Chasing the C/h/atwalk.

by Inkkerfuffle

Summary

Paris. The city of lights, love and fashion. Follow the progress of Marinette Dupain Cheng as she enters the extremely competitive world of Reality television for a chance to be the winner of Project Runway: France.
Prologue

This was all Alya’s fault.

Sure, Project Runway was a favorite show of hers, and she hadn’t missed a season. But when the auditions for the French version began, Marinette Dupain Cheng had absolutely no interest in participating. Sure, she as a consumer of reality television. That did not mean that she wanted to be a part of it!

Reality shows were just… something you enjoyed when sick at home, with nothing else to watch. They were guilty pleasures, hidden from people. Or, in the case of Project Runway, a way for Marinette research. It had never even crossed her mind to apply for a spot on the show. Marinette simply was not made for television.

Her life was exciting enough with her work as Ladybug. There was no need for any more excitement.

But Alya did not know that last part, nor did she listen any objections from Marinette. Alya was determined to get Marinette into the show, sending the application on behalf of her best friend and making sure she attended the actual interview.

Granted, there had been enough bribing, blackmailing, and mild threats of violence for Alya to get Marinette to the Grand Hotel where the second round of auditions were being held. Alya was holding the briefcase with all her designs hostage until Marinette went through with the audition.

To tell the truth, Marinette didn’t honestly think that Alya would not give them back if Marinette asked seriously enough. But it was far better to just play along with her best friend. After all, there was no harm in auditioning.

In theory, it was a good deal. She would get exposure, people all over Europe, and even the world would see her designs. And if she won, or even got to the finals, she would get to make an actual collection that was going to be shown during Paris Fashion Week.

It was tempting. But Marinette was already studying design, there was no reason for her to do things this way. She was a good student, so there was a good chance she would get a job in an actual company.

In the end, there was a small part of her that was glad that Alya was as brazen as she was, and pushed her into doing something risky that just might pay off. So yes, Marinette ended up playing along with the mild hostage situation that Alya goaded her into. She would never confess, but there was a small part of her that wanted to know whether she’d make the cut.

In the end, she had. Along with nineteen more aspiring designers, Marinette was officially part of the cast for the new season of Project Runway: France. It had taken her a month to get her affairs in order to dedicate her whole life to the show. But now she was ready.

Because if she was going to be a part of this thing, Marinette was going to do her damned best to win.

She’d put her studies on hold for the duration of the show, Alya had already made a Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr account with her name to be her official fan accounts, and her best friend had self-appointed herself as her official fan club’s president for the duration of the show. And beyond if she did win.
Marinette wanted to win, in any case.

It had been whirlwind of several things happening all at once. Contracts were signed, non-disclosure agreements were carefully read and signed as well. Friends had thrown good luck parties and it all led to this day. The first day of shooting. Marinette arrived at the studio, which was originally a large warehouse, which had been arranged in several areas. Workshop, runway, production, makeup and many areas she hadn’t been able to seen yet, all buzzing with people, running around and putting the finishing touches on everything.

It was dizzying.

She was greeted by a fast speaking woman, with the bluest and brightest hair she’d ever seen. “Marinette?” the woman, waiting for her nod before holding a finger up, clearly listening to instructions being transmitted through her headset. “uh huh… mhmmm.” The woman, whose name Marinette was yet to find out nodded for a second before snapping her fingers and motioning to Marinette. “Follow me!”

They navigated through what seemed a maze of people, who were apparently still setting up some common areas, fixing the lights so that the scenery appeared best on camera.

“Alright, to your right, there’s the workshop.” The woman said, pointing towards an open door, as they walked. Marinette was barely able to peek through it, looking at the shiny and new sewing machines, before she had to jog to catch up with Blue hair. “Yeah, yeah, we’re going over there. Who?” To tell the truth, Marinette was not even trying to reply, since it seemed that she wasn’t taking to her in any case; mainly assuming that the other woman was just speaking to whoever was talking to her via her headset. “Yeah, with her.” Still, Blue Hair tried, somehow fitting a couple of sentences to Marinette before going back to her conversation. “Over there’s the runway,” she said, pointing at a large yet closed door, “but you won’t get to see it just yet. Ah, here we are.” She opened a door and ushered Marinette through it.

To be honest, Marinette had not understood a word of what had just happened. Honestly, what had she gotten herself into?

She stepped into the room cautiously, looking around as she began processing everything she’d seen so far.

The room was small, with a comfortable looking red chair, surrounded by some half-dressed manikins and random decorations. Large headlights pointed towards the chair and Marinette quickly figured out that this was the interview room.

An older man was setting up the camera and motioned for Blue Hair to take a seat beside him. Behind him, there were two more people, mainly talking amongst themselves as Camille still talked to whoever was on the other side of the line. “Yeah, we’re shooting now.” She pressed a button and finally looked at Marinette like she was seeing her. “Alright Marinette, here’s the interview space.” The woman, directed her to a seat “My name is Camille, and I’ll be guiding you through this madness.”

Camille headed towards the back of the camera, staring at the monitor, before fiddling with the lights above her. Once she seemed to be satisfied, she addressed Marinette again, “Here’s how this works. I’ll ask you some questions about the events of the day, and you’ll answer them as if they’d just happened. Okay? It’ll all be edited in post, so just act natural and everything will be alright.”

Somehow, Marinette doubted that.
Still, she nodded, too stunned to say anything else as she sat down on the chair, fidgeting with the collar of the blouse she was wearing as she was swarmed by a tech, a makeup artist and a stylist, who quickly slapped her hand away from her clothes, as the other man began working on her face as the tech began attaching the microphone to her clothes.

This place was absolute insanity.

“ Aren’t you pretty?” The stylist said, “ You must take great pictures, mon dieu!” The older woman took a step back, admiring her simple outfit as she seemed to ponder just what to do with it. Whatever, Marinette was not changing her clothes. “ You probably already took your cast pictures, I can’t wait to see them!” she gushed, fidgeting with the collar and taking a step back to admire her whole look.

