The Little Things
by panda013 (Amiria_Raven)

Summary

“I only realized who you were by accident, really, and then I didn’t even believe it.”

Because it was just those little things that made it so hard to ignore the similarities between the two.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.

It was only the little things.

They were only tiny similarities, really, and Marinette found them incredibly easy to dismiss. It didn’t matter that both of them were blond, or that they both had green eyes, or that sometimes they both walked like a model. It didn’t matter that sometimes her breath hitched in her throat when the other one did something so very like her classmate. It definitely didn’t matter that her eyes widened when her classmate said something in a manner almost too reminiscent of her other friend.

Yes, they were both just friends to her…although she wanted more with just her classmate.

And that kitty cat didn’t hold enough of her heart to sway her. He really didn’t.

Marinette laughed whenever Alya’s crazy theory came up—the one she supported with that picture on her phone, where she’d colored over the Adrien Agreste with, of all things, Chat Noir’s outfit.

Because Chat’s hair was far more unkempt than Adrien’s, and just because his costume had green eyes didn’t mean the real person behind the mask did, after all. The swagger that Chat had, as if all the world were his stage, was totally not like Adrien’s runway walk. At all. And in those few moments when Chat’s sadness showed through his mask, when he accidentally let something slip about a poor home life, he didn’t remind her of the lonely side of her crush. And Adrien’s love of

…Right?

That time they were grouped with Alya and Nino for a play reading, and they were all goofing off in the library and he had called her *Princess* didn’t mean anything. It was in the script, and it *definitely* didn’t sound like Chat when he spoke to her while she was in her civilian clothes. The smirk that teased his lips, only to be quashed immediately, didn’t hold any meaning.

The mischievous twinkle in his eyes, quickly banished, didn’t send her mind reeling back to the same expression, the same shade of green, as a boy clad in black leather teasingly pecked her on the cheek before she could react and then scampered away.

The pained expression on Chat’s face when he and Ladybug had to deal with an akuma who was just lonely didn’t send a twinge of pain to her heart because of the gentle smile of the boy in her mind. The heartfelt words he had yelled to try to distract the akuma while they tried to get his game controller away from him totally wasn’t a cry for help that she had seen in Adrien’s eyes just a few hours before, when he had received a call from his father’s assistant because his father wanted to speak to him, instead of a call from the man himself.

The faraway look in her partner’s eyes didn’t send her heart into a series of sharp pains as she tried to think of some way, any way at all, to take away his loneliness. It didn’t remind her of the exact same urge to lean forward and hug Adrien whenever he was distraught about something, and it certainly didn’t remind her of the expression that her classmate had made when his father hadn’t even responded to his calls on the day of Parent Show and Tell.

Nothing about Chat reminded her of Adrien at all; nothing about Adrien was remotely similar to Chat.

So why was she watching Chat like she always watched Adrien?

Why had she started to tease Adrien as if he was her silly kitty cat?

*Why couldn’t she separate the two in her mind?*

It was only a minor interference at first, earning her a bruise or two, worried looks from Chat, and occasional questions from her parents or Alya. Once, when there was a light cut across her cheek, Nino had noticed first, since Alya was late to class, and had asked her about it.

But it was nothing Marinette couldn’t handle. It was a scratch, for heaven’s sake, and she was Ladybug. She’d had worse, and she *definitely* didn’t get these tiny injuries just because her mind was caught up in something Chat had said or done that was *so Adrien* that she started thinking of the boy. Ladybug didn’t get *distracted.*

Oh, but she *did.*

It was the most ridiculous thing, but the akuma that the super duo were facing had thrown Chat Noir into the Seine. He scrambled out quickly, shaking himself like a cat, but the akuma was still focused on him.

“Chat!” she felt herself yell, flinging herself forward. Her warning had alerted him in time, though, and he dashed to the side, snatched up his fallen weapon, rolled, and was safe from the whip of
vines that The Green Lady was using. When he looked up, his wet hair obscuring his vision, the black-clad boy had reached his hand up to brush the hair away.

The side-swept look floored her—Chat looked so Adrien that she almost called his name, until—

“Ladybug!” she watched his eyes widen and, belatedly, she tried to leap backwards.

The vines caught her by the ankle and with a strangled yelp, she was lifted into the air, dangling helplessly as another vine wrapped around her right hand and caused her yo-yo fall to the ground. A pained grunt passed her lips as the vines pulled lightly in opposite directions, but she grit her teeth and cursed her own stupidity.

Just because Chat looked like Adrien didn’t mean anything—especially not when she should have been focusing on the fight. But so long as Chat could distract the akuma, Ladybug knew that she’d be able to figure something out.

She opened her mouth to relay this plan but never got the chance.

She hadn’t expected The Green Lady to fling her into the wall of the nearest brick building, and the air rushed from her lungs in a single, painful breath. Stars burst in her line of sight, and a faraway voice shouted out for her, but everything seemed to happen in slow motion as the vines tugged her away from the brick, pulling her closer to the akuma’s green face.

Her lips were moving, and Ladybug had to concentrate much harder than she would have liked to make out even half of the words.

“—nd give me your Miraculous!”

“N…never!” she gasped, the taste of copper on her tongue and the world rushing back to her in a quick rush of light and noise and color. Ladybug struggled uselessly against the vines, feeling far more like Marinette than a superhero, as The Green Lady cackled.

“If you won’t just give me your Miraculous,” she drawled, smacking a desperate-sounding Chat Noir away with one of her vines, “then I’ll just have to take them from you!”

