Summary

Something unexpected happens during game night on the Couffaine’s houseboat

Notes

Welcome to my very self-indulgent fic that was meant to be a lot shorter than it is!
Age up to about 16 or 17
Let the Games Begin

Each student of Miss Bustier’s class, along with Luka and Marc, sit in a circle on the deck of the Liberty; the Couffaine houseboat. The crew had all gotten together to view a Kitty Section rehearsal—the very first including Adrien as their new keyboard player—and decided to hang back with each other once every one of their songs had been performed.

With not much to do on the anchored boat other than talk amongst themselves, Alya eventually proposed they play some conversational games together, to which everyone enthusiastically agreed to.

The group has already played Telephone, which could have been deemed as a success or complete failure, depending on if the point was to cry laughing or get the phrase out right—if it was the latter, they failed miserably. They had also participated in Two Truths and a Lie. Adrien, who has never even heard of these games before—and had to have the rules explained to him by his peers—won it with flying colors. Being the son of the renowned Gabriel Agreste, almost everything he brought to the table during Two Truths and a Lie seemed plausible, no matter how extreme. He mentioned traveling to exotic locations, meeting the hottest celebrities…it was hard to decipher what he hadn’t done. An unfair advantage, perhaps, but no one was complaining; they were just glad Adrien could be there and spend time with everyone.

Now, everyone is focused on Never Have I Ever—the cruel game where players force their friends to admit things they wouldn’t otherwise—as suggested by Alix.

“Never have I ever...been given a Miraculous,” Luka says curiously as he wags his remaining fingers, the pinky and thumb on his right hand already knocked down from the previous plays.

To no surprise, a hush falls amongst the party as eyes dart around. Everyone who has received a Miraculous knows this information must be kept secret, in order to protect everyone’s well-being, including their own. That being said, Marinette, Adrien, Alya and Nino keep their mouths shut and fingers up, just like everyone else. All except for...

“We all know none other than I could carry the burden of saving Paris as the brave and fabulous Queen Bee!” Chloé declares proudly as she sets a finger down, chin held high.

The Bourgeois girl would have rather not come to the soirée—the only boats she is willing to step foot on are yachts and five-star cruises—but after hearing word that her beloved ‘Adrikins’ would be on the Liberty and performing music, she made sure she would be there.

“Didn’t Ladybug say the Bee Miraculous is going to be given to someone else from now on?” Alya chimes in. Of course, her question is rhetorical; Alya has already made a post about the matter on her Ladyblog—she knows all about it. She was there, afterall, as Rena Rouge, when Ladybug told Chloé she may never be offered the Bee Miraculous again.

Clearly offended by the mention, Chloé crosses her arms, shooting out a scoff towards Alya. “Ladybug might be lending my Miraculous to someone else next time, but they won’t be performing nearly as well as I have. I can promise you all she’ll be giving it back to its rightful owner soon enough,” Chloé assures, ponytail whipping as she sticks her nose up towards the sky.

While no one dares to tell Chloé otherwise, or really disagrees with her in the first place, a few giggles fill the air at her frustration.
“Alright, it’s *my* turn,” Alix declares; the game is going clockwise, and she is sat between Luka and Nathaniel. She shoots the last mentioned boy a devilish grin, to which his visible eye grows wide, then turns into a dagger. Marc, who is sat next to Nathan, catches Alix’s smile and the look on the redhead’s face, easily becoming curious about the exchange. Is there something going on that he doesn’t know about? Marc looks at the boy with question in his eyes, and it takes everything in Nathaniel to ignore his gaze.

“Never have I ever...liked someone in this room,” Alix says honestly, the blinding smile on her face just getting bigger as Nathaniel loses what color he has in his already-pale face.

Oh, Alix is playing *dirty*.

As expected, the couples--Juleka and Rose, Alya and Nino, and Mylène and Ivan--all put a finger down and smile at their respective partners. Obviously, this isn’t why Alix used such a statement for her turn; she already *knows* who’s in a relationship here. She stares Nathaniel down.

Kim lowers a finger regretfully; there was a time where he had unrequited feelings for Chloé, but fortunately, they are now a thing of the past, as he only has eyes for his girlfriend, Ondine. Chloé lowers a manicured finger as she smiles, batting her lashes flirtatiously at Adrien, while the girl beside her, Sabrina, puts a finger down almost secretly, a shy look on her reddening face.

Marinette lowers a finger down as she’s having trouble focusing her eyes, gaze jumping from Adrien to Luka, then back to Adrien, then Luka once more. The Couffaine boy, a relaxed smirk on his face, glances over at the indecisive girl, showing no signs of shyness as he holds his ring finger down with his thumb. Luka’s eyes then trail over to Adrien, who is sitting beside him, crooked smile still on his face. Perhaps, it’s because he notices Marinette is looking at the two of them from across the circle. Or maybe, there’s another reason behind it…

Adrien, who seems to be the star of the show this round, quickly puts a finger down as he stares at the empty center of the circle, a soft blush splayed on his cheeks. Chloé’s and Marinette’s mouths are gaping towards his direction as they notice his participation.

Max still has his fingers up from the last play; his one true love is technology, and no one in this group of people could take its place.

Honestly? Alix couldn’t care *less* about these guys’ responses. She used this play for two specific people, with one reason only in mind: to get it into Nathaniel’s *thick* skull that Marc likes him. She has tried to tell Nathaniel times over that Marc has feelings for him, that it’s *so* obvious he does, but Nath always seems to just brush it off, as if to not get his hopes up on the idea. He tells Alix that they’re “just friends”, that it’s “not like that”, and that Marc “could never”, but Alix knows better. She sees the longing looks Marc gives him, she sees how his clumsiness is amplified when Nathaniel is near, she sees how happy Nathaniel makes him feel. Alix wants him to see it, too.

Nath has an easy way out this round; despite any current feelings he may have for a certain someone in the circle, he *did* have a short-lived crush on Marinette in the past, which is no secret to anyone here. Keeping this in mind, he puts a finger down with ease. If he hadn’t, it would be both an obvious lie, as well as suspicious.

Alix, excitement in her widened eyes, expectantly stares Marc down, anxiously waiting for his finger to come down. As soon as it does, Nathaniel won’t be able to deny that Marc likes him!

Marc has been eyeing Nathaniel since his and Alix’s strange, silent exchange, and he damn near sighs when Nath sets a finger down. It isn’t *fair*; Nathaniel’s response to the question doesn’t *mean* anything! There is no way to tell if Nathaniel is only answering about a past crush, or a current one
as well, and it’s killing him. He’s terrified to put a finger down, because, really, who else would he like besides Nathaniel? If he participates truthfully, there’s no way Nath won’t put two and two together. He doesn’t want Nathaniel to realize he has feelings for him just because of this game, especially when he has no idea how Nath would take it! Alix, you cruel, cruel girl; Marc now understands why she chose such a statement for her turn.

The raven is blushing a bright red. Even though mere seconds have gone by, it feels like hours as he hesitates putting a finger down. He needs something to look at, someone to guide him on what to do in this situation—

Luka.

Luka has become a close friend of Marc’s these past couple of months, to the point where he has even confided in him his feelings toward Nathaniel. Okay, okay, not like he had much of a choice in hiding his feelings from Luka, anyways; the very first time they hung out alone together, the cyan-haired boy played him a song he could clearly hear crying out from Marc’s heart—one obviously stemmed from romance by the entrancing melody it produced. Luka just knew it was about Nathaniel. Shamelessly, Luka had told Marc he was sure of who it was about, and being a bad liar, Marc had no choice but to admit it to him that he was right.

Having looked over to check Marc’s hand, Luka notices he’s being stared at by said boy, a desperate look on his face. Luka can feel in his gut what it’s all about; Marc is looking for Luka to tell him whether to put a finger down or not. Taking no time, he offers the raven a reassuring smile—as well as a secretive OK hand in his lap—before he wiggles his eyebrows at Marc, which, in turn, makes Marc smile bashfully and blush.