“I… uh,” Marinette began, but again. It seemed that no one listened. Still, there was so much more going on, as the make up artist began rummaging through his suitcase, pulling out several things and brushes. “ I… uh, I already got make up done for the pictures?” Marinette offered, before being attacked with a brush, as some powder was being brushed all over her face.

“We’re just making sure you don’t look shiny, Ma Cherie!” the makeup artist said, his grin bright as he tapped some dewy looking lipstick over her very surprised mouth.

“I look shiny?” she inquired, her hand rising to touch her face before being swatted and shushed.

“What about this top?” The stylist said, “ She’s pretty, we could do something here.” the woman turned to Marinette for a second, “ What’s your angle? Sweet or bitchy and catty?”

Marinette sputtered indignantly, “ What?” but no one really paid much attention to her.

Someone shushed the stylist, “ It doesn’t matter, it’s just the first episode. We’ll see how it develops when she meets the others.”

Eventually, they left her alone and they went to the back of the room, giving Camille the chance to speak again.

Thankfully. Marinette was beginning to miss the fast talking woman. “ Alright, here’s your time. You can say whatever you want in here, just remember to speak directly to the camera, and introduce yourself! Action!”

To tell the truth, the bright blinking red light made her nervous, but she was already here. She might as well try and make the best of it. “ My name is Marinette Dupain Cheng, I’m 23 years old and I’m a student of Ecole De La Chambre Syndicale, although I did put it on hold to be here.” Marinette smiled at the camera, feeling a little more relaxed as Camille motioned at her to go on. “ I’ve always been interested in fashion and design. I’ve been making clothing and accessories since I was twelve years old, I honestly can’t wait to see what the challenges are.”

“ Good, good.” Camille nodded, “ Alright, so have you worked with models?”

“ To tell the truth, not a lot. We’ve mainly worked on mannequins’ at school, but we have worked with models before. I’m excited to see my designs on an actual runway.”

“ Mhmm,” Camille nodded, “ As you know, here you’ll get to work with just one model through the season, unless you lose him or switch up later on. Tell me what you think about that.”

“ Oh, I’m looking forward to bonding with my model.” Marinette explained, “ I think it’s really the best for this show to just do that. It’s like working with a muse of sorts.” Camille seemed to approve
of her answer and she slipped her a brown envelope. Marinette looked at the large envelope, frowning before she turned towards Camille. “What’s this?”

The red blinking light on the camera signaled that they were still rolling, but Camille didn’t mind. Clearly everything would be edited later. “I know this doesn’t work this way in the other versions, but we’re assigning you your first model.” Camille motioned towards the envelope. “You’ll have to act out picking him later, We’re a little behind schedule so we need to get this episode done fast.”

“This is your model’s headshot. So you can give us your first impression and we’ll edit it together in post after you meet him officially. Just tell us what you think of them, and if you think it’ll work. Just… how inspired you are and all that. Aaand, action!”

Right. That made sense. Marinette nodded and opened the envelope, pulling the picture out slowly. Blond hair… green eyes… Oh no. Nononononono.

She turned her attention towards Camille. “I need a second.” she squeaked, doing her best to keep her composure as she pushed up from the chair and walked outside, closing the door quietly behind her.

Adrien Agreste. Of course her model had to be Adrien Agreste. To tell the truth, Marinette wasn’t exactly sure whether this was a big cosmic joke on her, or she was the luckiest girl in the world. Somehow, she always seemed to be stuck in the middle. She looked at the picture, pulling it out of the envelope so she could examine it more thoroughly.

Shit shit shit. Of course Adrien had grown to be even more handsome than he was during their school years. She hadn’t seen him since they’d graduated, since school and work had consumed her life and she’d barely had enough time to see Alya and her own family. But judging by the picture, she’d certainly missed out. He’d grown into his looks… even more if that was possible. His face had to be carved from marble by baby angels, it was just that perfect. And those shoulders… and… She was clearly not over her crush.

Oh God, she was going to be working in close quarters with him. She had to make sure he got dressed and looked perfect for each walk. She would need to measure Adrien.

Marinette’s head hit the closed door with a soft thud as she covered her mouth tightly to let out a muffled shriek, stomping her feet around for good measure. This was just… no. She had not signed up for this!

She was also going to murder Alya.

And then jump off the top of the Eiffel Tower.

No. No. She could do this. She was a professional. And she was definitely mature enough to handle seeing her school crush. Even if he looked even more handsome than before. That was just a small detail she needed to deal with. After all, she was going to be working in fashion and there were many models that looked just as good as Adrien did, so there was no reason for her to freak out

After a few deep, calming breaths, Marinette felt ready to go back inside and face the camera. She opened the door cautiously, her smile sheepish as slipped back inside and sat down again. “Sorry,” she smiled at the people, doing her absolute best to look as cheerful and cool as possible. “I’m done now, so where were we?”

The look on Camille’s face was unadulterated amusement as spoke, “Marinette?” Camille’s voice seemed to be barely containing her amusement.

“Yes?”
The woman tapped her chest, mirroring the spot where Marinette’s wireless microphone was clipped. “You do know that the microphone is still on, right?” At Marinette’s panicked realization, Camille mouthed, “We heard everything.”

Marinette’s eyes widened and her hands flew to her mouth again, muffling the panicked sounds of screaming once more. The actual show hadn’t even begun and she’d managed to embarrass herself, twice.

There was no way she was going to survive this.

Camille, on the other side, was bursting with joy. “I’m loving this one,” the woman said, nudging the camera man with a grin on her face.

The only thing Marinette was able to do in response was hide her face behind her hands and groan. There was no way she was surviving this competition, let alone today.
After what had been a disastrous interview. It was time for her to head back to the hotel and meet some of the other contestants. She couldn't deny it, she was very nervous, since she'd be meeting the people she would be sharing every day with for the duration of this whole competition. She had already dropped off her things at the hotel earlier, (which she honestly thought was a bit of overkill, since she lived three blocks away from the set.). But it was required so she would go with it, even if she was a little scared about keeping Tikki hidden from her future roommates.

