really read into it. Adrien considers Marinette a friend and vice versa. He has no clue that she likes him, and neither has any inkling as to the other's secret identity.

Additionally, I appreciate your comments, ideas, speculation. At least one comment has prompted an idea that I'm going to incorporate, so when we get there I will acknowledge that person's contribution. Just want to say, to keep them coming. I love to hear your thoughts.

Okay, I think that's it for now. Let's see how this plays out.
False Advertising

Chapter Summary

Adrien is confused on so many levels.

Chapter Notes

I'm so in love with this fanfic right now that I think I'm going to have to finish it before I can focus on my multi-part fanfic again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Adrien sat in his chair drumming his thumbs on the table he shared with Nino. Although his best friend, sitting beside him, talked animatedly about the latest Jagged Stone single, Adrien was only half listening. His thoughts were occupied with the unusual display of friendliness between Chloe and Marinette, who up until yesterday he would have characterized as antagonists. It was not unusual for these two to be in a fight, usually caused by Chloe’s callous indifference to others’ feelings and Marinette’s raison d’être to stand up for those who could not stand up for themselves.

He supposed Marinette’s affability toward Chloe wasn’t completely surprising, since the raven-haired girl’s kindness to others was one of her core characteristics as was her ability to forgive those who had wronged her. Chloe on the other hand…not so much. Chloe’s jealous nature meant that she could not stand for anyone else to receive praise and her superiority complex meant that she would never acknowledge that anyone else deserved it. In Chloe’s mind, the world was a reality TV show, she was the star, and everyone else were mere unnamed, background characters. The only people she deemed worthy to befriend were those she could manipulate into doing her bidding, such as Sabrina, and those who brought her additional status, such as himself, due to his celebrity and fat bank account. Marinette did not fit in either of those categories. Furthermore, Adrien’s oldest friend was very protective of him, feeling that everyone else was unworthy of being in his presence much less being his friend.

As such Adrien could not reconcile Chloe’s character with her recent behavior. First, she had talked to Marinette without getting into a fight with her. Then, she openly praised the designer, acknowledging her talent and even encouraged him to voice his own good opinion. Next, to his great surprise the blonde diva invited them both to lunch, in which there was no doubt that Marinette’s work and creativity would be on display, likely receiving additional accolades. Finally, he saw the two girls leaving school together, heading toward Marinette’s house, where they looked as if they would be hanging out…together…on purpose!

As much as he would like to believe that Chloe had overnight changed her mind about Marinette, something in him would not allow him to do so, at least not yet. He did not want to be suspicious of his oldest friend, but attending school with her daily had opened his eyes to what depths of insensitivity and even down-right meanness the diva was capable of perpetrating. So, although his heart told him to believe in the fundamental good nature of mankind, which by definition, included Chloe, his head told him that she was up to something and the logical target of whatever she had
planned was likely Marinette.

Marinette and Nino were the first two friends, real friends, that Adrien had made at school and as such he was naturally protective of them in terms of their feelings. He would never want to see them hurt or treated badly. He felt that way toward all people, really, but Marinette and Nino held a special place in his heart. And so, on behalf of his friend, he would do his best to uncover whatever it was Chloe was up to or at the very least assure himself that Marinette would come out of this, whatever it was, unscathed. He knew Marinette would do the same for him if their situations were reversed. And so, when Chloe walked into the classroom, followed closely by Sabrina, he made his excuses to Nino and walked over to the two girls’ shared table.

“Good morning, ladies,” the blonde model smiled. After receiving their morning salutations in return, he asked Chloe if they might talk privately for a moment. Chloe squealed in delight and clasped eagerly onto Adrien’s arm before he led her outside to the adjoining corridor.

“Chloe,” Adrien began, “I need to ask you a question.”

The blonde girl gasped in surprise as a broad smile spread across her face and her eyes shone brightly. This was it! He was going to ask her out…finally! He had come to his senses all on his own and realized the great oversight he had made in friend-zoning her. It had happened just in time, too. Now, she wouldn’t have to bother with her planned conspiracy with Marinette and things could go back to normal, specifically openly despising Miss Goodie Two Shoes.

“It’s about Marinette,” Adrien continued. Chloe’s smile instantly faded as her shoulders slumped in disappointment and she inwardly cursed her rival.

“What’s going on with you two?” he asked.

“Whatever do you mean, Adrikens?” Chloe responded, feigning innocence and batting her eyelashes in an effort to distract him.

“You two are…getting along?”

“You’re surprised?”

“Uh…yeah. I thought you two hated each other.”

“Hate’s a very strong word, don’t you think?” When he made no response, Chloe decided to change tactics. “I thought you’d be happy, Adrikens. Didn’t you say that you wanted me to be nicer? To get along better with your friends?”

“Well, yes, I did say that…” Adrien had actually given Chloe an ultimatum to either treat their classmates nicely or else they wouldn’t be friends. To redeem herself, Chloe had thrown a party for the class as an apology for her former crimes against them, however she had made no further efforts to change her ways and had slipped back into old habits.

“So…that’s what I’m doing. Marinette and I have buried the hatchet,” she smiled sweetly.

“Seriously?”

Chloe nodded, “Marinette and I are friends now.” She bit her tongue to keep from laughing at the absurdity of that statement. To her surprise she felt strong arms suddenly embrace her.

“That’s amazing, Chloe! I’m so proud of you,” Adrien replied, his voice full of emotion. Chloe melted into his grip, returning the hug with a soft sigh as her eyes fluttered shut.
“Chloe!” an agitated female voice screeched suddenly. Both blondes jumped before breaking apart.

“Oh! Hi, Marinette!” Adrien greeted his nearly late to class friend.

“What’s going on here?” Marinette asked, her words crisply leaving her tongue.

“We were just talking,” Adrien explained as he nervously rubbed the back of his neck. Marinette sounded upset and he wondered if he had done something wrong. He looked to Chloe for help.

“I was just telling Adrikens how we’re friends now,” Chloe explained.

“Oh really? Is that so, Adrikens?” Marinette pointedly asked, but she was staring down Chloe.

Adrien’s brows furrowed as he regarded the raven-haired girl. Marinette never called him that. That’s weird. Her face was all red, too, and her eyes looked all scrunched. His mind whirred as he tried to interpret his friend’s strange behavior.

“I was talking to Chloe. We hugged. Marinette found us. Got upset. So, then she must be upset that I hugged Chloe?” he asked himself. “Why would she be upset about that unless…is she jealous? Did I make her jealous? Marinette’s jealous that I hugged Chloe because…oh! Oh!” Adrien’s eyes widened as realization dawned on him.

“Yeah, I’m really, really happy that you two are friends now. I think it’s great,” he said with a huge smile.

“Y-you do?” Marinette asked, suddenly painfully aware of her crush's presence, which she had momentarily overlooked due to her anger at Chloe, who was obviously flirting with him and still calling him by that absurdly stupid nickname.

“Absolutely! I think it’s so great when two people can finally admit their feelings and can come together. I’m so happy for you both!” Adrien’s grin widened as he wrapped an arm around each girl, giving them each a sideways hug. Marinette squeaked with surprise.

“We’re happy, you’re happy, Adrikens,” Chloe cooed, but upon seeing Marinette’s death stare, she quickly corrected herself, “I mean, Adrien.”

“I can’t wait for lunch!” Adrien enthused. “It’s going to be such fun to hang out with you both!” Adrien felt so much better now that he understood the true nature of the girls’ relationship. He opened the classroom door for them and watched his new favorite ‘ship, Cholnette, sail inside. He’d play along, of course, with the “friends” ruse. It was nobody else’s business and it wasn’t a complete lie. Girlfriends are friends, too.

The romantic in him squealed, “From enemies to lovers…”

Chapter End Notes

I dedicate this chapter to BFG who left me a long comment on the last chapter and inspired me to make this an Adrien perspective chapter rather than going straight to the lunch with the three as I originally intended. I also would like to thank commenters tacomuerte for providing the name of the Cholnette ‘ship so that I didn’t have to find it myself and mf, who suggested a romantic ending for Chloe and Marinette, which my brain did not even think of when I started this fanfic as I am such a blindly Adrienette
shipper.
Please keep your comments and ideas coming. You are making this fanfic so much better by doing so. Also, I'm breaking one of my rules. Oops! This fanfic takes place after Despair Bear, but Chloe is still horrible.
For Adrien's happiness, Chloe and Marinette amend their agreement.

Marinette sat in her normal seat trying to look as if she was paying attention to her professor’s lecture, when she was actually replaying the morning’s events in her head. Just before class started Adrien had turned around in his seat and had whispered to her.

“Marinette!” Adrien crooked a finger at her, asking her to lean over her desk so that she could hear his lowered voice. “I just want to say thank you for forgiving Chloe and giving her a chance. I’m sure it wasn’t easy to do, confusing even. It’s really amazing of you; you’re really amazing.”

“Oh, wow!” the awestruck girl breathed. “It’s so amazing of you to call me amazing b-because you’re so amazing!”

“Idiot!” she chastised herself. “Get it together!”

“I mean, um…thanks?” she replied, trying to recover her dignity.

“I can tell that she really likes you,” he whispered as he glanced over to the blonde girl who was talking excitedly with Sabrina. “Look how happy you’ve made her!”

“Um…sure (hee-hee),” Marinette laughed nervously as she felt her cheeks burn. “I mean, it’s p-pretty new, so you know, we’re just trying to keep it q-quiet and um see how it goes.” Her eyes shifted to her left, indicating Alya. She wondered what her bestie would make of the sudden revelation that she had apparently forgiven her bully and even befriended her. No doubt she would not approve and think her crazy. Even telling Alya the truth didn’t have much of an upside. Alya would probably have her own ideas about what to do and it would just end in a fight between the opiniated reporter and the opiniated rich girl. Her best course of action was to keep Alya in the dark and since her affiliation with Chloe was only going to be for a limited time, Marinette didn’t feel she would have to withhold information from her bestie for too long.

“Oh, sure! I get it,” he winked at her and flashed a winning smile. Adrien understood that Chloe and Alya didn’t get along any better than Chloe and Marinette previously did.

“I-I mean, it may not last…” her fingers twisted one of her pigtails as she searched for some way out of the mess she was making. Maybe she could at least sew some seeds of doubt, so that he wouldn’t be too disappointed when it all fell apart.

“Oh! Don’t say that!” he reached out for her free hand resting on the table. “Look, don’t worry about what others think. Just do you. You have my complete support.” He gave her hand a squeeze and she squeaked in return.

“Th-thanks, A-adrien.”

“Of course! You’ve been such a great friend to me, I’m glad I can finally return the favor,” he said before turning around in his chair, since their teacher had begun calling roll.
Marinette internally moaned at the memory as she stared guiltily at the back of the blonde boy’s head. She wasn’t sure which was worst, that Adrien considered her a great friend when she wanted to be his girlfriend, or that he was so emotionally invested in her faux friendship with Chloe that she was afraid his heart would get broken when it would inevitably end. Add to that, he thought her so amazing for forgiving the blonde bully when she had done no such thing. She was living a lie. It was one thing to deceive when it was for the good of helping Adrien realize his mistakes, but quite another now that she was benefiting by his good opinion of her. She had not earned it and felt ashamed for her actions.

Marinette’s eyes tracked to her right and beheld the blonde diva. Was there any way that she could somehow, someway become her friend if only for Adrien’s sake? Could she forgive her for all of the hurtful words and humiliating tricks? She supposed that if Chloe was truly sorry for her actions and promised to not continue her bullying, then she could forgive her, but that was not actually the case despite what Adrien thinks. Marinette sighed as she continued to stare at her rival. There must be something she could do? Maybe she could try to be more patient with Chloe. Maybe if she could control her temper and calmly explain why Chloe was being insensitive or mean, then the blonde wouldn’t get defensive and try to justify her bad behavior. Maybe by doing so Marinette could make Chloe more aware of her actions, giving her an opportunity to curb her predisposition for selfishness. Maybe then she could stand to be around her, even maybe, possibly, but probably not be her (bleh) friend. It was worth a shot, right? For Adrien.

At the 10-minute break between subjects Marinette left her seat and tried to subtly catch Chloe’s eye. She motioned with her hand for her to follow as she exited the classroom. Chloe internally grumbled, while trying to keep a pleasant façade as she could see that Adrien noted the exchange. She rose and followed her rival to the privacy of the hallway.

“Aw…it’s so cute!” Adrien sighed to himself as he watched the two depart the classroom. “They want to spend every free moment together.”

“Before you even start,” Chloe held up a hand to stop the other girl from talking once they were in the corridor together, “Adrien hugged me. That’s not my fault; I wasn’t flirting.”

“Okay,” Marinette nodded.

“And, I accidently used ‘Adrikens,’ but I’ve been calling him that since we were practically still in diapers, so you know, it’s kinda a hard habit to break. You can’t blame me for that!” She crossed her arms and sniffed the air.

“Okay,” Marinette nodded again.

“Marinette! You are being completely unreasonable…wait. What did you say?”

“I said ‘okay’, Chloe.”

“Oh…I thought you were mad,” she stated as her arms uncrossed and dropped to her sides. The tension in her face began to ease.

“I was…initially, but I understand,” Marinette tried to smile. “I’m sorry I overreacted. I may be a little bit jealous,” she admitted quietly.

“Oh. Well, that’s understandable,” Chloe agreed, but feeling surprised at how reasonable Marinette was acting, since she had prepared herself for a fight, “people are jealous of me.” She fluffed her hair while Marinette fought the knee-jerk reaction to roll her eyes.
After a moment of silence, Chloe asked, “So, what am I doing out here?” referring to the hallway.

“It’s just that Adrien is really happy that we’re friends, I mean, really happy. I’m worried about how he’s going to react when all of this is over and we revert to being enemies.”

Chloe regarded her oldest friend through the large window that separated the hallway from the classroom. He had praised her and even claimed to be proud of her all because she had supposedly become friends with…her. Chloe’s eyes focused back on her adversary for Adrien’s affections.

“We are enemies; we’re just pretending to be friends,” she corrected. “Besides, I’m sure once he and I are together, he will have more important things to focus on,” Chloe smugly stated.

“What makes you so sure he’s going to pick you? He could pick me!” Marinette’s hands balled up into fists as she straightened them tensely against her sides.

“Please! If given the choice between this,” the blonde framed her heart-shaped face with her hands, “and that,” she waved dismissively at Marinette’s face, “there really is no choice, is there?”

The blonde turned to return inside the classroom, but Marinette’s voice stopped her.

“You know, Chloe, that was a really mean thing to say. Even if you believe it, what gives you the right to say it?” Marinette demanded, feeling her anger rise.

“A little something called free speech,” she replied saucily.

“Yeah, well your free speech is going to hurt the boy you claim to love.” Marinette took a breath to calm down. She tried to appeal to Chloe’s own self-interest. “He’s asked you to be nicer to people. If you disappoint him don’t you think it will ruin your chances of ever being with him?”

Chloe paused and considered her words. “What exactly are you suggesting?” Chloe asked, re-crossing her arms. “Actually, be friends with you?” A chortle escaped her lips, “Ridiculous!”

“We don’t have to be friends. We could just be…civil to each other, even after this ‘partnership’ is over…for Adrien.”

Chloe deliberated internally. Involuntarily she looked to Adrien, who through the window she noted was watching them. They locked eyes for a moment just before he looked away, trying to appear nonchalant. He did seem more interested in her since she started this “friends” ruse with Marinette. Maybe it could work to her advantage.

“What exactly do I have to do to be civil?” Chloe asked, wondering what would be required.

“Pretty much the same as what we are doing now. No disparaging each other. No tricks, no name calling, no laughing at each other. If we disagree…”

“When we disagree,” Chloe corrected. Catching Marinette’s scowl for interrupting her, she waved her hand for her to continue.

“When we disagree, we talk it out, calmly. No shouting.”

“Do we have to hang out?” Chloe shivered at the idea of returning to Marinette’s depressingly small, dark bedroom with the sickeningly sweet order of baking cookies.

“Nope, we don’t even have to talk to each other, especially if Adrien’s not around.”

“Can I go back to flirting and calling him Adriksens?”
“Only after we get him to give up Ladybug. The original agreement still stands. We’re just adding to it.”

“Not friends, not enemies…” Chloe mulled it over.

“Exactly. A détente, if you will,” Marinette explained.

“Fine,” Chloe stuck her hand out, which Marinette grasped and shook to seal the revised agreement, “for Adrien,” the blonde stipulated.

“For Adrien,” Marinette agreed.

As they re-entered the classroom, Adrien gave them a big smile, which the two girls returned. As typical of their disposition toward the model, Chloe’s was flirty while Marinette’s was shy. Marinette returned to her seat, feeling a bit less guilty and very amazed regarding the events of the past 24 hours. Two days ago if anyone had told her that she would voluntarily be working with Chloe and even figure out a way for them to get along, then she would have called that person crazy.

“I must be crazy,” she thought.
Marinette fidgeted with the hem of her jacket as she sat next to Chole as they rode in the rich girl’s town car to her father’s hotel. Of course, Chloe had maneuvered so that she sat next to the blonde model and boxed Marinette out. Despite that, Adrien continued to include Marinette in the conversation to the chagrin of Chloe and to the embarrassment of Marinette.

“Marlena’s made your favorite, Adrikens, I mean Adrien,” Chloe quickly corrected, “sushi!”

“That’s great, Chlo. I can’t wait! Do you like sushi, Marinette?”

“Um…yes, I like it p-pretty well,” the girl by the window replied.

Adrien breathed a sigh of relief, “Great! The sushi at Le Grand Paris is wonderful.”

“Y-yeah, Alya’s mother is a gr-great cook,” Marinette replied, referring to the hotel restaurant’s head chef.

“You’ve eaten at Le Grand Paris before?” Chloe asked, feeling annoyed that Marinette was still stuttering around Adrien despite all of their practicing. “I wouldn’t of thought you could afford it,” she sniffed.

“I don’t need to have eaten there to have had Mme. Cesaire’s food. I’ve eaten at Alya’s house plenty of times,” Marinette clarified, trying to hold back her temper despite the implied disparage to her bank account.

“Oh! What have you had? Does she make any traditional food from Martinique?” Adrien asked, interested in what his friend’s home-life is like. His father’s restrictions on his social life meant that Adrien had rarely visited any of his friends’ houses except for Chloe.

“Y-yeah, I really um like Fricassée de chatrou. It’s a stewpus octew, I mean, an octopus stew with tomatoes, onions, lemons, spices...” Marinette’s face grew warm at her blunder.

“Bleh! How disgusting! I hate soup,” Chloe spat the words as if they really tasted awful in her mouth.

“It’s not soup, it’s stew, and it’s delicious!” Marinette crossed her arms, defiantly. Keeping her temper with Chloe’s antics was proving harder than she thought it would be. “You know, you shouldn’t dismiss something before you even try it.”

“It sounds stew-pendous!” Adrien joked, trying to lighten the mood. Perhaps the topic, having such a close association with Alya, was making both girls tense. Adrien surmised that Chloe probably felt uncertain about how Marinette’s best friend would handle their new relationship, and Marinette probably felt torn between supporting her new girlfriend and standing by her faithful best friend.

Marinette blinked, “Did Adrien just pun?”
Chloe just groaned in annoyance. If Adrien had an imperfection, then in her opinion it was his sense of humor. Normally, she would just ignore it, but as she was already tense and annoyed by Marinette, Adrien’s punning served to only magnify her short-temper. Luckily, the car pulled up to the hotel and the three escaped the close confines of the vehicle in favor of the more spacious luxury hotel.

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As Marinette watched Adrien leave the locker room and head to their afternoon class, she felt Chloe come over to her and stand beside her.

“Lunch could have gone better,” Marinette lamented.

“It couldn’t of gone any worse!” Chloe huffed as she crossed her arms and leaned back hard onto the locker doors. “We made no headway in convincing him. If anything, we’ve pressured him into confessing** his feelings to Ladybug.”

“Yeah…but it’s like you said,” Marinette pointed out, “they rarely come into contact with each other.” She would have to make sure to avoid Adrien as Ladybug, then he wouldn’t be able to confess.

“He’ll make it happen somehow. Didn’t you see the look on his face? The determination?”

“Yeah, I didn’t know Adrien could be so stubborn.”

“Normally, he’s not, but about somethings, the really important things, like when he was determined to quit homeschooling and attend our school, he can be quite tenacious until he gets his way.”

Marinette could only nod in acknowledgement. This was a side of Adrien she hadn’t really seen before and so could only rely on Chloe’s superior experience with him.

At first lunch seemed to be going well. The three had sat down to the table laid out in Chloe’s suite. Of course, Chloe sat in the middle, but perhaps that was better, since it allowed Marinette a better placement to admire her crush, since Adrien sat opposite her. Chloe’s butler immediately brought in the soup and salad, which initially Marinette thought strange to serve at the same time, but it became clear as to the reason. Chloe pushed her soup toward Adrien who swapped it for his salad.

“You really don’t like soup, do you?” Marinette couldn’t help ask the blonde girl. She remembered the blonde’s disdain for her great uncle’s soup when he competed in a cooking competition that Chloe, among others, judged, but at the time Marinette thought Chloe’s bad opinion had more to with their rivalry than an actual dislike of the dish he prepared.

“Just means more soup for me,” Adrien smiled happily, but then paused, “unless you’d like it, Marinette?”

“No, th-thanks,” the raven-haired girl replied, blushing at his thoughtfulness.

“If you don’t like it, Adrien will eat it. He eats everything,” Chloe responded as she adjusted her chopsticks.

“Except salad?” Marinette asked, noting how he had given it up so easily.

“Oh, I like salad fine, but then Chloe wouldn’t have anything to eat. We always do this. She gives me whatever she doesn’t like and then she chooses what of mine she gets in return,” Adrien blushed, “I guess I never thought about how it must appear to anyone else. It must seem strange.”
"No, it’s n-nice," Marinette tried to smile, although she felt a bit sad to be left out. She didn’t have any special ritual with Adrien the way Chloe did.

"We’ve been doing it since we were kids,” Adrien explained. “Chloe’s a picky eater.”

“I am not,” the soup-hater defended herself. “I know what I like and I know what I don’t, that’s all,” she sniffed and then took another bite of salad.

Marinette simply nodded and picked up her spoon to begin eating her soup. She felt the spice on her tongue and the warmth of the broth as it traveled down her throat. Just as she was about to dip her spoon in again, she felt someone looking at her. Her bluebell eyes flicked up to find Adrien’s emerald ones intently focused on her.

“How do you like it?” he asked the girl opposite him about the taste of the soup.

“It’s really g-good!” Marinette blushed again.

“Too bad,” Chloe tsked. “I know you were hoping for a third bowl, Adrikens.” She giggled at her joke until she caught Marinette’s eye. She cleared her throat and corrected herself, “I mean, Adrien.”

Adrien noted the exchange between the two girls and also the fact that Chloe kept correcting herself every time she would call him by her nickname for him, but he said nothing. He honestly wouldn’t mind if he never got called “Adrikens” again.

“That’s not why I asked,” although pink dusted his cheeks. “I just want to make sure Marinette is enjoying herself.”

“Oh! I am! I love soup. It’s super!” The girl cringed at her unintentional pun but was surprised to hear a hearty laugh from across the table. Adrien’s mouth split wide with a huge grin.

“That’s a good one, Marinette!” he encouraged. “I hope to hear another pun from you spoon.”

“Oh, please don’t start with the puns!” Chloe whined. “I just can’t today.”

“Sorry,” Marinette replied as she lowered her eyelids guiltily, but the smirk on her face indicated her true feelings, “maybe ladle.”

Again, for her punning efforts she was rewarded with a boisterous laugh from Adrien that made Marinette’s stomach flip. Chloe gave her a death stare, but Marinette just shrugged. They never stipulated that they couldn’t joke with Adrien. She had done nothing wrong according to their agreement. Marinette only wished that Chat Noir was there to hear her as well. He would have appreciated those puns as much as Adrien seemed to. She supposed that the next time she saw her superhero partner she should thank him for all of his punning, which seemed to have rubbed off on her and allowed her to make Adrien laugh, gloriously, twice!

After the soup and salad Chloe’s butler brought in the sushi. Marinette recognized small bowls of steaming mixed chirashi as well as various uramaki and tamaki rolls. Based on their selections Chloe seemed to favor the uramaki rolls while Adrien selected almost exclusively the tamaki rolls.

“You should try one of each,” Adrien suggested, “and see which ones you like best.”

“These are mine,” Chloe said moving the plate of dragon rolls beside her.

“Chloe, you can at least let Marinette have one…” Adrien chided.
“Ohhh!” Chloe whined, “But Adrikens, these are my favorite!”

“I’m sharing my favorite with Marinette,” he said as he passed a plate of unagi rolls to the girl sitting across from him. “Chloe hates eel, so I normally get these all to myself. Try one.”

Marinette reached out her chopsticks, shakily, and plucked a roll from the platter. She barely managed to get it over her own plate before it slipped between the two sticks and landed with a plop. The roll broke apart messily.

“Here,” Adrien said, flipping his chopsticks over and using the think ends to move another unagi roll onto her plate.

Marinette smiled gratefully at Adrien, but then smirked as she looked at Chloe when she said, “Thank you, Adrikens.” Marinette would continue to remind Chloe of their agreement if it killed her. She was not going to let it slide. If Chloe would not stop using the dreaded nickname, then she would start using it. Chloe gnashed her teeth in response but relented her withholding of the dragon rolls and presented Marinette with the platter, from which the raven-haired girl took two rolls despite Chloe’s gasp of exasperation. Adrien meanwhile had turned a bright shade of red from hearing Marinette use his nickname for the second time that day. When he had recovered himself, he wondered why that name seemed to be such a sticking point between the two girls.

Dessert of green tea ice cream followed and then the three retired to Chloe’s lounge where they would look at Marinette’s sketchbook. This time Marinette got to sit in the middle so that the other two could equally see the sketchbook as the designer explained her drawings, although Chloe seemed less than interested. Page by page the three looked through her book as Marinette tried to describe her inspirations, her choices of fabrics, and her overall esthetic despite her stutter. Adrien peppered the conversation with compliments and probing questions, which only served to make the designer even more flustered and the bored blonde even more exasperated with the conversation.

Marinette’s face felt very hot and her palms were sweating, so she tried not to touch the book too much for fear of leaving sweat marks. She could feel Adrien’s thigh touching hers. He had one arm on the back of the sofa and leaned into her space so that he could get a closer look at the book resting in her lap. As a consequence, his face was ever so close to her own, his sweet breath tickled her cheeks and neck, while her shoulder connected with his strong chest. His closeness and compliments were beginning to overwhelm her. Her stuttering became worse and her sentence structure dissolved into muddled riddles.

“When is she going to get to that Ladybug design?” Chloe wondered. She tried to suggest flipping ahead and showing it to Adrien, but the blonde model would not be deterred, wanting to continue at their languid pace and seeing the designs in the order that they were created.

As they flipped to a new page, Adrien spoke again, “Oh I like this one. I love green.” He had noted that most of Marinette’s designs were in pink or other pastel colors. He wanted to encourage her to use bolder colors and green happened to be his favorite.

“Green, like your eyes…I love them,” she murmured as she lost herself for a moment in his emerald eyes, but then realized her confession. “I mean, um I love green things, t-too, like um grass and uh l-leaves and sea weed?”

Chloe had just about enough. It had been over an hour without telling Adrien any of the straight talk that they had practiced. Soon they’d have to go back to class. She had to intervene if they’d ever hope to accomplish what they set out to do or else this whole painfully agonizing faux friendship and being civil for real deal that they had endured for two days would have been for not.
“Would you please excuse us, Adrien?” Chloe stood up suddenly as she grasped Marinette’s hand, pulling her to her feet. “I need to use the bathroom.”

“Um… I don’t need to…”

“Yes, you do! Come on!” Chloe pulled the other girl away as if she was a rag doll.

Adrien shrugged, figuring it was true what he saw in movies and on television. Girls always went together to the bathroom. He caught the sketchbook before it hit the floor and amused himself with flipping through it during their absence.

When the two girls were safely behind the closed and locked door of Chloe’s obscenely large bathroom they felt free to emote their exasperation for one another.

“Chloe!” Marinette exclaimed as she wrenched her hand out of the other girl’s grip, “What on earth was that about?”

“What are you doing?” Chloe rounded on her with a finger shoved in her face. “You are making no sense out there! Have you forgotten the whole point of this lunch?”

“No! I’m trying my best!”

“All you’ve done is stutter and drool over him.”

“I have not! I made some good points about my drawings…”

“You told him he is a golden god and his p-picture should be hung in the L-louvre!” Chloe mocked.

Marinette grasped a pigtail in each hand and pulled, hard, “Oh god! I did, didn’t I? He must hate me! I’m so lame!”

Chloe nodded, “Yes, you are, very. Look, what is the problem? Why are you so… you around him?”

“I dunno. As soon as I’m near him, I just melt. His golden hair and his emerald eyes, his sweet smile and that laugh! (Sigh!) He’s so perfect!” Marinette covered her red face with her hands.

Chloe clucked her tongue in disapproval. “You think Adrien is him,” she pointed to the oversized poster of the perfume ad graced with Adrien’s angelic face and god-like physique that hung on the bathroom wall and framed in gold. “That’s not the Adrien in there,” she pointed to the door leading back to where the real boy waited for them.

“What do you mean? Of course, it’s the same person!”

“No,” Chloe shook her head, “that’s what they want you to believe. His father, the advertisers, the photographer, they’re selling you an image of a perfect boy, a perfect life. Adrien’s not perfect. Never has been, never will be. He’s great, don’t get me wrong, probably the best, but not perfect.”

Marinette looked at Chloe with amazement, “But you like him! You want to date him!”

“Doesn’t mean I don’t see his faults,” Chloe said as she turned the cold water on in the sink and wet a hand towel. She passed the damp cloth to the shook girl, who used it to cool her face.

After a moment, the lovestruck girl ventured to ask, “What are Adrien’s faults?”

“Well, for one he has a rather awful sense of humor. He puns. It’s annoying, seriously.”
Marinette nodded. She had heard him pun today, but she found it thrilling not annoying, since she was able to trade puns with him and make him laugh. She tried to think back on her previous interactions with him, but could not recall a time when he punned, although to be sure their conversations were typically pretty short.

“And, two, he’s kind of a dork.”

“What do you mean?” Marinette asked, offended on behalf of her crush.

“He watches a lot of anime and that’s where he’s picked up his social cues. Sometimes he’s just downright awkward.”

“I haven’t noticed that! He always very gentlemanly…and honest.”

“And dramatic…and overly excitable.”

“He does get excited about mundane things…” Marinette agreed as she thought of how happy he gets when she brings in some cookies or croissants from the bakery as a treat.

Chloe nodded, “So you see? Not perfect. Now, stop being a fangirl and start being a friend.”

“Ugh! I get so nervous! How do I stop being so nervous?” Marinette shook her head in dismay.

“I dunno,” Chloe shrugged. “Try pretending that you’re talking to someone that doesn’t make you nervous.”

“Like who?”

“How should I know! A boy you’re comfortable talking to…Nino? Kim? Just pick someone!”

Marinette nodded and tried to think of the one boy she felt the most comfortable talking to and one face flew into her head, her partner, Chat Noir.

“And, you can also just give yourself a pinch, like this.” Chloe pressed her two fingers together as hard as she could, squeezing Marinette’s arm flesh between them. The injured girl yelped in surprise and pain.

“Chlo-eee! OW!” Marinette rubbed her bruised arm as she scowled at her attacker.

“Pain is a natural deterrent. You’ll train yourself not to get so nervous, but you gotta really feel it.” She smirked devilishly, “Want me to show you again?”

“NO! I got it. Keep your ninja fingers away from me!”

[Knock, knock.]

“Everything okay in there?” Adrien’s voice asked through the door. “You’ve been in there awhile…” Initially, Adrien thought the girls bathroom trip was to relieve certain biological needs, but they had been in there so long that he wondered if they weren’t relieving different needs. Only when he heard Marinette yelp in pain did he decide to go ahead with his intuition and knock on the door.

“We’re coming!” Chloe called. She turned back to her co-conspirator. “You ready?”

“Ready!” Marinette nodded with determination as she tried to picture Chat’s face.

“You can do this,” Chloe encourage as her hand twisted the door handle.
“I can do this,” Marinette repeated.

The time had come. They would make their case.
Chapter Summary

Adrien, Chloe, and Marinette lunch (part 2)
Adrien comes under fire as the two girls ally themselves, although Marinette suffers a hit to her pride as she takes one for the Chlonette team.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Adrien resumed his spot on the couch as he awaited the girls’ return. Lunch, while pleasant, had certainly not been what he expected. The girls did not interact with each other much like he would assume two people in a relationship would. The compliments that Chloe had so eagerly given Marinette yesterday were completely gone. And, although, the two did not openly fight there did seem to be some kind of underlying tension. He wondered if perhaps they had a fight earlier and had not had a chance to makeup. He figured that some alone time, just the two of them, in the bathroom would perhaps serve to allow them to mend whatever breach had occurred previously. He just hadn’t of expected to wait so long and as such had gone to investigate. But, now they were coming and he hoped that all would be well between them.

“I skipped ahead,” he sheepishly admitted, holding the sketchbook in his hands. “You have some Chat Noir-inspired designs!” he exclaimed with great excitement as his finger tapped the page.

Marinette nodded, but before she could speak Chloe cut in, “I thought you were going to do a Ladybug design.”

“I did!” Marinette defended herself, “It’s just that Chat Noir is much more inspiring, so I did several with him as the theme.”

Adrien felt warm all over to hear that he had inspired the talented designer.

Chloe rolled her eyes, “I dunno how you can say Chat Noir is inspiring. Ladybug is the hero.”

“Chat is as much a hero as Ladybug!” Marinette argued, her hands landing on her hips.

Adrien cringed. So much for the idea that they had made up while in the bathroom. The merits of Chat Noir as a superhero was a long-standing point of contention between the girls. Chloe always took the stance that Chat Noir was a useless sidekick, while Marinette always defended him as an essential equal contributor to the superhero team. It seemed that they were about to fight another round despite never being able to convince the other of the merits of their arguments.

“Oh yeah?” Chloe countered, her own arms akimbo. “Where was Chat at the last akuma battle, hmmmm?”

That was something the spotted hero herself had asked her partner. The only reply she got from him was a simple yet vague one.

“He would have been there if he could have been,” Marinette echoed Chat’s response to Ladybug’s question.
“What was so important that kept him away?” Chloe asked. “What was more important than fighting an akuma? Does he even realize that Ladybug almost died? If it wasn’t for Adrien…”

Marinette picked up on where Chloe was leading them understanding that this was the opening that the whole lunch had been leading up to. “Yes, th-that’s true. A-adrien, you saved Ladybug.” She took a breath to calm her nerves and then gave her arm a hard pinch. She found the pain lessened her anxiety, giving her an alternative to draw her focus. “That was very heroic of you.”

“Quite dashing!” Chloe agreed.

Adrien smiled at the compliments, “I didn’t do much,” he replied, feeling grateful that at the least the two could agree on something.

“Nonsense,” Marinette tapped him on the shoulder in a teasing way as if he was her superhero partner. “You pushed her out of harm’s way and for your trouble you died.”

“Sacrificed your own life…” Chloe shook her head mournfully.

In her mind’s eye the secret hero recalled the moment that it happened. Ladybug felt a sharp force against her shoulder. She landed hard on the ground with Adrien on top of her. He flashed her a quick smile, but before she could even react to having her crush so near she watched in horror as his face crumpled in pain and his body collapsed.

“There you lay on the street,” Marinette spoke softly as she gestured with her hand. In her mind’s eye she recalled how he looked. “Your head leaned on your arm as if you were asleep…”

“So peaceful…” Chloe murmured.

“Except your eyes were wide open yet staring at nothing. Your white jacket becoming redder with every passing second as blood left your body and pooled around you. Your body achingly still, no movement, no breath. Your skin, the color of ash,” tears filled Marinette’s eyes as she described the worst moment of her life, the moment she watched the boy she loved die. She called his name over and over, but he did not answer. He died without ever knowing how she felt, how much he meant to her.

“Marinette?” Adrien asked out of concern. The conversation had taken a sudden solemn turn and she looked so upset that he was tempted to give her a hug.

“Do you have any idea what you put me through?!’ She asked suddenly much louder, using the same tone normally reserved for chastising Chat Noir when he punned too much instead of focusing on stopping the akuma. Then, remembering Chloe she corrected herself, “us through?”

“We watched you die, Adrien!” Chloe yelped. She had been on the scene when it happened as well. The akuma had been the result of another one of the diva’s insensitive actions. Adrien had been unable to stop Chloe in time to prevent the akuma’s creation and then she clung so tightly to him that he had been unable to get away so that he could transform into his super hero alter ego. Thus, at the moment of Ladybug’s vulnerability Adrien had no choice, but to act or he would have surely lost his partner.

“It was a reckless thing to do!” Marinette decried.

“Rash! Stupid!” Chloe socked Adrien on the back of the head with a throw pillow from the couch. The impact surprised him and a small “umph” escaped his lips.

“Hey! A minute ago, I was a hero,” the ambushed boy exclaimed as he rubbed the back of his head.
“What’s this all about?” Adrien had already gotten chewed out by his father and Nino for his actions during the akuma battle. He wasn’t expecting a similar chastisement from Chloe and certainly not from Marinette.

“It’s about you promising us that you’ll never do anything like that again!” Chloe clarified.

“I can’t promise you that,” Adrien replied calmly and truthfully. He’s Ladybug’s partner. If she’s in trouble then it was his duty regardless of whether he had the mask on or not to do everything he could to protect her, even if that meant dying for her. Of course, he couldn’t tell the two angry girls before him that, but he also would not make them a promise he knew he wouldn’t be able to keep.

“Why not?” Marinette crossed her arms in front of her.

“I can’t stand by and just watch. I can’t just do nothing.”

“Why not? It’s not your job, Adrien, seriously!” Chloe pointed out.

“It’s the responsibility of Ladybug and Chat Noir, not ordinary citizens,” agreed Marinette, using a calm, but firm voice that she often used when explaining why she didn’t think an idea from her superhero partner would work.

“Fine, but in this case Chat Noir wasn’t there and Ladybug needed help, so I helped. You do realize that if Ladybug had died instead of me we would all be at the mercy of Hawk Moth right now, don’t you?”

“But, Chat Noir…” Marinette began.

“No, not Chat Noir. He can’t cleanse the akuma,” Adrien interrupted. “That’s my whole point. Ladybug is essential to defeating Hawk Moth and his akumas. Chat Noir is as expendable as I am.”

“He is not and neither are you!” Marinette cried, stomping her foot out of anger and frustration that served to distract her from being nervous around her crush. Chloe bopped Adrien on the back of the head again, trying to knock some sense into his thick skull. He gave her a hard look before replying.

“Yes, we are!” Adrien argued, feeling odd talking about himself in the plural tense. “If it means we have to die in order to keep Ladybug alive so that she can stop him, then that’s what we have to do. That’s what I have to do.”

“But you did die!” Chloe emphasized.

“Yes, and she brought me back. Ladybug always saves the day! I wasn’t in any real danger.”

“But what if…” Marinette’s voice broke as she once again felt the enormous pressure of being the last man standing, “what if she fails…”

“Then I die, Paris loses, and Hawkmoth wins, but I know that won’t happen,” Adrien shook his head, knowing that his lady would not let them down. “Our best hope rests with Ladybug and I have complete faith in her that she will save us, every, single time.”

“But…h-how do you know?” Marinette asked, awe struck at the strength of his belief in her.

“Because I…” Adrien stopped himself from saying it, but Chloe finished the sentence for him.

“You love her.”

“Chlo-eee!” Adrien drew out her name, indicating his annoyance. He really did not want to talk
about his love life, especially in front of Marinette. They were friends, sure, but they didn’t talk about that with each other, well not Adrien and Marinette anyway. Chat and Marinette, well that was a different story.

“What? Are you embarrassed to admit that you love her?” Chloe asked.

“No! Of course not! I do. I love Ladybug,” although he felt rather foolish for saying it, knowing how it must sound as if he was a fanboy and not her devoted partner.

“Do you realize how ridiculous that sounds?” Chloe asked, rhetorically.

“It’s not ridiculous,” he stated flatly.

“You b-barely know her,” Marinette said softly before giving her arm another pinch to suppress her stuttering.

“I know her better than you think,” he muttered. “Look, it’s none of your business who I love, just like it’s none of my business who you love,” he gestured at both of them. He was supportive of their relationship despite their prior antagonistic history. Why couldn’t they be supportive of him loving a superhero seemingly from afar, okay, yeah that sounded weird, but really, couldn’t they just stay out of it?

“It’s very much our business!” Chloe exclaimed. When she received a “Seriously?” from Adrien, the blonde diva forged ahead, “Of course it’s our business! We’re in…”

“We’re your friends!” Marinette interrupted to cover what she feared could have been a confession of not only Chloe’s deepest feelings towards the boy, but also her own.

“Adrien, this love of Ladybug is compelling you to risk your life!” Chloe exclaimed in exasperation.

“And, you’re missing out,” Marinette pinched her arm again to give her courage. “You could be dating. There are plenty of nice girls out there…and here,” she swallowed the last two words.

“I’m not missing out on anything. There isn’t any other girl I want to date.” That wasn’t an entirely true statement, but the only other girl besides Ladybug that Adrien would consider dating had just recently gotten herself a girlfriend. He had delayed too long, trying to determine if his heart had healed enough from Ladybug’s rejection of him to try again at love, and if so how to make dating a civilian, who didn’t know of his secret superhero identity, work. Regardless, the statement had its desired effect: Chloe and Marinette became deathly quiet.

Marinette looked like Adrien told her that her pet hamster died. Chloe looked like Adrien told her that her shoes are tacky and clash with her dress.

Chloe smacked Adrien with the pillow again, but this time, square in the face.

“Will you please stop doing that?” he asked.

“Not until you start talking sense,” she replied.

“Look, if it helps, I can promise you that as long as Chat Noir shows up to back up Ladybug, then I, Adrien Agreste, promise not to help her,” he swore with one hand over his heart as if he was pledging allegiance to the French flag and the other held up by his ear as if he was being sworn in at court. “Okay? Satisfied?”

“It’s a start,” Marinette conceded.
“What about loving Ladybug? You have to give her up for your own sake,” Chloe pressured.

“That’s enough, Chloe,” Adrien warned.

“She doesn’t love you. She’s not going to love you,” Chloe persisted.

For a passing moment Adrien looked like a kicked puppy (kitten?) and Marinette had to hold herself back from blurtting out her secret superhero identity, wrapping her arms around him, and kissing him on the mouth. But, then something shifted in Adrien’s demeanor. His eyes flicked up in defiance and his jaw set into a hard, right angle. He looked determined, more determined than she had ever seen him.

“You’re wrong. You don’t understand,” he walked away from them. “I’m going to the bathroom and when I get back, we’ll talk about something else.”

The two watched him go, but just as Adrien’s figure disappeared from view Marinette remembered something important about the bathroom.

“Adrien! Wait!” she called after him, but then quickly whispered to Chloe, “The poster!”

Chloe’s eyes widened in horror and she started running, eager to catch up to the boy. She practically ran into him as she exited the room, since he had stopped and turned around at their calls. Marinette, who was right behind the blonde girl, was unable to cease her quick advance and as such slammed into Chloe, who in turn, slammed into Adrien. They had effectively made a rather awkward, human sandwich.

“What is it?” Adrien asked rubbing his chest where Chloe’s chin made an impression.

“You can’t use the bathroom,” Marinette stated and Chloe frantically shook her head despite the pain she felt at the back of it where Marinette’s forehead had collided into it.

“Why not?”

“Umm…” Chloe turned to Marinette, “tell him.”

“Oh! Well, um it smells in-th-there?” the less than capable liar shrugged.

Chloe nodded vigorously, “Yeah, Marinette really stunk it up!”

“Wh-wh…?” Marinette sputtered as her face turned red in embarrassment.

“Trust me, Adrikens, you do not want to go in there! You can use the bathroom in the lobby on the way out. It’s time to go anyway.” She grabbed his arm and led him out all the while Marinette scowled at the blonde girl, who chose to ignore her.

Chapter End Notes

I’m breaking another rule, sort of. I said the relationships were canon and as such there would be no established MariChat, but I forgot about the Glaciator episode (how did I forget?), so this takes place after Glaciator because I am referring to it subtly in this chapter and very explicitly in a future chapter as I build up that corner of the love square.
Also, I promised no LadyNoir scene, but I'm probably going to go back on that rule, too if I want to do a reveal. (Why did I bother to make rules if I was just going to break them all?) So as it stands now, every corner of the love square will have at least one scene. We'll get a nice Adrienette conversation next chapter.
Post-Mortem

Chapter Summary

Chloe and Marinette must deal with the fallout from lunch, which means making amends and figuring out the next step in their plan.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to Fishystar for being my Beta Reader on this chapter and also for suggesting I watch "Shugo Chara". It's an anime that has some parallels to ML and so I have incorporated it here as something for Adrienette to bond over.

“How could you say that?” Marinette seethed as the two waited in the hotel’s lobby for Adrien to return from the bathroom.

“Say what?” Chloe asked innocently.

“That I,” her voice dropped to a whisper, “stunk up the bathroom!”

“ You were the one that said it smelled. I just went along with your idea and embellished. So what?”

“I’m sooo embarrassed!” Marinette buried her head in her hands, but then her face shot up suddenly in anger, “I can’t believe you said that!”

“Don’t worry about it. Adrien has stunk up his fair share of bathrooms, too,” Chloe smirked.

“But, I didn’t! Wait…wh-what?” Marinette asked, looking as if her birthday balloon just popped.

“What? He’s a guy. Guys are dirty and smelly, even Adrien.” Chloe crossed her arms, decidedly. Her eyes flicked to the bathroom door as she impatiently waited for the blonde boy’s return. She turned back to the girl, noting her doubting face. “He doesn’t poop flowers and his farts don’t smell like potpourri. I told you, he’s not really the teen idol that you think he is.”

Marinette looked down at her shoes. Today, had not gone as planned. Adrien probably hated her for ambushing him and grossed out by her for what she supposedly had done in the bathroom. And, worst of all she found out that Adrien wasn’t as flawless as she thought he was, that it was only an illusion that he’s perfect. She was finding out first hand that he was not perfect, from his puns to his use of anime to relate to people to his stinky… poop. Ugh! Marinette hated today and she hated Chloe.

“Thank you,” Chloe said out of the corner of her mouth.

Marinette’s head snapped up and she locked eyes with her rival.

“What did you say?” Marinette asked, certain she had misheard her.
“You heard me,” she sniffed the air. As she continued to feel Marinette’s eyes on her, Chloe’s façade weakened, “You prevented Adrien from seeing the poster of him in the bathroom, so…thank you.” It killed Chloe to acknowledge what Marinette had done for her, but she had helped her, selflessly, and ultimately to her own detriment. Normally, Chloe never thanked anyone, because she didn’t have to do so. She’s Chloe Bourgeois, famous socialite and daughter of the Mayor, it was enough that she allowed people to do nice things for her, she shouldn’t have to thank them. Even her closest friends, namely Adrien and Sabrina, she rarely thanked. But, Marinette was different. She would expect a thank you out of politeness and being the right thing to do. So, if Chloe wanted Marinette’s continued help, and it looks like she still needed help with Adrien after their disastrous lunch, then she would have to bite the bullet and…(bleh!) thank her.

“You’re…um…you’re welcome,” Marinette replied, uncertain of what had come over the other girl. She had never known Chloe to say thank you before, except perhaps sarcastically, but, she didn’t sound sarcastic just now. She sounded…grateful. Marinette allowed herself to smile just a little.

“So, what are we going to now?” The blonde asked her fellow Adrien admirer.

“Well…”

“We should be heading back, don’t you think?” a male voice asked.

Both girls jumped in surprise, finding the tall, but stealthily quiet boy standing behind them. After recovering herself, Chloe simply nodded in agreement and began walking to the front doors, leading the way to her awaiting car. Adrien gestured for Marinette to go ahead and after she passed, he brought up the rear.

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The atmosphere in the car ride back to school felt tense. The three sat together in deathly silence, although their thoughts could not be further apart. Adrien focused his attention out of the window, hoping that if he kept a low profile that the girls would not resume their attack against him. What had come over them he could not understand. Chloe was his oldest friend and Marinette was a very good friend. Their concern for his safety was understandable. If one of them had done the same, then he probably would have said something to them about it to prevent them from doing it again as well. But, to meddle in his love life, such that it was, insisting that he was wasting his time on someone who would never love him to the detriment of being with someone who could, that seemed too pushy even for Chloe and definitely too much for Marinette. So why had they taken it upon themselves to do so he could not fathom. And so, he sat, looking out the window, replaying the conversation in his head, trying to understand not only their perspective, but also their entitled right to impose their opinion on him.

Chloe stared at her hands deep in thought about what went wrong during their confrontation. She consoled herself that at least they had secured a promise from Adrien not to interfere in akuma battles as long as Chat Noir showed up, so on paper Adrien’s safety should be assured. But, in reality Chloe felt a nagging pang of doubt that the alley cat could be trusted to show up and do his job properly. He had missed the last battle and on several previous occasions he had come under the influence of the akuma, fighting against Ladybug instead of beside her. Chloe wondered if Chat Noir’s allegiance shifted, would Adrien not argue that he would be once again compelled to help Ladybug? She wondered what her next course of action should be. Obviously, she had underestimated Adrien’s attachment to Ladybug and overestimated her and Marinette’s ability to convince him of its implausibility. There must be something else that they can do…someone else that can get through to him.

Marinette wrung her hands as her eyes searched Adrien’s face. She felt eager to in some way assure
him that she wasn’t mad at him and assure herself that he in turn was not mad at her. There must be some way to rebuild their relationship, even though it was just a friendship. There must be some topic that she could bring up to break the ice and then thaw this cold freeze between them. Marinette thought and thought, but her mind was blank as precious seconds ticked by, and all the while they were getting closer and closer to school.

“Think, Marinette, think,” she told herself. “What have you learned about Adrien today? Chloe says he’ll eat anything, so an adventurous eater. He loves Ladybug and is willing to die for her, so he’s not afraid to act on what he believes. He doesn’t want to date anyone else…” That thought left her cold, but she took some comfort in the fact that if he loved Ladybug and since she is Ladybug then he loves her. She just had to act more like Ladybug, right? Then he’d see, he’d know, and he’d fall in love with her…the Marinette her.

“Okay, think, think. Something to talk about. He likes puns. Is there something I can pun about?” She looked around the car, but nothing caught her eye. It was hard to think of a pun without much context. “Okay, what else? His poop stinks, no help there. He’s awkward cuz he watched too much anime and imitates the characters…” Marinette’s eyes flicked up to Adrien. She had it. Okay, deep breath, hard pinch.

“Um…Adrien? Chloe says you, um, like anime?” she ventured to break the silence. At the sound of their names both blondes turned to face the shy girl. Adrien gave a small smile, hopeful that perhaps Marinette was extending an olive branch to him, as he nodded in agreement.

“I recently started watching Shugo Chara. Have you ever seen it?” Marinette asked, crossing her fingers that he had. It was one of the animes Chat Noir had recommended to her as Ladybug and she had taken to the show right away.

“Have I ever seen it? I watch it all the time! I own the digital copy of all three seasons! I love that show!” Adrien bounced excitedly in his seat, happy to know of a fellow fan. Chloe only sighed in response and tried to turn her thoughts back to helping Adrien. She had been forced to watch that show on several occasions when hanging out with her model friend. The blonde diva held the opinion that the premise of the show was ridiculous and the fact that you had to read subtitles felt too much like doing school work, which she prided herself on never doing, since she had Sabrina to do it for her.

“I only just started watching it, but I really like it,” Marinette clarified, trying to picture her masked partner as the boy to whom she was talking.

“How many episodes have you seen?” the anime fanatic asked.

“Only about the first 18,” she admitted. She actually was stuck on episode 18. She found that particular episode to be perfect, or at least the first 10 minutes or so, and as such would continually watch it without moving on to either finish the episode or any other episode after it.

“Oh! There’s so much more in store! But, I don’t want to spoil it for you.” Adrien bit his lip, which sent a little shiver up Marinette’s spine. She had never seen him so excited to talk about anything before this. It reminded her a bit of Chat’s excitement when he told her about the show.

“You’ll love it L.B.,” Chat had said. “I just know you will! But, I don’t want to say too much and spoil it.”

“Do you have a favorite ‘ship?” Adrien asked, snapping Marinette back to the present.

Marinette nodded, “TadAmu,” she said, referring to the relationship composed of Amu, the magical
Marinette identified with Amu, seeing as they were both schoolgirls with magical sprite-like helpers that transformed her into more powerful versions of herself that fought evil, and associated Tadase with her own handsome, blonde crush.

“Is that because you want Ikuto for yourself?” Adrien asked, cheekily as he wiggled his eyebrows.

Marinette blinked, surprised at Adrien’s saucy question, but as her shock faded it was replaced by exasperation. “Wh-what? No! Not even!” What could she possibly see in him?

“Sorry! I didn’t mean to offend,” Adrien apologized and back-tracked on his Chat-like exuberance. “That just seems to be the consensus I see on the fan sites. Those who ‘ship TadAmu do so because they want Ikuto for themselves.”

“Well, I don’t,” she replied crossing her arms. “I don’t get why they would either. Ikuto’s the bad guy!”

“Ikuto only seems like a bad guy because he’s working for the Easter Company, but that’s not his choice. He’s been forced to do that.” Adrien knew something about that seeing as he had been forced to work as a model for his father’s fashion line since he was 10 years old. When he grew up he aspired to be anything except a fashion model.

“Is that why he’s so… depressed?” she asked, trying to understand the troubled boy.

Adrien nodded, “Yes…and he lost his father, mysteriously.” Again, something Adrien understood all too well, since his mother had disappeared under mysterious circumstances less than a year ago.

“Oops,” the blonde boy cringed, “spoiler alert.”

“That’s okay,” Marinette waved her hand. “So, I take it you ‘ship Amu and Ikuto?”

“Oh, yes!” Adrien nodded furiously, “Big Amuto shipper, right here.” In Adrien’s eyes, Amu was of course the equivalent to Ladybug and he, as Chat Noir, had a strong affiliation to Ikuto, who also transformed into a cat-boy and had a mischievous sprite that was always getting into trouble just like his own kwami, Plagg. If Amu and Ikuto got together, then maybe there was hope for LadyNoir in real life.

“I’m kinda surprised,” Marinette said off handedly. When Adrien quirked an eyebrow as an indication he wanted her to explain, she said, “Well, you’re so…positive all of the time. I’m surprised that you identify with a sullen, cat-boy. Oh! I mean, if you identify with Ikuto, that is…” Marinette pinched her arm hard again, trying to calm herself. She hoped she hadn’t insulted Adrien, but she just couldn’t understand it. Adrien’s positivity no matter what happened was one of the many things she admired about him. Ikuto’s obvious pain and depression meant that he barely said two words strung together in any episode. She wondered why the creators had even bothered to hire a voice actor.

“I have my dark times, too, just like everyone,” he explained, “but I guess I can relate to Ikuto because…” Adrien hesitated, not sure how much he should reveal, but Marinette was a good friend and Chloe looked like she wasn’t listening, so, “well…sometimes I feel that I might have ended up like Ikuto if I hadn’t of made the friends that I made at school, like Nino and…you.” He wanted to add ‘and Ladybug’, but for obvious reasons he couldn’t. Part of why he fought so hard to attend public school when his father wanted him to continue with private tutoring was so that he would not end up depressed and alone like Ikuto. He needed people in his life. Friends, school, and his miraculous were life lines that gave him a reason to get up every morning and look forward to the day ahead of him.
A gasp escaped Marinette’s lips as Adrien’s words settled in her brain. “I might have ended up like Ikuto…if not for you.” She blushed heavily. Before she could even think what to say the car stopped, having pulled up outside of the school. The driver opened the door and the three exited one by one. Unfortunately, Marinette’s ankle turned as she stepped out and she wavered dangerously to one side. Luckily, Adrien had waited by the door and was able to catch her by her arm.

“Careful!” He asked as he steadied her, “You okay?”

“Yeah,” she lied as she winced in pain, “that’s just my type of road trip.”

Adrien busted out laughing at her pun and Marinette felt her embarrassment recede.

“I auto have known,” he replied with a smirk, “considering how many trips you take.”

From the top of the steps Chloe called asking a bit impatiently if they were coming. Adrien gave a wave to his friend.

“Can you walk?” he asked. Marinette nodded and the two slowly made their way up the steps to join the waiting girl. When the three had regrouped Adrien expressed his gratitude to Chloe for lunch. Marinette added her thanks as well.

“Of course!” Chloe responded with a plastered on smile as she walked through the school entrance. “We must do it again and soon!” She was not giving up. She just had to figure out a better plan.

Adrien smiled back in return, but then his attention focused on the other girl. “Let me know how you like the rest of the season and if you jump ‘ships.”

“I doubt I’ll be giving up TadAmu any time soon,” Marinette smiled at the boy that reminded her of Tadase, but that she tried to imagine as Chat for the sake of her nerves. As they walked down the hall toward the locker room to retrieve their books she continued, “but I’d be h-happy to discuss the show with you.” She gave herself another pinch to try to calm her rapidly beating heart.

“I’d like that, too,” he replied with a grin as he deposited her at her locker and then turned away to find his, meeting Nino on the way and the two falling into easy conversation.

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So there Marinette stood, next to Chloe in the locker room, mulling over their next step.

“We could try talking to Adrien again?” Marinette offered weakly.

“I don’t think he’ll listen to us,” Chloe shook her head sadly, not that she blamed them. They had done their best at lunch, but had come up short.

“Yeah, probably the only person he would listen to is Ladybug,” the raven-haired girl whispered as the two co-conspirators walked out of the locker room and down the hallway to their classroom. “If she rejected him, then that would be it. He’d have to face that his crush is pointless.”

“I have the perfect idea!” Chloe exclaimed as a metaphorical light bulb went off in her head. “Ladybug will reject Adrien and that will end his crush.”

“I just said that!” Marinette huffed. Chloe was always stealing other people’s ideas. Marinette smirked, “How are you going to get Ladybug to reject him, hmm? Just because you’re her so-called biggest fan doesn’t mean she owes you any favors.”
“I have you know that Ladybug and I are like this,” Chloe showed her longest finger wrapped around her index finger. “If I asked her, then she would do anything for me,” the blonde boasted.

“Yeah, right,” Marinette mumbled under her breath, annoyed to hear her lie about her masked self.

“But, we don’t need Ladybug,” Chloe surprisingly stated.

“What? You just said Ladybug has to reject him, so…”

“Meet me after school at my suite,” Chloe instructed her associate before entering the classroom. Marinette watched the blonde girl sit happily in her usual spot before climbing a few steps to take her own chair two levels up. As Mlle. Bustier began her lecture, Marinette tried to puzzle out what her accomplice could possibly have cooked up for their next move.
Chapter Notes

Thanks again to Fishystar for beta reading this chapter and for providing the plot point regarding Marinette as a yandere.

During the 10-minute break between subjects Marinette quickly filled in Alya on the events of her shared lunch with Adrien and Chloe. She had not been able to keep their lunch date a secret from her bestie due to her inquisitive nature and the fact that they almost always had lunch together. Missing out on two hours of talking about boys had to be explained. However, she left out the part about Chloe and her partnering up to set Adrien straight about Ladybug and akuma attacks. Marinette simply explained that Adrien had shown interest in seeing her sketch book, which Chloe overheard and maneuvered to horn in on what should have been a one-on-one with her crush. It was a perfectly reasonable explanation that had enough truth to make it sound believable. But, now Marinette found herself in the unenviable position of how to recount the details of said lunch to her friend while having to leave out the juiciest parts, namely the actual confrontation, in which Marinette learned just how much Adrien really seemed to be in love with Ladybug, so much so that he did not regret dying for her and would gladly do it again.

“So? *Spill*! What happened at lunch? Were there sparks between you and Adrien? Did Chloe eat her napkin out of jealousy?” the aspiring reporter asked.

“Well, not exactly, but I think it went well. He seemed to like my designs,” Marinette recounted.


“Well…I found out that we’re watching the same anime. We talked about that quite a bit.”

“You did? You actually talked, like *talk*, talked?” Alya could hardly believe her ears.

Marinette nodded, “You probably aren’t going to believe this, heck, I don’t believe it myself, but Chloe gave me some really good advice.” After receiving an anxious “*What?*” from her pal, she explained. “I think, that I’ve been thinking of Adrien as the guy in the fashion magazines and the perfume ads, when he’s really, just an ordinary guy.”


“Yeah, but still a person like you and me, not this god-like idol I’ve made him out to be. So, Chloe suggested that I think of someone I’m comfortable talking to and pretend that Adrien is that person.”
“Who did you picture? Did it work?” Alya asked, her reporter’s curiosity working overtime.

Marinette nodded in answer to the second question, while ignoring the first. “And she said I also should pinch myself really hard when I’m nervous,” showing Alya her arm where she had squeezed her flesh several times.

“Girl, you better pick a new spot. You’re gonna have one hell of a bruise!” She replied as she inspected the raven-haired girl’s arm. “I’m surprised Chloe was so helpful.”

“I know! Me, too,” she paused as she considered what to say next. “Don’t laugh, but, um, I think maybe, Chloe might possibly not be as awful as I thought.”

“Oh no! She’s turned you! She must have put something in your food! That explains why Adrien’s been her friend for so long! She’s been drugging him, too!” Alya joked, as she put a hand to her bestie’s forehead to check for a hallucination-inducing fever.

“No,” Marinette laughed, as she pushed Alya’s hand away, “I’m serious. I saw a glimmer of humanity from Chloe today and that’s more than I’ve seen in the four years I’ve had the misfortune to know her. I think we connected on some level.”

Alya looked extremely doubtful.

“It was probably just a fluke. Maybe Chloe has the fever!” Marinette laughed.

Alya laughed along. “So, tell me more about you and you-know-who,” she wiggled her eyebrows as both girls’ eyes found Adrien, who Marinette realized to her disappointment was talking with Chloe.

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Adrien could tell that Chloe seemed unusually subdued for one who basked in the sunlight of praise and love from others. He wasn’t her oldest friend for nothing. She had been deathly quiet in the car ride back to school and now seemed to be ignoring him. That did not bode well. Chloe only ever kept to herself when she was up to something. Adrien wondered if he could tease out from her exactly what that something was and how much trouble it was going to cause him. So, at the 10-minute break he rose from his seat and made a beeline for the blonde diva before she could flee the room.

“Chloe!” Adrien called. “That was quite a stunt you pulled at lunch.”

“Stunt?” Chloe asked innocently.

“Yeah, ambushing me about my love life, hitting me with a pillow, and dragging Marinette into it as your accomplice.”

“I didn’t have to drag Marinette anywhere. She willingly came. If you’re mad at me, then you should be mad at her, too, Adrikens,” she tsked at herself in frustration, “I mean, Adrien.”

“Look, I’m very happy that you two are getting along so well, but if you’re going to be a bad influence on her, make her do things like you’ve made others do for you,” he tried to subtly indicate Sabrina with his eyes as the redhead sat next to her bestie, eavesdropping, “then I’m going to have to warn her off of you for her own good.”

He had hoped that the reverse would be true, that Marinette would have a positive influence on Chloe. He hoped that the kind-hearted girl would be able to show the blonde diva that being nice to
people wasn’t a sign of weakness, but actually a sign of strength in terms of character and ethics. But, now he feared Chloe might be leading the naïve-girl down a path toward deceit, trickery, and selfishness.

“No one makes Marinette do anything,” Chloe sniffed. Adrien silently conceded that her statement had a ring of truth to it. Marinette certainly was not one to back down or be pushed around, especially where her friends were concerned. “Besides, how can you have the right to warn Marinette about me, when you won’t admit that we have the right to warn you about Ladybug?”

Adrien opened his mouth to protest and then clamped it shut. His brows furrowed as he rocked back on his heels.

“What’s wrong, cat got your tongue?” Chloe purred.

“I seemed to have stomped on my own argument,” he replied ruefully.

Now, don’t be upset, Adrikens, er Adrien,” Chloe corrected herself again on the use of his nickname. She didn’t realize that it would be so hard to stop using it. She would have to make a concerted effort to stop if she wanted the partnership with Marinette to continue and she needed it to continue at least for a few more days. “We’re all friends, just looking out for each other.”

“I suppose…although could you not look so hard next time?” He asked as he gave his nose a rub with the palm of his hand. “The button on that pillow got me right in the nose.”

“Awww…sorry, Adrien. Oh! I did it! I didn’t say Adrikens this time,” Chloe enthused as she mentally gave herself a pat on the back.

Sabrina chirped up, “I knew you could do it, Chloe!”

“Not that I mind, but why aren’t you calling me by my nickname?” Adrien asked, the curiosity he felt all day about it getting the better of him. He had noticed several times at lunch Chloe kept correcting herself and when she failed to do so, Marinette would use the nickname, but in such a way as to make a show of it for Chloe’s sake and not as a term of endearment for him even though it was his nickname.