Seeing Marc’s lips curve into a smile from the corner of his eye, Nathaniel looks at him, then his eyes dart between the two boys once he realizes who Marc is smiling at. What...is this? The way that they’re looking at each other, smiles plastered on their faces during this round is making him feel sick…

Now, feeling rather comforted by Luka’s support, despite it having just been little gestures, Marc decides to finally put a finger down, definitely being the last to do so. Luka winks at Marc proudly and approvingly for getting it over with. See? Not so bad!

Nathaniel stares at the scene like a zombie. He...can't believe this.

After a moment of drowning in racing, incoherent thoughts, Nathan comes back to life, jaw and fists clenched.

Oh, he’s pissed.
Alix looks between the three boys in complete shock, her stomach dropping as she notices the vexed look on Nathaniel’s face. This is not what she had wanted to get out of her turn. Oops… “Uh,” she breaks the silence, awkwardly rubbing at her arm. “It’s your turn now, Nath,” Alix minds. Hopefully, he’ll get his mind off of...whatever the hell just happened, as he continues playing the game; Alix is sure this is just some sort of weird misunderstanding, though she isn’t quite sure of the explanation for it.

“Alright,” Nathaniel speaks, voice sounding more confident than ever as he sits up straightly, piercing Luka with his eyes, then looks over at Marc. “Never have I ever been akumatized over a boy,” he says accusingly. The words are clearly directed towards Marc. Is he...trying to embarrass him? Kim ‘ooh ’s, and everyone else looks at each other in surprise, a few mouths hanging open at Nathaniel’s boldness; who knew he was physically capable of something like that? The redhead just doesn’t care right now, and continues staring down the boy in question.

Marc’s lightly-freckled nose crinkles in confusion. Is this some sort of weird joke he just doesn't understand? He knows the statement was directed towards himself, but...why? A brow raised, he looks at Nathaniel for an explanation, and hopes it’s a good one.

“Well, aren’t you going to put a finger down?” Nathan asks, causing Marc’s cheeks to turn a deep red. Why is he being so hostile? Marc is so confused… Did he do something wrong? Maybe, Nathaniel is upset over Marc’s silent admission of liking someone here? Perhaps, he now knows that Marc has feelings for him, and isn’t okay with it... He’s going to die if that’s what this is all about. Marc isn’t going to jump to conclusions, though.

He swears he can feel his insides shaking as everyone stares at him and Nathaniel. “Wh-Why would I do that? What you said doesn’t apply to me...” Marc defends, the last bit spoken under his breath.

Nathaniel, obviously frustrated, forces out a small chuckle. “You’re telling me you got akumatized for a reason other than me not wanting to work with you?” he questions snidely, arms crossed as he raises a brow at him. Clearly, Nathan doesn’t believe him, and wants Marc to admit it...in front of everyone.

This is really bad. What he’s doing isn’t okay, Nathaniel knows this, but he’s just so upset with what he saw between Marc and Luka, that he can’t stop himself. It’s almost like he needs to prove that Marc feels something for him in front of Luka, despite the fact that he isn’t even sure Marc does like him. This...isn’t a good way to go about it, though.

“Dude, Nathaniel,” Nino hints for him to stop, but Marc speaks up before giving Nathan a chance to say something back.

“I’m saying it’s more than just that. It wasn’t ‘over a boy’ like you’re putting it; it was over being accused of something and not getting a chance to explain myself...and not to mention my journal getting ripped apart...” Marc defends, the last bit spoken under his breath.

“What’s going on with you, Nath? Why would you say something like that?” Marc’s never really
spoken to anyone so pointedly before, especially not to Nathaniel, and it has his heart racing so fast he fears it may give up on him.

Luka, worried Nathaniel may say something in response that might hurt Marc, decides to chime in. “Guys, come on, let’s not--”

“Hey, Luka? This has nothing to do with you, so I suggest you stay out of it,” Nath growls. Clearly, it does have something to do with him; Luka can tell from the heavy metal song coming from Nathan’s heart.

“Okay! Uh...! M-Marc! How about you take your turn now?” Alix practically begs, her words dwindling down as she notices tears pricking at the boy’s eyes. She looks over at Nathaniel, giving him a death glare, as if silently telling him to somehow fix this mess.

Marc chokes back his tears, and soon enough, words fly out of his mouth that he would soon regret. “Never have I ever been the cause of someone getting akumatized,” Marc retaliates, guilt simultaneously washing over him. That was a low blow, especially for Marc.

Times over, Marc has had to sit a remorseful Nathaniel down, promising that he forgives Nathan for the events that resulted in Marc’s akumatization into Reverser. Despite how sincere Marc always is about letting it go and allowing it to live in the past, the thought still weighs heavily on Nathan’s mind at times; he wishes he could take it all back, but knows that he can’t. Perhaps, he will always feel guilty for it, and Marc is more than aware of that.

Much like his initial reaction to Marc and Luka’s little exchange just moments ago, Nathaniel freezes. It takes him a good second or two to figure out if Marc really just said that or not. Did this mean that Marc’s comfort all those times before had just been a lie? That maybe, he had told Nathaniel everything was okay just to shut him up? Has Marc just been using him this whole time to make a comic?

“Now that is a ridiculous question! Utterly ridiculous! I object!” Chloé interposes with a pout, as if she can’t see that this has nothing to do with her. Adrien sighs softly to himself, forehead pressed to his hand.

“Really, Marc?” Nathaniel snorts. “Wow. You know, I always worried that the reason you’ve been so willing to accept the fact that I caused your akumatization was so that you could guilt me into drawing out your little stories…and it looks like I was right,” the salty boy accuses.

“That’s pathetic, even for you.”

“Alright Nathaniel, that’s enough!” Luka yells. He didn’t want to shout at him, he has always liked Nathaniel, but he couldn’t watch this go down any longer; it just wasn’t right.

Marc, in the most relaxed way possible for someone who’s on the brink of crying, stands up from his spot on the deck, blinking back tears that are dying to spill out. “It’s okay, Luka. I-I should be getting home anyways…” Marc turns to leave. ”I’m really sorry about this,” he apologizes to the party, feeling ashamed. He hurriedly makes his way to the boat ladder, shimmying himself down. Once he’s off and walking away from the boat, he freely allows himself to start crying, though he stifles his sobs through a gloved hand.

Chapter End Notes
uhhh ruh roh, raggy!!!
Suddenly

How was it that such a great time could turn into one of the worst nights of his life in an instant? Marc doesn’t understand...He has no idea what the hell he even did to make Nathaniel so suddenly hate him, and he’s unsure that he will ever know.

“...Wait!” a voice cries from behind. Marc doesn’t have to look back to know exactly who it is running towards him. The raven doesn’t know whether to run far away or walk towards the voice; he doesn’t know how much more he can take.

“Please, just leave me alone, Nathaniel,” Marc struggles to speak. “I don’t know what I did to cause you to act like that in front of everyone, but I don't need any more of it.”

Nathaniel had ran off the boat shortly after Marc to apologize, to tell him he took things too far, but Marc playing dumb about the situation just pisses him off even more. He can't contain himself.

“You’re kidding me, right? You’re absolutely joking!” Nathaniel laughs seethingly. He doesn’t want to admit to what exactly is making him so upset with Marc, but he’s sure that the boy already knows anyway, and just doesn’t want to be caught. “You seriously...play with my heart for months, making me think that you...th-think that you might have actual feelings for me, when in reality, you’ve got something going on with Luka?! To think I thought you weren't just like everybody else!”

After having stopped in his tracks to listen to the blathering boy, Marc turns around, staring at Nathaniel in utter disbelief, hot tears streaming down his face.

“What?!” he nearly screams. Marc has never been so confused and infuriated in his life, and he can't believe the cause of said feelings is Nathaniel. “Where in the hell did you get the idea that I like Luka?! ” He’s way too pissed off to even care this must mean Nathaniel likes him; he’s too focused on his wildly irrational jealousy and accusations.

“Oh, stop playing dumb, Marc! I saw you two giving each other those...those looks during Alix’s turn! How are you going to explain that to me, huh? ” Nathan points out with a wavering voice. “Luka literally wiggled his brows all suggestively towards you then winked at you!”

This...isn't real, is it? Nathaniel is really going off of something so miniscule that he happened to catch? Marc is astonished by how stupid this guy is. Sure, maybe that whole exchange between him and Luka might have looked kinda suspicious, but did Nathan really have to cause a scene over it, rather than just ask Marc about it?