The van that was driving her back to the hotel only held Camille, a driver and a camera man who was going to film her staged arrival. “Do I really have to stay at the Hotel?” Marinette asked, as she spotted her home through the van’s window. “I live right there.”

“‘m afraid so.” Camille said, not even lifting her eyes from her clipboard. “It makes for good Television to have everyone living at the same spot. And this way we don’t have any delays for whatever might make you late if you come to the studio on your own.”

She nodded, that was obnoxiously logical. “And how many cameras are there at the hotel?”

“None.” Camille asked, and Marinette’s eyes widened. “There are no fixed cameras in your apartments, of course. But we will come to see you every now and then, and get some interviews. Maybe recording dinners, and some casual moments.”

That made sense too. All that was left was knowing just who her roommates would be.

“Allright, this is where you get out. Just walk at the hotel and marvel at your surroundings.”

One of the things Marinette was beginning to find out? For Reality Television, it was terribly scripted. “Alright,” Marinette said, as the van’s door slid open and she was able to step out. To be honest, she wasn’t completely in the mood to look awed considering she’d lived in Paris her whole life. But instructions were instructions and she stepped into the hotel, holding her messenger bag tightly with one hand as Camille directed her from behind the camera.

“There. Take the elevator to the tenth floor.” The three of them entered the elevator and Camille continued, “You’ll have about an hour to get ready and meet your roommates, then the van will come pick everyone up to go to the first challenge. We’ll call you all about fifteen minutes before we’re there so you can be ready and downstairs in time.”

There was such an onslaught of instructions, Marinette was beginning to get dizzy. She would also have to admit that living at Le Grand Paris Hotel, home to one Chloé Bourgeois was not one of her favorite things. But as she'd already realized, it was part of the rules she had to follow to participate on this contest. She would have bear it and hope she didn't run into the blonde.
"Room 1014!" Camille instructed, and Marinette made her way through the luxurious hallways towards the room. The key had already been given to her, so she simply unlocked the door and stepped in. Inside, there were two women, both organizing their things before turning their attention towards Marinette. "Hello!" Marinette said, heading towards the young one, "I'm Marinette!"

"Marinette!" the younger one said, air kissing both Marinette’s cheeks as she smiled brightly. "Hi! I’m Anaïs Charpentier. Seems we’re going to be roommates!" She reached for Marinette’s hand and led her towards their other roommate. It was an older woman, if Marinette had to guess, she was probably in her early fifties. "She is Noémie," she said, and the older woman nodded her head in greeting before going back to her computer. "She’s kind of grumpy," Anaïs whispered, though it was evident that Noémie was clearly able to hear the whole thing, judging by her exaggerated eye roll.

Anaïs dragged Marinette back to their beds, “This one’s yours. Since you were the last one you had the last pick, sorry. I hope you don’t mind the one next to the door…” The brown haired girl ran a hand through her wavy locks and clasped her hands together, her eyes sparkling as she waited for Marinette to answer her barrage of questions. “So, tell me about yourself? What do you do? How old are you? Where are you from?”

It was hard to ignore the blinking red light from the camera, but Anaïs seemed to be an absolute professional at ignoring it. “Uh… I’m a fashion design student,” Marinette tried her best to relax, though she was still feeling a little bit stiff; especially after her first interview earlier today. “I’m twenty three and I’m from Paris?”

“Really? Anaïs’ voice was curious, and Marinette wasn’t exactly sure how to interpret it. Honestly, her experience in reality tv shows had taught her that trusting people could be a tricky business, but it was not in her nature to be so skeptical. “I think you’re the only contestant from Paris. I’m from Lyon, but I’ve lived the past five years in New York. It’s one of the best cities for fashion, you know,“

“Oh, I’ve heard that,” Marinette said, brushing her hair from her face as she tried to interact with the overenthusiastic girl. “I’ve always wanted to go, what did you do there?”

“I was a fashion advisor,” Anaïs said, her voice proud as she spoke, “I had very important clients, but I just wanted to create.” The girl, who seemed older than Marinette patted her hand, “You should get settled, we’re leaving soon. You can call your family if you want… I’m going to go freshen up for the cameras,” Anaïs winked at Marinette and then at the camera and sauntered off to the bathroom they shared.

“And Cut!” Camille (who Marinette had almost forgotten was still there) said, “She’s right. Rest, call family or whoever and get ready. You won’t be styled or made up before the challenge, so make sure to make yourself Pop.” With that, Camille and the camera men disappeared through the door, leaving Marinette alone for the first time in what seemed forever. Not counting Noémie, of course, who wasn’t paying attention to Marinette in any case.

Marinette plopped down on the bed, her eyes staring at the ceiling. She was exhausted and she still hadn’t sewed anything. “This is insane.”

The silent tap of Noémie’s computer was the only sound in the room, and thankfully, it was soothing. “It’s reality TV kid,” the older woman said. “Either you can handle it, or you can go home. No one’s going to coddle you here.”

The look on Noémie’s face told Marinette just how little faith the older woman had in her abilities, and that probably meant that she needed to shape up. She still needed to face the challenge, there was
no reason to whine just yet. Rolling off the bed, Marinette headed towards her suitcase, “Is this my closet?” She asked Noemie, and at the woman’s nod, she began placing her clothing there, organizing it neatly.

*Make yourself pop.* That was the advice Camille had offered, and Marinette set herself to find something cute, that was also comfortable to work in, since she doubted they’d get the chance to change before heading to the workshop. Pulling out several articles of clothing, Marinette laid them on the bed carefully, arranging them in different combinations to find the one that suit it the best. In the end, she’d picked a pair of comfortable jeans and a cute pink blouse. Sure, it didn’t make her look mature and grown up, but it was familiar and she felt comfortable.

Shoes… In the end, she decided against the cute heels she'd brought, picking a pair of flats, since she was well aware of her penchant for working on her feet when she got stressed, it was best to forego the heels unless it was time to present her designs.