“Oh! Marinette doesn’t like it,” Sabrina chimed in from her seat next to Chloe’s. The blonde diva turned around to her bestie and hissed her name, warning her to shut up without actually saying it. It was always hard for the brainy, bookworm to stop herself from answering a question she knew the answer to.

“Why doesn’t Marinette like my nickname?”

Chloe gulped. She was not supposed to disparage Marinette to Adrien or to anyone really, but she had already spilled her guts to Sabrina yesterday when she was annoyed with Marinette because of her demands and stuttering. Now, however, Marinette had proven herself a helpful ally. She had saved her from Adrien finding out about the poster, genuinely tried to helped Adrien despite not achieving the results that they both wanted and was still committed to the cause of helping him. Chloe hesitated to give in to her normal instincts of mocking her rival out of fear of losing said ally if she were to find out.

“Well, it’s kinda childish, don’t you think?” Chloe asked, hoping that would be a good enough explanation.

Before he could answer, Chloe’s cell phone started to ring. She looked at the display, “Daddy!” she cried grateful for a reason to extricate herself from the conversation. She rose and exited the
classroom for the privacy of the hallway to answer the call.

Adrien watched the blonde leave, cursing himself mentally that he did not get more answers as to whatever Chloe was up to. He then turned back to Sabrina to nod a goodbye, but he paused. She squirmed in her seat, squeezing her fists and biting her bottom lip. Adrien had seen that expression on the academically-inclined girl before. Sabrina had trouble keeping her mouth shut if she knew an answer to a question, sure, but it was even worse for her if someone answered before her incorrectly. Then, she always looked like she would explode if she didn’t have the opportunity to correct them. Right now, Sabrina looked like a volcano about to erupt.

“Sabrina,” Adrien smoothly prodded, “is that the real reason Marinette doesn’t like my nickname?” Sabrina’s eyes flicked up to Adrien and then back down to the table. She tried to hold back, she really did, but she just had to answer. “She’s jealous. Marinette’s jealous.”

“Why’s that?” Adrien asked. “Oh, I get it, Marinette’s jealous because Chloe doesn’t have a nickname for her.” Adrien guessed, making sure to put forth an explanation that was blatantly wrong.

“No, no!” Sabrina shook her head. “Marinette’s jealous because you’re such old friends with Chloe. She doesn’t like it. She thinks the nickname is like flirting.”

“Oh!” Adrien nodded. “That explains the hallway…” When Sabrina asked what he meant, Adrien explained that “Marinette looked jealous yesterday in the hallway when she caught Chloe and me hugging.”

“You know? You know that Marinette is jealous of…you and Chloe?” Sabrina asked, surprised that Adrien had picked up on the dynamic. After he nodded his ascent, Sabrina continued,

“Then, that must mean you know about Marinette’s crush?”

‘Oh!’ Adrien thought, ‘It was Marinette that had the crush. I thought it was Chloe after all of the compliments she paid Marinette the other day. Or, maybe it’s a mutual crush?’ That made him feel better to have at least one side of the pairing confirmed. He was starting to think after today’s lunch that maybe he had read too much into it.

In any case Adrien simply nodded in answer, but then added, “It’s fairly obvious, don’t you think?”

“Well, yeah!” Sabrina answered, but she didn’t think Adrien knew that Marinette had a crush on him. It was kind of a running joke in their class that Adrien was oblivious to Marinette’s true feelings. Alix and Kim even had a bet that he wouldn’t figure it out by the end of the school year. She supposed Kim lost that bet. “When did you find out?”

"Just yesterday,” he replied.

“She told you?’

Adrien shook his head, “I kinda figured it out, but I didn’t know for sure until now.”

“Oh!” Sabrina cursed herself, “Please don’t tell Chloe that I confirmed it.” She bit her lip in worry, “Chloe’s going to kill me!”

“Don’t worry, Sabrina. Your secret is safe,” he gave her a reassuring wink.

“Thanks,” she breathed a sigh of relief, “So I take it Marinette doesn’t know that you know?”
“No, I hinted at it, but I haven’t directly come out and acknowledge it. I don’t want to spook her. Things seem…delicate.”

Sabrina nodded, “And, um, how do you feel about it?” She crossed her fingers. “Say bad, say you’re upset, say…”

“Really happy! I think it’s great. Well, I mean the crush part, not the jealousy part.”

“You do?” Sabrina’s heart sunk. ‘Chloe’s not going to like it, nope, not one bit. What to do? What to do?’

“So, um…are you going to do anything about it?” The redhead asked. ‘Say no, say you’ll ignore it.’

“I think I should talk to Marinette about it. You know, clear the air? I can reassure her that she doesn’t have anything to be jealous about. Chloe and I are just friends.”

“Right…” Sabrina replied as her mind raced. ‘Bad, bad, bad. Damage control! Damage control!’

“You know, I don’t think you should do that, Adrien. You have to be careful of jealous types, you never know what they’re capable of,” she claimed what she hoped would be a valid excuse for Adrien not to talk to Marinette. Sabrina knew the score. One of her standard plays with her bestie was to keep Marinette and Adrien apart, usually by doing or saying something to make Marinette look bad.

“What do you mean? This should make her happy, right?” Adrien wasn’t really following what Sabrina was trying to say.

“Well, yes…you would think so, but I dunno…” Sabrina tried to plant a seed of doubt. “I mean, Marinette put an awful lot of stipulations on Chloe about you. She’s not allowed to take your arm, hug you, or call you by your nickname.”

Adrien’s frowned in confusion, “Did Marinette really do that?” Adrien asked, surprised that Marinette could feel so threatened by what was obviously only a friendship between Chloe and himself. His eyes darted to find the raven-haired girl on their own accord and for a moment they locked eyes. He realized that she had been watching him, but then looked away quickly, trying to act as if she hadn’t been.

Sabrina nodded, “Yeah, she’s really controlling. If you confront her, then it might make things worse! She could tell Chloe not to even talk to you! You wouldn’t want that!”

“No…”

“So, if you push the issue, then who knows what she might say…or do?” Sabrina added, hinting at the prospect of a darker of reaction.

“Yeah, but, I mean…it’s Marinette,” he looked again at the subject of their discussion and again she looked away just as his eyes fell on her. “You don’t think she would…(heh-heh)...I mean it’s not like she’s a yandere or anything, right?”

“Oh, I don’t know…I think she might be,” Sabrina replied, catching on that Adrien considered it a bad thing.

“Really?” Adrien squeaked.

“Yeah, she’s a total yandere!” the redhead raised the stakes.
Adrien audibly gulped, “Then *that* would mean…” The blonde ran a hand through his hair as his eyes again found Marinette, who once again looked away just a half second after they made eye contact. Adrien hurriedly walked back to his seat and sat down. Sabrina watched him, silently wondering what she had agreed to, yet happy that it seemed to have the desired effect. Adrien did not seem happy as he uncharacteristically slouched down in his chair. In fact, he looked nervous as one knee bobbed up and down underneath the table, maybe even downright *sick* as his face and neck flushed bright red.

A few moments later, Chloe re-entered the classroom and sat down. Just as the professor was calling the class to order to start the next subject, Sabrina leaned in and whispered to her friend.

“Chloe, what’s a yandere?” Sabrina asked.

“How should I know? That’s what Google is for,” Chloe said as she dropped her phone in her bag and pulled out her compact.

As Chloe primped in the mirror Sabrina lowered her phone under the table, so the teacher could not see, and did a Google search: “Yandere definition”.

The results came back as:

**Yandere** (ヤンデレ) is a portmanteau of two Japanese words yanderu (病んでる), meaning to be sick, and deredere (デレデレ), which is **defined** as strongly and deeply exhausted, infatuated, moonstruck, head-over-heels, or lovestruck, but in this case used for "lovestruck."

‘*That sounds like Marinette alright,*’ Sabrina thought to herself. She looked over her shoulder at Marinette, who sat dreamily staring at the back of Adrien’s blonde head. Sabrina turned back to her phone and kept reading:

A common term in otaku fandom, a **yandere** is a person (usually female) romantically obsessed with someone to the point of using **violent** means to get them in their arms. Often seen with a **sharp weapon** and a **psychotic grin**.

‘*Oh! Well, that explains his nervousness,*’ the redhead thought as she glanced at Adrien, who seemed to be uncomfortably squirming in his seat. He looked as if he could feel Marinette’s eyes boring into the back of his head.

A yandere is a character who starts out sweet and calm, and probably very good natured. Then there is some sort of interaction with the main character (usually), and suddenly all they want to do is be with that main character or protect him/her. The problem is, is that they want that connection at any cost. This can lead to others being bullied, hurt, or worse, *killed*.

When the teacher’s back was turned, Chloe leaned over and whispered to Sabrina, “Did Adrien say anything more about his nickname or Marinette?”

“Nope. Don’t worry about. I took care of it,” Sabrina smiled. Chloe nodded approvingly. Sabrina sat
back in her chair, satisfied that she had completely *malign*ed Marinette’s character.
Adrien bounced nervously in his seat as one knee knocked the underneath of the table he shared with Nino. The usually cool and patient DJ eyed his best friend warily.

“Dude!” Nino whispered as he leaned over toward the other boy. “What’d you have for lunch? Pure sugar? Why are you so hyper?”

“I’m fine,” Adrien whispered back as he stilled his knee with his hand. “Is she looking at me?”

“Who?” Nino had no idea what Adrien meant.

“Marinette. Is she looking at me?” Adrien tried to cover his mouth by leaning his head on his hand nonchalantly, so the teacher couldn’t see his mouth move.

Nino didn’t have to check; he already knew the answer to that question. According to Alya, the girl had been seriously in love with the blonde model since the first week of school. Marinette was definitely looking at him, not that Nino was allowed to confirm said crush. Both Marinette and Alya would have his hide. He’d have to play it cool.

Nino shrugged, “She sits behind you, man. She’s bound to look at you, or at least the back of your head.”

“I think I can feel her eyes on me,” Adrien brushed a hand through his golden locks. A dreamy sigh from behind him soon followed.

“So?” Nino whispered, trying to not draw any attention to the girl behind them mooning over his friend.
“It’s making me a bit nervous,” Adrien admitted with a weak smile.

Nino nodded. He pulled back as he caught his teacher’s eye. Better not get caught talking during the lecture. He moved over to his normal position on their shared bench. He slowly pulled out his phone from his jacket. Under the table he tapped Adrien’s arm and when the blonde looked over at him he wiggled his phone at him indicating that they could text. Adrien discreetly pulled his phone out as well.

Nino: did something happen at lunch?

Adrien: I think Marinette is jealous

Adrien: of me and Chloe.

Adrien: I think she thinks we’re more than friends

Adrien: even though we’re not.

Nino: Y would Marinette b jealous?

Nino played dumb. He knew all too well how Marinette struggled with her jealousy over any girl she perceived as being too close to Adrien. Top of the list was Chloe.

Adrien: Because of her crush

Nino’s eyes popped open and his eyebrows jumped. Suddenly French literature class had gotten very interesting.

Nino: U know about her crush?

Adrien: Yeah, you do, too?

Adrien: I mean it’s pretty obvious, but

Adrien: I don’t think she wants it known, you know?

Adrien: So, please don’t say anything, okay?
Adrien: I probably shouldn’t of said anything

Adrien: It’s just I’m kind of freaked out

Nino had so many questions, but he held those. The important thing was to support his friend and get him through this. The details of when and how he found out would have to wait.

Nino: don’t worry. I won’t say anything

Nino: ok, ok stay calm

Nino: what’s freaking u out?

Adrien: The jealousy part

Adrien: She told Chloe not to use my nickname

Nino: Adrikens? U should b thanking Marinette for that

Adrien: Yeah, but she also told Chloe not to hang on my arm or hug me

Nino: Still should b thanking Marinette

Adrien: I guess?

Adrien: It just seems out of character

Adrien: Marinette is so nice and caring

Adrien: But then she acts so differently with Chloe

Nino: Because it’s Chloe

Nino couldn’t help but shake his head. Chloe was in her own special class of bitch, like Her Highness Queen Bee-atch. Marinette, like the rest of their class, did their best to cope with Chloe as best they could. Some ignored her, like Alix. Some cried, like Rose, or got mad, like Ivan. Marinette and Alya, they stood up for themselves, each other, and the rest of the class. They didn’t cower. Nino guessed Chloe got too clingy with Adrien and Marinette decided to set her straight. Seemed perfectly reasonable. It’s not like Adrien enjoyed Chloe’s attentions anyway. He liked their friendship better before he started school and she got all handsy. When it was just the two of them Adrien said Chloe was a lot less flirty. She did it mostly for show, to make herself look more important and popular to the other kids, since Adrien is rich and famous.

Adrien: I suppose you’re right

Adrien had to agree that if you were going to treat anyone differently then it would be your crush. It was probably only natural for Marinette to be protective of Chloe. And maybe since their relationship was so new, she had insecurities that manifested as jealousy and being controlling.

Adrien: It’s just…okay please don’t laugh

Nino: ok I won’t

Adrien: Sabrina thinks that Marinette is
Adrien: and I quote

Adrien: a total Yandere

Nino stifled a chortle as best he could, but their teacher still paused mid-sentence. He turned his unfortunate laughter into a cough and then apologized for the disturbance. The professor nodded solemnly and returned to her lecture.

Nino: Like Sabrina is a good judge of character?

Nino: she’s friends with Chloe

Adrien: Hey, I’m friends with Chloe!

Nino: C? Ur not a good judge of character either

Adrien: :P

Nino: U watch 2 much anime

Adrien: There’s no such thing

Nino: There is if u think Marinette’s a Yandere

Nino: Marinette is NOT a Yandere

Adrien: Yeah, but isn’t that what the Yandere wants you to think?

Adrien: They’re always sweet and nice

Adrien: Until they meet their crush

Adrien: They snap

Adrien: Go nuts

Adrien: Start stabbing people

Nino: Marinette is not a serial killer

Adrien: Stabby stab stab

Adrien: STAB

Nino: Marinette is NOT a serial killer

Adrien: Not yet…

Adrien: But what if this is a warning sign?

Adrien: And we’re missing it!

Adrien: This is the chance to catch it before her jealousy goes crazy
Adrien: I mean she was pretty pushy with me at lunch

Adrien referred to Marinette’s meddling in his love life. Now, it was starting to make sense. She probably wanted him involved with someone so that there was less of a chance of him stealing Chloe away from her. Since Marinette didn’t consider Ladybug a viable option for him, she was pushing for him to drop his crush and find a girlfriend.

Adrien: And these stipulations she put on Chloe…

Adrien: I’m worried for her

Nino: Marinette or Chloe?

Adrien: Both!

Adrien: But, mostly Marinette

Nino: U know what would probably help?

Nino: Some reassurance

Adrien: You mean tell her that there’s nothing between me and Chloe?

Nino: Well yeah

Nino: But also that her feelings are returned

Nino: Unrequited love is a bitch, man

Adrien: It’s not unrequited

Adrien: It’s very much requited

Adrien could tell how much Chloe liked Marinette. She complimented her like crazy yesterday and she was really trying to rein in her flirting with him today, especially her use of the nickname. Chloe *only* ever did things for people because she liked them and the list of the people that she liked was really, *really* short. The fact that Marinette had made it onto that list alone was pretty stunning, add to that Chloe was actively trying to make her happy, a very *rare* feat indeed.

Nino: XD

Nino: Alya is gonna go nuts!

Nino actually couldn’t believe that Adrien had just admitted his feelings for Marinette. Out of all of the girls in the class he certainly paid her the most attention, trying her cookies that they made in class, dancing with her at Chloe’s party, getting her autograph on the Jagged Stone CD cover she designed, chatting her up about helping Chat Noir fight the Evil Illustrator akuma...the list went on and on, but prior to today Adrien would always say, “Marinette is just a friend.” He supposed when Adrien found out about Marinette’s crush on him, he in turn must have realized his feelings for her.

Adrien: Remember: SAY NOTHING
Nino: U got it
Nino: Feel better?
Adrien: A bit
Adrien: I just need to talk to Marinette
Nino: When u gonna talk 2 her?
Adrien: I don’t know
Nino: After class?
Adrien: .....

Adrien was so lost in thought about Marinette that he did not notice that the classroom had gone silent.

Nino: Better to do it soon
Nino: Ya know b4 the
Nino: Stabby stab stab
Nino: STAB

Nino was enjoying teasing Adrien so much that he did not realize that their teacher had approached their table.

Adrien: Not funny

Nino: oh no. It is, dude, it IS

Nino tried to suppress a snicker.

“Ahem!” Came a voice from above. Both boys jumped in surprised. Their teacher’s hand extended out to them, expectantly. With lowered eyes both boys placed their phones in her hand.

“You can have them back after class,” Mlle. Bustier scolded over her shoulder as she walked back toward the front of the class.

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The bell rang ending class for the day. Immediately all the students began packing up their things into their backpacks.

“Alright class, please read the next chapter and answer questions 2-4,” Mlle. Bustier instructed. “Have a good rest of the day and I’ll see you tomorrow.” The pretty teacher smiled cheerfully at her class.

“Adrien, Nino,” the professor continued, “Please stay after class.”

The two boys exchanged a look, as they slowly rose to take their metaphorical medicine. As Adrien stood humbly before his teacher, he saw out of the corner of his eye Marinette and Alya walk past. He caught Marinette’s eye before she quickly looked away. Alya whispered something to Marinette, and the two girls giggled. Adrien couldn’t help feeling nervous being once again noticed by the raven-haired girl despite Nino’s reassurances.

After regaining their cell phones, Adrien and Nino walked to the locker room. Adrien was relieved to find that his teacher’s lecture had delayed them long enough for everyone else to have already left, including a certain twin-tailed, raven-haired girl. He’d postpone the talk with her a bit longer. The blonde boy entered the combination to his locker and then opened the door. Plagg, Adrien’s cat-like kwami, zoomed from his hiding spot in Adrien’s messenger bag into the locker.

“Snack time!” Plagg squealed in delight as he greedily picked up a wheel of camembert cheese. He hadn’t gotten anything to eat since breakfast due to the lunch with the two girls making it impossible for Adrien to sneak him food without being seen.

“Shhh!” Adrien warned, hoping Nino didn’t hear. He looked over at his DJ friend, who was stuffing books and binders into his backpack.

“You ready, Dude?” Nino called as he closed his locker shut.

“I, um, need a few more minutes. My locker’s kind of a mess,” he pointedly looked at his kwami, who was smacking his lips as he ate. “But, don’t wait for me. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Nino could only see Adrien’s hand waving goodbye as the locker door blocked the blonde’s head. Nino was about to ask about Marinette, but realized there was no need, and simply called his farewell, before he quickly exited the locker room.
Adrien sighed as he placed the needed books and folders into his messenger bag while waiting for Plagg to finish eating.

“You about done?” Adrien whispered. “Gorilla’s waiting…” he reminded him of his driver who was likely parked on the curb in front of the school.

Without a word Plagg floated into the waiting bag as crumbs of cheese fell from his paws and mouth. Adrien straightened up and closed the door to his locker with a loud bang.

“AAACCCCCCK!!!” Adrien cried out in surprise seeing Marinette’s smiling face seemingly appear out of nowhere. It was right out of the yandere playbook to quietly sneak up on one’s target.

“I-I’m s-so sorry!” Marinette squeaked. “Are y-you okay?” She gave herself a pinch to the arm to stop herself from stuttering.

“You, you scared me!” Adrien panted as one hand instinctively covered his heart. His head screamed at him to “RUN, DUMMY! RUN!” but his feet seemed to be mysteriously glued to the floor. The sudden terror Adrien felt distracted him from hearing Plagg chuckling in his bag.

“I, um, just wanted to say that, I enjoyed talking to you about Shugo Chara,” Marinette explained shyly.

“O-oh, good,” He replied as he rubbed the back of his neck with one hand, a telltale sign of his nervousness. His eyes flicked to the exit and he thought he saw two spectacled heads pop out of sight. He wondered if Alya and Nino had really gone or if they were at least in earshot. Would they hear his desperate cries of help as the blade cut him?

“Um..A-adrien? Did you hear what I said?” Marinette asked, biting her lip as she worried that she was boring her crush.

“What? No! I’m so, so, sorry,” he apologized profusely, not wishing to make the unstable girl even more, well, unstable. “I spaced there for a second. But, I should really be going. Gorilla will be waiting for me.” He edged his way for the door, but Marinette followed closely and caught him by
the arm. Adrien howled as if her hand burnt him. She dropped her grip on him in surprise.

“Are you okay?” she asked with genuine concern as her eyes travelled over him. He looked odd.

“Yes, I’m sorry. I’m a bit j-jumpy today. Um...I have a lot on my mind…” Adrien searched his brain for some better excuse to tell her.

Marinette couldn’t help but feel that Adrien wasn’t quite himself and wondered if he was still upset from lunch. Although, he had seemed back to normal when they talked about Shugo Chara in the car, maybe the anime talk had merely distracted him and now having had time to brood during class he had begun acting strangely around her. She needed to try again to make things better.

“I know Chloe and I were hard on you today, but please know we only said those things because we care. I...I really care about you, Adrien.” Marinette took a deep breath, pinched her arm, “Adrien, I want to tell you,” she hesitated. She had agreed with Chloe to not go after Adrien until they had gotten him over Ladybug. Even if she broke that promise, what good would telling him now about how she felt about him do anyway? She was sure of rejection. He still loved Ladybug.

“Um...yes?” he asked, again eyeing the exit and slowly inching toward it.

“I-I want to tell you that I really enjoyed talking to you about Shugo Chara ,” she said, but then winced. “I mean, obviously I did, because I already said that. Um…” Her arms flailed in the air, but she caught herself, stilled them, and moved them behind her back as Chloe had instructed her to do.

“What I mean to say is, um…” Marinette pinched her arm and imagined Adrien with a black mask and cat ears, “would you like to watch the show with me sometime?” Technically, she was asking Adrien out, which she shouldn’t do per the terms of her partnership with Chloe, but she would argue that it would only be as friends if Chloe happened to find out. Afterall, Adrien had hung out at her house before when they were practicing for the gaming competition and there had been no confusion about it definitely not being a date as much as she wished it had been. Friends can just hang out, right?

“W-with you?” Adrien squeaked.

Marinette nodded, “We could watch at my house. You could stay for dinner, if you like. Maman is a really good cook and, um, Adrien, are you okay?” It was the third time she had asked that particular question, but she couldn’t help herself. She had never seen Adrien act like this before and could not
understand his behavior. He looked really uncomfortable. Was he sweating?

Adrien wanted to be anywhere, but where he was actually standing.

“Um, y-yeah, I’m fine. Look, that’s really nice of you, Marinette,” Adrien began.

Marinette held her breath. She could feel the proverbial “but” coming next.

Adrien noticed Marinette’s eyes looked down to her feet and her lip started to tremble. “Oh crap! I’ve upset her. Okay, don’t panic. Don’t upset the yandere. Just get out of here.”

“Father has me on a tight schedule, so I’ll have to ask Nathalie for a good time and get back to you, okay?” He crossed his fingers that he had put her off without setting her off.

“REALLY?” she asked a bit too loudly, looking up with wide eyes.

Adrien’s phone beeped. He looked down at the display, “Thank God,” he mumbled.

“Gotta go! My driver’s waiting. OKAYBYEEE!” Adrien ran out of the room, brushing past a spying Alya and Nino without giving them a second look.

Alya hurried over to her best friend, giving her a big hug in congratulations.

“You did it, girl! I didn’t think you ever would. I’m so proud of you,” Alya enthused.

“Yeah, I did pretty well, didn’t I?” Marinette felt a surge of pride and confidence, which was soon replaced by her typical feelings of doubt and insecurity regarding her crush. “But...it’s not really a date or anything. It’s just two friends getting together to watch a show we both like.”

“But, it’s a start, right?” Nino encouraged. “Finding common interests is how we got together,” he referred to his own girlfriend as he took Alya’s hand in his.

“Exactly,” Alya said. “You two will be dating in no time.”
Marinette laughed, “Don’t get ahead of yourself, Alya.”

“I’m not. I’m just saying...you’ve made great progress today. Maybe even more than you realize,” she beamed.

“What do you mean?”

“Did you not see how strangely Adrien acted? The stuttering? The sweating? The distracted looks? The nervous rubbing of his neck? All telltale signs of Adrien having developed a CRUSH on you!” Marinette’s bestie enthused.

“Al-ya!” Marinette moaned. “You’re making too much of it.”

‘Afterall Adrien loves Ladybug, so how could he possibly have a crush on me?’ she thought.

“You said that you had a great talk and he liked your drawings, so maybe now that you’re more comfortable talking to him he sees how great you are!” Alya reasoned.

“Yeah, but, still,” Marinette chuckled, “Adrien doesn’t have a crush on me...does he?”

Both girls looked at Nino.

“Hey man, don’t look at me!” Nino threw his arms up in the air. “But, he was acting pretty strange…” He gave the raven-haired girl a knowing smile. Even though Adrien had finally admitted his crush on Marinette, it was in the best bro book of conduct to keep his secret. Still, no reason to squash the idea.

“Maybe...” Marinette agreed whistfully, “maybe.”

Chapter End Notes
Thanks again to Fishystar for beta reading and also for suggesting that the boys get in trouble with the teacher.

I borrowed the "Stabby Stab" line from Shiningheart_of_ThunderClan, who left it as a comment on one of my other fanfics as to what Shingingheart would like to do to HawkMoth. It made me laugh and I thought it worked well here.

I know I said I was going to not include the besties of our three protagonists, but I ended up needing them as it didn't make sense for Chloe/Adrien/Marinette not to talk to them about this especially when they are acting so suspicious and it's kinda fun to see how much worse they make everything for their friends, especially Sabrina, and also how many people I can make have conversations about one thing and the person they are talking to think it's about something else. Honestly, that's what this whole fanfic is about. :)}
“Chloe, this isn’t going to work. You look nothing like Ladybug,” Marinette pointed out as she looked at the blonde’s reflection in the full-length mirror in the obscenely large bathroom. The rich girl’s walk-in closet stored an impressive collection of haute couture and luxury brand fashion, but the jewel in her crown was her one-of-a-kind replica Ladybug super suit. She kept it hidden in a secret compartment of her closet, accessible only by knowing the correct code inputted on the remote control. Marinette had to admit the cosplay costume was of the highest quality and only because she herself was Ladybug would she know that it was a fake. The problem with Chloe’s disguise wasn’t the costume, but her hair.

“Ladybug’s not a blonde. There’s no way Adrien’s going to believe that you’re Ladybug.”

“I’ll just tell him that I dyed it,” Chloe explained, dismissing her collaborator’s concerns.

Marinette shook her head, “What about the length? Overnight it grew 10 centimeters? No, your hair is all wrong.”

“Well? What would you have me do? Ask the real Ladybug to reject Adrien? As if she would!”

“Chloe, I know you two aren’t really that close, but Ladybug cares about people. I’m sure if we explain, then she’d be glad to help,” Marinette secretly offered her own services.

“We are extremely close, I’ll have you know. I’m her best friend!” Chloe insisted, annoyed that the other girl had the nerve to call her out. Marinette had to dig her nails into her own palms to keep from retorting in anger. She hated liars and braggers. Ladybug and Chloe were certainly not best friends, they weren’t even friends.

“But, do you honestly think I would allow her within 3 meters of a gushing, lovestruck Adrien?” Chloe asked, rhetorically. “Adrien is the trifecta of boys. He’s handsome, rich, and famous. If Ladybug had even an inkling that he liked her, she would have to be insane not to be flattered and jump at the chance to be with him.”

‘Oh, I’m insane alright,’ Marinette agreed ruefully.

“Alright, then, what do you propose we do? If we can’t ask the real Ladybug, and you look nothing like her, who are we going to get to be our superhero?”

Chloe didn’t answer. She just looked at the raven-haired, twin tailed girl with bluebell eyes and a petite frame. She took off the spotted mask and placed it over Marinette’s face.

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“Marinette! What if Chloe and Adrien figure out that you’re Ladybug?” Tikki, Marinette’s kwami and source of her Ladybug powers, asked as her chosen changed out of her normal clothes.

“Don’t worry, Tikki. Adrien will think he’s talking to Ladybug. It won’t be any different than when I normally interact with him as Ladybug.”

“What about Chloe?”

“I’ll just act like Marinette. I’ll be extra clumsy.”

“Marinette, this isn’t a good idea!” Tikki insisted.

“I’m not sure what else to do,” Marinette replied as she kicked off her shoes. “We have to convince Adrien he shouldn’t be pining for Ladybug. It’s for his own good.”

“But are you really doing this for Adrien? Or for yourself?”

“Adrien, of course!” She pulled her shirt overhead and when she was clear of it she got an eyeful of a doubtful looking kwami. “Okay, okay, I’ll admit I’ll benefit from this, but only if I can make him fall in love with me, the real me, the Marinette me. I’m taking a risk here. Chloe could just as easily sink her teeth in him.” She folded her shirt and placed it on the floor next to her shoes.

“So, why are you taking this chance? You don’t have to! You are Ladybug! Tell Adrien how you feel.”

Marinette shook her head, “It won’t work if he’s in love with an idol. He has to love the real me.” She took of her pants, folded them, and then placed them on top of her shirt on the floor.

“Isn’t that the pot calling the kettle black?” Tikki asked referring to Marinette’s crush on Adrien’s model image. Even though they were friends, Marinette’s nervousness around Adrien didn’t allow her to know him, the real him, much better than Adrien (apparently) would know Ladybug.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Marinette said a bit too loudly.

“Did you say something?” Chloe asked from the other side of the door.

“What?” Marinette put a finger to her lips to shush Tikki. “Oh, um, yeah, I asked you, um, why do you like Adrien?”

“Duh, he’s an Agreste,” Chloe replied with an eyeroll even though Marinette wouldn’t have the benefit of seeing it.

“So, what? You just like him for his family? Because he’s rich and famous?” Marinette asked as she tried to pull the tight spandex of Chloe’s Ladybug costume up her thigh. It was a bit like putting on a wetsuit.

“His family sucks personality wise, or at least his father, but it’s a respectable name. The money helps for sure and of course Adrien is drop dead gorgeous. All of that combined with my father’s political connections and we’ll be an unstoppable power couple,” Chloe buffed her nails on her shirt.

“Oh…” Marinette huffed as she stuffed herself into the suit, jumping up as she pulled the suit at the waist to hike the crotch up further.

“We’d be a political force to be reckoned with, like JFK and Jackie Kennedy, like Emmanuel and Brigitte Macron, like Nicolas Sarkozy and Carla Bruni…” Chloe smiled happily as she leaned back
against the door frame with a sigh. “Adrien has all of the makings of an inspiring candidate all he needs is for someone to provide him with the direction and the drive.”

“And, I suppose that’d be (oof) you?” One of Marinette’s eyebrows raised on its own accord. She reached forward with a huff trying to stuff one arm and then the other into the top of the super suit.

“Yes of course!”

“Why do you want to go into politics? To help people?” Marinette felt naïve just asking the question.

“What? No! Well, I mean, sure, you have to help some people, your campaign contributors at least. No, the reason to go into politics is to be powerful and to get even richer,” Chloe pounded her fist into the flat palm of her other hand for emphasis.

Marinette sighed, “Is that what Adrien wants to do with his life?” Her hands reached behind her, struggling to pull the zipper up her back.

“Adrien has no idea what to do, unless you tell him to do it. His whole life has been scheduled by his father.”

“And you want to (ohh) continue scheduling Adrien as what? (Umph) His girlfriend, his wife?” She asked as she bent forward trying in vain to move the zipper up her back. “Doesn’t sound like he’d be much better with you than with his father.” The one thing that Marinette found she agreed about with Chloe was that Adrien had no life of his own, only the one that his father made him have.

“Well, when you put it like that…” Chloe started to doubt the merits of her dream as she realized she never considered Adrien’s feelings in the scenario.

“It’s rather old school, isn’t it? I mean the role you would play, the woman behind the man? Can’t you just be the woman?” Marinette gesticulated with her hands for Tikki to pull the zipper up the rest of the way for her, but Tikki silently crossed her little arms and shook her head no. She would not be a part of this ridiculous, ill-conceived plan.

“I’m not following…” the blonde’s brow creased in confusion.

“You have a respectable family name with your own political connections, you’re rich and beautiful. Do you even need Adrien? Just go into politics yourself.” Marinette’s shoulders dropped in defeat at Tikki’s refusal to help. She knelt on her knees and clasped her hands together, silently begging her kwami for help.

“I never thought about it that way…”

“Yeah? Well, maybe you should. Maybe you’d be happier fulfilling your own dreams by being in the spotlight and then Adrien can figure out what he wants to do himself rather than being pushed into something.” Tikki still refused and Marinette stood up, realizing her entreaties were for naught. She was grateful that she didn’t have to go through this with every akuma attack because by the time she would arrive at the battle, half of Paris would be destroyed and she’d be exhausted. Getting her super suit put on magically by her kwami certainly had its benefits.

“So, how’s it going? You dressed? Let’s see!” Chloe knocked on the door impatiently.

“I can’t get the zipper up!” Marinette called.

“Come out and I’ll do it.”
Marinette opened the door and Chloe gasped at the sight of the be spotted figure before her.

“Oh! You look just like her! Here turn around,” she excitedly ordered so she could zip her up.

“Oh no!” she cried upon seeing the back of Marinette. “It won’t work.”

“What? Too small?” Marinette tried to stand up straighter to provide more slack for the zipper.

“No, it’s not that,” Chloe replied dejectedly as she easily zipped up the suit. “It’s your butt.”

“My…my what?” Marinette asked surprised.

“Your butt,” Chloe repeated. “It doesn’t look like Ladybug’s.”

“What are you talking about?” Marinette asked as she spun around like a dog chasing its tail trying to get a look at her own butt. The spinning made her dizzy and although her body stopped turning, her head kept going around and around, causing her to fall over.

Chloe laughed and then rolled her eyes. She helped her up and pulled her to the mirror, so she could see better. “Look! It looks nothing like Ladybug’s butt. Her’s is all round and plump and yours is…”

“What?”

“Well, flat. You have a flat butt, Marinette,” Chloe frankly told her.

“I do not!” The insulted girl’s fists clenched at her sides.

“You do! You totally do!” Chloe gesticulated at Mlle. Crepe-Bottom in the mirror.

“How do you know what Ladybug’s butt looks like anyway?” Marinette asked as her eyes narrowed suspiciously.

“You can’t help but look at it! It’s right there.” She brought her hand into the space right in front of her face.

“Uh…I think you are making too much of this. It’ll be fine. Adrien probably won’t even notice.”

‘Not that there’s actually anything to notice because it’s the exact same butt!’ Marinette inwardly screamed, but she held her temper.

“I dunno,” Chloe hemmed. “You look okay from the front. It’s just the back…maybe if you don’t turn your back on him you can get away with it.”

“So, what? If I walk away I have to walk backwards?” Marinette asked incredulously.

“Yes! Exactly. Then he won’t see your flat butt. Perfect!” Chloe clapped her hands together.

Marinette rolled her eyes but said nothing. Reasoning with the blonde would probably get her nowhere, not that she could actually tell her the reason she was wrong anyway. She picked up the mask and put it on.

“Chloe, why do think Adrien loves her?” Marinette asked as she looked at her Ladybug reflection in the mirror, wondering what her superhero self has that her non-superhero self doesn’t have, besides a form fitting costume and a magical yo-yo.

“Adrien doesn’t love Ladybug,” Chloe replied distractedly as she fluffed her hair in the mirror.
“He said it. I heard him. ‘I love her’ he said.”

“No, he thinks he loves her, but he doesn’t really love her. How could he? He doesn’t know her. Obviously, he feels gratitude and he’s mistaken that for love.”

“Gratitude?”

“Yeah, for all of the times Ladybug’s saved me. Wouldn’t you be grateful if she saved your oldest friend?” Chloe asked Marinette’s reflection in the mirror.

“Well, yeah…”

Chloe shrugged, “There you go.” She returned to primping in the mirror. “And, she’s saved me a lot.”

“She’s saved other people important to him, too. Nino, his father…” Marinette counted off on her fingers.

“I know, I know,” Chloe waved her hand dismissively. “But she saved me the most, so it’s not surprising that I should love her.”

“What?!” Marinette’s head snapped crisply to her right to look directly at the other girl.

“I said it’s not surprising that Adrien should love her.”

Marinette closed her mouth and decided she did not want to further delve into Chloe’s slip of the tongue for fear that the blonde might slip her, her tongue.

“So? What do you think? Will this work?” Marinette asked Chloe’s reflection as she gestured to her costumed self.

“I think it’s our best option,” Chloe nodded back, “but, just, you know, remember to walk backwards.”

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“I still say this is a bad idea,” Tikki warned as she once again hovered above Marinette, this time as she took Chloe’s Ladybug costume off.

“I’m not tricking Adrien. I’m Ladybug, and Ladybug is going to tell him that she doesn’t love him,” Marinette whispered as she pulled one arm out of Chloe’s costume.

“Which is a lie. You do love him!” Tikki countered.

“This is for his own good,” the raven-haired girl argued.

“Shouldn’t Adrien decide that?” the very wise kwami asked.

“Love is blind, so in this case I think it’s best if Chloe and I decide for him.”

“Marinette…” The kwami sighed dejectedly, disappointed in her chosen.

“Tikki, I’ve made up my mind. I’m doing this, so please, not another word.”

Tikki just shook her head as she continued to watch as Marinette struggled to peel Chloe’s costume off of her. When she finally got it off, she held it with two fingers away from her as if it was made of
rotting cheese.

“I’m never putting that on again! It’s too much work. I’ll be wearing my own suit tomorrow when I visit Adrien.”

Tikki could only shake her head in response.

Marinette folded up the uncomfortable costume and placed it in her bag. She’d have to take it with her to complete the ruse. She couldn’t have Chloe catching on to her actually being Ladybug. As she stood in her bra and panties, she turned halfway around to catch the lower half of her body in the mirror of Chloe’s walk-in closet. A worried hand ran over her backside.

“Tikki? When you transform me do you do anything to change my butt?”

Tikki just shrugged and pointed to her closed mouth, indicating that she wasn’t allowed to talk.

Marinette pursed her lips in annoyance at not getting an answer. She looked at her reflection again.

‘*Maybe it is a little flat,*’ she thought.

Chapter End Notes

In honor of "Frightningale" here's the first cosplay chapter of the fanfic.
Chapter Summary

Marichat chapter!!!!!
Chat Noir visits Marinette and they discuss their crushes (on each other). Marinette watches Shugo Chara.

Chapter Notes

Spoilers for the Shugo Chara edisode, Happy, Embarrassing First Date!
Thanks again to Fishystar who beta read the first draft of this chapter. I ended up adding a lot more, so any mistakes are mine. Thanks also to Fishystar again for suggesting I watch Shugo Chara, which I've been binge watching.

In case you don't know, a Good Guy CLAUSE on a contract is "typically found in rental agreements in New York City, is a provision that allows a tenant to be released from the liability of completing the agreed upon rental period, assuming the tenant vacates the rented space and leaves it in favorable condition" (Wikipedia). I just liked how it sounded and that I can make a pun of it when referring to Chat by saying "claws". =^_^=

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Chat Noir?” Marinette asked after she opened the hatch door to her balcony. “What are you doing here? Everything alright?” She wondered if she had missed an akuma sighting. She hadn’t heard her phone ding with a notification from the LadyBlog or heard any trouble in the street. She had just gotten home from being at Chloe’s and had barely had a chance to settle in.

“That’s why I’m here…to find out if you’re alright,” he explained as he crouched on her railing. He had his baton still in his hand in case he needed it to fend off the girl.

He had spent the evening at home, trying in vain to think of anything but Sabrina’s warning to him about Marinette. He had tried to do his homework. He had tried to practice the piano. He had tried to eat dinner. But, he succeeded at nothing except driving his own kwami, Plagg, completely nuts with his so-called “idiotic paranoia”. Adrien had recounted a list of yandere anime characters and the many ways that they had quashed their rivals. There were even a few who had targeted the object of their affection. Plagg pointed out that fictionalized, cartoon television should not be taken seriously, which brought Adrien some comfort until he impulsively Googled “real life yanderes” and to his horror was met with a search result list of news articles and YouTube videos. Plagg hit the power strip on his desk turning his computer off suddenly just after the third video, a particularly gruesome one in which a girl killed her rival by stabbing her 27 times, mostly in the face.

All Adrien could do was think about Marinette and the many ways she might try to…to…(gulp). It was completely ridiculous! Anyone who knew Marinette knew that she was not a threat to anyone.
She’s kind, thoughtful, caring, Adrien reminded himself and yet...she had that very, very imposing death stare when she’s angry. One that would stop even the worst criminal, probably even Hawk Moth himself, in his tracks if he had the misfortune of getting caught on her bad side. And, Adrien was afraid that he was on her bad side.

So over Plagg’s protests that he’d rather sleep, Adrien transformed and left the house with the intention of getting some air to clear his head. Unintentionally, his run across the rooftops of Paris brought the feline superhero to the balcony of his troubled friend. It wouldn’t hurt to check on her, right? Maybe he could have that talk with her as Chat Noir, hero of Paris, rather than as Adrien, unintentional rival for Chloe’s affections. That would be safer...

So there he was, waiting for her answer with bated breath.

“Um…yeah, I’m fine, why wouldn’t I be?” Marinette asked puzzled.

“Oh well, it’s just the last time I was here you said you had your heart broken, and I was in the neighborhood, and I just thought I would come to see how you are. Are you better now? Are you happy?” he asked, holding his breath as he hoped for a positive response. It had been not quite a month ago when both had their hearts broken. Ladybug had broken Chat’s heart by missing a romantic rooftop meeting that he had planned. Looking for solace, Chat sought out companionship, and landed on Marinette’s balcony, who was also nursing a broken heart. Marinette had welcomed him and even confessed that she was heartbroken, too, even though she did not tell him the reason was that Adrien had missed an ice cream outing with his friends, one that she hoped might turn romantic in nature between the two.

“Yes, thanks. That’s sweet of you, Chat,” she smiled brightly. Her partner could be incredibly thoughtful sometimes. “I’ve made some progress with my crush. We actually had lunch today.”

“That’s wonderful! I’m so happy for you!” Chat replied with a smile. He jumped down to the floor, venturing a little closer to her. “So, then…nothing troubling you? All’s right with the world?” His tail still swished nervously and his ears pointed directly at her, eager to catch any hint of movement.

“Yes,” she nodded, but then her smile faded, “except…it’s just…my crush has this friend, an old childhood friend, and…they’re really close. They know each other so well, it’s a bit intimidating. And, I know she has a crush on him so I can’t help feeling just a little bit…”

“Jealous?” he asked. He straightened his posture, tensed his muscles, and prepared himself for whatever would come next.

She nodded and sat heavily on the lawn chair. Her head fell in her hands, “I know it’s stupid. I shouldn’t be jealous. I just wish that we had that much history together. It hurts to see them together, knowing I won’t ever have that.”

“Never say never,” he comforted as he stepped a bit closer, but ever watchful. “You just need more time together. You’ll make your own memories, develop your own inside jokes, and come up with your own pet nicknames, I’m sure of it. You know half the fun of falling in love is discovering the other person and figuring out how you match up.”

“I suppose…I just wish I knew for sure that he didn’t return her feelings, you know?” she asked looking up at him and he could see the hurt in her eyes. “Then, I’d know nothing would happen between them even if she still has a crush on him. He wouldn’t let it happen.”

A light bulb went off in Chat’s head. He could do that, well Adrien could. He could assure Marinette...
that he and Chloe were just friends in the strictest sense. Of course, he knew that up until now Chloe wanted more from him, but that was before she and Marinette got together and since then he had seen the flirting from Chloe lessen. He could easily promise Marinette that nothing would ever happen between him and Chloe.

“If he says there’s nothing between them, then I’d believe him,” she continued.

“You trust him?” he asked as he secured his baton at his back and sat next to her on the lawn chair.

Marinette nodded, “I trust him completely. He’s a really good guy, the best.” Chat smiled as he regarded the lovesick girl. How did he ever think she could hurt him? She’s a friend for Pete’s sake! Besides, Marinette’s not violent. She wouldn’t even hurt a fly.

“He’s a friend, right? Can’t you talk to him about it?”

“What? No way! It’s too embarrassing!” She shook her head, making her pigtails wave in the air. “I have trouble saying hello to him sometimes. How can I ever talk to him about this?”

“Why is that?” Chat asked. The question escaped his mouth before his brain could stop him, but it was something he always wondered about. “I mean, if he’s a friend and you trust him so much, then why do you have trouble just saying hello?”

“He’s famous…and gorgeous and just the sweetest guy in the world. He’s perfect! I dunno, I get intimidated.”

“No one’s perfect,” Chat corrected. He hated being called perfect.

“I know. That’s what Chloe says. She even listed all of his ‘so-called’ imperfections.”

“Only so-called?”

“Yeah, he puns.”

“That’s not an im-purr-fection. That’s a skill,” Chat smirked.

Marinette laughed, “Well of course you would think so, the Pun Master, the King of Puns, the Pun-slayer!”

“Pun-slayer, I like that one,” he mused as he shined his claws by breathing on them and then rubbing then on his super suit.

“And he’s kind of a dork…”

“Wh-what?”

“He gets really excited about the most trivial things, like eating treats from the bakery or even just having lunch with us today.”

“I’d be excited to have lunch with you, Purr-iness!” he bumped his shoulder against hers.

Marinette rolled her eyes, “You’d be excited for lunch, period,” she laughed. “So, you see? They’re not really imperfections. At best, they’re quirks, but even so it’s helped me to recognize them. I feel less nervous around him now.”

“That’s good and you know, if he’s so great, then I think he’ll understand. I bet he’d really like it if you two could talk just like we’re doing right now.”
“You think?”

Chat nodded. He really liked talking to her today, hearing her explain her designs and finding out her opinion on one of his favorite shows. Those were the longest conversations he had ever had with her up until now. And this one was even better because she looked and sounded completely at ease with him. She didn’t seem to have any qualms about telling him how she felt.

“You’re a great person, too, Marinette. Don’t forget that, okay?”

“That’s nice of you to say, Chat, but…”

“But what? You don’t think so? Come on!”

“It’s not that, exactly. It’s just I’m not anyone special,” she shrugged. “I’m just ordinary ol’ me.”

Chat shook his head, “Your designs aren’t ordinary.”

“How did you know I design?” she asked surprised.

“Oh!” Chat had to think fast, after all he had never seen her sketchbook, only Adrien had. “You won that hat contest, didn’t you? I’m sure I read about it one of the fashion magazines. Didn’t that blonde, pretty boy model it?”

“Adrien Agreste.”

“Yes, that’s the one!” Chat pointed at her with one clawed finger. “And, you designed Jagged Stone’s last album cover. I read about that, too. Very impressive!”

“I made him a pair of one-of-a-kind sunglasses, too,” Marinette smiled to herself at the thought.

“Really? Wow!” Chat grinned. “And, I bet you’re really popular at school.”

“Oh, I don’t think so,” Marinette blushed. “Although my classmates did elect me to be class rep.”

“You see! Those elections are always popularity contests. You must be the most popular girl in your class!”

Marinette laughed.

“And,” he continued, “You have the distinguished pleasure of being the only civilian to have ever partnered with yours truly,” he laid his hand over his heart.

“Was that a pleasure?” she asked with a smirk. “I remember it as being rather painful…”

“Aww… I didn’t meant to hurt you, Princess, but I couldn’t be your partner forever,” he tsked. “I’m paired with Ladybug, you know.”

“Oh I know only too well,” she hummed.

“Anyway, what was I saying? Oh yes! Plenty of people think you’re great. There’s Aaron Agreste…”

“Adrien,” she corrected.

“Whatever,” he replied with a wave of his hand. “The model boy, Jagged Stone, your entire class, and me. We all think you’re great, so you should, too.”
“Thanks, Chat,” she leaned her head on his shoulder and smiled. Her partner could be wonderfully endearing sometimes. She felt warm all over to know that he thought highly of her for her Marinette-ness.

Chat let a moment go by and then stage whispered, “This is where you say, ‘You’re pretty great, too, Chat.’”

Marinette laughed, “I can’t say that!”

“Why not? You don’t think so?” Chat’s ears went flat and his bottom lip stuck out in a pout.

“You’re ego is plenty big. You don’t need me to stroke it.”

“Every cat likes to be petted now and then. Come on, Princess,” he needed her with both his words and his claws as he poked her a few times in the arm. “Am I not cat-tastic?”

“More like a cat-astrophe,” Marinette laughed. “On second thought, you are a-mew-zing!”

“That’s high praise indeed, Purr-incess!” he said with a note of sarcasm as he crossed his arms.

She giggled, but then turning serious said, “You’re a good guy…and a good friend.”

Chat blushed. It felt good to make a friend as his masked self even if he was already friends with her as his civilian self. “And with that, I will take my leave,” he stood up and bowed low with a flourish.

“Other maidens to visit?” she quipped. “Dragons to vanquish?”

“No, all the dragons have been slayed for now, thanks to M’Lady,” he said referring to Ladybug. “And, you’re the only maiden this stray cat visits.”

“You’re always welcome, here, brave knight,” she smiled at her partner as she stood up to see him off.

“That means a lot, Princess,” he replied sincerely, wondering how he could have ever doubted her character as to think her a yandere. Then, he turned on his heel, jumped up to the rail, and before vaulting to the next rooftop he flashed her a toothy smile and gave her a two-fingered salute.

As she leaned on the rail, watching his figure grow smaller against the city lights she realized that she had forgotten to ask him about his own heartache. She wondered if he had gotten over her as Ladybug yet.

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Splayed out on her deck chair, enjoying the late night breeze, Marinette watched her favorite episode of *Shugo Chara, Happy, Embarrassing First Date!* Through a quirk of fate Amu and Tadase end up going on a date of sorts when their other friends suddenly cancel on joining them on a trip to the aquarium. Marinette wondered why she and Alya had never conspired to engineer such a first date between Adrien and herself. They could have easily concocted a scheme for the four of them to do something together and then at the last minute Alya and Nino could conveniently drop out.

As Marinette watched the episode again, she realized the reason. She would be completely mortified being on a date with Adrien just as Amu was with Tadase, worried about what to say and do around her crush. What if she acted too excited and said something stupid? What if she spaced out because she was internally freaking out and Adrien got the wrong idea that she was bored or that she didn’t want to be there!??
“Ohhh!” Marinette moaned as she paused the episode. “I forgot I asked Adrien out, sort of. I’ll be alone with him!” She banged her tablet against her head. What was she thinking?

“You’re a great person, too, Marinette. Don’t forget that, okay?”

Chat’s words from earlier filtered through her head. She smiled at the thought.

“I’m proud of you…you’ve made great progress today. You two will be dating in no time.”

Alya had enthused.

“You can do this!”

Chloe (of all people!) had encouraged her.

“I can do this! I’m a great person!” she said out loud to herself. “I’ll be dating Adrien in no time!” A pang of doubt took hold of her for a moment, but she shook it off and repeated her words with more forcefulness and determination. She just had to believe in herself. If Amu could do it, then so could she!

Actually, did Amu get through her date? Marinette had never finished watching the episode. Just at the moment Tadase looked like he was ready to reciprocate Amu’s feelings, a little girl out of nowhere latched onto Tadase, interrupting the date. Just like Adrien, Tadase’s handsome looks attracted females of all ages, even little girls. That was always the point at which Marinette would stop the episode and run the playback to the beginning to start watching it over again. But not this time, tonight she would watch the whole episode and move onto the next one. Afterall, how could she possibly hope to talk about the show intelligently with Adrien if she had only seen the first 18 episodes, well 17-½?

Marinette pushed play on the tablet to resume watching. Almost immediately an X egg presented itself and Amu was forced to leave Tadase, who had to take care of the little girl, so that she could chase after the egg to cleanse it. It was not unlike Marinette’s own responsibility as Ladybug to cleanse the akuma butterflies. As the battle began Amu ran into Ikuto’s guardian character, Yoru, a troublesome, cat-like trickster who had stolen Ikuto’s key and sought out Amu because he was curious to know what would happen if the magical key was used to unlock her magical lock. As she watched Marinette was reminded that Ikuto’s key is supposed to fit Amu’s lock. She paused the episode to consider what that meant. Did that pairing of lock and key give stronger credence to an Amu/Ikuto ‘ship than an Amu/Tadase ‘ship? Could Adrien be right? As she pondered, out of the corner of her eye she saw something streak across the rooftops.

“Chat Noir!” Marinette called out as she waved her hand above her head. She could see the feline silhouette stop at her shout and look. He turned, changing course, and bounded toward her.

When he landed on her balcony railing, he bowed his head in greeting, “Good evening, again, Princess. Everything alright?” His eyes darted about and his ears twitched, searching for trouble.

“No, everything’s fine, Chat, I just…” Truth be told Marinette wanted a break from thinking about Adrien. She searched for some excuse for why she called over her partner, “I didn’t get to ask you earlier…how are you? I mean, after you got your heart broken…are you okay?”

“Oh, yes, I’m fine,” he sighed in relief that his friend was not in any danger. “It was just a misunderstanding. Ladybug and I talked, now we’re good.”

“What d’ya mean? Are you two together?” Marinette asked, confused by Chat’s words even though
she knew the truth.

“No, no, sorry!” he said as he dropped down to the balcony floor. “I meant I was heartbroken that she didn’t show up, but she explained, apologized, and then came to the rooftop. She really liked it,” Chat smiled at the memory of her impressed expression as she surveyed the rooftop he had decorated with candles and roses.

“But, are you two dating?” Marinette pressed, knowing that they aren’t.

“No, I confessed my feelings to her, but she loves another boy.”

“I’m sorry, Chat. You must be so upset. Is there anything I can do?” She asked feeling guilty for having hurt him by rejecting him as Ladybug.

“That’s kind of you, Princess, but I’m not upset.” When she gave him a doubtful look, he continued, “No really, I’m not. You see, Ladybug told me that she values me as a friend. Actually, we’re best friends, so you see? How can I possibly be upset?”

“But…but she rejected you! She doesn’t want to be your girlfriend!”

“But she does want to be my best friend.”

“That’s just as good?” she asked disbelievingly.

“Of course, arguably better.”

“How is it better!?!?”

“Well, you only have one best friend, right? But, you can date and break up and date someone else. To be the person who is always going to be there no matter what, through thick and thin, good and bad, that’s who a best friend is, and that’s who she is to me, and who I am to her.”

“But, you won’t get to kiss her! Or hold her!”

“True, at least not a romantic kiss, but maybe a kiss on the cheek goodbye, or a kiss on the top of her head when she’s sad, and always a kiss on her hand because, well, that’s kind of our thing. I’ll still hug her when she’s happy and hold her when she’s sad. And, we have our fist bump after a victory in battle,” he smiled fondly.

“Do you still love her? Even after she’s rejected you?”

“Of course! I probably always will,” he shrugged. “Maybe someday she’ll love me the way I love her, and maybe not. Either way, I’m okay with it because I know that in her own way she loves me.”

“I-I don’t understand,” the secret superhero’s brows frowned in confusion.

“I know it probably sounds strange to talk about loving someone when it’s not romantic. It’s platonic, sure, but just as meaningful as any romantic love. We have a bond. We protect this city and the people in it. We protect each other. Every day I’m willing to sacrifice for her and I know she will fight with everything that she has to bring me back. I trust her like no one else. Whatever she asks, I’ll do because I know it’s purpose is good because she’s good.”

“Chat…” Marinette’s eyes began to fill with tears.

“I’m probably not explaining this clearly,” he shook his head. He turned around to look out at the city lights, hoping for inspiration to explain his feelings.
“It’s beautiful,” she said a bit breathless as she joined him at the rail. She had never known Chat to be so sensitive or expressive about his feelings.

“We’re like PB&J,” he tried again.

“What?”

“You know, Peanut Butter and Jelly? Ladybug and I, we’re like PB&J.”

Marinette’s stifled a giggle. Leave it to her dorky partner to use a food analogy to explain his feelings and to, well, ruin a moment.

“Okay, go ahead. Tell me. How are you and Ladybug like PB&J?”

“Well, see peanut butter goes well with a lot of things, like chocolate or crackers or bananas...,” he smiled, “and so does jelly, like jelly doughnuts and jelly shortbread cookies...” Chat’s mind started to wander.

“You’re drooling...”

“Oh! Right, sorry. I’m hungry. Anyway, my point is whenever you hear ‘peanut butter’ your mind automatically fills in...”

“...and jelly.”

“Exactly,” Chat crossed his arms in satisfaction, knowing he had made his point crystal clear.

“What the hell are you talking about, you silly cat?” Marinette laughed as she shook her head in dismay.

“Well, whenever you hear ‘Ladybug’ doesn’t your mind automatically fill in...”

“...and Chat Noir.”

“Exactly,” Chat smiled. “I knew you’d understand, Princess. Ladybug and I are like PB&J. Even if other people come into our lives, even when we’re no longer wearing our masks, we’ll still always be Ladybug and Chat Noir. We just...go together.”

Marinette nodded slowly, taking in his words. She supposed he was right. They would always be inextricably linked. In the hearts and minds of Parisians, they were their heroes. In her heart Chat was her partner, her friend, her rock; the only other person in the world who knew what it was like to be her, to hold a miraculous, to wield its power to save others, and to hide its secret from the world, even from those she loved.

“She doesn’t have to be my girlfriend for me to know that she cares about me, that she loves me. I’m special to her. No one else is her Chat Noir and no one else is my Ladybug,” Chat continued thoughtfully.

“I understand...” she smiled warmly at Chat, thankful that he could accept her feelings for him and, well, even understand her feelings for him better than she did.

“We’re like ham and cheese...”

“Okay, okay, I got it!” Marinette laughed, stopping him before he could continue any further. “So which one of you is peanut butter and which one of you is jelly?”
“Obviously, Ladybug is jelly...because she’s so sweet.”

“That makes sense...you would have to be the peanut butter, cuz you’re completely nuts!” she chortled. Chat laughed, too, while at the same time inwardly chastising himself for ever toying with the notion that his sweet, smart, and funny friend could ever be a yandere.

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Alone again on her balcony, Marinette resumed playback of the *Shugo Chara* episode. As the battle continued the X egg stole the key from Yoru and then charged Amu, but just in time Ikuto appeared and saved Amu from getting hurt. After depositing her on the ground, Ikuto took off after the egg to retrieve his key. Amu, although upset at Ikuto from a previous episode, decided she must help Ikuto to repay him for saving her.

Marinette sat up a little straighter as she watched the two team up to fight the X egg. Ikuto provided the distraction, just as her own feline partner did when battling akumas, while Amu cleansed the X egg and restored it to its natural state. This was the first time Amu and Ikuto fought side by side. They made a formidable team.

Amu jumped to catch Ikuto’s key before it dropped, not realizing how close she was to the edge of the building’s roof where the battle occurred. Without a moment’s hesitation Ikuto caught her arm, but the force of her fall carried them both over the side. They clung to each other as they sped closer and closer to the ground. At the last moment, Ikuto used his power and agility to save them, landing safely on the ground with Amu in his arms. Marinette flopped back in her chair, relieved the two were okay.

Amu asked Ikuto why his key fits her lock. At first he tried to brush it off saying, it doesn’t matter, but when she insisted it did matter, Ikuto explained that the lock and key are a pair.

“*You can’t say ‘lock’ without thinking ‘and key’,*” Marinette realized. “*They go together.*”

Suddenly, Tadase appeared and warned Ikuto to stay away from the lock. That he will keep it safe even though he failed to keep the key safe, allowing it to fall into Ikuto’s hands. Ikuto responded before leaving that the lock is not his only goal and promised he would be seeing Amu again. Amu and Tadase then tried to resume their date, but did not get far due to the reappearance of the little girl who insisted on staying with Tadase despite him having already reunited her with her parents.

As the credits rolled Marinette shut off her tablet, but continued to look at the screen, though now black and unable to offer her a window into the *Shugo Chara* world.

‘*Ikuto is certainly an interesting guy,*’ Marinette admitted to herself. ‘*More complicated than I realized. He’s not the bad guy I thought he was, but, he’s so quiet and introspective, although he does have a trickster side. I much prefer my exuberant, funny, dorky, partner, although I suppose Chat’s more complicated than I realized, too, now that I’ve seen this sensitive side of him.*’

She thought about what Chat Noir said about them being like PB&J and how it seemed to equate to the lock and key of the anime.

“*If anyone would hold the key to my lock, then it would be Chat Noir.*” She smiled to herself, but then panicked. “*What am I saying? It would be Adrien. Adrien! Adrien would hold my key! Ugh! Go to bed, Marinette! You’re so tired, you’re not making any sense!*”

Chapter End Notes
That scene in Shugo Chara in which Ikuto tries to put his key in Amu's lock is soooo cringe-y, creepy. It's definitely meant to symbolize sex. The key hole on her lock actually shrinks in size so that he can't put the key in cuz she's not ready to be "unlocked". *Shakes head*
Misleading Labeling

Chapter Summary


Chapter Notes

Thanks very much to MJ for beta reading the chapter for me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

For the entire morning Adrien worked up the courage to talk to Marinette. Nino kept poking him with his finger and indicating Marinette with a tilt of his head, reminding the blonde of the need to talk to the girl sitting behind him in class. Adrien delayed it as long as he could, saying that he needed more time than just the moment before class would start to talk to her. Even the 10-minute break between subjects was not long enough, Adrien argued; but there was no way he could procrastinate any longer once the lunch time bell rang. He would have two hours of opportunity to speak with her.

Even though he had ruled out Sabrina's notion of Marinette being a yandere after talking with her as Chat Noir the night before, he still felt nervous talking to her as Adrien about her crush on Chloe. He wasn't entirely sure how much he was supposed to know or how she would react when he brought the subject up. He didn't want to offend or upset her. With jelly knees and a dry mouth, Adrien stood up at his desk. He hastily shoved his belongings into his messenger bag, all the while his eyes were trained on the raven-haired girl.

"Marinette?" he squeaked and then cleared his voice. "Marinette? Could I talk to you a moment, um, privately?"

The poor girl gave a nervous laugh in response as her eyes flicked to her bestie for help. Marinette should have known better. Alya smiled widely and hooked her arm around her boyfriend, hastily pulling him away. No help there.

They stood there, the two teenagers, awkwardly waiting for the rest of their classmates to leave. When the last of their peers left, Adrien took a breath to steady himself before beginning his practiced words.

"Marinette," he began, "I happened to notice yesterday at lunch that, um, perhaps you weren't quite at ease with Chloe and me. I was wondering if perhaps something was bothering you?"

"What? No!" Marinette dismissed his concern with a fake frown and a hand wave. "I'm not bothered, I'm not bothered at all. Are you bothered?"

"No, no. I'm not," he said with a frown. She seemed to be protesting too much to be believed, and he had counted on her to tell the truth that it was bothering her. Marinette hated liars, so why was she
lying herself? Undeterred, he pressed on with his speech, feeling sure that she needed to hear him. “I’m just glad that you’re not bothered, because I want you to know that you really have nothing to be bothered about because Chloe and I, we are just friends and that’s all that we will ever be.”

"J-just friends? You and Chloe?"

“That’s right, just friends,” he confirmed. “So, if you are bothered or even, um, oh, I don’t know, jealous?” He waved his hand dismissively as if it couldn’t be farther from the truth. “Then, I just want to reassure you that there’s no reason to be.”


“Oh! Good! Well, I’m glad to hear it. Sorry I bothered you with this then,” he turned to go with a puzzled frown on his face, wondering if he had done more harm than good. He had done exactly what she told Chat she wished he would do and yet she didn’t seem any better for it. She still seemed nervous and anxious.

“A-Adrien!” she called after him, giving her arm a pinch at the same time. She replayed Chat’s words in her head, “You’re a great person, too, Marinette. Don’t forget that, okay?” She lifted her head a little higher. Then she thought about Adrien’s kind words to her the other day, ‘Adrien admires you. He thinks you’re clever, kind, and thoughtful. He likes your passion and that you help your friends.’ She took a deep breath and then opened her mouth.

“Thanks for, um, checking to make sure I’m okay. That was really kind and thoughtful and, um, well…” she pictured Chat’s cat eyes and goofy grin, ‘...that’s one of the many reasons that I like you.’

‘HOLY FUCK, Marinette!!!! What did you just say? Oh, God! I want to die! Can Hawk Moth please just akumatize me and get it over with? I’ll be his evil minion and chase Chat around to get his miraculous and I’ll never have to see or talk to Adrien again.’

Adrien smiled broadly, “Thanks, Marinette. I like you, too.” He took her words as platonic and returned them in kind. Marinette on the other hand...

“Uh…” Marinette sat down with a thump, only she wasn’t anywhere close to the bench at her desk and so crumpled onto the floor landing heavily on the step between levels, right at the point where the tread and riser meet. She let out a sharp yelp and Adrien rushed to her side.

“Are you okay? What happened?” he asked kneeling down and trying to support her with his hands on her arms so that she wouldn’t pitch forward and fall down the stairs. He settled her back on the tread of the step she landed on.

In a daze Marinette stared, eyes wide and open mouth at the beautiful boy. His words ran in an endless cycle inside of her head.