“Oh my God...You’re so--!” Marc tries to speak, but is cut off by the sound of Nathaniel fearfully whining. Confused, Marc looks towards the same direction Nathan is staring at.

Just feet away, an akuma flutters in their direction.

“No, shit, no, not again!” Nathaniel breathes shakily. He has already been akumatized once before, and he swore to himself afterwards that he would never let it happen again, no matter how hurt, angry or upset something may end up making him. Even so, he knows that no matter how much someone doesn’t want to get akumatized, it can still happen with Hawkmoth’s persuasion; he’s heard of it happening before, like to Miss Bustier when she became Zombizou.

“W-Which one of us do you think it’s going for?! ” Marc whimpers, eyes glued to the akuma just feet away from them.
Nathaniel’s hand instinctively grabs Marc’s, backing away from the nearing evilized-butterfly. “B-Both of us, I'm gonna guess! W-We need to calm down, and fast,” the redhead warns. How are they supposed to though when they’re both angry at each other, and now terrified by an approaching akuma just seconds away from evilizing them?

Marc is still so mad at him, so hurt by him, and he’s nowhere near ready to forgive Nathaniel, but he doesn’t want to be akumatized over it. There’s...one solution to their impending akuma problem that’s invading his thoughts, too. An embarrassing one that has come out of nowhere. He has no time to contemplate it--there isn’t a second to spare; Marc is going to turn Nath’s anger and fear into surprise, and his own into a feeling of embarrassment (though not intense enough to be akumatized over).

Marc quickly takes hold of Nathaniel’s face, showing no hesitation as he locks their lips together, and a bit deeply at that; he’s trying to surprise the boy as much as he can without totally humiliating himself--that would defeat the purpose of even doing this--so he figures the deeper the kiss, the better. Marc's kissing is passionate and slow, and for a moment, he isn't so upset with Nathaniel; he’s almost wishing this is happening in a different scenario right now, one where they aren't so irate with each other. Marc would love nothing more than to kiss him just because he wants to.

As Marc had hoped, Nathaniel is completely taken aback by the intense kiss. He’s blushing like crazy, and his face feels tingly at the sensation of Marc’s soft, warm lips against his. Why is Marc kissing him right now? Was he so mad that he just...needed to or something? God, Nathaniel isn't complaining though, despite the fact he knows he doesn't deserve the pleasure of feeling Marc's lips against his right now. Just as he is about to reciprocate the kiss, Marc suddenly pulls away, letting go of his face. The raven gently pants as he frantically searches the darkening sky, looking for the akuma that had gotten dangerously close.

After a few moments of staring into the sky, Marc breathes a sigh of relief as he finds the akuma, almost too far to see now, flying in the opposite direction, hopefully back to Hawkmoth rather than new prey.

Looks like Marc’s plan had been a success.
“You’re an idiot, Nathaniel,” Marc suddenly speaks, his face adorned with redness. It’s weird to say something like that to him, especially after having just one-sidedly made out with him, but he needs to speak his mind before losing it. “I do fucking like you. I did like you…” he explains, a soft frown on his face; he’s unsure if he can, or rather should continue letting himself have those feelings for him—he’s hurt by Nathaniel’s impulsive behavior, and this isn’t the first time he has been wrongly accused by him. “I’ve liked you like crazy ever since we met, Nath… I thought it was obvious. What you saw was me silently begging Luka for advice on whether or not to put my finger down, because I was scared of what you would think about it. I-I was sure that if I played honestly, you’d know who it pertained to, and I didn’t know how you would take it. Luka knows how I feel about you, and I know who he likes, too, and it’s certainly not me.”

Nathaniel stares at Marc stupidly. He just got kissed by the boy he has feelings for, but it seems that it was all just to get the akuma away; it doesn't actually matter that it just happened, and there is no point in mentioning it, despite how badly he wants to. Plus, heard Marc anyways. He knows now how Marc feels for him—he was just bluntly told—and the grave mistake Nathaniel has made is clear. He’s speechless, really. Is there any coming back from this? He’s sure Marc hates him now, but he can understand why, if that's the case; he hates himself, too, for jumping the gun like that, especially since it isn't the first time he has done so with him. Marc is the one person who has been so kind to him no matter what, and now Nathaniel hurt him.

“Marc, I-I’m…” Nathaniel tries to speak, but he doesn’t know what to say. What could he say at this point? Yes, Nathaniel has been hurt times over by peers, used just for people's selfish entertainment, which has made it hard for him to trust others and make true friends, but he should have known better that Marc would have never used Nathaniel for making comics. Their connection is the most genuine thing he can think of.

“I just...can’t believe you accused me for something I didn’t do again. I-I’ve already forgiven you for before, I truly have, but...I really thought we were passed this,” Marc admits, and tears begin forming in his eyes. He feels a bit embarrassed for being so emotional, so he turns away to wipe his eyes. Nathaniel watches, completely heartbroken.

“I know, I know,” Nathaniel cries softly and truthfully, a frown on his face as he places a hand on Marc’s tense shoulder. “I feel horrible about this, Marc. I’m so, so sorry...I really fucked up. I shouldn’t have assumed...I wish I didn’t, I just...I let my thoughts get the best of me. I wish I could take it back, Marc;” he apologizes, his eyes beginning to well up. “It’s no excuse, but...it’s really hard for me to get out of my own head sometimes.” He really doesn’t expect the acknowledgment to make everything okay, but he needs to let Marc know why this happened, and that he understands it’s an issue.

Marc releases a shaky sigh, turning to face the boy as he carefully removes the hand from his shoulder.

“I know. And I can understand to some extent, but I just...” Marc takes a moment to collect his thoughts.

"Look. I really, really like you, a-and I guess at this point it's safe to say you like me, too.” Marc doesn't want to continue, but he has to, for his own sanity.
"But...I don’t...really think we should do anything about the fact...N-Not right now, at least,” he nearly whispers, watching the ground as he wipes an eye. Marc really hates doing this. “I understand you’re feeling regretful and sorry--I apologize for what I said, too; i-it was way too far, and the fact that I got so upset with you that I could say something like that...” Marc shakes his head disapprovingly at himself.

"I think...I’m going to need a little time. S-So, maybe...we should put the comic on hold for a bit. J-Just until I’ve had...some of that time, to think and stuff, you know?"

Is this what a break up feels like? Fuck. This hurts. They were never even together in that sort of way, but Nathaniel feels like he is about to shatter into a million pieces. He wants to sob. He wants to wrap his arms so tightly around Marc and tell him that nothing like this will ever happen again, and that he doesn't blame Marc for what he said to him before in retaliation, but he knows it’s pointless; whether it’s true or not it won’t happen again, Marc is going to need time to heal and think their friendship through. All Nathan can do right now is respect his decision without argument, or they will have no chance of ever being friends again; he knows this.

“Yeah...Yeah, I understand,” Nathaniel says quietly, forcing a soft smile on his face. If this means they aren’t going to be seeing each other for a while, he doesn't want last thing for Marc to remember him by to be a frown on his face.

Marc nods as he chokes back tears. Whether or not Nath really does understand, he appreciates the words; it’s a good start to their mending. “I’m glad,” he nods softly. "W-Well, I...I guess that means I should make my way back home now.”

Instinctively, Nathaniel opens his mouth, ready to offer to walk him home just like he would do any other time, but quickly catches himself before he can ask. Marc smiles sadly as he watches, knowing exactly what it’s all about.

“I’ll see you around school, okay?” Marc says softly, and Nath nods as he tries his hardest to hold back the tears building up in his eyes.

“Yeah, I’ll see you,” Nathaniel murmurs.

And with that, Marc waves softly and takes his leave into the night, making his way towards home while wiping rushing tears off his face.

Nathaniel turns on his heels in the opposite direction, suppressing sobs into his hand as he heads home.

Who would’ve ever imagined that their first kiss might have very well been their last?

Chapter End Notes

...can you believe i intended on making this story a fluffy one shot lol
Alix gives Nathaniel an unprompted therapy session during lunch

Nearly a week has passed since Marc and Nathaniel have spoken to one another. The past few days at school, including this one, have been completely devoid of gentle gazes, flirtatious laughter, and art room shenanigans--Marc hasn’t even set foot in the art room since last week.