“LADYBUG!” Chat’s cry was heartrending. His voice was just like Adrien’s.

She knew why he was screaming that way when her air was pushed from her lungs again, the solid brick pressing into her back as her head cracked against the wall. Her vision went black and the rest of her body went numb, and for the first time, a shred of fear crept into her heart. Not only would she fail to catch the akuma at this rate, but she would lose her Miraculous and fail Tikki at the same time. She’d fail Chat, and he’d find out who she was.

But she already knew who he was, so wasn’t it only fair?

Her vision was blurred now, shapes slowly coming back as she realized that the vines had released her and she was falling.

Ladybug willed her limbs to move, but she didn’t have her yo-yo, and she was far too out of it to land on her feet. In her present condition, she would be lucky to survive the fall and she’d be useless when it came to attacking and defeating the possessed person. Chat couldn’t purify an akuma either, so they would have to find some way to escape and regroup.

If she survived the fall.
Somewhere above her, The Green Lady shrieked, Adrien’s voice said something in Chat’s cocky attitude, and Ladybug closed her eyes. They weren’t helping her much at the moment, anyway.

And then she felt her direction changing, heard two feet hit the ground and hissed at the pain that suddenly raced through her figure, and when she opened her eyes she was looking up at the underside of Chat’s chin as he grit his teeth, held her close, and ran for all he was worth.

“Where?! WHERE DID YOU GO?!” the shouts of the possessed woman rang out behind them, but Chat didn’t respond as he ducked into an alley, and then into another. His teeth were clenched, his eyes dark, and Ladybug felt a lot more like Marinette than she had ever felt with the mask on.

“Chat,” she managed to voice, but her tone was breathy and croaky and not at all like her normal voice.

“Hush,” he murmured, sparing her a quick, concerned glance before looking up and turning another corner. She merely nodded, curling in on herself a little as the pain throbbed through her bruised and battered form.

It was a few minutes before they burst through the doors of an old warehouse that they occasionally used to hole up in and recuperate. Chat Noir kicked the door closed with his foot, leaning back against it as his chest heaved and he cradled her against him, and she clenched her eyes to keep the tears from falling.

Everything hurt. Her back, her shoulders, her head. Even Chat hadn’t been hurt this bad before, despite the sheer number of times the stupid, stupid cat had gotten between Ladybug and an enemy’s attack. And the conflicting thoughts and emotions running through her mind didn’t help her situation, because now she was listening to him breathe and even that sounded like Adrien. She clenched her eyes at the thought, and suddenly her head exploded in pain and she whimpered, causing the leather-clad boy holding her to look at her in fear.

“Hang on, My Lady,” he made an attempt to soothe her, slowly walking across the room to the makeshift cot that she usually had to make him lie on. “We have to figure out how bad it is and then work on treating it before we go back out to get the akuma…”

“We can’t fix it here,” her voice was soft as he helped her onto the edge of the cot. She slowly reached her hand up to her throbbing head and instantly regretted the light touch, pulling her hand away with a hiss as bright spots infiltrated her vision.

He had stepped to a rundown dresser, where they kept a few bottles of painkillers and water, and grabbed one of each before turning back at her unexpected statement, rushing as soon as he heard her soft sound of discontent.

“What’s on your hand?” he discarded the bottles on the cot near her. He caught her wrist as it fell from the back of her head and his eyes widened at the darker red substance on her already red fingertips. Cursing, he used his teeth to pull off a glove and then reached gently behind her head before she could protest, lightly touching until Ladybug let out a sharp cry and nearly fell off the cot. The look on his face made her blood run cold as he held her up, pulling his hand away from her head.

His fingers were slick with blood, and it made her stomach lurch.

“I hit it,” she supplied, closing her eyes against the spots. “When she slammed me against a building for the second time, I hit my head pretty hard.”
“Ladybu—”

“I think I’ve also fractured a few ribs,” the sound escaping her lips was nearly a sob, and she hated her weakness in this moment. Chat Noir, of all people, was bearing witness to the fall of one of Paris’s superheroes, and it tore her apart inside. “I’ll need the hospital, Chat. I can’t get there on my own, but I can’t be Ladybug when we get there.”

Her words took a moment to sink in and his eyes widened.

“You want…you want to take off the transformation?”

She took a shaking breath. “I’ll have to…but first, we need to try to get the akuma. If I go to the hospital now, they won’t let me out for several days, and at this rate we don’t have that long. She’s more violent than most, and I’m worried about what she’ll do if we leave her to roam unchecked.”

“You can’t fight when you’re injured like this!” Chat looked imploringly into her eyes, but she simply shook her head.

“I have to,” she whispered, her voice breaking.

Everything may hurt, but she was still Ladybug, after all.

“Ladybug, you can’t,” he sounded very near desperate. She didn’t like that sound in her cat’s tone of voice—in Adrien’s voice. “If you try to face her now, you’ll be an easy target!”

“I still have Lucky Charm,” she cut across, looking right into his eyes with the most determined look she could muster. The Marinette in her knew that her eyes were clouded by pain, but the Ladybug side was determined to press forward regardless. “You still have Cataclysm. If we plan it right, we should be fine, Chat. We just have to watch her carefully, and you’ll have to serve as a distraction and find the akuma. I won’t be able to move very quickly, so I’ll have to stay hidden for the most part.”

“My lady,” his voice fell to a soft, pleading tone, “you’ll make your injuries worse.”

“If we do this quickly, I’ll be able to go to the hospital right after,” she retorted, reaching up carefully to run her fingers through his soft blond hair, still damp from his dip in the Seine. “Please, Chat. Trust me.”