‘Thanks, Marinette. I like you, too. Thanks, Marinette. I like you, too. Thanks, Marinette. I like you, too.’

Adrien waved a hand in front of Marinette’s face trying to get her to respond. He had seen her zone out before, but this seemed to be an unusually deep trance even for her. He bit his lip and craned his neck to see out the window from the classroom to the adjoining hallway. No Alya. No Nino. No one at all. He turned back to his friend. She looked...peaceful enough. She didn’t appear to be in any pain. No foaming at the mouth or uncontrollable shaking. Just...in her own world he supposed. He wondered if he should wait or try to snap her out of it.
“Ow!” Marinette cried out as one hand protectively covered the flesh on her arm that had just been brutally pinched. An instant later her dominant hand flew out on its own accord striking her attacker squarely in the nose.

Adrien fell backwards as his arms ceased their support of his body weight as it crouched on the stairs in favor of shielding his face from any further injury. Unfortunately, his effort was in vain as the target of his next assault was the back of his head as it collided with the leg of Marinette’s desk.

“Oh, Adrien! I am so, so sorry! Are you okay?” A flustered Marinette asked as she helped the boy to sit up. It took a dazed Adrien a moment to respond, but he grunted a “yeah”. Marinette continued to sputter her apologies. Adrien was more concerned about what his nose looked like than what it felt like. He’d be in trouble with his father if he got an injury at school that would necessitate rescheduling his photo shoots.

“Is it bleeding?” he asked as he took his hands away from his nose and tilted his head back.

“No,” she concluded after looking him over carefully. “It just looks red. Do you want to go to the nurse? I can take you...”

“No, that’s okay. I’ll just sit here for a moment,” he brushed a tear from his eye. A mixture of stinging and pain radiated through his nose and across his face, but at least he felt relieved that it would probably escape his father’s notice. “That’s quite a right cross you got there. Do you box or something?” Adrien was starting to rethink his earlier assessment of Marinette as not being violent. At the very least, she had no trouble defending herself.

“Well...how about lunch?” he asked, wiping new tears, now of joy, from his eyes as he pulled his head off of her shoulder to face her. “I’m hungry.” He stood up, offering her a hand to help her to her feet. “I’m headed to the cafeteria. You going home to eat?”

Marinette nodded and followed him down the landing, but then stopped. She didn’t have to be scared or nervous anymore. He liked her, so she should just go for it.

“Want to come with me? For lunch I mean...we could watch Shugo Chara while we eat.”

“That sounds great! After you,” he waved a hand in front of him, allowing her to pass before following her.
“So you see, Chloe, we don’t have to go through with our plan because he’s over Ladybug and likes me,” Marinette broke the news to her partner as kindly as she could.

Chloe looked skeptically at the raven-haired girl, “Tell me exactly what you both said.”

“I said, ‘You’re so kind and thoughtful, that’s one of the many reasons that I like you.’ And, then he said, ‘Thanks, Marinette, I like you, too.’”

“Ah-ha! See! He said like.” Chloe crossed her arms and gave a little nod in satisfaction.

“Yeah, he likes me, so problem solved! He’s over Ladybug. I’m sorry to have beaten you to him, but it just sort of happened. I hope you’re not too mad…”

“I should be mad at you. You broke our deal! Neither of us were supposed to go after Adrien,” she wagged her finger at Marinette. “But it doesn’t matter anyway,” she sniffed smugly.

“What doesn’t matter?” Marinette asked, confused. Had Chloe already decided to give up her crush on Adrien?

“He’s not over Ladybug. He said he likes you, but he loves Ladybug. I’m sorry, Marinette,” Chloe pressed a hand over her heart and she closed her eyes for dramatic effect, “but you are still very much in the friend zone.”

“But, but he said…”

“Trust me. I know this. I’m right there with you in the friend zone of hell,” the blonde laid a hand on her companion’s shoulder in a comforting if not condescending gesture of support. “He likes everyone. Like is for friends. He only loves one person, Ladybug.”

“But we had lunch…”

“Did he kiss you? Hold your hand? Make a date with you?” Chloe waited for a response and when she got none she cried out, “Friend zone!”

Marinette blushed in embarrassment. How could she have been so wrong? How did she misjudge their exchange? How the hell did she get through lunch with him?

“Come on,” she linked arms with the confused girl and dragged her down the hallway.

“Where are we going?”

“Your house. We’ll pick up the Ladybug costume and then wait at my place until it’s time to go to Adrien’s.”

“I thought you were just going to pick me up in your car.”

“If you think I am letting you out of my sight, you can think again. This is what you get for going behind my back and trying to get Adrien all for yourself. Now, we have to hang out together.”

Marinette sighed miserably.

“I don’t like it any more than you do,” Chloe shook her head. “But if Operation Stomp LoveBug works then we’ll never have to do it again!”

Marinette allowed herself to be led by the blonde girl, who laughed mercilessly. “And to think you were the one that broke our deal first!”
“I don’t think…”

“I’ve been a better friend than you!” Chloe gloated. “I really am quite surprised at you, Marinette. I don’t know whether to be mad at you or proud of you!”

Marinette groaned.

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“So what should we do to pass the time?” Marinette asked as she dropped her bag by the door. Chloe kept walking through the lounge to her bedroom without answering. Marinette waited for a moment, taking in the large room. When Chloe didn’t return she followed the blonde.

“We could watch Shugo Chara,” Marinette suggested as she entered Chloe’s walk-in closet. The blonde girl pushed one piece of clothing after the next on the hanging rack.

“That show is ridiculous!” Chloe scoffed. “I’m not wasting my time watching it.”

“I like it…and so does Adrien,” Marinette argued.

“Then, I’ll leave it to you two to watch the magic girl fight eggs,” she rolled her eyes.

“She doesn’t just fight them, she also fights the monster that they become and then she cleanses the eggs. I would have thought you’d like it seeing how much you like Ladybug.”

“Ladybug’s real.” Chloe corrected as she pulled out a long, tan trench coat. “She’s not a cartoon.”

“It’s anime,” Marinette corrected. Feeling the trench coat being shoved into her hands, she asked, “What’s this?”

“For you to wear over the Ladybug costume, so you don’t look suspicious,” Chloe called from over her shoulder as she continued to hunt through the racks of clothes.

“Oh, right! Good thinking!” Marinette draped the coat over her arm and then absentmindedly fingered a silk blouse hanging beside her. “What are you looking for now?”

“What I’m going to wear, duh! I need something inconspicuous,” she hummed.

“It’s not really what your known for, is it?” Marinette asked with an arched brow.

Chloe guffawed, “What’s the point of dressing to blend in? You should alway dress to stand out.” She sighed as she looked up at the ceiling. “I should have borrowed something from you.”

“Hey! I don’t blend in!”

Chloe’s eyes traveled across her body from head to toe. “You always wear the same thing. A t-shirt under a blazer with capris and flats. And always pastels.” She yawned dramatically.

“It’s a classic look,” Marinette argued back.

“It’s boring! You know why Adrien’s never noticed you? You’ve never given him a reason to.”

“You’re one to talk!” Marinette’s hands landed on her hips, “You wear the same yellow jacket everyday.”

Chloe’s face burned bright red. “If you don’t want my help, then just say so!” she yelled.
Marinette was surprised by how upset Chloe got and she reflexively held up both hands in surrender. “I’m sorry! I didn’t mean to offend you...really. I like your jacket and yellow is very, um, cheerful.”

“Thanks,” Chloe mumbled.

“What do you suggest I wear to make Adrien notice me?” she asked. Chloe looked doubtful. “No really,” Marinette insisted, “tell me what you think.”

“Well...you should wear skirts and dresses more. Bold colors to make you stand out.” She eyed the other girls' pigtails. “You should try wearing your hair differently, too.”

“What’s wrong with my hair?”

“Nothing...if you’re four years-old. Come here,” she commanded. When Marinette didn’t move Chloe repeated herself more politely. “Come here, please.” Marinette rolled her eyes and reluctantly joined the blonde at the mirror. Chloe removed the ribbons holding the pigtails. She ran her fingers through Marinette’s raven tresses, trying to help the hair relax from being held so tightly.

“See? When you wear it down, it’s almost pretty.”

“It gets in my eyes,” Marinette complained, brushing a strand from her face.

“Well, you could use a barrette or a comb to keep it in place,” she turned and opened a drawer. After a moment she fished out two red barrettes. She pulled a lock of Marinette’s hair back and fixed the barrette to hold it in place. She then did the same on the other side. “There. You look much older. Sixteen at least.”

“It doesn’t look, too bad,” she hummed.

“Or, you could wear it up,” Chloe returned to her drawer and brought out some hair ties. She removed the barrettes and swept Marinette’s hair into a high ponytail.

“My hair’s not long enough,” she moaned. “It looks silly.” A small tuft of hair stuck up at the top of her head, bobbing as she moved.

“I’m not done. Be patient,” Chloe chided. She twisted and coiled the hair around itself, making a small bun. “Hmm...still looks a little small.”

Again, Chloe disappeared into her drawer. After a moment she returned with some blonde extensions.

“Not my color,” Marinette laughed.

“Shhh,” Chloe chided. She undid the bun and clipped on the fake hair. She wound it around to make a bun and then pinned Marinette’s real hair around it, covering as much of the yellow locks as possible. “Not perfect, but it gives you an idea of the effect. See? Now you look eighteen.”

“Whoa! I really do look older,” Marinette admired herself in the mirror.

“Uh-huh,” Chloe agreed. Then tapping her finger with her chin she moved to another part of the closet. She pulled out a cerulean blue dress. “Here, try this on.”

Marinette took the dress and looked at the label. “Versace?” She squeaked and felt her knees go weak.

“Go ahead,” Chloe shooed her into the bathroom. “Try it on while I look for what I’m going to wear
Marinette took off her school clothes and very carefully put on the designer dress. She admired herself in the mirror. It fit pretty well, maybe just a bit big in the bust. It had a high collar that down played her small chest and was sleeveless which accentuated her toned arms. The knit bodice was broken by large geometric intarsia panels at the neck and back with small panels at her waist and between her breasts.

“I don’t think this dress is appropriate for school!” Marinette called. “Although it’s divine!” She spun to try to see herself from the back.

“Can I come in?” Chloe asked. When Marinette gave her access, Chloe opened the door, wearing her own new outfit of a blank tank over black leggings and high heel boots that came up to just above the knee. “Um-hmm. For school? No. But, for a date?” She handed her a pair of metallic mules. “You should wear blue more. It brings out your eyes.”

“Papa would never let me out of the house in this,” Marinette moaned as she slipped on the shoes.

“It’s not revealing,” Chloe argued as she looked Marinette over with a judging eye. “You look about twenty years old in that dress.”

“Exactly why he wouldn’t want me to wear it,” Marinette laughed.

“Is your father that uptight?” Chloe asked, scrunching up her nose.

“No, just protective. I doubt most fathers would want their teenage daughters wearing this,” Marinette mused, but then realized what she said. “Not that you’re father would want you to wear it. I mean, he did buy it for you, so I suppose he does want you to wear it, but I’m sure he’s protective of you in his own way.,,hee-hee.”

“Daddy lets me do whatever I want,” Chloe sniffed.

“That must be very...freeing.” Marinette hands flailed in front of her. Chloe eyed them sharply and the nervous girl instinctively pulled them behind her back to still them. “Thanks for letting me try this on. I’ve never worn a designer dress before.”

“No?” Chloe hummed. “I’m not surprised, your papa can’t afford to buy you designer clothes on a baker’s salary.”

“Well, it won’t matter because one day I’ll be a fashion designer with my own label. Then I’ll wear all the designer clothes I want. Designed by me!” Marinette smiled.

“I dunno about that!” Chloe chortled. “I’m sure Adrien’s father would give you a job designing for Gabriel if you land Adrien, but give you your own label? Noooooo. Not in a million years.”

“I don’t want M. Agreste to give me anything. If he hired me, then I’d want it to be because of my talent, not because I’m dating his son.”

“Are you telling me that your interest in Adrien has nothing to do with what he and his father could do for your dream to be a fashion designer?” Chloe asked sceptically.

“None whatsoever. I like Adrien for who he is, not for what he may or may not be able to do for me.” Marinette asserted. “In fact, if he talked his father into giving me a job or my own line, I would refuse it.”
“Yeah, right.”

“No, I’m serious!” she exclaimed, stomping her silver shoed foot. “It’s bad enough his father makes
him model for his line. I would never want Adrien to feel like I was using him!”

“You showed him your sketches,” Chloe accused.

“Only because he specifically asked me to show them to him. He wanted to see them,” Marinette
argued. “I would never force them on him. And, I’d never ask him to show them to his father or
anyone else he knows in the fashion industry.”

Chloe regarded the aspiring designer with narrowed eyes as if trying to discern the truth just by
looking at her. “For Adrien’s sake, I hope you mean that.”

“I do.”

“Okay, then,” Chloe placed her hands on her hips. “Why do you like Adrien?”

“Well...do you remember his first day of school?” Marinette asked. After Chloe nodded, she
continued, “He and I got off on the wrong foot because I thought he was trying to put gum on my
seat.”

Chloe laughed, “That would’ve been a good one! Too bad he foiled my efforts.”

Marinette stuck her tongue out at Chloe.

“Anyway, my point is that even though I unfairly accused him and rushed to judgment, he made it a
priority to explain himself and make friends. He even lent me his umbrella. The funniest thing
happened: right after he handed it to me, it closed all by itself and for a few seconds my head was
stuck in it. We laughed and laughed. Adrien has the best laugh.”

“Oh, let me get this straight. You like him because he gave you a broken umbrella and laughed at
you when you got your head stuck in it?”

“No!” Marinette sighed in frustration. “I like him because he’s forgiving and generous. He sees the
good in people even when their goodness isn’t on display. He’s the kindest person I know.”

Chloe hummed in agreement, “Sometimes he’s too kind for his own good, which is why we have to
look out for him. Come on!” She pulled an oversized black sweater over her head and then looking
at herself in the mirror adjusted it so one shoulder showed through the opening in the neck. “Time for
you to dress for your grand debut, ‘Ladybug’!”

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“Okay, this is the spot,” Chloe said as she stopped suddenly on the street outside the back of the
Agreste mansion. Marinette had been looking over her shoulder to make sure no one was around and
ran into the blonde girl with an “omph!”

Chloe rolled her eyes and then dusted off her jacket where it had made contact with her partner.
“Will you get yourself together! Ever since we left my suite you’ve been extra clumsy even for you!”

“You sure there’s a gap in the security cameras’ coverage here?” Marinette asked as she chewed her
lip nervously.

“That’s what Adrien said. That’s how he’s able to sneak out from time to time,” Chloe replied
confidently. “Unless of course they changed the cameras…but, I’m sure they haven’t. So, don’t worry!”

"Adrien sneaks out?" Marinette asked, surprised to hear that her perfect boy is a rule breaker.

“Um, yeah! If he didn’t, then he’d have no life, seriously. His father is super strict.” Chloe reached into her pocket and handed something small to Marinette. “Put this on,” she instructed.

In the dim light of the night, Marinette looked down at her hand and saw a small earpiece. It was not unlike the kind she used when Alya gave her prompts during what she thought was going to be a date with Adrien at the zoo. It ended up being a date with Nino, which got interrupted by an akuma attack, and then Nino decided he’d rather date Alya.

“This way I can hear everything and tell you what to say if you get stuck,” Chloe explained as she put a matching earpiece in her own ear.

Chloe reached out and smoothed Marinette’s pigtails. “Now, remember: confidence. You’re a superhero so there’s no reason to be intimidated by a famous, gorgeous model.” She meant her words to be encouraging, but they served to only stoke the raven-haired girl’s nerves. “Be brutal. Break his heart. No mercy!”

“No mercy!” Marinette nodded. She took off the long trench coat that she wore to hide her super suit and passed it to her partner. She sighed and then cast her yo-yo onto the nearby street light, swinging herself up onto the top of the high fence that surrounded the Agreste grounds. From there she quickly cast her yo-yo out again catching the decorative molding of the roof eaves, which she used to pull herself up to Adrien’s bedroom window.

“Whoa!” Chloe said in amazement to herself as she saw her classmate swing through the Paris night. “Her butt looks a lot less flat than yesterday! I wonder if she did some squats…”

From below she watched a spotted Marinette crouch on the sill and tap the window. A moment or two later the window opened by a blonde figure and she disappeared inside. Chloe continued to crane her neck, hoping to see what was transpiring inside. She tapped her right foot impatiently on the sidewalk.

“*This better work…”* she hummed to herself.

Chapter End Notes

The Versace dress that Marinette tries on can be seen here: https://www.saksfifthavenue.com/main/ProductDetail.jsp?PRODUCT%3C%3Eprd_id=845524447161754&site_refer=DFA_RMK_S5_CRITEO

Okay, LB uses her magic yo-yo to get into Adrien’s bedroom = plot hole. I see it, you see it. Honestly, I didn't feel the scene between Adrien and LB made sense anywhere other than his bedroom and I couldn't think of a way to get LB in said bedroom without the use of the magic yo-yo. So, please forgive me. I'm going to explain it away by Chloe being too distracted by LB’s butt to notice the magic yo-yo. I reserve the right to come back to this plot hole and use it as a plot point. :)

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Balancing precariously on the windowsill, Ladybug peered inside. She could see Adrien sitting at his desk, probably doing homework she guessed. Gathering her courage and standing a little straighter, she knocked on the window. Adrien turned around in his chair at the sound and then his eyes grew wide at seeing her. He ran to the window and opened it.

“Ladybug!”

“Hi” she smiled, “Can I come in?”

He held out a hand, which she took before jumping inside. She smiled again before letting go and moving further into the room. She had been in Adrien’s room before a couple of times, but always during an akuma attack, so she had not had the opportunity to fully appreciate the size of the room and all of its decorations. It was an obscenely large room, two stories tall and probably as long as her parents’ bakery.

“Is there an akuma?” Adrien asked excitedly.

“No, no akuma,” Ladybug replied over her shoulder as she continued to take in the room. The lower floor housed a huge bed, two couches, a massive entertainment center, his computer with three monitors, a foosball table and a rock climbing wall.

“You’re collection is really impressive,” she said pointing to the upper floor, which consisted of shelving for Adrien’s massive DVD, CD, and gaming library.

“Thanks,” Adrien rubbed the back of his neck nervously with one hand. “I kinda went overboard. It’s too much, isn’t it?” Nino had called it “sick,” which only later did he find out was a good thing, and yet that first perceived negative response stuck with him as something for which he should apologize.

“What? No! I’m glad you have such a large collection. I don’t know how Chat and I would have stopped The Collector without it.” The two superheros had used the collection as ammunition to fight Adrien’s akumatized father, The Collector.

Adrien made no response and Ladybug looked around her for something else to say. She noted his pajamas and commented on them.

“What are you doing?” Chloe asked in her ear. “Quit the small talk and get on with it!”

Ladybug pressed her lips together in annoyance. She was getting there in her own time. You can’t
just blurt out “I DON’T LOVE YOU!” especially to someone who looked so nervous and distracted as Adrien did now. He still hadn’t said anything in return. He looked a bit pale.

“Are you okay?” she asked, feeling that she was sounding like a broken record as she had now asked him that question four times today.

Honestly, Adrien could not say. He had dreamed of Ladybug coming to visit him in his room. Sometimes he fantasized that she was saving him from an akuma or even Hawk Moth himself. Other times he imagined that she came just to say hello and ended up challenging him to a game of foosball or they would play video games, hanging out like friends. A few times he imagined that Ladybug came and told him that she had found out that he’s Chat Noir and she wanted to reveal herself to him. But regardless of why she came, his daydreams always ended the same way: with a confession of her undying love for him and a kiss, okay multiple kisses, no a full on make out session…but, NO! She had rejected Chat Noir and Adrien had made a concerted effort since then to stop those daydreams as soon as they turned romantic. Well, he didn’t indulge in them for too much longer after they turned romantic, usually… Could he really be blamed? He’s still in love with her after all! In any case, he had accepted her feelings for him. He wouldn’t press his case. Friends is good, better than good. He had asserted it as fact to Marinette. His friend, Ladybug, was here to...wait, why was she here?

“Adrien?”

Realizing he had not answered her question, Adrien simply nodded. He cleared his throat and tried to speak.

“I’m sorry. What did you say?” He walked over to where she had wandered so that they could better talk.

“I said, ‘I like your pajamas,’” Ladybug pointed at his clothes. Without thinking he looked down to remember what he was wearing. Oh right, a black tee-shirt with “LOVEBUG” across his chest written in red scrawl and a ladybug in place of the “O”. His pants were red flannel with black polka dots.

His face blushed a bright red, but he quickly recovered, “I wear the colors of my mistress for I am, but your humble servant.” He bowed low. When he straighted he noticed her stunned face and inwardly cursed himself for acting too much like Chat Noir.

Before he could say anymore he was relieved to hear her giggle. “Such a stylish knight,” she teased as she curtsied in return.

“Uhhh...are you flirting? You DON’T love him, remember?” Chloe chastised in Ladybug’s ear.

“Wh-what can I do for you?” he asked, withholding the “M’Lady” that almost slipped off of his tongue. He’d have to control his Chat-ness.

“Well, I came to thank you,” Ladybug replied.

“WHAT? Don’t thank him!” Chloe screeched. Ladybug twisted her torso, so her face turned away from Adrien while she pretended to sneeze and at the same time nonchalantly adjusted her earpiece, turning down the volume.

“Salut!” Adrien responded to her sneeze.

“Thank you.” She cleared her throat to begin again. “I came to thank you for saving my life. It was very brave, but unnecessary and...”
“No offense, Ladybug, and forgive me for interrupting, but it was very much necessary,” he argued. “If I hadn’t done what I did, you wouldn’t be here and who knows what would have happened to Paris, much less me.”

“That may be the case, but I know the real reason why you sacrificed yourself for me.”

Adrien held his breath. ‘She knows I’m Chat Noir!’

“I know that you’re in love with me.”

“M’La... Wait. What did you say?”

“I said, ‘I know that you’re in love with me,’” she repeated, trying to stay calm.

“How did you...Chloe!” his brows furrowed. “I knew she wasn’t going to let this go!” he said more to himself than to her. “I am so sorry that she bothered you with this.”

“No! It’s okay! I’m glad she told me.”

“You are?” Adrien held his breath, daring to hope that she might return his feelings.

“Yes! Because I care about you.”

“You’re flirting again!” Chloe intoned. “I should have done this myself,” she muttered.

“You...you do?” He took a step closer, hope in his eyes.

“Yes, of course! Um...you’re one of the most beloved sons of Paris,” Ladybug scronged for a plausible reason. “Everyone would be heartbroken if something bad happened to you. We can’t have that now, can we?” She laughed nervously.

Adrien looked forlorn as his eyes found the floor. “I see…”

“And your father, your friends, they would be devastated as well…”

“And you?” he asked, looking up hopefully. “Would you have been upset if I had died?”

“Well, technically speaking you did die and I wouldn’t be here if I wasn’t upset by it,” she admitted, but then cursed herself as she seemed to keep digging a bigger and bigger hole for herself. “I’m a big fan!” she lamely tried to explain.

“Oh...a fan, of course.” He couldn’t keep the disappointment out of his voice. He forgot that she only knew him as Adrien, famous fashion model, and not as her partner and best friend, Chat Noir.

“Yes, well…” Ladybug chewed her lip. He looked pretty upset. Did she really have to throw down the hammer and completely shatter his heart?. Was it absolutely necessary to tell him that she doesn’t love him?

“Tell him you don’t return his feelings. Tell him you don’t love him,” Chloe demanded. Apparently, it was absolutely necessary.

Ladybug took a deep breath trying to calm herself so that the lie she was about to utter would sound convincing, but she didn’t get her chance. Adrien spoke first.

“I know how it must look,” he began, brushing a hand through his hair. “I know it must seem that I just have a celebrity crush on you, but please believe me. My feelings for you are not so shallow.”
“How can he possibly love her, when he doesn’t even know her?” Chloe snapped.

“How can you possibly love me, when you don’t even know me?” Ladybug repeated.

“But, I do know you!” he pleaded, but then remembering himself and how creepy that must sound, he corrected. “Or, at least I think I do. I know that there is a girl beneath that mask. Someone who already has her own life. Someone who has to juggle family, friends, school, hobbies, maybe work, too, with being a superhero. I know that can’t be easy.”

Ladybug nodded, surprised by his words. Most people just gushed about how wonderful she is, how amazing her powers are, how brave she is, etc. No one had ever observed that being a superhero must have its own challenges. Adrien was right; it wasn’t easy. She struggled some days worse than others. She was always running late and forgetting things.

Adrien took a step closer to her as he spoke. “I know it means that you have to make sacrifices. You sacrifice sleep. You sacrifice doing the things you love and being with the people you love, not all the time, but sometimes, maybe at the most inconvenient of times. And you can’t explain. You can’t tell them why. You have to lie to them to keep them safe. Everyday you have to come up with some excuse, some lie to tell a loved one about where you’re running off to or why you’re late. I know for someone as honest as you are that it can’t be easy.”

Ladybug nodded; it wasn’t easy. She was a horrible liar and she hated having to let people down. She hated the look of disappointment in her parents’ eyes when they grounded her for missing school. She hated hearing the jokes from Alya about how she always flaked on their plans that were meant to be funny, but also carried an undercurrent of hurt.

“I know that you live in fear that one day they will find out your secret. They’ll know that you lied and you can only hope that they will understand and forgive you. But, there’s a small part of you that doubts. You’re afraid that you’ll lose them if they find out, which makes you even more desperate to hide the truth.”

Ladybug nodded again as tears began to well in her eyes.

“I know the responsibility to save the city and to stop Hawk Moth ways heavily on you. You have to be the savior, the last man standing, the final hope. It must make you feel lonely. Maybe it even makes you feel guilty, because you know you have to survive for the rest of us to have a chance, which means you have to sacrifice even those that you think you can’t do without. I know that sometimes you’re afraid, that you doubt yourself, that you might not be able to win every single time; because all it’d take is just one misstep, one fumble...and game over.” He gently placed a loving hand on her shoulder.

Tears started to fall from Ladybug’s glistening eyes as she listened to Adrien’s words. He seemed to be shining a light into the deepest, darkest places of her heart, seeing things that she had only begun to admit to herself, much less Tikki and Chat. It was hard for her to think about, even harder to express.

“You do know me…” she breathed in amazement.

“What?!!?” Chloe screamed.

“So you see, since I know you so well, is it so strange that I should love you?” He placed his other hand on her shoulder. “I’ve seen you set aside your doubts and focus with such determination, such resilience, such strength. It’s amazing.” He chuckled, “Not to sound cheesy, but it’s miraculous! You’re miraculous, the you behind the mask. Won’t you...won’t you please give me a chance to
prove myself?” He took her hand in his, “To win your heart?”

“You’ve already won it,” that’s what she was about to say, but Chloe intervened.

“No! No! No! You’ve already given your heart to someone else. You love someone else!”

“Someone else,” Ladybug managed to say as she gazed into his green eyes.

“You already love someone else?” he asked, his voice breaking as he said the last two words. He already knew that. She had told Chat Noir the same thing. She loved another boy. “Who?” He shouldn’t have asked. He had already asked her as Chat and she had resisted telling him, saying that she couldn’t out of fear of exposing her identity. Yet, the question slipped out anyway. He wanted to know who his rival was, to whom she deemed worthy of giving her heart.

“Who?” she repeated. She felt as if she was in a daze, still reeling from all of his wonderful, insightful, sensitive, loving words. He loved her. He really loved her. The real her, the Marinette her, even if he didn’t know her name.

“Chat Noir!” Chloe urged. “Say ‘Chat Noir’!”

“Chat Noir,” Ladybug repeated, not really understanding the context as to why her partner’s name was being brought up.

Adrien gasped and took a step back, dropping her hand. “You love Chat Noir?” he asked in confusion. But, she had rejected Chat. Why? Why did she say she loves Chat?

The lack of contact snapped Ladybug awake and she fully registered Adrien’s words. “I love Chat Noir!?” she laughed incredulously. Such a ridiculous statement! Wherever did he get that idea?

“Yes, you do! Marinette, so help me, if you make him fall even deeper in love with Ladybug... UGH! Tell him you love Chat Noir!” Chloe bellowed.

Ladybug immediately sobered. “I do. I love Chat Noir.”

“But, you laughed.”

“I’m still getting used to it. It’s new...” she replied lamely.

“So you two are together?” his eyes narrowed.

“Yes!” Ladybug nodded her head vigorously. “He’s my boyfriend, yep!” She popped the “p” on the end of the word.

“I see...I didn’t think you cared for him that way,” He crossed his arms as he eyed her suspiciously. “In the interview with Nadja Chamack, you denied that you’re in a relationship.”

“Well, yeah, it’s safer that way. You know, to keep things secret.”

“But, you’re telling me because...?”

“I just want to be clear with you. I don’t want to play with your feelings.”

“Okaaaay,” he nodded. She had said the same thing to him as Chat, that she didn’t want to play with his feelings; but he knew she didn’t love Chat. Why is she lying now? Was she lying then, too? Was there really not a boy that she loved? Was she just trying to let him down easy then by making up a fake “someone else”? Is that what she’s trying to do now?
Adrien looked doubtful and Ladybug felt nervous. He wasn’t buying it. She would need a harder sell. She searched her mind for some way to convince him of her love for Chat.

“You see, Chat and I, we are like PB&J,” she began.

“PB&J?” Adrien croaked.

“Yeah, you know, peanut butter and jelly. Whenever you hear ‘peanut butter’ you automatically think ‘and jelly’. It’s the same with us. Whenever you hear ‘Ladybug’ you automatically fill in…”

“...’and Chat Noir’,” he whispered.

“Exactly,” Ladybug smiled. “I knew you’d understand. Chat and I are like PB&J.”

Adrien stared. He stared at the girl before him. The girl with bluebell eyes. The girl with raven hair always tied in pigtails with red ribbons. The girl whose smile lit up a room. The girl whose big heart made her come to the defense of any friend in trouble. He stared at Ladybug, but saw Marinette. Chat had explained his relationship with Ladybug as PB&J...to Marinette...and only to Marinette. This whole time Ladybug had been sitting behind him in class. If only he had ever thought to turn around and see, really see her.

“That’s gotta be the most ridiculous thing I’ve ever heard!” Chloe cried in exasperation. “Utterly ridiculous!”

Ladybug wasn’t sure if Adrien was buying it either. He was just staring at her with wide eyes and an even wider mouth. She cursed Chat for his silly analogy. Well, it was her own fault. She’d brought it up. She’d just have to run with it.

“Chat Noir is my partner, my friend, my rock. He’s the only other person in the world who knows what it’s like to be me, to hold a miraculous, to wield its power to save others, and to hide its secret from the world, even from those I love. I couldn’t do it without him. I wouldn’t want to do it without him. He’s special to me. No else is my Chat Noir. We just…”

“...go together.” They said at the same time.

“Do you really mean it? You really love Chat?” Adrien asked, his heart bursting. He had used the analogy to explain why he was okay with them just being friends, but she was using it to explain why their love, romantic love, was meant to be. Was it too much to be believed that his words last night had touched her? Made her realize how she truly felt?

“I do, I really do love him. ” It wasn’t a complete lie.

“I do love Chat in my own way, the platonic PB&J way ,” she thought.

She took Adrien’s hand in hers and gave it a squeeze, “I’m so sorry, Adrien, I can’t return your feelings.”

“Good. Now get out of there!” Chloe encouraged.

But, Ladybug didn’t move. She didn’t want to hurt him at least not too badly. She didn’t want him to get akumatized. She’d stay until she knew he was okay. Ladybug scanned his face, seeing a mixture of emotions.

Adrien looked into her eyes, Ladybug’s eyes, no Marinette’s eyes. Marinette, his classmate. Marinette, his friend. The same friend he had opened up to last night and with whom he shared the
secrets of his heart. He had talked about his crush on her to her. And she in return had talked about her crush on... not him. Her crush was not on him he realized. A month ago Marinette was broken hearted over that crush, who was definitely not Chat Noir or else she would have come to be with him on that rooftop he had decorated with roses and candles. No she was lovesick for someone else, the person she had lunch with yesterday. Marinette loved Chloe, not Chat, Chloe.

Is this why she lied? To protect herself from being judged? Did she really think that her partner and best friend would judge her for loving a girl? Is that why she said she loved another boy? Is that why she said she loves Chat Noir? Did she really think so little of him? Had he ever given her any reason to doubt him? Had he ever said or acted in a way that made her feel uncomfortable? Maybe it was all of the flirting Chat Noir did with her? But, didn’t she flirt back sometimes? Was this just another way to protect her identity? To try to throw him off from finding her? But he wasn’t trying to find her. He needed to reassure her, that whatever her reason for lying to him, that it wasn’t necessary; she could trust him. Above all if he couldn’t have her love, then he at least wanted her trust.

He stepped closer and squeezed her hand in return. “It’s okay. I understand,” he said quietly, looking directly in her eyes. “I know you don’t love Chat Noir. You don’t have to lie.” She tried to protest, but he continued. “You don’t have to pretend anymore. You don’t have to be scared.”

He tried to be brave. He tried to smile warmly, but inside his heart was breaking. This really was the end for any possibility to have a romantic relationship with her. She liked girls, so even if it didn’t work out with Chloe, it was never going to work out with him. He would never be a viable option no matter how long he waited, no matter how hard he hoped.

Adrien’s words whirled in Ladybug’s mind. ‘You don’t have to lie,’ he had said. ‘You don’t have to pretend anymore. You don’t have to be scared.’ He knew. He understood. He saw through her story. It felt like she wasn’t even wearing a mask, as if he was talking to her, knowing who she really is. As if he could see all of her doubts and fears, and with his words he was reassuring her and asking her to be as brave about her feelings for him as she was as Ladybug when fighting akumas. She wasn’t going to be afraid anymore. She would tell him. No, words had always failed her with him; she would show him.

“M’La…” Adrien didn’t get the chance to say anymore. He wasn’t able to tell her that he wore a mask, too. Nor could he speak the true name of the girl standing before him. His mouth was otherwise occupied…

Ladybug had grabbed Adrien by the collar of his t-shirt and smashed her mouth against his. It took him a moment to register exactly what was happening and then to determine that it was not part of his fantasy, but that it was actually happening...FOR REAL! Ladybug’s lips were touching his lips! His arms reached out awkwardly into space, thrashing for something to hold onto as his whole world turned upside down. He felt the pressure on his lips decrease. She was pulling away. No, no! He wrapped his arms around her. If he was falling, then she would be the one to steady him, or else they would fall together. He kissed her back, tilting his head to adjust the angle so their lips now comfortably fit together.

Ladybug moaned against his mouth, as she realized that he wanted this, too. He wanted her as much as she wanted him. It felt right. It felt good. She tilted her head the other way and then back again. This was so new, so wonderful! She wanted more! She opened her mouth and felt him respond in kind. Their tongues tangled. He tasted sweet. She ran her hands through his hair and she felt his hands on her back, pressing their bodies closely. The need for air shortened their kiss, but she could not stop herself completely. She pecked his lips and then again. Then, she traced a line of kisses across his jawline, down his neck, lingering momentarily to nip and suck in one particular spot; and then back up the other side finishing at his lips once again. She launched another entanglement of
their tongues, which was cut short by...

“Helloooo,” Chloe called from inside Ladybug’s ear. “What is going on? Why is no one talking? And, what is that smacking sound?”

At the sound of Chloe’s voice, Ladybug broke her embrace of her crush. She stepped back to see the amazed boy before her. Her hand covered her own mouth, surprised at what she had just done.

“I-I have to go n-now,” she stuttered as she turned and ran to the window. Adrien called after her to wait, to stop, but she didn’t listen. She leapt up to the window sill, pushed open the ajar window and cast her yo-yo outside, resulting in a red blur that faded to black as the night surrounded her.

Adrien considered transforming and chasing after her, but his legs felt too weak to move and he had no voice to call for his kwami. What the hell had just happened? His daydream had come true. Ladybug had kissed him and not just a peck on the cheek, no. A full on kiss, no kisses, on the mouth with tongue!!! His body crumpled beneath him and he found himself lying on the floor looking at the ceiling. A moment later Plagg came into view as the little kwami hovered over him.

“I can die a happy man now,” Adrien whispered breathlessly with a goofy smile on his face.

“Before you do, go get me some more cheese. Your mini fridge is empty,” the little god demanded.

Adrien laid there for a long while, replaying in his mind what happened. The last minute or so of her visit was like out of a dream, completely disconnected from what had happened before that moment.

“Marinette is Ladybug. She said she loves Chat Noir, yet I know she loves Chloe, and then she kissed me! Does she love me?” Adrien asked. “Plagg, I’m so confused! I just...I just don’t understand!” he moaned as he laid spread eagle on the floor.

“Don’t feel bad, kid. Life is full of mysteries. That’s why I love cheese, nothing mysterious there. Speaking of which...”

“Plagg!” Adrien cried, “I need help!”

“Look, kid, I’m the god of bad luck and destruction. If you want a kwami that gives good advice about love then you should trade in your ring for a pair of earrings.” Plagg tapped his chin with his little paw, “Actually, given Ladybug’s behavior I’m starting to doubt Tikki’s abilities.”

“So...what should I do?” Adrien asked with equal parts hope and uncertainty.

Plagg shrugged. “Turnabout is fair play. Go to her bedroom as Chat Noir, tell her you don’t love her, and then kiss her senseless.”

“How is that going to help anything?”

“It won’t, but it’d be really funny!” the little god chuckled.

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“Marinette!” Chloe called. She ran over to where the fake superhero landed from the fence line above. “I couldn’t hear you near the end. Something must have happened with the earpiece. All I could hear were these strange pop and smack sounds.”

“Oh! That’s too bad...where’s the car?” she asked as she pulled the coat out of Chloe’s hands and threw it on to cover her super suit.
“Just down the street. Come on!”

Marinette ran as fast as she could and Chloe followed a little bit slower due to her heels. When they were safe in Chloe’s town car and on their way to drop off Marinette at her house, Chloe asked excitedly for details.

“It went fine! (Heh-heh.) Adrien got the message alright. No doubt about it. (Hee-hee.) I made it very clear how Ladybug really feels about him, yes sir.” Marinette explained.

“Yep, Adrien would have to be an idiot to not know that Ladybug loves him after that kiss!” she thought. Her lips felt swollen from his touch. Marinette sank back into the leather of the seat to rest her head and gripped the arm rest to steady herself.

“Oooh, good, good!” Chloe squealed. “Now the fun part: console him and make him realize how perfect we are for each other!”

“Good luck,” Marinette said under her breath. Neither Chloe nor her Marinette-self had a chance in hell at capturing Adrien’s heart now. It definitely belonged to Ladybug. All of those beautiful words and that kiss proved it.

“Don’t worry! You can try, too,” Chloe waved a hand dismissively in Marinette’s direction, but then something came to mind. “You weren’t too harsh were you? I mean, you don’t think he’ll get akumatized, do you?”

“No, no, I don’t think so. When I left he was smiling, so…”

“Smiling? Really?” Chloe frowned.

“Yeah...uh...I think he was happy to, um, know how Ladybug feels about him. You know, he probably feels relieved to have it out in the open and settled,” Marinette smiled weakly.

Chloe nodded and thankfully didn’t question her. She jabbered on about her plans to win Adrien, while Marinette lazed in the car, enjoying a mental replay of her last few moments with Adrien. When the car pulled up to the bakery, Marinette collected her bag and stepped outside. Before the car drove off, Chloe rolled down the window.

“Don’t forget to bring me my costume and coat tomorrow,” she instructed.

Marinette gave a nod in agreement. She shifted her weight back and forth between her feet as she waited for the blonde to leave. She felt anxious now as panic was rapidly replacing the bliss she had previously felt.

“I guess tomorrow we’ll be rivals again,” Chloe noted. “Although civil rivals, right?”

Marinette nodded again. She didn’t trust herself to speak.

“All right then,” Chloe paused for a moment. She looked to be debating with herself about what to say next. Marinette wished she would just hurry up. “It wasn’t completely awful partnering with you,” Chloe admitted. “I...I suppose if you want to…”

“Okay, gotta go!” Marinette sprinted to the side door that led directly to the personal living quarters of her family. She gave a wave over her shoulder, not realizing that she had cut off her partner mid-sentence.

Chloe sat back in her seat and rolled the window up. Her bottom lip protruded slightly as her brow
creased. Then realizing the car was not moving, she bellowed to her driver.

“What are you waiting for? DRIVE!”

Looking out of one of the small window panes of the building’s door, Marinette saw Chloe’s car drive away. She shook off the trench coat and de-transformed, before heading upstairs to find her parents in the lounge watching television. After exchanging greetings and pleasantries, the raven-haired girl claimed fatigue and hurried up to her room with the supposed intention of going to sleep. When the door to her bedroom hatch had been securely closed, she let out a whine to her kwami.

“TIKKI! What am I going to do?”

Tikki shrugged.

“Please, you have to help me!” she begged. “I’m sorry I didn’t listen to you. I’m sorry I told you not to say another word about it. I was wrong! I really messed up!”

“I forgive you, Marinette!” Tikki cried, hugging her chosen by the neck.

“But, what am I going to do? After that kiss Adrien probably thinks that I, I mean Ladybug, like him.”

“You do like him!”

“I know! But, now Adrien has even more reason to try to save me during an akuma attack. He could get hurt! He could die again! I really don’t think I can watch him die again, Tikki.” Tears began to well in her eyes at the thought. Tikki gave her a comforting pat on the shoulder.

“Ohhh!” Marinette moaned as she flopped onto the chaise lounge. “I am so stupid to have kissed him! There’s no way I have any shot at being with him as Marinette! I’ve made him fall even deeper in love with Ladybug. And I can’t be with him as Ladybug, because then Chloe will figure out my identity and Adrien will risk his life for me!”

“I think you’re forgetting someone in all of this…”

Marinette lifted her head off of the chaise to ask, “Who?”

“Adrien.” Tikki responded, crossing her arms. “You need to do what’s right by Adrien.”

“Meaning?”

“You have to come clean and fess up that you disguised yourself as Ladybug, went over to his house to try to dissuade him from loving you, I mean Ladybug, and then selfishly kissed him.”

“I can’t do that! He’ll hate me!”

“Marinette!”

“What if I visit him again as Ladybug and this time strongly tell him that the kiss was a mistake and that I don’t love him? That will keep him from risking himself for me, Chloe wouldn’t need to know, and it still leaves the door open for him to eventually fall in love with me, the Marinette-me.”

“If you weren’t able to tell him you don’t love him the first time, what makes you think you can do it a second time?” The wise kwami asked, but didn’t give the girl time to answer. “And, two wrongs don’t make a right. You need to come clean and tell the truth.”
“I know you’re right, Tikki,” Marinette sighed. “I just...I’m afraid I’ll lose Adrien. Even if I’ve completely ruined my chances with him in every possible scenario, I’d at least like to still be friends with him…”

“Adrien is a very kind, forgiving boy. I’m sure if you explain that you were doing what you thought was best, even though it turned out badly, that Adrien will forgive you.”

“You think?”

“Absolutely!” Tikki enthused. “The sooner you tell him, the better. It will only be worse the longer you wait. And, better he hears it from you rather than someone else…”

“Chloe!” Marinette realized she had armed her rival with very damaging ammunition that could be used against her. “Oh, Tikki! Will you help me figure out what to say to Adrien? I promise I’ll talk to him the moment I see him. I’ll even get up early and meet him first thing at school.”

“Of course, I’ll help!” Tikki flew over to the wall and grabbed one of Adrien’s pictures. Holding it up in front of her she said in a much lower voice “Hi Marinette!”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks very much to MJ for beta reading the chapter for me.
Thanks also to WilhelmAres who commented all the way back on Chapter 2, "I just want marinette to transform and seduce Adrien in front of Chloe." Great idea and spawned the whole cosplay plot line. ;)


Adrien finds out the truth...well at least some of it.

“Nino! I need your help!” Adrien called after his friend. He quickly ran from his car and up the steps of their school to join him.


Adrien considered that Nino may be closer to the truth than he realized, but he let it go for now.

“Remember that work friend I have that I confessed to?” Adrien whispered as they walked through the school’s front doors.

“Yeah...the one that told you she’s already in love with someone else. Right?”

“Yes, she told me there’s another boy. Well, I found out that actually, her crush isn’t a boy, but a girl.”

“Okay, so?” Nino shrugged just before leaning against the wall of the courtyard. His eyes looked past Adrien to see if a certain curvy, brunette was amongst the crowd of kids milling around before school started.

“You don’t find it odd that she lied about the gender of who she likes?” Adrien asked.

Not finding Alya, Nino turned his attention back to his friend. “Maybe she just didn’t want to deal with it. You know some dudes can get pretty hostile when being rejected, especially if they find out it’s for a girl.”

“I wasn’t hostile!” Adrien threw his hands up in surrender. “I was super understanding.”

“I know, man, but she probably didn’t know how you’d react. Anyway, that was weeks ago. Why you stressing now? Does it matter her crush is a girl?”

“No! Yes! I don’t know! That’s the problem, see yesterday I saw her and well, she told me again, specifically, that she doesn’t have feelings for me…”

“Oh, dude!” Nino shook his head. “Did you confess again?”

“No, um, wellll,” Adrien rubbed the back of his neck with his hand, “it doesn’t matter. Look, after she told me she doesn’t love me,” Adrien’s voice dropped to a whisper, “she kissed me!”

Nino chuckled and shook his head, “On man, you have the best luck! Even when a girl doesn’t like you, she still kisses you!”

“But it wasn’t just one kiss! It was kisses! With tongue! And look!” Adrien pulled the collar back
from his jacket to reveal...

“A hickey! The girl gave you a hickey? I don’t care what she said, she likes you, Dude.”

“How is that possible if she has a crush on a girl? I think they may even be dating!” Adrien’s arms flew up into the air.

“Um, you do know that people can be attracted to both guys and girls, don’t you?” Nino calmly asked crossing his arms.

“You think she’s bisexual?”

“Maybe,” Nino shrugged. “Or, she could be pan.”

“Pan?”

“Yeah, she could be attracted to people regardless of their sex or gender identity.”

“You think?”

“I have no idea, Dude!” Nino shook his head again. “Look, does it really matter what label you use? Looks like the girl is digging ya.” He pointed to the hickey.

“Yeah, but she likes this other girl, too.”

“Okay, so how do you feel about that? I mean, do you mind if she were to, say, date both of you at the same time?”

“Do people do that?” Adrien’s eyes grew wide in surprise.

“Have you been living under a rock? Oh, wait, I forgot you have. Yes, they do that! This is the 21st century! And, we are in Paris, the capital of l’amour. There are no rules! You might even be able to date both girls, depending on what they’re into.”

“No, no, no,” Adrien shook his head. “I have no interest in the other girl.” He had known Chloe forever. She felt like a sister to him and an annoying one at that.

“I hear ya, man. Alya’s enough for me and then some,” he smirked. “I wouldn’t want to juggle two girls, either.”

“So...what do I do?”

“I think you need to talk to this girl and find out what’s up. Ask her what she wants and tell her what you want.” Nino regarded his friend and clapped him on the shoulder. “Look, I know you really like this girl, but don’t compromise who you are and what you want to be with her. Be honest...with her and yourself.”

“Okay, okay, be honest. Talk to her.” Adrien repeated, trying to reassure himself.

Nino nodded and smiled. Once he felt sure Adrien was breathing again normally, he ventured to ask, “Now, about Marinette, what...”

“Adrikins!”

Nino groaned at the sight of the blonde diva making her way over to them. She had a way of making everything about her that left the normally calm and cool DJ completely agitated. Any other day
Adrien was very patient with her, but today...well, he looked like he might bite her head off.

“Chloe!” Adrien frowned and crossed his arms in front of his chest.

“How are you?” she asked with an unusual look of concern. “I wasn’t sure if you’d be coming to school today.”

“Why wouldn’t I?” he asked, narrowing his eyes at her.

“Oh, well I just thought…” Chloe bit her tongue. She couldn’t say that she thought he’d be too heartbroken to come to school today. She wasn’t supposed to know that Ladybug visited him last night. “You look like you might be coming down with a cold.” She pressed the back of her hand to his forehead.

Adrien dodged away quickly. “Save your concern, Chlo. I know what you did. I thought I made it clear to not meddle in my love life.”

"And, I thought I made it clear that as a friend, I can’t do that,” she insisted.

“So you admit it, then?” he asked, trying to keep his voice restrained. “You sent her to my house yesterday, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I did! And you should be thanking me. Don’t be mad at me that she rejected you.”

Nino’s eyebrows jumped up, realizing Chloe’s role in Adrien’s love predicament. A smirk spread across his face as he interjected.

“Oh! She didn’t reject him. She marked him!” Nino teased, pulling at Adrien’s collar. He was only too happy to burst the blonde diva’s bubble. “And for that he should thank you!”

“Nino!” Adrien hissed as he pulled his jacket back into place to cover up the bruise on his neck.

“Is that a...a hickey?”

“Shhh…” Adrien chided, looking around to see if anyone heard. Having hickeys didn’t exactly align with the perfect boy image his father had created for him. If his Gabriel Agreste got wind of this, Adrien would have quite a tall tale to tell to avoid punishment. Lucky for him his next photoshoot was a week away and hopefully by then it wouldn’t be noticeable.

“I’m going to kill her!” Chloe cried now realizing that the smacking sounds she heard was not static on her earpiece, but actual smacks made by lips kissing! She turned on her heel and as luck would have it at that exact moment Marinette came in through the school doors. The raven haired girl locked eyes with Adrien and gave him a small wave. He realized that she was coming over to him, but Chloe was heading straight toward her. She would get to her first. The reason hit him like a ton of bricks. Chloe knew. Chloe knew Marinette was Ladybug. And, he, well Nino technically, had just told Chloe that Maribug? Buginette? had given him a hickey! Oh no! No, no, no! Adrien ran at top speed to try to stop them. He could hear Nino calling after him, but he didn’t stop not until he got to them.

“How could you?” Chloe was saying.

“Hi Marinette!” Adrien puffed.

“How could I what?” Marinette asked, eying the blonde girl and not hearing the blonde boy.
“How could you be so early?” Adrien asked, trying to cover and doing a horrible job of it. “You’re usually late…(heh-heh).”

“You know exactly what you did!” Chloe leaned into Marinette’s space, pointing a finger at her nose. “You have to fix this! Tell him!”

Marinette gulped. She had practiced with Tikki. Now the time had come to tell the truth. She just didn’t think there’d be an audience. Chloe breathed heavily at her shoulder. She certainly wasn’t going anywhere. Nino had come up behind Adrien, not wishing to miss whatever lay in store. In fact, Marinette could feel the eyes of all the students gathered in the courtyard on her, eager to see how another confrontation between her and the school bully would play out.

“Um...Adrien…” Marinette said quietly. Tears started to form in her eyes. “God, this is so embarrassing!" she thought. "He’s going to hate me. We’ll never be friends again." Her hands absentmindedly squeezed the bag in her hand. The crinkling sound caught Chloe’s attention.

“Is that…?” Chloe pointed to the paper bag Marinette was holding in her hand, covered slightly by the trench coat she had looped over her arm. Marinette squeezed the bag protectively against her chest. Her eyes guiltily flicked to Adrien before returning their focus on Chloe.

“Um…” Marinette tried to get the words out. Why couldn’t she remember her practiced speech?

“If you don’t tell him, then I will…” Chloe threatened.

“Tell him what?” Nino asked.

“It doesn’t matter,” Adrien shook his hands in front of him. “You don’t have to tell me anything! Really!”

“God, is Chloe forcing Marinette to tell me that she’s Ladybug and here of all places? Everyone will find out!” Adrien started to panic. He hopped on the balls of his feet, unable to contain his anxiety.

“Um…”

“Fine, I’ll do it myself.” Chloe snatched the bag out of Marinette’s hands. “Adrien, the truth is…”

“No!” Marinette cried and she grabbed for the bag, but Chloe was unwilling to let go. She needed that bag. It held the proof to convince Adrien of the truth. The paper bags stocked by Tom and Sabine’s bakery could bear the weight of a dozen large rolls of crispy, French bread, but it was not able to withstand the impromptu tug of war the two girls were now playing with it. A large gash split the bag in two and out tumbled the evidence of Marinette’s deceit.

For a long moment they stood there transfixed, looking at the crumpled red and black costume lying motionless on the ground.

“I...I don’t understand,” Adrien choked out. Why would Ladybug have a costume? Her super suit was magic just like his. And, why would she bring it to school? And, how did Chloe know about it?

“Adrien,” Chloe said calmly, trying to get his attention. “The truth is...it wasn’t Ladybug that visited you last night…”

“LADYBUG?!” Nino cried. “Dude!”
Chloe frowned at the interrupting boy. With a flick of her ponytail, she continued. “No, it was…”

Marinette felt her doom and all she could hear in her head was Tikki’s words.

“You need to do what’s right by Adrien. Tell him. Better he hears it from you rather than someone else.”

“...me.”

Adrien blinked. Both girls had admitted to dressing up as Ladybug.

Marinette stared at Chloe. “Did she just take the blame for me?”

Chloe stared back at Marinette. “Idiot! She picks this moment to speak?”

Nino started to laugh. “No offense, dudettes, but I don’t think both of you can fit into that costume. So, which one of you kissed my boy here?” He wiggled his eyebrows, while crossing his fingers, hoping the answer would be a certain raven haired, fashion designer.

“Me.” Marinette squeaked. She cleared her throat and looked Adrien in the eye. “It was me. I dressed up as Ladybug. I visited you last night. I...I was the one that kissed you.”

“YESSS!”

Chloe scowled at the exuberant DJ, who was jumping up and down, fist pumping in the air. Nino had completely missed the fact that his friend looked heartbroken. Marinette did not miss it. A wave of emotions flickered over Adrien’s face. At first his mouth formed a perfect “o”, then he caught Marinette’s eye and blushed, but finally and most upsettingly, he looked away, unable to look at her. She had hurt him, badly.

“Adrien, I’m so sorry…”

“So, you’re not really her...are you?” he choked out, still looking away from her.

“You actually thought Marinette is Ladybug?” Chloe chortled. “Ridiculous!”

Marinette’s cheeks felt like they were on fire. Through watery eyes she saw Adrien finally look at her with disappointment. Chloe’s laughter echoed through her ears. She could see the other kids whispering and pointing at her. The Ladybug mask lay at her feet, a stark reminder that “Marinette” was not as perfect as “Ladybug”. She wasn’t as graceful. She wasn’t as brave. She wasn’t as strong. She just wasn’t...

“I’m sorry,” she repeated, before turning on her heel and running all the way home. The calls of her name did nothing to dissuade her. She ran and ran until she was safely in her room with the door shut and the lights off, where she promptly flopped onto her bed. Tears cascaded down her cheeks, dampening her pillow. Tikki flew out from her hiding spot in Marinette’s purse. She silently nestled into her chosen’s neck, trying her best to comfort her.

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Adrien watched the girl he thought was Ladybug, no the girl he wanted to be Ladybug, run away in tears. He fought the urge to run after her. He needed to deal with the girl standing before him first.

“Chloe, please explain!” he demanded.

Chloe laughed nervously. “We were only trying to help. You see we thought that if Ladybug
rejected you that you’d give up your crush on her.”

“So, you made Marinette dress up as her?” Nino asked. “Dude!”

“I didn’t make Marinette do anything!” Chloe exclaimed. “She willingly volunteered. Why does everyone think I’m a bad influence?”

“Because you are,” Nino said under his breath, but Chloe heard him nevertheless.

“That’s not fair! I was trying to help Adrien,” Chloe cried. Tears were starting to form in her eyes now. She hated that feeling of weakness growing inside of her. She blinked them back.

“You...you think it’s cute, don’t you?” she pointedly asked Nino. She held her clasped hands to the side of her face and fluttered her eyelashes for effect. “Aww...he has a crush on Ladybug.” She suddenly dropped the act and shouted, “Well it’s NOT cute! It’s unhealthy!”

“You don’t get to decide that for him!” Nino shouted back. “He can make his own decisions and his own mistakes.”

“No, he can’t! Not if it gets him killed or hurt! He died for her!”

Nino had already chastised Adrien for interfering in the akuma battle and getting himself killed. But that was then and this now, and right now his best bro needed back up.

“And, she brought him back because she’s a superhero, dude. And, if anyone’s hurt him, it’s not Ladybug. It’s you!”

At the accusation the dam broke. Tears spilled from Chloe’s eyes as her bottom lip trembled. Her face burned in shame. Nino was right. She had hurt Adrien.

“It wasn’t supposed to happen like this!” She stamped her foot out of frustration, although she felt frustrated at herself...and Marinette. “She wasn’t supposed to kiss him! That wasn’t part of the plan.”

“But the breaking of my heart part...that was?” Adrien asked softly; the hurt apparent in his voice.

“I’m sorry,” Adrien’s oldest friend choked out. “I’m sorry I hurt you. I was just trying to help...”

“By manipulating me? By lying to me?” Adrien asked, incredulously.

“I tried talking to you about it! You wouldn’t listen!”

“That still doesn’t give you the right to do what you did!”

“I know! I said I’m sorry!” Chloe repeated. “If you want to waste your time pining for Ladybug or even...sacrifice yourself for her, then I won’t stop you!”

Adrien regarded his friend. Those were real tears in her eyes, not the fake tears she uses to get her way. He pulled out his handkerchief from the inside pocket of his jacket and handed it to her.

“Thank you,” she said as she took it and then dabbed at her eyes. This was no doubt ruining her eye makeup. She could see that some of her mascara had rubbed off onto the hankey.

“Look I know you meant well and...logically you have a point. I shouldn’t pine for someone that doesn’t love me.”

“I suppose, you don’t know that she doesn’t,” she conceded. "I mean, it’s completely ridiculous to
think that Ladybug doesn’t have a significant other, because, well, she’s amazing!” Chloe gushed. “But technically you don’t know that she doesn’t love you, since you never confessed…”

“Yes, I did and no she doesn’t,” he sighed. “She doesn’t love me. There’s someone else.”

“Dude!” Nino breathed.

“Oh Adrikins! I’m so sorry!” Chloe tackled him in a hug. He staggered a bit at the sudden force of her embrace to prevent them both from falling over.

“Thanks, Chlo!” He rasped.

“I’m not going to say, ‘I told you so,’” she said, wagging a finger at him.

“But you will,” he thought.

“But, I did tell you so!” Chloe flicked her ponytail in satisfaction. “Maybe next time, you’ll listen to me!”

“There won’t be a next time, will there? Because you’re going to stay out of my love life, right Chlo?”

Chloe hummed noncommittally, “We’ll see...maybe I know of the perfect girl for you!”

“Chloe!”

The bell rang, signalling the five minute warning before class would start.

“Come along, Adrikins!” Chloe called over her shoulder. “You don’t want to be late!”

“Bro! I can’t believe you let her off the hook!” Nino shook his head in dismay.

“Don’t worry. I haven’t. She’ll be doing quite a few favors for me in the foreseeable future,” he said as he watched the blonde walk away. “Come on!” He started walking toward the classroom.

“What about Marinette? It’s not fair to be mad at her and forgive Chloe,” Nino reasoned.

“Hey, guys!” Alya shouted as she jogged over toward them. “What’s up?”

“Woman!” Nino cried. “Where have you been? You picked one hell of a morning to run late!”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again to MJ for beta reading this chapter.
I’m on vacation the next two weeks, so I won't be posting then. I plan on writing, though, so hopefully I'll return home with this fanfic done. Another 2-3 chapters left, I think!
Buyer's Remorse

Chapter Summary

Adrien decides he has to get to the bottom of things the only way he knows how.

Chapter Notes

MariChat! MariChat! MariChat! (oops, sorry, I had to get that out.)

My struggle with this chapter initially was how upset do I make Adrien at Marinette? After seeing TroubleMaker I decided that he's not upset, so much as confused. Once he finds out the truth, he's a bit flattered. Aaand, he's going to have some fun with it. This is just the beginning. More fun and references to TroubleMaker to come.

Thanks to Fishystar from whom I borrowed a line from one of our chat sessions. Chat says it to Mari as advice on what to do, but honestly it's good advice for anyone. I admire Fishystar for being so brave.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Okay, smart guy,” Alya replied with her hands on her hips, “what’d I miss?”

Nino barely said two words before Alya interrupted him. Something bright red caught her eye. She walked a few paces and picked up the mask from the ground.

“OH NO!!! Please tell me I didn’t miss Ladybug’s REVEAL, did I!?!”

Adrien guffawed. If anything, Ladybug’s identity was even more securely hidden than before this morning’s events. Nino giggled as well, which only served to make Alya angry at being the last one to know something. Nino began his story again and this time Alya didn’t interrupt. So enraptured by the tale she did not realize that she had handed the mask over to Adrien. He held it reverently, staring at it, as he followed his friends down the hall to their classroom. He had no idea what they were saying, too lost in his own thoughts.

Out of habit he sat at his desk. His hands placed his notebook, pencil, and text book on the table in front of him in their usual spot. He answered to his name being called for roll just like always, but he wasn’t aware of doing any of these things. His eyes were glued to the red and black spotted mask sitting on his desk before him.

“Ladybug’s mask ,” he thought. “No! Chloe’s mask. Chloe’s mask from her fake cosplay costume. No, no! That’s not right either. It’s Marinette’s mask. The mask that Marinette wore to impersonate Ladybug. The mask she wore when she...when she kissed me!”

Adrien swallowed hard and ran a hand through his hair as he remembered that kiss. It was his first kiss, or at least the first kiss he could remember. He had supposedly kissed Ladybug when she saved him from being under the influence of the akuma, Dark Cupid, but he didn’t remember that kiss. He
would forever remember this one. The softness of her lips, the sweet taste of her tongue, the warmth of her body, the feeling of her hands in his hair, and the delicious moan that escaped her mouth, sending electricity through his body. He suddenly had a very strong urge to see Marinette. His knee bounced excitedly under the table as he drummed his fingers on top of it.

“Calm down!” he chastised himself. “You don’t even know if she likes you or not.”

Although, Chloe had said that the kiss was not part of the plan. Marinette wasn’t supposed to have done that. So why did she? If the purpose of visiting him was to convince him that Ladybug didn’t have feelings for him, then kissing him like that certainly worked against her efforts. So, doesn’t that logically mean that she kissed him because she wanted to kiss him?

“Which must mean she likes me!” Adrien thought, a smile pulling at the corners of his mouth. “But…do I like her?” he asked himself.

In no uncertain terms the kiss was phenomenal, like out of a dream, but at the time Adrien thought he was kissing love of his life, Ladybug, and not friend and classmate, Marinette. How would it be kissing Marinette knowing it was Marinette? Did he even want to find out? Yes, his heart sang out. Yes, he did!

Adrien sighed dejectedly as he continued to stare at that mask. That damn mask had ruined everything! If only it didn’t exist! If only Marinette really was Ladybug, then everything would be…still complicated as hell, but at least it would remove one problem. At least he would know who he loved. Because the fact still remained, despite his kiss with Marinette and despite Ladybug’s own rejection of him, he loved Ladybug.

He had accepted Ladybug’s rejection of him. He respected her feelings of only friendship toward him. He would not press his suit. Yet, try as he might he could not stop loving her. He assumed he would always love her. It would be a romantic, idealistic, unrequited love. He would write her love poems that she would never read. Sing her love songs that she would never hear. Pick her flowers she would never smell.

Only now with the prospect of someone who might actually want to read his poems, hear his songs, and smell his flowers did he realize how unbelievably wasteful and pathetic it was to continue to moon over Ladybug. He now realized that Marinette and Chloe were right, he needed to give up his crush. He sighed again. Chloe would relish knowing that her plan had actually worked. He reached out and picked the mask up off of the table. His thumb slowly brushed over it, feeling the softness of the material, before he placed it inside of his messenger bag.

His thoughts returned to Marinette and what to do. She had run away crying. Did she cry because he knew the truth or because Chloe did? Or both? Was she ashamed that she kissed him? Did she think Chloe was mad at her? Actually, Chloe definitely was mad at Marinette for kissing him. He moaned as he let his head fall into his hands. He worried that he had inadvertently come between them and ruined their new romance. He had sunk the Chlonette ‘ship, hadn’t he?

Or, maybe there’s a new ship? The Chlodrienette? Adrien shuddered. He wanted to be open minded about it, but…no. He didn’t have feelings for Chloe. Never did, never would, no.

Okay, so maybe Marinette wanted to date both of them…would that work? Again, Adrien’s heart sang out “no”. Firstly, Chloe was not one to share anything. Secondly, he found that he really did not want to share either. Maybe it was rather old fashioned but he had this notion of the knight and his lady. He had no qualms about his lady kicking ass and saving the day, even saving him, but in his mind he always pictured himself with one very special girl. And, he selfishly wanted to be the only one for her.
Adrien sighed again. He had never felt so mixed up about anything before now.

“I think you need to talk to this girl and find out what’s up. Ask her what she wants and tell her what you want.” He heard Nino’s voice repeat inside his head.