What’s the point of even coming to school anymore, really? Nathaniel isn’t entirely sure. Marc is the one who always makes the hell-on-earth-dubbed-as-school bearable--and honestly, even enjoyable at times--and now that they aren’t talking...? Nathaniel would rather not have to sit through another one of Ms. Mendeleiev’s lectures if it isn’t going to be followed by spending lunchtime with his favorite boy. At least he has Alix, though; she’s always good company.

“Dude, are you going to eat your lunch? You’ve just been sitting there staring at it for like, five minutes,” Alix points out, mouth stuffed with bread.

“What? Oh. Y-Yeah. Just got kinda lost in thought there for a sec,” Nathaniel assures, lifting his plastic fork and poking the prongs at a grape tomato in his salad. He isn’t feeling very hungry; his appetite has been completely wiped ever since the weekend, when he and Marc last spoke. The scene of Marc telling him that he needs a break refuses to stop playing on a loop in his mind, though he really isn’t even willing to think of anything else; he feels he deserves to suffer.

As he’s lazily playing around with the lettuce on his tray, Nathan hears the sound of a familiar laugh. It sounds a bit less lively than usual, though he still knows it from anywhere. Then, he hears the comforting voice speak, and his heart begins to ache. Nathaniel groans softly.

“Don’t look. Just keep your eyes on your food,” Alix warns through her teeth, which Nathaniel completely ignores. He earns a little sigh from her, though she isn’t at all surprised by him. This boy has got it bad, and he’s in mourning, so there’s really no stopping him. Nath’s eyes frantically search for the owner of the aforementioned voice, and lock onto him once he’s spotted.

Marc, tray in hand, is accompanied by Luka as they look for an empty table to sit at. Though there is a smile on the raven’s face as he chats with his friend, he’s looking a little glum. As the two search for a place to sit, Marc’s eyes eventually catch sight of Nathaniel.

Nathan feels as though he’s being stabbed in the chest as Marc’s emerald eyes seem to pierce right through him. Not that the look is malicious or anything. It’s just...his eyes have always had the capability to do this, but they never hurt Nath like they’re doing right now. The looks Marc gives him are usually breathtaking and exhilarating, making Nathaniel feel warm and special, but right now, the look is making him feel cold and wistful; it’s just causing Nathaniel unbearable pain.

Though it feels like a lifetime has gone by since their eyes initially locked, the glance only lasts a second or two. Marc finally breaks the gaze, acting as though it never even happened as he continues on searching for a table with Luka, eventually finding a place to sit--considerably far from Nathaniel.
Nath pushes his tray aside before pressing his face to the table, groaning louder than before; seeing Marc when they’re not on speaking-terms is absolute torture.

Alix pats her friend’s back. Sure, she thinks he’s being totally dramatic right now, but she knows it’s best to just be there and comfort him during his agony. Honestly, she’s feeling a bit guilty about their argument in the first place, since her turn during Never Have I Ever had sparked the fight, so it only feels right to be more tender than she would be otherwise towards the situation. “It’s okay, buddy,” the pinkette assures, though Nathaniel just groans again in response.

Alix sighs. “Nathan, I know this totally sucks for you right now, but everything will turn out just fine—I’m sure of it. You said that Marc told you he just needs a little time, right? He never said he didn’t want to speak to you ever again, or anything extreme—”

“Oh, god,” Nathaniel interrupts, head shooting up from the table like a rocket. “What if he doesn’t want to speak to me ever again, Alix? Marc’s so nice and empathetic, he might have just been trying to spare my feelings by letting me down gently the other day. Shit, what if we never talk again?” Nathaniel blabbers anxiously, fingers combed through his hair on either side of his head.

“You’re ridiculous, Kurtzberg, you know that?” Alix sighs, flicking the boy’s forehead lightly. “You just need to be patient and trust… that he’ll be back eventually.”

“Can it, Alix,” Nathaniel sighs back. “I just can’t help but feel worried that he won’t be back. I’ve never...felt this way for someone before, you know? It’s not just some little crush…I’m scared to lose him,” he admits as his face reddens, embarrassed to be so honest about it.

While Alix doesn’t know the first thing about crushes, she tries her best to understand how he’s feeling. “Yeah, yeah, loverboy, I know...but this right here is your problem: you get too deep inside your own head and worry way too much, which causes you to eventually explode. Worrying is normal and okay or whatever, but you let it get to a point where it eats you alive. Have you considered that, maybe, if you had just talked to Marc about your feelings and fears having to do with him, this could have been avoided?” Alix questions honestly. She tries not to sound accusing, but she knows she needs to be blunt with him to get her point across.

Nathaniel sinks a little in his seat. Alix is completely right. If he would just open up about his feelings more often in general, perhaps he wouldn’t have all these trust issues; when all he does is bottle up the more serious things that are bothering him, especially those fears having to do with other people, all he can do is assume how things are, rather than know how they actually are.

Maybe if he had just kept it together and asked Marc about what he had seen between him and Luka that night, everything would be just fine right now. But, because he already had so many feelings bottled up for Marc--fondness, as well as fear of being used--seeing him look at another boy like that when he likes him so much caused him to finally explode. “I’m not good with words; that’s why Marc is the comic script writer, after all,” Nath excuses through mumbles.

“Well, it sounds like the comic won’t be able to go on for much longer if you continue to hide your feelings from him. Once Marc starts speaking to you again, whenever that'll be, you’re going to have to start being open with him, Nath, no matter how much the idea terrifies you,” Alix minds. “But really, I think you might be surprised at how Marc will take you being so honest with him; you did say yourself he’s nice and empathetic.”

Nathaniel takes a deep breath as he soaks in Alix’s words, finally lifting his fork to start on his lunch.

“Yeah... Maybe you’re right,” Nathaniel agrees softly. He's scared out of his mind over the idea of being so honest with Marc, but what else can he do to mend their friendship?
“Thanks for the advice, Alix.”
Chapter Summary

Marc confides to Luka what’s bothering him

Marc is speed walking to the furthest, barren lunch table he has his eyes locked onto, not daring to look anywhere else. He just wants to get there now, and to think about nothing other than making it there. When he arrives at his destination and takes a seat--nearly tripping once or twice over his own feet--he sets his lunch-filled tray down on the table, a whine coming up his throat.

He was afraid something like that was going to happen--getting a good look at Nathaniel, and being unable to break away from gazing at his gorgeous aquamarine eyes when he’s been trying his hardest to avoid him…They may be on a bit of a break at the moment, but that doesn’t change the way Marc feels for Nathaniel, so it’s difficult not to look at him when Marc knows he’s there.

That’s not the only thing bothering Marc right now though, but it is making his problem worse...

As the raven hums out of discontentment, he earns a warm chuckle from Luka, who has taken a seat beside him. The cyan-haired boy gently pats his back. Marc doesn’t need to say anything for Luka to understand what the cries are all about; he had been there for the beginning of Marc and Nath’s argument--it happened on the Liberty, after all--and has already been told by Marc everything else that followed after they ran off the boat, including their break proposed by Marc.

If Luka is totally honest, he’s astounded the boys have gone nearly a week without any contact from each other. Not only has he seen it on their faces, but heard it from the songs in the boys’ hearts--neither of them seem to be doing all too well without the other. Of course, they had lived and survived through everything life dealt them before knowing each other, but it seems as though their qualities of life became so much better once the two had become friends. Nathan makes Marc feel complete, and Luka is sure of vice versa, too. At the end of the day, no matter what happens, Marc and Nathaniel make each other contented, so it only makes sense that the boys are feeling pretty miserable now that they have put their friendship on hold.

“I know. It’s gonna be a little hard not to see him, going to the same school and all,” Luka says, piercing a roasted potato slice with his fork before bringing it up to his mouth.

“Yeah,” Marc says softly, a blush beginning to grow on his face; seeing him wasn’t the only thing he was groaning over--there’s something he wants to admit to Luka, but he’s feeling rather embarrassed over it.