He closed his eyes, brows furrowed in an expression that spoke volumes about his internal conflict. She could practically see the gears turning in his head as he contemplated all the possibilities and she positively hated doing this to him. Unfortunately, her sense of duty was much stronger than her value for her own health, and she owed a lot to the city of Paris. Chat Noir would have to suffer watching his love risk her life for just a little while longer, and then later, if they succeeded, he’d get to know something he’d wanted to know for a very long time—the face behind the Ladybug mask.

“We probably won’t be able to get away a second time,” his voice shook as he lifted his ungloved hand, her blood long since wiped away, and placed it gently on her cheek. “If something goes wrong, I will distract her. You have to get away, at all costs. That’s the deal, My Lady—we don’t go if you don’t agree to that. We’ll go straight to the hospital instead, and I’ll go try to handle her myself.”

She bit her lip and then leaned a few inches forward to place her lips to his cool, damp forehead. When she pulled away, she glanced to the side and murmured, “I agree.”
His hand remained on her cheek for several long moments, and at last he lifted his chin to place a light kiss against her cheek. His lips lingered for longer than necessary, but Marinette, or Ladybug, or whichever one was in control at the moment, didn’t protest.

“Let’s go then, My Lady,” he stood slowly, reaching for the discarded medication and handing her the bottle. “Take a few painkillers and drink some water. It’s not much, but it’s better than nothing. We’ll wait a few minutes before heading back out.”

She nodded without a word, taking the items from him gingerly so that she didn’t seriously aggravate her wounds.

“We need to get my yo-yo back,” she said softly, wincing at the hole in her plan as she separated double the usual dose of painkillers from the bottle. “I’ll be completely useless without it.”

“I picked it up on the way out of there.”

The pills went down with a hard swallow and she turned to look at him much more quickly than was necessary. Her partner unhooked an uncharacteristically red item from his belt and passed it to her. She took it from him with a sense of relief and a small, genuine smile. The familiar weight of her weapon in her hand was comforting, and knowing that Chat would be beside her was even more assurance. She could do this…and then she’d have to address the fact that she was absolutely positive that her beloved partner and her idolized crush were one and the same.

“Thank you, Chat,” she found her voice for those words instead, taking another drink from the water bottle before offering it to him.

“An indirect kiss, My Lady?” he tried to pick up his usual tones, although she could tell it was forced. “Have you finally realized how purrfect I am?”

“That’s impawisible,” she tossed back with a smile as he took a drink. She was rather proud of herself, although it took her partner a moment to realize what she had said. A wide, Cheshire grin spread across his face and he chuckled, somehow managing to swallow before he choked, and then he took another drink before handing it back. She screwed the cap back on and dropped it beside her, taking his offered hand.

“Now let’s go for real,” he said softly, snaking his arm around her waist as she dropped hers across his shoulders.

The red-clad girl nodded, smiling.

It took them a little while to find The Green Lady. They had to move carefully because of Ladybug’s injuries, and it had given the possessed woman time to move away from the small greenhouse where they’d first encountered her. At last, though, the super duo found their target making a new home for herself in a park. Vines and leafy plants were popping up at various intervals around the area, and hedges were growing at an alarming rate around the outside of the premises.

“That’s a bit much for a casual home garden,” Chat tried to joke softly, and she just shoved his shoulder lightly, shushing him. Her eyes flicked from place to place in the area, and she finally spotted a closer place to hide.

“Chat, look there,” she murmured, but he heard and followed her gesture. “That’s where I’ll be
hiding. Make sure to keep her distracted so that she doesn’t see me while I use my Lucky Charm.”

“As My Lady wishes,” he smirked at her, but reached for her hands, both of them, and lifted them to his lips, leaving the ghost of a kiss across the knuckles of both hands. “Do whatever it takes for you to stay safe, Ladybug.”

Her heart clenched painfully at the undisguised worry in his startlingly green eyes.

Ladybug tugged her hands gently from Chat Noir’s and reached up to ruffle his hair endearingly, offering him a small smile.

“Cheer up, kitty.” she teased, her hands falling to her side as her eyes trailed back to the park, where their target was working on a section of her hedge. “Once this is over, I’ll let you take me to the hospital, and we can talk about everything then.”

His gaze still remained more serious than Chat Noir’s usual expression, and she couldn’t help but see Adrien in his worried eyes. But then he sighed and surged forward, too quickly for her to react, and placed his lips in the center of her forehead. They lingered for a few moments longer than necessary, but she couldn’t bring herself to pull away. The attention was comforting, and she hated to admit that her heart was trembling at what they needed to do.

But she trusted Chat, and he trusted her judgement.

“Let’s go, My Lady.”

He lifted her into his arms and found his way back to the ground, into an alley that fed into the park’s grounds. There he let her down gingerly, offered her one of his trademark smirks, and darted off towards the greenery, a black blur against the dreary gray of the city street.

“Let’s go, indeed,” she muttered to herself with a grin, waiting for him to cause a ruckus so she could slip over to the spot she’d found from above. It was still within her sights, so as soon as Chat had The Green Lady furiously turned the opposite direction, she braced herself for the onslaught of aches and shooting pains she knew she’d be feeling and bolted across the street, flinging her yo-yo at a streetlamp and swinging across to prevent the biggest part of the pain.

Once she had reached the space she’d singled out, behind the park’s notice board, surrounded but not yet obscured by hedges, she took a moment to breathe before throwing her yo-yo up and calling out for her Lucky Charm.