Soon enough, they were all ushered into a van and they were off. The vehicle drove them all the way to the *Palais Garnier*, home of the Opéra National de Paris. As they walked through the majestic hallways, Marinette looked at the posters, signaling the upcoming shows for the seasons, her eyes glued to the beautiful artwork.

In the end, they were all standing on the stage, though it was impossible to look at the seating area, since the rest of the theatre was absolutely dark. A light lit up in the center of the stage, highlighting the host. “Welcome designers,” the host, an older former model named *Heloise Auger* welcomed them. Next to her, stood Tim Gunn, famed stylist and the mentor on the original version of the show. “Welcome to Paris and the first season of Project Runway: France!”

Tim spoke up, “We’re thrilled to get to know each and every one of you, and see what you can bring to our competition.”

“You are currently standing on one of the most famed stages in the world, *Le Palais Garnier!* Where only the most prestigious companies perform.” Heloise said, her hands motioning around her as one of the cameras panned around the area.

“And you’re here, because you are all the best in fashion.” Tim said, taking the time to look at the contestants, “And the top three competitors will get to show your designs at the world famous Paris Fashion week.”

“But only one of you will win the first season ever of Project Runway, France.” Heloise spoke up, “and you’ll get one hundred thousand Euros, to fund and start your own collection.”

The group cheered, looking between each other with excited looks on their faces. Marinete would have to confess that she was pumped. The adrenaline was beginning to hit and she couldn’t wait to see what today’s challenge would be.

“But we have a long way before that,” Tim, said, “So we should probably get started. Shall we?” He said to Heloise, who nodded graciously before turning towards the group.

“Designers, the challenge today is to design an outfit inspired in one of the shows shown in this magnificent theatre.”

Tim raised a hand and the lights in the theatre began turning up, and they were able to see the whole seating area, and realized that there were large pieces of fabric carefully laid on top of the chairs. Oh God, this was going to be insanity right from the start.
There was a small rumble as the designers began to comment the current situation. There were several colors, and from what she could see, several types of fabrics too. They would need to be careful, because the fabrics might not mesh together properly, since they couldn’t make out what they were from their current distance. All Marinette knew was that she needed to secure some neutral fabrics. Everything else could be solved with accessories or small details to make the design pop. She needed to grab that black fabric, because it would definitely be a starting point for all the ideas that were swimming on her head.

“You will have three minutes to gather the fabrics you’ll use. We’ll stop at a store for you to buy the rest of supplies you might need, but you will only work with these fabrics. You will not be allowed to buy any more.” Tim spoke, before looking at the group with amused eyes. “Pick carefully, and pick fast. You will have two days to complete this challenge.”

“That’s right,” Heloise said, “Also, you can only pick four fabrics each. No more than that. I wish you all good luck, and you have three minutes, starting…. now!” With that, all the designers scattered, running towards the seat in a mad dash to get to the fabrics.

It was time to run like she’d never ran before. Marinette had never been so thankful that she’d left her heels behind, even if it might make her look like a teenager in comparison to the other contestants, because right now she was faster than most. The young designer ran, like the woman on a mission that she was; closing in on her chosen fabrics and managing to snag a piece of gorgeous black fabric. It seemed thick and heavy, ideal for a jacket, and the idea for the design began to form on her head. Still, she had to get to more before the time was up.

She scanned around quickly, finding a lone piece of satin-ey looking red fabric, snatching it right out of the hands of another male designer who quickly gave her the stink eye.

However, the gorgeous green (which would have made someone’s eyes pop like no one’s business,) was grabbed before she could get to it, which meant that Marinette needed a new plan. She paused for a second, looking at the remaining fabrics and launched herself towards a dark grey one like a madwoman.

She had never been so happy to wear flat shoes.

In the end, there was a piece of brocade right between two other contestants that were two rows away from her, all of them looking at the piece and then each other. “Oh no.” Marinette said, before jumping over a seat and scrambling towards it. She was shorter, yes. She was younger, yes. But she was a fighter, and she had, along Chat Noir, defeated Hawkmoth before they were even out of Lycee.

This was no match for her.

In the end, Marinette dove towards the fabric, snatching right out of the other two’s hands, and crashed to the ground in an awkward tangle of fabric and limbs. But she’d won and that was what mattered.

“Time’s up!”

Marinette stood up, holding on to her precious fabrics as she walked back towards the stage, along with the rest of the designers. Holding on to her loot with one hand, Marinette pushed her hair out of her face, since it had gone a little crazy during her hunt for fabrics.

“Alright designers,” Heloise said, a bright smile on her face as she addressed the already exhausted looking contestants, “This is the first chance you have to impress the judges, take it seriously and I’ll
be seeing you on the runway!” With that, the model turned around and exited the stage, leaving them only with Tim Gunn.

“And now, follow me!” Tim said, as he walked off stage in the opposite directions. “We’re going shopping and then it’s time to meet your models at the workroom.”

Right. Models. Marinette took a deep breath, fully aware that there were cameras on them at any minute. She needed to keep the amount of embarrassing antics to a minimum, and she needed to keep her dignity for when she had to deal with Adrien Agreste.

Shopping was a blur, having to hurry up to fit everything in the given time limit; but she was almost certain she’d managed to get everything she wanted. The design was a mere doodle on her sketchbook, done while the van was driving towards the store and then back to the studio, but it was shaping up to be something she knew she’d be proud of.

The workroom was everything Marinette hoped it to be and more. Their work tables were long and wide, enough for her to work comfortably and with a sewing machine that was better and more complete than anything she’d ever need.

She wanted to name it.

Next to each work table, there was a mannequin, which held a small name card. Marinette headed quickly towards hers, leaving her fabrics and purchases on it, arranging them quickly, before opening her sketch book and doodling over the design she’d made up.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” Tim announced, “your models.”

The door opened and the models walked in. Eight men, and eight women. All of them tall and absolutely gorgeous. Marinette gritted her teeth, pulling on her best poker face for the minute Adrien stepped into the room. She had to be ready, because it had been years since she'd seen the blond.

She wasn’t ready.