“Yes, that’s what I need to do,” he decided. “I need to talk to Marinette.” He wasn’t getting anywhere talking to himself. He needed to find out why she had done what she did and if she was sorry. God, he hoped she was sorry. And, he needed to know what she wanted from him. And he needed to tell her what he wanted, too. Because at the end of the day what Adrien wanted was his friend back. He hated this feeling of uncertainty and disappointment. Again, he felt a surge within his heart to see Marinette.

Adrien bit his lip with worry. She hadn’t exactly been honest with him recently. Could he really trust that she would tell him the truth? He was pretty sure she had lied about not being jealous about Chloe and him. He was definitely sure she had lied about her identity, loving Chat Noir, and probably even her feelings for him. Marinette hated liars, but she had done an awful lot of lying to Adrien. But, not to Chat Noir. He realized that she had talked very openly about her crush to him on two occasions. Maybe, just maybe she’d talk to Chat about her troubles now and he’d actually find out what was going on inside that head of hers.

At the sound of the bell signaling the 10-minute break between classes, Adrien stood up and looped his messenger bag over his shoulder.

“Where ya goin’, bro?” Nino asked.

“I gotta see a girl about a mask,” he replied. He walked up to his teacher, passed her a note from his jacket pocket and left the classroom.

Adrien opened his locker with the intention of storing his bag, but before doing so, he opened the bag to let his kwami out. The surprised boy paused at the sight before him. There was Plagg wiggling his hips and spinning while wearing the mask.

“What are you doing?” Adrien hissed.

“Dressing up as Ladybug. What? Everyone’s doing it,” the kwami shrugged. “You wanna try?” he asked as he shook the mask teasingly at his chosen.

“No thanks, I got my own mask. Come on!” Adrien opened his jacket. Plagg dropped the mask, leaving it in the bag before flying out of it and inside one of Adrien’s jacket pockets. The blonde boy put away his bag and closed his locker. He hurried out of the room and down the hall.

“I see you used one of the fake notes I made for you. I thought you said you’d only use those for emergencies.” The kwami’s voice sounded muffled, but Adrien could still hear the tone of superiority crystal clear.

Adrien slipped out of the side door of the school. “This is an emergency,” he whispered. He needed to see Marinette or else he’d go crazy. The alleyway was empty, so Adrien opened his jacket and Plagg zipped out.

“I don’t see any akumas! So, what kind of emergency?” the kwami asked innocently. “A loooove emergency?” he sing-songed.

“I told you before, Marinette is just a friend,” Adrien insisted.

Plagg rolled his eyes. “She didn’t seem like just a friend last night when you were sucking on her
“I thought she was Ladybug!” Adrien argued.

“Idiot!” Plagg mumbled.

“You thought so, too!” Adrien reminded him. “So I’m not the only idiot!”

“I didn’t call you an idiot for thinking Marinette is Ladybug,” Plagg clarified, “I called you an idiot for thinking she’s ‘just a friend’.” The little kwami flapped his paws to make air quotes on the last words to indicate their ridiculousness.

“You’re right. At this point I don’t even know if we’re friends anymore, but I’m going to find out.” Adrien raised his hand in the air, “Plagg! Claws out!”

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With a soft thump Chat Noir landed on Marinette’s balcony. He leaned over the window hatch and peered inside. He could see her lying on her side on the bed. Her face buried in her pillows. The screen of her tablet flickered although the playback had been stopped. Chat tapped lightly on the glass. After a moment, he saw her look up in surprise and then as recognition set in she hesitated, but then with a sigh she opened the hatch to him. When she flopped back onto the bed, he took it as an invitation to come in, since she wasn’t coming out.

“Princess?” he asked as he lowered himself carefully onto the bed so that his boots dangled off of the edge so as not to come into contact with the duvet. “Are you sick?” He noted the bed was covered in balled up, used tissues, no doubt from drying her eyes rather than wiping her nose. Still it was better to play dumb.

“No!” Marinette croaked. “I wish! Then, I wouldn’t have to go to school! I can never show my face there again.”

Chat frowned. That seemed overly dramatic even for him. “It can’t be that bad! What happened?”

“I messed up!” she shook her head, making her raven pigtails sway back and forth. “I hurt my crush and I made an absolute ass out of myself.”

“I’m sure if you apologize, then your crush will forgive you.”

“I dunno…” Marinette blew her nose.

“Sure, she will. I mean, she likes you, too, so…”

“She?” Marinette asked puzzled. “What’d ya mean, ‘she’? My crush is a he. Have you even been listening to me? Or, have you gotten me confused with another one of your damsels in distress?”

Chat blinked. He could feel the heat rising up his neck and onto his cheeks.

“Chat Noir!” Marinette waved a hand in front of his face. “You’re not listening, are you?”

“This whole time your crush has been a he? I mean a boy? Your crush is a boy?” the superhero squeaked.

“Yeah!” Marinette’s eyes narrowed. “Who’d you think my crush is? And, what are you doing here anyway? There’s no akuma…”
“I know,” he swallowed. He had to think quickly. “It’s just sometimes I stake out your school because there’ve been so many akuma attacks there. And, I just happened to see you leave there this morning and you looked upset. So, I just thought,” he shrugged, “that, um, since all seemed to be quiet I might check in on you. You looked like…you could use a friend?”

“Oh, thanks,” she smiled shyly. “That’s kind of you.” She blew her nose. “I could use some company. I was trying to distract myself by watching my favorite show.” She indicated the tablet.

“Didn’t work?” he asked, noting that it was an episode of *Shugo Chara*.

She shook her head no. “I couldn’t read the subtitles through my tears. Plus, it’s the show my crush and I’ve been watching together, so it just reminds me of him.”

That was the confirmation then. Chloe hated *Shugo Chara*. He, or rather his Adrien-self, was definitely Marinette’s crush. They had discussed it several times and even spent all of lunch yesterday watching episodes in her family’s living room downstairs. How had he misread all of the signs? How had he possibly thought her crush was on Chloe when it had been on him the whole time? His mind was spinning, reassessing every conversation, every compliment, every look shared between him and the girl before him.

“CHAT?” Marinette said. “You keep spacing out. What’s wrong?”

“I’m sorry, Princess,” Chat replied, shaking his head. “You have my undivided attention. Tell me what happened with your crush.”

The sad girl looked down at her hands as she twisted the blanket. She took a deep breath and then blurted, “I…I kissed him!” She flopped back onto the bed and covered her face with a pillow.

“Okaaay,” Chat replied, feigning ignorance. “I take it he didn’t want you to? He didn’t like it?”

“Oh, no!” the embarrassed girl cried removing the pillow momentarily, so she could talk. “He liked it… a lot. He totally kissed me back!”

“That’s good isn’t it? Maybe he likes you back?” Honestly, this was a dangerous road for Chat to go down, since he wasn’t entirely sure about his feelings for her. But seeing her so upset made him want to comfort her and reassure her. He also felt pretty curious about what it would be like to kiss her again.

“No, no, no! You don’t understand!” Marinette sat upright and slammed the bed with her fist. “He didn’t know he was kissing *me*!”

“He was blindfolded?” Chat again played dumb.

“Not exactly. I was wearing a disguise.”

“Oh! Like at a costume party?”

“No, I, um…”

Chat waited patiently for her to elaborate.

Marinette bit her lip. “You can’t laugh,” she demanded. “If I tell you, then no laughing at me. Promise?”

“Chat’s honor,” he replied with his left hand covering his heart and his right hand up to swear the
Marinette paused. She looked to be trying to decide if she could trust him or not. “I dressed up as his crush…Ladybug.” Marinette winced, bracing herself for the onslaught of laughter and teasing she knew was coming. When she heard nothing, she ventured to open one eye. She saw Chat sitting, listening, waiting. His ears laid flat on his head and his eyes were downcast.


“I was trying to help him! He’s so in love with her that at the last akuma battle he pushed her out of the way and died for her!”

“A very noble sacrifice!”

“How can you say that?” Marinette asked outraged.

“I’ve done it myself, three or four times…”

“Oh, right… I forgot. I’m sorry,” she whispered.

“It was four times,” Marinette thought. “Four times Chat’s died for me. I wonder if he has nine lives like the saying goes.” Tears started to well up in her eyes. She had already cried quite a bit this morning, but the thought of Chat’s sacrifices for her brought them back again.

Chat nodded. “I can understand that you don’t want your friend to die,” he comforted as he placed a clawed hand on her shoulder, “but surely there must have been a better way than this?”

“I tried talking to him, but he’s very stubborn,” she replied dabbing her eyes with a fresh tissue. “Shouldn’t he be the one to decide what or who’s worth dying for?”

“No! I mean, well, when you put it like that, I suppose, but seeing him die…it was awful! I felt so helpless. It never should have happened! I shouldn’t have let it happen.”

“I don’t think there was anything you could’ve done, Princess,” Chat noted as he rubbed her back between her shoulder blades. He had never seen her cry before today and he hated it.

“I just thought that if Ladybug told him that she doesn’t love him back that he’d fall out of love with her and then he wouldn’t put his life at risk.”

“I see,” Chat soothed. “But, then why did you kiss him if you were trying to reject him?” That was the crux of their predicament. He held his breath as he waited for her answer.

“I didn’t mean to kiss him!” Marinette cried, again attacking the bed with her fists. “He just said all of these beautiful things and he has that face…that gorgeous face that makes my brain ooze out of my ear so that I can’t function around him.”

“That must be some face!” Chat guffawed. “So that’s why you like him, huh? He’s just so handsome?” There was a trace of hurt and disappointment in his voice.

“No! I don’t like him because of how he looks. But, I’m not blind. I can’t help but be affected by it. Especially his eyes. He has such expressive eyes…”

“Okaay, so then why do you like him?”

“He always thinks the best of people even when they disappoint him. He forgives people so easily.
He’s kind almost to a fault,” Marinette smiled to herself. “We had a misunderstanding when we first met. I accused him of playing a trick on me when actually he was trying to prevent it from happening. I was awful to him. Most people would’ve just written me off. Why bother helping someone who isn’t even grateful? But not him, he helped despite me getting mad at him and then sought me out to explain and make friends.”

“He sounds like a nice guy,” Chat smiled, happy to know that she thought so highly of him. But, now he had to ask a tough question. “Now, tell me truthfully was his safety and well-being the only reason you meddled in his love life or did you have ulterior motives?”

Marinette looked down guiltily. “I had ulterior motives,” she admitted. “I was hoping that, well, if Ladybug was out of the way, then maybe…”

“Maybe you’d have a shot?” he asked.

She nodded as tears once again flooded her eyes. “I know it was selfish and stupid. I mean the idea that Adrien Agreste, famous supermodel, would feel that way about me,” she shook her head mournfully. “It’s ridiculous!”

Chat frowned, “Why do you say that? Has he made you feel badly about yourself?”

“No! Of course not. It’s just I’m so… ordinary and the girl he likes is a superhero! How could I ever have a chance?”

Chat crossed his arms as he regarded his friend. “I already told you the last time I was here why you’re a great person, Marinette. Or, have you forgotten?”

“No,” she replied quietly. “I haven’t, but…”

“You do realize that Ladybug’s a normal person just like you and me?”

“Well, like you, sure. You’re a superhero, too.”

“We aren’t always superheroes. We take the masks off sometimes. I mean, not very often, because it’s really cool having superpowers, but you know, every now and then we do. Just to, ya know, remember what’s it’s like to be ordinary and average like you little people.” He poked her with his claw as he needled her with his words.

“No, seriously, Ladybug is a normal girl most of the time. Only when there’s an akuma does she have her superpowers. Otherwise she’s the same as you,” Chat noted. “I’ll tell you a secret,” he leaned down and whispered low, “she even has flaws! I know! I know! It’s shocking! But, she does.”

“What flaws? Ladybug doesn’t have any flaws!” Marinette asked with her hands on her hips. Chat felt bemused that she was offended on behalf of Ladybug.

“Oh yes she does!” Chat insisted. “Trust me, I know; I’ve seen them first hand. She can be stubborn! One time, Chloe Bourgeois, the mayor’s daughter, tried to tell her where the akuma was hiding and Ladybug wouldn’t listen simply because she doesn’t like Chloe.”

“Well, not many people like Chl—”

“And, Ladybug acts rashly sometimes. One time she jumped straight into the mouth of a giant Tyrannosaurus Rex. I thought she’d been eaten!”
“But, that was to stop an akuma…”

“And on occasion, she doubts herself. I know, you wouldn’t think that superheroes have fears, but we do. Sometimes even we get scared. But you know what? She doesn’t let that fear stop her and when she makes a mistake she always takes responsibility and apologizes…even to Chloe Bourgeois.”

“Oh…”

“So, if Ladybug can do it. Then so can you, Marinette! Because you two are more alike than you realize. You should apologize to your crush. And,” Chat hesitated for a moment before continuing, “I think you should tell him how you feel about him. At least then you’ll know how he feels about you and you can then deal with your feelings.”

“But, what if he rejects me?” her eyes lowered mournfully.

“It’s a possibility. I got rejected. And you know what?” He lifted her chin with one gloved finger to meet his eyes. “The world didn’t end. I’m still here. And, I’m still friends with Ladybug. So even if he rejects you, does it have to mean the end of the world? Does it have to be the end of your friendship?” Chat held his breath.

“No,” she decided. “Even if he rejects me, I still want to be Adrien’s friend. If he’ll forgive me, that is.”

“I’m sure he will,” Chat smiled broadly. “I’m sure he can appreciate that even though you went about it the wrong way you were trying to help him. And, he might even feel flattered that you went to such lengths. I think Adrien’s lucky to have a friend like you.”

“Thanks, Chat. I hope you’re right.”

“Now, how about you get us a little snack and we watch Shugo Chara?” he asked picking up her tablet. “If you can’t read the subtitles then I’ll read them out loud to you. I’ll even do accents. ‘Posh’ for pretty boy Tadase, ‘Smooth Operator’ for our favorite cat, Ikuto,” he gave her a wink, “and ‘Cool and Spicy’ for our heroine. What’d you say?” he asked settling back on the bed. “Oooh…this is comfy!”

“No damsel to rescue?” Marinette’s hands landed on her hips as a smile played on her face. He looked so damn comfortable with one hand behind his head and his legs crossed at the ankles.

“There’s nowhere else I’d rather be, no damsel I’d rather be with…if you’ll have me, Princess?”

Marinette’s face softened, “I suppose so.” She settled herself beside him and picked up her tablet. She was about to push play when he whispered.

“Snacks, Princess! We need snacks!”

Marinette hauled herself up with a sigh and climbed down the stairs. Chat called after her.

“I like the butter croissants best! And, the strawberry macarons! And, those little cookies with the jam in the center…”

The hatch door slammed shut as she left. He settled back against the pillows, smiling happily to himself as he looked out the hatch window above him. He could see nothing, but blue skies.
The good news: I am back from my vacation. I went to Paris among other places and tried Camembert for the first time and yeah, it's stinky, and I prefer brie. I'm finally over my jet lag and I have Chapter 18 done and Chapter 19 almost done.

The bad news: Chapter 19 is really long. The current draft is 8,654 words! Eek! So, I need some feedback. Is that too long for one chapter? Should I split it up into two or just cut half of it? It's an Adrientte chapter where they actually TALK! OMG! I know! Crazy! But they do, except not everything gets resolved, but there's some great moments aaaaand it got me over my writer's block when writing Adrientte (yay!), although arguably the scene slips in some Marichat, Ladrien, and LadyNoir. It's a thing. You have to read it to understand and you will, but I need to know if 8,000+ words for one chapter is too much. So let me know if it is, otherwise I'm going to assume it's ok and post it.

The really bad news: This fanfic is going to be at least 20 chapters. I'm going to try, really try, not to go past 22 chapters, because otherwise it's just going to turn into a multi-parter like These Kids Need Therapy and no one wants that. That one's still not done either. Ackk! I really admire those that can write a one-shot and I hope one day that will be me. Please! *begs higher power*

If you made it this far, then thanks for reading! :)
Hostile or Friendly Takeover?

Chapter Summary

While Marinette wallows she gets a visit from someone unexpected.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

At lunchtime Adrien found Alya and Nino on the steps of the school. The three talked about their missing friend. Adrien explained that he had tried to visit Marinette to talk to her but had not succeeded. He had been biding his time in the park across the street, thinking, ever since.

“Why didn’t you just come back to class, bro?” Nino asked.

“When you have a note excusing you from class for a photoshoot, and then you come back 10 minutes later, I think you’d be raising some suspicions,” Adrien replied dryly.

Nino nodded.

“Well, we’re going over there to see Marinette now,” Alya declared. “You wanna come? We’ll sneak you in!”

“No, thanks. It’s probably best if you two go without me. I need to talk to someone else anyway.” Adrien’s eyes followed a certain blonde diva as she appeared at the school’s exit. “I’ll catch up with you after lunch. I wanna hear how it goes.”

“Okay, man! Good luck!” The two waved goodbye before crossing the street, headed toward the bakery.

“Chloe!” Adrien called out.

“Adrikins!” Chloe beamed. “I’m so glad to see you! You’re not still mad at me, are you?” she pouted.

“Well…I can think of a few ways you can make it up to me. How about you buy me lunch to start with? Let’s go to your suite.”

“Oooh! Of course! Anything you want!” Chloe enthused as she hooked her arm through his.

“Good,” he thought. “I’m going to take her up on that. I have quite a few demands.”

“Sabrina!” Adrien called to Chloe’s best friend who was loitering behind them. “Won’t you join us?”

The red-head beamed brightly and hurried to join the two blondes. Chloe pouted for real now, but Adrien gave it no mind. If this was going to work, he’d need Sabrina’s buy in as well.

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“I don’t see why I have to go!” Chloe whined.
The bakery loomed large on the street before them. Pedestrians on their way home from work passed in front and behind the three as they stood on the street staring at the corner building. The bakery was now closed for the day, but bright lights streamed from the kitchen at the back where Marinette’s parents were likely cleaning up and preparing for tomorrow. The upper two levels appeared completely black in contrast. The smell of baking bread wafted around them.

“No one has seen or heard from Marinette all day. She wouldn’t even see Alya or Nino,” Adrien explained. “And she’s not answering her phone.”

“All the more reason, then! She’s not going to want to see me,” Chloe reasoned, crossing her arms.

“You two did this together. If she can talk with anyone about it, then it’s you. Plus, you two need to make up anyway after the fight you had this morning.”

“Who says I want to make up with her?”

“Chlo-ee! You said you’d do anything I want, so I want you to talk to Marinette, make her feel better, and make up with her. Now go!” Adrien pointed a finger at the bakery.

“You can do it, Chloe!” Sabrina encouraged. She handed Chloe the garment bag and the small shopping bag that she had fetched for this exact purpose.

“Of course, you can!” Adrien echoed with a smile and a pat on the back.

Chloe sighed and took the garment bag. She slowly walked over to the private entrance and rang the bell. After a moment the door opened and Adrien could see Chloe talking and shaking the bags in front of her, probably explaining their contents and for whom they were intended.

“What’re in the bags anyway?” Adrien asked the girl standing beside him.

“A guaranteed entrance fee,” Sabrina replied mysteriously.

They both continued to watch as Chloe plead her case to Marinette’s mother at the door. Adrien bit his lip with worry.

“This isn’t working…” His voice betrayed his nerves.

“Just give her a minute,” Sabrina assured. “Chloe doesn’t take no for an answer.”

Adrien nodded. That certainly was true. His eyes stayed fixed on the door, all the while he wished he could hear the conversation. After what felt like an hour the door slowly opened wider and Chloe was allowed inside.

“Shall we move on to Stage 2?” Sabrina asked.

Adrien slapped his hands together and then rubbed them furiously. “Yep! Let’s go!”

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“Marinette!” Mme. Cheng called as she led the blonde girl up the stairs to her daughter’s room. “You have a visitor!”

The hatched opened and Chloe found Marinette sitting on her chaise longue wrapped up in a pink blanket balancing her tablet on her knees. Balled up tissues were strewn about her.

“I’m not up to seeing anyone, Maman!”
“I think it’s time to get up, dear,” her mother responded. “You’ve been wallowing long enough!”

Sabine had already had a long talk with her daughter. She held her while she cried, dried her tears, and gave her some very sound advice followed by a cup of tea and two aspirins.

“You!” Marinette sat up straight at the sight of Chloe. “What do you want?”

“She comes in peace, dear,” Mme. Cheng interjected. “She even brought you a present.”

Chloe shook the garment and shopping bags in front of her.

“Now, I’ll just leave you two to talk,” the kindly woman said as she laid a plate of cookies on Marinette’s desk. After one look at Chloe’s gifts, Mme. Cheng decided that she was definitely cookie worthy.

After her mother departed Marinette asked crisply, “What do you want?” as her hands landed on her hips.

“Don’t you want to open your presents first?” Chloe dangled them out to her provocatively. Marinette simply shook her head. Chloe sighed and laid them down on her desk. No matter. Take ‘em or leave ‘em, she didn’t care.

“Give me my costume then and I’ll leave,” the blonde replied matter of factly.

“I don’t have it!” Marinette exclaimed. “And, I don’t want it! I never want to see it again! It was a stupid idea!”

“You must have it. You scooped it up off the ground before turning tail and running away. Now, what did you do with it?” Chloe set down her large purse on the floor and then started looking around Marinette’s bedroom. She peered under the desk, opened a closet and then a drawer.

Marinette came up behind her quickly and slammed the drawer of her bureau shut.

“I told you I don’t have it. Now go away!”

“Fine. I will,” Chloe replied, but she didn’t move. She eyed the other girl as she crossed her arms. “Some people are worried about you. Not me, of course. But you know, other people, and well, they’re too nice to force their way in, so I had to do it… just to check on you.”

Marinette glared at Chloe. And, Chloe glared right back, but she noted the other girl’s red rimmed, puffy eyes. Her hair fell messily around her face and her clothes were all wrinkled. She looked like hell.

“Well, I can see that you’re alive and not well, but at least alive. That’s good enough for me!” Chloe turned on her heel and picked up her purse.

“Wait!” Marinette called after her. “Why did you do it? Why did you try to take the blame for me? I can’t work it out. What’s the angle?”

“There’s no angle!” Chloe stamped her foot in anger. “I just wanted Adrien to know it wasn’t Ladybug that kissed him. It didn’t matter who he’s mad at. So, if you couldn’t do it, then I could.”

“Oh…that was really big of you, Chloe. You’re a good friend…to Adrien.”

“Yeah, well, not like he cares or anything.” Chloe sniffed, her nose jutting high into the air.

“What’d ya mean?” Marinette asked softly.
“I mean, Adrien has made it very clear that he doesn’t have feelings for me like that…you know, romantic ones. He says we’ll never happen. He thinks of me like a sister.”

“I’m sorry, Chloe,” Marinette patted her on the shoulder. It was her worst fear and it had come true for Chloe. Maybe it would happen to her, too.

“Yeah, it’s worse than the friend zone, actually. I didn’t think there was anything worse than that.” She sighed, but then her jaw set decidedly. “But, who needs him anyway! I can have any guy I want. And like you said, I don’t even need a guy. Why be the woman behind the man when I can be the woman?”

“But, you’re not going to stop being friends with him, are you?” Marinette asked surprised.

“What? No, of course not! I’ve known Adrien, since we were both in training pants. No one’s put up with me for so long. I’d be very foolish to let a little thing like a broken heart get between me and my oldest, dearest friend. Besides, Adrien needs me.” Chloe eyed her former partner and crossed her arms. “I hate to say it, but he needs you, too.”

“Pffft,” Marinette scoffed. “I haven’t done anything to deserve Adrien’s friendship much less his love.”

“You tried to prevent him from repeating a mistake and getting himself hurt or killed. And, you know what?” Chloe asked with a triumphant smile. “It actually worked! Adrien is going to give up his crush on Ladybug.”

“Really?” Marinette squeaked. She felt torn between laughing and crying.

Chloe nodded, “So you see? It wasn’t all for naught!”

“That’s great,” Marinette sat heavily on the chaise. After a moment she asked, “I’ve completely ruined my chances with him, haven’t I?”

“Adrien is very forgiving, seriously,” Chloe answered as she sat down next to her. “I think if you apologize and promise to never impersonate his crush, break his heart, and then kiss him passionately, that he’ll forgive you and you can be friends again.”

“Just friends, though…” the lovesick girl sighed.

“You know, Adrien doesn’t have many friends. You can thank his father for that,” she noted wryly. “Adrien values each one of his friends very highly. I wouldn’t be so quick to dismiss being his friend. It means more to him than you realize. You mean more to him than you realize.”

“You think?”

Chloe nodded, “If I had a Euro for every time he said something nice about you, I’d be rich. Wait. I am rich!” she laughed. “Well, I’d be super rich! I wasn’t lying before when I told you he admires you. It’s actually really disgusting to listen to him talk about you.”

Marinette nodded as a smile pulled at the corner of her mouth. “I’m sorry I kissed Adrien. I didn’t mean to break our pack. It just sorta happened.”

“Seems like that happens a lot with you when Adrien is involved. You lose your head and forget yourself,” Chloe noted. “Don’t feel too bad. If circumstances were reversed and I was in your shoes dressed as his crush, I probably would have kissed him, too. No, I definitely would of!” She laughed.
Marinette laughed, too. It felt good to laugh.

“I owe you an apology, too,” Chloe admitted softly after their laughter had died down. “I misjudged you. I thought that the reason you want to be with Adrien was just so he could help you get ahead in the fashion industry. I’m really glad that’s not the case. Adrien deserves someone who cares about him for who he is, not for what they can do for them.”

“Whoa…” Marinette breathed, astonished that the normally stuck-up girl would ever admit a mistake.

“I mean you can’t really blame me. Circumstances were against you. And, God knows, I’ve fended off plenty of conniving, blood-sucking fan girls on Adrien’s behalf.”

“You have?”

Chloe nodded, “That was the whole point of the poster, remember?” She asked as if Marinette was already aware of the intended purpose of the inscribed and autographed Adrien poster in Chloe’s bathroom.

“I thought you did that to make yourself look important to the other kids at school,” Marinette argued.

“What? No! Well, I mean, if that’s one of the outcomes, then I can’t help that,” she flicked her ponytail. “No, I did it to dissuade all the grubby fangirls from chasing after Adrien.”

“You did it to protect him,” Marinette realized in awe.

Chloe nodded, “I didn’t want Adrien to know because he hates it when I interfere in his love life. But, I realized my plan had a fatal flaw. Not only would it keep the undesirables away, but it also would keep the good ones away.” Chloe sighed. “I’ve learned my lesson, though. No more interfering for me.”

“Really? What changed your mind?”

Chloe smiled. “I didn’t give Adrien enough credit. I thought he was too kind, too naïve. But, it turns out he knew all about the poster. So, I think he can decide for himself who’s worthy. And, if he’s wrong, then I’ll be there to help him pick up the pieces. Apparently, that’s what friends do or something.” She picked a loose string off of her sleeve and let it fall to the floor.

“Chloe?” Marinette felt the urge to completely clean the slate with her rival, if she could. “Why don’t you like me? Did I…did I hurt you somehow?”

Chloe blinked. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I don’t like you or dislike you. I don’t give you a single thought.” She sniffed as her nose jutted into the air.

“See! There! Right there!” Marinette pointed as she suddenly stood up. “You just put me down. You do that all the time. You make fun of my clothes, my father’s business, my family’s class…why? Why can’t you just be nice?”

“Why should I be nice to you? What do you care if I’m nice to you or not?” Chloe jumped to her feet, but she felt something catch on her heel. She looked down to find her shoe had snagged on her Ladybug costume, which was hidden underneath the chaise. She pulled it off of her heel and held it up.

“Told you, you had it!” she taunted.
Marinette snatched the costume out of her hands and threw it down on the ground. The costume didn’t matter. In this moment Adrien didn’t matter either. What mattered was having it out with her rival once and for all.

“I do care! Do you think it’s easy to be made fun of all the time? Do you think I like looking over my shoulder, wondering if you’re about to play another prank on me?” Marinette stressed her arms akimbo.

“Oh please! I hardly make a dent in your perfect little world!”

“Are you kidding? My world looks like it’s sat out in middle of a hail storm it’s so dented from your bullying!”

“Bullying! Bullying! Excuse me for trying to keep you grounded, Mademoiselle Perfect! If I didn’t take you down a peg or two every now and then you’d be even more insufferable than you already are!” Chloe huffed turning her back on her as she crossed her arms.

“What are you talking about? I’m not perfect! I’m a clutz! I’m stubborn. I’m rash! I can’t talk to my crush without stuttering and making a complete fool out of myself.”

“Everyone likes you! You’re the most popular, admired girl in school,” Chloe said over her shoulder, but then turned around to mock her. “‘Oh, Marinette’s so talented!’ ‘Marinette’s so pretty!’ Bleh! It’s disgusting! You have everything! A perfect home with a perfect father and a perfect…MOTHER!” Chloe choked out. Tears welled up in her eyes, but she blinked them back. Chloe had already cried once today. She was NOT going to make a habit of it.

“My family’s not perfect, Chloe,” Marinette said quietly, but firmly.

“Well, you could’ve fooled me.” Chloe huffed as she sat on the chaise. “She even brought us cookies!” Her hand flew out to indicate the plate sitting on the desk.

Marinette’s gaze traveled to the plate of treats her mother brought them and then back to the jealous girl sitting before her. She wondered how she would handle her parents breaking up. She tried to imagine not seeing her mother everyday, not hearing her laugh, not seeing her smile, not being able to seek her advice or receive a hug when she was upset. Just today her mother’s calm understanding had helped her to feel better and her wisdom had seen fit to let this girl into her room supposedly to make her feel better. But, if anything Chloe just made her mad...and thankful for what she had and had been taking for granted. Marinette sighed and walked over to the desk. On the return trip she offered the plate to the blonde. Chloe gingerly selected a cookie and began to nibble. Marinette took one for herself and sat beside her, balancing the plate on her knees. For some time they sat in silence.

“Do you know why I wear this yellow jacket all the time?” Chloe asked suddenly. Marinette shook her head no. “It’s the last present my mother gave me. It was two years ago for my birthday. She’s missed two Christmases and a birthday since then. Not a card or a phone call. Nothing. I haven’t seen her in person since I was seven. It hurts…a lot. Sometimes when I see you, I just feel so…angry. You have what I want.” Tears pooled in her eyes and no amount of blinking could keep them from spilling out.

“I’m sorry, Chloe. Your mother shouldn’t treat you like that.”

“I shouldn’t have treated you the way I did. I just don’t know how to handle my anger and my...jealousy sometimes. I lash out. I’m…I’m sorry.” She sniffed and then wiped her wet cheek with her palm.
Marinette smiled and passed her a tissue.

“Damnit. All I’ve done today is cried and apologized!”

“Me, too!” Marinette laughed and then Chloe laughed, too.

“It’s okay to be angry or jealous, you know, but you gotta figure out a better way to deal with your feelings,” Marinette counseled.

“I don’t know how.”

“I could help you, if you like?”

Chloe blinked. “Why…why would you do that?”

Marinette shrugged. “That’s what friends do for each other. I know you can be a good friend, Chloe. I’ve seen you be one to Adrien.”

“That’s true. I am an excellent friend. Adrien’s lucky to have me.” She opened her purse to search for a mirror. When she found it, she stared at her own reflection, dabbing her eyes with the tissue. “I suppose if it means that much to you, then you can help me. And, I can help you, too. God knows you need it. You know for a designer, you really should take more care with your own wardrobe.” She snapped her compact shut and dropped it in her bag. “I told you yesterday to wear more blue and what are you wearing today? Pink, again.”

Marinette bit her tongue and smiled. This was not going to be easy. Nothing with Chloe ever was, but maybe there was hope for her. She had never thought so before now, but spending so much time with her the past few days made her realize that Chloe wasn’t the monster she thought she was.

“Would you…would you like to stay for dinner?” Marinette asked her friend.

“Depends,” the rich girl hummed. “What’re you having?”

Marinette remembered it was Thursday and she deflated. “Soup.” The Dupain-Chengs always had soup on Thursdays. “It’s okay you don’t have to…”

“No, I’d like to. I actually, um, never tried it before…”

“You never even tried soup before? Any kind of soup?”

“No, I never have. It just looked so…wet.” Chloe’s eyes met Marinette’s and they both burst into giggles again at the ridiculousness of her statement. After their laughter died down, Chloe said, “You know a friend once told me that I shouldn’t dismiss something before I even try it.”

“So, you’ll stay?” Marinette brightened, recognizing that Chloe had quoted her own words to her.

Chloe nodded. She supposed trying soup for the first time was a small price to pay for a friend.

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After seeing Chloe off, Marinette flopped onto her bed, face first. A small “ump” escaped her lips as her face hit her pillow. Despite the reassuring words from her mother, Chat Noir, and Chloe, Marinette still felt like an utter fool. How would she ever face Adrien at school tomorrow? He must have figured out her crush on him. There was no other explanation for her actions. She had dressed up as his crush and kissed him. She sounded like a fangirl, a stalker, a psychotic.
"UGGGGHHH!" Marinette groaned into her pillow as she pounded the bed with her fists. "I'm such an idiot!" She could not get out of her head the mental image of Adrien’s face when he realized exactly what she had done, the shock, the embarrassment, the hurt. Hurting him was the last thing she wanted to do. If anything, the whole point of this crazy endeavor was to prevent him from getting hurt, well, that and to try to finally get him to love her or at least notice her.

Tikki, who had been tucked away in her private nook, had the good grace not to tell her chosen “I told you so” even though she had every right to do so. Instead, the little kwami offered a suggestion to cheer up her chosen.

"Marinette!" Tikki called as she alighted on the girl’s desk. “You never opened your presents from Chloe. Maybe you should. It might make you feel better!” She sing-songed the last two words as she peeked into the shopping bag.

Marinette hoisted herself up off of her bed and trudged down the steps to join Tikki at her desk. She open the shopping bag first, finding the silver heels she had worn at Chloe’s and two packets of hair extensions in Marinette’s shade of raven black. For a moment she was puzzled until it hit her.

“No way!” she cried. She hurriedly picked up the garment bag and unzipped it. Upon seeing what was inside the bag she screamed. Downstairs her mother smiled knowingly at her daughter’s enthusiasm.

“The dress! Chloe gave me her dress!” Marinette held up the cerulean Versace dress. She ran over to her full-length mirror and placed the dress under her chin, imaging what it would look like on.

“Put it on!” Tikki encouraged. “I didn’t get to see you in it!”

“Will you help me with my hair?” the girl asked as she pulled out the ties that held her pigtails in place.

“Absolutely!” the red spotted kwami cried, bringing over the hair extensions. She felt happy that her chosen had found something to distract her from her troubles if only for a moment. They would figure out what to do about Adrien in a little bit.

----o----

Chloe walked leisurely across the street and around the corner to her awaiting town car. Her driver saw her coming and got out to open the door for her. She climbed inside seeing two expectant faces.

“What took you so long?” Adrien asked.

“What? She invited me for dinner. It would have been rude to say no,” the blonde replied.

“That’s never stopped you before,” Adrien noted.

Chloe stuck her tongue out at him.

“How’d it go?” Sabrina asked.

“Good, I think. She’s upset, but you know, I made her feel better.” At her friends’ doubtful faces, she crossed her arms, insisting, “I did! By the time I left she had finally stopped crying. But, prepare yourself, Adrikins, Marinette looks an absolute mess!"

Adrien bit his lip with worry, “Maybe…maybe I shouldn’t do this. Is this a bad idea?”
“No, no!” both girls cried.

“We’ve gone to so much trouble!” Chloe argued. “You have to do it!”

“I think Marinette will at least appreciate the gesture,” Sabrina advised.

“Absolutely!” Chloe agreed. “You look completely ridiculous!”

Adrien scowled while Sabrina waved her hands in front of her to signal to Chloe that she had said the wrong thing.

“What? You do!” Chloe insisted, but catching Sabrina’s hint, tried to backtrack. “I just mean that Marinette feels embarrassed, so seeing you dressed so foolishly is bound to make her feel better.”

Sabrina nodded, encouragingly. “And, she’ll sleep better if you two can talk now rather than wait until tomorrow.”

“Yes!” Chloe nodded. “Very sound advice. Better to get it over with. Aaaand, both Alya and Nino thought it a good idea, too, so four people can’t be wrong, especially when one of them is me.” She smiled sweetly and tilted her head.

“Alright, let’s do it!” He reached out his hand for the trench coat, which Chloe quickly passed to him. After he had slipped the coat on, the three hopped out of the car and ran over to the bakery, giggling with excitement.

Chapter End Notes

Chloe redemption, yay! Or, at least the start of it. She’ll be going on her mea cupla tour now.

Thanks to everyone who chimed in on the optimal length of chapters word count-wise. It's helpful to know because you put so much time and effort into something, but then if people are put off by length of a chapter or the number of the chapters, then I certainly want to take that into consideration so that hopefully the fanfics actually get read and maybe even appreciated. It'd be unfulfilling to write with the purpose of having people read and comment only to write too much and have no one read it.

My schedule has changed pretty significantly, so I'm not entirely sure when writing fanfics are going to slot into my calendar on a regular basis, but I'm so close to finishing this one, you guys, I AM DETERMINED to complete! Wish me luck!
Security Breach

Chapter Summary

Adrien and Marinette talk...finally!

A couple of winks to the Troublemaker and Frightingale episodes as the cosplay and flirting continue.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

From above her head Marinette heard a tapping sound. She climbed the stairs to the level of her bed and looked up to the ceiling. She could see a black figure through the window of the trap door to her balcony. For a second, she thought it a burglar, but when she heard the figure call her name she realized who it really was.

“Chat Noir!” she cried as she opened the door and hoisted herself up through the opening. “You scared me, you silly cat! But, I’m glad you’re here…” Her words died in her mouth as she discovered that it was not Chat Noir after all, although he was trying to be. He wore a very similar super suit, all black and likely leather. The details of the suit looked accurate, including the placement of the zippers, the belt for a tail, and the golden bell at the throat. The giveaway was the mask. It was a black mask just like Chat Noir’s, but the eyes were wrong. Covering the eyeholes looked to be green swimming goggles that had been disassembled and then glued to the mask.

“Who are you?” the petite girl growled with a surprising ferocity as she leapt up onto the balcony. “What have you done with Chat Noir?!?”

“Easy, Marinette! It’s okay! Chat’s fine, really. It’s just me, Adrien,” the figure replied.

“A-adrien?”

He removed the mask to show that it was indeed the blonde model.

“Hi,” he said sheepishly, but then his eyes went wide. “Wow! You look pretty,” he breathed. He had never seen her so dressed up before now. She looked older, more sophisticated. Her hair sat high on top of her head twisted into a bun with red ribbons holding it in place. Adrien could see the the sharp outline of her chin, the smooth contour of her neck, and the delicate ripples of her collar bone. The color of her dress brought out her blue eyes with sparkling clarity. Adrien’s eyes traveled across her body, admiring her toned arms and long legs. But despite his normally gentlemanly manners his eyes lingered over her chest. The knit bodice was broken by large geometric intarsia panels at her neck, waist and between her breasts... her breasts. Adrien swallowed hard. There was no way Marinette was wearing a bra. No way at all and that was just absolutely fascinating.

“Wh-what? What? WHAT?” was all that the poor, startled girl was able to say to her crush as her arms gesticulated in his general direction.

“What?” he repeated her words, which broke him out of his staring. “I mean you always look pretty,” he tried to cover his compliment, fearing she had taken it the wrong way. “I just
mean...you’re wearing your hair up and I like your dress.”

He frowned as he stepped closer to inspect her outfit. “You know, Chloe has one just like that.” It dawned on him that this must have been what was inside the garment bag. “But, you wear it better. Oh! Um, please don’t tell her I said that,” he rubbed the back of his neck as he spoke. He felt hot as his cheeks flamed red. The flustered boy purposefully looked at her shoes. Shoes were safe, yes, look at her shoes. Silver heels on small feet with delicate ankles and muscular calves with such creamy skin….

“Cat?” Marinette squeaked. “Chat suit?”

“Oh! Um….what am I wearing?” he asked, inferring her question. “It’s Sabrina’s Chat Noir cosplay costume. Well, technically, it’s Chloe, but Sabrina always wears it. But, the mask was all wrong. I improved it, see?” he said as he replaced the mask on his face. “I added ‘Chat eyes’, well, as best I could. I didn’t have a lot of time. I’m sure you could’ve done better.” He chuckled nervously. His eyes betrayed him again as they noted her small waist. He felt the urge to wrap his arms around her.

“WHY?” she said too loud. She swallowed hard and pinched her arm, trying to gain her composure. “Why are you here?”

“I came to see you. You visited me as Ladybug, so I thought it only fair to visit you as Chat Noir…” He bowed as low as he could, the tightness of the suit hindering his movement, “M’lady.”

“That’s not funny,” she replied, her cheeks burning brightly. He was teasing her she realized and she didn’t like it. Today, had been extremely tiring, even though it was of her own making, and the last thing she needed was Chat making fun of her.

“No, Adrien ,” she corrected herself with a panicked tremor. She had just chastised Adrien !!!

“I’m not laughing,” he replied as he straightened himself. “I went to a lot of trouble to be here. I snuck out and I had to squeeze myself into this suit.” He straightened out his arms to show the inch and a half of skin that was exposed between the cuff of his sleeves and his gloves.

“Sabrina is surprisingly small,” the cat-boy noted.

“You snuck out?” Marinette cried. “You’re willing to get in trouble…for me ?”

Adrien nodded, “I couldn’t wait until tomorrow to talk to you.” He took a step closer. The need to be near her overpowering him.

“You couldn’t?” she squeaked with surprise and trepidation.

He shook his head. “And you weren’t answering your phone,” he explained drawing nearer.

“I turned it off,” she lowered her head, sorry to have missed a call from him, especially if it would have prevented this . “Wait. You have my number?” she asked, looking back up at him with wide eyes.

“Alya gave it to me. And now you have mine because I left you about a dozen voicemails and texts.” He hovered close above her, aching to touch her.

“Oh,” she said quietly, looking at her shoes. “You must be mad at me.”

He shook his head no, “Confused, not mad.”
“I can explain…”

“Chloe gave me the highlights, but I have some questions…”

She waited to hear them. “How could you be so stupid?” and “Do you really think I wouldn’t find out?” and “Why on earth would I even consider being with you?” All questions she dreaded to hear, but knew were coming. She squeezed her eyes shut as she lowered her head, waiting for him to ask his awful question and once and for all dispel her illusions of ever being his girlfriend.

“What were you thinking climbing onto my window like that?” he asked as he raised her chin with one gloved finger. “You could have hurt yourself. What if you had fallen?”

“But, I didn’t!” she protested as her determined blue eyes met his concerned green ones.

“But you could have,” he insisted. “It was a reckless thing to do! Rash! Stupid!” He chastised her using her own words against her. “If I had a pillow, I’d smack you.” A small grin pulled at his lips.

“Chloe did that, not me.”

“Doesn’t mean you don’t deserve it,” he continued using a stern voice as he wagged a finger at her. After a moment his expression softened. His will power gave out and he pushed a loose strand of her hair behind her ear. He said much quieter, “I don’t want you falling for me…”

She felt a lump form in her throat as water filled her eyes. This was the rejection that she always knew she would hear.

“…unless I’m there to catch you.”

Marinette’s mouth formed into the shape of an “o” although no sound could be heard.

“Lucky for you, I happen to be a very good cat-ch,” he smiled as his eyes twinkled behind the goggles.

She let out a breathy, nervous laugh. “I’m sorry I deceived you,” she said quietly.

“You really had me going,” he admitted. “I really believed you’re Ladybug.”

“Sorry to disappoint,” she replied mournfully. If only she could tell him the truth…

“Me, too,” he said reflexively, but then realized what he had said and hurriedly tried to explain, “I just mean, if anyone could be Ladybug it would be you. I mean, I think you’d make a really great Ladybug.”

“You do?” she asked with awe. How could anyone think clumsy Marinette, a lowly baker’s daughter, would make a good Ladybug? Even though she actually is Ladybug...would anyone really believe it to be true?

“Oh! YES! Definitely.” Adrien nodded vigorously. “The way you stand up for your friends and you aren’t scared of akumas. I’ve seen how brave you are when the school’s under attack. You even partnered with Chat Noir that one time, didn’t you?”

Marinette nodded.

“And, you’re very clever with your designs and your gaming strategy. I bet you’d make a great superhero.”
Marinette blushed, “Thanks.”

“But, I’m glad you’re not Ladybug,” he said taking her hand. “I wouldn’t want you to get hurt. I wouldn’t want anything bad to happen to you, Marinette.”

“You wouldn’t?” she squeaked.

“No, I wouldn’t, which is why you shouldn’t of climbed up to my window,” he scolded her again as he laid his other hand on top of hers.

“I had to!” Marinette defended herself, pulling her hand from his hold so that it was free to scold him back. “You wouldn’t listen to reason so…”

“So, you tricked me!” Adrien’s hands landed on his hips and he leaned into her space.

“Yes.” She lowered her head in shame. “I did. I’m sorry, but, I meant well.”

“I know,” Adrien nodded, pulling back and crossing his arms. “I know you thought you were doing the right thing. I’m sure Chloe used her own twisted logic to convince you.”

“Don’t be mad at Chloe. She didn’t mean any harm either.”

“That’s true. Chloe’s crimes against me weren’t nearly as severe as yours.”

“Wh-what are you talking about?” the raven-haired girl sputtered. “What crimes?”

“Kissing me under false pretenses.” His eyes flicked to her lips on their own accord.

“Oh, that…”

“Yes, that,” Adrien chided. His tongue subconsciously wetted his own lips.

“I can explain…”

“Really?” Adrien hummed.

“I, um…well the thing is… you see, um…” Marinette struggled to find a logical explanation as to why she kissed him besides admitting that she has a crush on him.

“It’s okay;” he chuckled. “I get it. You have a crush on me.”

“What? NO! Don’t be silly. I don’t have a crush on you. I um…”

“Marinette?” Adrien leaned in toward her so that their noses practically touched. “Are you lying?” He had to call her out. She had done enough lying in his opinion. He needed the truth from her or how could he ever trust her?

“I… I…” the flustered girl sputtered, but only managed to push him back to a straightened position.

“I mean, when someone dresses up in a form-fitting suit, climbs up to their bedroom window, and kisses them, then what other logical conclusion can one draw except that they must have a crush on them, right?” He asked with one arched eyebrow.

Marinette sighed. There really was no point in trying to deny it. He had caught her.

“Okay, yes, I…I have a crush on you, Adrien.” She couldn't look at him. Her heart pounded in her
chest and her palms were sweating.

Adrien smiled broadly. “Now, was that really so hard to admit?” His hands landed on her shoulders and for a moment he regretted wearing the gloves, wishing he could feel her skin, which no doubt probably felt warm and soft. He lowered his head to try to meet her gaze.

Marinette dared to look up at him and seeing his open, happy face, she smiled back, “No, not nearly as hard as I imagined it would be. I should’ve told you sooner. It would have saved a lot of heartache.”

Adrien nodded, “And chafing…” He shook one leg and then the other, trying in vain to move the leather material down his shin. “This suit is soooo tight.”

Marinette laughed at his discomfort. He looked so ridiculous in that ill-fitting suit.

“I’d really like to be friends again,” she said hopefully. “If you can forgive me.”

“Do you promise to stop lying and trying to trick me into doing what you want?” he asked.

Marinette nodded, “Absolutely! No more lies or tricks. I swear!” She hoped her identity as Ladybug never came up again as that would be the one thing she would have to lie to him about.

He wrapped his arm around her shoulders, drawing her into a sideways hug. “Then, I’d be very happy to be friends with you, Marinette.”

“Good,” she smiled, pulling out of his embrace and throwing out her hand. “Friends?”

He took her hand and shook it, “Friends.” Adrien’s smile wavered a bit as he looked at her, the lights of the city shining in her eyes. Were they only going to be friends? Nothing more?

“Um...Adrien? Can I, um, can I have my hand back?” the puzzled girl asked.

“Oh! Sorry!” Adrien hadn’t realized how long he had been shaking it. He slowly lowered her hand to her side and then let released it. “There you go,” he said lamely.

For a moment they stood there not really knowing what else to say to each other. Adrien rocked on his heels. Marinette stole a glance at him, but when their eyes met, they each looked away, a blush gracing each of their cheeks.

“Um...goodnight?” It came out more as a question, than as a goodbye, but as she moved to the door in the floor that led to her bedroom it was obvious that her intention was to leave.

“Wait!” Adrien called out. “We could hang out for awhile...if you want. I mean, I did sneak out, so I’m free all evening.”

“Well, alright…” she hummed, trying to decide what they could do or talk about.

That was all Adrien needed. He had disappeared down the hole in the floor before Marinette could say anything more. By the time she joined him on the level of her lounge chair, she immediately regretted her mistake. She hadn’t meant to invite him in, but she wasn’t clear about that and now he was looking, he was seeing... oh, God!

Adrien whistled as he stared at her walls. “Wow! That’s a lot of pictures of me. One, two, three…” He continued to count each one. “Twenty-four! Twenty-four! pictures!”

“I, um, I...hee-hee,” the poor girl laughed nervously, “I like fashion?” She inwardly cringed at the
lameness of that statement. How this day had gotten any worse Marinette could not have imagined, but it had. Adrien had seen the full depths of her crush on him, well almost all of it. She worriedly glanced at the roll-up calendar above their heads that she had made documenting in great detail Adrien’s daily schedule. Her attention was brought back to the boy as he chuckled to himself all the while eying the pictures. She bounced on her toes trying to think of something to say, but all she could do was remember Chloe’s words: “Adrien hates fangirls.”

“This one makes my forehead look huge!” he said pointing to one headshot. “I had a gi-normous pimple on my chin the day this one was taken,” he recalled pointing at a different one. “It took quite a bit of Photoshopping to remove it.”

“Really?” Marinette guffawed. She had never known Adrien to have even a hint of bad skin.

He continued to call out each photo. “Pensive, dreamy, crotch shot, ‘The Smoulder’, Sadrien…” He paused to pretend to pout to make the girl laugh. “Another crotch shot, boy next door, oooh this one is my favorite!” He indicated an advertisement for his father’s clothing line that made him look as if he was flying.

“I kept having to jump on a trampoline,” Adrien explained. “Just after they took this shot I landed wrong and the trampoline flipped. I face planted into the dirt. Needless to say, not even Photoshop could salvage any pictures of me after that. I couldn’t model for a month. Father was sooo mad!”

Marinette laughed so hard, she had to hold the sides of her torso because they hurt from the strain. Adrien laughed, too. It felt good, as if the tension had now broken between them and they were friends again. Actually, it felt much easier between them than Marinette had ever known it to be. Maybe finally being honest with him made it easier to be his friend. She didn’t have to worry about him finding out that she likes him. He knows and he doesn’t seem bothered by it. He seemed completely willing to carry on as before.

Once their laughter had died down, Adrien asked if he could sit, indicating the chaise lounge. Marinette nodded and turned to fetch the plate of cookies from her desk that her mother had brought for Chloe and her. When she returned she found Adrien sprawled on the chaise, resting his head on one hand and crossing his legs at the ankles.

“You look very comfortable,” she noted with amusement as she offered the plate to him.

He blushed. “The suit’s actually too tight for me to sit,” he admitted. “I can only lie down.”

Marinette giggled. “Maybe you shouldn’t have any cookies. You might bust a gut.”

“I’ll risk it,” he smirked before stuffing a whole strawberry macaron in his mouth.

“Do you want to watch Shugo Chara?” she suggested, bringing over her tablet and sitting on the foot of the chaise. They had done so the last time they hung out together.

“Sounds purr-fect,” he hummed.

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“Wow! I did not expect that twist!” Marinette breathed as the credits rolled at the end of the episode. “I mean, the whole time Amu’s best friend, Nadeshiko, is really a boy! And, a boy who seems interested in her! I just…I have no words…”

Marinette’s eyes flicked up to read Adrien’s expression, since he was unusually quiet. He looked deep in thought and obviously was not listening to her. First, Chat and now Adrien, everyone
seemed distracted today! She waved her hand in front of his face. The movement caught his eye and he snapped to attention.

“Sorry,” he smiled shyly. “I was just thinking about something…”

“Wanna share?” Marinette asked as she picked up the nearly empty dish of cookies and her tablet to take them over to her desk. It was getting late. Adrien would probably have to leave soon she figured much to her great regret. Their time together had gone by so quickly. They seemed to have re-established their friendship easily enough. She had apologized. He had forgiven her. Marinette smiled to herself, happy to be Adrien’s friend again. Chat was right. Being friends was good, better even than being boyfriend/girlfriend, or at least that was what she was telling herself.

“Yeah,” his brow furrowed, “I was just thinking, well wondering, how did you manage to scale the fence around my house and climb up two stories to my window sill?”

Marinette froze and turned around slowly to face him, her hands still full.

“How did I…” she squeaked. Adrien picked up on her sudden nervousness. He crossed his arms and raised an eyebrow, interested to hear her answer.

“Well, um…” Marinette’s brows furrowed as she searched for an answer. “How did you manage to climb up to my balcony? Hmmm?”

“I’ll tell you if you tell me first,” he replied as he rose slowly and carefully off the chaise. The last thing he wanted to do was to rip the suit. He walked towards her.

“That’s rather childish, don’t you think?”

Adrien shook his head slowly as the space between them receded. He looked down at her as he hovered over her. She could feel the heat from his body radiating off him, making her own temperature rise. He carefully took the plate and tablet out of her hands and set them to one side on her desk and then resumed his close position, knowing how it was affecting her, not that he too was unaffected. He swallowed hard and fixed his eyes on hers and not on her chest. He needed to focus.

“Well?”

“Um, Chloe’s yo-yo has a, uh, built-in grappling hook,” she shrugged as if it was a perfectly reasonable explanation. “Yeah, so you know it was really easy. You?”

“Same, only on the baton.” He paused to consider. “You seemed awfully relieved when I told you that Alya laughed at me for thinking you’re Ladybug.”

“That’s just because I was afraid she’d jump to conclusions and get all excited and nosy and annoying…”

“And reveal your secret? Let the cat out of the bag as it were?” Adrien grinned widely.

“What? No! There’s no secret to reveal! And…and I hate cats!” She pushed up on her toes to accentuate her last statement, closing the gap between them, wagging a finger in his face. Adrien’s teasing was beginning to annoy her much like Chat Noir’s always did.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk,” Adrien clucked, shaking his head. “You wound me! And here I thought you liked me dressed as your kitty…your Chaton.” He grasped the hand she had shoved into his face and turned it over in his own. His lips brushed the top of her hand just before he whispered, “M’Lady.”
“I told you! That’s not funny!” She pulled her hand out of his grasp and then punched his arm, hard.

“Meow –ch. Take it easy!” He said as he took a step back and rubbed the sore spot that she had made. He was right. Marinette was definitely a natural when it came to throwing punches. “I would think that after seeing me die that you would treat me gentler. Which reminds me…how did you see me die?”

“How did I…well, I was there…”

“Yes, I gathered that much, but where?”

“Where?” she squeaked.

“Uh-huh. Where? I don’t remember seeing you that day, so…Where…Were…You?” he pressed.

“Ummm…” Marinette had to think fast. “In the park. Hiding in the bushes.”

“The park, huh? Across the street? You saw my breath still and my skin become grey from all the way across the street?” he asked, his voice tinged with doubt.

“I don’t want to talk about you dying!” she said firmly with tears in her eyes.

Adrien blanched, surprised at her sudden and strong reaction. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t tease you about that.”

“No, you shouldn’t!” She stomped her foot. Her heart pounded in her chest. She didn’t want to lie to him, but he was forcing her to. What if he caught her in a lie and got mad at her again? What if she lost him again? What if he discovered her identity and that put him in danger?

A quiet fell over them. Adrien rubbed his neck nervously as he eyed the girl. He bit his lip. He had ruined it. His curiosity had gotten the better of him. He hadn’t meant to upset her. It was just this feeling in the pit of his stomach that bothered him. Something did quite set right. There was an itch, if you will, that he needed to scratch.

“Stupid cat!” he chastised himself. Using his pinkie and his thumb, he spun the silver ring on his finger around and around as he thought. “If Marinette really is Ladybug,” he reasoned, “then she doesn’t want me to know. And if she isn’t, then she does want me to treat her as if she is or that I want her to be. Okay, no more Ladybug talk. I need to make it better...somehow.”

“You look pretty,” he blurted. “I already told you that, didn’t I?” he asked more to himself.

“Really?” she squeaked. “I don’t remember you saying that.”

“You do! I did! As soon as I saw you I said so. You look pretty. The dress and your hair...” His hand went into his own hair and knocked the headband with the faux cat ears off of his head. Marinette quickly picked it up for him.

“You look pretty, too.” She smiled as she handed him the headband. But then her eyes went wide as she realized what she said. “I didn’t mean you’re a pretty boy or anything. Girls are pretty. You’re not pretty, not in the least.”

“No?” he asked with a smirk. “I’m feline pretty foolish in this catsuit!”

“No! No! You look great! Really! All those (gulp) muscles...your pecs and biceps and triceps...they really stand out. You could give Chat Noir a run for his money.”
“You think so? I dunno…he’s a superhero…” But he flexed his biceps to flaunt his muscles as he flashed her a dazzlingly smile. Adrien was reminded of when he had done the same as Chat Noir when he partnered with Marinette to fight Evil Illustrator. She had been impressed then, too, he recalled with pleasure.

“I take it back. You totally have Chat beat,” she drooled.

“Since we look so pretty, how about a picture together? Do you have your phone? I couldn’t fit mine anywhere. The suit is sooo tight,” he pretended to whine.

“You want to take a picture of me?” she asked with surprise.

“It’s only fair. You have a ton of me.” He indicated her Adrien-covered wall with his hand.

“Oh! Right!” she laughed. She grabbed her phone from her desk and turned it on. While she waited for it to start up she noticed Adrien tossed his cat ears on the chaise.

“I’ll stand behind you, so you can block my ridiculous outfit,” he suggested as he came up behind her. He wrapped his arms around her neck so that his forearms landed just above her heart and leaned his head in close toward her own. The scent of her shampoo, sweet and fruity, filled his nostrils. He could see a blush rising up her neck and no doubt dusting her cheeks.

With shaky hands she held out her phone and called out, “Smile!” before taking the picture. She quickly stepped out of his embrace. He felt cold at the loss of her touch.

“That’s a good one!” Adrien judged when she showed him the picture. “Will you send it to me?” Marinette nodded and opened the messenger app to send the text. “Oh! You did send me a bunch of texts!”

“I was worried about you. You left school pretty upset. I was afraid you’d get akumatized,” he explained.

“I would’ve been fine. Ladybug would’ve saved me,” Marinette hummed as she pressed buttons on her phone.

“I dunno. You’re pretty tough! I’ve taken a few of your punches,” he chuckled as his hand covered his nose and then his arm where she’d hit him. “I think Ladybug might’ve been in trouble if she would’ve come up against you.”

“She has Chat Noir. Two against one…”

“I don’t think Chat would be of much use…” Adrien replied as he selected the last jam shortbread cookie from the plate. Although he had fought his other friends before when they had been akumatized, the thought of going up against Marinette left him extremely cold. He seriously wondered if he’d be able to put his feelings aside to fight her.

“I’d have to,” he decided to himself. “Not to fight her, but to fight for her…to save her. I just hope it never comes to that.”

“Chat’s very useful!!!” Marinette’s eyes flashed in anger as she looked up from her phone. How dare he disparage her kitty. Wait. Her kitty?

“I didn’t mean it like that!” Adrien tried to explain as his hands waved in front of him, trying to calm her. “I just meant, well, you two worked together that time against, um, Evil Illustrator, wasn’t it?
You must know his tricks...you know, how he fights, how he thinks.”

“Well, yeah, he is my partner.” Marinette bit her tongue. “I mean, was my partner and just for that one day. Not even a day, a few hours at most. And, um, I don’t know him that well at all! Nope! I don’t know how he fights much less thinks. I mean, he doesn’t really think, so much as react. He just launches himself head first into danger and then...” Marinette’s words died on her tongue as she described Chat to Adrien who was dressed as Chat, both of whom had sacrificed their lives for her without thinking.

“Could you...um, I mean, could we take another picture together?” she asked. “This time with your cat ears and mask?” She had a sudden urge to see him in the full costume. Marinette couldn’t help, but feel that she had missed seeing something the first time.

“Sure,” Adrien turned around and grabbed his cat ears from the chaise, but not finding his mask he knelt down to look on the ground underneath it. He found his mask along with something else. “But, only if you’re in costume, too.” He held out Chloe’s Ladybug costume to her.

“Uhhhh...” She hesitated, knowing full well Tikki would hate the idea. Why did she bring that costume back into her room anyway? She must have panicked, snatched it up and then brought it with her when she ran.

“That is if you don’t mind,” he hedged. “It’d be nice to have a picture of the two of us. We can look back on this years from now and laugh.” He held the suit up to his chest as if he might try it on himself and swung one of the sleeves around and around so that it playfully batted at her.

“Years from now?” she thought. “He’s thinking about us in the future! He wants a future with me!”

“Okay!” she agreed without really understanding what she was doing. She took the faux supersuit from him and walked into the bathroom, shutting the door behind her with a happy sigh.

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When the bathroom door was closed Adrien turned his attention to the plate of cookies on her desk. He missed the bathroom door silently opening a small fraction to allow a small, red floating body pass through it.

“Lemme out!” The voice came from one of the zippered pockets in the catsuit.

“Shhhh!” Adrien chided as he unzipped the pocket and Plagg’s head popped out with a gasp. “She might hear you!”

“Any cheese?” the kwami asked, swiveling his head to look around the room.

“Nope. Want a cookie?” The blonde boy offered him an almond macaron, Adrien’s least favorite flavor.

Plagg shook his head no. “What’re ya doing, kid? This has to be about the stupidest thing you’ve ever done and that’s saying something.”

“What do you mean? This was your idea!” Adrian hissed.

“First of all, I was kidding. Second of all, my idea included kissing. You haven’t kissed her! What gives?”
“She just wants to be friends.”

Plagg did not miss the sound of disappointment in his chosen’s voice. “Is that what she said? And what about you? You finally ready to admit your feelings?”

“I told you Marinette is…”

“Just a friend,” Plagg completed Adrien’s sentence. “Sure, whatever you say. Not like you’re taking this picture to show your future grandkids or anything…” Plagg rolled his eyes.

“That’s not why we’re taking it!”

Just then the bathroom door opened and Adrien hurriedly pushed Plagg’s head back inside his pocket and zipped it up. He slipped his mask and headband on, turned around, and instantly gasped at the sight before him.

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“Marinette!” Tikki cried as she flew into the bathroom after her chosen had quietly closed the door behind her. “This is a baaaad idea!”

“He’s already seen me in the costume! What’s the harm? Besides, you heard him, he wants it for a picture so we can reminisce in the future. The future, Tikki! He’s thinking about us in the future tense!”

“Marinette! First of all, I thought you two agreed to be friends, so why are you still mooning over him?”

“I can’t just turn off my feelings. I can accept that all I’ll have with Adrien is friendship, but I still love him.” She opened a cabinet and pulled out a large bath towel.

“Second, what if seeing you again as Ladybug makes Adrien realize that you really are Ladybug?” Tikki sensibly asked.

“No, Chloe’s costume reveal took care of that. Don’t worry,” Marinette waved dismissively at the air with her hand just before placing the towel on the floor to cover the crack in the door.

“Third, he wants a picture. A PICTURE! He’s going to to show it to other people and they will see it! They’ll see you dressed as Ladybug!”

“But, I already promised him,” she whined. “How can I go back in there and disappoint him?” What she wasn’t telling Tikki was that it was her own curiosity about Adrien that was driving Marinette to act rashly. She had her own itch that needed scratching.

“Marinette, you didn’t listen to me before and that’s what got you into this mess in the first place,” the wise kwami scolded.

“You’re right, Tikki. This is all my fault. I’m sorry.”

Tikki sighed with relief. Finally! Her chosen was acting sensibly again.

“Tikki, spots on!”

As the Ladybug miraculous pulled Tikki’s form inside of the earrings Marinette wore, the kwami’s high pitched voice let out a “Nooooo!” cutting off the stream of curses that would have surely followed.
Ladybug looked at her reflection in the mirror. Her hair was still up in a bun rather than in her normal pigtails. She decided to keep her hair as it was. Better to have some difference to her typical superhero look. Hopefully, that would throw Adrien and anyone else who saw the picture off track enough not to suspect her. She folded up the towel on the floor that she had used to block the light from her transformation, tucked Chloe’s cosplay suit inside of it and then hid it in a cabinet between two other bath towels.

She slowly opened the door and stepped out. A gasp escaped her lips at the sight before her.

At the same time they both blurted out in astonishment how much the other person looked like their masked partner.

“Except for the hair,” Adrien noted.

“It took me awhile to get this bun right. Would you mind if I didn’t change my hair?”

“Not at all!” Adrien smiled. “I prefer it up. I mean, it really suits you.” His eyes flicked away in embarrassment.