“Pesticide?” she mused, and then she grinned, taking a moment to prepare herself before leaping from her hiding place.

She pegged the instant Chat noticed her, because he stumbled and narrowly avoided a vine, but he didn’t say anything and instead tossed another insult at the possessed woman to continue distracting her. There he was, protecting her, as always!

“Hey, Kitty Cat, I think it’s time to weed the garden!” she called loudly, a pain shooting through her torso. Their opponent perked up and spun around, the column of vines winding around her legs quickly propelling her towards the injured Ladybug.

“Welcome back, Ladybug!” she cried gleefully. “It looks like you’re in a hurry to give up your Miraculous!”

“In your dreams!”
Her voice mingled with Chat Noir’s as his cataclysm rent the ground beneath her, rising up a portion of the vines, and in order to help him, the spotted superhero aimed her can at the pillar of vines and sprayed.

The Green Lady sprawled on the ground, rolling to her back quickly and calling other plants to her aid, but not fast enough. Ladybug had spotted a trowel in her hand and, with one well-aimed throw of her yo-yo, the item was wrenched free of her grasp. It was promptly dashed to the ground and, as expected, a corrupted butterfly rose from it.

She captured it, the usual words slipping out before she realized it, throwing the pesticide can into the air to cleanse the city. She could see the dark power fading from a blinking, confused gardener, all the plants and destruction returning to normal—although, she couldn’t help but notice, the plants stayed a little greener than they had been when she’d visited this park just the day before. She sagged in relief, stumbling against a tree as the adrenalin started to wear away and her fatigue and pain set in.

A familiar leather-clad figure was at her side, after just a few passing words of comfort to the recovering akuma victim, and he was quickly slipping an arm around her waist, glancing around for the quickest route to safety. She let herself lean on him, sighing as the weight of everything that had happened started to settle on her shoulders.

“We should head to the hospital now, My Lady,” he said slowly, helping her from the park and into an alley. They turned a few corners, her movements becoming increasingly sluggish, as her trusted partner helped her along. “You promised that I could take you after we dealt with the akuma.”

“I did,” her heart was thumping wildly now, because she had to ask him before she saw. She had to prepare herself now, even if she was already convinced she knew the answer. So she stopped moving, and he noticed immediately, stopping with her and casting her a concerned glance. As he opened his mouth to speak, she cut across with, “I just wanted to ask you something first.”

Her Miraculous beeped in her ears, and seconds later she heard Chat’s go off, too.

“I’m taking you to the hospital regardless,” he retorted, searching her face. She just laughed.

“I know, Kitty,” she answered. She let her head fall on his shoulder as she worked up the courage, the second beep ringing insistently, and then she asked, her voice more timid now than ever, “It’s just…you’re Adrien, right?”

She felt him stiffen, and lifted her blue eyes to meet his wide green ones.

“My Lady knows my name…” he muttered, “…but I don’t know who you are.”

“I was careful,” she giggled, ignoring the throbbing pain in her skull for just the moment. “I only realized who you were by accident, really, and then I didn’t even believe it.” There was no way she’d be telling him that her confusion over his identity is what got her injured, after all. It would also be a very long time before she admitted that she’d started being suspicious because she was constantly staring at the back of his head, memorizing the contours, even once designing a full suit for him to wear, maybe one day, on a runway.

The thoughtful look on his face was endearing, and it was another thing that reminded her of his more withdrawn, other half. And then, curious green eyes meeting her tentative blue, he voiced his next question.
“But…does this mean we know each other?”

Her last dot beeped at her—when had the other two gone?—but she just smiled softly as she felt Tikki’s finally caving to the fatigue.

“A little,” she murmured, averting her eyes just temporarily from him as a light flashed and her red hero garb started unraveling from the bottom up. Her flats came into view, and then her usual capris, though a little tattered and torn from the hell of a night she’d been having. And then came her top. It was now or never. She raised her blue eyes once more to meet his and gave a nervous grin as she said, “Hi, Chat. I’m Marinette Dupain-Cheng.”

His transformation began to unravel then, starting from his orange Converse and moving up his usual jeans. It continued all the way up, and she was able to see the fully stunned Adrien Agreste standing before her. He looked a little weary, but she was sure she looked worse, and she wasn’t sure what to do with him staring at her like that. Staring at her as if all the pieces of a puzzle had just fallen into place, and he was caught between being absolutely thrilled and completely stunned that the mystery was finally over.

“I, um, I’m sorry I didn’t tell you when I first started to suspect who you were,” she mumbled, her cheeks starting to redden. “I just, uh, didn’t want to, um, worry you? Or something…”

“Marinette,” he breathed, the arm he still had around her waist tightening slightly. “All this time, it’s been you?”

“Disappointed, Kitty Cat?” she asked teasingly, although the thought of his disappointment struck a painful chord in her.

“What?! No! Of course not!” he shook his head violently. “I—I’m just surprised that it’s you! You’ve been so close all this time, and I never—I didn’t even think—and now’s not the time to be worrying about that, Marinette! I have to get you to the hospital!”

“Maybe it would be less conspicuous if…we called them to come get us here?” her voice was kind of wheezy, and her legs were trembling. “No, I think it would definitely still be suspicious…but I don’t think I can walk that far…”

With a worried glance, Adrien’s grip on her waist tightened once more as she struggled to hold her own weight. She sagged against him, gritting her teeth as one of her knees gave out, and he immediately offered more support. His brows furrowed, and then, in one quick swoop and a yelp of surprise mingled with just a tiny bit of pain, she found herself cradled in his arms.