Adrien walked inside, his expression casual and even somewhat uninterested as he looked at the designers, before his green eyes fell on her and a flash of curious and surprised recognition appeared.

Oh someone save her, because the simple white t-shirt and jeans look he was sporting was definitely doing it for her. Adrien, unaware of her nervousness, smiled at her in silent greeting, before Camille appeared in front of everyone and began shouting out instructions again.

“Alright people. You know who you have to pick. Let’s get this done in one take, shall we?”

They somehow managed to do just that. Suddenly, the camera was on her and Marinette simply did what she was told. “Adrien.” Marinette said, making sure her voice sounded as even and casual as she was able to. The blond walked towards Marinette’s table, keeping his composure until the selection was finally over and people began working again.

Once the cameras were no longer solely focused on her, and everyone was just busy working and talking to their assigned model, Adrien finally seemed to relax, “Marinette! Hey!” he finally said, greeting his former classmate with a warm smile. “I didn’t know you were competing!”

“Hi.” she answered, feeling a hint of warmth on her cheeks, “It… well. Alya, you know. She can be very pushy when she wants to be.”

He chuckled, he too had been exposed to Alya’s antics during their school years. “You’ll do great,”
he said, a warm smile on his face. “So, what’s your idea?”

Bless him for saving her from making any more small talk. Talking shop was a sure way for Marinette to get her bearings and manage to act like the adult she knew she was. And let go of the awkward teenager that Adrien somehow seemed to bring out of her. Focusing her entire attention on the design, was a good way to do that. "Right." she said, opening her sketchbook and showing him the doodle. “We have to create an outfit inspired on one of the shows. So I picked Carmen.” The design had several notes, scribbled with her girly handwriting, since she'd barely had time to make a full design in the time they'd had since they left the Palais Garnier.

Adrien nodded, his eyes looking at the picture, “That makes sense, it’s based on Escamillo, right?”

She’d forgotten for a second just how cultured Adrien was. “Exactly!” she exclaimed, her expression brightening as Adrien seemed to get her idea. “I just remember going to see the show with my parents when I was younger.” It was Sabine’s favorite and Tom had purchased a recording for her to play in the house. It was familiar, and familiar was a good way for her to find her footing in this show.

"Sounds great.” he said, before clapping his hands and standing up straight. “Alright then! How do you want me?”

The clattering sound of Marinette’s supply box hitting the ground, scattering her pencils and scissors on the floor besides her desk was a welcome distraction from the implication in his words. Granted, there was a 99,9% chance that he didn’t mean it like that, but God, she had certainly dreamed of hearing those words.

But not now. While the cameras were not solely focused on her, it was time to get to work. The clock was running and they’d would only have a limited amount of time to get everything settled. “I just need to take your measurements.” Marinette said, picking up her supplies quickly, and grabbing a spare pencil, weaving it through her hair as she secured her dark hair on a bun on the top of her hair.

Adrien, seemingly used to these situations, simply stood still for her, as Marinette flitted around him, measuring the length of his arms and shoulders, taking notes on her sketchbook. Adrien stood still, only moving his eyes as he followed her movements.

There. Marinette was set and all the measurements she needed for the jacket were done. Now… trousers. “Almost done,” she muttered, as she kneeled in front of Adrien.

Honestly, dropping to her knees in front of Adrien was not something she’d ever thought she’d do. Ever. There was never a moment in her life that she thought that the thought process of ‘kneel in front of Adrien’ was a thing that she would do.

That was actually a lie. She had thought about it, but this was not the moment to dwell on that.

Clearing her throat and shaking her head, in an almost physical attempt to dispel the less than family friendly thoughts from her head. Taking the length was no issue, and after a quick scribbles on her notebook.

The young model didn’t even bat an eyelash, which it even worse, considering everything that was currently going in her head. But somehow, she managed to measure his inseam without acting like a creeper and without squeaking awkwardly. She would consider it today’s greatest accomplishment.

“There.” Marinette said, finally standing up and looking up at Adrien. He had a gentle smile on her
face, clearly finding nothing unusual about their interaction; which definitely made sense, considering he’d started modelling in his early teens. “I’ll see you tomorrow for the fitting then?” he said, and Marinette nodded, “Good luck!” Adrien patted her shoulder, in what Marinette knew was an encouraging gesture, but her heart still skipped a beat. Adrien flashed her a small smile, “Bye!” he said, before grabbing his things and exiting with the rest of the models.

“Bye…” she said, looking at his retreating figure before she remembered that there were _cameras_ around her and that she needed to get to work.

For fuck’s sake. She was twenty three years old, not fifteen. There was no reason for her to feel _this_ flustered!

She straightened herself up and began spreading her fabric on her work table, knowing that she needed to get herself back on track, or her participation on this show was going to be over before the first episode actually _aired_.

There was a small chuckle coming from the table next to hers and Marinette turned her attention to the source. A man in what seemed to be either his late twenties or early thirties flashed her an amused smile. “You’re in trouble.”

“What?”

He snickered, “You’re cute.” he said, “and funny. Don’t let a pretty face startle you out of the show.”

“..Wha… What?” Marinette sputtered, “It’s not like that!” she defended herself. “I’m just nervous about the show.”

“Sure thing.” he said, winking at her. “I’m Raoul. Raoul Deveraux.”

“Marinette Dupain-Cheng.” she replied, narrowing her eyes at the amused man. Hopefully he had only caught her because he was on the next work table. Because if Marientte was in fact that obvious about her crush... she was going to go and hide forever.

“Well, Marinette, let’s get to work, before Tim shows back up and yells at us for chattering instead of working.”

“Right.”

The rest of the day was spent cutting fabrics and sewing the mockups, keeping everything ready for the actual fitting on the following day. Hours went by, and then Tim Gunn stepped the workroom just thirty minutes before they were supposed to go, and he walked by every work table looking at the progress.

“What do we have here today?” He asked Marinette, his posture impeccable as he peered at her work. “this seems interesting.”

“The pants are done, same with the shirt. the jacket and cape need to be assembled and lined. Then, it’s just adding the decorations.” She explained, pointing at the sketch.