One of Luka’s brows raise as he watches Marc’s face heat up. He sets his fork down, too curious now to work on his lunch. “What is it?” the elder of the two questions, causing Marc’s blush to darken. “Come on, you can tell me,” he assures, twisting his body a little on the bench to face Marc better.

A small sigh escapes Marc’s mouth. He wants to pull up the hoodie on his jacket to hide the shy look on his face, but there isn’t much of a point to it when he's only around Luka; he knows that it’s perfectly okay to be honest and talk to Luka about what's bothering him, though the subject on his mind is making him feel a bit ashamed.
“I think…I think I was too harsh on him, Luka… And I really miss him,” Marc admits, the embarrassment seeping through his voice.

He feels so stupid.

“I’ve not like I’ve forgotten what he did or anything like that, but…I forgive him for it, you know? I think, maybe… I should have just given us the night to cool off, and then really talk about what happened the next day, but I was just so upset, I just couldn’t think straight and come up with a better plan,” Marc explains. Considering he had told Luka just a day or two ago that he wanted to be independent and enjoy himself without Nath, he’s feeling extra embarrassed to admit this.

Luka offers Marc a sad smile, scooting himself in closer to the boy. “Marc, you were really upset over what happened—rightfully so… At the time, if you felt like it was best to have a break from him, that’s okay. If you’re ready to talk to him now, that’s okay, too. Maybe Nath needed to be in the doghouse for a minute, so he could really think about the gravity of what he did.”

Marc hums almost inaudibly at the wisdom Luka offers to him, playing anxiously with his fingers. “Yeah, that’s true, but…I’m pretty guilty of getting jealous when it comes to Nath talking to other people, too,” Marc confesses, cheeks a deep shade of red as the shame in his body rises. He knows it’s pathetic to have that kind of possessiveness towards the boy he likes, but it’s the honest truth, so he’s going to tell Luka about it. “Maybe I’ve never blown up the way Nath had with me the other day, but…I have to be honest and say that I can sympathize with how he felt. It’s like…him and I are so close, yet…we’ve kept how we really feel about each other totally locked away for what feels like forever,” Marc tries to explain, idly using his fork to shove some of the food around on his tray.

“Since I like him so much, and thought, before all this, maybe he liked me, whenever I had seen him talking to someone else, I worried that more than just a friendly conversation was going on between him and whoever, and I’d panic over it… It’s irrational, I know, but I have such strong feelings for him that I get scared sometimes, and I know he feels the same way. It’s almost like…we’ve been together all this time, but never decided to talk about what exactly we are to each other, and what we’re doing with our relationship. Nathaniel might have been a bit…extreme the other day, but I can understand it, to some extent. I think he just needs to work on expressing his feelings more, in a healthy way, and so do I.”

Wow. Marc really hasn’t talked that much without a pause since…well, his whole life, so once he stops speaking, he grabs his water bottle and gulps the contents down, the plastic crackling from the pressure.

While the words aren’t funny, Luka chuckles at the dramatic way Marc chugs his water. He’s also entirely impressed and happily surprised with Marc’s impromptu speech, and has a big smile on his face. “Well, I’d say you’re doing a damn good job at expressing your feelings more than ever right now, so that’s really good. It’s definitely an improvement, Marc,” Luka assures, squeezing Marc’s shoulder.

Marc smiles shyly at the validation, almost unsure of how to handle it. “The only thing is, I… Is it bad that I’ve still been thinking about him, maybe even more than before, ever since I’ve been keeping myself from spending time with him? I mean, yeah, I’ve been doing all the fun things I like to do without him, like playing video games by myself and watching movies… I even started writing my own solo story! But…I can’t help but to think of how much more fun it all would be if I could do these things with him.”

Luka smirks a little as Marc speaks; it’s so clear he’s got it bad for Nath, and it’s really quite sweet to witness. “I don’t think that’s a bad thing—no at all. You really like him, and always seem to have a really good time with him, so it only makes sense you want to be around Nathan again. I know you
talked the other day about wanting to be more independent, but I think you already are; you just love
this guy and want to be with him, and that’s a very human thing to desire. When you have feelings
like that for someone, it just feels better to have them there with you, even when you’re doing
something that’s already pretty fun on its own,” Luka explains, sounding as though he himself
understands these feelings all too well.

The ‘L’ word catches Marc by complete surprise, but he really can’t deny it, which only makes his
face go red for the nth time. He really does love him, doesn’t he? Marc doesn’t drop off on the
conversation though, and listens thoroughly to what Luka has to say. By the end of his spiel, he’s
feeling rather assured.

“...And you said you could only explain things through your guitar,” Marc chuckles. “You’re right;
I...I’d think the same thing, if someone came to me dealing with something like this. When you have
feelings for someone, it’s only natural to want to be with them,” he agrees, smiling bashfully. “Thank
you, Luka... I’m feeling a lot better now,” the boy sighs, finally having the appetite to dig into his
food.

A grin is plastered on Luka's face—he's so happy to help someone he would call a best friend, and
he's feeling a bit relieved about Marc's understanding and acceptance of his own feelings. “No
problem, man; I’m glad to hear it!”

"So, when are you going to talk to him, then?” Luka questions.
The Text Message

Chapter Notes

chapter under construction, but still readable to continue onto the next lol

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Just as he’s getting ready to leave the cafeteria to go sketch on the courtyard stairs (and wishing he could do so with Marc by his side), Nathaniel feels a light buzzing in his pocket. Huh, that’s weird. The only person who ever texts him during school hours is—Oh my god.

It has to be him.

Nathaniel fumbles with his phone once he snatches it from his pocket. Dear God, is it a message from Marc? It couldn't be, right? It has to be a game notification or something, not a text. Before he can even check to see what the buzzing was all about, clumsiness in his movements causes the phone to take a tumble and smack right onto the lunch table, much to Alix’s amusement. She chortles at the pitiful display, shaking her head at Nathaniel. “Jeez, dude; you trying to break the damn thing?” Alix snorts.

Ignoring the teasing, Nath rushes to pick his phone right back up; as much as he would love to retaliate, this is much more important right now—if he in fact does have a message from who he thinks. As he locks his eyes onto the screen, which, thankfully, didn’t shatter during the fall, his hand tightens around the phone. Nath was right; it is a message...and it's from Marc. “Oh my God, it’s him, i-it’s Marc,” his voice trembles, taking no time to slide the message open with a shaky finger.

Marc : Can you meet me in the art room? I need to talk to you.

As he reads the message over, Nathaniel feels his heart sink deep into his chest. Is he reading this correctly? He looks over Marc’s text two or three more times, just to be sure he isn’t seeing things. “He...he wants to talk?” Nathaniel whimpers, darting his eyes from the message, over to his friend sitting beside him. There's no doubt in his mind that this can't be anything good. “Oh God, Alix—”

“Dude,” she interrupts, placing a hand onto Nathaniel’s shoulder and firmly gripping onto it. “You’ve got to relax before you really screw up your phone,” she attempts to lighten the mood, a small smile on her face. “What exactly did he say to you?” Alix questions as nonchalantly as possible, curiously trying to peek over at Nath’s phone screen.

Nathaniel takes a deep breath before holding his phone out towards Alix, displaying the text for her to read. “He wants me to meet him in the art room,” he paraphrases—despite showing her the message. He pulls the phone back shortly to stare at the nerve-racking message once more. What else could it mean besides Marc is ready to tell him that he's letting him go? “What do I do?” Nathaniel whimpers, a frown on his face as he looks over Marc’s contact name and the rainbow emote next to it, a picture Nathan loves of the boy placed above it.

A puzzled look on her face, Alix raises a brow at Nathaniel; she doesn’t understand why—rather, how Nath could even consider doing anything other than go see Marc right now. “Don’t you want to talk to him?” she asks, pulling her hand away from his shoulder. “You’ve been waiting for something like this all week, haven’t you? It’s all you’ve been able to think about! Now’s your
chance to patch things up!"