“My Princess shouldn’t have to walk,” he quipped, before realizing what he’d said as color rushed to his cheeks. “I—uh, I mean—“

“It’s…okay,” she giggled lightly, carefully lifting her arms to wrap around his neck. Her nose nestled in the hollow of his throat and she exhaled slowly. “Just don’t hurt yourself on my account, Kitty.”

Adrien started walking, slowly at first to get adjusted to the new weight in his arms and then more quickly. His voice was much softer than before when he told her, “I’m more worried about hurting you, My—Marinette. Marinette.”

The way he said her name, carefully and almost reverently, sent her heart pounding and the heat rushing to her face. The fact that he’d caught himself in the middle of saying My Lady and had abruptly switched to her name had also been a contributing factor. It wasn’t every day that the
person you’d been fawning over for the best part of two years said, accidentally or not, *My Marinette.*

They fell into a comfortable silence, though, as his quick footsteps echoed on the buildings and she tried to ignore the aching of her entire body. But after a time, she started to feel like she was floating—and not the good kind, like when she was daydreaming about her future with Adrien—and she squeezed him once to get his attention. She didn’t know how loud her voice would be.

“A-Adrien,” she rasped. When had her voice failed her so much?

“What is it, Marinette?” he asked, his arms shifting just slightly as he leaned closer to hear her. The tone of worry in his voice wasn’t missed.

“I think…my head…it’s…” her thoughts weren’t coming out right. She couldn’t remember what she was going to say beyond the fuzziness in her sight and the buzzing in her ears. And then the ringing, driving her insane inside her own head. She swallowed, and forged through a quick phrase, “My head is worse than I thought.”

She heard an intake of breath, and his grip pulled her tighter against him as his pace sped up.

“We’re almost there, Marinette, so just keep talking to me, okay?”

“Mmmkay,” she murmured, not even noticing when her bottom lip brushed against his collarbone.

“What…should I talk about?”

“It doesn’t matter,” he said quickly, and she felt them change directions. “Tell me about Alya, or, or about your kwami, or what your kwami likes to eat, or about your grades, or your parents, or the bakery…”

“Tikki,” Marinette found herself saying. “Tikki likes cookies and sweet things, so when we get to the hospital you have to make sure to find her some, okay?”

“No problem, I can do that. Tikki is her name?”

“Yes,” a woozy voice came from the pocket of Marinette’s shirt, and for the first time the little red kwami poked her head out. “I’m Tikki.”

The blue-eyed girl opened her eyes, trying to blink away some of the problems she was having with her vision, and her tiny companion slowly came into view, drifting to sit on Adrien’s shoulder, between the collar of his shirt and the skin of his neck so she was out of sight.

“I’m Plagg,” a black kwami with large green eyes suddenly appeared behind Tikki, and Marinette grinned softly at him.

“You look just like a little kitty,” she told him endearingly, giggling softly. “No wonder you’re the kwami for *Chat Noir.*”

“He’s annoying, too. He likes *camembert,* of all things. It smells so bad!”

She could hear Adrien’s voice shaking as he tried to be cheerful, and she knew he was worried for her sake. He was so much like her crush and like her kitty all at once, and it was completely and utterly endearing. He was caring and considerate and compassionate, and he was trying to put on a brave façade so that she didn’t worry, and she fell even more in love with every second.

If Adrien and Chat Noir could feel the same way for Marinette as he felt for Ladybug, they would
be all set, because she was falling for Chat Noir just as much as she had already fallen for Adrien.

But it wasn’t the time to be thinking of those things, because Adrien had just asked her name, worriedly, for the third time.

“Sorry, sorry,” she mumbled, “I was…thinking…about some things…”

A quick sigh of relief—from Adrien and from the two kwamis on his shoulder. She was worrying some of those she cared for the most…and she could only imagine how bad it would get when her parents were called, and when they told Alya that she was in the hospital.

“What kinds of things?” his voice was a little more insistent, his pace increasing yet again, jostling her slightly. She held back the pained sounds that wanted to escape.

“It’s…a secret…” she teased, blinking again to clear her vision once more. She didn’t like how wide and worried Tikki’s blue eyes were, and she didn’t like worrying the little black kwami she’d only just met, but she saw his eyes narrowed in concern. She tried to hug Adrien even tighter, but she was unsure if she had succeeded until his arms tightened around her.

“C’mon, we’re partners,” his voice took a Chat Noir tone, lilting and teasing. He couldn’t hide the nervousness, but he was trying. And he started trying even more when he continued speaking. “Now I know who you are, and you figured out that the person behind the mask isn’t nearly as purrfect as you were probably expecting, knowing how awesome Chat Noir is. Surely there aren’t any more secrets between us?”

“Can’t a girl…have a couple secrets?” she murmured back, her fingers tugging lightly on the blond locks brushing against them. She heard his breath catch, and chuckled softly.

“I guess,” he finally spluttered, “but only because we’re nearly at the hospital. Hold on, Princess, because this will probably hurt a little.”

And then she felt him break into a loping stride, one that she’d remember anywhere from her energetic kitty cat, and she did as he said, holding even more tightly. She heard a car horn and, with a start, realized that they must be crossing the street. And then there were some shouts, and Adrien was asking for help in rushed, breathless tones, and voices around them became muffled and ran together until Marinette wasn’t sure who was talking anymore.

“Adrien…” she felt herself whisper, and he stiffened, cutting off whatever he was saying and calling her name in a voice that seemed so very, very distant.