The older man nodded, his eyes analyzing the work she had done so far and then back to the design sketched. “It’s _very_ ambitious,” he said, tapping the sketch on her notbook. “Are you sure you can pull it off in the time we have left?”

It was a lot of work, for sure. But Marinette was sure she could get it done. “I can do it.”
“Good. I’m looking forward to see it on the runway.”

Marinette stood for a moment, feeling slightly proud of herself for getting some sort of positive feedback from the talented mentor, before the older man gave her a quick look, clearly ushering her back to work. “Go on, make it work. Go go go!”

Right.

Tim Gunn walked towards the front of the room, surrounded by three cameras that worked to catch everything happening in the room. “Designers! You’re done for the day. Time to head back to the hotel and rest.” He gave them all a look “Don’t worry, your precious creations will be left safely and your work tables will remain just like you left them.”

The designers began gathering their things, and Marinette picked up the show’s official messenger bag (with the pretty logo emblazoned over the front), which held all her personal belongings and marched out and into the awaiting vans.

The drive back to the hotel was surprisingly quiet, but that was probably due to the fact that they were all exhausted. It was past midnight when they finally got to their rooms and after a small calculation, Marinette realized that she’d been working on this show for over eighteen hours today. No wonder she was about to pass out.

But first things first. “I’m going to take a shower before bed!” Marinette announced, grabbing a few of her things and entering the bathroom. Thankfully, their room had a large bathroom, and if Marinette had the time she would have loved to take a bath in the luxurious looking tub; but alas… it was not meant to be.

The first thing she did was turn on the shower, the loud sound of the falling water providing some cover. Then, she pulled out her cellphone and put on some music, trying to cover for any noise she wouldn’t be able to explain. “Tikki?” She finally spoke, “Are you alright?”

The tiny red kwami flew out of the bag, stretching her limbs as she floated on the empty bathroom. “I’m okay!” She told Marinette, before giving her chosen a close look. “Are you okay?”

The young woman nodded, “I’m exhausted, but I can deal.” Marinate sat down on the closed lid of the bathroom and covered her face with her hands, “Oh Tikki, Adrien is here!”

“I heard,” the kwami said, sitting on the border of the bathroom counter. “But you need to stay calm. You can win this!”

“I just need to not get nervous around him.”

“It’ll pass.” Tikki flew towards Marinette, and snuggled her face. “You’ll do great. But you need to get some sleep, so finish up here and get to it!”

“I know, I know.” Marinette rummaged into her clothing bag and pulled an unopened pack of cookies. “Here. I’ll take a quick shower and you can eat before we go to bed.” she walked into the shower, groaning in pleasure as the water hit her exhausted muscles. “We need to figure out how you’ll sleep.

“I can sleep in your bag.” Tikki said, nibbling on her cookies. “Leave it next to your bed and that way I’ll be close.”

“That’ll work.” Marinette said. To tell the truth, she would prefer to have Tikki sleeping on her bed as usual, but since she was sharing her living quarters, it was not meant to be. “We’ll figure out how
to go on patrols soon.” She told her, “At least so I can tell Chat not to worry since I won't be around as much.” Marinette emerged from the shower wearing her pajamas and towel drying her damp hair. “I am exhausted.”

“I know. Sleep!” Tikki commanded, and Marinette nodded, opening her bag and letting Tikki fly inside it before she headed back into the living area.

Noemie was already in her bed, and Anaïs was currently slathering some facial cream on her head. “Oh,” Anaïs exclaimed, “I thought you’d drowned in there,” she giggled, before noting Marinette’s yawning. “Oh, tired?”

Marinette nodded, “this is intense.”

“Oh, poor thing!” Anaïs flashed Marinette a sympathetic smile, “New York is always this insane, I’m used to this sort of life.”

“I just need to adjust,” Marinette explained, as she set her bag right next to her bed, on the opposite side of where Anaïs was, and settled into bed. “Sorry for hoarding the bathroom.”

“Oh, don’t worry!” the other girl beamed. “I showered right before we went for the challenge anyway.”

“Right,” Marinette said, feeling her eyelids heavy. “I’m going to sleep now. Night Anaïs, Night Noemie.”

Marinette was just so exhausted that she wasn’t sure whether her roommates had actually replied.

The morning started as insane as usual, since all the designers basically ignored the breakfast offered at the hotel, eager to get back to the workshop. Marinette grabbed some cookies and some other snacks to last her through the day before securing a large cup of coffee. The van was there earlier than what she’d expected so Marinette simply got inside and waited.

"Hey!" Raoul sat next to her inside the vehicle and nudged her with his shoulder. “How did you sleep?”

“Not enough,” Marinette said, sipping on her coffee. “Why are you so alive?”

“I’m one of those terrible people, you know?” Raoul winked, his eyes glinting in amusement. “Morning people.”

“You are terrible and I hate you already.” Marinette groaned, but was glad to have someone to talk with. She had missed casual banter, since every interaction with Anaïs was an interrogation, and speaking to Noemie was talking to a wall.

Raoul laughter was loud, and Marinette enjoyed the energy. “How are you doing with your design?”

“I’m… okay.” Marinette hesitated for a second, but really. They had until midnight to finish their designs and then present the following day. “I’m hoping I manage to finish in time though.”

“Oh God yes.” Raoul sighed loudly. “Two days is not enough for theatrical costumes. I’m trying to finish a full skirt for my model and I’m not sure whether I’ll manage to get it done without it falling apart on the runway.”

“We have until midnight though,” Marinette said, “Although, we have to do a fitting... and get the
“Welcome to reality television darling.” Raoul joked, “Driving us insane is part of their job.”

The ambiance at the work area was filled with stress. Some mild cursing was heard all around, as the half-finished outfits either fell apart, or just didn’t move like they were supposed to. Marinette had pricked her fingers at least a hundred times today, and she was still not done with the embroidery.

“How are we doing?” Tim Gunn’s voice startled her, making her drop the piece of fabric she was currently holding.

“I’m finishing the decoration and then I’ll work on the lining of the cape.”