“W-Well, yeah I wanna talk to him!” Nathaniel quickly acknowledges with a reddening face. His hand grips tightly to the phone as turquoise eyes continue looking over Marc’s picture. God, Nathaniel misses him so much his chest is aching just looking at the photo. “B-But...I’m scared he wants to tell me it’s all over or something,” Nathaniel admits. "What if that’s why he wants to see me? Just to tell me that he doesn’t want to see me? God, Alix, I can’t do this,” he whines, tension building up throughout his body. If Nathan thinks a week without Marc is unbearable, how is he going to feel if Marc never wants to speak with him ever again? What would he even do without him? He doesn’t want to imagine such a horrible scenario.

Despite feeling a bit sorry that Nathaniel is thinking this way, there's absolutely no way she's going to let him dwell on such negative ideas without doing anything about it. “Yes, you can,” Alix assures. “You can’t avoid this, Nath, even if it is going to be something you don’t want to hear. Which, I doubt it will be anything like that,” she speaks honestly. “Marc likes you so much, man. He’s probably just ready to forgive you or something. We can’t be sure unless you go talk to him, though,” she points out. “And ignoring him when he’s finally reaching out to you will just make things worse.”

Ugh. He hates how right Alix is. He’s just...so scared to finally be confronted by Marc. At this point, it really feels like anything could happen, and Nathaniel can’t take it; he’s desperate to know the outcome of this messy situation, but terrified of what it could be, making him hesitant to face this.

“Dammit,” he says under his breath, defeated by Alix’s reasoning. Nathaniel takes a deep breath, typing away at his keyboard before pressing send and shoving his phone back into his pocket. “I told him I’ll be there in a minute,” Nathan mutters, earning a proud smile from Alix.

“Atta boy,” she nods, giving Nathaniel a few hard pats on his back before practically shoving him off the bench, as if to send him off to his destination. “Just remember, be kind and give Marc plenty of time to speak; don’t even think about interrupting him!” Alix warns knowingly (to Nathaniel’s genuine surprise) as she points in his face.

Nathaniel can’t help the laugh that slips from his mouth at Alix’s lecturing, despite how tense he’s feeling. “What makes you the relationship expert, anyways?” he smiles a little, standing up from the edge of the bench.

Alix chuckles back at his question, folding her arms. “C’mon. I hang with all the girls in Miss Bustier’s class; I’m bound to know a thing or two at this point,” she points out.

“Now go follow my advice and win him back, Romeo.”

With a nod and a bit of an anxious smile, Nathaniel starts walking, hands gripping tightly to the straps of his messenger bag. He’s really doing this, isn’t he? He’s finally going to speak with Marc again after a brutal week without him. What exactly is going to happen when he sees him? What does Marc even have to say to him? Nathan knows it's pointless to try and figure it all out before even meeting up with Marc, but he just can’t stop himself; Marc means the entire world to him, more even, so he can’t help but to worry he might be on his way to losing his other half for good.

Nathan’s steps soon come to a halt as he is met with a familiar door: the entrance to the art room. Marc must be just feet behind it by now. Despite the fear inside Nathaniel yelling at him to turn the other way and book it, just avoid this whole situation, he does his best to shove it aside. He has to do this; he has no choice if he wants even a chance of not losing Marc. He bites his lip before turning the cool handle of the door, slowly pushing it open.
At this point, what’s the worst that could happen, right?

Chapter End Notes

next chapter is a much longer one than any of the previous!
As he slowly pushes the art room door open and peeks inside, Nathaniel’s eyes are immediately drawn to a bright red jacket, one he would know from anywhere.

There Marc is, scribbling on what looks to be one of the last pages in his journal as he sits alone at the very table where the two first met—the spot where not only have they spent countless hours working on their comic together, but enjoyed each other’s company after a hard day, showed each other how much they care for one another with seemingly simple words and little gestures, and goofed off so much to the point where they laughed until they cried.

As his eyes lock onto Marc, half of his being yearns to sprint over to the boy, hug the life out of him and tell Marc how badly he misses him, while the other half is fearful to even keep looking at him.

Before Nathaniel can decide on what to do in this situation, Marc turns in his swivel chair at the sound of the slightly squeaking door being pushed open. Though having expected Nathaniel to come, Marc takes in a quiet, yet sharp breath at the sight of his best friend standing in the doorway; it’s startling to see him this close after their agonizingly long week apart. It’s just as exciting as it is terrifying.

“Hi,” Marc breaks the ice as he sets his shortened pencil down, hands anxiously gripping at the table in front of him.

Despite feeling a little sick over having no idea what’s about to go down, Nathaniel feels his shoulders relax at the sound of Marc’s voice. Nathaniel might truly be in deep shit right now, but that can’t take away the fact he loves this boy and feels comforted being around him, no matter what’s happening between them. He flashes Marc a small, apologetic looking smile.

“Hey,” Nath greets back quietly, stepping into the art room and letting the door shut behind him. His fingernails scratch at the strap of his messenger bag as he looks Marc’s face. “I, uh. I got your text,” he starts, which, yeah, duh he got Marc’s text—he showed up, and not to mention Marc had sent Nath a message back—but he wants to get the conversation rolling; he’s much too anxious for small talk right now, and knows it’s best to get to the point in this situation. “O-Obviously,” he mumbles.

“So you...wanted to talk?”

Marc smiles a little at the obvious statement, which catches Nath a bit off guard. Honestly? Nathaniel had almost expected to come in here and get yelled at upon arrival by the boy—which, he wouldn’t even blame Marc for doing so. But...here Marc is, smiling at him. Nathaniel can breathe a bit more easily now as he watches the curve of his glossy pink lips, though he isn’t getting his hopes up for the situation to end well. Nathaniel knows he fucked up, and he can’t expect Marc to forgive him, as much as he would love for them to patch things up and continue onward.

“Yeah,” Marc says softly, his grip on the table letting up as he tries to relax. “Come sit,” he offers, pulling out the small swivel chair beside him. As Nathaniel gives him a little nod and walks toward him, Marc becomes too aware of the quickening pace of his heartbeat. It’s not like Marc has anything bad to tell Nathaniel, and it isn’t like he needs to confess that he has feelings for him a second time. It’s just that he’s scared Nathan maybe...had a good time without him, these past few days. N-Not like Marc wanted him to be miserable or anything! He just can’t help but worry that, possibly, this time apart has made Nathaniel realize that he doesn’t really need him, and is better off keeping his distance.

Once Nath sets his bag down and takes a seat, Marc gazes at the boy’s face timidly, his expression
beginning to soften at the comforting sight. It’s been much too long since he’s had the privilege of looking into Nathaniel’s enchanting turquoise eyes, one being almost completely hidden behind crimson hair. Marc has always hoped that one day, he could muster up enough courage to run his fingers through Nathaniel’s soft fringe and push it back to enjoy the full view of his face. He already knows Nathan is beautiful, so he can’t imagine what it would do to his heart to finally see his entire face without any of his hair in the way. Maybe if all goes well, that day will still have a fighting chance to come.

“E-Everything okay?” the redhead questions softly, watching as Marc seems to zone out on his face. “I mean, besides the obvious.” The staring isn’t exactly making him uncomfortable, but it is making him confused, to say the least. Why is he being looked at like this? It certainly can’t be that Marc is admiring him or something, right? He knows Marc has feelings for him, which, he still kind of can’t believe—though Nath isn’t quite sure if Marc’s feelings have changed since they last spoke—but for Marc to find him cute or something? There’s just no way, especially not right now, when Marc is probably still really upset with him.

Once he registers that the sound of Nathaniel’s voice filling his ears isn’t all in his head, Marc becomes saucer-eyed. “Oh! Yeah! S-Sorry,” he frantically apologizes as he finally draws his eyes away from Nathaniel’s, a blush of embarrassment burning his cheeks. “I-I just got...I-lost in thought, I guess,” he excuses shyly, hoping the explanation will suffice. “Anyways, I, um...I-I asked you here because I’ve done a lot of thinking. E-Ever since...you know,” Marc says softly, almost wanting to smack himself for handling the situation so awkwardly, but he pushes through it, for Nathaniel’s sake. “And I’ve definitely...realized...some things,” Marc admits. He’s a bit fearful to be anything but vague for now, considering he isn’t sure where Nathaniel stands with him at the moment. For all he knows, Nathaniel may very well not care for him anymore.