She felt when they placed her on a gurney, when Adrien’s slightly clammy hand slipped into hers and he told her that he was right there. Her thoughts were moving sluggishly, but she didn’t want to let him go. She squeezed his hand and, as loud as she could muster, she practically begged, “Don’t leave me alone, Adrien!”

And then the sounds around her all ran together until they ceased, and the lights in her eyes faded until all she could see was black.

When he felt her hand go limp in his, Adrien’s heart gave a painful lurch and he stumbled to keep up with the gurney, holding her hand even tighter to make over for the pressure he’d lost.

“Marinette!” he gasped, and he heard two small voices just below his ear ask him what was wrong.
He breathed, “She passed out!” for the benefit of the kwamis, but he couldn’t really give them any more information without the nurses around him believing that he was delirious. But at his words, they increased the pace, and he found that they were heading straight for the intensive care unit and, he feared, surgery.

“Excuse me, sir,” one of them, jogging beside him, placed a hand on his shoulder, “Sir, we can’t let you keep going.”

“She asked me to stay with her—“

“I know, but we can’t let you. You can go to her later, but for now we need you to wait out here. We need to know who to call, if she has any family who should be here, and what medical records to pull up to make sure she doesn’t have any allergies. Please, sir.”

As they slowed at the doors, Adrien grimaced, lifted her hand to his lips and kissed her knuckles, hard, before letting her hand drop back to the gurney beside her. And then he stood, watching as she passed through the doors where he couldn’t follow, and tears started to build in his eyes.

*I should be in there*, he cursed himself desperately, fists shaking at his sides. *I should be at her side, like she asked!* *I shouldn’t have to wait out here!*

The hand descended on his shoulder again, but he didn’t move. He continued staring at the closed doors, wishing he was there, behind them, holding her hand until everything was better. Until she opened her eyes again, and smiled at him, and asked him, *What’s wrong, Kitty? Cat got your tongue?* Because even she used cat puns back at him sometimes, and that’s what make him fall even harder.

“Sir, we need to know her name. Please.”

His eyes were burning and the tears were starting to break free, but he stood tall and turned to the person. “It’s Marinette. Marinette Dupain-Cheng. Her parents own the Dupain-Cheng Bakery that’s not too far from here.”

“And your relation to her?”

*What are we now?* His mind hissed at him, and he hated that he didn’t know. She wanted him to stay with her, and he could only think of one believable option that would get him back into her presence as quickly as he wanted to be there. Silently, he begged her to forgive him for telling the lie, prayed that his bad luck wouldn’t act up here, and gave his answer.

“I’m her boyfriend.”

*Friend* wouldn’t have worked, nor would *best friend*, and he didn’t think they’d buy *fiancé, wife, or brother*—but he’d never try to pass as her relative, even if it would get him in faster, because he still loved her too much for that. Despite the fact that Ladybug was actually the clumsy, often shy girl in his class, despite not knowing her feelings for him, Adrien Agreste was still hopelessly in love with the girl.

He blamed the moments where he’d seen Marinette stand up against Chloe, or to state plainly what she believed. In those moments of clarity, of being straightforward and courageous, he had seen some of the facets of his superhero partner.

“Alright then. If you’ll please wait over here,” he gestured to a waiting room nearby, “and we will contact her family now.”
“Wait,” Adrien reached forward and grabbed the nurse’s wrist. He paused to look back at the teen, and the blond quickly asked, “Will you be able to let me know how she’s doing? Please?”

“I’ll have to see, sir, but I can’t guarantee. If you’ll excuse me.”

Adrien nodded numbly, stepping back and walking slowly to the waiting room he’d been directed to. As he walked through the doors, he paid little attention to the others in the room, waiting to hear about their own loved ones, as he walked to a chair in the corner and slumped into it. His aches and pains and bruises from the fight offered him no comfort, and the screaming in his muscles from carrying her so far didn’t help. He wouldn’t complain, though. He would never complain about doing something to help his lady.

Even if she wasn’t his lady in the sense he wanted her to be.

“Adrien?!”

He didn’t know how much time had passed, but when he looked up to the voice, he saw Alya rushing at him, followed by two people he recognized as Marinette’s parents.

Adrien quickly stood to greet them, but his tongue was heavy and he couldn’t force any words to come out. These were the parents of the girl he fought Hawkmoth’s minions with. The parents of the girl who sat behind him in all his classes. The parents of the girl he’d claimed as his girlfriend, just in the hopes that he could get back to her side more quickly. And Alya…Alya was their classmate, Marinette’s best friend, and the number one threat to revealing their identities through her Ladyblog. But here, in this stagnant hospital full of pungent antiseptics and hollow eyes, they were all worried about Marinette, and they would probably want to ask him questions.

His classmate flung her arms around his neck and he felt the wetness of her tears as they soaked into his shoulder, and he slowly brought his arms around her in return. He didn’t realize how much he’d been shaking until he caught a glimpse of his hand on Alya’s back, and then the tears started again as he squeezed her tightly and dropped his forehead to her shoulder.

“I’m sorry,” he wheezed softly. “I couldn’t do anything…I’m sorry…”

But suddenly he wasn’t just hugging Alya.

There were gentle arms sliding around both teens, meeting Alya at the shoulders and Adrien around his back, and then larger, comforting arms wrapping around all three of them, holding them tightly together.

“Hush, now,” Marinette’s mother, a small woman called Sabine if he remembered correctly, said soothingly, in a voice thick from her own unshed tears.

“You’ve done enough, son,” Tom, the large baker, murmured into the blond boy’s hair. “They told us that you carried her in, got her immediate attention.”