The older man looked at it, his expression serious as he examined the mannequin, “It’s going to be an attention grabber, that’s for sure.”

“Thank you.” Marinette held up the lining, “I’m just not sure about this color, it fits with the theme, but then I’m thinking it’s a little bit too bright and th…”

Tim held up a finger, “Don’t think too much. The models are going to be back in a couple of hours and you need to make sure everything works.” he told her, “This can be a big wow moment. Follow your instincts and get back to work!” With that, he turned away from her and walked towards the next table, leaving Marinette to work with renewed energy.

Soon enough, the models entered the workroom again and she was once again faced with Adrien Agreste. Surely now that she had gotten over the shock of seeing him, she would be able to act like a normal human being.

“Marinette!” Adrien’s voice was warm and he sounded excited to see her, and it did so clearly it was a clear no on the whole acting like a human being thing.

“Adrien!” Came the unfortunate squeaky reply, “how are you?”

“I’m good, you?” he answered, before he looked at the mannequin, which was currently dressed with a half made jacket and with a cape covering it's shoulders. “Oh, you really made progress with it.”

Right. Back to the contest. “Yeah, I just need to make sure it fits you right, before adding the finishing touches.” She pushed the clothing at him, naturally expecting him to go… somewhere to change. She definitely did not expect Adrien to pull the back of his shirt over his head and place it on top of her work table and then casually buttoning up the dress shirt Marinette had handed over to him. After working through most of the buttons, he unbuckled his belt and casually dropped his pants, leaving him wearing just a pair of black boxer briefs before slipping on the pants Marinette had made.

Oh.

Marinette’s attention was focused on the very blank wall right to her left, completely ignoring Adrien’s small talk. To tell the truth, the situation at other worktables was very similar, with all the models in different stages of undress as they were fitted and their clothing was adjusted to their bodies. Which meant that it made no sense for her to be this flustered about Adrien in his underwear. Even if he was ridiculously toned and his skin looked so very soft and… focus.

“There, I think it’s done.” He said, and Marinette turned back to him, since he was thankfully dressed now.
“Right. Let me see if it needs any adjusting.” She said, walking around him so she was standing at his back, making sure that the jacket fit properly and taking advantage of the fact that Adrien couldn’t see her face. “Move your arms?” She asked, and Adrien did as instructed.

“It feels comfortable,” He told her, rolling his shoulders and moving his arms, testing the fit of the jacket. “You did a good job.”

“Thank you,” She breathed out, before turning to glare behind her back, as Raoul chuckled right next to her as he too dressed his model.

A few marks here and there, and Marinette seemed satisfied with the results. “You can take it off now,” She told him, going back to her sketchbook and scribbling some details on the paper. It provided a reprieve from having to watch him strip again, and she was thankful. Despite everything, Marinette was well aware that cameras were on them all the time. She needed to not embarrass herself. Again.

The clothing was carefully placed on top of her worktable, and thankfully Adrien was dressed again and Marinette felt able to stand seeing him again. “We’re done for today, then…” he announced, slipping his jacket back on and grabbing his bag. He paused and looked back at the table. “It really looks great,” he repeated, his fingers grasping at the fabric, before he looked at all the models marching out. “Tomorrow then?”

“Thank you!” Marinette smiled, looking away as a small blush tinged her cheeks. “Yeah, I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Once Adrien had left, Marinette settled back on the chair, and began working on the adjustments she had to make, quickly marking up the places that needed to be fixed and pushing the fabric through the sewing machine. She still needed to get the embroidering on, so there was no time to waste.

But of course, reality television did not care for personal time tables. “Marinette? Interview time?” Camille’s head peeked through the workshop’s open door.

She looked up from her worktable, looking at the blue haired woman with disbelief in her eyes. “Now?”

“Yup!”

Marinette sighed loudly and walked towards the exit, “Fine.” She had so much work to do and they were doing an interview now? She followed Camille towards the interview room, all the while repeating the words ‘Do not say anything incriminating.’ Over and over inside of her head. She quickly settled on the chair, waiting for the tech to fiddle with the microphone and everything else they had to do. Once all of that was taken care of, Camille took a seat to the right of the camera, and the prompting began.

“Alright, so… how is everything going?”

“It’s been… hard.” Marinette began, “It’s kind of crazy, and I’m honestly struggling to get the jacket finished by tonight. I really hope I have enough time.”

“What did Tim tell you?”

“Well, that’s actually exciting. Tim said that it’s an attention grabber, and I’m really trying to make it live up to the expectations.”

“What’s your inspiration?”
“I chose the Opera Carmen, because I’m actually familiar with the story. So I know a little of what to do?” Her hands moved. “I’m trying to give character, but still make it wearable? So hopefully it looks like it's following a theme, but it's not a costume.”

“Good, good.” Camille said, looking at her notes before asking, “Have you been bonding with your model?”

Marinette’s jaw tightened for a second. It was a trap. “It’s been a… surprise.” She paused for a second,

“You seem to get along.”

Oh shit. For a second, Marinette wondered just what they'd managed to catch on tape but this was no time to be thinking about that.“Oh. We were in school together, so he’s not a stranger. It was a bit of a surprise to see him here though...” Marinette’s shoulders were tight, as she tried to focus all her energy on being as casual as humanly possible. And to tell the truth, the idea of discussing whatever Adrien was to her in front of a camera, was just not on her list of things to do. Also, she was extremely wary of what editions could do, so she knew she shouldn’t do anything she didn’t want edited into something more.

Also. She needed to finish her outfit before they left. “I should really go finish my look though.” She said, and Camille nodded. With that, Marinette scrambled out of the table and towards the work room.

In the end, she had pricked her fingers about a thousand times, she had somehow managed to glue her fingers to a piece of rhinestone (and she wasn’t even working with rhinestones, so it was even more surprising.) She also wasn’t sure whether she’d actually eaten today. This show was going to kill her.

The zombie horde of designers stumbled back into the vans, and soon enough they marched into the hotel as the army of the undead. They piled into the elevator “Can we get room service?” Marinette spoke up, feeling her stomach rumble, since her regime of protein bars was definitely not enough. “Like, is that allowed?”