“Your hair is wrong, too, you know,” Ladybug pointed out. “It should be messier. Do you mind?” She reached up to ruffle his golden locks, but hesitated to touch him without his permission. Adrien lowered his head to reach her hand. Carefully she removed the cat ear headband and then gently ran her fingers through his hair, tousling and tangling the blond strands. She regretted doing so with her gloved hands. She imagined his hair felt soft and silky. After a moment she replaced the headband and took a step back to admire her work.

“It’s uncanny,” she breathed. “Add in the puns and…” She laughed suddenly at the ridiculous thought that ran through her head. “Sorry!” she gasped between giggles. “It’s just the thought of you as Chat Noir is soooo funny.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” he chuckled although there was a touch of hurt in his voice. “About as funny as you being Ladybug.”

“Yeah,” Ladybug agreed, although suddenly she wasn’t laughing. “Shall we take the picture?” she asked changing the subject.

Adrien held out the phone this time since his arms were longer as the two scrunched their heads together and smiled. He handed the phone back to her so she could see the result.

“This is going to sound strange,” he began as he rubbed the back of his neck with his hand, “but would you mind terribly if you don’t show this picture to anyone or, um, post it anywhere?”

“No! Not all! That’s fine! More than fine!” Ladybug happily agreed. Tikki would be relieved. “I suppose we do look pretty silly.” She smirked at the image as she texted it to Adrien’s phone.

“It’s not that... exactly,” Adrien tried to explain. “It’s just that my father is rather particular about my appearance and, well, if that photo got out I’d be in trouble. I’m not allowed to wear any clothes unless they’re pre-approved.”

“Pre-approved?” Ladybug’s head snapped up to meet his gaze.

Adrien nodded. “ Mostly I only wear the Gabriel label for obvious reasons. Wouldn’t really do to be seen wearing a competitor.”

“I suppose not…” she hummed. “But you do get to choose your own clothes from your father’s line,
Adrien shook his head. “I...I’ve never told anyone this, because it’s pretty embarrassing, but actually my clothes are laid out for me everyday. The colors, style, fit, the whole look has been pre-planned. I don’t get any input.”

“You’re kidding! Jeez, that’s awful! I mean, clothes are worn to express oneself! They’re one of the first things people notice about each other.” Ladybug’s hands gesticulated wildly in the air, indicating her agitation over Adrien’s oppression. “They’re like a physical manifestation of one’s character!” As an aspiring fashion designer, Ladybug felt insulted that anyone would be forced to wear clothes contrary to their own personal aesthetic. As a friend, Ladybug felt downright outraged that his father put his business and image before Adrien’s right to self expression.

“And you don’t get to do that, do you? You don’t get to show people who you really are.” She took a step closer and pulled down the Chat mask from his face. “Who are you, Adrien Agreste?”

“Wh-what?”

“Who are you?” she repeated, taking a step back to regard him. “If you could wear any kind of clothes, any style, any color, what would you wear?”

“I...I don’t know,” he frowned in reply. “I never gave it much thought.” The only thing he had ever worn for himself was his Chat Noir superhero suit. Plagg had told him to imagine it in his head during the transformation. The result being a black, leather-like suit with external shoulder and knee pads, zipper covered pockets, a belt for a tail, cat ears pinned in his hair, and a bell at his throat.

Ladybug sat down at her desk and pulled out her sketch book.

“Well...I like leather. I mean not real leather, cuz that’s cruel, but ya know the look of it. When it fits of course,” he guffawed at the gap between his sleeves and his gloves.

Ladybug selected a pencil from the pen holder on the desk and turned to the first blank page in her book. “What else?” she asked, encouraging him to go on.

“When I’m at home I mostly wear comfortable clothes, T-shirts, jeans, hoodies, any athletic wear really, but not too baggy.” He worked extremely hard to get and maintain his body. He didn’t want it to be swallowed by the clothes he wore. “When I’m going out...I guess I like a clean look, clean lines. A tailored suit, but not with a tie. Vests! I like vests. Umm...I liked the hat you made for the contest.”

“The bowler hat?” she asked, stopping her pencil from its scribbling. She had designed and made a bowler hat accented with pigeon feathers for a design contest Adrien’s father had judged. Adrien had modeled it in one of the Gabriel line’s photo shoots.

“Yeah, that one!” he enthused. “I’d definitely would wear hats more. But no feathers. I can’t be anywhere near feathers.” It made his nose tingle just thinking about them.

Ladybug giggled remembering how much Adrien had sneezed when he tried on the hat. Looking at him now dressed as her partner she recalled that Chat Noir also had an allergy to feathers.

“Anything else you’re allergic, too?” she asked as she filed in the shading of her sketch. “Wool? Synthetics?”

“Nope. Nothing else. Just feathers. I like clothes that are unexpected, like your hat. You wouldn’t expect feathers on a bowler. I don’t know, a formal jacket with a bright colored lining maybe...or,
um, I dunno.” His brows furrowed as he thought.

“Favorite color?” Her pencil sharply drew the outline of his legs as her keen eyes flicked back and forth between the model and the drawing.

“Black. I like black a lot...and green. But, in terms of what colors look best on me, I’m a ‘Warm Spring.’”

“Yeah, you are!” she enthused in a dreamy voice, but then catching herself she quickly said, “I just mean, we don’t call you ‘Sunshine Boy’ for nothing!”

“Sunshine Boy? Who calls me that?”

“Oh! (GULP) Everyone? You know, the girls mainly, Alya, Rose, Juleka, Mylene, Lila…”

“You?” he smirked.

“Maybe…” she twittered nervously. “Just cuz of your golden hair, your sunny personality, and your warm smile.” Her eyes flicked to the pictures on her wall as she admired model-Adrien’s smile and sighed.

“I see…” His eyes lowered and he sat heavily on the chaise, his shoulders slumping low.

“It’s a compliment, truly,” Ladybug tried to reassure him, setting down her pencil and drawing her roller chair up closer to him.

“You know I’m not that guy,” Adrien pointed to his image in the fashion layouts pasted on her wall. “I’m not perfect.”

“I know!” she replied a bit defensively.

“Do you? Most people don’t. Most people see him and think it’s me, but they’re wrong. And, when they find out the truth…” Adrien hesitated, choosing his words, “they’re disappointed, sometimes even angry.”

“I’m not disappointed, Adrien. I like you for you, not for being him. We gave you that nickname because of who you are and how you make us feel. It’s like the sun is shining when you’re near.”

“Really?” he asked surprised.


“I didn’t know. I mean, I hoped so, but I didn’t know. Sometimes I feel kind of awkward. I wish I could be more like him.” He picked up the framed photograph of model Adrien from Marinette’s desk. His fingers brushed over the icon’s buoyant smile, but his own mouth turned up in a wry grimace.

“Everyone feels awkward sometimes and we all wish we could be better, you know, happier, prettier, smarter, thinner, richer, or whatever…” she shrugged.

“Even you?” he asked replacing the framed picture onto the desk where he’d found it.

“Of course! For example, I wish I wasn’t so clumsy.”

Adrien smiled, “Thanks, Marinette!”
Ladybug jumped. For a second she forgot that he knew who she was. It felt strange to be transformed and be called by her real name. Strange, and yet thrilling.

“You’re really good at listening and talking. I like that we can talk.” He leaned closer, but then hesitated. “Would you mind… I mean, could I…”

“What?” she breathed. Was he going to ask to kiss her? Ladybug felt her heart throb in her chest.

“Um... would you mind taking off your mask?”

That was not the question she was expecting. “I can’t... it’s stuck, I mean it’s glued on, you know with that glue actor’s use. It takes a bit of work to get it off. So…”

“Right. Got it. Of course. Mine just has a cord,” he pulled on the mask hanging around his neck, stretching the elastic cord. He then let go dejectedly, letting it snap back against his collar bone. He pulled away and sighed, “I should probably get going. It’s getting late.”

Ladybug watched as Adrien stood and walked toward the stairs that led up to her bed. Inwardly she cursed herself for having transformed. She should have struggled to put Chloe’s wretched costume on. Then, she could have taken the mask off and then... what would have happened? Would he have kissed her?

“Wait,” she called after him. “Just give me a minute.”

Adrien paused and turned around smiling. Ladybug hurried to the bathroom and shut the door. A moment later she re-appeared sans mask and supersuit, and back in the Versace dress and heels.

“Wow! You’re quick!” Adrien remarked. “It took Chloe and Sabrina forever to get me into this suit. I can’t imagine how long it’s going to take them to get me out of it. Wait. Umm... that came out wrong.” He scratched the back of his neck.

Marinette giggled. “So you had some help pulling this off, huh?”

“Maybe... although I take full credit for the idea to dress up and to add the goggles. Chloe didn’t want me to at first, but she owes me a few favors.”

“I see... and what about me? Am I in your debt?” she asked as she flicked the bell hanging from his throat.

Adrien grinned so broadly that Marinette did a double take. He really looked like Chat in that moment.

“I think you owe me a few more cookies,” he hummed.

“Is that all?” Marinette couldn’t help, but feel disappointed. She hoped he might have asked her for a kiss.

“To ask for anything else would be ungentlemanly,” he bowed with a flourish. Forgetting himself and the tightness of the suit, he dipped past the breaking point, resulting in a deafening RIIIIIPPPP!!

Marinette guffawed and then howled. “I think you’ve had too many cookies already!!”

Adrien, still bent in half at the waist, looked up at her, pleadingly. “I’m calling in a favor. I need a patch job.”

Marinette held her sides as she continued to laugh. She could only nod in agreement as her giggles
continued to tumble out of her. They reached a zenith as she watched Adrien awkwardly hop to the bathroom trying to cover the rip with his hands and missing it completely, allowing her to easily see his purple (!) underwear.

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“How’s it going?” Adrien asked bouncing on the balls of feet as he watched the talented designer sew up the rip in Chloe’s Chat Noir suit.

“Almost done,” she hummed. Her tongue poked out of the side of her mouth as she concentrated. “I haven’t worked with leather before, so it’s going a little bit slow.” She stretched out the last three words to emphasize her point. She brought the thread to her mouth and with a quick chomp she bit the thread, snapping it loose from the stitch she had just made. She inverted the suit, turning it so the outer surface was now actually on the outside. With a careful eye Marinette inspected her work and then looked up with a smile.

“I don’t think Chloe will be able to tell unless you point it out. You just popped a seam, so no real harm done.”

Adrien carefully took the suit that she held out for him. His fingers ran over the seam she had just repaired.

“This looks great! Even better than before. You’re amazing, Marinette! Thank you!” His enthusiasm manifested in a sudden hug. She squeaked in response at the unexpected embrace. He released her just as quickly as a red blush bloomed across his cheeks. “Sorry. I…um…”

“No! It’s okay, really. I don’t mind. I mean, friends hug, right?” she asked with tremor in her voice.

“Right,” he agreed with an overeagerness that he meant to hide his disappointment. “Friends hug all the time. No biggie.”

Silence fell over them. Marinette snuck a glance at Adrien and started to giggle. When he raised a questioning eyebrow, she tried to suppress her laughter causing her to only laugh harder.

“Sorry,” she spurted between guffaws, “it’s just you look so cute in my pajamas.”

“I think I pull off hearts and unicorns pretty well,” Adrien pouted, referring to the pink PJs that he wore. The shirt had a large scooped neck that exposed his collar bones and short sleeves from which his muscles bulged. Across his chest a white unicorn with a rainbow mane pranced happily in a field of pink hearts. Scattered hearts and rainbows decorated the matching bottoms.

“You do!” she squealed excitedly. “You totally do!” But her laughter seemed to indicate otherwise.

“Laugh all you like,” he crossed his arms. “I’m secure in my masculinity.”

As her laughter continued, Adrien’s certainty began to waiver.

“Okay, that’s it.” He turned on his heel and ascended the steps to the next level above them.

“Wait! Adrien!” Marinette called as she watched his form slip through the hatch door in the ceiling. She grabbed the mask and headband that he had left behind and followed him. “You’re leaving?” She panted as she joined him on the roof, finding him putting the black gloves from the costume back on.

“It’s late and I think I’ve entertained you enough for one night,” he smirked. He picked up the Chat
suit from the deck chair and slung it over one shoulder.

“You’ve been very entertaining.” She took a step closer, handing him the mask and headband.

“Wait until Chloe and Sabrina see me in this,” he said indicating the pajamas, which were a bit snug and too short. He slipped the mask over his head and let it hang around his neck. He set the headband on his head, the cat ears pointing upwards to the sky in attention.

“You look very…”


“Dashing, definitely,” Marinette giggled as she rolled her eyes.

“I’ll bring you your clothes tomorrow. I don’t think it’s worth the effort or the risk to put the suit on again.”

“I...I had a really good time tonight.” Marinette ventured to say. “I hope we can do it again sometime? Maybe without the superhero suits?”

“I’d like that. But the unicorn, you gotta let me wear this again. So comfy,” he joked, wrapping his arms around himself and squeezing.

“Only if you let me wear your pajamas in return,” Marinette joked.

“Deal! And, if you decide to wear this dress again, [whispers] which I sincerely hope you do, I’ll dress up, too.”

“In a dress!??” Marinette cried.

“No! Don’t be silly.” But, then his face screwed up into a smirk, “Although, I do have gorgeous legs.”

“Given what you’ve worn tonight I wouldn’t put it past you.”

“Point taken,” he said using his finger and thumb to playfully shoot at her. He cleared his throat and then rubbed the back of his neck with his hand. “I, um, checked with Nathalie and I have an opening in my schedule on Sunday. So...would you, uh, would you want to...um, hang out?”

“Sure! I’d love to,” she enthused.

“Great!” Adrien smiled broadly. “I know it’s a long time to wait, but we could eat lunch together tomorrow...if you like.”

Marinette nodded, “Yeah! We have more Shugo Chara to watch!”

Silence fell over them again as neither wished to part from one another.

“I suppose I should say goodnight, then.”

“Goodnight, Patch.”

He slung a leg over her railing, but paused at the new name. He quirked an eyebrow at her as he noted her broad smile. “Am I ‘Patch’?” he asked. Marinette nodded.

A smile pulled at his mouth. “Because of my, um, patch?” He pointed to his bottom. Marinette
nodded again while giggling. “You know I’m going to have to give you a nickname, too?”

“Okay,” she tittered happily. “Wait! How are you getting down? You’re not going to jump are you?”

“No!” he assured her as his hand gestured to the grappling hook and rock-climbing rope dangling from the balcony railing. “Look familiar?”

“Oh! Right. Yes, yes it does,” she agreed, all the while inwardly cringing. She could only hope that Chloe’s yo-yo actually had a grappling hook feature or if it didn’t that Adrien would never find out.

He nodded and continued his maneuver, kicking both legs over the side of the rail. He twisted around holding the rail with his hands as his toes stood on the edge of the balcony.

“How will you get home?” she asked, stopping him again.

“Chloe’s car is parked around the street. She’ll drive me home, well near enough and then I’ll sneak back in..”

“She’s been waiting this whole time?”

“She had Sabrina to abuse, I mean, to amuse her,” he smirked. “Slip of the tongue.” His hands grabbed the rope and deftly passed it between his legs, front to back, before looping it around his left leg and then across his chest from his left hip up to his right shoulder.

“Is this safe?” Marinette asked, eyeing the drop.

“Perfectly,” Adrien tried to assure her. He had done this before lots of times, but only from his rock climbing wall in his bedroom which was only about a quarter of the height. “It just takes a while. Um, could I ask, I mean, would you mind a kiss? I mean, uhhhh, for luck?”

Marinette leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. “Good luck,” she whispered. Her breath on his skin made the hairs on his neck stand on end.

“I am sooo lucky,” he babbled happily. Before he knew what he was doing he had returned the favor and kissed her on the cheek.

“Me, too,” came her astonished reply.

With a silly grin Adrien carefully turned his body sideways. Preparing himself to rappel down, his hands moved from the rail to the rope. With his right hand he held the rope nearest where it was secured to the rail and with his left hand he held the rope as it dangled below. Slowly and with painstaking care Adrien descended, letting the rope between one hand slightly loosen to lower his body, allowing the rope wrapped around his shoulder, torso, and leg to tighten to provide tension as he leaned away from the building. All the while he could feel Marinette’s eyes on him. He could hear her whisper words of encouragement.

When he finally reached the bottom, he called out that he was safe. With a wave over his shoulder that he wasn’t sure she could see due to the darkness surrounding him, he ran down the alley and turned the corner toward Chloe’s parked car. Now safe out of view he pumped his fist in the air in celebration as he ran.

Chapter End Notes
Thanks to MJ for beta reading this chapter.
Hope you guys like this chapter. It did wonders for my writer's block when writing Adrinette, so for that I am very thankful.

I like the idea of the clothes that they wear being a reflection of who they are. Marinette is girly, so she wears pink, but also picks a classic, simple outfit to be unassuming. At least some of her outfit, her purse for example, she has designed and made herself, so it is truly an expression of her. Pink is also associated with her Ladybug red, but muted and softer. Chloe wears a bright color, yellow, to stand out, but since it's her mother's last gift to her that pain also shades her personality and she carries it with her on a daily basis. Adrien wears what his father tells him to, just like his whole life. The whiteness of his jacket, representing Adrien's bland/plainness, covers his black tee-shirt that represents Chat Noir. But not all of it is hidden, some of the black can be seen and there are moments where as Adrien he lets his Chat-ness show. The stripes on his t-shirt represent Chat (green), Chloe (yellow), and Gabriel (purple). Chloe, who doesn't like Chat, and his father, who as HawkMoth is his enemy, surround him, but they are or rather should be the people he's closest to, his oldest friend and his only living (or present) family. They are also the two characters most in need of redemption and Adrien/Chat will most likely be at the center of the their redemption. (If Gabriel can be redeemed.) Okay, that's all for my color commentary...

Anyway, the next chapter will set up the final chapter. I envision two more chapters and then we will be done. Yay! I have a request though: I need an idea for an akuma, for the last chapter. Something that initially seems not so dangerous, but then is very dangerous and may or may not kill Chat. Let me know if you have any good ideas that you don't mind me using. Otherwise, there may be a bit of a wait for the last chapter until I can think of a good one.

Thanks to everyone for their comments, which I enjoy reading, and your kudos, which makes me feel very appreciated.
“Oh my God, girl? Where have you been?” Alya cried as she launched herself off of the school steps and into the arms of her best friend. “Tell me everything that happened last night? Are you and Adrien DATING?!?!”

“What? No, Alya,” Marinette shook her head as she tried to untangle herself from the taller girl’s grip. “We’re just friends, same as before. Well...maybe better friends now.”

“How much better?” Alya waggled her eyebrows.

“Not friends with benefits if that’s what you mean.”

“Ugh! You two are going to be the death of me. Okay, okay, just tell me what happened. I’m dying to know!” she begged.

“Adrien came over dressed as Chat Noir…”

“Yeah!?!?”

“And, I apologized and explained. And, he forgave me. And that’s it,” Marinette shrugged. “Now we’re friends.”

“That’s it? How can that be IT?!?!? He dressed up in a superhero outfit! Climbed in your bedroom window! And,…”

“No ‘and’. That’s it. We just talked.”

“But he must know how you feel about him. Please tell me you told him!” Alya pleaded.

“I didn’t have to. He said it was pretty obvious when someone dresses in a skin tight outfit, climbs in
“OH MY GAWD!!!! He said that? He actually said that!?!?” Alya grabbed her bestie by the shoulders and shook her.

“Yeah, so?” The shook girl clawed Alya’s hands off of her shoulders and took a step back to steady herself.

“Marinette! That’s exactly what Adrien did for you! He likes you!”

“No, see he didn’t kiss me, so we’re just...um...oh...no, see, it wasn’t like that.” She shook her head nervously as she bit her lip.

“*What* wasn’t like that?”

“Our kiss,” Marinette whispered, “it wasn’t like that!”

“You kissed again!!!” Alya shouted and jumped up and down. Marinette’s arms flew up in front of her, waving Alya to be still, all the while shushing her to be quiet. After getting the message, Alya resumed her interrogation at half the volume, “You said ‘that’s it’. You said you ‘just talked’.”

“We did! I mean, it happened just before he left. He had to climb down the rope and you know, my balcony’s pretty high and he just asked me for a kiss, you know, for luck.”

“And you kissed!!! That proves he likes you!” Alya pointed happily at her friend.

“Noooo! I just kissed him on the cheek…”

“Aww, girl! *That* was your opportunity! You should have kissed him for *real*.”

“And, then he kissed me on *my* cheek.” Marinette’s hand covered the spot on her cheek where Adrien’s lips had touched her.

“Oh yeah? Did you need some luck, too?” Alya smirked, as she elbowed the other girl in the ribs. “Okay, the boy’s crushing on you. I don’t care if you don’t see. *He* may not even see it. But he does. Adrien has a crush on you!”

“Shhhh....Alya! Be quiet! Someone’s going to hear you! And, no he doesn’t! We agreed on friends. That’s what we are, *just* friends.”

“What’s with your hair and the dress, then? Why’re you so dressed up?” Alya asked, noting Marinette’s updo and pale blue, cotton, Spring dress.

Marinette hummed not commitally as she walked through the door of the school.

“Hmph! Friends my ass!” Alya huffed as she hurried after her.

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Marinette stretched herself out on the deckchair, reveling in the comfy pajamas that she wore, *Adrien’s* pajamas. He had brought them over for her to wear while they hung out this morning. He, of course, donned her unicorn pajamas again underneath the preapproved clothes of his father, but once inside the Dupain-Cheng domicile the *Gabriel* label shirt and pants were discarded in favor of the prancing unicorn. She in turn happily wore his Jagged Stone t-shirt and plaid, flannel sleep pants despite them being a size or two too big. Her father’s eyebrows raised up so high at the sight of them that Marinette thought that they might get stuck, while her mother couldn’t hide her giggles. But the
two teenagers paid them no mind, getting their snacks and returning to Marinette’s room to watch *Shugo Chara* and talk.

A smile pulled at Marinette’s mouth at the happy memory of a wonderful late morning spent with her crush, er, *friend*. So wonderful in fact that she had not changed her clothes since putting on Adrien’s pajamas. After he left an hour or so after lunch, she lazed around the house in them, doing homework, cleaning up her room, and helping her parents cook dinner. Now as she breathed in the cool air of the early evening from her balcony she slowly flipped through her sketchbook, coming at last to the sketch of Adrien she had made a few nights ago. She smiled fondly, before turning to reread the notes she had scribbled in the margin about the type of clothing that he likes. Her gaze became unfocused as she saw in her mind’s eye Adrien’s figure. Unknowingly the end of her pencil came to her lips, she nibbled gently as she pondered. After a few moments the pencil popped out of her mouth and lowered quickly to a fresh turned page. Curiously her hand moved back and forth, eager to capture on paper the lines and curves that only she could see. Only once did her pencil still and then flip, bringing eraser to paper. Soon enough the pencil flipped again and graphite once more connected to the page, adding shading and detail. She scribbled notes about fabric and color. She held the book at arm’s length to admire it. Only when she was completely satisfied with her design did she call out to the air around her.

“I know you’re there, Chat!” She could feel the feline’s eyes on her. “Here, kitty, kitty!”

With a thud, Chat landed on her balcony. “What gave me away?”

Marinette shrugged as she set her pencil in the crease of her book and let it rest on her lap. “Just a feeling,” she replied with a stretch and a small smile. She just knew her partner is all. The last time he had seen her, she was pretty upset, so she knew it wouldn’t be long before he’d visit again. Marinette was a little surprised that it was only three days later, but she didn’t mind. “What’s up?” She moved her legs to make room for him on the deck chair.

Chat shrugged before settling himself in the spot she indicated. “Just came to check on you.”

“This is becoming a habit,” she smirked.

“What can I say? I hate seeing you sad.” He regarded her and then pointed out, “You look much happier today.” She still wore his pajamas he noted as well as a bright smile.

“I am, thanks. I talked to my crush and he’s forgiven me. We’re friends again, so everything is fine. We even had lunch together the next day and this morning he came over. We hung out for a few hours between his Chinese class and his piano lesson.”

“That’s great! I’m glad, Princess.” Chat paused, wondering if he should ask, but then did so anyway. “So, just friends? You okay with that?”

Marinette nodded. “Like you said, friends is just as good. Even better.”

“I see...” Chat’s brows furrowed, but then he smiled reassuringly, even brightly. He was trying to be happy. Why didn’t he actually *feel* happy? A silence fell over them. Chat searched for something to say. “What are you working on?” he asked pointing to her sketchbook.

“A gift for my crush, er my *friend*. See, his dad is really strict and won’t let him wear the clothes that he likes, he has to wear the clothes that his father likes. So, I’m making him something. He can wear it here when we hang out and his father’ll never know. I just hope he’ll like it.”

“I’m sure he will!” Chat enthused. “If you made it, how could he not?” His head raised and cocked
to one side, trying to get a better look at the sketch.

“I suppose so. He liked the other gifts I made for him.”

“Gifts?” Chat stopped his snooping and searched his memory. He could only remember one gift that she had made for him.

Marinette flipped back several pages in her sketchbook. “I made him this Santa hat for Christmas,” she said as she showed the drawing of the red and white hat to her partner. “He ended up giving it to an actual Santa. He got akumatized on Christmas, remember?”

“Oh yeah, how could I forget.” That was the gift Chat had been thinking of a moment ago. “I’m sure he liked it...a lot. I bet he gave it to Santa Claus just to cheer him up. He was having a bad night as I recall...getting akumatized...” Chat’s voice trailed off, feeling suddenly guilty and regretful that he had given away Marinette’s present.

Marinette nodded, “Yeah, Adrien’s really kind like that.” She smiled to herself. She reached into one of the pockets of the flannel pants and pulled out a string holding yellow and blue beads. “He gave me this for my birthday. It’s like the one I gave him when we teamed up for a gaming competition. He gave me this for my birthday. It’s like the one I gave him when we teamed up for a gaming competition. I didn’t make that one for him, but I gave it him to cheer him up. I told him it was lucky. He must have liked it if he made me one, right?”

“You...you have it with you?” he asked surprised.

“Absolutely! I love it. And, he told me that he always carries the one I made with him, so, it’s only fair...” Her voice trailed off. She chewed her lip. “Maybe I shouldn’t carry it with me now that we are just friends...” she thought. “But, no, we were just friends before all of this and Adrien carries the one from me, so then carrying his mustn’t mean anything more than friendship.” She gave the charms a squeeze in her palm before placing them securely back in her pocket. “I’ll continue to carry them as a reminder of my friendship with Adrien,” she decided.

“And then the first present I gave him was this...” Marinette flipped back more pages to almost the beginning of her sketchbook until she found the one she was looking for and held it up for him.

“A scarf?” Chat asked, puzzled. He didn’t remember ever receiving a scarf from Marinette. “When did you give this to him?”

“For his birthday. Actually, he doesn’t know I gave it to him,” she explained as she allowed Chat to take the sketchbook from her hands. “There was some kind of mix up and well...he thinks his dad gave it to him.”

“He (gulp) didn’t?” he asked as his eyes stayed glued to the page. He had never seen this sketch despite having looked through her sketchbook over a week ago at Chloe’s suite, but he recognized the knitting pattern. He had seen every time he had swathed his neck in the soft, warm fabric. There were several swatches of blue pasted on the page, but the one circled several times and marked “This One!” exactly matched the color of his scarf.

“Nope. I did.” Her finger tapped the book. “See? I incorporated my signature in the design. You have to hold it sideways. And, it runs the length of the scarf. I guess he never noticed and I certainly wasn’t going to tell him.”

“Why? Why didn’t you tell him?” Chat asked, his face flushed and his eyes began to pool. If the scarf was from Marinette, then that meant his father had gotten him nothing for his birthday, not even the same expensive, but impersonal fountain pen that he had received the previous three years. He
could feel a lump forming in his throat as disappointment clenched his heart.

“I couldn’t. You didn’t see the look on his face. He sparkled! He was so happy. He loves that scarf. It meant so much to him to think his father gave it to him.”

“But…”

Marinette shook her head no. “I made it for him to make him happy. And, it did. I had to keep it a secret. Don’t you see? If I told him, then I’d only be hurting him.”

Adrien’s heart swelled, knowing how much Marinette valued his happiness. She put it above her own. The only other people in his life who had ever done the same were his best friend, Nino, and his missing mother. The disappointment he felt just a moment ago fell from his heart like dry, shriveled leaves falling from a tree in autumn, and in its place grew a blossoming sense of acceptance, belonging, and even...love, tender like the new green sprouts of Spring growth.

“You’re so awesome, Marinette!” he breathed. The words sounded lame to his own ears, but it was all he could think, all he could manage to say, so overcome with emotion. Tears pricked his eyes, so he rose and stepped toward the railing. With his back to her he appeared as if he was looking out at the city, but he couldn’t see anything. He closed his eyes and hugged her sketchbook to his chest.

“You okay?” she asked, joining him at the railing.

“Adrien’s lucky to have you in his life, Marinette.” He passed her the sketchbook. “I am, too.”

“You just say that because I feed you pastries and cookies. Speaking of which, do you want a snack?” Sure of his answer she turned on her heel to fetch him a treat, but his words stopped her.

“Not today, thank you.” He swiftly pulled out his baton from its holder at the small of his back and jumped up to the rail. “I have an important errand I must attend to...superhero stuff, you know. Good night, Princess!” In one motion Chat leapt, planted his baton on the pavement below, and vaulted to a nearby rooftop.

Marinette watched as his figure grew smaller, marveling, “I never thought I’d see the day when Chat would turn down food. That boy eats more than...well, everyone, even Adrien!” A smile pulled at her lips as she settled back down on the deck chair to begin another sketch.

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Chat Noir touched down on the tiles of his bathroom floor. Before walking into the adjoining bedroom he released his transformation. Plagg zipped over to the mini fridge, seeking a snack. When the little god had settled comfortably on Adrien pillow, cheese wedge in hand, only then did he bother taking note of his chosen.

Adrien had stretched out on the bed a blue scarf, the blue scarf. The boy peered at it closely. Scattered across it were small “x”s stitched into the fabric. No wonder he had never noticed them before since the stitches were the exact same shade of blue as the yarn used to knit the scarf. He carefully traced the “x”s with his finger, slowly spelling out “MARINETTE” as he traveled the length of the scarf. With her needle the designer had “kissed” the scarf over and over to intwine her name into the fabric, signifying her artistry and her love for what she had made and for whom she had made it.

Plagg, having finished his cheese, flew over and sat on Adrien’s shoulder. “Trying to decode the message from your girlfriend?” he asked. “I’ll give you a hint...it says, ‘I love you, Adrien.’”
“Marinette is not my girlfriend, she’s…” Adrien stopped himself.

“Just a friend?” Plagg rolled his eyes.

“No,” he pulled the scarf off of the bed and looped it around his neck. “She’s the girl I love.”

The sudden movement of the scarf and the unexpected sentiment, knocked Plagg off his perch, sending him spinning through the air. When he had righted himself, he flew over to Adrien and grabbed him by the nose.

“So? What are you going to do about it?”

“I...I need to make a phone call.”

“Darn right! You need to...wait, what?” the kwami asked, surprised he wasn’t being made to transform Adrien again so he could run right back over to the bakery. “Who are you calling?”

Adrien picked up his cell phone from his desk and scrolled through his contacts. He held his breath as he listened to the phone ring, once, twice, three times, and then she answered.

“Chloe?” he asked. “I’m calling in another favor.”

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They had been talking and planning this for almost two weeks now. Most of that time had been necessary for Adrien to devise and then make a gift. He had finished it yesterday, so now they could commence with Operation Catch the ‘Bug. The time had come. The blonde girl scanned the students loitering at the picnic benches trying to find her target. She noted that the team had taken their places. All was set. Chloe caught Adrien’s eye across the courtyard. They gave each other a little nod before Chloe strode over to a picnic table occupied by a certain raven haired girl. She flopped into an empty seat and declared with a sigh, “Marinette, I need your help.”

“All she’s done is help you for the past two weeks!” Alya exclaimed, worried for her best friend sitting next to her. Marinette had been at Chloe’s side almost constantly, helping her to make amends to those she had wronged and trying to prevent her from causing new offenses.

“So? She promised she’d help me because we’re friends now,” Chloe stressed. Sabrina, who had accompanied Chloe, nodded in agreement.

“Friendship is a two-way street, ya know. I don’t see you returning the favor.” Alya crossed her arms as she spoke.

“I don’t mind, Alya,” Marinette cut in, but Alya wasn’t listening.

“Chloe’s done a lot for Marinette,” Sabrina defended her bestie as she patted her on the back.

“Like what?” Alya doubted.

“Well, for one, I helped her get noticed by Adrien.” Chloe smugly took credit for Marinette’s improved friendship with the blonde boy.

“By having her dress up as his crush!” Alya shook her head. “That stunt almost ruined their friendship.”

“No! Well, yes, I suppose, but no! By having her dress up! Wearing bright colors with her hair up has totally caught Adrien’s eye.”
“No it hasn’t!” Marinette twittered nervously. “Has it?”

“See for yourself!” Chloe’s eyes flicked to where Adrien sat at a table across the courtyard. Marinette turned her head and for a split second her eyes locked with Adrien’s before he turned his gaze away and back to his lunch companion. Marinette noted with surprise that pink dusted the boy’s cheeks. Was he... blushing?

“See, I told you!” Chloe sing-songed. “Adrien’s been bitten by the love bug. All thanks to me.”

“Chlo-ee!” Marinette whined, eager for her friend to stop her boasting. “I haven’t been dressing up for Adrien to notice me. I just want to look nice. As a designer I decided that I should put more thought and effort into my own wardrobe.”

“Your welcome,” Chloe dryly answered, dismissing the designer’s explanation. “So you see, Alya? I’ve been a great friend, a better friend than you!”

“How dare you!” Alya cried. “I’ve worked my butt off trying to get them together.”

“And done a very poor job of it.”

“L...I...you!” Alya sputtered.

“Chloe! Apologize! Quickly before an akuma comes!” Marinette demanded.

“I’m sorry I’m a better friend to Marinette than you are.” Chloe flicked her ponytail in the air.

“That’s not what I meant.” Marinette shook her head, disapprovingly.

“You’re not a better friend! And Adrien hasn’t been bitten by anything! Or if he has, then he’s still in denial,” Alya shot back.

“Says you. You don’t know Adrien the way I do.” Chloe’s nose thrust into the air as her hand clutched her heart. “I’m his oldest friend. Trust me. He has a crush on Marinette.”

“That doesn’t make any sense. For one thing, I would totally hear about it, since I’m dating Nino, Adrien’s best friend. And two, if Adrien has a crush on her, then why hasn’t he asked her out? Hmmm? He’d be certain of her answer. She dissolves into a puddle of goo anytime he’s near her.”

“Alya! I’m sitting right here!” Marinette reminded her. “Besides weren’t you just telling me that Adrien has a crush on me not too long ago? Not that I believe you...either of you…”

“Obviously, your source of information is either unreliable or withholding,” Chloe addressed Alya regarding Nino. “And, Adrien is not certain of her answer. He keeps saying Marinette wants to be just friends.” Chloe looked pointedly at the girl.

For a moment Marinette hesitated, unsure that she would be heard, since up until now she had been discussed while at the same time being ignored. When Chloe arched an eyebrow at her and specifically asked for her input with a “Well?” she jumped into the conversation.

“I didn’t say that!” Marinette exclaimed, throwing her hands up in surrender, but then upon reflection she admitted, “Well, um, maybe I did give that impression, but only because I thought that’s what he wants.”

“What do you want?” Alya asked, leaning into Marinette.

“I’m fine with friends,” Marinette nodded, but gave a weak smile. “Friends is good...better than
“What if he asked you out?” Sabrina inquired, placing her hands on the table to raise her body closer to Marinette’s face. “Would you say yes?”

“He’s not going to…” she sighed.

“But what if he did?” Chloe pressed, hovering ever nearer. “What would you say?”

Marinette felt hemmed in on all sides and wished for the previous moment when no one cared what she said. Her eyes flicked away, searching for help, and they fell on Adrien. He laughed at something Nino said before turning his head and locking eyes with her. His smile grew even wider as his gaze softened. Marinette’s answer left her grinning lips before she realized what she had said.

“Yeeeaah,” she cooed. “I’d say yeah.”

Chloe, Alya, and Sabrina exchanged a satisfied look before Alya made a big show of taking off her glasses, cleaning them for a decidedly long time and then placing them back on her face. From across the courtyard, Adrien took note. That was the signal for “yes”. He had his answer. Nino also noticed the grand gesture and slapped his friend on the back in congratulations.

“But, it doesn’t matter,” Marinette insisted, having come out of her haze now that she was no longer staring at Adrien. “We’re just friends.”

“If you say so, but if I were you I’d expect him to ask you out short-ly.” Chloe sat back in her chair, sing-songing the last word.

“Did he say that?” Marinette’s voice raised two octaves.

“He doesn’t have to. He will. The evidence is obvious, seriously!” Chloe insisted.

“What evidence?” Alya asked, skeptically.

“For one thing, he went to all that trouble to visit her after they had that falling out.”

“Yes, that was pretty remarkable,” Alya hummed in agreement. When Marinette started to protest, Alya interrupted, “The boy cosplayed for you, Marinette, aaaaand risked his life getting up and down your balcony.”

“They’ve been spending a lot of time together, too,” Chloe noted.

“Nine lunches and two Sundays of hanging out in the past three weeks,” Sabrina helpfully surmised.

“Wow!” Alya breathed. “That’s a lot. I’m almost jealous. Adrien’s trying to steal my bestie.” The bespeckled girl threw her arm over the shoulders of the blushing girl sitting beside her.

“No he’s not!” Marinette protested, throwing Alya’s arm off of her. “And, that’s not a lot of time together. Adrien only has limited openings in his schedule, which means that lunches are the easiest times to get together, that’s all.” But no one was listening to her...again.

“That must be why Nino’s been so pouty lately,” Alya hummed. “He’s been complaining that he hasn’t had enough bro-time. I thought he was over exaggerating, but maybe not!”

“It’s ridiculous how much time they spend together,” Chloe noted referring to her oldest friend and her newest. “Utterly ridiculous!”
Sabrina nodded. “It’s like you can’t help seeing one without the other. People don’t even ask ‘Where’s Adrien?’ or ‘Where’s Marinette?’ anymore. They ask ‘Where’s Adrienette?’”

“No, they don’t,” Marinette argued. “Do they?” The raven-haired girl was reminded of a certain PB&J conversation. Did her classmates just equate her with Adrien now as if they...go together!?!?

“And, they have those sickeningly sweet pet names for each other. It’s disgusting, seriously,” Chloe continued.

“They’re not pet names; they’re nick names,” Marinette corrected.

“Nicknames can be used by anyone or are social names. Whereas pet names are intimate names and can only be used by one individual,” Sabrina defined helpfully.

“So if it’s a nickname, then I can call Adrien ‘Patch’, can’t I?” Chloe asked with a wicked smirk. Marinette turned beet red at the thought.

“You already have a pet name for Adrien,” Marinette reminded her, “and it’s plenty sickeningly sweet.”

“Why won’t you tell us how you got your pet names, huh?” Alya asked. “I mean, yours is pretty straightforward, but his? I feel like there’s a story behind ‘Patch’ and you’re holding out on us. Spill!” Alya demanded.

“There’s nothing to tell,” Marinette lied as she busied herself with folding a spare napkin leftover from lunch. Anything to keep her from meeting Aya’s scrutinizing gaze.

“I don’t believe you,” Chloe hummed. “He’s looking at you again...”

Marinette’s head whipped around on its own accord just in time to again catch Adrien staring at her before he looked away. Nino, who was sitting across from him, noticed the exchange and waved at the raven-haired girl. Marinette could see Nino saying something to Adrien, who had turned bright red. The blonde boy ever so reluctantly turned toward her and waved sheepishly. Marinette giggled and waved back.

“I rest my case,” Chloe stated decidedly.

“I, um, well...” Marinette tried to find something to say.

“Now, then, if I may be allowed to finish,” Chloe pointedly looked at Alya, who rolled her eyes. “So, Marinette, will you help me?” The blonde smiled sweetly at her newest friend.

“I’d be happy to help, Chloe, if I can...” Marinette replied, feeling a bit nervous that the request would be something more than supporting the blonde in her endeavors to be a better person. “What do I have to do?”

“Not that much. Just help me entertain the kid of one of Daddy’s associates.”

“Who?”

“I don’t know!” Chloe waved her hand dismissively in the air. “Some kid. She’s younger than us. She wants to go to the aquarium.”

“Who wants to go to the aquarium?” a male voice asked, unexpectedly. All of the girls looked up to find Adrien’s smiling face. Nino stood next to him.
“Hi there, Dudettes,” the DJ greeted the girls, but he looked to be less than thrilled to be standing there. “We don’t want to intrude. We’re just passing by, right, Adrien?” He tapped his bestie on the arm and then hooked his thumb, directing them to where Nino wanted to go.

“Adrikins!” Chloe gushed. “I was just trying to convince Marinette to help me. I have to babysit a kid of one of Daddy’s associates. She wants to go to the aquarium. Won’t you help me, Marinette?” She grasped the other girl’s hands with her own. “You’re so much better with young kids, probably because you’re still so immature.”

“Chloe!” Alya elbowed her and Sabrina waved her hands in front of her trying to warn her friend.

“I mean, um, you’re so young at heart,” Chloe tried to cover her mistake. “Come on! Pleeeeaaasse!?!?”

“Well…”

“It sounds like fun,” Adrien interjected. “I’ve never been to the aquarium before.”

All of Adrien’s friends stared at him in surprise.

“Dude!” Nino shook his head. “Your father has serious control issues. I mean, the aquarium, man, that’s like totally educational! He shouldn’t have a problem with you going there.”

“Come with us!” Chloe happily agreed. “It’ll be more fun with Adrien, won’t it Marinette?”

“Yeeaaah,” Marinette drooled, but then coming to her senses she backpedaled. ‘I mean, um, of course, it would be more fun if everyone came.” Her arms flailed excitedly as she tried to gesture to the other girls seated at the table and then to Nino. “We all should go! The more the merrier, right?”

Everyone good naturedly agreed, nodding and voicing their approval, especially Nino, who seemed overjoyed to spend more time with his bestie.

“Good, then you lot can watch the little monster,” Chloe snarked, but noticing the doubtful looks of her friends, she amended, “under my supervision, of course.”

“Why do I get the feeling that we’ll be doing all the work?” Alya grumbled.

“We’ll meet at the aquarium, Sunday at noon,” Chloe ordered.

“But, Patch!” Marinette squeaked. “Not Sunday!”

“Sunday works,” Adrien agreed with a smile.

“But, Patch!” Marinette jumped to her feet and grabbed her “just a friend” by the arm. The sudden movement caused one end of the blue scarf that Adrien had been wearing religiously for the past two weeks despite the warm weather to slip from his shoulder. “That’s when we hang out and watch Shugo Chara, remember? ” As much as she knew helping Chloe was the right thing to do, Marinette did not want to sacrifice any alone time with Adrien.

“I haven’t forgotten,” he soothed, looping his arm over her shoulders and giving her a sideways hug. “I’ll come over to your house as usual, we can eat breakfast and watch Shugo Chara and then meet Chloe at the aquarium at noon. Sound good?”

“But, your piano lesson…you’ll hardly be at the aquarium before you’ll have to go,” Marinette argued.

“Oh! I didn’t get to tell you. M. Ravel’s daughter is getting married. It’s a destination wedding in
Cannes, so he won’t be back in town in time for my lesson, so…”

“So, you’re free the whole day?!” Marinette asked excitedly.

“The whole day…” Adrien grinned. “We can hang out afterwards if you want, too.”

“Definitely!”

“Then we’re agreed?” Chloe broke in.

“What d’ya say, Doodlebug?” Adrien took Marinette’s hand in his. “Will you go to the aquarium with me?”

Alya and Chloe snickered at hearing Adrien call Marinette by his pet name for her. Marinette scowled at them before simply nodding yes.

“Great! It’s a date!” Adrien beamed. Before Marinette could faint at the thought, Chloe squealed in delight, snapping the shook girl from what would have been a mesmerizing moment. The blonde girl thanked them both, of course only after Sabrina reminded her to do so. Alya bit the inside of her cheek to keep from squealing herself, but her eyes gave her away as they danced excitedly. Nino chuckled quietly to himself as a bemused smile graced his lips.

The bell indicating the warning that lunch would be ending in five minutes rung.

“Walk you to class, ‘Bug?” he asked, turning his hand over and entwining his fingers with her own.

Marinette started. Chat Noir called her that. No, Chat Noir called Ladybug that. He didn’t use it very often but that was probably more due to the fact that he had so many pet names, er nicknames, for her. There was M’Lady, L.B., Bugaboo, Buginette, ‘Bug…

“Marinette?” Adrien asked, while using the end of his scarf to tickle her cheek. “May I please walk you to class?”

Batting the scarf away from her face, she gave Adrien an annoyed scowl before giggling at the pout on his face. “Okay,” she smiled, but was surprised to find herself holding Adrien’s hand, not that she’d let go, of course.

The friends rose from their seats, following the other two down the hallway all the while whispering to each other.

“Nicely done,” Alya quietly complimented her co-conspirator.

“I was good, wasn’t I?” Chloe agreed. “You played your part adequately.”

“High praise indeed!” Alya smirked. “You know, it wasn’t nearly as horribly painful teaming up with you as I thought it would be.”

“Likewise,” the blonde allowed herself to admit.

A few steps behind the two girls Sabrina and Nino walked side by side.

“I don’t know which is more surprising,” Sabrina hummed, “seeing Adrien and Marinette on the brink of dating or seeing Chloe and Alya on the brink of being friends.”

“I’m gonna go with Chloe and Alya,” Nino decided. “I never thought those two would ever see eye to eye on anything.”
Sabrina nodded, “It did seem pretty unlikely. About as unlikely as Chloe befriend...”

“Or, Chloe settling to be ‘just friends’ with Adrien,” Nino chuckled.

“Or, Chloe actively working to set Adrien up with another girl,” Sabrina laughed.

“What are you two giggling about?” Chloe asked annoyed as she whipped around suddenly to glare at the two stragglers.

“Nothing!” they both replied in unison, but they looked sideways at each other conspiratorially.

“Pay them no mind, girl,” Alya said as she linked arms with the blonde. “Let’s just enjoy the fruits of our labors.” She steered Chloe back down the hall so that they could watch Adrien and Marinette hand in hand walk to class.

Marinette leaned closer to Adrien to whisper something that the co-conspirators couldn’t hear.

“You do realize Chloe will likely not show up and we’ll get stuck with the kid.”

“That’s fine by me,” Adrien hummed. “I’d gladly get stuck with you anytime.”

“You think they’ll actually get together?” Alya asked her partner excitedly as she watched Marinette giggle and playfully smack Adrien’s shoulder with her free hand.

“With those two, it would take a miracle.” Chloe rolled her eyes, but a smile tugged at her lips.

Chapter End Notes

The SCARF! OMG, the SCARF! So, they have to circle back to it on the show, right? Adrien has to find out, right? I'm convinced that he does and that it actually will be the thing that saves him after he finds out his dad is HawkMoth. That finding out what Marinette did for him restores Adrien's faith in humanity. Cuz if they don't ever bring it back up again, I'm gonna be mad and then I'm gonna have to write that scene just to pacify my soul. Ok, rant over.

Adrien's music teacher is named for the French composer, Maurice Ravel.

Nicknames: I neglected to discuss this in the last chapter, but there is no way that Adrien wouldn't come up with a nickname for Marinette once he develops feelings for her. I feel it in my bones. Honestly, I kinda hate "Mari". I've seen it used, and I've even used it in one of my other fanfics, but I wanted something more personal for this story, hence Doodlebug, which is fitting for her drawing and designing, but also hints at her being Ladybug. Patch for Adrien makes sense given the previous chapter, but it is also the 10th most popular name for a cat in the U.S. according to a website I found while doing a Goggle search and that's good enough for me.

Love the idea of Chloe and Alya finally being friends and even teaming up, whether it be as their civilian selves or as QueenBee/Rena Rouge.

This chapter is basically set up for the next (last) chapter where we will see Marinette and Adrien hang out, exchange gifts, go to the aquarium, and (maybe) a reveal or two. Also, thanks for the akuma ideas. I actually came up with my own, although I'm still...
trying to figure out what her name will be. Here's a hint: Stab, Stab, Stabby, STAB
Again, thanks so much for all of the support, comments, kudos. It really helps
motivation-wise to hear from you. Thanks for reading! <3
A Strategic Relationship

Chapter Summary

Adrien visits Marinette at her house prior to meeting their friends at the aquarium. Lots of fluff.
The two teens arrive at the aquarium and meet two unexpected people.

Chapter Notes

Thanks to MJ for beta reading this chapter. I thought this would be the last one to end the fanfic, but whoops! I couldn't get it all in one, so there'll be another chapter to wrap things up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Marinette!” her mother called. “Adrien’s…”

“Here!” She could hear a male voice from below. “Can I come in?” Adrien tapped on the trapdoor.

“Ack!” Marinette cried, scrambling to her feet, tripping over the leg of her desk chair and falling to the floor with a loud thump. “Ow!”

“You okay?” came Adrien’s concerned question from behind the door.

“I’m fine!” she assured him as she opened the trapdoor with a smile. “You’re early! Not that I mind.”

“I got let out of class on good behavior,” Adrien winked as he walked into her bedroom. “My Mandarin teacher was so pleased with my inflection that he let me go a whole 15 minutes early. Well...that and he had to take an important phone call,” he shrugged. “But in any case, here I am! Did you miss me, Doodlebug?”

“Hardly,” she scoffed, trying to play off the excitement she felt by seeing him. “I just talked to you last night.”

“Well, I missed you! I even brought a surprise!” He teased, holding up his messenger bag.

“What is it?” Marinette asked, curious as her hand reached out to open his bag. Adrien pivoted to move it out of her reach.

“Uh-uh,” he scolded. “Not yet…”

Marinette pretended to pout. “Patch!” she whined, but Adrien just chuckled.

“You going to the aquarium in your pajamas, ‘Bug? Or should I say, my pajamas?” he asked with a bemused smile.
Marinette’s face burned bright red. “I...I...didn’t have any clean pjs. I don’t normally wear these, ya know. And besides, you...you’re early!” she sputtered. “Stay here! I’ll just be a moment.” She hurriedly grabbed some clothes without really thinking and stomped off to the bathroom downstairs to change.

“He would have to catch me wearing his clothes,” she thought ruefully. “He must think I’m so weird…”

When she returned to her room Marinette found Adrien sans messenger bag, jacket, and scarf, standing in front of her wall of pictures. A small grin graced his delicate mouth as he carefully admired each picture. Upon her approach he spoke without turning to see her.

“You added some pictures,” he noted, “of both of us.”

“Yeah, I thought maybe it was a bit weird to have a wall devoted to you, since, you know, were friends,” she said as she set down a plate of pastries on the desk. “I mean, it’s not like I worship you or anything. I’m not a fangirl. I just didn’t have any personal pictures of you before, but now I do, so...”

“I like these.”

“Yeah?” she asked with a smile. “Me, too. I thought for every picture I put up of the two of us, I’d take down one of your modeling shots, you know, until they’re all replaced.”

Adrien’s eyes scanned the wall finding a cosplay Ladybug grinning beside cosplay Chat Noir. Another picture showed the two in each other’s pajamas with their faces stuffed like chipmunks, the result of an impromptu eating contest. Adrien grinned at the memory of Marinette beating him by eating 29 macarons in 2 minutes compared to his 27. A different picture displayed Marinette’s broad smile and petite frame in Chloe’s Versace blue dress as Adrien stood behind her with his arms wrapped around her. Next to it hung a full length shot of Marinette in the same blue dress beside Adrien in a gold lamé Gucci dress, borrowed from Chloe’s closet. Both struck impressive, overdramatic “Vogue” poses. That day the famous model had shown the aspiring fashion designer how to strut on an imagined catwalk in her bedroom. But, the best one by far in Adrien’s opinion was a picture that he didn’t even know had been taken. The two of them were curled up on her couch downstairs in the family’s living room. They shared a fuzzy, warm blanket as each held one end of the tablet as they intently watched *Shugo Chara*. Adrien’s arm draped over Marinette’s delicate shoulders while her head rested peacefully on his chest.

“Maman snapped that one,” Marinette explained after noticing where Adrien’s eyes lingered. “I can send you a copy.”

Adrien nodded and smiled in agreement. He pulled his gaze away from the wall so he could thank her and that’s when he finally looked at the girl standing next to him. Her hair was parted and tied in her typical pigtails. She wore a white blouse with a pink and red floral design over pink capris.

“Oh!” Adrien breathed. “You look pretty...as always,” he quickly added.

“Just my normal look,” Marinette sighed as she struggled to tie the loose ends of the cuffs of her sleeves. They ended just above the elbow and she couldn’t quite tie them with one hand. “Chloe will probably give me crap for it. No doubt she’ll think it boring,” she muttered.
“I’ve never found anything about you to be boring,” Adrien opined, “including your clothes.
Tasteful, feminine, and cute. Yes, yes, and yes, but boring? No. Want some help?”

Before she could answer Adrien had taken up the loose ends of one cuff and had tied it into a bow.
Marinette slowly turned her body and offered her other arm so as to make it easier for him. This time
he proceeded much slower, taking his time to tie the bow just so. His fingers looped one end over the
other as they ever so delicately brushed her skin. Marinette inwardly cheered. What did Chloe know
anyway? Her ensemble may be “boring” to some, but she liked it and so did Adrien and furthermore
it provided a reason for this achingly wonderful close proximity.

“Marinette!” she chided herself. “You’re supposed to be just friends!”

“That’s great!” she chirped, stepping back to examine his work. “Thanks!” She busied herself with
sending him that picture of them on the couch, allowing herself time for her heartbeat to resume to its
normal rhythm. Even though she had accepted Adrien’s feelings to be just friends, there were times
when Marinette had to work hard to keep her own feelings under control. This was one of those
times. She gave her arm a pinch to give her something to think about besides the gorgeous, kind,
funny blonde dork standing in her bedroom.

“Today’s the big day!” Adrien enthused as he sat down on the chaise, rubbing his hands together.
“In more ways than one,” he thought. He felt a buzz with excitement mixed with anxiety. “Are you
ready to finish Shugo Chara and find out whose ‘ship is canon?” They had five episodes left to
watch until the series finale. Adrien picked up her tablet and began cuing up the video. When all was
ready he looked up to find Marinette had disappeared somewhere.

“Doodlebug?” he called.

“Just a sec,” Marinette called over her shoulder as she dug at the back of her closet. When she found
what she was looking for she re-appeared, package in hand.

“What’s this?” he asked.

“Just a little present. Something for you to wear while you’re here...besides the unicorn pajamas.
Open it,” she commanded.

Adrien slowly took the package held out to him. He took a moment to admire the beautiful
wrapping, a large green ribbon swathed around white parchment paper. He gently pulled one end of
the bow, loosening the ribbon and then carefully unwrapped the paper. Inside was a black, soft
fabric, which he assumed was a blanket, but when he unfurled it, he realized it was actually...

“A cloak!” he cried and with a swish he had swirled it around his shoulders. He ran over to the full-
length mirror to admire himself in it. The cloak clasped with a zipper down the front, allowing him to
have a fitted, sleek look across his chest and torso as the faux leather hugged his frame down to his
waist and then hung to about the knee. A soft fleece-like material covered his sleeves and hung in
panels over the leather from his shoulders down the sides and across his back to almost his ankles.
From the chest the black leather swooped out across the shoulders, covering the panels, creating an
eye-catching pop out collar. A hood at the back of the neck could be brought up to complete the
look. The layered piece was part coat, part cloak, and part bad ass biker jacket.

“I love it! Thank you!” he whooped as he pulled the designer into a hug, the fabric enveloping her.
“Look! It can double as a blanket.”
Marinette giggled and nodded. Adrien turned around again to look at the cloak in the mirror, turning this way and that to see it from all sides. He pulled different faces and poses, pretending to be a king, followed by a Jedi, then a sorcerer. Each time Marinette laughed harder and harder at his overly dramatic antics.

“This is amazing! Father would never let me wear anything like this. It’s so dark and dramatic!” Adrien squealed in delight as he played with the hanging panels, swishing and swooping them in the air. The boy felt beyond impressed with Marinette’s gift. It was unlike anything he had ever seen her design before based on her drawings in her sketchbook. She had taken his input on his preferred aesthetic and made something entirely for him.

“I’m glad you like it. Let me show you how it works. Both the hood and the cape detach, so you can have different looks, depending on your mood,” she said as she snapped off the hood first and then the cape to show him. “And, you can wear the cape separately if you want.” She helped him off with the coat and then handed him the cape, which he threw over his shoulders.

He held up one arm, using the cape to partially cover his face and then in his best Dracula voice he said, “I vanna suck your blood! Blah-bla-blah!”

Marinette giggled. There was something about the gleefulness in Adrien’s eyes that made her think of Chat, but she chalked it up to just associating him with her partner due to the black leather. “Now, here’s the best part,” the designer noted. “It’s reversible.” She turned the fitted coat inside out and held it up for him to see.

Adrien’s eyes beheld a dark hunter green coat with the same zipper closure, but on the back was something very special: patches.

“I decorated it with patches, since I call you ‘Patch’, she explained. “Get it?”

They were made from rectangular pieces of various fabric with designs stitched on them and then hand sewn onto the cloak. The first patch was of a black umbrella against a grey background with blue raindrops. The next showed a grey, feathered bowler hat against a pink background. Another featured a Ladybug Mech fighting a Black Cat Mech from Mecha Strike III, the video game that they often played together. Beside it was a patch displaying the pink and green string of charms Marinette had given Adrien and another patch further down showed the blue and yellow string of charms that he had given her. A steaming bowl dominated another patch with the phrase “Marinette soup” stitched in Chinese characters, commemorating the day that Adrien acted as translator for Marinette’s great uncle while in Paris for a cooking competition.

“It’s our friendship,” Marinette felt the urge to continue to explain her creation. “See? This one is for when I tried out for the fencing team and you showed me how to fence. And, this one with the musical notes is for when we danced together at Chloe’s party.”

Adrien ran his hand carefully over the patches, taking note of each one. A green patch displayed Ladybug and Chat Noir masks, no doubt a reminder of their cosplaying. A blue patch featured a tray of macarons, their favorite snack. There was even a patch with a tablet, showing a very small Amu and Ikuto, in honor of their Shugo Chara viewing parties.

Marinette watched Adrien carefully as she chewed on her lip. He hadn’t said anything for a long time. Instead, the blonde’s eyes remained fixed on examining the patches.

“I just thought that you could, um, sort of wrap yourself up in the memories that we made and know
that someone, well that is, that I, care...about you,” she stumbled over her words. “Not that you need a reminder, I mean, plenty of people care about you...Nino, Alya, Chloe, your dad…”

“Marinette.” Adrien looked up at her with tears in his eyes. “This is the most amazing gift I have ever received. I didn’t think it possible, but you’ve out done yourself.”

Marinette wasn’t sure exactly what he meant by that and he gave her no time to puzzle it out.

“I...I don’t know what to say...except, thank you! Thank you!” He hugged the cloak to his chest and then scooped the girl up into another hug. He twirled around and around while still holding her in his arms. Breathless and dizzy the two stumbled to a halt. Only then did they realize how close they had become to one another. Nose to nose the two stared, blue eyes meeting green, but only for a moment. Both turned away in embarrassment as their cheeks flushed. Adrien reluctantly released his hold on her and Marinette stepped awkwardly away.

“I’m so glad you like it,” she repeated. “Put it back on and I’ll take a picture.” The happy boy gladly obliged, posing in several stances to give her several options for her wall. As she texted him copies of their photoshoot, Marinette felt displeased to see that he had taken the cloak off again. He brought it over to the desk and laid it out on the flat surface. He leaned over it, inspecting it intently.

“What’re ya doin’?”

“Trying to find your signature. You always sign your work, right? Where did you hide it?” he hummed. For several minutes he searched, along the collar, down the panel of the cloak, inside the hood. The designer stood by, waiting patiently until at last he found it. On the hem of one sleeve she had stitched out a very small “Marinette” in cursive using black thread against the green fabric. The “i” was dotted with a heart.

“You...you sewed your heart on my sleeve,” he breathed. “I’m wearing your heart on my sleeve!” He wondered what that meant. He dared to hope that it meant something.

“Oh! Well, yes, I suppose so,” she agreed, not really realizing what she had done. When she signed her name, pen on paper, she always dotted the “i” with a heart. She’d never done so before when signing her clothing designs, but somehow this one felt much more...intimate. It deserved a more personal signature. “I just thought that it’d be nice for you to look down and see me, or at least my name, and know that I’m with you, but, I mean, of course, I would be with you, since you’d only be able to wear it here...with me…” Suddenly, her reasoning sounded rather stupid now that she said it out loud.

Adrien nodded and smiled. “I’m glad to be here with you, Doodlebug, especially if it means I can wear this.” He held the cloak up admiring the patches. “This one is my favorite, I think, because that’s when we became friends.” He pointed to the patch showing the umbrella in the rain when they had cleared up their misunderstanding upon first meeting.

“I like that one a lot, too, but my favorite has to be this one,” Marinette laughed as she pointed to a prancing rainbow unicorn in a sky filled with pink hearts. “That’s when we became best friends.”

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As the credits rolled Marinette stretched her legs, unfurling them along the length of the chaise lounge.
“One more episode to go!” Adrien enthused from his place curled up beside her. “Who do you think Amu will end up with?”

“Tadase. Definitely Tadase,” she answered emphatically.

“No love for my boy, Ikuto, huh?” Adrien shook his head as he swung his legs over the side of the chaise and onto the floor. “I guess not everyone is a cat person.”

“I am, too, a cat person!” Marinette insisted, rising to her knees and giving him a little shove.

“I recall you saying, ‘I hate cats!’ Believe me, I wouldn’t forget something like that.” To her surprise, the blonde boy looked downright forlorn.

“Cats are so very important to you?”

“Definitely.”

“Well, I don’t hate cats. I just said that because you were annoying me at the time,” she admitted. “I like them quite a lot. See?” She pointed to her desk where a figurine of a cat with a large smile sat. Adrien’s face brightened. Then, she ran up to her loft and pulled down the oversized cat pillow to show him. “I sleep with this guy every night.”

“Lucky tabby,” Adrien mumbled under his breath, but Marinette heard him and blushed. She dropped the pillow on the floor at her feet. She’d put it back later.

“I’m glad you like cats,” he smiled. “Too bad you don’t like Ikuto.”

“I don’t dislike him,” she clarified. “I just don’t like him with Amu, that’s all.”

“But, they go together!” the Amuto ‘shipper argued. “He has the key to her lock. That has to mean something!”

“Maybe it does and maybe it doesn’t. Amu should be able to choose and not be forced into being with someone just because of fate.”

Adrien frowned. “When you put it like that…”

“And besides the only reason Ikuto has that key is because he stole it from Tadase.”

“That’s true…”

“So? Have I convinced you? Are you Team Tadase now?” Marinette asked with wide eyes, but then her face twisted to a smirk. “I didn’t realize I had so much influence over you.”

“You do, but I’m not Team Tadase,” Adrien corrected. “Or, even Team Ikuto for that matter. No, for someone as special and magical as Amu, she deserves a guy as sweet and handsome as Tadase, but also someone who shares her same interests, like Kukai.”

“Kukai? Okay, I can see that,” Marinette agreed. She could get on board with that. She and Adrien certainly shared the same interests when it came to anime and gaming. They also liked the same foods, had the same friends, went to the same school. They had a lot in common.
“And, that person should be someone that Amu is completely comfortable talking to and being with, like her best friend, Nadeshiko, or rather Nagihiko, since she turned out to be a he,” Adrien continued.

Marinette nodded. She certainly considered Adrien to be one of her best friends, just like Alya and Chat Noir. She could talk to Adrien about anything now, since her feelings about him were no longer a secret. He had accepted her feelings with such grace and care, that she knew she could trust him with anything, even her deepest secret. Just like with Chat Noir and Alya, she had been tempted to tell Adrien about her superhero identity, but out of concern for their safety that one piece of her life she would have to guard from everyone she loved.

She noticed Adrien was staring at her and realized she hadn’t said anything. She scrambled to keep up with the conversation. “But, what about Ikuto?”

“Well, who can resist a flirty, mysterious cat-boy?” He raised the hood of his cloak up over his head, leaned in very close, and wiggled his eyebrows.

Marinette laughed, “Me for one!” Ladybug had lots of practice at that despite Chat’s charm and unbelievable good looks. But in those quiet moments when Chat visited her on her balcony she found that Marinette was a bit less resistant to his charms. She liked talking to him without the bluster of his ego or the rush of an attacking akuma. She was surprised to find that they had a lot in common, and not just in terms of broken hearts and unrequited love. He liked sweet, savory, and spicy foods, but not salty, just like her. Their taste in anime was pretty similar. Chat had not only gotten her hooked on Chugo Shara, but also Seven Deadly Sins. He had suggested it on a recent visit, teasing her that since she had a thing for green-eyed, blond guys that she’d probably like the show. Chat stayed to watch the first few episodes with her. After that he had visited almost every other day to watch an episode or two, although Marinette realized that the last two times he visited that they never even gotten around to watching it. Too busy talking, she supposed.