“We might have been faster if I had called an ambulance,” he choked, still fearing that their reluctance to compromise their superhero personas would cause lasting damage to the girl he had loved for the last two years. “If I had thought of it sooner…”

“No,” Sabine rubbed a gentle circle on his back, “we were told that the incident she was injured in had already taken all of their ambulances. If you had waited for one, it would have been too long. You did the right thing, Adrien.”

He didn’t ask how she knew his name. He just clutched Alya like she was a lifeline as he was
showered in the trust of Marinette’s parents.

If they had known the truth, though, would they comfort him so much?

Or would they blame him?

“Excuse me, is the family of Marinette Dupain-Cheng present?”

Tom pulled himself away from the group hug and motioned to the nurse, who came over to the group with a clipboard in hand. She adjusted her glasses and glanced over them as the other three released their hug. Each individual dried their tears in their own ways as the nurse read a few more lines on the paper in front of her.

“If you would follow me to Conference Room 3, I’ll fill you in on what we’ve found.”

Adrien’s heart lurched to his throat and he stumbled to the side as he tried to take a step back to allow Marinette’s family to go through, bumping into Marinette’s father. The large man put a hand on the teen’s shoulder and offered him a small smile, gently propelling him forward after Sabine and Alya.

“Come on, son,” he said kindly, his arm dropping around the boy’s shoulders. “You’ve done so much for us, and I’m sure you want to know how she’s doing just as badly.”

“She asked me to stay with her, and I couldn’t do it,” Adrien didn’t know why he said it, but it came out only just above a whisper. “When they were taking her back, they wouldn’t let me follow, and she’d asked me to stay with her.”

The arm around his shoulders tightened, and although Tom didn’t say a word, Adrien felt warmth flow through him.

This was the family that Marinette had grown up with. The large, somewhat intimidating man that had raised her had such a kind, compassionate heart, only outdone by the small woman he’d married. Sabine was casting constant glances over her shoulder at the blond teen, smiling softly and reassuringly at him even though he could see the remnants of tears on her cheeks, as she gently led Alya to the conference room.

It was no wonder, really, that he’d fallen for all those traits in her, and more.

He was guided into the room by Marinette’s father, and the two took one side of the table in the room whilst Marinette’s mother sat down with Alya across from them. They all looked up towards the front of the room, where the employee that had led them there was writing a note on the clipboard she had with her.

“Miss Dupain-Cheng, for all of her injuries due to the recent incident, should make a full recovery,” was the first sentence out of the nurse’s lips once the door had closed behind the group of four. “She has two fractured ribs and a slight concussion. She has already woken and is currently undergoing tests, but considering the circumstances, she is doing remarkably well. She was informed that her friend was detained for her benefit, and she wants to see her guests as soon as possible.”

“When can we see her?” Alya asked, almost before the nurse had finished speaking.

“At the moment, her immediate family may enter. After the tests are over and some of the results are back, pending approval from her doctor, other guests will be allowed to enter the room. We ask that you keep noise levels lower in consideration for her headaches, and she will need to stay here
for a few days so we can monitor her and make sure there are no complications in her recovery.”

Alya’s shoulders slumped when she learned that she could not yet enter, and Adrien drew into himself.

The news that Marinette should make a full recovery make him sag against the table in relief, breaths coming just a little easier. The thought that it could be hours before he got to see her again was agonizing, but he would bear with it just a little longer.

He honestly didn’t pay attention to much of what the nurse had to say for a few minutes after that, because most of the information they were asking about was knowledge he already had. But after a couple of minutes had passed, they started to ask questions about how they would have to handle Marinette when she came home, in order for her to recover as quickly and as safely as possible. Here, Adrien tuned in, and he could see that Alya had started to focus once more.

He might not have been able to stay with her in the hospital, but he’d be damned if things kept him away from her while she was recovering. He’d do anything to help her.

“Are you sure you’re ready to come back to school?” Adrien asked her dubiously, perched on the edge of her bed as he watched her pick out her outfit for the next day. “It’s only been a week since it happened, and you’re still having occasional headaches from the concussion!”

“I’ll be fine!” she turned and flashed him a shy grin. “I have my trustworthy boyfriend to help me out, right?”

She winked at him, and Adrien felt the flush crawl up the back of his neck, burning his cheeks and the tips of his ears simultaneously. Ever since he’d admitted to her that he’d claimed to be her boyfriend to get in to see her faster, she’d teased him about it—despite her initial lapse into stuttering, blushing, and being completely unable to string a sentence together, just like the girl she’d been before she started to figure him out.

But…she still hadn’t denied the relationship.

Sure, it wasn’t official by any means, but she hadn’t told her parents that it wasn’t true, and from what he had gleaned from their conversations, she hadn’t even told Alya that it was a false statement. So Adrien found himself hoping, and he had resolved to do something about it tonight… until she had distracted him with the news that she was going back to school in the morning.

“Adrien?”

He blinked, raising his green eyes to meet her nervous blue ones. She was so much closer than he had expected, and it took all he had in him to stay still rather than leaping back at the shock. He knew his face was still burning, and when their eyes met he saw a soft flush rise across her cheeks. The sight made his stomach lurch, and it was that precise moment that Adrien knew, for a fact, that he was in way too deep to back out now.

“A-Adrien?” her voice was tiny, and she furrowed her brows just slightly when he didn’t respond.