Though Nath can’t be completely sure of what Marc means due to the lack of detail in his words, he does his best to keep his composure, despite the nagging in his brain telling him that Marc must hate him now—what Marc means is that he’s finally realized Nathaniel is bad for him, and is going to cut him out of his life for good.

“S-So have I. Like, a lot,” Nath promises, anxiously picking at the edges of his nails. “Lots of thinking and realizing things,” Nathaniel assures, hoping that with that knowledge, Marc might possibly give him a chance to explain those things, if he hadn’t been planning on doing so. The words seem to earn Nathaniel a bit of a smile from Marc.

Marc knows it’s up to him to speak now—he’s the one who invited Nath here in the first place—but the idea that they may be on completely different pages is making it hard for him to say something. What if Marc tells Nathaniel he forgives him, and Nathaniel says that it doesn’t matter anymore, because he doesn’t want to see him again? Maybe he’s thinking way too hard about this. He just has to spit out what he needs to say, and not think about it, otherwise they’ll never know what the other is thinking.

“I’ve missed you. A-A lot,” Marc breaks the silence, a hot blush spreading across his cheeks. Sure, admitting that is more than terrifying for Marc, but he knows it’s possible that maybe, just maybe, Nathaniel might be having his own worries and doubts, too, making it hard for him to be completely honest with his feelings. “I-It’s okay if you didn’t miss me, though! I just...I th-thought I’d...g-get that out of the way, before saying anything else.”

Nathaniel watches Marc’s face as he speaks, completely dumbstruck by the revelation. He’s almost certain he just heard the boy wrong. He has been so sure, so afraid that Marc wouldn’t mind having him out of his life, so to hear he really was missed by him? Nath can’t believe it; he’s overjoyed. Though, to hear Marc even consider that Nathaniel might not have missed him, too? His heart sinks a
“God, Marc, of course I’ve missed you,” he assures, moving his chair in closer to Marc’s without thought. He has to hold himself back from taking Marc’s hands into his own, wanting nothing more than to hold them tightly as he promises Marc he truly means it. “I’ve wanted to talk to you so bad; there’s so much I’ve been wanting to tell you.”

Whoa, wait, what? Nathaniel just so confidently admitted to missing Marc? And on top of that, he has things he wants to say to him? A little stunned by the words, Marc takes a moment to process the information before he can even respond.

“Really?” is all Marc can say at first, and the redness on his face amplifies out of embarrassment. “Well,” he tries again, twisting a drawstring from his jacket around his finger as he watches Nathaniel tentatively. “Now would be a pretty good time to tell me what you’ve been wanting to say, don’t you think?” Marc suggests.

Shit. Nathaniel knows what Alix said, to give Marc plenty of time to speak, but he was just so eager to let the boy know that he’s really learned his lesson, that he almost forgot the advice he had been given. “Since you’re the one who wanted to meet—I mean, not that I didn’t want to meet, too, I just mean…! Since you approached me, you should get to talk first,” Nathan prattles, hoping he doesn’t sound as stupid as he feels.

Marc’s apprehension seems to dwindle down as he watches Nathaniel trip all over his words, a warm smile growing on his face. While he does feel a bit sorry that Nathaniel is so obviously on edge over the situation, he can’t help but find it sweet he cares so much, and clearly is trying his hardest to be careful with his word choice. “It’s okay,” Marc assures. “What I want to say can wait a bit…I’d rather hear what you have to say first.”

Well, in that case, it’s alright if Nathaniel takes the floor, right? Alix, your advice was good, but it seems that Marc wants him to talk, so he’ll do just that.

“A-Alright,” he nods. Nath is not an eloquent person, not by any means, but he hopes that for Marc, he can get his words out decently enough. After a moment of silently collecting his thoughts, Nathaniel takes a deep breath. “I just wanted to tell you that…what I did to you the other night was awful, and completely inexcusable. And I’m so sorry for it, Marc,” he begins, fingernails digging anxiously at his thighs. “I know I can’t take away what I did, even though I really wish I could. I never want to hurt you, or humiliate you, because you’re the last person who deserves that—and I care about you so much,” Nathaniel speaks as he gazes at Marc’s face, despite how much it’s causing his heart to feel like it’s being squeezed in a tight fist.

“I’m going to work on being more open about my feelings, because when I don’t, sometimes it all gets so out of hand and overwhelming that I just...blow up, like I did,” Nathaniel acknowledges. “And I don’t want to do that again, especially not to you. You’ve never shown me otherwise that I shouldn’t trust you, Marc, and I never should have reacted the way I did the other day. Deep down, I know that you’ve always had good intentions towards me, yet I allowed myself to lose sight of the fact, just because I got jealous. And already having fears and just…overall uncertainty revolving around us, which, I never let myself tell you about, made it a million times worse.”

“I just get so… in my own head sometimes, because I’m too scared to talk about things that are bothering me. But when I keep it all to myself, I end up creating irrational scenarios in my head and believing them, and just fucking explode when it gets to be too much. It’s...it’s almost like I come up with these ideas, and let myself believe in them as a way of protecting myself, before someone can hurt me, I guess,” Nathaniel admits, trying to keep the shakiness in his voice at bay. “But in doing so, I hurt you, when you didn’t even do anything wrong. Which really, really sucks,” Nathaniel sighs.
“A-After all this, I realized that...bottling up my feelings all the time hurts not only me in the end, but the people I care for, too. And I can’t let myself do that anymore,” he explains, watching Marc’s eyes as he speaks.

“Even though it can be...really embarrassing—to say the least—talking about feelings and stuff...i-if I had just told you I liked you before, a-and how I was feeling unsure about how you might feel about me, none of this would have happened. Honestly, there’s a lot of situations that would have gone so much differently if I would’ve just communicated better in the first place,” Nathaniel confesses.

“Like, the day we met. I just...yelled at you for the Ladybug misunderstanding, accusing you of trying to make a fool out of me, when I could’ve just sat down and talked through the miscommunication with you. B-But even when you tried to explain yourself, I didn’t listen, because I was scared of getting hurt, which just ended up hurting you. How messed up is that? Sometimes...I really can’t believe that you took my hand after how horrible I was to you,” Nath laughs hollowly.

“I’m seriously so lucky you gave me a second chance that day, Marc...because my life has been so much greater with you in it. You’re seriously just...the most wonderful person, and I’m so grateful to have gotten the privilege to know you. A-And as much as I would love to always have you in my life, I-I understand if you don’t want me around anymore, b-because of the awful things I’ve done to you; I-I know that me making an effort to change doesn’t take away what’s happened in the past,” the boy recognizes. “So...yeah. That’s kind of...what I’ve been thinking about lately. H-Hopefully I made some sort of sense. Basically, I’m sorry, a-and I totally respect whatever decision you make towards me being in your life,” Nathaniel finally concludes.

Whatever words Marc had prepared to say to Nathaniel have escaped him entirely. What could he say, really? Nathaniel had said it all. Being spoken to by him so openly and honestly about what happened wasn’t something Marc had foreseen happening today. Marc already knew that Nathaniel was truly sorry, he’s known since this whole mess happened, but he never expected him to be this apologetic, especially when Marc is feeling a little guilty for putting their friendship on hold in the first place. Moreover, Marc wasn’t expecting for Nathaniel to prove that he truly seems to understand what he needs to work on emotionally—he clearly isn’t just blowing smoke. Nathaniel means what he said, and Marc knows it.

Overwhelmingly proud of Nathan for being so vulnerable with him, Marc’s eyes begin filling with warm tears. Without an ounce of hesitation, he scoots his chair into Nathaniel’s and wraps his arms tightly around the boy, wanting nothing more than to hold him right now and show him how much the apology means to him. “Nathaniel,” he speaks softly, face pressed into his neck. “I’m so proud of you for speaking out to me,” Marc whispers, arms squeezing harder around Nathaniel. “I forgive you. I’m not going anywhere, okay?”

Though initially stunned by the embrace, Nathaniel puts his arms around Marc’s waist, holding the boy as closely as he can. The wavering of Marc’s voice, along with the compassionate words he speaks, sparks tears to overflow in his eyes. Normally, in a situation where he was on the brink of crying, he would be blinking the tears back, facing away from anybody around him, but now, more than ever, he knows it’s okay to be honest with his feelings, especially in front of Marc.