“That’s too bad,” Adrien murmured, snapping Marinette out of her reverie. She realized she was still pressing her hand on his chest to push him away, but he covered it with his own.

“And, she deserves someone brave enough to tell her how he really feels about her, just like Kairi.” The mood between them had suddenly turned serious as he lifted her hand off his chest and placed it into his other hand.

Marinette’s smile faltered. Adrien hadn’t confessed his love for her, because he didn’t love her. He loved Ladybug. And so did Chat. They both loved her superhero persona.

“I agree Amu deserves somebody like that, but there’s just one problem: no character has all of those characteristics.” She moved to turn away, but he held onto her hand.

“Marinette, I…I …”

The raven-haired girl looked from her hand enclosed by his to his emerald eyes. They sparkled brightly. Her hand felt warm in his. Something was about to happen. She could feel a million ladybugs flying inside her stomach.

“I want to say…”

Ding…ding.
Adrien cringed at the sound. His voice faltered.

“Your phone,” Marinette sighed.

_Ding._

Beep...beep.

“Yours, too.” Adrien reluctantly let go of the girl’s hand so he could fish his phone out from his pant’s pocket under the cloak. Marinette turned to pick up her phone from her desk.

“Oh no!” she cried. “Alya can’t make it.”

“Neither can Nino,” he replied with a sheepish grin, although he hadn’t even bothered to open his phone. He knew what the message would be. Internally, he was kicking himself for the lost moment and cursing his bad luck. He knew Plagg was probably chuckling at his interrupted confession from inside his messenger bag. “He forgot it’s his grandmother’s birthday.”

“We better get going. I didn’t realize it was so late.”

“Yeah…um,” Adrien scratched the back of his neck with his hand. “You still want to go? I mean, I’d understand if you don’t want to, since Alya and Nino can’t go.”

“Of course, I want to go!” she replied with sincere enthusiasm. “It’s your first time going to the aquarium. We can’t miss that!” The thought of doing something with Adrien for the first-time thrilled Marinette. She felt sure that in the future any time he went to an aquarium or saw a fish he would think of her. Actually, that didn’t sound either very special or romantic, but she would take whatever she could get.

"Yeah," he chuckled. “And we can’t ditch Chloe with the kid. I’m not sure who I would feel more sorry for if we did.” He unzipped his cloak to take it off.

“Plus, I spent a good two hours yesterday looking up fish related puns. We HAVE to go,” Marinette giggled.

“You...researched puns...for me ?” Adrien’s heart swelled.

“Of course! I can’t be flounder- ing for words around you, now can I?” she asked as she pulled out a hanger from her closet and passed it to him.

“Not bad!” he chuckled. “Cod do better. You’re super smart. You should think of your own puns and not leave it to salmon else.” He carefully placed his cloak on the hanger and passed it back to her.

“If you can think of a good fish pun, then by all means let minnow ,” she called over her shoulder as she hung up the cloak in her closet.

“No trout I can school you in making fish puns.” Adrien chuckled to himself as he pulled on his jacket. “Mind if I leave a few things here? We’re coming back afterwards, right?”

“Oh, yeah sure,” Marinette gave a distracted muffled reply. She was on all fours with her head stuck in the closet. One shoe after the next flew over her shoulder as she searched for the right pair. “We
still have the last episode to watch and Maman insists you stay for dinner.”

Adrien checked to make sure Marinette was otherwise occupied before opening the messenger bag. Plagg flew out.

“Don’t forget the cheese, Lover Boy!” he commanded quietly before settling himself in his normal place inside the right chest pocket of his chosen’s jacket. Adrien pulled out a wedge of camembert from his bag as well as a small box.

“What’s that?” Marinette asked. Adrien jumped in surprise. “Sorry! Didn’t mean to scare you. Soooo, what is that?”

“Uhhh…this? Just a snack for later,” he replied nonchalantly, hoping that’s what she was referring to and not to the magical sprite that just floated into his pocket. How would he ever explain that? He stuffed the cheese in his left side pocket, as far away from Plagg as he could keep it. He had learned the hard way that Plagg would eat endlessly if left to his own devices and then claim hunger when the time came to transform him. Adrien made sure to only feed Plagg after de-transforming and before needing to transform again.

“No! I meant that!” she pointed at the small box he was trying to hide inside one palm. “Is that my surprise?” She made a grab for it, but Adrien pivoted away.

“Maaaybe. I told you, Doodlebug, you have to wait,” he scolded.

“Patch!” she whined in annoyance.

Adrien just shook his head as he smirked. He wrapped his scarf around his neck.

“You won’t need that,” she advised, looping the strap of her purse over her head and one arm. “It’s supposed to be hot today.”

He had worn the blue scarf every day since learning Marinette had made it for him despite the warm weather. She was right though, the weather forecast called for unusually hot weather for April. He reluctantly flipped the scarf from his neck and folded it carefully before placing it in his bag.

“I hope it turns cold again soon,” he replied wistfully. He left his messenger bag sitting on her desk chair. He wouldn’t need his Mandarin text book or class notes.

“Come on! We’re late, remember?” She grabbed his hand to lead him out of the room, but in her haste she led him directly into the path of a shopping bag sitting on the floor. He tripped. Fabric of all colors spilled out onto the floor.

“Oh! Sorry!” He knelt down picking up the dislodged fabric one by one, refolding it and setting it back inside. Marinette joined to help him, assuring him it was no problem. These were mostly scraps that she had used to make his patches. When Adrien picked up a particularly eye-catching fabric his hand stilled.

“Don’t tell me you’re making a Ladybug costume?” he asked suspiciously as he held up the bright red and black spotted fabric.

“No! Not really…” she blushed. “I lost Chloe’s Ladybug mask. Somehow in all of the, um, drama, I must have dropped it. Anyway, she said I have to make her a new one. I just haven’t gotten around
I’ve been otherwise occupied making someone a cloak,” she smiled shyly before taking the fabric out of Adrien’s hands and plopping it back into the bag. Adrien sighed in relief, but before he could make any comment, Marinette had grabbed his hand and pulled him out the door. After all, they were late for the aquarium.

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Adrien and Marinette stood in line, waiting patiently for their turn to buy tickets at the aquarium. When their turn came Adrien had just opened his mouth to speak when the girl behind the counter started to scream.

“AAAAAaaaahhhhh! OH! MY! GAWD! No Way! NO WAY! It’s you!”

Adrien turned around to look behind him, wondering who she was talking about. Had someone famous walked in? Jagged Stone? Laura Marano?

“Uhhh...I think she means you,” Marinette leaned over and whispered in his ear. Feeling her breath on his neck made all the little hairs on his arms stand on end.

“O-oh!” he stammered as he tried to regain his senses. He turned back around to face the broadly smiling aquarium employee. “Hi!” He waved his hand in greeting, but then realized that was rather a stupid thing to do and dropped his arm to his side.

“Hi!” was all the awe-struck girl was able to say in return.

“Hi!” Adrien mimicked back. He felt an elbow jab into his side and he looked over to find an annoyed Marinette gesturing at him.

“Tickets!” she whispered.

Oh! Right. Sure. “We’d like two…”

“I just can’t believe it’s you!” the ticketing agent enthused. She ran a hand through her long, chestnut hair, flipping it coyly to one side. “I mean, I thought it might be you when you first came in, but then I thought, ‘No, Amélie, why would Adrien Agreste be coming to the aquarium of all places?’ But here you are! You!”

“Yep, here I am,” Adrien rocked on his heels as his hand nervously rubbed the back of his neck. He didn’t have a lot of practice dealing with fans. He hardly ever came into contact with them, since he rarely went out in public unless it was a media event with security and a red velvet rope where all the fans would gather, safely. When he did venture out Gorilla, his driver and bodyguard, was always there to keep them away or else he was Chat Noir and could just escape by parkouring with his trusty baton. He wished he had his baton now. This felt awkward. He should say something, do something.

“What are you doing here?” Amélie asked. “Do you like fish? I love fish, but not as much as I love you!” Her hand slapped up to cover her mouth. “Oh my gawd, I can’t believe I just said that! I’m sooo embarrassed! Get it together, Amélie!” she whispered the last sentence as a chastisement to herself.

“That’s okay,” Adrien chuckled, trying to play off the impulsive confession. “I’m always happy to meet a fan.”

“Oh! I’m not just any fan. I’m the co-president of your fan club,” she informed him proudly as she
took a large “I Love ADRIEN” button out of her pocket and pinned it on her employee t-shirt.

“Of course she is,” Marinette muttered under her breath.

“Wow! Look at that!” he turned and smiled weakly at Marinette. “That’s really...something, huh?” He could tell that Marinette’s normally endless patience was wearing thin. She smiled through gritted teeth. He wondered to himself how he could possibly extricate them from Amélie’s (is that her name?) presence when he realized with horror that the infatuated girl had left her spot behind the counter and was coming right at him with arms held open wide.

“Oh no!” he thought as her arms enveloped him in a tight hug. He felt his biceps squish against his ribs and he bit back a squeal of pain. Gratefully her vice grip only lasted a few seconds, but the torture continued as she pulled out her phone and thrust it into Marinette’s hands.

“Can you take a picture of us?” Amélie asked, flipping her hair again. She latched onto Adrien’s arm and then laid her head on his shoulder.

“Sure,” came Marinette’s quick reply. She pushed the camera button without warning. Adrien wondered if she even had time to aim. Marinette held the phone out to her, but Amélie insisted on one more. This time the possessive girl pushed up on her toes and kissed Adrien on the cheek. On instinct Adrien pulled away as if her lip gloss burned his skin.

The camera fell out of Marinette’s hands and landed on the hard, tile floor with a bang. “Oops! Butter fingers!” She stooped down to pick up the camera, but Amélie snatched it out of her hand.

“Is your phone okay, Amélie?” Adrien asked.

The scowl from the fan girl melted away in an instant. “He said my name!” she breathed.

“Uh...Adrien, don’t you think...?” Marinette had stood and was starting to pull Adrien away.

“Hey, there!” Amélie jumped up and cut Marinette’s question off. “Don’t bother him!” she shouted. She turned a concerned face to Adrien, “Is this girl bothering you? I’ll call security!”

“No! No! Don’t do that!” Adrien assured her, stopping her movement with his arms splayed out. “She’s not bothering me! We’re together!”

“Together?” Amélie squeaked. “Like a date?”

Adrien gasped. Technically, it was a date, or at least it was meant to be a date, although he wasn’t entirely sure that Marinette knew that. He’d had to keep her in the dark for the sake of the surprise, but now he was thoroughly regretting that decision. To say yes would not only spoil the surprise, but also run the risk of making things with Marinette awkward if not completely ruined. To say no would give Amélie hope that she might have a shot with him and even though she seemed nice enough in an over-excited sort of way, Adrien didn’t want to give her false hope.

“Yes. A date.” Adrien turned wide-eyed to see Marinette beaming proudly. She hooked his arm with her own.

“Excuse us a moment, please.” She led him out the front door and into the bright sunshine. “You okay?” she asked, looking him over and then brushing his cheek with her fingers to remove the stain of Amélie’s lip gloss.

“Never better,” he breathed, enjoying the feeling of her touch against his skin.
“You sure? She was...a bit much, don’t you think?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Don’t worry about that picture. It’s out of focus and tilted. No one will believe her that it’s you,” Marinette assured him. “So don’t worry about getting in trouble with your dad.”

Her words finally started to sink in. “Thank you for saving me back there. Sorry for the weirdness.”

“It’s not your fault!” Marinette turned around slightly to look through the large glass windows of the aquarium. “She’s looking at us. Just try to act like we’re on a date.” She stepped closer and smiled lovingly up at him.

“Act?”

Marinette nodded, “Seemed like the best thing to do was to just go along with her assumption. Hopefully it will put her off. Have you heard from Chloe or Sabrina? Maybe we can meet them somewhere else. I don’t think going back in there is the best idea.”

“Oh! Right! Chloe and Sabrina! I completely forgot!” He took his phone out of his pocket and proceeded to send a quick text to both girls even though he already knew they wouldn’t be showing up. As he texted he ventured a few glances in Marinette’s direction, wondering what the girl was thinking, feeling...would she be mad to learn the truth or flattered or happy or…?

“Anything?” she asked anxiously as she peered over his shoulder to read the text he sent. “I’m thinking we should walk down the sidewalk a bit, out of sight of your fan.”

“Right, good thinking,” he agreed. He had only taken one step before he felt his fingers entwined with hers. She laid her other hand on his arm, drawing it closer to her body so that her head nestled into his bicep. Adrien gulped, feeling a giddiness overtake him. He blindly let her lead him down the sidewalk and across the front lawn. They stopped at the sign for the aquarium. Marinette unwound their hands and the lovesick boy felt sorry for the loss of contact.

“We should be able to spot Chloe and Sabrina from here. Any word from them? It’s almost a quarter past 12. They should be here by now,” Marinette hummed, looking around for the blonde and redhead.

Adrien drew in a long breath, held it, looked up to the sky, saying a silent prayer. When he exhaled the truth came spilling out. “Chloe’s not coming.”

“Ha! Called it!” Marinette cried with a smirk and a headshake. “I knew it. I knew she wouldn’t show. Don’t get me wrong, she’s made a lot of progress. A LOT. But, yeah, I had a feeling. What’d excuse she give?” Marinette’s hands landed on her hips as she leaned slightly to peer over Adrien’s shoulder to look at his phone.

“She didn’t,” he replied quickly closing the texting app, so she couldn’t see that his text hadn’t received a reply. Chloe was supposed to send a text with her excuse to go along with the plan, but she probably forgot to tell Sabrina to do it.

“Typical,” Marinette rolled her eyes. “I suppose Sabrina’s not coming either?”

Adrien shook his head no.

“She’s probably doing whatever with Chloe,” the raven-haired girl reasoned. She shrugged, “Oh well! What do you want to do now?”
“Um...well, I had the whole day planned around the aquarium...so?” he motioned to walk back toward where they had come.

“Really? You wanna go back? Well, I suppose if we keep up the charade that we’re on a date, it’d be okay…” she hummed as she tapped her chin with her finger.

“Yeah, about that…” Adrien rubbed the back of his hand with his neck.

“I know, it’s not ideal, but maybe it’s best just to keep your most fanatic fans away. I’m starting to see why Chloe is so protective of you. Maybe your father was right; maybe the aquarium is too dangerous for you!” She grinned broadly, “Just kidding! You’re safe with me! I’ll protect you!”

“Thanks, Marinette!” Adrien chewed his lip, trying to decide how to tell her about his surprise. “Before we go back in, I want to tell you something…”

“Adrien!”

He cringed at the call of his name. He’d forgotten that there was one other person they were meeting. The two teenagers turned around to find a short, pig tailed girl with a gap between her top two front teeth.

“Manon?” Marinette recognized the little girl she regularly babysat.

“Marinette! Adrien! Marinette! Adrien!” Manon cried jumping up and down.

“Hello, Mme. Chamack,” both teens greeted Manon’s mother.


“She can’t make it, I’m afraid,” Adrien admitted. “We’ll be babysitting Manon.”

“We will?” Marinette asked surprised and then realizing that Manon was the kid of Mayor Bourgeois’s associates, she nodded in agreement, “I mean, we will.”

“I’ll just be down the street at the Pont des Arts,” Mme. Chamack explained. “The Mayor is giving a speech and then I’ll be filming a short interview with him afterwards. We should be done in about an hour and a half or so. I have your number, Marinette, so I’ll just text you when I’m done and meet you both here. Sound good?”

Both teenagers agreed. After giving Manon instructions to be a good girl and to listen to her guardians, the news reporter hurried off to film the story. Manon watched her mother depart, waving both hands frantically in the air to say goodbye. When she was out of sight Manon turned to Adrien and made her first demand.

“Piggyback ride!” she cried. Adrien turned around and knelt down halfway so that the little girl could hop aboard. “Happy first, embarwasing date!” she yelled, throwing one arm in the air.

“Manon! What are you talking about?” Marinette asked with a puzzled expression.

“You and Adrien,” the little girl explained. “This is your first…”

“Hold on tight!” Adrien cried as he started to run toward the aquarium’s doors. “Hurry up, Doodlebug! We’re beating you!”
“Wheee!” Manon cried happily. “Faster! Faster!”

Huffing, due to the additional weight he carried on his back, Adrien held the door open for Marinette who had followed on his heels. “After you, Doodlebug.”

“Are you Doodlebug?” Manon asked Marinette, who nodded in reply. “Who are you?” the little girl asked Adrien as she patted him on the head.

“Patch.”

“Patch!” she giggled. “That’s funny. I wanna name! What’s my name?”


“Oh! You’re back! I’m so glad! I missed you!” Amélie cooed, as she smiled only at Adrien.

“Two adults, one child, please,” Marinette requested.

“And who’s this?” Amélie asked, nodding toward the child tapping on the top of Adrien’s head as if it were a drum. Her gaze left Adrien only long enough for her to type the number of tickets into the computer.

“Pigtails!” Manon cried. “I’m Pigtails!”

“Won’t that be confusing?” the ticket agent asked. “You both have pigtails,” she noted, referring to Marinette’s hairdo.

“Awww…” Pigtails whined. “Marinette copied me. No fair!”

“Yours are different,” Adrien whispered. “They’re longer.” He reached up and grabbed one of Manon’s pigtails, using it to tickle her cheek with the end of it. She giggled and then stuck her tongue out at Amélie.

“That’ll be 30 Euros, please.”

Adrien pulled out his wallet and passed the cash to Marinette, who in turn placed the cash on the counter. Amélie slid the tickets across the counter toward Marinette, noting with a smirk, “So, not a date then?”

“Is so a date!” Pigtails argued. “It’s happy first, embawassing date!”

Adrien cringed and looked sideways at Marinette, but to his surprise she appeared unphased. The raven haired girl looked boldly at Amélie, with her arms crossed and her nose in the air, as if daring the fan to doubt her.

“How can it possibly be a date with you along, cutie?” Amélie asked, trying to bop Manon on the nose with her finger, but the little girl dodged.

“Keep your hands to yourself,” she ordered, repeating an instruction she had heard on multiple occasions from her mother. “It is a date! It’s ‘Sugar Kara’! Can we go?” she asked Marinette and Adrien in her most exasperated, whiny voice.

“Excellent idea!” Marinette agreed, leading the way down the hall toward the fish tanks.

Adrien gave a slight nod to Amélie and then hurried to fall in step beside Marinette. He wondered how hard it would be to turn a pretend date into an actual date.
I've seen a lot of fanfics where Marinette makes Adrien a hoodie or pajamas and yes, even a coat. I wanted her to make something that evoked Chat Noir rather than just the cat aspect. Here's a link to a phenomenal coat/cloak that I found on-line on which I based the Patch Cloak: https://thecrystalhand.com/collections/his-favorites/products/super-high-quality-unisex-long-hooded-coat-cloak-w-pop-collar-zipper-closure

It's a little dark, I admit, but I wanted something completely unlike what Adrien wears and what we typically see Marinette design.

I haven't watched Seven Deadly Sins, but I understand that the voice actor for the English Chat Noir also voices a character in Seven Deadly Sins, so I thought that'd be cute to reference.
Partnership By Estoppel

Chapter Summary

Adrien and Marinette’s "Happy, First Embarrassing Date" continues and it gets even more embarrassing for both of them.

Chapter Notes

In case you’re wondering, here the definition for "partnership by estoppel":
Legally binding partnership that may arise where, in fact, no formal partnership agreement is in effect. A person who by conduct or words represents, or allows him/herself to be represented, as a partner in a firm is liable for the credit or loans obtained by firm on the basis of such representation.

Thanks to MJ for beta reading once again!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Marinette watched Adrien tease and joke with Manon, who walked between them, holding each of their hands in hers. The two made fish faces at each other and then at the fish swimming in the large tank before them. Adrien kept the little girl giggling constantly with his silly puns. But, Marinette didn’t join in on the fun despite the list of fish puns she had stowed in her purse. The raven-haired girl felt anxious as if someone was watching them. She kept turning her head quickly over her shoulder to scan the crowd of people. No Amélie. No crazed fangirls. Good. Marinette’s eyes found Adrien again. Maybe the disguise was working. As stupid as it seemed, Adrien looked less like himself wearing the baseball cap they had bought at the aquarium’s gift shop, since it covered his distinctive golden locks.

“You okay?” Adrien whispered in her ear. She gave a tight smile and head nod in reply. “You don’t look okay,” he pressed.

“No, I am! Really,” she forced herself to smile brighter.

Adrien still looked doubtful. He opened his mouth to say something, but Manon interrupted him.

“Pufferfish!” the little girl squealed. Manon suddenly let go of both of their hands and ran, zig-zagging around people to get to her destination. Marinette and Adrien followed in hot pursuit. For the briefest of moments they lost sight of the girl, due to the low lighting of the aquarium, but luckily as the crowd parted to allow them passage they found the little girl with her face pressed up against the side of a large tank. A yellow fish with googly eyes and bucked teeth swam slowly back and forth. It looked like a birthday balloon, three days after the celebration, as its floppy body sagged sadly.

“Manon! Don’t run away like that!” Marinette scolded her.

“Yes,” Adrien agreed, “please be a good gill or eel-se!”
Manon giggled as Marinette shook her head while a grin pulled at her lips.

“Look, Patch! A pufferfish! Scare it! I wanna see it puff up!” Pigtails demanded.

Adrien made all kinds of scary faces at the fish. He crossed his eyes and gnashed his teeth. He held up his curled fingers above his head. Manon made faces, too, sticking out her tongue and then puffing up her cheeks.

Marinette looked over her shoulder again, scanning the low lit room for any sign of Amélie.

“You don’t seem to be having much fun,” Adrien whispered softly to Marinette as the little girl continued to try to scare the pufferfish.

“No! I am!,” Marinette replied.

“It’s okay, really. You can relax now,” Adrien tried to reassure her. With a flat hand he lightly rubbed her back between her shoulder blades. She suddenly became aware of all of the tension she had been holding there. Under his touch she allowed herself to relax, to breathe.

“Yeah, Marinette! Loosen up!” Manon cried as she pulled one of the ties on Marinette’s cuff, undoing the bow. Marinette scolded the little girl, who only giggled in reply. As Adrien tied the loose cuff, Manon slipped around to the other side and undid the other bow.

“I’ll tie it as a knot,” Adrien suggested between chuckles. “Or else, she’ll keep it up.”

Marinette watched Adrien’s fingers carefully knot one cuff and then the other. She knew she shouldn’t let Amélie ruin her time with Adrien. She smiled warmly at him in thanks, but Marinette could tell that he still looked anxious. So, to prove that she was enjoying herself she took a step closer to the tank and pulled her eyelids inside out at the unknowing puffer fish. After a moment, she glanced up at Adrien who pushed his nose against the tank, making himself look like a pig. Marinette chortled.

“Such a dork!” she thought, affectionately.

The three continued to make faces at the unobservant, perfectly calm pufferfish until it became clear that he was not going to cooperate.

“Too bad,” Marinette lamented. “I wanted to scare the carp out of him.”


“Tanks a lot!” Marinette jokingly huffed. She gave Adrien a playful shove and he giggled in reply. That only made Manon laugh harder and Marinette couldn’t help, but join in.

“Maybe he just can’t puff,” Adrien mused. “Maybe he’s eel and needs a re- plaice- ment.”

“You shouldn’t scare a puffer fish.”

They jumped at the voice behind them. They slowly turned around only to find Amélie hovering closely.

“When they get scared they puff up with water. All of their organs get squished out of place. It’s pretty stressful for them. Sometimes they even die.” Amélie sniffed as if she might cry.

“Oh! We’re sorry,” Adrien quickly responded. He laid a gentle hand on her shoulder to comfort her.
“It’s okay, Sweetie,” she replied with smile, and then covered his hand with her own. She looked at him with half lidded eyes. “I know it wasn’t your idea. You wouldn’t ever hurt anyone would you?”

“Um...well, not intentionally, no,” Adrien gulped, letting his arm drop.

“None of us would,” Marinette interjected, feeling offended that somehow she was being blamed. She felt her shoulders tense again. Why was this girl following them? Couldn’t she mind her own business?

“We’re just joking,” Manon explained. “Come on!” She pulled on Adrien’s hand and then Marinette’s leading them away.

“Would you like a behind the scenes tour?” Amélie called after them.

Manon suddenly stopped and spun around to face the aquarium employee. Her eyes looked as if they had doubled in size. Her hands clasped together under her chin.

“We have more fish in the back. Special ones! Rare ones!” Amélie tempted.

“I wanna see!” Manon demanded, hopping up and down.

“But Manon…” Marinette tried to stop her, but the girl marched off to follow Amélie. The two teens had no choice but to run after their charge, who was really in charge.

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“These are wrasse fish,” Amélie explained. “Bigger fish swim up to them and the wrasse fish eat off all of the gunk that accumulated on them. Then, the big fish swim away all happy and clean.”

“Like a bath?” Manon asked.

“Yes, it’s like they give the big fish a bath.”

“But with their tongues!” Manon giggled as she watched the small fish swim around the tank. “Don’t they know that they’re already in water? They should use soap!”

“Here,” Amélie said sliding the top of the tank off. “Put your hand in here. They’ll clean it for you.” She placed her own hand in the tank and the little fish swam over to her. Manon stepped up on a step stool and hovered her hand over the tank.

“Manon! I don’t think…”

Amélie cut Marinette off, “It’s perfectly safe!” She pulled her own hand out of the tank to show them. “See?”

Manon giggled as the little fish tasted her fingers. “It tickles!”

“They just eat off the dead skin cells, right?” Adrien asked. “Some high end spas have them. You can pay hundreds of Euros to have them clean your feet.”

“How’d you know that?” Marinette asked with a bemused smirk. “Personal experience?”

Adrien blushed. “Chloe may have dragged me to spa once or twice. Try it!” He placed his own hand in the tank. Marinette joined him. They both giggled at the fishes’ ministrations.

“Who’s Chloe?” Amélie crossed her arms haughtily.
“She’s a friend,” Adrien replied without much thought. He smiled brightly at Marinette as the fish continued to tickle their fingers.

“Chloe Bourgeois,” Manon supplied helpfully. “She was supposed to watch me today, but instead we get happy first, embawassing date!”

“The mayor’s daughter…” Amélie grumbled to herself.

Marinette’s eyes tracked from Manon to Adrien. That was the second time the little girl all on her own had called their visit to the aquarium a date. Adrien gave her a sheepish smile. He looked guilty. Marinette smiled back, but wondered if something more was going on.

“We should probably get going,” Adrien nervously suggested. “We haven’t seen the top floor yet and Mme. Chamack will be expecting us soon.” He pulled his arm out of the tank and then flicked the drops of water still clinging to his fingers at both Manon and Marinette. The girls shrieked, and then teamed up to do the same to him.

“Of course, I’ll show you out,” Amélie smiled broadly. She placed the top back on the tank and led them to the door.

The three followed the aquarium employee, Andrien first, then Manon. Marinette brought up the rear with her hands at the ready to catch Manon should she fall. The room felt over-stuffed with the many tanks, bubbling loudly. Cords littered the floor, zig-zagging this way and that. The often clumsy girl stepped carefully, trying to avoid tripping herself.

Amélie held the door open for them. Manon ran out bypassing Adrien, who expressed his thanks to the aquarium employee for the special tour. Marinette felt a pang of guilt. It had been a really nice thing for Amélie to do. Maybe Marinette had misjudged her. Maybe she was just a nice girl, who was excited to see her celebrity crush and just went a little too far. It was really the kiss on the cheek that made Marinette feel uncomfortable and she could tell it made Adrien feel that way, too. Now, though, Amélie seemed okay. She seemed a lot calmer and less pushy.

“Anything for you, Hot Stuff,” Amélie replied as she winked at Adrien in response to his thanks.

Marinette gritted her teeth. “Nope. First instinct was right. Always go with your gut. This girl is Trouble!”

The green goggles of jealousy must have fogged up Marinette’s vision, as such she didn’t notice that something had suddenly jutted out in front of her path. She grabbed frantically for anything to steady herself. Unfortunately, that something was a large, open barrel, the sides of which were wet causing Marinette’s hands to slip. Rather than stopping herself from falling, she only fell faster. At least her trajectory changed, so instead of falling face first onto the floor, she landed chest first across the barrel.

“Whoa! Marinette! You okay?” Adrien called from the hallway, as he rushed to her side. Marinette winced and then stood up. The side of the barrel caught her in the abdomen. Her hands cradled the sore spot as she hunched over in pain. She could hear giggling around her and her face flushed in shame.

“You were almost a fish caught in a barrel,” Amélie mused. Marinette’s eyes flicked up to see the other girl’s wicked smile.

“You were almost a fish caught in a barrel,” Amélie mused. Marinette’s eyes flicked up to see the other girl’s wicked smile.

“You okay, Marinette?” Manon asked as she patted her shoulder. Her kindness didn’t last too long. “Ew! You’re all wet. You smell like fish!” She sniffed her hand that had come into contact with the
soggy girl.

“Thanks, Manon. I’ll be okay.” She gripped the edge of the barrel for support and tried to take only shallow breaths.

“We should get you dried off…” Adrien tried to suggest, but Marinette cut him off.

“You tripped me!” she accused the fangirl.

“What? No, I didn’t! You tripped over your own feet...or a cord or something!”

“No. I. Didn’t,” Marinette asserted, finally able to stand completely erect.

“Oh! Your pectoral fins are showing!” Amélie pointed at Marinette’s chest, who reflexively looked down to see what the annoying girl was talking about. The cold and drippy girl felt mortified to realize that her once beautiful white floral blouse had become see-through after being soaked. She quickly slapped her hands over her breasts to hide them. To her relief she felt the warmth of Adrien’s jacket as he draped it over her chest and held it in place by laying a hand on each of her shoulders.

“You’ll ruin your jacket that way!” Amélie scolded. “That’s a Gabriel, isn’t it?”

“I don’t care. I have a far superior coat at home made by an even more talented designer,” he replied with a smile only for Marinette. He looked her over carefully, assessing if there was any further damage. He gently tucked a loose strand of her hair behind her ear and gave her cheek a delicate brush with his thumb. “Come on, Doodlebug. Let’s get you cleaned up.” Marinette nodded and allowed herself to be led by Adrien out the door and down the corridor. He had thrown one arm over her shoulders to keep the jacket in place, but also to bring her closer to him.

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In the ladies’ room Marinette leaned awkwardly to the right. Back to the left. Down a bit more. Maybe hunch over. No. Trying to dry her top while still wearing it with the hand dryer that was fixed to the wall proved to be impossible. She slumped back onto the wall in defeat. Nothing to do, but wait for Manon to come in with the t-shirt Adrien had promised to buy her from the gift shop. The raven-haired girl idly wondered if Amélie got a commission for the gift shop purchases. If so, then she was making a killing off of them, this being their second purchase.

“Ooooh! That Amélie!” Marinette seethed. She was certain the fangirl had tripped her and on purpose. She wanted to embarrass her and she did a good job of it, too. Marinette’s face burned bright at the thought that Adrien had seen her breasts through her blouse, made translucent by the water. That Amélie ruined their date... fake date. Marinette sighed and then chuckled to herself. Manon was right. This was an embarrassing, first (fake) date. Why did Manon say that anyway?

She sighed again. Having nothing better to do, Marinette opened her phone. She could see from the display that they had only been at the aquarium for just under an hour.

“Okay, you can do this,” she encouraged herself, “A half hour to go and then we can get out of here. We’ll drop Manon off with Mme. Chamack and head home.” Marinette smiled to herself at the thought of spending the rest of the day with Adrien. Just to be sure she checked to see if Mme. Chamack had texted that she was done. No such luck. No text from the news reporter, but there were several from a certain absent, blonde friend.

Chloe: Feel free 2 thank me 4 2day by buying me something sparkly

Chloe: But not from a tacky gift shop
Chloe: BTW don’t forget about my Ladybug mask. U still have 2 replace it

Marinette’s face burnt in anger. She took a breath trying to calm herself, but her fingers itched to tell off her friend.

Marinette: Y on earth should I thank u 4 2day? U ditched me

Chloe: Duh. How else would u have had ur date w Adrikins? U want me tagging along w u?

Marinette: Manon’s tagging along. Hard to have a date with a 5-year old.

Marinette: Besides it’s not a date

Chloe: That’s Adrien’s idea not mine

Chloe: Whadya mean Not A Date?

Marinette: What do U mean Adrien’s idea?

Marinette: This was ur idea. Right?

Chloe: …

Marinette: U asked 4 a favor.

Marinette: The aquarium. Manon. That was all u. Right?

Chloe: …

Marinette: Chloe?

Marinette: CHLOE!!?

Marinette watched the time tick by as she waited for an answer she knew would not come. She switched from the texting app to the phone app. Scrolling through her contacts she found the number she wanted and pressed send. The phone rang, once, twice, thrice…

“You have reached the voicemail box of Chloe Bourgeois,” said a high-pitched voice that Marinette recognized as Sabrina’s. “You may leave a message at the sound of the beep, although it is highly unlikely that your call will be returned as there are very few people Mlle. Bourgeois considers worthy of talking to…” Marinette hit the end call button, knowing that Chloe wouldn’t return her call, since she wasn’t even answering her texts. Instead, she switched tactics and decided to call a different girl.

“Hi Marinette,” Sabrina answered her phone on the first ring.

Marinette could hear Chloe’s voice in the background. “Sabrina! I told you NOT to answer!” After a second or two of muffled voices the phone went dead. No doubt Chloe had just hung up on her. Marinette was just about to send a series of curse texts to the rude girl when Manon appeared in front of her with the replacement shirt. She held up the t-shirt, which said “Carp Diem” above the picture of a large fish.

“He would get one with a pun ,” she thought to herself as she rolled her eyes. She consoled herself that at least it was dry and didn’t smell of fish.

“Adrien said to tell you we’re going to go touch fish,” Manon informed her before dashing out of the
ladies’ room.

Marinette hurried into one of the stalls to change her top, wondering what Manon meant. A few moments later she walked out of the stall with Adrien’s damp jacket over one arm and her soaked blouse in her other hand. She looked at herself in the mirror. The t-shirt looked a little tight, especially across her breasts and the hem fell about an inch above the waistband of her pants. The size on the shirt’s tag said medium and Marinette idly wondered if Adrien bought her a child’s shirt by mistake. She draped both Adrien’s jacket and her wet blouse over the door of a stall. With a balled up fist she tried to push the t-shirt’s material from the inside out across her chest, trying to make it stretch where it needed to be bigger. Then, she pulled on the hem of the t-shirt, trying to make it cover more of her torso. The raven-haired girl sighed as she noted that no amount of tugging or stretching was going to fix the fit of the shirt. The designer had become accustomed to wearing her own designs or clothes that she had altered to better fit her petite frame. Wearing something off of the rack felt odd. No point, she decided. She slipped Adrien’s jacket off of the stall door and threw one arm in and then the other. Despite the warmth of the day, she’d feel better with it on to help cover up the ill fitting t-shirt. Her hands naturally found themselves inhabiting the side pockets. She felt something in one and pulled her hand out to find an empty cheese wrapper. Marinette hummed in thought, wondering when Adrien had sneaked his snack. With a shrug she threw the wrapper away and then grabbed her damp blouse and exited the bathroom.

Back in the large exhibit room of the aquarium she looked around for signs of Adrien and Manon. Finding none she inspected a map on the wall opposite. A room down the hall from where she stood was labeled “Touch Pools.” With a nod, she pivoted on her heel and strode down the corridor, eager to find her companions.

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Adrien sat on the edge of a small fish pond and with one finger he gently stroked the back of coy fish as it nibbled on the food he had just thrown to attract it.

“See, Manon? You have to be gentle or else you’ll scare them away,” Adrien patiently advised. The little girl tried again and this time the coy fish didn’t swim away as if its life depended on it.

“Adrien! Are you listening to me?” Chloe scolded on the other end of Adrien’s cell phone.

“Yes, I’m here,” he replied, half-heartedly, turning his attention back to his friend who had called him only a moment ago to chew him out.

“Why does Marinette not know she’s on a date with you? Why didn’t you tell her?”

“I was going to!” he wailed. “It’s just everything’s gone rather badly. It’s such a mess! I think it’d be better if she doesn’t know. This was a bad idea.”

“Happy, happy, happy embawarring first date!” Manon sang to the fish she petted. “Do you two want to date? Then you can get married and have little baby fishies!”

“I told you at the time it was, but you didn’t listen!” Chloe chastised.

“You encouraged me!” Adrien accused.

“No! I said you should ask her out properly, but YOU wanted to surprise her by recreating an episode from that dumb show.”

“It’s her favorite episode from her favorite anime,” the Shugo Chara fan corrected. “I thought it would be romantic.” Adrien had recreated every aspect of the date from the location to their friends
backing out unexpectedly to a little girl tagging along on the date. He cast Marinette as Amu and himself as Tadase, hoping that Marinette would be flattered by cosplaying her favorite ‘ship.

“How romantic can it be if she doesn’t even know she’s being romanced!” Chloe groaned. “Okay, just tell me what’s gone wrong and I’ll tell you how to fix it.”

Adrien quickly and suspicently related the details of the events of the last hour or so to his nosy friend. When he finished his story he waited for Chloe’s advice.

“Okay, first of all you have to take care of that Amy-girl.”

“Amélie,” Adrien corrected.

“Whatever,” Chloe sighed.

“Are you talking to Amélie?” Manon asked Adrien, pointing to his cell phone.

“No,” he whispered to the little girl. “Chloe.”

“Just tell her to back off,” the blonde diva ordered. “Tell her you have no interest in her whatsoever and she should stop deluding herself and find some other celebrity to fawn over.”

“I don’t want to hurt her feelings…”

“Whose feelings?” Manon asked as she continued to splash both hands in the water. Her shirt was getting about as wet as Marinette’s.

“Amélie’s,” Adrien replied, pulling the receiver of the phone away from his mouth, so Chloe couldn’t hear.

“You’re too nice, Adrien, seriously,” Chloe scolded. “I mean, the last time this happened what did you do?”

“I made friends with the fan,” the fashion idol replied sheepishly.

“You mean stalker .”

“Wayhem’s not a stalker. He’s a nice guy and he helped me out when Gorilla got akumatized, so…” Adrien’s voice trailed off not knowing exactly how to explain how deeply indebted he was to Wayhem. When Gorilla, his driver, became akumatized Wayhem pretended to be Adrien as a decoy for the akuma, so that Adrien could transform and fight alongside his partner. If it hadn’t been for Wayhem his secret superhero identity might have been discovered or worse he might have had to abandon Ladybug, leaving her to fight Gorizilla by herself.

“You didn’t have to give him your email address! Jeez! Now you’re friends with your stalker. Nice!” Chloe quipped sarcastically. “Look, Marinette probably won’t care if you’re friends with a guy who’s in love with you, but she will seriously have a problem with you being friends with a girl who’s in love with you.”

“Wayhem is not in love with me.”

“Okay, sure!” Chloe’s eye roll was audible.

“Who’s Wayhem?” the little girl asked, her attention drawn from the fish.

“Just a friend,” Adrien whispered back.
“Is he in love with you?” she asked, climbing up on the ledge of the pool to get closer to Adrien.

“No.”

“Are you in love with him?” Pigtails latched her wet hands onto Adrien’s free arm to steady herself, before leaning down to touch another fish.

“No.”

“Don’t be friends with Amélie! Be a jerk. Jump off that pedestal she’s put you on, burst her bubble, okay?” Chloe advised.

“Okay, I’ll...I’ll be a jerk to Amélie...somehow,” Adrien agreed, although he wasn’t exactly sure how he was going to do that. He’d have to do what Chloe would do, what his father would do.

“Is Amélie in love with you?” Manon asked, abandoning the fish once and for all to resume interrogating her babysitter. Her hand extended and pointed across the room. With his eyes Adrien followed where her hand led and saw Amélie, who quickly turned her attention to a family that stood nearby and began talking to them about the sea creatures in the tank before them. Adrien wasn’t sure, but he felt she had been watching him.

Adrien ignored Manon’s question and pressed on with his conversation with Chloe, “What about Marinette?”

“It’s ridiculous that you haven’t told her this is a date! Utterly ridiculous! Just tell her today was meant to be a date.”

“Is Marinette in love with you?” Manon asked.

Adrien’s face burned bright at the question and he swallowed hard. “If only...” he thought. Having a crush on someone was one thing, being in love was different. He didn’t want to be put on a pedestal. He wanted to be loved in spite of his flaws; he wanted to be loved because of his flaws.

“But, what if she gets mad?” he asked his friend.

“Well, just apologize. If there’s one thing I’ve learned in the past few weeks is that a good apology goes a long way in getting you what you want. Marinette’s a sucker for a good apology, most people are, actually. Just admit your mistake, say you’re sorry, and promise to never do it again.” Adrien could practically hear Chloe flip her pony tail.

“You think she’ll forgive me?” Adrien squeaked.

“This is Marinette. She’s been in love with you for, like, a year; yeah, she’ll forgive you. She’ll probably be flattered that you went to all this trouble to recreate that dumb show.”

“Does Marinette love you?” Manon asked again, tugging at Adrien’s sleeve.

“I dunno...” he waivered in response to Chloe, but Manon took it as an answer to her question.

“Do you love Marinette?” Manon asked him.

“Look, if all else fails, then give her the gift,” Chloe instructed. “I mean, what girl can resist a gift that sparkles, right?”

“I suppose,” Adrien hummed. “Okay, I’ll do it. I’ll apologize to Marinette and I’ll tell her the truth.”

“Fine. And, make sure you paint me in a good light. Tell her how much trouble I went to helping
“Do you love Marinette?!” Manon repeated, louder and more insistently.

“Don’t worry and thanks, Chloe. I really appreciate your…”

Adrien didn’t get to finish his sentence as Manon’s wet hands grabbed his phone out of his hand and with a quick “Bye!” she pressed the red button and hung up on what no doubt was an utterly shocked and speechless Chloe for having been so rudely dismissed.

“Manon!” Adrien cried in a mix of anger and surprise, his arms crossing against his chest as his brows furrowed.

“DO YOU LOVE MARINETTE?” the little girl practically screamed, jumping down from the ledge, stopping her foot in frustration as tears welled in her eyes. Adrien looked down at her. A pang of guilt struck his heart. He knew what it felt like to be ignored by others, especially adults. He knelt down in front of her so as to be at eye level. His hands brushed her shoulders as he took a breath, willing himself to calm down.

“Yes, Manon,” he replied softly, looking at the little girl as her lower lip wobbled slightly. “I love Marinette very much. That’s why we’re here, so I can tell her. Will you help me?”

Manon looked up with bright, wide eyes as a huge smile blossomed across her face. Her eyes lit on something just over his shoulder and Adrien wondered what had caught her attention. No matter. He opened his mouth to ask Pigtails if she would quietly play with the fish in the touch pools, so that he could have a moment to confess to Marinette when the little girl tossed his phone at him and bolted away. In surprise he jumped back, juggling the phone between his hands as he tried to catch it.

“I’ll tell her!” she yelled over her shoulder just as she ran headlong into Marinette. “Marinette! Marinette! Adrien loves you!”

Chapter End Notes

Obviously, the story isn't over. Remember when I said there'd be only another chapter? Yeah, I lied. I have two more chapters written after this one and still more story to write. So, first let me apologize for taking two months to deliver this chapter. I needed some time to think and to plan. That said, I used the time to write three chapters and plan out a fourth, so time well spent. Secondly, since I have the next two chapters written I will be uploading more frequently. I'll stick to one chapter a week so I have the ability to go back and modify a bit if I need to.

A note about the chapter: My family took a vacation to Paris this past June and I dragged them to the aquarium there, specifically so I could write scenes that took place there for this fic because I knew even back then that Adrien was going to recreate Marinette's favorite Shuga Chara episode because he is such a romantic, even though sometimes a misguided one. I tell you this just so that you know how committed I am to this fic. I will finish it; I'm just not sure how many chapters it will go because I keep thinking of more ideas, but in any case I hope you enjoy reading it.

Thank you all for reading, commenting, and leaving me kudos. I really appreciate it,
especially the comments. Sometimes when I feel low or uninspired I go reread the comments of this fic and others I've written and it helps me feel better. You have no idea how a simple "nice job" absolutely makes my day. :)

Adrien confesses, but it's not well received.

Thanks to MJ for beta reading the chapter.
I meant to upload this over the weekend. Better late than never. :)

“He loves you! He loves you! Adrien looooves you!” Manon sing-singed as she danced in circles around Marinette, pointing both index fingers at her.

“Manon!” Marinette hissed. “Stop saying that! He’ll hear you!”

“Adrien loves you!” the little girl persisted in her teasing.

“Uhhh...(gulp) hi!” Adrien felt at a complete loss for words as he approached his doom. This is not how he meant for Marinette to find out about his feelings for her. “You look good in my jacket,” he hummed, trying to distract her, but the compliment only seemed to fluster Marinette more as her face turned bright scarlet. He quickly changed tactics, “I should...um...explain?”

“Adrien loves Marinette! Lovey-lovey, kissy-kissy,” Pigtails giggled and then proceeded to make smooching sounds with her mouth to imitate the disgustingly gross kissing that the little girl imagined the two would no doubt engage in momentarily.

“Oh! It’s o-okay!” Marinette stuttered. “Y-you don’t…”

“No, he doesn’t! Stop saying that!” came a shrill reprimand from behind them. The group of three turned to find a red-faced, frowning Amélie before them. “Tell her, Adrien! You don’t love that...that...HO!”

“Excuse me,” Adrien stepped in front of Marinette to shield her from the intruder. “This conversation doesn’t concern you, but if you must know I very much do love this beautiful, talented, intelligent young lady, to whom you owe an apology.”

“Y-you...you do?” the fangirl stammered in surprise.

“Yes, I do. And do you know why?” The blonde fashion icon asked rhetorically. “Because of her kindness, something which you have in very short supply. Marinette never hesitates to help a friend in need, even at the detriment to her own happiness. Now, if you don’t mind we would like to be left alone to finish our date in peace. Please stop following us, spying on us, and interrupting us or I shall have to involve the authorities and my lawyer.”
Adrien turned on his heel. With one hand he took Manon’s hand in his own and with his other he led Marinette by the elbow, out of the exhibition room and down the hall.

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“What’s wrong with her?” Manon asked as she climbed up onto her knees to peer closely at Marinette’s stony face.

“She zones out sometimes,” Adrien explained. “She’ll snap out of it eventually.”

“How much longer we gonna wait?” Manon huffed as sat down on her bottom with a thud.

Adrien’s eyes looked upward, seeing the fish and sharks swim around them in the viewing tunnel in which they sat. The light refracted in waves around them, giving the atmosphere an eerie aura.

“I don’t know,” he shrugged. “As long as it takes.” He had only managed to escort them so far before Marinette’s legs stopped working. He had been able to turn her and gently push her into a sitting position in the tunnel. He could only hope that she would snap out of it soon so that they could leave the aquarium, Amélie, and this disastrous (secret) date behind them.

Manon swung her feet back and forth, her heels hitting the bench with loud thumps. Adrien gave her a sideways glance, wondering if asking her to stop would get her to do so or just encourage her to do it more. At the same time she twirled in the air the ladybug-themed stingray stuffed animal by the tail. Around and around the ray spun in a blur of red and black. It reminded Adrien of Ladybug’s yo-yo. It had been impossible not to buy Manon a toy on both trips to the gift shop. When he bought his baseball cap for a disguise he had been guilted into buying the ray. The second trip for Marinette’s t-shirt also produced a black catfish stuffie. It had green eyes and a golden bell at its throat, an obvious attempt by the manufacturer to make it Chat Noir-themed.

“LadyRay needs a partner,” Manon insisted, holding the black catfish up to him. “Puh-leaseeeeee?” How could he resist such sound logic?

Adrien inwardly chuckled as he watched Manon smash the mouths of the two stuffies together as she made kissing noises. He supposed that she, like most of Paris, even himself until recently, ‘shipped LadyNoir.

Pigtails hopped up from the bench, eyes bright. “I know! You could kiss her! Twue luv’s kiss to break the spell!”

“Marinette’s not cursed!” He shook his head.

“Let’s pinch her! That’ll wake her up.”

“Trust me. You don’t want to do that.” Adrien’s hand came up to cover his nose in memory of when he had done just that and paid the price. “She’s just processing. Give her a minute to reboot, okay?” Adrien sighed. “Too bad I don’t have my scarf. I could tickle her cheek. That normally snaps her out of it.”

“Use her pigtails,” Manon suggested. “Like you tickled me.” She pulled the end of one of her own pigtails to her cheek, letting the soft tresses brush against her skin. Adrien grinned at the smart girl’s idea. He gently lifted Marinette’s right pigtail and used the end to tickle her cheek. Her hand absentmindedly came to her face to brush away whatever was there and when she did she came into contact with the boy’s hand. Marinette jumped in her seat, a surprised “Oh!” escaping her lips before her face turned a brilliant red at Adrien’s close proximity. The memory of his words washing through her brain again.
“It worked!” Manon cried, jumping up and down. “Let’s go! I’m booooored!” she whined, pulling on Marinette’s hand to try to get her to her feet.

“Easy, Pigtails,” Adrien soothed. “I need to talk to Doodlebug for a second. Can you please wait?”

“No!” The little girl stomped her foot. “I wanna go!”

“How about I give you my phone and you take some pictures of the fish and sharks?” he asked as he open the camera app. Manon didn’t even reply, eagerly snatching the phone from his hands and skipping quickly to the other side of the tunnel to stand on the opposite bench. Manon strained on tip toes to angle the phone just right before clicking the shutter button a few times to capture the image of a tiger shark swimming by her. The now abandoned stuffies laid on the ground, forlorn. Adrien scooped them up and held them in his lap. He gave the ray a gentle stroke in an attempt to calm his nerves.

Now semi alone with Marinette, Adrien gulped. “I guess I should explain?” The perplexed girl nodded slowly in response. Adrien took a shuddering breath. “Marinette, I am so, so sorry about everything. I mean, your shirt and Amélie, and well everything!”

“It’s okay,” Marinette whispered, her teeth worrying her bottom lip. “This isn’t your fault and...I know you didn’t mean what you said. You...you were just trying to put Amélie off. I get it. I was just a little surprised is all. I know you don’t really…”

“No! I do!” Adrien interrupted, but then realized what he was saying and how loudly he was saying it. His body curled in on himself as his wide eyes searched her face. “I do actually really like you, Marinette. A lot. And, um, not just as a friend.”

“Y-you do?”

Adrien nodded, but he looked miserable as his hand brushed through his hair. “I just didn’t want to tell you like this. I had such high hopes for today!”

Marinette flashed back to her text conversation with Chloe. Today had been Adrien’s idea.

With a thump Manon jumped from the bench and ran over to the two teenagers. She thrust the phone in their faces declaring, “Look at the fishy! It’s a rainbow trout. See all the colors?”

“Actually, I think rainbow trouts live in freshwater, not saltwater,” Adrien corrected.

“Actually, I think rainbow trouts live in freshwater, not saltwater,” Adrien corrected.

“Well, this one does!” Manon insisted.

“It’s a good picture,” Marinette encouraged. “Will you take some more? You can show your mother.” Manon turned on her heel and resumed her position atop the bench. Through dark lashes Marinette turned her attention back to Adrien. “Today? What did you want to happen, today?”

“Well,” Adrien sighed. “I meant for today to be our...first date. See, I was trying to recreated Amu and Tadase’s first date…”

“Shugo Chara?” Marinette squeaked, recalling Manon’s words from earlier. “Happy, First Embarrassing Date?”

Adrien nodded, “I thought It’d be romantic to, well, recreate your favorite episode. But I, um, may have been to thorogh in re-enacting the episode? I didn’t realize it at first, but I guess I kinda tricked you into going. You thought all of us would be going, but everyone back out because I told them to…”
“Just like Amu and Tadase’s friends backed out at the last minute…” Marinette recalled.

Adrien nodded. “So you shouldn’t be mad at Chloe and the others. They only did what I asked. I meant it to be a surprise. It sounded so good when I was planning it in my head, but then...I know I specifically said ‘date’ when I asked you, but…”

“You did! I remember,” Marinette nodded, “but I didn’t think you meant it like that, or at least, I didn’t want to assume…”

“Yeah, I got that impression. I’m so sorry, Marinette. You must hate me,” Adrien sighed.

“No, no I don’t hate you. I admit I was confused, but I’m not now. I’m glad we’ve straighten things out.”

“Really? Me, too,” Adrien smiled brightly. “So...friends?”

“No.”

“Oh.” Right. He didn’t deserve her friendship. He had betrayed her trust.

“Friends don’t date, right? And we’re on a date, so…” Marinette slipped her hand into his.

“Oh! Yeah! Right! Great!” Adrien beamed as he squeezed her hand in his. “So...you’re not mad?”

“No,” Marinette shook her head; her pigtails waved back and forth. “I don’t think I have much ground to be mad at you for not specifically asking me out on a date when I didn’t specifically ask if I could kiss you.”

“I didn’t mind…”

Marinette smiled. “Doesn’t make it right, though. I still should’ve asked.”

“Me, too. I should have asked you clearly for a date.” He placed his other hand over their joined ones. “Can we start over? The whole day, let’s just start over. Marinette, will you go on a date with me?”

“Oh no, this is our first date. No do-overs.” Marinette chuckled. “You weren’t kidding when you said you were too thorough. I mean, not just our friends, but the setting, the little girl tagging along...” She pointed at Manon.

“Well, I wanted it to be special...memorable.” He lowered his eyes bashfully.

“I won’t be forgetting this, I promise,” Marinette laughed. “Thank you. I love it.” She drew a shaky breath in before saying, “And, I love y---”

Her words were cut off by screams. The cry of “Akuma!” echoed through the tunnel.

“I swear, I didn’t arrange for an akuma attack,” Adrien pledged with wide eyes, referring to how Amu and Tadase’s own date at the aquarium had been interrupted by an X Egg.

“ADRIEN AGRESTE!!!”

“At least, not on purpose…” he mumbled as his eyes fell on the akuma, who shouted his name. It was Amélie, no doubt about it. He recognized the “I Love Adrien” pin attached to her chest. Her brown hair had changed to long, bright pink tresses parted and tied into four low-hanging pigtails. Her eyes were extra large and also pink in color. Her aquarium uniform had been replaced by a blue,
sailor-inspired blouse and pleated skirt. A large red bow accented the wide, white collar at her throat. She looked like…

“Oh no,” Adrien breathed. “It’s Yuno!”

“Yuno?” Marinette asked. “I think it’s Amélie.”

“Amélie looks like Yuno Gasai…from Future Diary!” Adrien whispered hoarsely.

Marinette turned to Adrien. They looked at each other in horror as the full implication of that statement settled over them. “Yandere!” they both breathed. But, not just any yandere. Yuno is the original yandere, the one that all other yanderes were modeled off of, compared to. In the list of top 10 yanderes Yuno was number 1. She was the queen. And, Amélie looked just like her, from her wild eyes to her snarling mouth to her large bag full of weaponry. A rifle, a crossbow, a katana sword, the handle of an axe stuck out of the bulging sack on her back.

“Where is that little pigtailed whore?! I’m gonna gut her!” the amuka cried as she pulled out a long, sharp blade from the overstuffed green backpack strapped to her. Blood already dripping from it.

“I’m not a whore!” Manon cried stamping her foot. “What’s a whore?” she asked Marinette with wide eyes.

“Don’t worry, sweetie. She means me, not you,” Marinette soothed as she pulled the little girl down one end of the tunnel, followed by Adrien on their heels.

“Get her out of here!” Marinette commanded to Adrien once they had entered the large exhibition space of the adjoining room. She turned on her heel about to run back toward the akuma, but he grabbed her by the wrist, waylaying her.

“What about you? Where are you going?”

“I. AM. HEARTATTACK!” the akuma screeched. “No one will come between me and Adrien!”

“She wants me. I’ll distract her so everyone can get out of here,” Marinette moved to leave again, but Adrien’s grip on her remained firm. “Don’t worry! Ladybug and Chat Noir’ll be here soon. Now go!” She twisted her wrist, so that the small side of it was against his thumb. She pulled away from him hard and slipped through his grasp.

“Hey!” she called out to the akuma waving her hands in the air to get her attention.

“Adrien?” Manon whimpered. With an anxious look at the brave girl he was leaving behind to fight his battle, he scooped up his charge in his arms and ran as fast as he could out of the aquarium to the safety of the outdoors. With luck, he would find Mme. Chamack, deposit her daughter with her, transform and return before the akuma had time to do too much damage. He just hoped his partner was already on the way.

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“Maman!” Manon called out to Mme. Chamack standing near the opening of the bridge with a mic in hand. The news woman's eyes flicked worriedly to her daughter and her babysitter running toward her as she continued to talk into the camera.

“Protesters continue to chant in opposition to the Mayor’s task force here to remove the so-called “love locks” from the pont. In his speech, Mayor Bourgeois called the locks a safety hazard and their removal imperative to the survival and maintenance of Paris’ bridges.”
The cameraman swiveled the camera off of the reporter back to the protestors and the Mayor, trying in vain to speak over their chants. Mme. Chamack lowered her microphone and stepped forward to intercept the unwanted visitors.

“Manon! Adrien! What’s going on? You shouldn’t be here. I’m not done.” Mme. Chamack’s annoyance quickly turned to anger. “Manon! I thought I told you no more toys…”

“But, Maman!” Manon whined as Adrien set her on the ground before her mother. She thrust his phone in his hands as she pulled her beloved LadyRay and CatfishNoir from him and into a bear hug. “I love them!”

“Manon!”

“Akuma!” Adrien breathlessly panted, interrupting them.

“Akuma! Where?” Mme. Chamack quickly metamorphosed from scolding mother to intrepid newswoman. She eagerly tapped her cameraman on the back to get his attention. He spun around and focused on Adrien. The blonde boy pointed back toward the aquarium from which they had run. Dozens of people beat the same path from the aquatic-centric building toward the bridge. Shouts of warning rang out, but they couldn’t be heard over the protestors. Realizing that hundreds of innocent and ignorant people stood in the direct path of the akuma, Adrien raced to the center of the bridge and up the make shaft platform. Pushing passed a surprised Chloe and Sabrina, Adrien shoved the blustery Mayor away from the podium. The crowd cheered, but Adrien raised his hands above his head, silently signaling for quiet.

“Ladies and gentlemen, an akuma has been spotted at the aquarium,” he pointed in the direction of the ensuing danger. “Please make your way calmly and safely off of the bridge and take shelter.” Without hesitation the Mayor’s own security team forcibly lifted him up and carried him across the pont.

“Chloe!” the Mayor called over his shoulder. “Keep up!”

The crowd did not hesitate to respond. Akuma attacks had become a normal occurrence in Paris and its citizens in turn had become well versed in handling the threat. Adrien nodded in satisfaction as he watched the crowd make their way across the bridge. From his vantage point from atop the podium he could see Manon and her mother in the distance running along the bank of the river away from the aquarium. From their position trying to cross the bridge would take too long. They would cross at the next one, which was not that far away. No doubt Mme. Chamack had to abandon getting the story in favor of ensuring her daughter’s safety. Her cameraman, on the other hand, had no such divided loyalties and stayed in place, filming the eerily quiet aquarium at a distance. Adrien turned on his heel about to run back toward trouble when he ran smack into Chloe.

“Where do you think you’re going?” she asked trying to block his path with her own body. She held her arms outstretched.

“Sorry, Chlo. Can’t stay!” Adrien pivoted to one side

“Oh, no, Adrien Agreste!” Chloe shadowed his movement, not allowing him to pass.

“Look out! The akuma!” Adrien hollered pointing behind Chloe’s head. She instinctively ducked, allowing Adrien space and time to race past her. Her face burned bright at her mistake.

“You promised, Adrien!” Chloe yelled as she watched him run toward the akuma, fists gripped in tight balls at her sides. “No more helping Ladybug!”
“Come on, Chloe!” Sabrina tugged at her best friend’s sleeve, urging her to do the sensible thing and flee.

“Ridiculous,” she muttered. “Utterly ridiculous.”

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Adrien ducked behind a bus stop shelter located along the street almost halfway between the the bridge and the aquarium. From this vantage all appeared clear, yet he knew that inside the akuma was wreaking havoc. He had to get in there. Although the sides of the bus shelter were made of glass they had been covered by posters advertising concerts, local sales, and other community activities. It would provide enough coverage for his transformation, not that there were any onlookers, most having already fled the scene. In a motion his body had performed countless times, Adrien opened the right side of jacket to allow his kwami to appear from his hiding spot as the magical words left his lips.

“Plagg! Claws…”

The words died in his mouth as Adrien realized in horror that he wasn’t wearing his jacket. Worse, he had no idea where Plagg was.

The neighborhood’s akuma warning siren pierced the silence.

“*How could I be so stupid!*” he moaned to himself. The siren agreed, as it seemed to blare “STUUUUUPID!” for all to hear, for all to be made aware of his blunder. Adrien felt his knees go weak and his mouth dry, as panic bubbled up from his stomach. Marinette had his jacket. Marinette had Plagg. Marinette was fighting the akuma when he should be. And, worst of all...Chat Noir was not coming!

Chapter End Notes

I actually found a ladybug-themed stingray stuffed animal on my travels, although I didn’t find it in France. I found it in Belize of all places, but thought it too good not to include in the story. (Of course, I bought the toy after convincing my son it was the best of the lot offered. It’s for him, not me, I swear! You gotta get a souvenir, right?) Not sure about France, but if the USA ever had a real superhero then we’d sure as hell market the crap out of her. So, I figured why not include it in the story? Seems believable to me and a call back to “Puppeteer”.

And so begins the akuma attack. This is the reason it has taken me so long to update as I had to plan out the battle. Sigh! I love this show except for the akumas. ;)
Chloe knew she should run. In her bones she knew it. That’s what any sensible person would do. That’s what Sabrina was begging her to do, right now! It’s what she normally did. But, this time was different. Adrien was out there, about to do something stupid, reckless, and unbelievably brave. The last akuma battle she had witnessed in person, an akuma she had caused, Adrien had acted the same way and paid the ultimate price. It felt like a deja vu. It was all going to happen again, but this time she had hindsight as her guide. She knew what was about to happen and this time, she wasn’t just going to stand around, mouth agape, frozen in fear. No! Chloe Bourgeois waits for no man...er, akuma! She would act. She would help. She would save Adrien from the akuma, from himself.

Adrien had stopped halfway to the aquarium, hiding in a bus shelter. She wondered why? Perhaps to formulate a plan. It gave her time to formulate her own as the neighborhood’s akuma warning siren rang in her ears, urging her to hurry. Chloe looked around her, searching for some weapon or shield. Anything she could use to stop the akuma or protect Adrien. Her eyes lit on the wagons full of broken locks the men and women of the city’s Transportation Department had removed from the bridge. “Love locks” the Parisians called them. Lovers would etch their initials on the surface of a lock and then lock it in place on the rails of the bridge. They would throw the key over the side into the murky Seine below as a show that their love would be steadfast, never to break, that is until her father ordered their removal. She strode over to the nearest wagon and picked up one of the broken locks stacked inside. It felt heavy in her hand. Heavy enough that when combined with others it threatened to take down the bridge. Maybe, they could be used to take down the akuma. A pair of huge metal clippers lay on the ground beside the wagons, abandoned by its wielder. Chloe picked it up, too, for good measure, placing it in the wagon.

“Come on!” she yelled at Sabrina as she tried to pull the wagon. “Help me!”

Sabrina hurried to push the wagon from behind. Her nature made her follow Chloe’s orders against her better judgment, but her curiosity got the better of her. “What are we doing?” the redhead asked.

Chloe wasn’t used to explaining herself and paid her friend no mind, focusing all of her efforts on moving the wagon closer.

They had only taken a few paces when they heard a series of pops, like fireworks, followed by a
crash. At the same time both girls looked up to see a tall woman with pink hair emerge from the aquarium. The remnants of the building’s glass walls lay in shards along the ground, blown out by some projectile prior to the akuma’s appearance. Chloe gulped at the sight of her. She held a long, sharp sword in one hand and a machine gun in the other, no doubt the cause of the noise they had just heard and the damage done to the building. A large, bulging green sack strapped to her back held even more weaponry.

“Adrien!” the akuma cooed.

Chloe’s eyes snapped to where Adrien had been hiding. She could see him peeking out from around the bus shelter.

“Where are you, Sweetie?” the akuma called out. “I miss you, Darling! I have your jacket!” She pulled the white jacket, now much dirtier and ripped in a few places, from where it was fastened around her hips and held it up. “That Marinette isn’t worthy of it. She isn’t worthy of you. You’re mine! Come out so we can be together!”

Chloe could see Adrien consider, the wheels turning in his head. With horror she saw him stand up, step out, and call out to the akuma. Without thinking, Chloe jumped into the wagon. With both hands she held the handle back up toward her as a steering wheel. With one foot in the wagon, she pushed off with the other one and at the same time ordered Sabrina to push her from behind. Her friend obliged and the sudden forced hurled Chloe down the slope of the bridge, careening toward Adrien and the akuma.