*Chat, a little help here…*

The silent plea gave him courage, just a little, and he reached forward to brush a lock of her dark hair from her face. She blinked in surprise, a startled gasp escaping, as her flush grew darker.
“Of course,” he very nearly purred, finally finding his voice. “This humble cat will do whatever his Princess wishes. I’ll carry your bags, your books, buy your lunch…or, if you’d prefer, I could carry you, My Lady.”

Her face lit up but she didn’t move as he took both of her hands in his with a devilish smirk, courtesy of his time as Chat Noir. He raised both of her hands to his lips and brushed light kisses across each individual knuckle, never removing his eyes from hers. The blue was so mesmerizing that he felt like he might drown, and the red that had spread across her face to her ears, accentuating her currently black Miraculous earrings, made his heart do strange things.

And then, before he could think better of it, he started to lean forward, slowly. He gave her plenty of time to back out, but she just exhaled in surprise, eyes fixated on his own green orbs, until he saw her lashes flutter.

When her eyes closed, he had all the confirmation he needed. Adrien leaned the rest of the way, pushing his lips gently to her own, releasing her hands as his own moved to cup her face. Her skin was feverish beneath his palms, and where her hands met his shoulders, he felt like he was on fire. She tasted like tea and pastries, the snack that her mother had brought them not long ago, but also like home.

Their kiss ended all too soon in his opinion, but he knew that he was just as red as she was, and he saw the way her knees trembled slightly before she let herself sit down next to him on her bed, bashfully avoiding eye contact for the moment. She folded her hands in her lap uncertainly, and he rested one hand on his knee, the other on her bed beside him, as he tried to find the words to explain what had brought that on—to explain that he’d rather his little fib not be a lie any more, thanks very much, and that he would really like to continue kissing her because it was the best thing he’d ever had the fortune to experience—but then she giggled softly.

“Y-you’re so red, Kitty,” she teased, and Adrien flushed even more.

“You’re one to talk, Mari,” he retorted, averting his gaze briefly. His eyes were drawn to her, though, and he couldn’t help but look back at her as she slowly raised a hand to tuck her hair behind her ear—shyly, nervously. He saw her gently bite her lower lip, and then he saw her sneak a peek at him through her lashes.

When she noticed he was watching her, she stiffened and looked away again. And this time, it was his turn to chuckle softly.

He decided to take another leap of faith.

Adrien reached out and took her hands in his once more, but made no move to raise them to his lips. Instead he waited for her to look up at him curiously, despite the color on her cheeks, and then he struggled to find the words to say.

“Marinette…” he started, loving the way her name sounded on his tongue. “W…what would you say if I…um…actually wanted to be your b-boyfriend?”

Oh, god, his luck was gone. He had just made everything awkward, and he’d been incredibly awkward, and she was going to tell him that even though she’d kissed him back, she didn’t want to be with him in that sense and—

“Really…?”

The word was just above a whisper, and when he glanced up at her, meeting her gaze for the first
time in several long moments, a warmth started to spread through him. He recognized that look anywhere, because it was the same one he always saw in the mirror when he practiced his confessions to Ladybug.

*Hope.*

“Really,” he confirmed, banishing the stutter, at least for the moment. “I really want to be your boyfriend, Marinette. If you’ll have me.”

“I-I...really? I-I mean, I, uh, well, to be honest, A-Adrien, I’ve l-liked you for a while now, so it would be...um, yes?”

Neither one of them were very articulate, and even though her words weren’t exactly a fluent answer to his question, Adrien laughed in relief, pulling her gently towards him by their connected hands before letting go and wrapping his arms around her. He took care not to jostle her too much, and could have melted when he felt her arms circle around his middle as she buried her burning face against his neck.

“Does this make you my girlfriend?” he murmured, slightly teasingly.

“I-if it makes you my b-boyfriend,” she managed back.

“You’ve got a deal, Princess,” he breathed, laughter bubbling up once more as he pressed his lips to her hair. And then to her temple. To the exposed top of her ear, which had started to lose the red flush he so adored. She lifted her head from its place then, pouting up at him, and he smirked back down at her, dropping a light kiss on her nose and then on each cheek.

Marinette caught his face between her hands then, frowning at him with the light of a thousand suns in her cheeks, before she pulled his face down to hers and surprised him by capturing his lips with her own. He couldn’t help but chuckle as he broke the kiss, resting his forehead against hers as a giggle bubbled up from her chest.

She almost couldn’t believe her luck. Sure, she had to deal with the flirtatious Chat Noir now, but knowing that her trusted partner and the boy she’d always admired were the same person gave her so much more confidence than before. Marinette was astonished that she had reached this point with Adrien, of all people. Until just a few days ago, kissing him had been a passing, albeit reoccurring, daydream of hers, one that seemed far away. And then just moments ago, he had kissed her first.

She felt like her heart might burst.

And, in the back of her mind as she leaned into him again, she wondered if they would have reached this point more quickly if she had only confided in him when she started to learn his secret...or even two years ago, when they’d been partners for only a few months and he had asked to see who she really was behind the mask.

But no...it had given her time to fall almost as in love with Chat Noir as she was with Adrien, and she wouldn’t trade the feeling of loving both sides of him for anything.

It was one of those little things that meant infinitely more than she’d ever be able to explain.

*End Notes*
I COULDN'T HELP IT OKAY.

I started typing about four days ago, and then typed off and on when I had a free moment and here we are, at over 9k, with a bit of fluff, a bit of angst, and a bit of me asking myself why I'm so invested in these adorable little cinnamon buns.

Adrienette/Ladynoir/Chatinette/Ladrien is my favorite love square. I don't even. They're just two people with two personalities apiece.

Anyway, enough of my rambling. I hope you like this!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!