“Th-Thank you, Marc,” he struggles to speak, his body trembling as he tries to talk through his tears. “F-For being so kind to me, and giving me another chance. I don’t exactly f-feel like I deserve it, but I’m glad to know you still want me around,” Nathaniel stutters out quietly, pressing the pads of his fingers into Marc’s back with the need to have him as close as possible.

Marc can’t help but to frown over Nathaniel’s weeping, as well as him feeling undeserving of
forgiveness. While staying close, he slowly releases Nathaniel from his embrace, pulling away so that he can look at him. As he notices the tears that have fallen onto Nathaniel’s cheek, Marc instinctively reaches a hand up, gently brushing them away with his thumb, offering him a sympathetic smile.

“You do deserve it, Nath. What happened…it doesn’t define who you are; you’ve just been struggling is all,” Marc assures with a soft voice, making no move to pull his hand from Nath’s cheek. “On top of that, you showed me you’re truly willing to work on expressing how you feel, which really makes you even more deserving,” he points out. “W-Which isn’t to say I think you’ll be an open book from now on or something like that…especially not to start. I know it’s going to take some time for you to get more comfortable talking about your feelings, and that’s perfectly okay,” he promises. “Just as long as you make an effort to not keep everything bottled up, you know?”

As Nathaniel is spoken to with so much kindness by the boy he adores, he feels more tears building up and threatening to spill. Craving to have the close contact and physical comfort once more, he pulls Marc back into a bear hug, burying his face into the boy’s collarbone. How did he get so damn lucky as to meet someone as understanding, patient and caring as Marc? He will never know, but he’ll always be so grateful for him. He’s going to make sure that from now on, every single day of his life, Marc knows how much he is cared for and appreciated by him. “You’re my favorite, you know that?” he laughs gently through his tears, a couple spilling onto Marc’s shirt. “Thank you for being so kind,” he murmurs, feeling himself start to relax as he’s surrounded by Marc’s warmth.

Easily melting into the hug, Marc rests his cheek atop Nathaniel’s head. “Of course. And thank you for talking to me about this. I know I already said it, but I’m proud of you. I know it isn’t easy opening up, so it means the world to me that you did,” he assures softly. “I-I promise I’ll try to be a bit more open with you, too,” he explains, a pink tint coloring his face.

Hesitantly pulling out of the embrace, Nathaniel shoots a curious look at Marc. He had almost forgotten that Marc has yet to speak...Not that he doesn’t care what Marc has to say, because he really does; he just got a little caught up in this tender moment of resolve. Silently prompting him to take his turn to speak, he watches Marc intently.

“I, uh…I owe you an apology…” Marc starts, face flush as he pulls his chair back a little, tugging lightly at his gloves. “I-I had…let my emotions get the best of me the other day, too. I-I retaliated when I really shouldn’t have, a-and said something really hurtful towards you, and I’m sorry,” he apologizes, glancing at Nathan’s eyes momentarily. “I-I should also let you know that…I-I’ve been pretty guilty of feeling jealous when it comes to you, too,” he admits sheepishly, shyly pushing some hair behind his ear.

“I-I’d get insecure sometimes, s-seeing you be friendly with other people, s-since I wasn’t sure of how you felt for me,” he says truthfully, and feeling a little silly about it. “I-If I would’ve just been honest with you about my feelings, I-I’m sure I would’ve ended up feeling a lot better. B-But I kept it all to myself, because I was worried about what you’d think,” he acknowledges.

“I-I think we both realize now that…i-it’s important to talk about these sorts of things, since keeping it all to ourselves has proven to be…not such a good idea,” Marc explains, letting out a soft chuckle. “So I just…wanted to say I’m sorry: I’m sorry for what I said to you...and for not being very open about my feelings, either,” he apologizes, a bit of a guilty look on his face. “It’s something I’m going to have to work on, too.”

Though surprised he’s being apologized to, having not anticipated it in the slightest, Nathaniel smiles
warmly at Marc’s sincerity. “It’s okay, Marc. I’m not upset with you in the slightest,” Nathaniel promises, blushing softly as he rests a hand on his shoulder. “Th-Thank you for being honest with me, though...I-It means a lot,” he smiles softly. “I know it’ll be a little difficult for the both of us to talk about our feelings and stuff more often, b-but at least we’ll have each other through it, right? I mean, we’ve already made a lot of progress just today, I’d say.”

Nathaniel’s positivity and support causes a smile to grow on Marc’s face. “Especially you, Nath. You really impressed me today, you know? I really wasn’t expecting you to say everything you did, b-but I’m really happy you were able to talk to me,” Marc tells him softly.

“Well, it just goes to show I’ll do anything to get the guy I like back,” Nathaniel teases, though not without making his own face go red. “Honestly, I’m super excited we’re talking again, though,” he beams. “It’s been the longest week without you. I can’t tell you how many times I wished I could just...be with you, you know? Nothing’s really the same without you, I realized pretty quickly.”

Cheeks reddened, Marc smiles bashfully at Nathaniel’s words, nodding with understanding. He had a pretty rough time without Nathaniel this week, too, and all Marc wants now is to be by his side again. “Well, I’m here now, a-and I’d really love to make up for lost time,” the raven assures. “M-Maybe we could even hang out tonight, s-since it’s Friday and all,” Marc shyly suggests, peeking at Nathaniel. “I-If you want to, that is.”

A soft smile creeps up on Nathaniel’s face as he watches a timid Marc speak. He wonders, would they be hanging out as just friends tonight? Or would it turn out to be...something more? He has a feeling Marc might be wondering the same thing, considering the shy way he’s asking him to hang out. Nathaniel guesses they will just have to feel this out together, and he’s more than willing to do so. “Absolutely,” he assures.

As the two smile rather absentmindedly at each other, both relieved with the way they worked things out, the boys flinch as a loud ringing infiltrates their ears. It doesn’t take long for Marc and Nathaniel to realize it’s the school bell, warning that the next period is about to begin.

“Already?” Nathaniel whines, breaking his gaze from Marc as he checks the art room’s clock. Unfortunately, the bell isn’t out of order; the time is just right for the bell to ring.

Nath reaches down, grabbing his messenger back from off the floor with a sigh. He just got back to being able to talk to Marc again, and now he has to go back to class? Time is such a cruel mistress.

Marc, looking just as disappointed as Nathaniel, sighs softly, picking up his own backpack as well, resting a strap over his shoulder. “Sounds like it,” he nods.

While trying his hardest not to pout over having to leave, Nathan stands up from his seat and slings his bag across his body, watching as Marc seems hesitant to get up and go to his next class without him. A warm smile and even warmer blush decorating Nathaniel’s face, he reaches his hand out to Marc, offering to help him up.

Surprised by Nathaniel’s sweet gesture, Marc’s cheeks are stained bright red. “Thanks,” he says as he carefully takes Nathan’s hand into his. He pulls himself up from the chair, keeping hold of Nathaniel’s hand even as he’s standing, reluctant to let him go. “I guess I’ll see you soon. M-Meet me by the courtyard steps after school?” he suggests, looking at Nathaniel sheepishly.

Squeezing lightly to Marc’s hand, Nathaniel smiles at him. “I’ll be there,” he promises, melting at the gentle way Marc is looking at him. He really wishes he had the courage to kiss him right now, because he wants to, really badly. There is something he can do though that probably won’t kill him. Nathaniel takes a step forward, shly pressing his lips against Marc’s cheek. Once he pulls away after
a second or two, he hesitantly releases Marc’s hand and steps back, grinning bashfully as he admires Marc’s shy smile and reddened face, relieved by the boy’s reaction towards the little kiss. “S-See you in a little,” Nath says softly.

A delighted and dumbstruck Marc stares in awe at Nathaniel. Did he really just do that? Did Nath really just kiss his cheek? He must be in a dream… Marc’s heart might just burst over how ecstatic he is. He hopes, maybe, Nathaniel will kiss him like that again sometime soon. Maybe tonight, even, if he’s really lucky. A little giggle bubbles up to his lips at the thought. “Y-Yeah, see you,” he says softly, earning a little nod and loving smile from Nathaniel before Marc watches him take his leave for his next class.

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