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“Amélie!” Adrien croaked, waving one hand in greeting. “I mean, Heart Attack!” His heart pounded fast in his chest, feeling as if he himself might have a heart attack.

“God, this is stupid,” he thought, forcing himself to smile as if being photographed for a fashion layout. He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, trying to calm himself. It was one thing to go up against an akuma when you have enhanced abilities, a super suit to protect you, and your trusty baton to fight with, and quite another when you didn’t. The last time he did this he didn’t have time to think, he just reacted. This time, he had had time to not only think, but also to panic. He rubbed his hands along his thighs, trying to dry his sweaty palms on his jeans.

“I just need to get close...close enough to get that jacket.”

Technically speaking he wasn’t fighting the akuma, he was just going to trick her. And, Chat Noir wasn’t there, no thanks to his own stupidity, but still technically true, so he wasn’t breaking his promise to Marinette or Chloe. At least, that’s what he was going to tell them when they inevitably would jump him, pummeling him with pillows.

“I missed you, too!” he cried, slowly walking toward her. “I’m so sorry about what I said. Can you please forgive me?”

“Of course, Dearest!” Amélie squealed in delight. She rushed forward to greet him. “I know it was that awful girl, confusing you, twisting your thoughts and feelings against you. We won’t have to worry about her anymore. I took care of her.”

Adrien’s slow pace stalled for a moment. Concern for Marinette washed over him. He swallowed hard and pushed his panic down. He had to focus. Jacket, Plagg, transform, stop akuma, in that order. Once Ladybug had cleansed the akuma, whatever damage Amélie had done to Marinette and anyone else would be reversed...he hoped. He resumed his march toward the yandere.
“Keep calm,” he told himself. “As long as she thinks you love her, she won’t hurt you. Just a few more meters…”

“Thank y---”

His words were cut off as he felt a force hit him from the side, knocking the breath from his lungs.

“Ladybug,” he thought, as he swung through the air, secure in her strong arms. From above he could see a large wagon carrying a blonde girl, charge toward the akuma, something metallic and heavy swinging in one hand. It knocked Heart Attack off of her feet, spilling the contents of the wagon, including the blonde, across the street. Wait. Was that Chloe?

Adrien felt his feet hit the pavement as Ladybug set him down on a flat rooftop a few blocks away.

“You okay?” she asked. He managed to nod in reply. “Great. Stay here. Keep hidden.” She moved to leave, but he called out to stop her.

“Wait! My friend, I mean, my girlfriend, my, my Marinette! She’s in danger...from the akuma and I can’t find her! Please! She was in the aquarium and...”

“It’s okay,” Ladybug assured him, turning back to rest both hands on his shoulders. She looked almost touched by his concern. “I got everyone out of the aquarium, including Marinette. She’s fine. Now I have to go!”

“Wait!” Adrien caught her by the wrist. “I can help!” If he couldn’t transform, he had to still help. “The akuma wants me. I...I can be your decoy. Bait for your trap!”

“I can’t risk your safety,” she smiled fondly. Her hand came up to his cheek and cradled it briefly. Adrien’s heart stuttered for a moment and he doubted he was over her after all. “But it does give me an idea. Thanks!” Ladybug twisted her wrist, so that the small side of it was against his thumb. She pulled away from him hard and slipped through his grasp. Something about that felt so familiar, Adrien was struck dumb for a second. When he came back to his senses, he cursed his continuing bad luck. He had forgotten to tell his partner where the akuma was hidden.

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Feeling a bit dizzy, Chloe sat up. She wondered why she was sitting on the ground. Her eyes focused on her feet splayed out in front of her, one of which was missing a shoe. Movingly slowly because of the ache in her side she pushed herself up and stood. She wobbled for a minute before finding her balance. She could hear her name being called in the distance.

“Sabrina!,” she yelled into the air, not knowing exactly where her friend was. “Get over here and help me find my shoe!” She hobbled around, sidestepping scattered love locks, making a zig zag path toward her goal. “Daddy really needs to do something about all the trash in the street. You can’t even walk!” The mayor’s daughter thought in disgust. She picked up the Prada shoe and tsked in dismay when she noticed the scuff marks. She bent down to place the shoe on her foot and that’s when she heard it, the strangled moan...of an akuma! She was lying...right there! Less than 3 meters away!!!

“Fuck me!” Chloe thought. She slowly backed away, trying to be quiet despite the clicking of her heels on the pavement. “Adrien thought I’m a bad influence? ” she scoffed. “He’s the bad influence! Fighting akumas! What the hell was I thinking?”

The akuma sat straight up and locked eyes with Chloe. The awe-struck girl lost her footing and tripped over one of the larger, heavier love locks. With a thud, she landed on her bottom. Pain surged
through her lower limbs and back.

“That’s gonna bruise,” she thought ruefully.

“You!” The akuma accused, pointing a finger at her. “You’re Chloe Bourgeois, the mayor’s daughter.”

“No, I’m not! I just look like her. I get that all the time!” Chloe waved a hand dismissively in the air. Chloe hoped that this wasn’t someone that knew her or at least the old her. How many people had she apologized to over the last two weeks? Fifty? A hundred? This would be the one person she hadn’t gotten to yet. “I’m actually much prettier than her.” She flipped her hair, hoping that talking to the akuma would buy time for Ladybug and Chat Noir to save her. Where was that damn cat anyway? This was all his fault! If he’d just do his job, then Adrien wouldn’t of engaged the akuma, and she wouldn’t be sitting vulnerably on her ass about to get smote by an angry akuma.

“No, you are Chloe!” the akuma insisted, rising to her feet and picking up her sword at the same time. “I recognize that tacky yellow jacket you wear all the time.”

Chloe’s face burned bright red. She loved this jacket. Her mother gave her this jacket.

“My mother, the founder and editor of Style Queen and the most influential fashion critic gave me this jacket so it can’t possibly be tacky!” the offended girl spat.

Heart Attack leveled her sword at the blonde girl. “So you admit it then? You are Chloe Bourgeois!”

“Shit!” Chloe cursed herself, she walked right into that one.

“You took Adrien to a spa. You’re his friend, but I know what kind of girl you are! I know you want my Adrien for yourself!” the akuma accused as she leveled her sword at Chloe. The blonde stared cross-eyed at the sharp tip, mere centimeters from her nose. She gulped to try to moisten her dry mouth. This must be that Amy-girl Adrien mentioned, Chloe realized. She felt a surge of pride for her friend that he had stood up for himself enough to cause an akuma.

“Well done, Adrien,” she thought.

Chloe laughed nonchalantly, “Oh, that! Adrikens and I are old friends, childhood friends.” She stressed. “He’s like a brother to me.” She carefully moved the blade to one side and out of her face.

“That’s not what the tabloids and gossip blogs say…”

“You can’t believe that trash. Besides, I don’t even like boys. I like girls. Big Lesbo, right here,” she twittered nervously. It wasn’t totally a lie. She definitely found Ladybug attractive, but honestly what Parisian didn’t have a crush on the city’s savior? It was totally normal to have a crush on her, right? Right. But that doesn’t make her a Lesbian, just a Ladybug-lover, right? She pushed that thought out of her mind, having to focus on the crisis at hand. Her hands scooted out slowly in opposite directions along the ground. When each hand came into contact with a love lock, she felt more confident. She arched an eyebrow, looked the akuma up and down, and drawled, “How you doing?”

The akuma paused, mulling over the girl’s words. Chloe wondered if she had been convincing enough. Realizing she was still sitting awkwardly on the ground, she slowly got up, careful to keep the love locks hidden in her palms.

“You know, I can help you. I know Adrien like the back of my hand. I can tell you what he likes. Give you tips to win him over…”
“I don’t need any tips! Adrien already loves me!” The akuma screamed. “And, we don’t need you!” Heart Attack charged, swinging her sword, but Chloe ducked and then threw both locks at the akuma. One missed completely and the other Heart Attack batted away with her weapon. Chloe cringed as she felt the breeze from the sword as it approached her neck. Then, stillness. She dropped to her knees.

“I must be dead,” she thought, although she didn’t feel any pain. Her hands felt her neck wondering if her head was still attached or not.

“No need to fight. Let’s just all keep our heads,” a voice from above quipped.

Chloe looked up to find, “Ladybug!” The superhero held the akuma’s sword in one hand. She must have disarmed her with her yo-yo. Without thinking Chloe launched herself at the bespotted girl, tackling her in a hug. “I’m so glad you’re here!”

A purple haze fell over Heart Attack’s face. She answered cryptically to someone who wasn’t either Ladybug or Chloe. The akuma’s momentary distraction gave Ladybug the chance they needed.

“Hang on!” Ladybug commanded as she hurled her yo-yo above them and grabbed Chloe with one arm by the waist. A second later they were mid-air and Chloe held on as tight as she could. She dared to look below, seeing the akuma come to her senses and then scream in fury at their sudden departure. She used her machine gun against them, but Ladybug was too fast, zipping them this way and then that, farther and farther away from the akuma. Chloe closed her eyes and buried her face in Ladybug’s neck. She breathed, willing herself to calm down. The hero smelled like freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, sweet and warm. It reminded her of Marinette’s bedroom above the bakery. There was a time when that smell made her angry and full of jealousy of the other girl’s happy homelife, but now it made her feel safe and secure.

Chloe felt the ground rise up to meet her and the air still around her. She opened her eyes to find herself standing on the balcony of her hotel suite. She was home.

“Um...you can let go now,” Ladybug said. Chloe jumped back releasing her hold and laughed nervously.

“Oh, Ladybug! I want you to know I had nothing to do with causing that akuma…”

“I know,” Ladybug reassured, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder. “And, I saw how you tackled the akuma with that wagon. Very clever, very brave.”

“Thank you.”

“But very reckless. You could have gotten hurt.”

“I did,” Chloe rubbed her backside. It still smarted from her fall. “But, I had to help Adrien! He was going to do something stupid all because that damn cat flaked out again!”

“That ‘damn cat’ happens to be my partner.” Ladybug crossed her arms with dissatisfaction. “I don’t know where Chat Noir is, but whatever the reason for his absence, I know it’s a good one.”

“You deserve better,” Chloe replied decidedly as she watched Ladybug launch her yo-yo into the air, crying “Miraculous Ladybug!” Something small and red with black spots dropped into her hands. The hero unfurled the scroll and after looking at its contents she looked up with a gleam in her eye.

“How about you?” Ladybug asked, looking up from the lucky charm. “Think you’re up for it? Wanna help me?”
There really is a bridge in Paris called the Pont des Arts where people put love locks. You can actually see it in the show. specifically in the Glaciator episode where Marinette first gets the ice cream. In real life they have removed the locks as it threatened to pull the bridges down due to the extra weight. Thought it'd be a nice detail to include in the story.

This is a short chapter. The next one will be much loooonger. Getting close to the end!
“Master Fu!” Marinette called as she walked into his establishment. Tikki hovered above her at her shoulder. “My Lucky Charm brought me here!” She held up the red and black scroll that matched the decorative one hanging on his wall. With efficient speed the old man fetched the miraculous box from its hiding spot in the antique record player. With a flourish the box opened all of its compartments revealing the miraculous contained inside. The jewels shimmered and shined in the afternoon light streaming in from the small windows.

“Choose wisely, Marinette,” Master Fu advised. Her hand hovered over one miraculous before shifting to another. She hesitated, but then made her decision, selecting a golden hair comb crowned by a bumble bee.

“Do you have someone in mind?” Master Fu asked.

“I do,” the hero responded.

“You trust her?” he asked.

“I know she’s highly motivated to help,” Marinette answered. “She’s a strong personality, but I believe she wants to be a better person. I’ve seen her make changes recently.”

Master Fu smiled and nodded, approvingly before closing up the box and placing it back in its hiding place. Tikki, who had zipped off to the kitchen for a snack, returned and waited expectantly for her chosen.

“Is there something else, Ladybug?” he asked Marinette.

“It’s just...Chat Noir,” Marinette began. “He didn’t show up at all for an akuma battle about a month ago and now today...he didn't show again.”

“Did Chat Noir explain why he missed the akuma before?”

Marinette shook her head miserably. “He just said if he could’ve been there he would’ve.”

“You don’t believe him?”
“It’s not that. I...I’m worried for him. I’m afraid something else might be going on. Has he...has he said anything to you, Master?”

“No, but if you’re concerned then you must speak to him the next time you see him. I’m sure it’s a simple explanation, but if not, then you two will figure it out.”

“Thank you, Master Fu!” Marinette nodded. She felt reassured that whatever was causing Chat to miss battles that the two would figure it out. She’d help however she could and for now at least she had a new partner to back her up.

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Using the rusty, rickety fire escape Adrien had managed to scale down the building Ladybug had left him on with only a scrape to the elbow for his pains. In the distance he could hear the rat-a-tat of the akuma’s machine gun broken by the sounds of glass shattering and occasionally the screams of by standards. Now, he waited. It was agonizing to wait. He wanted to help, especially since his cruel words had caused the akuma. He rocked on his heels and then checked his phone. No further emails.

“ He must be on his way,” Adrien thought.

A few moments later, although it felt like years to Adrien, a green and black scooter turned into the alleyway where Adrien hid. The headlights flashed just before the motor stopped. Adrien ran over to greet the driver, who flung one leg over the scooter before removing his helmet.

Adrien gasped in surprise at the boy standing before him. It was like looking in a mirror.

“Wayhem!” Adrien breathed. “You dyed your hair!”

“Aww...it’s so sweet of you to notice!” the other blonde boy beamed. “What do you think? Is it me?” He brushed his fingers through his flaxen tresses.

“I think it’s me,” Adrien replied a bit dumbfounded before shaking his head to gather his thoughts. “I mean, you look just like me!” Both boys were the same age and about the same height and weight, but Wayhem had brown hair, or at least he used to. Now, the only discernible difference between them was the color of their eyes and Wayhem’s slightly more rounded face and larger nose.

“You hate it, don’t you?” Wayhem pouted.

“No! Quite the opposite! I love it! It’s perfect!” Adrien enthused. His plan would work even better now. Finally, his luck was changing. “Quick take off your shirt!” he ordered while at the same time slipping his own over his head.

“Okay!” Wayhem giggled, his cheeks flaming red. Now shirtless, Wayhem reached for Adrien, but then paused with one arm still outstretched in the air. His eyes locked on Adrien’s abs.

“Here,” Adrien draped his own shirt over Wayhem’s outstretched hand as he took the other boy’s shirt from him. He slipped Wayhem’s t-shirt over his head and then waited for Wayhem to dress. He had that same distant look Marinette would get. Adrien waved a hand in front of the other boy’s face. He rolled his eyes in frustration. There wasn’t time for this. He grabbed the extra helmet dangling from the scooter’s handle and started up the electric scooter.

“You coming?” he called. His voice snapped Wayhem out of his reverie. He quickly donned Adrien’s shirt and then he own helmet. “Get on!” Adrien commanded and Wayhem complied, happily wrapping his arms around Adrien’s midsection from behind. He let his head rest on the model’s shoulder blades. He wasn’t sure, but Adrien thought he heard a little sigh escape the other
boy’s lips.

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“Jean Pierre!” Chloe screeched. “Are you done yet? Ladybug may be back any minute!”

“Almost, Mademoiselle,” her butler answered as he continued to work as fast as he could. This wasn’t exactly his expertise, but he had found that working for the Bourgeois meant that you never knew what unorthodox demand they expected next. A few moments later Butler Jean stood up and held up his work for his employer to inspect.

“Good enough, Jean Luc,” she sniffed in approval and then waved a hand for him to continue. He quickly rolled up the cutout and secured it with a rubber band. He carefully placed it in a duffel bag.

“That’ll be all, Jean Claude,” Chloe took the bag from him and dismissed him with a wave. She hurried out to her balcony just as the spotted superhero landed.

Chloe began to rapidly assure Ladybug that everything had been prepared to her specifications, when the hero held up a hand to pause the helpful girl’s words.

“Chloe Bourgeois,” Ladybug started with a sense of formality, “I bestow upon you the Bee Miraculous, which grants the power of subjection. You will use this power for the greater good and when asked to return it, you will do so. Do you understand?”

Chloe nodded with a broad smile and took the small, lacquered box from Ladybug’s outstretched hand. She flipped the lid off and a brightly glowing orb rose up, dancing in the air. With a flash it manifested into a small, yellow and black creature. It looked bee-like. Atop its large head set black antennas. It blinked its bright blue eyes and said in a sweet voice, “At your service, My Queen.”

Chloe felt a thrill of satisfaction. “That’s exactly how I should be addressed,” she thought. “Finally, someone gets it right.”

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“You know,” Wayhem whispered, “I’m sure your dad would rather buy you a replacement jacket than have you try to steal it back from the akuma.”

“It’s not about the jacket,” Adrien clarified. “It’s about what’s inside the jacket and that can’t be replaced.” He eyed the akuma from their new vantage point. She was slowly stalking up the street, randomly shooting off her gun. She screamed for Ladybug, cursed out Marinette, and cooed for “her Adrien” in steady succession. “Okay. You ready? Understand what to do?”

Wayhem nodded and swallowed hard. Adrien gave him a reassuring smile and squeezed his shoulder with his hand. The fan boy thought he might die from the close contact. This was the best day ever! His crush was smiling at him, at him! And he had seen his abs. Adrien Agreste’s abs! And, he was wearing his shirt! Adrien Agreste’s shirt!

“Don’t worry. As long as she thinks you’re me, then you should be safe.”

“And if she figures out that I’m not you?” He twisted his fingers nervously and looked up at him through long lashes.

“Chat Noir will be there to save you. Promise.” Adrien mimed crossing his heart with one finger.

“Right,” Wayhem nodded. “Shouldn’t we wait for Chat Noir?” He looked around, trying to see if he
could see the feline superhero somewhere, but Adrien had already mounted and started up the electric scooter.

“Just wait for me to get into position. Wait for the signal and then come out.” Adrien called over his shoulder as he zoomed away. Wayhem rocked back on his heels. He squeezed his cell phone in his hand, waiting for the beep that he knew would be coming in moments. He peeked out to see the akuma as she approached. She looked hideous!

“Poor thing,” he thought. “Bad enough she’s akumatized, but she has to be seen wearing that horrible sailor suit.”

He snapped a quick picture for his Adrien blog, *Simply Agreste*. He’d have quite a story to tell for this week installment!

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“Queen Bee,” Ladybug called out to Chloe, now clad in a mask and bee-inspired super suit, as the two raced across the rooftops of Paris. “We’re going to have to work together as a team, okay?”

The new superhero nodded, her black-streaked, blonde ponytail bobbing behind her. “I’m an excellent team player,” she asserted. Out of the corner of her eye Queen Bee could see her partner bite her lip. “Don’t worry. I’ve been practicing for this. My best friend and I cosplay Chat Noir and you all the time.”

“This isn’t playtime,” Ladybug warned as she swung to the next rooftop, Queen Bee following using her own magical implement, a trumpedo. “This is real. I need you to go to the Eiffel Tower and set up our trap.”

Queen Bee’s step stuttered on the landing. “But, what are you going to do?” she asked in surprise.

Ladybug stopped, too, to explain. “I’m going to engage the akuma and bring her to you. Then, you’ll spring the trap.”

“But, I want to fight the akuma, too!” Queen Bee whined as her brow furrowed. This wasn’t at all how she imagined it. She thought they’d be fighting side by side.

Ladybug laid a patient hand on Queen Bee’s shoulder and squeezed. “And you will! But I need you to do this first. You’re my secret weapon. I can’t have you with me because that would spoil the surprise. No one knows about you yet and we can use that to our advantage.”

“I’m your secret weapon?” Queen Bee squeaked, thinking she might die from the close contact. This was the best day ever! Ladybug was smiling at her, *at her!* And she had given her a miraculous of her very own! Now, she was a superhero in her own right! Her own kwami and her own miraculous jewel! Even her own supersuit, which if she did say so herself, she thought far superior to that of both Chat Noir and Ladybug. The yellow stripes against the black stood out boldly and really made her crystal blue eyes pop, and not to mention her hair: a high ponytail with a dramatic, black streak cutting through her normally blonde tresses, so avant guarde!

Ladybug nodded. “You’re essential to this plan, Queen Bee. I can’t do this without you. You ready?”

“I’m ready,” she assured her with a firm nod. “I won’t let you down.”

With that Ladybug launched her Lucky Charm spell into the air. She received a red and black glue stick in return. She placed the charm in Queen Bee’s hand and with a word of warning to be sure to
return it to her, she turned on her heel and jumped.

Queen Bee watched her go for a moment, before unscrewing her trumpedo and snapping a quick picture of herself using the camera app built into the magical tech. She texted the picture to her civilian cell phone, knowing that she’d have to start an official Queen Bee social media campaign as soon as this akuma was caught.

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Ding.

Wayhem looked down at his phone. A text from Adrien. That was the signal. He took a deep breath to steady himself and ran out from his hiding place behind a row of bushes. He called out to the akuma, who had crossed the bridge, which the protestors had previously blocked, and was now stalking down the opposite side of the Seine away from the Eiffel Tower. Adrien had dropped him ahead of the akuma’s path while he circled back behind her. Wayhem would be the distraction, the bait. He had done this once before when Adrien’s body guard had been akumatized into a 50-foot gorilla, Gorizilla. He had impersonated Adrien then to draw out the akuma for Chat Noir to engage. This wasn’t any different. He could do this.

“Heart Attack!” Pretend Adrien called out again, waving both hands over his head. The akuma locked her eyes and her machine gun on him. He gulped, throwing both hands up straight in surrender. “It’s me! Adrien! Don’t shoot!”

“Adrien!” the akuma cried happily. “Oh! Darling! You escaped from that horrible insect! I knew you would!” She started running toward him, arms outstretched, ready to embrace him. The heft of her backpack slowed her down. Her pigtails and the white jacket tied around her waist barely flapped as she traveled.

“Adrien’s jacket!” Wayhem thought. His eyes flicked past Heart Attack. He was coming. Adrien was coming.

Wayhem braced himself. The electric scooter sped toward them, unbeknownst to the akuma. Wayhem had been thankful that he had spent the extra Euros to buy an electric scooter. That money was well worth its silent motor. It allowed for the surprise. The akuma never saw it coming. Adrien charged past, an outstretched hand grabbing the hem of the jacket as it dangled from her hips. A sharp tug released its hold on her waist and the jacket came free, flapping in the air as he continued pass.

Despite himself, a breathy “Yes!” escaped Wayhem’s lips in enthusiasm for their success.

The akuma screamed in anger and lifted her weapon. The line of her sight was blocked by faux Adrien allowing the real one to get away. Wayhem cringed and threw his hands back up into the air, trying to calm the akuma.

“Don’t worry, Sweetheart!” false Adrien soothed. “You got the real deal here. You don’t need that jacket. I have dozens more that I can lend you.”

The akuma froze, taking in his words. Wayhem gulped again, wondering if the jig was up.

“You’re right of course, Adrien Dear,” the akuma agreed. The disguised blonde sighed in relief as he slowly bought his arms down to his sides.

She closed the gap between them. “But why are you wearing a helmet?”
“Well, just for safety, you know. There’s been a lot of damage done…” he said looking around the bullet ridden street.

“You don’t have to worry about that, now that you’re with me,” she assured him, giving his arm a squeeze of encouragement. “Take off the helmet so I can see your handsome face and hear your lovely voice properly.”

Wayhem gulped again.

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Adrien skidded into an empty alleyway and held up the jacket.

“Okay, Plagg!” He called, “Come on out!” Nothing. No movement from the jacket. Adrien held his breath as he reached into the right chest pocket, hoping Plagg was only sleeping very deeply and didn’t hear him. His hand felt something soft, but not Plagg, only the handkerchief that the kwami used as a pillow. He tried the left side. He knew even before he withdrew his hand it wasn’t Plagg, just his lucky charm bracelet from Marinette and the small box that was her present. He hastily thrust both back in and then frantically searched both side pockets. Nothing. Not even an empty cheese wrapper.

“Where is he?” he cried out loud, helplessly. In horror, it struck Adrien that Chat Noir was not coming to help. He had left Wayhem alone with the akuma. This was the second time today he had abandoned a friend with the intention of transforming only to fail. He had seen no sign of Marinette since, even though Ladybug had assured him she was safe. Wayhem definitely wasn’t safe. With no plan in mind short of giving himself to the akuma and hoping for the best, Adrien turned the scooter around and zoomed back the way he had come. He just hoped he wasn’t too late.

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Ladybug paused on a rooftop, overlooking the Seine River. Her eyes scanned the empty streets below as she searched for her target. The akuma’s powers seemed to be centralized on her weaponry and not on any enhanced physical abilities. Heart Attack couldn’t fly, couldn’t jump atop buildings, and couldn’t teleport. She had no added strength, no special sight or hearing. As such, Ladybug waited atop the building as she saw the akuma slowly stalk by. Her earrings beeped, having already used her lucky charm to obtain the glue stick for Queen Bee. Tikki flew out a moment later and Marinette offered her a cookie from her purse.

“Eat quickly!” Marinette encouraged. “Queen Bee is waiting for us and I still need to get Heart Attack to the Eiffel Tower.”

Tikki nodded with a mouthful of cookie. She didn’t bother to answer knowing time was of the essence. She focused on eating as she sat on her chosen’s shoulder, but a moment later the kwami felt a shiver go through her and paused mid chew. She turned her head and her eyes spotted the cause of her bad feeling.

“Plagg!” Tikki called with a frown.

“What’s a Plagg?” Marinette asked, distractedly, as she continued to spy on the akuma, who repeatedly called out for Adrien, Marinette and Ladybug in succession. The hero wondered if she could relieve the akuma of that green backpack before they sprung their trap. It would give them their best chance. She chuckled a bit to herself, realizing who she meant by “them”. Chloe was her new partner. If anyone had told her even a week ago that she would willingly give Chloe a miraculous she would have called them crazy. But, the blonde diva had made large strides in being a
better person, going so far as to make “an apology tour” across the city.

“I must be crazy,” she hummed in thought and then realized that Tikki hadn’t answered her question. She turned her head to look at her kwami only to find she was no longer sitting on her shoulder.

“Tikki!” she cried out in disbelief. “Where are you going?”

“Be right back!” Tikki chirped. She flew as quickly as her kwami powers would carry her toward an overturned crepe cart. She could hear crinkling and ripping, followed by the sound of smacking lips.

“Nyum-yum-yum!”

“Plagg!” she cried with disdain. Plagg paused mid-chew and then turned his head toward the sound of his partner’s voice.

“Hey there, Sugar Cube!” he sweetly responded.


“Having a snack,” Plagg smiled and then opened his mouth to show the partially chewed cheese inside of it. Tikki turned her head away in disgust as the black cat kwami giggled before swallowing. “You want some chocolate?” He held up a tin of chocolate sauce and then opened the lid. The tantalizing smell of the sweet confection filled Tikki’s nose. She reached out a greedy hand before remembering herself and batted the tin away with a smack.

“Where is Chat Noir?” she asked impatiently. “Ladybug is worried sick!”

“He’s fine,” Plagg responded, “probably...”

“Probably? Probably!?! Where is he, Plagg?” she repeated and then with a gasp she realized. “You lost him! You lost your chosen!”

“I didn’t lose him!” Plagg defended himself. “He lost me.”

“Tikki!” The red kwami could hear her chosen calling her, distress apparent in her voice. Well, she wasn’t going to tell her. Tikki grabbed Plagg by one cat ear and dragged him though the air, up the side of the building, and only let go to deposit him in front of Marinette.

“Tell her!” Tikki ordered.

“I lost Chat Noir,” Plagg admitted.

“This...this is Chat Noir’s kwami?” Marinette blinked in disbelief at the little cat-like god. He had black fur and bright, green eyes.

“Plagg,” Tikki crossed her arms in dissatisfaction as she drawled his name out to make the introduction.

“We’ve met before, Ladybug,” Plagg pointed out to Marinette, “although at the time you had your eyes shut, soooo...you probably didn’t see me.” He referred to when Ladybug and Chat Noir had been caught in a vat of sticky whip cream by the akuma, Dark Owl, and were forced to detransform in front of each others. The two humans had kept their eyes shut, but the two kwamis had not.

“Aren’t I the cutest?” He turned over on his back and batted the air in an attempt to get her to pet him. The superhero was not so easily charmed.

“Where’s Chat?” Marinette demanded grabbing the kwami by the same ear that Tikki had accosted.
Plagg shrugged. “I dunno. I woke up and he was gone. It’s not my fault!” He phased though her hand so she could no longer strangle hold his ear.

“Why hasn’t he called you to transform?” Marinette asked. Plagg shrugged again, but Tikki recognized the tinge of guilt in his movement.

“Does he even know that you don’t have to be right there with him to hear the transformation words?”

Plagg shrugged, “I can’t remember if I told him that detail or not.” Tikki shook her head in disappointment. “What? Do you know how many Chat Noirs I’ve had? I can’t remember what I’ve told each one! Look, don’t worry! He’s here...somewhere.” Two pairs of very doubtful blue eyes bored into the cat kwami. He gulped. “No really! The akuma and Ladybug are both right here.” He gestured with his little paws at Heart Attack down below and Marinette before him. “Chat Noir’s bound to show up. You couldn’t keep him away.”

“Chat’s not foolish enough to fight an akuma untransformed...is he?” Marinette worried.

“I’m sorry, have you met Chat Noir? Only death could keep him away. And he’s not dead,” Plagg shook his head with a satisfied smirk. At that moment the akuma below bellowed in anger.

“At least not yet,” Plagg mumbled. The three looked over the side of the building in time to see a green and black scooter turn the corner while the akuma screamed in white hot anger. A figure before her blocked her path and her weapon’s trajectory. He wore a motorcycle helmet and a very familiar t-shirt. He was saying something, his words muffled by the helmet. Whatever he said worked because the akuma giggled. It was an eerie sight to hear something so light and feminine come from the horrific akuma.

“You’re right of course, Adrien Dear,” the akuma agreed.

“Adrien,” Marinette breathed. “He promised!” she cried in anger as her fists landed at her sides. He wasn’t supposed to interfere with akuma battles...unless Chat Noir didn’t show! Marinette grabbed her pigtails and pulled hard, realizing that an absent Chat not only put her at a disadvantage to stop the akuma, but also put Adrien in danger.

“Ahh! See!” Plagg was about to say he was right that Chat Noir wasn’t far away when he received a sharp blow to the abdomen from Tikki, knocking the wind from his lungs and incapacitating him from speaking any further.

Marinette turned a reproachful eye at Plagg. “Go find Chat!” she commanded. “And hurry up!” Then to her own kwami, she called, “Tikki! Spots on!”

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“ This really is sidekick work ,” Chloe thought as she brushed the back of her forearm across her forehead. The cabin of the elevator felt thick and warm in the unusual early Spring heat. Back and forth her hand moved, scribbling glue onto the back of the cutout that laid on the ground. She hoped this worked. She laughed to herself. Of course it would work. This was Ladybug’s plan and Ladybug never failed.

With delicate fingers she picked up the cutout with the tips of her gloved fingers. She angled it into place against the back wall of the elevator and then pressed firmly, sealing it in place. She stood back to admire her work as she brushed her hands against each other to remove any remnants of the sticky
glue. She picked up the glue stick off of the floor. Ladybug had stressed the importance of returning the lucky charm to her. Queen Bee patted her hands down on her suit, wishing she had a pocket.

“Where am I gonna stick this?” she asked herself and then laughed at her unintentional pun. “I’m soooo a better sidekick than that stupid alley cat! I even pun better than him!”

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“Ahhh! I’m not going to make it!” Ladybug realized. Too late. Heart Attack opened fire at Adrien just as the hero dropped between them. Ladybug spun her yo-yo around and around, creating a shield to deflect the bullets as they ricocheted around them. Adrien crumpled to the ground.

“Adrien!” Ladybug screamed seeing the pool of blood increase around him. His face paled. She failed him, again! He was dying. Ladybug could feel the taste of bile rising as it burned her throat. Tears pricked her eyes.

“That’s not Adrien!” The akuma screamed, teeth gnashing. “I’m not falling for your tricks! Where is the real Adrien?”

Ladybug looked more closely at the boy at her feet. The akuma was right, it wasn’t Adrien, but he was still dying. She had to help him. With a kick she scooped up the boy’s helmet off the ground, flipped it up into the air and caught it with her free hand. She then hurled it at the akuma, who once again was in conversation with Hawk Moth if the purple glow of her face was any indication. The helmet hit her on the head and she fell, dazed, to the ground.

A green and black scooter pulled up. Another boy, wearing his own helmet, dismounted and knelt, pressing some white cloth to the boy’s shoulder wound. Ladybug rushed to help. The two worked quickly and silently to get the wounded boy up. She propped the hurt boy on the scooter while the other one mounted it.

“Get him out of here!” Ladybug ordered. In the confusion, no one noticed that a small, black blurr hitched a ride on the scooter as it peeled away.

“I don’t care, Hawk Moth!” the akuma screamed, rising to her feet. “I want Adrien! Where is he?”

“Where you’ll never find him!” Ladybug answered, but her eyes betrayed her as they flicked to the Eiffel Tower hovering above them.

“Ha! I’ll get him now!” Heart Attack laughed. She pulled a grenade out of her bag and threw it at Ladybug’s feet. With a leap and a throw of her trusty yo-yo Ladybug dodged the explosion with a few seconds to spare. From where she landed atop a nearby roof, she could see the akuma charging off for the Eiffel Tower, exactly where she needed her to go.

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Adrien swerved in his haste. The scooter, unused to being driven so recklessly, skidded and toppled, sending the two boys flying into the street. Adrien’s head slammed onto the pavement, although his helmet took most of the force. His arm screamed in pain as he felt flesh tear away. Wayhem fell on top of him, his head crashing into the other boy’s chest.

“Wayhem!” Adrien called, gently pushing him off of him so he could rise and laying him tenderly on the pavement. He knelt beside him. “Wayhem, I’m so sorry!”

Wayhem didn’t answer. His shirt was soaked with blood. Adrien’s formerly white jacket laid next to him in the street. Adrien grabbed it and placed in back into position to try to stop the blood loss. He
pressed hard and continued to call his name to no avail. It was no use. Adrien felt sick to his stomach. He turned and vomited. He did this. He brought Wayhem into this all to solve his stupid mistake. All because he had to help Ladybug at all costs, at any cost, even Wayhem’s life. Tears began to prickle his eyes as he tore off his helmet and threw it across the street in anger. It wasn’t supposed to happen like this.

“Plagg!” Adrien whispered hoarsely even though he knew he was only talking to himself. His eyes clenched shut, no longer wishing to see the gory figure laying on the street. He just wished he could undo all of this. He wished he had his friend with him to console him, to help him, to yell at him. “I really messed up,” Adrien admitted as tears ran down his face.

“I can see that,” Plagg agreed, assessing the damage done to both boys and the scooter.

Adrien’s head whipped up so fast, his head swam. “Plagg!” He snatched the little god out of the air. “I’m so glad to see you, buddy!” He brought the cat kwami to his cheek, nuzzling his soft fur. He felt Plagg’s purr reverberate through him.

After a moment the two broke apart. “What happened to Marinette? Ladybug said she got out of the aquarium, but…”

“She’s fine,” Plagg said. “Maybe a touch mad…” he mumbled.

Adrien sighed in relief. He was afraid that when he saw his jacket that Marinette had been wearing in the possession of the akuma that something horrible had happened to her.

“Which is more than I can say for him,” Plagg floated down to hover above Wayhem’s nose. “He’s still breathing...barely.”

Adrien’s jaw clenched decisively. “I gotta fix this. We gotta stop her,” Adrien said, “so Ladybug can save him.” He looked mournfully at his friend laying on the ground. “Her Lucky Charm can save Wayhem. It has to!”

“Don’t keep me waiting any longer,” Plagg drawled.

“Plagg! Claws out!”

----o----

“The akuma’s coming!” Ladybug called as she ran through the courtyard underneath the Eiffel Tower. Normally it would be swarming with tourists, but Queen Bee and the local police had made sure the scene had been completely cleared of bystanders.

“We’re all set,” Queen Bee replied, gesturing to her handiwork in one of the tower’s elevators. Ladybug nodded in approval and then leaned over, cupping her hands to make a stirrup to give her partner a boost. Queen Bee stepped on the other girl’s gloved hands and pulled herself up. She braced one foot against one wall and the other foot against the adjoining wall. Her back pressed against the elevator’s ceiling. In one hand she held her spinning top at the ready. Ladybug stepped back, exiting the elevator. She made sure that she couldn’t see her partner from the elevator’s door.

“You okay up there?” she asked her partner. Queen Bee gave a mumbled assurance. It wasn’t exactly a comfortable position, but it wouldn't be for too long. Ladybug looked over her shoulder, scanning for the akuma. She didn’t have to wait long. The spotted hero whispered the go word to her partner and then jumped up into the ironwork of the tower to keep out of sight.

Below her Ladybug saw Heart Attack approach slowly, her weapon trained to ward off any attack.
When she came in sight of the open elevator the akuma saw her goal: Adrien. The akuma gave a girlish scream of delight as she hurried to embrace her beloved. Something yellow and black shot out in a quick movement and the elevator doors shut just before Heart Attack reached her destination. With a foot stomp, she growled in frustration. Her eyes lit on the empty, waiting elevator sitting opposite the one that just ascended. She hurried inside. A moment later she too lifted skywards.

Ladybug hummed in satisfaction. “All is going to plan,” she thought. She turned, about to leap upwards to intercept the akuma, but instead she came face to face with an unexpected surprise.

“Hey, ‘Bug!” Chat Noir greeted his partner swiftly. “Miss me?”

Chapter End Notes

I'm on vacation next week, so the posting of the next chapter will likely be delayed. Hoping I can wrap this story up in one more chapter. We'll see...
Miraculous Incorporated

Chapter Summary

Obligatory akuma battle, part 2.
--Chat Noir finds himself in trouble with an insect miraculous holder.
--Ladybug goes skydiving.
--Chloe makes a date.
--Wayhem meets a like-minded person.

Chapter Notes

Thanks once again to MJ for beat reading and also for all of the encouragement.
Trigger warning: a major character gets hurt.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Chat Noir?” Ladybug’s face broke out into a smug smile as she crossed her arms. “Finally found your kwami, huh?”

Chat Noir blushed. “How’d you know that?” He rubbed the back of his neck with one hand.

“My kwami found your kwami,” she replied breezily as she leapt to the next rafter. Her partner followed, mimicking her movements to ascend the tower. She kept one eye on the two elevators slowly rising, making sure to keep ahead of the second one.

“The akuma is in the ‘I Love ADRIEN’ button” Chat reported, trying to be useful. “And she’s hell bent on taking her anger out on the rival for his affections.”

“How’d you know that?” Ladybug asked, stopping in surprise that he knew so much having just arrived at the scene.

“Said rival is a friend of mine. We gotta protect her. You seen her?” Chat asked, landing on the beam beside Ladybug. He angled his baton so she could see a picture of Marinette on the display screen. She recognized it as the one she had texted him of her unmasked self when they fought the Evil Illustrator.

“The girl that you partnered up with that one time?” Ladybug asked, feigning ignorance.

“The same.”

“She’s fine, I promise,” Ladybug replied, taking another leap upwards. “The akuma is also after the object of her affection. And, she’s about to catch him, but not before we catch her.” Ladybug replied knowingly. Before Chat could ask, his partner pointed to the first elevator that had just come to a stop. The door opened, revealing the baited trap. Chat barked a laugh as recognition settled in his brain, but Ladybug quickly covered his mouth with her hand.
“Follow my lead,” she whispered. Chat gave a silent nod and readied his baton to leap at Ladybug’s signal.

As Ladybug waited her mind wandered. Chat’s explanation didn’t really make sense. She hadn’t seen him all day as either Marinette or Ladybug, so how did he know about the hiding place of the akuma and her target?

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Queen Bee’s heart pounded rapidly in her chest. The elevator had finally come to a stop and the doors automatically opened. Her eyes flicked to “Adrien”, glued in place. The new hero could only hope that Ladybug was right and that when this was all over, her partner’s Lucky Charm would restore her poster back to its proper place in her bathroom and in one piece. Not like when the same spell supposedly restored it after the Dark Cupid akuma, and the permanent marker didn’t get removed.

She shook her head, willing herself to focus on the threshold of the elevator. She waited, holding her breath. She squeezed her spinning top in her right hand, anticipating its use. Any second now…

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The doors to the second elevator opened. The two saviors of Paris saw the muzzle of the akuma’s gun and the point of the arrow lodged in her crossbow before they actually saw Heart Attack. She slowly stepped out, cautiously. Her narrowed eyes surveyed the platform, looking for them.

Ladybug held her breath. Just a few more seconds...

The tension in Heart Attack’s shoulders relaxed as her eyes lit on the figure in the opposite elevator. The snarl disappeared from her mouth, replaced by a sweet smile. It felt eerie to see such a sudden transformation from demented killer to girl next door.

“Adrien!” Heart Attack hurried to greet her love.

On instinct Ladybug bent her knees ready to leap at the right moment when suddenly a black blur streaked across her line of sight.

There was no time to speak. No time to give warning or to stop her partner from acting. He was already mid-air. With his stealthy superpowers Chat landed on the platform below, right behind Heart Attack, without making a sound. Ladybug cringed, hoping he would somehow go unnoticed. No luck. Heart Attack spun around and without even looking, she opened fire. Ladybug felt a sense of relief as she looked sideways at her partner to see that he too was spinning his baton.

“Venom!” Queen Bee called out as she dropped from her hiding place in the ceiling of the elevator and in one movement struck the akuma in the back of the neck with her spinning top. Heart Attack immediately became paralysed, but her machine gun continued to fire as her finger was frozen in place, pressing the trigger. With a swift kick Queen Bee knocked the weapon from the akuma’s hand. With a thump it landed on the platform floor a few meters away, now finally silenced.

Ladybug stopped swinging her yo-yo and gave Queen Bee a grateful smile. “Nice work!” she complimented, but to her surprise Queen Bee didn’t look happy. In fact, she looked down right mad.

“How dare you interrupt Adrikins’ date!” Queen Bee stomped her foot in anger as she scolded Heart Attack.
“I’m not sure she can hear you,” Chat Noir chuckled as he waved a hand in front of the incapacitated villain. “Besides, I’m sure this ‘Adrikins’ can take care of his own love life.” Queen Bee whirred around to face him, but he crossed his arms and stared down the blonde girl. “You look very familiar, but I don’t believe we’ve met.” He bowed lowly and dramatically, before stating his superhero name. “And you are?”

“Queen Bee, Ladybug’s partner,” she smirked.

“I bee-lieve that I have that honor,” he smirked back.

“Not anymore!” Queen Bee asserted. “Ladybug needs someone she can depend on. Someone who actually shows up.”

“I did show up!”

“You were late!”

“M’Lady, would you please set her straight?” Chat asked with frustration, which quickly turned to hurt when he saw his partner’s face.

“Actually, Chat Noir, Queen Bee isn’t wrong,” Ladybug began, walking slowly to stand beside the other girl. She needed to be kind, but firm. “I do need a partner that I can depend on…”

“You can depend on me,” Chat cut in.

“So when you didn’t show,” Ladybug continued, “I recruited Queen Bee.”

“That’s right. So now, scat, you!” Queen Bee tried to shoo him away with her hands. “We don’t need you.”

“I never said that,” Ladybug argued.

Chat swallowed hard. “What did you say?”

“She said I was essential to the plan,” Queen Bee insisted with a hand over her heart. “How did you help?” she rhetorically asked her competition. “I’ll tell you! You didn’t!” With each word she took a step toward Chat, intimidating him to back up as she jabbed at his chest with her finger. The last jab caught the crook of his right shoulder. Chat let out a cry of pain as he cradled his hurt arm with the other.

“Chat?” Ladybug asked in concern. She realized that he had fought using his left hand to wield his baton, which was unusual. “Are you…are you hurt?”

He shook his head. “It’s nothing, I just had some trouble getting here,” he offered as explanation for both his tardiness and his outburst.

Ladybug looked doubtful. He was obviously trying to cover up his injury, and yet he seemed to be in more pain from Queen Bee’s words. This was no good. Why were they fighting? They were on the same team. She needed to put a stop to this. They still had a job to finish. She broke them a part with a shove and stepped between them. With a sigh she addressed Chat.

“I know you lost your kwami today and…”

“Ha! A likely story!” Queen Bee scoffed.

“It’s the truth!” Chat’s eyes sparked in rage.
“You were probably messing around with some girl,” Queen Bee spat out the last word. “You Tom Cat!”

“Queen Bee, that’s enough!” Ladybug scolded over her shoulder. “I know Chat and he doesn’t lie. And, he’s not a Tom Cat!” But her certainty wavered when she turned her head back to regard the feline superhero, whose face had turned bright red. “Chat?”

“It’s not true...exactly.” He rubbed the back of his neck with his good hand. Ladybug squinted hard. He only did that when he was nervous. “I was on a date when I lost my kwami. But, but, it could have happened anytime! It wasn’t her fault!”

“I-I didn’t know you were dating anyone…”

“It’s, um, new?” he replied, looking guilty. “It’s a first date, actually.”

“Oh.” Ladybug bit back her feelings. Why should she feel disappointed? She should be happy for him, right? She has Adrien and Chat has...this girl. “How’s it going?” The spotted superhero cursed herself. What a stupid thing to ask, yet she really wanted to know.

“Good! Then bad, then good again, I think, but then ya know, akuma! So yeah…” his voice trailed off as he frowned, lost in thought. “Look, L.B., I’m really sorry…”

“Save it! She doesn’t need your apologies.” Queen Bee asserted. “This wasn’t the first time you let her down and I doubt it will be the last!”

“Look, I admit I made a mistake this time. But, I’ve done everything, everything I knew to do to get back here...by your side, M’Lady. Nothing could keep me away!”

“Oh, yeah?” Queen Bee cocked her head as her hands landed on her hips. “And what about last time when you didn’t show at all? What kept you away then? A different girl?”

“No!” Chat cried out. “Only…”

“Only death,” Ladybug whispered to herself, remembering Plagg’s words from earlier. “Only death could keep him away.” Her head shot up to face him, to see him. She knew now. She understood. Chat had shown up to the previous akuma battle, but just like Adrien he had died at the hands of the akuma, probably before Ladybug had arrived at the scene. She had been so upset about Adrien’s death, no wonder Chat hadn’t told her that he had died, too. It would have been devastating to have known then. She felt shaken even now to learn the truth.

The sound of Queen Bee’s miraculous beeping the first of its five-minute warning, snapped Ladybug out of her reverie. She opened her mouth to speak when without warning she felt a huge force push against her abdomen and the next thing she knew she was lying flat on her back. Something silver whirred overhead.

“How dare you!” Queen Bee cried out in frustration and anger at being placed in the same horizontal position.

“Akuma!” Chat breathed out as he knelt on the ground. He had pushed them both down, out of the way of the attacking akuma. A second volley of throwing stars hurled their way. Chat batted them away with his baton as the other two superheroes took cover. Ladybug cursed herself. She had let their petty fighting distract them from the main goal: cleanse the akuma. Now, Queen Bee’s Venom had worn off and they were right back to square one. She peeked out from behind the beams to formulate a plan.
To her horror, Chat had not taken cover, but was slowly advancing despite the continuous onslaught of throwing stars. With his left hand he twirled his baton rapidly. The blurred stick deflected the sharp projectiles from striking.

“Chat!” Ladybug called out, trying to get him to act reasonably and take cover. He was doing this to prove a point. He would show just how useful he could be.

With the next volley of stars, Chat’s right hand shot out catching one as it bounced off of his baton.

“Such a dramatic...reckless...bad ass move ,” Ladybug seethed in both anger and admiration.

He threw the star up in the air. The action seemed to unnerve the akuma. With a shaky hand she launched the arrow in her crossbow. The black clad hero merely leaned slightly to one side, letting it pass as if it was a mosquito. The star above hit a metal beam and fell back down, faster, faster.

“Oh! Look! A shooting star! Make a wish!” Chat quipped.

“I WANT ADRIEN!” Heart Attack screamed just as the star slashed at her sailor suit, taking the akumatized fan button with it. Both fell to the floor with a clank.

“Sorry, we’re all out of superstars. You’ll have to settle for me as a constellation prize,” he smirked.

Chat Noir planted his baton on the ground and with some stiffness, bowed low to retrieve the fan button. Holding it in his right hand, he called out for his power.

“Cataclysm!” Dark bubbles surrounded his right hand as the button inside dissolved to dust. Immediately, Heart Attack reverted to a dazed and confused Amélie. Her backpack full of weapons, dissolving into nothing. A single purple and black butterfly escaped from his grip. “All yours, M’Lady!” he called over his shoulder.

Without missing a beat, the spotted superhero hurried to cleanse the akuma butterfly with her magical yo-yo.

“That was the stupidest, most reckless…” Her word died in her mouth as she saw a mixture of fear and surprise flash in Queen Bee’s eyes. Ladybug followed the girl’s gaze to Chat Noir standing, no slumping beside her as he leaned on his staff. He tottered for a brief moment before falling to the floor in a heap.

Ladybug rushed to his side, a flurry of questions on her lips as she tried to assess what was wrong. He was holding his stomach with both hands. She pulled one away. His gloved hand looked wet, slick.

“’Tis but a scratch, M’Lady. I’m sure it won’t even leave a star ,” Chat tried to joke, but the pain was all too obvious on his face. He had been stabbed by a throwing star. It was wedged deep in his abdomen. A lump started to form in Ladybug’s throat as tears pricked her eyes. She squeezed his hand, trying to give him some comfort.

“The Lucky Charm!” Ladybug called over her shoulder to Queen Bee, her voice cracking, betraying her feelings. “I need it! Where is it?” It was the only thing that would save Chat. It had to save him. It had to!

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Queen Bee started at the sound of her partner’s voice and spun on her heel. She quickly ran back to the waiting elevator. In one corner next to the plastered Adrien she reached around to pull out where
she had wedged the glue stick between two panels. With shaky hands she gripped the Lucky Charm and spun around again. Ladybug anxiously called over and over, arms failing in front of her, encouraging her to hurry. The distance was but a few meters, but Ladybug’s insistence spurred the new superhero to act. She tossed the red and black spotted glue stick in the air.

Perhaps Queen Bee was unaccustomed to being ordered and rushed by others and as such became flustered. Perhaps she was not terribly accurate in throwing despite the superpowers her miraculous leant her. Perhaps it was those very superpowers that worked against her, making her throw too high, too fast, too hard. Whatever the reason, she did not hit her target. Instead, the glue stick ricocheted against one of the many beams of the tower, changing its trajectory. It fell over the side of the rail.

Down, down, down…

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Ladybug didn’t even think twice. She was on her feet in an instant and then leapt. She didn’t hear the moan of Chat or the scream of Queen Bee. All she heard was the rushing air around her. All she saw was the Lucky Charm growing smaller and smaller as it fell faster and faster. From the height of the drop, if it fell to the ground below it would be nothing of its former self: broken into a million pieces or a dent on the pavement.

And what of herself? Did she give any thought to what her body would be if it too hit the pavement? No. No, all that mattered was the Lucky Charm. All that mattered was saving Chat. She had to save him. She flung out her yo-yo, catching the glue stick in its string. She pulled back and the yo-yo snapped into her hand, bringing the Lucky Charm with it. She felt a moment of relief before fear washed over her as she continued to plummet toward the earth. She readied her yo-yo as she twisted her torso, trying to right herself so she could throw it out again. She had to hook it on a beam of the tower. The force of the fall pushed against her as she struggled. Her lungs burned. Her eyes teared.

She felt a tap on her foot and then a pull, an excruciating pull on her leg as the earth that rapidly threatened to swallow her suddenly receded. Ladybug cried out in pain and then in delight. “Queen Bee!”

As the two slowly ascended thanks to the magic string of Queen Bee’s spinning top, Ladybug, despite still hanging upside down, threw the Lucky Charm up toward the sky, calling “Miraculous Ladybug.” A million or more tiny ladybugs swarmed around them, setting right all of the wrong the akuma had made.

When they reached the platform, Ladybug sighed in relief at the sight of her silly kitty sitting next to the akuma victim. He talked softly, soothingly, giving the poor girl words of encouragement and kindness. His eyes flicked up to meet his partner’s, a sheepish smile on his lips. The spotted superhero felt warm all over. Chat was safe and back to his old self, doing what he always did: helping people. She grinned back.

Queen Bee’s miraculous beeped again.

Chat slowly rose from his spot, murmuring to Amélie that he’d be back. Never breaking his gaze, he walked over to his partner. At the same time, they held out a fist to one another. As their hands met, “Pound it!” fell from their lips in unison.

“M’Lady…” Chat began, but Ladybug shook her head.

“I know I can depend on you. And, I also know we can’t always do everything or be everywhere. I don’t doubt you, Chat,” she smiled sincerely. “But, you can’t argue that it’s nice to have some back
“That it is,” he agreed. “Thank you,” he turned to Queen Bee, offering his fist. She begrudgingly tapped it with her own. “Thank you for saving her. And, thank you for saving me,” he said turning back to Ladybug. “I was wrong before when I said we’re all out of superstars. But I don’t like falling stars anymore than throwing stars. Seeing you perform that stupid, reckless move, L.B., may have starred me for life,” he teased and she chuckled despite herself.

“It’s not reckless or stupid to save someone you love...you care about,” she corrected. “I’m glad you’re okay.” She gave him a quick peck on the cheek.

Chat blushed, but then cleared his throat. “Careful, there, M’Lady! I’m spoken for. I have a girlfriend now.”

“I thought it was just a first date?” Ladybug arched an eyebrow, but then laughed. “I’m happy for you, Chat. I’m glad you have someone.” And, she meant it, too.

“Yeah,” he replied wistfully. “Me, too.”

“So, that’s it?” Queen Bee threw up her hands in exasperation. “You’d rather have him for a partner, instead of me? Ridiculous, utterly ridiculous!” She threw out her spinning top, hopped on, and sped away.

“I should go,” Ladybug pointed after her. “I have to collect her miraculous.”

“So...still partners?” Chat asked hopefully.

“Always,” she replied with a smile. Ladybug threw out her yo-yo, but before pulling back, she took a parting look at her partner, who had returned to Amélie’s side. She could see the girl relax at his comforting words. She smiled fondly before pulling back and letting her yo-yo sling her across the skyline of her favorite city.

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Queen Bee touched down on her balcony, retracting her spinning top with one swift flick of the wrist. She walked through the open doors into her hotel suite.

“Buzz off!” Her transformation dropped after a bright glow of yellow surrounded her. Pollen hovered above her.

“Are you alright, Your Majesty?”

Chloe did not answer, choosing instead to walk back to the bathroom. She closely inspected the poster of Adrien hanging on the wall. There was no evidence that his figure had ever been cut out and even the smallest hint of the permanent marker had now been erased. She nodded to herself approvingly as she walked back out of the bathroom.

“Well, at least Ladybug didn’t lie about that!” she muttered more to herself, but Pollen responded anyway.

“Did Ladybug lie about something?” Pollen buzzed nervously, zipping this way and that.

“Yes!” Chloe pouted. “Ladybug said I could be her new partner, but she’s totally taken that alley cat back!”
“Ladybug and Chat Noir are a team,” Pollen tried to explain. “They were the first miraculous wielders. They have always been a pair.”

“I don’t care!” Chloe argued stubbornly. “Ladybug promised!”

“What did I promise?”

Chloe whirled around to find Ladybug standing on her balcony. She had left the door open. Ladybug probably heard their whole conversation.

“You said I could be your partner!” The reformed diva had such high hopes for her latest endeavor. She imagined that she and Ladybug would save the city together, run across the rooftops together, watch the sunset together, share secrets with only each other, laugh and play and...No! It was all a lie! None of it would happen! Certainly not with that Chat Noir horning in.

“And you were,” Ladybug responded calmly. “You did a great job! I couldn’t have stopped that akuma without you. In fact, I might not be here if you hadn’t saved me. I want to thank you.”

“Your welcome,” Chloe said softly as her eyes lowered to the floor. A smile tugged at her mouth as a blush graced her face.

“I need your miraculous back now,” Ladybug said not unkindly as she held out her hand, expectantly.

Chloe’s eyes flicked up defiantly. “I can’t believe you prefer him over me. Chat Noir is worthless!”

“No one’s worthless, Chloe,” Ladybug asserted. “And, Chat is far from worthless. He’s saved this city and you countless times. I trust him with my life. It may seem that he let me down before, but I know in my heart that he didn’t. Whatever happened that caused him not to be there then and that caused him to be late today wasn’t his fault.”

“You believe him?”

“I believe in him,” Ladybug corrected. “Just like he believes in me. And, just like I believe in you.”

“You-you believe in me?” Chloe asked, surprised.

Ladybug nodded, “I know how hard you’ve been trying to be a better person. I know you’ve been apologizing to people throughout the city for you prior misdeeds. I’m very proud of you, Chloe.” She laid a gentle hand on the blonde’s shoulder. “You’ve shown that you can be heroic both in and out of the mask.”

“Thanks, Ladybug,” Chloe smiled. She looked up at Pollen, hovering above them. “I suppose I have to say goodbye now.”

“It won’t be forever,” Pollen giggled. Chloe turned in surprise to Ladybug, who gave a quick nod.

“They’ll be times when we need help,” Ladybug explained. “Can we count on you?”

“Definitely!” Chloe exclaimed happily.

“Can you get along with Chat Noir?” the spotted superhero asked, arching an eyebrow.

Chloe sighed dramatically, “If I must!” She gently removed the comb from her hair and handed it to Ladybug. Pollen blinked away as soon as the miraculous no longer touched Chloe.
Ladybug threw out her yo-yo, which caught on the eave of a nearby rooftop.

“Wait! Ladybug!” Chloe insisted. “Do you think we could hang out sometime? We could go shopping or… a spa date?”

Ladybug paused and considered. “I’m pretty sure my supersuit would get in the way of both of those activities.”

“Oh. Right,” Chloe’s shoulders slumped in disappointment.

“But, how about lunch? I hear the soup is pretty good here,” Ladybug smirked.

“Oh! It is! You’ll love it!”


Chloe waved back and then felt a surge of confidence, causing her to call out, “I love you!” as the superhero’s silhouette slipped across the horizon.

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“Here we are,” Chat said as they touched down on the ground. “Safe and sound.”

Amélie gave a grateful nod. She still looked a bit dazed. Chat Noir helped her walk the few steps toward the waiting ambulance. A medical technician stepped forward and took her by the arm. He gave a quick nod of thanks to the superhero before beginning his assessment of the akuma victim.

Out of the corner of his eye Chat Noir saw another figure being treated. He stepped over to him.

“Wayhem, right?” the superhero asked. The other boy nodded. “I’m so sorry I was late. Are you alright?”

Wayhem nodded again. “I-I think I died?” He said it as a question. “I’m not really sure. One minute I was talking to the akuma and the next thing I know I woke up inside the ambulance.”

“Well, I’m glad you’re okay,” Chat laid a gentle hand on his shoulder. “Someone else is rather worried about you. I’ll get him for you. Stay here, okay?”

Wayhem nodded again. It was all he could really manage right now. His thoughts felt a garbled mess. He watched Chat Noir leap away. Kicking his legs off the side of the ambulance truck, he waited. He pulled the blanket that the medical technician had given him more tightly around his shoulders, more out of a need for comfort than for warmth.

“Wayhem!”

The boy lifted his head at the call of his name. At the sight of his friend, his face split into a grin as his hand flew up to wave a greeting. “Adrien!”

Amélie heard the exchange and sunk a little further back into the ambulance. Feelings of guilt mixing with that of confusion.

“I’m so glad you’re okay!” Adrien excitedly drew the other boy into a hug.

“I missed you,” Wayhem murmured in return as he hugged back. “I mean, I, um, missed what happened?”
“Oh!” Adrien pulled back and then lowered his eyes in guilt. “The akuma shot you. I came back with the scooter and Ladybug helped me get you to safety. Then, Chat Noir took you to the ambulance,” Adrien explained. “I’m so sorry, Wayhem. None of this should have happened. I never should have asked you for help.”

“It’s okay!” Wayhem eagerly assured him. “I wanted to help!”

“No, I should have listened to you,” Adrien shook his head. “A jacket wasn’t worth your life.”

“I’m fine, thanks to Ladybug and Chat Noir…and you!” He smiled warmly. “Speaking of your jacket…” He reached behind him and pulled the white jacket out of the ambulance truck. “I woke up with it on top of me.” He offered it to Adrien, but the blonde boy shook his head and gently pushed it back to him.

“You keep it,” Adrien offered. “If you want it, that is?”

“Are you kidding!?” Wayhem cried as he greedily hugged the jacket to his chest. “Of course, I want it!” He threw the blanket off of his shoulders and then pushed one arm inside the jacket and then the other. “Thanks! Oh, man! Adrien Agreste’s shirt and jacket! This is my lucky day!” He smoothed the jacket with his hands across his chest and then stood up straight. “How do I look?” he asked with a smile.

Adrien smirked, “Like a supermodel.” The two boys laughed.

Wayhem reached into one of the inner pockets. “Here! You don’t want to lose these. What are they anyway?” He asked as he placed a string of charms and a small box in Adrien’s hand. But, before Adrien could answer the two boys were interrupted.

“Adrien?”

The boy turned at his name. “Hey, Amélie. Are you okay?” he asked as he approached the other ambulance. Wayhem followed his friend.

The girl nodded slightly. “I want to apologize for following you in the aquarium, and spying on you, and interrupting your date, and causing trouble with your girlfriend.”

“You have a girlfriend?” Wayhem asked. He felt a lump form in his throat.

“I tripped her,” Amélie confessed, “on purpose. I wanted to embarrass her.”

“Thanks, Amélie, for apologizing. It means a lot. And, I’m sorry, too, for hurting your feelings. I never meant for you to get akumatized,” Adrien replied solemnly.

“It’s okay. I deserved it.”

“No one deserves to get akumatized,” Adrien shook his head. “And you didn’t deserve my harsh words. I’m not very used to dealing with my fans. I don’t come into contact with them very often. I’m sure that if you can manage to be nice and respectful to Marinette, then we can be friends.”

“Really?” the girl replied, hopefully.

Adrien nodded and then turned to indicate Wayhem. “Hey, I want to introduce you to someone. I think you two have a lot in common.”
From a nearby rooftop Ladybug spotted Adrien talking with Amélie and a blonde boy that she didn’t know. She lowered herself down with her yo-yo and then de-transformed in the empty alleyway. Tikki resumed her normal hiding spot in her purse. Marinette smoothed her hair with her hands and readied herself to meet the trio.

She had returned the bee miraculous to Master Fu and then returned to the scene of the akuma attack to find Adrien. She had not expected to find him with Amélie. As she approached she could hear them laughing and talking.

“I should go now,” Adrien said. “I still need to find my girlfriend.”

“Speak of the devil,” Amélie murmured under her breath, but only Wayhem heard her.

“Adrien?”

The blonde boy whipped around at the sound of his name, a broad smile on his face. “Marinette!” He pulled her into a strong hug. “I’m so glad you’re okay!”

She returned the embrace with a tight squeeze. It felt good to hold him in her arms, safe and sound. “And you? You okay?” she asked. “You, um, changed clothes?” She noticed Adrien was wearing a different shirt and the other boy now wore Adrien’s along with his jacket. He could have passed as Adrien’s double if you squinted.

“Yeah,” he admitted as he rubbed the back of his neck with his hand. “It’s kind of a long story. I’ll fill you in later.” He introduced her to Wayhem and they exchanged shy hellos.

“I want to apologize,” Amélie began, addressing her former rival. “I tripped you on purpose. I meant to get you wet. I’m...I’m sorry.” Her eyes casted downwards in shame.

“I forgive you,” Marinette smiled. “I’m glad you’re okay now.”

“Thanks, me, too.” Amélie blushed, “I don’t remember anything about being an akuma. I hope I didn’t do anything too awful...”

“Don’t worry. I’ll catch you up,” Wayhem offered with a smirk.

“Are you okay to get home, Amélie?” Marinette asked. “We could walk you home or ride with you on the Metro?”

“Oh no!” Amélie’s hands waved in front of her. “I don’t want to interrupt your date anymore than I already have.”

“We don’t mi...” Adrien began, but Wayhem interrupted.

“I can give her a lift,” he indicated his scooter.

After a few more minutes of small talk Adrien and Marinette said their goodbyes, intending to finish their date.

“So that’s Adrien’s girlfriend, huh?” Wayhem asked as he watched Marinette walk away, hand in hand with Adrien.

Amélie only nodded, miserably.

Wayhem shrugged. “I don’t really see the appeal.”
Amélie laughed, “I suppose you wouldn’t.” She nudged him playfully with her elbow.

“You got me there, girl,” he smirked. “But, seriously, she’s wearing a t-shirt with a fish pun on it!”

“So lame…” Amélie agreed. “You know...they sell them at the aquarium. I work there, so I get an employee discount.”

“You can hook me up with one?” Wayhem asked, eagerly. If Adrien liked people wearing fish pun themed t-shirts, then he wanted one. Amélie nodded in response. “Well, come on! Let’s go!” He walked over to his scooter, which was parked nearby. He held out the spare helmet to her.

“I don’t suppose my employee discount is worth that jacket in trade?” Amélie asked, hopefully.

“My one of kind, authentic Adrien Agreste jacket?” Wayhem asked with an arched eyebrow. “Now, don’t get all akuma on me, but NO!”

Amélie shrugged as she placed the helmet on her head. “It was worth a shot.”

“Please, no talk of shooting, okay?” he smirked, indicating where he had taken a bullet.

Amélie giggled, “I promise not to shoot my mouth off.”

“You should be nice to me!” Wayhem chastised. “I just might have something you want...” He pulled out a piece of white fabric from one of the inner pockets of Adrien’s jacket. He waved it in the air, teasingly. Amélie snatched at it, but the boy whipped it away before she could grab it.

“Adrien’s handkerchief!” she gushed.

“I'll trade you for it if you give me that ‘I Love Adrien’ button.”

“DONE!” Amélie hurriedly yanked the button off her blouse and passed it to him. He dropped the square of fabric into her hands. She squealed in delight and then brought it to her nose, taking in a long breath, the smell of her crush filling her nostrils. To her surprise it smelled like camembert.

“Best day ever!” she sighed.

“Totally,” Wayhem agreed as he affixed the button on the collar of his new jacket.

Chapter End Notes

So...I have to admit I hate akuma battles. I hate writing them, I hate watching them. I really wish the show would abandon the whole monster of the week thing because sometime it just does NOT serve the story. Prime example for me is Frozer. The akuma battle was so secondary to the rest of the story and it was over super fast. That episode could have done without the akuma, spent more time on the relationships and been much better for it. That is one thing that Shugo Chara had going for it - they would abandon the "cleanse the X egg" from time to time and it really helped move the story/characters along. I wish ML would do likewise. That said, I tried to write an akuma battle that dealt with one of the main issues of the story: Adrien/Chat's recklessness - Adrien finally realizes he's gone too far, Ladybug/Marinette performs her own reckless act and perhaps has a better understanding of why he does what he does. Also, we get some nice protective
Chloe/Queen Bee, but this time of Ladybug.
I have to say I really like the Wayhem/Amelie platonic friendship at the end.
Okay, I'm in the midst of writing the last chapter. I swear, this time, it will be the last one. For real.
Thanks for reading. Please leave me a comment and/or kudos if you liked it.
“Adrien?” Marinette asked, puzzled. “Where are we going? I told Maman we’d be home soon.” Both teenagers had taken a few moments after leaving Wayhem and Amélie to assure Marinette’s mother and Nathalie that they were safe despite the akuma attack. They planned to return to Marinette’s house to hang out until dinner time, when Adrien would be joining them for the meal.

“We will,” Adrien replied mysteriously, “as soon as I give you your present.” He winked mischievously.

“Oh! Well in that case...lead on good sir!” she laughed.

Adrien led Marinette back to the Pont des Arts.

“What are we doing here?” Marinette asked. “We’re practically back to where we started.” She could see the aquarium from the bridge.

“Well...this happens to be the perfect spot to give you this...” With a clammy hand he reached into his pocket and withdrew his charm bracelet and then a small black box. He could feel his heart pounding in his chest as fast as a jack hammer.

Marinette smiled sweetly, thanking him as she took the box from his hand. She slowly lifted the lid. Adrien rocked on his heels as he waited. She looked up at him in surprise at the box’s contents.

“A...a love lock?”

Adrien nodded. “I made it to look like Amu’s humpty lock and the key...” he pulled it out of the other pocket of his jeans. “I made it to look like Ikuto’s dumpty key. See?” He pointed to the little jewels he affixed to both in the shape of a lucky, four-leaf clover so that they mimicked the ones from their favorite anime. The nervous boy bit his lip as he waited for her to say something. He could see her carefully inspecting the lock as she turned it over in her hands.

“Our initials!” she exclaimed when she recognized that they had been engraved on the backside of the lock: “A.A. & M.D.C.”.
“Do you like it?” He squeezed the charm bracelet in his hand. Marinette had told him when she had given it to him that it was lucky. He hoped it would bring him luck right now.

“I...I love it!”

Adrien beamed brightly. Taking one of her hands in his, he took a deep breath. “Marinette…” he began. “I’d like to ask you if you’d allow me to...to be your boyfriend?”

“Really?”

“Yes!” he nodded eagerly. “And for real, not pretend. And...and I want everyone to know. We can put our lock on this bridge for all to see!” He smiled widely, making his white teeth flash in the sun, but then doubt started to eat away at him. “That is...if you want to…” he murmured. She hadn’t answered his question.

“I...I…” Marinette took a breath and then smiled, “I’d love to be your boyfriend....I mean, for you to be my girlfriend...NO! Ooh!” She pulled on her pigtails in frustration as Adrien chuckled softly.

“Is that a yes?” He wanted to be sure. No assumptions or misunderstandings this time.

“Patch!” a small voice cried out.

“Marinette!” another older voice called.

The two teenagers turned to the sound. Manon ran across the bridge both hands waving in the air as her pigtails bobbed up and down. Her mother followed, a little slower and out of breath.

“Yay! Patch!” Manon squealed as she jumped into the boy’s arms.

“I’m so glad you both are okay,” Mme. Chamack said as she joined them. “Marinette, you should get home, your parents must be worried.”

“We will. Don’t worry. I already talked to Maman. She knows we’re okay,” the responsible girl informed her.

Mme. Chamack gave an approving nod. “Thank you both for taking care of Manon, especially during the akuma attack.”

“It was our pleasure, right?” Adrien arched an eyebrow at his co-babysitter, who nodded in response.

“Did you have a good time?” Mme. Chamack asked. “At least before the akuma?”

“We had the best time!” Manon jumped up and down. “Adrien is sooo funny! Tell Maman a joke, Patch, pleeeeeease.”

“Well, I don’t do jokes, exactly,” the embarrassed boy explained. “I do puns. I kept Manon entertained with some fish puns. Actually, we both did.” He bumped his shoulder against his companion. “Marinette is really funny, too.”

“No! You’re funny.” Manon insisted as she poked Adrien in the belly. “Please! Do one itty, bitty fish pun?”

“I dolphinitely don’t have any fin to say…” he smirked. Manon giggled.

“Dolphins aren’t fish. They’re mammals. Try again,” she teased.
“I highly trout that!” Adrien feigned ignorance. “Dolphins must be fish, because they swim in the sea!”

“No, they’re mammals!” Manon laughed.

“You’re squiddin’ me!”

“No!” Manon chuckled uncontrollably. “I’m not!”

Adrien shrugged, “I suppose any fin is possible.” He flashed a smile at Marinette who he noted with pleasure was also laughing.

“Alright,” Mme. Chamack announced, “time to go, Manon.”

“How do you do that?” Manon asked Adrien and at the same time ignored her mother. When Adrien asked what she meant by “that” the little girl clarified, “Make puns. How do you make puns?”

“Oh! It’s easy. You know how you play with toys?” He asked and she nodded in return. “Well, I play with words.”

Manon looked confused, so Adrien continued. “I am the King of Puns!” he cried. “There isn’t a word I can’t pun. I’m the Pun Master! The Pun-slayer!” He mimed sword fighting as if his enemy was before him. Manon giggled and jumped up and down at his antics. Then the two started to spar with each other. With her invisible rapier Manon struck Adrien a mighty blow and he collapsed at her feet. Manon jumped on top of him, cheering.

“Alright, you two! Break it up!” Mme. Chamack scolded good naturedly. “Oh, dear, Marinette! You dropped something.” She stooped to pick it up for her. “Oh! A love lock! It must have been a good date!” She winked at Adrien, who blushed, before placing the lost present in Marinette’s hand. “But you can’t lock it here, I’m afraid. The Mayor is having all of the love locks removed. It hurts the integrity of the bridge.” She indicated the bins lining the bridge that were partially filled with broken locks.

“Oh!” Adrien sighed in dismay as he rose from the ground. He dusted his jeans with his hands. “I didn’t know. Well...we can figure out something else, can’t we?” he asked Marinette, but his smile faltered when he saw her face. She looked...upset, but not in a disappointed kind of way. No, she looked like she just found out something horrible.

“Marinette?” he asked in concern “Are you okay?”

Her mouth opened as if to speak, but then closed. She swallowed hard. Adrien noted that tears had formed in her eyes. Marinette shook her head, making her pigtails smack against her face.


“I...I’d like to go home now. Could you please give me a ride, Madame?”

“No!” Marinette practically shouted. “I mean, Adrien, you can call your driver, can’t you? I just, um, don’t want to get you sick, so...”

“But...but, what about dinner?” He had been looking forward to getting to know her parents better. They seemed so nice and caring, and from what little he had had the pleasure to eat, they were both excellent cooks.
“I’m sorry, Adrien!” she said as she backed away. “I’m not up for company right now. I’ll...I’ll see you at school tomorrow.” She hurried away, but then called over her shoulder, “If I feel well enough for school, that is...which I doubt I will!”

Mme. Chamack and Manon waved their goodbyes, but Adrien did not reciprocate. He stood stock still, watching his girlfriend’s figure get smaller and smaller. Was she even his girlfriend? She hadn’t clearly answered his question. What had actually just happened? Everything was fine. She seemed like she was going to answer in the affirmative, but then Mme. Chamack and Manon had arrived. He had teased and kidded with Manon. Mme. Chamack seemed pleased that the two teenagers were safe and had had a good time, so then why was Marinette upset? It couldn’t just be she was upset that they couldn’t put the love lock on the bridge. It wasn’t that important, was it? They could figure something else to do with it. So, what had happened to make her run away practically in tears?

“I gotta hand it to you, kid,” Plagg said as he peaked out from the top of Adrien’s head."You sure have a way with that girl. That’s at least the third time she’s run away from you in as many weeks.”

“What did I do wrong, Plagg?”

Plagg merely shrugged and then yawned. “There’s no telling with that one. I wouldn’t worry. Tomorrow, she’ll be obsessing over you again. Now, how about we head home and take a nice, long nap?”

“I don’t think I can sleep knowing that Marinette’s upset at me.” His brows furrowed in thought.

“Not much you can do about it. She obviously doesn’t want to talk to you about it.”

“No...she doesn’t,” Adrien agreed. “But, I know someone she will talk to…”

“No, kid. Bad idea! Trust me, just let this blow over.”

“Plagg! Claws out!”

“Nice try, kid. But, you have to feed me first,” the little kwami smirked and then patted his empty belly.

Adrien groaned in frustration. “Fine,” he agreed. “But you’ll need to eat quick.” He scanned the park, looking for the closest source of a snack for his kwami. “How about a ham and cheese crepe?” he asked, spotting a crepe cart nearby.

“Sounds good,” Plagg smacked his lips in anticipation, “but hold the ham...and the crepe.”

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Marinette sat in agony in the van, trying to hold back the tears. Luckily, the cameraman, Simon, was a talkative type, so he dominated the conversation and kept most of the attention on himself. Unluckily, all Simon would talk about was the day’s akuma attack. He gave a blow by blow as he drove the van. Mme. Chamack and Manon watched the playback on the small screen on the camera. Manon whooped and hollered in favor of Adrien and then Ladybug as they each battled the akuma. At least Marinette was spared from reliving the fight atop of the Eiffel Tower, since Simon’s camera wasn’t equipped for long range. She didn’t think she could bear to see Chat Noir die again.

The raven-haired girl let out a sigh of relief as the van stopped at the curb in front of her parents’ bakery. She hopped out, calling out a thank you over her shoulder. She quickly ran inside and up the stairs, giving her parents a hurried greeting. The bakery bustled with afternoon customers picking up bread, rolls, and desserts in preparation for their Sunday dinners, so her parents missed her distraught
appearance.

Safe inside her room with the trap door firmly shut, Marinette let go of the sob she had been holding inside for the last twenty minutes as she flopped onto her chaise lounge.

“Oh, Marinette!” Tikki exclaimed as she phased out of Marinette’s purse. “What’s wrong? Why did you leave Adrien so suddenly? What happened?”

Marinette gave a muffled response, that the kwami couldn’t quite understand except for a few phases, including “It’s not fair!” and “It can’t be!”. Tikki nestled into her chosen’s neck, trying to give her some comfort. Between sobs and sniffles, Marinette crawled on her knees to grab a box of tissues from her desk. She made her way back despite her blurry eyes to collapse back onto her chaise. As she curled up into a fetal position she pulled out a tissue...the last one. In frustration, she threw the empty box across the room and then blew her nose. One more thing to go wrong today. She didn’t know how long she stayed like that, feeling sorry for herself. Her crying only stopped when she heard a tapping on the roof skylight above her bed, but she didn’t get up.

“Aren’t you going to let him in?” Tikki asked, seeing the dark figure’s silhouette.

Marinette’s eyes flicked defiantly to the skylight. She stood and wiped her face with the back of her hands. She stomped up the stairs, grabbing her pillows as she went. With a shove she threw open the window.

“Hello, Princess!” Chat Noir greeted her. “Everything oka…”

He didn’t have the chance to finish his question as a pillow came hurtling at his head. His cat-like reflexes served him well as he ducked at just the right second.

“Hey!”

Another pillow followed, aimed straight for his nose, but he caught this one.

“What’s going on?”

“You have no right!” Marinette fumed, stomping her foot. “No right to just barge in here whenever you like just because you feel guilty! I told you, I’m not up for company right now!” Without anymore explanation she disappeared back inside, but she didn’t close the door to the skylight. For a second, Chat blinked, trying to process what just happened, but what she said didn’t make sense. The open door seemed like an invitation, so he picked up the other pillow and followed inside, jumping onto her bed. Discarding the pillows without a second thought, he hurried down the stairs to join her on the level below, but tripped on the oversize cat pillow. He tottered for a brief second, just long enough for Marinette to pause in her pacing.

“Are you...are you mad...at me ?” he squeaked in confusion.

“Of course, I’m mad at you!” Marinette yelled. “You...you died !”

“How did you know about that?” he asked in surprise.

“Don’t change the subject!” Marinette scolded, realizing that she didn’t have a plausible reason why she should know that Chat Noir died from a throwing star to the stomach atop the Eiffel Tower. There was no one up there filming it for the LadyBlog or the local news. “You died! Do you deny it?”

“No…” Chat shook his head slowly. “No, I don’t deny it. It’s one of the consequences of being a
“superhero. I’ve died before and I’ll probably die again…”

“Don’t say that!” She pulled on her pigtails, desperately. His calm demeanor and nonchalance only made her feel worse.

“But, Ladybug always brings me back!”

“You can’t just rely on Ladybug! You can’t be so reckless, so cavalier with your life! You gotta think before you act!”

“I know,” Chat admitted. He sat down heavily on the chaise “I know that now. I...I lost someone today. He died right before me and...and it was my fault.”

“Oh...I’m sorry,” Marinette whispered as she sat down next to him. She had been expecting a fight, not for him to agree with her or to become so sad. “I didn’t know…”

“He’s okay now. Ladybug brought him back, but I realized...I...I’ve been too careless. I’m sorry that I upset you, Marinette. I understand now, I promised myself as I saw him die that I can’t be reckless anymore. I swear I’ll be more careful in the future. You don’t have to worry.” He took her hand in his and gave it a squeeze. “Chat’s honor,” he promised as he crossed his heart with one clawed finger.

“But, I do worry,” she insisted. “I love you.”

Chat’s eyes grew as wide as saucers. “You mean, as a friend, right? You love me as a friend, because I know there’s that guy you’ve been crushing on and I’m pretty sure he’s crazy about you. I mean, he’d have to be crazy not to be, so…”

Marinette covered his mouth with her hand to stop his rambling. “I love you, Adrien. And, I can’t bare the thought of losing you.” She wrapped her arms around the stunned boy, needing to feel his embrace and to assure herself that he was okay, safe and sound.

“H-how...how did you...?” he sputtered.

She pulled back to see his face, giving him a weary smile. “You told Manon that you are the King of Puns, the Pun Master, the Pun-slayer…”

“Yeah...you called me that,” he agreed, still confused how that had revealed his identity.

“I called Chat Noir that, not Adrien.”

“Ooops! I’ve been spending so much time with you in and out of the mask, I guess I forgot which conversations I had with you as Chat and which as Adrien.” He smiled sheepishly. “Sorry? I didn’t mean to lie to you.”

“I know it was just to protect me. I’m not mad at you.”

“At least not about that,” Chat corrected. “But you are mad at me, aren’t you?”

“I just...I’m not mad so much as scared for you.” Marinette sighed, “I can’t stand the thought of losing Adrien or Chat and now...(sniff)...now I know that you’re the same person.” The tears that had been abated by her anger started to form again. “So everytime I lost one of you, I lost the other one, too, and I didn’t even know it...(sniff)...and I was so mad at you for protecting Ladybug, but I know now that’s what you’re supposed to do, but you even did it without your super suit and...and...” A few new drops fell from her eyes.
“Doodlebug, please don’t cry. I hate to see you cry. I promise I’ll be more careful. Please, don’t worry so.”

Marinette shook her head. “Your friend? The one that died? Did that happen before or after you died today?”

“Before,” he whispered quietly.

“See? Even when you try to be careful, you still die!” She grabbed her pigtails and pulled.

“I had to protect Ladybug,” he replied, trying to reason with her. “And you know why.”

“Because you love her,” Marinette responded miserably. Logically, it shouldn’t matter. Marinette is Ladybug, Adrien loves Ladybug, ergo Adrien loves Marinette. And yet, it did matter. It mattered a lot. She wanted him to love her, the Marinette-her, too. And, she also didn’t want his love for Ladybug making him risk his life for her. She feared more than anything that one day she would fail to cleanse the akuma, lose her miraculous, and let everyone down. If that happened and Chat died during the battle, then she wouldn’t be able to bring him back. She would lose him...and Adrien.

“What?! No!” Chat jumped up, startling the crying girl. “Ladybug is our best chance to defeat Hawkmoth. She’s the only one the can cleanse his akumas. We’ve been over this before...” He ran a hand through his hair, trying to think of something to convince her, but then he realized he was making the wrong argument. He tried again. “Close your eyes...please.” She did as he requested. Behind closed eyes, she could still see the bright green light of his de-transformation. “Now, open your eyes.”

She gasped at the sight of Adrien now standing in place of Chat Noir. Even though she knew the truth it still felt disorienting to see it with her own eyes. How could she have never realized it before?

Plagg hovered beside him and then floated down in front of her.

“So this is the girl that’s been causing you so much trouble, huh?” The kwami arched an eyebrow and shook his head disapprovingly.

“Plagg, go take a nap or something,” Adrien ordered, shooing him away. “Don’t mind him,” he told Marinette. “He’s my kwami.”

Plagg shrugged and zipped away. He found the bag full of scrap fabric and nestled atop of it, pulling the red and black polka dot cloth for Chloe’s replacement mask over him like a blanket.

“Where’s the love lock I gave you?” Adrien asked. She fished it out of the pocket of her capris pants and held it out to him, but he didn’t take it. “Turn it over,” he ordered. She did so. “Now, read.”

“A.A. and M.D.C.”

“See? Not a L or a B anywhere on that lock.” He resumed his seat next to her and took her hand in his. “I love you, Marinette.”

“But you said you’d always love Ladybug.”

“I...I did say that,” Adrien agreed. “And I suppose I always will...in one way, but not in the way I love you, Marinette.”

“I don’t understand...”
“No, I suppose you wouldn’t. I’m not sure I understand it myself.” He sighed, running a hand through his hair. “My love for Ladybug, it first started when…” He paused, trying to organize his thoughts, and then started again, “Our first day as superheroes, she was a mess! She was clumsy and scared and she doubted herself. We messed up, remember? We didn’t fully cleanse the akuma and it came back en masse. She was so upset, blaming herself, and everyone was against us - the police, the mayor. But, then she dug deep within herself, put away all of her doubts and fears, and she believed in herself. In that moment she became Ladybug and I...I was there to see it. It was a beautiful, miraculous thing to behold. And, I fell in love with her, right then and there. It was like a bolt of lightning hit me...powerful and breathtaking and awe-inspiring.”

Marinette nodded as tears continued to fall. She sniffed to stop her running nose. Of course, he loved Ladybug. How could he not?

“But, my love for you is...different. It sort of snuck up on me. I suppose it started when we first became friends, that moment in front of school in the rain, remember? You listened to me and you were willing to give me a second chance at being your friend. And then, little by little as I got to know you better my love for you grew. You have this way of always helping people even though you don’t get anything out of it, even if it gets you in trouble.”

“I...I do?” she asked, puzzled.

“Yeah! You tried to reunite Max with his robot when the principal confiscated it. You convinced the school photographer to retake the class picture so Juleka could be in it. You helped Marc partner up with Nathaniel on doing a comic book together. You helped hide me when my fans got too crazy.” Adrien counted off the girl’s good deeds with his hand.

“Oh, well, any good friend would do that…”

“No, Marinette. You do more than most people, more than anyone! You’re an awesome friend...to everyone. I know you’ve been helping Chloe be a better person, going with her on her apology tour. The things you do...its powerful and breathtaking and awe-inspiring...and beautiful. You’re beautiful, Marinette.”

“Thanks…” she whispered as the heat rose in her body. She brushed the tears from her eyes as a small smile graced her lips.

“I’ve never known anyone like you. I’ve never felt this way about anyone before. It’s like being wrapped in a warm, safe, security blanket. No! A custom-made jacket...or...a hand-knitted scarf...” The corners of his lips curled up in a knowing smile.

“Oh, no!” Marinette realized much to her chagrin. “I told you about the scarf! You weren’t supposed to know!”

“I’m glad I found out, because that was the definitive moment I knew that I love you. I couldn’t deny it anymore. Plagg had been right all along.”

“Hrmph! Cross-stitch that on a pillow, so you won’t forget next time!” the cat-like kwami snarked as he snuggled further under his make-shift blanket.

Adrien narrowed his eyes at Plagg for a moment before returning his attention to the raven-haired girl “You put my feelings above your own. The only other people in my life who have ever done that for me are Nino and my mother.” Adrien grew somber for a moment as thoughts of his missing mother wafted through his memory, but soon enough he rallied. “You know, when I told Chole about it, she agreed that it proved how much you love me. She said she would never let someone else take credit
for a gift no matter how happy it would make them. And, she’s my oldest friend!” he chuckled.

Marinette laughed, too. That explained why Chloe had gone along with Adrien’s aquarium date scheme. She smiled up at him and then leaned her head against his shoulder. He wrapped an arm around her and drew her close.

“My love for Ladybug was born out of admiration, I suppose. She’s someone I look up to, that I aspire to be like. My love for you, it’s born from admiration, too, but also friendship and acceptance. When I’m here with you, for maybe the first time in my life I feel as if I can finally just be me.”

“You...you don’t feel that way normally?” Marinette asked as a frown darkened her face.

“Adrien is who my father wants me to be, who my fans expect me to be, just so that he can sell clothes.” He sighed. “It means extra classes, being scheduled in 10 minute increments, and being cut off from the world. I always have to be on my guard. I always have to be...perfect. It’s exhausting.”

“What about when you’re Chat Noir?”

“Chat is me, but in a heightened way...and under strange circumstances. It’s not typical to be a superhero. And...it’s hard to explain but there’s some of Plagg in there, too. We merge together. But, I love it! Chat is freedom and excitement and everything Adrien isn’t.”

“But...you’re here with me as Adrien, not Chat.”

“Nope,” he grinned. “Here, I’m Patch. And, I love being Chat, but I love being Patch even more. I don’t have to be perfect and I don’t have to worry about attacking akumas. I can be me. I can eat whatever I want, wear whatever I want, watch whatever I want. And, I get to do it with my best friend and the girl that I love. I’m happiest when I’m with you.”

“I think I understand...” she smiled. “I’m happiest when I’m with you, too.”

They stayed like that for a bit, wrapped up in each other’s arms, each getting used to the newness of their circumstances. The silence only broken by the sounds of Marinette sniffing and Plagg snoring. But, no matter how hard she tried one thought kept running through her brain until she could take it no longer and finally voiced her thoughts.

“You still died for her,” Marinette whispered. She pulled away to meet his eye. “You still sacrificed your own life for Ladybug’s.”

“I know...I...I can’t change that. And, it probably will happen again. We’re partners. I have to protect her.”

Marinette slipped out of his embrace and stood, turning away from him. He followed her, gently placing his hands on her shoulders from behind. “I know it must seem...unfair...”

Marinette guffawed at the ludicrousness of his statement, causing Plagg to pop one eye open. Of course, it was unfair! It had always been unfair...to Chat and now to Adrien, too. She tsks at herself. She would have to stop thinking of them as two separate people.

“It’s bad enough you have to save everyone!”

“But, I don’t,” Adrien responded. “I only have to save Ladybug. I only have to protect her. She has to save everyone. It’s much more unfair to her. She has all the pressure.”

“You shouldn’t have to die!” Marinette insisted as tears fell again. She wiped them away with a
frustrated brush of her hand. Tears weren’t helping. She needed to stop crying so she could think and solve this problem. There must be some way...

Adrien leaned in about to murmur something comforting into her hair, when Plagg cut in.

“I agree! You shouldn’t have to die.”

“Plagg…” Adrien warned him with his tone of voice not to interfere.

“So, don’t,” the kwami simply stated. “Don’t die.”

“Oh! As if it were that easy! Okay! I won’t,” Adrien scoffed.

“It is that easy! You control what your suit looks like, what it’s made of…” Plagg reminded him. Adrien frowned in confusion, but Marinette understood. She whipped around to face the blonde boy.

“Think kevlar!” Marinette commanded. “When you transform, think…” her hands flailed in front of her as she tried to imagine the most impenetrable substance, “....think invisible force field!”

“Will that work?” Adrien asked.

Plagg nodded, “Of course it will work. It’s magic!”

“Why didn’t you tell me that before?” Adrien asked. “I’ve died almost a dozen times!”

Plagg shrugged. “Dying didn’t seem to bother you, so...less work for me!”

Adrien groaned as his palm hit his forehead in disgust, but Marinette merely laughed. She giggled, she roared, she chortled. She grabbed Adrien’s hand and used it to spin herself around as she shook her hips.

“What are you doing?” he asked, surprised at her antics.

“Celebrating!” she cried as she grabbed his other hand. She moved him across the room with her, twisting her torso, kicking her legs, hopping up and down. She felt free, light as a cloud, as if a heavy burden had been lifted off of her shoulders. She wouldn’t have to worry about the safety of her partner anymore. She wouldn’t have to even worry about herself!

“We’ll be unstoppable!” she cried at the top of her lungs as she spread her arms wide, falling into him for a hug.

“What?”

“I’m mean, you’ll be unstoppable. You and Ladybug! You’ll both be invincible. You can defeat any akuma now, even Hawk Moth himself!”

“Yeah, you’re right!” A smile spread across Adrien’s face as her words sunk in. “This is...this is great! Wait ‘til I tell Ladybug. Oh! This might even make up for letting my secret identity be discovered.” He gave Marinette a hug in his enthusiasm. “I’ll have to tell her that you know, so that we can both protect you.”

“I’m sure Ladybug won’t be too angry at you,” Marinette smiled knowingly into Adrien’s shoulder.

“I’m not so sure. I lost my kwami today, showed up late to the battle, and now blown my cover. Not a great day in terms of being a superhero.” He squeezed her a little tighter as a sigh fell from his lips.
“Well…” She pulled back to look him in the eye. “What about in terms of being something else...like, a boyfriend?”

“I suppose that depends...am I a boyfriend or more specifically, am I your boyfriend?”

“Do you even need to ask?” she teased. “Can I kiss you?”

Adrien leaned a little closer. “Do you even need to ask?”

Their lips met, softly, hesitant at first. He could feel the wetness on her cheek, the taste of salt from her tears. She could feel the warmth of his body, alive and well. Their first kiss in Adrien’s bedroom so many weeks ago had been full of passion and desire, the culmination of the yearning they had felt for one another, but had never been able to express. This kiss in Marinette’s bedroom was full of tenderness and care, the beginning of the love they hoped to build and share.

“Marinette!” a female voice came from below just as the trapdoor to the bedroom opened. Both teens jumped apart as if the other was on fire. “Oh! And Adrien, too! I wondered if you were here or not. And, I see that you are. Wonderful! You’ll be staying for dinner, I hope?”

“Yes, Madame. Thank you,” Adrien responded nervously.

“None of that ‘Madame’ stuff. I told you, please call me Sabine.” She wrapped her arms around both teens, bringing them toward her for an awkwardly tight hug. “I’m so glad you two are okay. How awful that an akuma attack interrupted your date!”

“Maman!” Marinette didn’t realize her mother knew so much. She needed to shut her down before she said something really embarrassing.

Her mother released them and then turned to her daughter. “Leave this door, open, please dear. I’ll send your father up with some snacks in a bit.” Sabine turned to go. About halfway down the stairs she called over her shoulder, “I put some condoms in your sock drawer, Marinette.”

Too late. “Maman!!!”

“Just in case! Better safe than sorry!” she called cheerfully.

“Ugh! I am so sorry!” Marinette groaned as her face fell into her hands. “I can’t even look at you I’m so embarrassed!”

“I think it’s nice,” Adrien chuckled, but then realized what his words could be misconstrued to mean when Marinette looked up at him in surprise. “I mean, not that it’s nice that you have condoms, I mean, it’s not that I don’t want to use them, b-but not that we need to use them right now or anything...I just mean, it’s nice that your mom cares. Crap! Now, I’m embarrassed.” He rubbed the back of his neck with his hand in that nervous way, which surprisingly made Marinette feel a bit more at ease.

From one end of the room a muffled “Idiots!” could be heard and from the other end the sound of giggling, reminiscent of bells. Marinette’s eyes grew wide, fearing that Adrien might have heard her kwami laugh.

“Let’s do something else…” she suggested. She wiped her eyes of the remnants of her tears and sniffed to stop her running nose.

“We could watch the last episode of Shugo Chara ,” Adrien suggested. “Find out whose ‘ship is canon: Amuto or Tadamu?”
Marinette shook her head. “I think I like your idea best. Amu deserves to be with a guy with all the right qualities: sweet and kind, enjoys the same things as her, is brave enough to confess his feelings, and be a mysterious cat-boy. Anything less would be disappointing.”

“Then, the ending will be disappointing,” Adrien confirmed.

“That’s too bad...” Marinette smiled as she inched toward him, “…for Amu. Lucky for me, I found just the right guy who meets every criteria.” She wrapped her arms around him. “Kiss me, Kitty.” Adrien happily obliged.

After a moment they broke apart, resting their foreheads against one another. “So what shall we do now?” Adrien asked. “We better figure out something else to do before your father appears with the snacks,” he smirked.

“I know!” She pulled the love lock out of her pocket. “We need to put this in its proper place.”

“But, Mme. Chamack said that you can’t put them on bridges anymore.”

“I know, but how about if we attach it to this?” She pulled out from her other pocket the string of charms that Adrien had given her for her birthday.

“That’s a great idea, Doodlebug!” he cried with enthusiasm. “Will you do the same for mine?” He held out the matching key and his own string of charms that she had given him.

“Gladly!” She took them from him and went over to her table where her sewing machine sat. She pulled out a box, taking from it a pair of pliers and a couple of small, wire rings. “I use these for jewelry making,” Marinette explained. “They should work perfectly.”

“I didn’t know you made jewelry, too,” Adrien replied as he watched her attach the lock to one string of charms.

“Sure you did! I made your charm bracelet, didn’t i?”

Adrien nodded in realization and smiled. He watched her as she worked. She did so quietly, except for the sniffing. Leaning over her work exacerbated the runny nose that had started when she was crying.

“I need a tissue!” she exclaimed more to herself that to Adrien as she continued to work.

Adrien spun around, looking for a tissue box, but then recalled he always carried a handkerchief with him. He reached in to get it from his jacket only to remember that he had given said jacket to Wayhem. Marinette continued to sniff, spurring him on to look elsewhere. Adrien found an empty tissue box lying on the floor near the desk chair. No help there. He opened up his messenger bag, which rested on the chair in front of her desk.

“*There might be one in here, ,”* he thought to himself, remembering how Plagg likes to take naps in there during class and would often use a handkerchief as a pillow. He reached in and rummaged around until his hand came into contact with something soft. “*Ah-ha!* ” he thought as he drew it out, only it wasn’t the white handkerchief he was expecting, but a red and black-spotted...mask! He stared at it for a moment, trying to figure out what it was and why he had it in his bag when it suddenly hit him. It was the mask from Chloe’s Ladybug costume, the one that Marinette had supposedly lost and had to replace. He had had it all along. He turned to voice his discovery, finding Marinette hunched over the table, hard at work and still sniffing. But, something nagged at him in the back of his brain. He turned back to look...he looked at the pictures covering her wall...he looked at the picture of him in Sabrina’s Chat Noir costume and Marinette in Chloe’s Ladybug costume
only...only Marinette was wearing the mask...the mask in his hand. He plucked the picture off of the wall. His eyes flicked back and forth between the mask in one hand and the picture in the other.

“Hey, Doodlebug!” Adrien called, still looking back and forth between the objects in each hand, but not at her.

“Yeah, Patch?” Marinette responded not looking up from her work.

“I found Chloe’s Ladybug mask!”

“You did!” Her head snapped up in surprise as a grin spread across her face. “That’s great! Now, I don’t have to make a replacement. Where’d ya find it?” Her head lowered again as she resumed her work. She expertly twisted the metal ring closed with her pliers.

A smirk slowly spread across his face as Adrien stalked towards her, the evidence in his hands. “In my messenger bag. I remember now, I picked it up off the ground at school after you ran off. I’ve had it this whole time.”

Marinette chuckled as she squeezed her pliers one last time. “There!” she exclaimed with satisfaction holding up her handiwork for Adrien to see. Her smile faded almost instantly when she caught his eye and saw what he held in his own hands.

“It begs the question,” Adrien began, “if I had the mask, then what are you wearing in this picture?”

“What am I...?” Marinette audibly gulped as she tried to think of a plausible excuse as to how she could be wearing Chloe’s mask in the picture when it had been in Adrien’s bag. “Well, I have my own mask…”

“Your own mask?” Adrien’s eyes searched the room. “Where? Let me see it?”

“I don’t have it...I, um, I lost it!”

Adrien tsked. “That’s too bad...how did you lose it?”

“I dunno!” she exclaimed, jumping out of her chair and quickly crossing the room to get away from her interrogator, but he quickly followed her. “I’m always losing things!”

“Marinette,” he leaned in close, invading her space, “are you lying? You promised not to lie to me anymore, remember?”

“I’m not lying...exactly,” she mumbled the last word. She pushed him back so that she could breathe again. “I don’t know where it is. It just vanished!”

“Oh, I see! You made it disappear...with a few magic words...”

“That’s ridiculous!” she laughed, crossing to the other side of the room as her arms flailed. “Who do you think I am? A magician?”

“No, Ladybug!” Adrien crossed his arms smugly. Before she could protest he laid out his evidence. “You knew about me dying today atop the Eiffel Tower…”

“The Ladyblog…”

“Nope! No cameras up there and no Alya either. Aaaaand!” He hopped up and down excitement as he pointed a finger at her. “There wasn’t any press coverage of The Collector battle either. So how did you know how we defeated him?”
“I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Marinette could feel the panic bubbling inside of her.

“When you came to my room, dressed as Ladybug,” he recalled, shaking the picture at her, “you complimented me...just before you kissed me...you said how fortunate it was that I have a large entertainment collection because we used it as ammo against the Collector.”

“Did I say that?” she hemmed. “I...I don’t recall…”

“Yes, you did! Yes, you did!” he cried, happily. “And the only people who could know that were me and Ladybug!” He tossed the picture and mask on her desk before grabbing her by the shoulders, exclaiming “Oh! This makes so much sense! You didn’t use a grappling hook to get up and down from my window. You used your yo-yo! I watched you leave! I mean, I was stunned at the time, but I was so sure you used your yo-yo, but then you got mad at me when I brought it up. Oh! I was beating myself up for thinking you were you when you weren’t you, but you are you!” He pulled her into a tight hug as he continued to ramble. “I mean, if anyone should know that you’re you then it should be me, right? Your own partner!” He laughed uncontrollably until tears of joy started to pool in his eyes. “Now I need a tissue!” Adrien chuckled.

His laughter died very quickly however, when he noticed her pained expression. “What’s wrong?” he asked with grave concern.

“I’m sorry,” she moaned.

“You don’t have anything to be sorry for,” Adrien responded in confusion.

Marinette shook her head. “I’m sorry, Tikki. I should have listened to you.” She plunked herself heavily onto the floor and buried her head in her knees.

“Tikki?” Adrien asked.

“It’s okay, Marinette,” a high pitched voice squeaked as a red blur flew out of the desk drawer and hovered just above her head.

“No, it’s not. I should have followed your advice and never worn that stupid costume. I allowed myself to be discovered!” she wailed.

“Tikki?” Adrien squeaked as his eyes bulged out of his head.

Having momentarily forgotten him, Marinette looked up to see a shell-shocked Adrien, mouth agape and finger pointing. “Adrien, meet Tikki. Tikki, this is Adrien.”

“Nice to finally meet you, Adrien!” Tikki chirped as she darted in front of the stunned boy’s face.

“Your...your kwami?” He swallowed hard. “You...you really are Ladybug?”

“Geez, kid, we already established that. You finally figured it out. What? Did you forget already?” Plagg chided as he joined the conversation.

“It’s one thing to know and another thing to actually see it.” He ran a hand through his hair and then promptly sat down on the floor himself, making a similar thud in the process. “I just...need a sec.”

Tikki buzzed back to Marinette, who still looked miserable.

“I’ve been so reckless! I should’ve thought things through and now...I’ve put everyone in danger, my family, my friends...” she said more to herself than to anyone in the room. The girl looked up
suddenly, “I’m so sorry, Tikki. The one thing you told me to do: keep my identity a secret,” she shook her head. “I couldn’t even do that. I failed.” She hung her head in shame.


“Yeah!” Plagg agreed. “Adrien makes them all the time!”

“Hey!” the blonde boy’s head snapped up as a frown crossed his brow.

“It’s true!” Plagg defended himself. “He even thought that you had a crush on Chloe!” he disclosed conspiratorially to Marinette.

“What?” Marinette’s head popped up so fast Tikki was afraid the girl might get whiplash. “You thought...that I ..had a crush ...on...CHLOE!!?”

“Okay, okay,” Adrien raised his hands in front of himself, protectively. “I know how it must sound…”

“Ludacris? Ridiculous? Crazy!? Nonsensical!!?” she asked with each word sounding higher pitched.

“But, you have to admit...it was pretty strange you two hanging out. First, she went to your house and then you went to her house. She asked you to lunch and talked up your designs and…and you spent all that time alone in the bathroom together!”

Marinette blinked in disbelief. Adrien felt his face grow hot with embarrassment.

“You got really jealous when I hugged her,” Adrien argued, trying to make his case.

“I wasn’t jealous of you hugging her!” Marinette exclaimed in exasperation as a smile tugged at her lips. “I was jealous of her hugging you!”

He shrugged. “I didn’t know that. It was just so weird to see you two get along. I mean, the only reason I could think of was that you two were in love.” His mouth twisted up as if he ate a lemon. “Okay, it’s not that funny!” he chided at the girl laughing hysterically on the floor in front of him. The two kwamis also laughed at his expense; Tikki’s tinkling giggle and Plagg’s snarky chortle filled his ears. Adrien waited patiently until the laugher finally died down, feeling rather stupid at his mistake.

“Feel better?” he asked Marinette once she had sobered up.

She sighed, contentedly, and nodded. “I needed that.” She ran a hand over her abs which ached from all of the laughter.

“Now, Marinette, as I was saying,” Tikki began again. “It’s okay that you made a mistake. The point is: you admitted it, apologized, and learned from it. So the next time I give you advice…”

“I’ll listen,” the girl promised as she crossed her heart with her finger.

“I don’t expect you to always do what I say,” the red and black spotted kwami clarified. “But, I do expect you to at least hear me out and to not use your powers for personal gains.”

Marinette nodded solemnly. “I understand. Thanks, Tikki.” The two embraced, Tikki cuddling against Marinette’s cheek. When they broke apart, the girl brought up another concern. “But, what are we going to do? We know each other’s identities!” Her hands flailed in the air to stress her point.

“I don’t see why this is a bad thing!” Adrien exclaimed. “I’ve never understood. Your secret is safe
with me, M’Lady,” he promised, taking her hand in his. “And, I know I can trust you. It’s not like we’re going to tell anyone else.”

“Not by choice, no,” the raven-haired girl explained, trying to keep her head, despite the thrill running though her at hearing Adrien call her “M’Lady.” “But what if we come under the influence of an akuma?”

“You mean, what if I come under the influence of an akuma?” Adrien corrected.

“It’s happened before,” she agreed mournfully. “Not that it’s you fault. It only happens when you’re protecting me. But, what if it happens...and now you know...and what if you tell Hawk Moth?”

“Oh…” Adrien’s face fell against the fist of one hand, as he leaned it against his knee. “Good point…”

“Yeah…” Marinette agreed as she mirrored his position. They both sat there, sitting on the floor, opposite one another, thinking.

“How long do you think it will take them to figure it out?” Plagg whispered.

“Not long. Marinette’s really smart,” Tikki smiled reassuringly. She settled herself in the pile of scrap fabric that Plagg had been napping in and leaned her head on the ends of her arms in rapt attention. The kwami of creation enjoyed seeing her chosen solve a problem, watching the wheels turn within her head to produce potential solutions.

Plagg sighed. He hated waiting. He wandered over to the sewing table. Finding the box of jewelry supplies opened, he perused the contents. He picked up a bead, the color of his counterpart. No harm in helping things along, he supposed. And, besides it would be fun…

“Ow!” Adrien cried suddenly. Marinette looked up in concern as the boy rubbed the back of his head with hand. “Something hit me!” The girl spied a medium sized red bead on the floor and picked it up. She held it out to him in her palm. They both stared, puzzling over it. Plagg rolled his eyes as he watched them. He picked up another piece of ammunition. Adrien turned around to see from where the object had come at just the moment Plagg flicked another volley at his chosen. The bead hit him square in the nose.

“Plagg!” Adrien wailed. “What are you doing!?!”

“Helping,” the kwami replied with a smirk as he flung another bead at the blonde boy.

“I don’t see how…” Adrien replied annoyed as he waved a hand to block the sting of the bead as it zipped through the air.

“I’ll get you, Chat Noir!” Plagg cackled launching fist fulls of bead at both teens. “I will have your miraculous!”

“Does he always do this?” Marinette giggled as she, too, dodged the spray, taking shelter behind her desk chair.

Adrien shook his head. “Plagg causes trouble in general, but this is new!” He grabbed his messenger bag and ducked behind it, using it as a shield against another attack.

“Give up! You have no defense! That magical suit can’t stop me!” Plagg taunted. “You’ll be under my power and you’ll give me your miraculous!”
“HA!” Adrien teased back. “My suit is impenetrable! I’m impervious to your powers. I have a magical force field…”

“Adrien!” Marinette grabbed the boy by the sleeve of his t-shirt. “That’s it! We already have our answer!”

“We...we do?” he asked in surprise. He carefully lowered the bag so he could see her, but looked warily at Plagg in case he resumed his attack. But, the cat-kwami looked completely satisfied with himself and dropped the beads he held in his paws onto the floor. They scattered and rolled, this way and that.

“The force field! Don’t you see? It will keep us from not only getting hurt, but also from coming under the influence of akumas!” She turned for confirmation from the kwamis, “Right?”

“Right!” Tikki confirmed from her resting place. “Very good, Marinette!”

“Plagg!” Adrien cried in irritation as he stood up, tossing his messenger bag down with a thud. “Did you know about this?” he asked but didn’t wait for an answer, striding over to him to continue his accusation. “Why didn’t you tell me? I’ve been placed under the influence of an akuma more times than I can count!”

Plagg simply shrugged. “You never seemed bothered enough to do anything about it, so I figured you didn’t mind.”

“Didn’t mind!?!?” Adrien grabbed for his kwami, but he zipped from his grasp.

“My favorite was Refleckta!” Plagg chortled. “You looked so cute dressed all in pink and in heels!” Marinette giggled as she rose to join her boyfriend. “You were pretty cute.” She tried to hide her smile after catching Adrien’s eye, who looked less than pleased. “Alright,” she said addressing the kwamis, “I think it’s about time that you two told us everything, and I mean everything, that you can think of to keep us safe and make our jobs easier.”

Adrien crossed his arms and stared down the two little gods. Plagg’s ears fell flat against his head as he gloomily dropped to the ground like a helium balloon with a slow leak. What had he done? This was going to be soooo boring. How many times had he given the same information to his chosen? Dozens of times? Maybe a hundred? Tikki responded with enthusiasm, twirling in the air. She began relating all she knew with rapid speed.

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“Now, you don’t have to just use one Miraculous,” Tikki explained. “You can combine them.”

“But, I thought combining the Ladybug and Chat Noir miraculous was bad thing?” Marinette asked as she frowned in confusion.

“Yeah, it grants you a wish, but takes something of equal value,” Adrien chimed in. “Plus, if one of us has both, then the other has neither. That’s no fun. I wouldn’t want to do it without you, ‘Bug.”

Marinette blushed.

“Combining the two strongest miraculous is not advisable,” Tikki surmised. “But, that doesn’t mean you can’t combine them with other, lesser miraculous.”

“Like the fox? Or, the bee?” the curious girl asked.
“Uh-huh!” Tikki nodded. “Or even the snake and the dragon!” She flew in large arcs up and down, around and around in her excitement. “One time a Ladybug combined her miraculous with the rooster. It gave her power such that her voice could be heard from miles away. She used it as a call to arms, to rally the people to her side.”

“She sounds so...heroic!” Marinette gushed.

“As much as I love hearing you crow, Bugaboo, I’m afraid I’d run afowl of my allergies. I’m allergic to feathers, remember?”

“What about one of the other miraculous, Tikki?” Marinette asked. “How about...the horse?”

“Ohhhh!” Plagg whined as he scrubbed his paws down his face. “There are over 30 miraculous! This is going to take foreverrrrr!”

“Quiet, Plagg!” Adrien scolded. “This is important!”

“So’s my tummy and it’s empty! I’m so hungryyyyyy!” he wailed as he flopped sideways onto the desk as if starving.

“I have just the thing!” came a booming voice from below. Both teens jumped while the kwamis dove for cover. “Who’s hungry?” Marinette’s father asked, offering a tray filled with cookies and pastries.

“Meeeee! I’m so hungryyyyyy!” Adrien did his best to imitate Plagg, hoping to fool Tom.

“Thanks, Dad!” Marinette giggled, trying her best to keep a straight face, as she took the tray from him. “This is exactly what we needed!”

Tom smiled wide and looked as if he meant to stay, pulling the chair out from Marinette’s desk, but the girl quickly got to her feet, shooing him out before he could get comfortable.

“Think he bought it?” Adrien asked in a low voice. He chose a strawberry macaron from the tray.

Marinette nodded, “But, just to be safe. Maybe we should forgo any further talk about...miraculous.” She whispered the last word. Tikki nodded and grabbed a chocolate chip cookie. Plagg sighed in relief and proceeded to inhale all of the cheese Danish.

A few minutes later the two teenagers seemed content to have a break, sitting on the chaise, wrapped in each other’s arms. Tikki sat perched on Marinette’s desk eating another cookie, while Plagg snoozed happily and noisily on the pile of fabric scraps.

Marinette leaned her head against Adrien’s chest; the steady pounding of his heart felt reassuring to her. She had lost him too many times, she thought with a sigh, but now they had solved that problem. She gave him a squeeze, relieved to no longer have to live through the agony of seeing him die again.

He squeezed her back. “You okay, M’Lady?” Adrien asked.

It felt so strange to hear him call her that out of their supersuits. She would need some time to adjust, for her brain to reconcile that her handsome and kind classmate was also her brave, but flirty partner. Yet, the more she thought about it, the more she saw the commonalities: the silliness, the puns, the nicknames, She smiled to herself. Both were thoughtful, giving, helpful...dorks. Marinette chuckled at the thought.
“What?” Adrien asked. “What’s so funny?”

“It’s just…if only I had known! I could’ve saved us so much trouble!” Marinette bemoaned as she dragged a hand over her face. At Adrien’s questioning look she explained further. “The only reason I rejected you, I mean Chat-you, was because I was in love with Adrien, er, you.”

“Oh!” Adrien laughed in response. “Yes, that would’ve saved us some trouble and heartache.”

“I’m sorry I hurt you,” she craned her neck so that her blue eyes met his green ones. Adrien shook his head. “It hurt I’ll admit it, but you were there for me as a friend…when I visited you that night on your balcony the first time, remember? You made me feel better. You didn’t have to do that, but you did.”

“I didn’t realize I had hurt you by not showing up to your rooftop surprise,” she explained, pushing her hands against the chaise to raise the upper half of her body up. She folded her legs underneath her. “I never took your flirting seriously. I didn’t know you really cared.”

“I really do,” Adrien smiled, placing a loving hand on her shoulder. “And, you came eventually. That meant alot even though it didn’t end exactly how I would have liked it to have.”

Marinette’s eyes turned downwards in regret.

“You were very kind in your rejection. I was glad to still have your friendship.”

“Me, too,” she smiled. With fondness she remembered how Chat had left her that night. He had accepted her rejection of him with surprising grace and had even given her a rose as a parting offering, telling her she should have it since it matched her super suit.

“Speaking of that night,” Adrien began, “when I visited you on your balcony I recall that you, too, were heartbroken. Was I…was I the cause?”

“Yeah,” Marinette admitted, but seeing Adrien’s sorrowful face she amended her statement, “not that it was your fault!” Her fingers twisted in her lap. “I sort of built up this idea in my head. See…we were all going to have André’s ice cream and…well you know the legend, right?”

“That whomever you share André’s ice cream with you’ll fall in love forever?” Marinette nodded, “So I thought…well, I hoped that you and I…” She sighed. “But then you didn’t come…”

“Cuz I was waiting for Ladybug on the rooftop…” he realized. “Oh, Doodlebug! I’m so sorry! I had no idea!”

“I know! I know! It’s okay!”

“I had no idea that you felt that way about me…”

“Obviously,” Mariette snarked as a wicked grin spread across her face. “You thought I was in looooove with Chloe!”

“I still stand by that,” Adrien pouted as he crossed his arms. “Given the evidence, anyone would draw that conclusion.”

“No, no, no,” Marinette guffawed. “We may have acted suspiciously! But, to conclude that Chloe and I….” She laughed so hard, she had to hold onto the chaise for support. “…are in love! No!”
Adrien rose from the chaise as Marinette fell back onto it, laughing hysterically. He crossed the room and opened her closet. His hand cut through the hanging clothes and withdrew holding his jacket. A quick flick of the wrist and he had dislodged it from its coat hanger. With great care he separated the hood and cape from the jacket and placed them back on the hanger, which he rehung in the closet. All the while Marinette continued to laugh.

“What are you (hee-hee) doing?” she managed to force out between shortles “Are you (ha!) are you leaving?”

Adrien gave a curt nod before throwing one arm in the jacket and then the other.

“Oh, come on, Patch!” Marinette teased. “Don’t get all salty on me! I was just kidding!!”

Adrien crossed his arms. Turned his back to her and threw his nose up in the air. Marinette bit her lip in worry. She hadn’t meant to hurt his feelings. Just when she was about to say so, he gave her a sly, sideways glance and she knew he was teasing her back.

“Well…if you’re going to go,” she said playing along, “I can’t stop you. But, you’ll die of heat stroke in that jacket.”

“Plagg needs a pocket to hide in,” he replied coolly. He unzipped a pocket at his hip and held it open for the cat-like kwami, who flew inside.

“Ahhh…” he sighed contentedly, burrowing himself inside.

“I suppose…” she hummed. “But I couldn’t forgive myself if I was the cause of your demise. Arms out!” she ordered. She pushed one of his arms up. Zip, zip. With a pull she removed one sleeve. She repeated her movements on the other side. “There!”

Adrien stood in awe as he stared down at his jacket, no vest. She had made him a vest. He loved vests! He ran over to the mirror to get a better look. “Marinette,” he breathed. “You...you are amazing!” He scooped her up in his arms and spun her around and around.

“I thought you were leaving?” she giggled.

“Oh!” Remembering himself, he dropped her a bit wobbly onto her feet. “That’s right! I am!” He took two very determined steps toward the door before turning around and grabbing her hand. “But, you’re coming with me!”

“Wait! Where are we going?”

“To Andre’s of course!” He leaned in and wiggled his eyebrows. “I believe I owe you an ice cream!”

“Patch! We just had cookies! We’ll ruin our dinners!”

“Don’t you want to fall in love forever with me?” he pouted.

“Yeah…” she drooled and this time Adrien laughed. The sound snapped her out of reverie and she blushed. He held his arm out, offering it to her, but she hesitated.

“You…you’re not going to wear that out, are you?” she asked meaning the jacket, now vest she had made for him.

“And why not?” Adrien asked, brushing the leather from his chest to his navel with his hands to
check the fit.

“Your father…”

“Oh, him,” he waved his hand dismissively. “I can’t wait to see the look on his face when I show it to him. He’s going to be absolutely green with envy that he didn’t make it himself.” A wicked grin spread across his face.

“Adrien…”

“I think it’s about time that I choose what I wear and I’m wearing this,” he replied stubbornly. “I’m going to tell everyone that my talented, clever girlfriend made it for me.”

“Thanks,” she replied shyly.

“Thank you,” he responded, taking her in his arms and brushing a soft kiss against her lips. When they broke apart, he smiled widely and took her hand in his. “Come on! Let’s go!”

Marinette dashed to grab her purse, which Tikki flew inside, and then slipped her shoes back on her feet. When she turned around she found Adrien, head buried in his phone.

“Where’s Andre’s cart?” she asked, thinking that must be what he was looking at. “Is it far?”

“I dunno…” he answered without looking up. “I think we better watch this first.” He tilted the display screen so she could see. There was Chloe dressed as Queen Bee with the title “Ladybug’s New Partner” scrawled beneath her.

Marinette audibly gulped. “Oh no! She didn’t!”

“Oh? Didn’t she?” Adrien smirked. “Let’s just see what she did.” He pushed play on the video.

“Bonjour, Paris!” Chloe exclaimed, dressed in a Queen Bee super suit. “As you all know Ladybug and I are the best of friends!”

“Urgh!” Marinette breathed between clenched teeth.

“And, today Ladybug has shown how very deep her affection is for me by bestowing me, Chloe Bourgeois, with my very own miraculous!” She flicked her blonde ponytail. “You may call me Queen Bee!”

“She did…” the raven-haired girl sighed with disappointment, shaking her head. She looked up to find Adrien smirking. “You don’t seem surprised…”

Adrien paused the video. “That Chloe is bragging? No, not at all.”

“I mean, that I gave her a miraculous,” she clarified.

“I’m very surprised about that. I didn’t think you liked or trusted her enough to give her one. You sure you don’t have a crush on her?” he teased.

“Stop it! I meant you don’t seemed to be surprised to find out her identity.”

“She referred to me as Adriakens on the tower. She’s the only one that calls me that.”

“So...within minutes of meeting her you knew who she was, but me it took you months to figure it out?” Marinette quirked an eyebrow.
Adrien shrugged, “She is my oldest friend. And, in my defense you didn’t want me to figure out your identity, so I didn’t even try.” Adrien pressed play again and the two turned to watch.

“And as your Queen I will be protecting you from Hawk Moth and his evil akumas, especially in times when that lazy Chat Noir can’t be bothered to show up.”

“Oh no!” Marinette gasped and then gave Adrien an apologetic look.

“Ladybug and I make the perfect duo!” she bragged. “We work wondrously as a team. She said I was crucial to stopping today’s akuma and that without my help she might not have even survived. I saved her life, something which her other partner couldn’t be bothered to do.” She waved a hand dismissively.

“Only because I was bleeding out from saving your life,” Adrien mumbled under his breath as he scowled at the video.

“And to thank me she asked me out on a date!” Queen Bee declared. “Naturally, I accepted.”

The boy paused the video and looked up at his girlfriend. “A date?” Adrien asked incredulously.

“*She asked me*,” Marinette clarified, “and it’s only lunch.”

“A lunch date.” Adrien raised one eyebrow suspiciously. “You sure you don’t have a crush on her?”

“Don’t be silly,” Marinette reassured, but he looked doubtful. “Just play the rest,” she encouraged.

“We’ll be dining in my luxury suite here at Le Grand Paris tomorrow. I’ll give you an update on our intimate tete-a-tete afterwards. Until then, buzz off!” The video ended.

“I can’t believe she outed herself!” Marinette exclaimed.

“Did you tell her she had to keep her identity a secret?”

“I thought it understood. I mean, we’re wearing masks for a reason!” Her arms flew up into the air to make her point. “Where did she even get that costume from and so fast?”

“She’s rich! Enough money and clout will get you just about anything,” Adrien explained, having a lot of experience in the matter.

“We’ll have to protect her from Hawkmoth. She’s put herself in a lot of danger.”

Adrien nodded, “Although, she doesn’t really know anything. She doesn’t know who we are or where the miraculous are kept. She won’t be much of a prize if Hawkmoth catches her.” At Marinette’s doubting look, Adrien conceded. “Alright, I’m not opposed to keeping an eye on her. I’ll even start tomorrow...when you go on your date…”

“It’s not a date,” she insisted. “It’s just lunch. What? Are you jealous?”

“Given your history of going to people’s bedrooms and kissing them senseless, let’s just say I’m concerned.”

“I’m not going to kiss Chloe! I don’t have a crush on her!”

“Hmmm...can’t quite say the same for Chloe, though. I think she’s been bitten by the love bug!” he teased. “Oh, she has got it bad for you, Bugaboo! Real bad!”
“She does not!” Marinette chided. “And, don’t call me Bugaboo!” She began to pace back and forth across her room. “What am I going to do about lunch?” she asked more of herself than of anyone else in the room.

“Do you need to do anything?” Adrien asked. “You’re so insistent that neither of you have feelings for each other. What do you think is going to happen?”

Marinette thought about what Chloe said that time in her bathroom: “Ladybug saved me the most, so it’s not surprising that I should love her.”

Marinette couldn’t be sure, but she thought Chloe had yelled, “I love you!” as she swung away on her yo-yo from the blonde girl’s balcony.

She could feel the bubbles of anxiety pooling within her. She had to do something.

“I know!” she exclaimed. “Come with me tomorrow!”

“What?”

“Yes! Yes! You come to lunch as Chat Noir and act as a buffer.”

“You mean third wheel,” Adrien corrected. “Oh, boy! Chloe’s really going to hate me if I do that!” The idea had an unexpected thrilling appeal.

“So you won’t go?”

“Oh, I’ll go, alright! But, I have a better idea: I dress up as Ladybug and tell Chloe I’m already in love with Chat Noir.”

“ADRIEN!”

“What? It’s a good idea! All the better to keep you two apart. Less chance of kissing that way. I just need to borrow your earrings…” His arm stretched out as he playfully pretended to take them.

“No way!” Her hands defensively raised to cover her miraculous. “You can’t. They don’t come off. I… I glued them on.”

“You...what now?”

“I glued them on, so Hawk Moth and his akumas could never get them.”

Adrien blinked.

“Just say you’ll come to lunch with me tomorrow so that we can get some ice cream,” Marinette ordered.

“Whatever you say, M’Lady,” he smirked.

“Good. Now, where is Andre’s cart?”

Adrien looked back down at his phone and began his search. Andre’s cart changed locations everyday. Today, he was located….

“All the way across town,” Adrien sighed gloomily, “at Sacré-Cœur. You think we can make it there and back by dinner time?”
“Definitely,” Marinette agreed, “if we go by rooftop. Spots on!” A red light surrounded her. Adrien shielded his eyes with his hand. When he noticed the fading of the light, he dropped his hand, finding Ladybug standing in Marinette’s place.

“I like the way you think, ‘Bug,” he smirked. “I suppose the public debut of my new jacket can wait until school tomorrow,” he hummed. “Claws out!”

“Nooooo!” Plagg whined as he was sucked into Adrien’s ring. “I want ice cremeaam!”

Ladybug giggled at the plight of her feline boyfriend’s kwami.

“We can de-transform when we get there, so Tikki and Plagg can have some, too,” she suggested as she ran up the stairs toward the ceiling access to the balcony.

“You sure you want to do that?” he asked as he followed her up. “You know a few pictures of Ladybug and Chat Noir eating ice cream from Andre’s would be sure to discourage Chloe.” He pulled himself up through the hatch. With one hand over his heart he declared dramatically, “As Chloe’s oldest friend, I feel compelled to warn her off of you. It really isn’t at all healthy for her to be crushing on you.”

“That’s true…” she hummed, pausing at the balcony rail. “And as Chloe’s newest friend I feel compelled to help her as well. It wouldn’t be good for her to waste her time on me when my heart belongs to another.”

Chat blushed as he joined her at the rail. “I promise to take very special care of it.”

“I know you will,” she smiled fondly, as they inched closer to one another.

“Alright then, we get one cone for Ladybug and Chat Noir to share and one cone for Marinette and Adrien to share...with Tikki and Plagg, too.”

“I like the way you think, Kitty,” she smirked as she flicked the bell at his throat.

“Know what I’m thinking about right now?” He leaned in for a kiss, but she pivoted around him, advancing quickly toward her flower pots. His eyebrows jumped in surprise, but then he grinned. He liked how she teased. He turned to follow her. His mouth formed a perfect “o” at the sight of what she held in her hand. “For me?”

“For you,” she affirmed as she placed behind Chat’s ear the small, red flower plucked from her balcony garden. “I believe I owe you a rose.”

Chat looked too overcome with emotion to speak. His fingertips lightly grazed the petals of the bloom.

“You know that moment you said when you fell in love with Ladybug?”

“With you,” he corrected.

“With me,” she agreed. “The reason that I was able to ‘dig deep’ and put aside my fears and doubts was because you told me that you believed in me...in us. That gave me the confidence to be Ladybug. I wouldn’t be Ladybug without you.”

“And I wouldn’t want to be Chat Noir without you,” he smiled. Again he leaned in for a kiss and again she rebuffed him, this time pushing his nose away with her finger.
“Did you think magic force field when you transformed?” she asked, a knowing smile pulling at her lips.

“Um, of course I did!” Chat answered, his voice cracking on the last word.

“Then you won’t mind if I punch you in the nose?” Ladybug drew her fist back.

“I wouldn’t want you to hurt your hand!” he excitedly responded with both hands outstretched to stop her.

“I have my own magic forcefield to protect me.‘ She dropped her hand and quirked an eyebrow. “You forgot, didn’t you?”

“It’s hard to think straight with you around, M’Lady,” he admitted sheepishly. “All I can think about is kissing you.”

“Chat…” Ladybug chided. “I never thought I’d say this, but…you think too much. You need to be a bit more…reckless!” She grabbed him by the shoulders and brought his lips to hers.

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Chapter End Notes

Notes to the story:

Geography: I have to admit the geography in the story is not accurate for Paris. There is a bridge that connects across the Seine in which the Eiffel Tower is on one bank and the aquarium is on the bank opposite. That bridge is called the Pont d’Iéna. In the story the bridge is the Pont des Arts, famous for the love locks. In reality the Pont des Arts is further to the east. I defend myself by saying that the geography of Paris in the show is also inaccurate, so I figure if it can be forgiven there, it can be forgiven here. I placed Marinette’s bakery in the 13th Arrondissement or southeast section of Paris, where there are lots of little local parks, since in the show the park is across the street from the bakery and the school. Sacré-Cœur is located in the 17th or 18th Arrondissement or the northern section, so it would be quite a trek for them.

Marinette’s reaction: I got some feedback from a few readers in a previous story of mine, “Help Me Break Your Heart”, which has a very similar premise only there’s no Chloe, that Ladybug should have been upset at learning Chat’s identity because when he died as Adrien earlier in the story she had lost both and never have known it and had even chastised Chat for missing the akuma battle when he had been there fighting, only as Adrien. So taking that feedback into account, this is the result. I hope it brings the story full circle.

Chloe: Admittedly in order to do the reveal Chloe gets shafted on appearing in the chapter, but I tried to incorporate her as best I could almost through the end of the story.

Part 2: I could keep this story going or add a second part or as MJ suggested write some related one-shots that would include the superhero lunch, Adrien standing up to Gabriel to wear the jacket, the class’s reaction to Marinette and Adrien dating, Paris’ reaction to LadyNoir, Adrienette’s efforts to get Chloe a non-Ladybug girlfriend, etc. etc. But, this
story has to end somewhere and I feel this is the best spot. The rest is just superfluous and can easily be filled in by the reader’s own imagination, which will probably be better than anything I could come up with anyway.

Did you make it to the end?: Just wondering how many people actually made it to the end, so if you did and enjoyed it, please leave me a comment. Kudos are always appreciated as well. Thank you to everyone who read the story even if you didn't make it all the way to the last chapter. And a big thank you to everyone who left comments and kudos. And a super hero thank you to Fishystar and MJ (AvrilMariaR) for being my beta readers, supporting my writing efforts, and for being good friends. Now, on to another story...

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!