“I’m getting a burger.” Emmanuelle, another designer Marinette had barely interacted with spoke up. “Just try and stop me."

The good thing about having a day dedicated solely to the fashion show, was that Marinette could actually get herself ready for a change. She actually slept, ate breakfast and was fully awake by the time the van was waiting for them outside of the hotel. Granted, that happened almost at noon, but still... Marinette had been very, very tired.

Tim welcomed him at the workshop. “Designers. Your models are getting ready. Meet them at hair and makeup and get them ready for the runway. You have one hour to make sure that everything is spotless. Make it work!”

Everyone hurried towards the hair salon, and Marinette reached the door to find Adrien already sitting on the hairdresser’s chair. The hairdresser, a woman greeted her quickly and quickly began throwing questions at her. "Alright. What should we do? Color? Texture?"

Marinette paused, she had honestly not thought this far, since she’d never had to present an outfit in an enviroment like this, but thankfully she had a clue on what she wanted. “I think his hair should be
neat, but not slick, you know.” Marinette said, gesturing around Adrien’s hair as she tried to explain what she wanted. “It should move, but not look messy.”

“Got it.” The hairdresser winked and began working on him, brushing Adrien’s hair before gathering more supplies.

“How are you doing?” Adrien asked, absolutely nonplussed as the older looking woman sprayed his hair with some product Marinette didn’t even recognize.

“Nervous.” she confessed, biting her lower lip as she watched Adrien’s hair being wrestled into submission. It was really messier than she’d remembered.

“It’ll be fine,” he reassured her, wincing as the hairdresser tugged a bit too hard, but otherwise, not really reacting to the styling. The clothes look good, you’re definitely still on the race.”

It was then, that Adrien began being attacked by the makeup artist, who quickly began matching foundations to Adrien’s skin, before turning towards Marinette. “Neutral make up?” The makeup artist asked, already brushing some foundation on Adrien’s face. “Or do you have any specific ideas?”

Marinette paused for a second, picturing the whole look on her mind. “How about some eyeliner?” Marinette suggested; leaning back against the table as the artist began applying the dark make up on Adrien’s eyes, smudging it slightly to give… well, a very good result.

“Like that?”

Marinette nodded, It shouldn’t be legal to look that good, really. “That’s amazing, thank you.” Soon enough, Adrien was done, and fully dressed. After fussing over his outfit for a couple more minutes, Marinette was ushered towards the runway, where she had to take a seat with the rest of the designers, opposite all the judges.

The host, Heloise Auger walked into the stage, doing her best runway walk while wearing a gorgeous and very short white dress. "Welcome to the runway,” Heloise greeted them. “As you know, in fashion, one day you’re in and one day… you’re out. There are sixteen of you here, after this show, there will be fifteen.”

The statuesque woman walked closer, still on top of the runway, “Your challenge was to design an outfit inspired by the shows at the Palais Garnier, using only the material you were able to gather. Alright. Let’s say hello to our judges.”

Behind here, there were three more people alongside Tim Gunn. Marinette was familiar with the drill, but she wasn’t familiar with all the faces, so she paid close attention to the introductions. “We have the creative director for Mode Magazine, Tatiana Geiger.” The woman waved at them, a pleasant, if rehearsed smile on her face. “Next to her, we have the creative director for S.E.L.F. Fashion, and famed designer, Thierry Leclère; and today’s guest judge, the amazingly talented, a regular at the Palais Garnier, Margot Peltier.” The woman, a famous ballet dancer waved at the group.

Heloise continued, “We also have Tim Gunn, but as you know, since he’s your mentor; he will not be judging you. That said, he will have one Tim Gunn Save. If at some point he disagrees with the judges, he can bring that designer back to the competition.” She said, “We also have an anonymous runway. That means, that the judges don’t know which designer created which look. Let’s start the show!”
The lights dimmed and the music began blaring and they were off. Her outfit was the fourth to come from backstage, and it took her breath away. It was something else, to watch an actual design made by her, be walked on an actual runway. It was different from seeing it displayed by a friend, or wearing it herself. Adrien was able to showcase the outfit perfectly, with the cool and effortless attitude of someone who was doing this for years already. Which, to be honest, was the case. The light metallic embroidery glimmered under light pleasantly; so that it caught the eye, but didn’t distract from the rest of the outfit. His pants were fitted, displaying long toned legs, but leaving the attention to the details on his jacket, which were the central of the entire outfit. Adrien removed the cape at the end of the runway and walked back with a confident ease until he reached the end, striking a pose before leaving the runway. It was no more than thirty seconds, but it felt like an eternity.

“It looks really good,” Raoul, who was currently sitting to her right whispered. “Good job.”

“Thank you,” Marinette breathed out, as they watched the rest of the models work their way through the runway. That was it. That was her participation on the runway. Adrien looked good, the outfit held perfectly and… there was nothing else for her to do but wait.

Soon enough, the runway show was over, and the designers stepped over the runway. The sixteen, very exhausted designers waited for the judges to announce the results. “We have learned who created each look. Once we name you, please step forward.” Heloise looked at the card she was holding, and began listing. “Angelina, Jean Phillipe, Leo, Halette, Marinette and Raoul.”

The six designers took a step forward, looking amongst each other nervously. “You are all the highest, and the lowest scores.” Heloise announced, “Everyone else, your scores have qualified you to move to the next round. You may leave the runway.” The rest of the designers walked off stage, leaving the six designers alone on the runway. At the same time, the models walked on stage, each of them standing beside their designer.

“Noemie. Explain your design.”

As the older woman begun explaining the story behind the ballet inspired dress, Marinette was trying to calm down her nerves. She could honestly feel herself shake in anticipation of when the judges would ask her to explain what she tried to do. It wasn’t until she felt a small nudge on her shoulder that she turned to look up at Adrien, who mouthed ‘breathe’.

And she did. She could do this. She’d taken on so much more and succeeded. Judges at a reality show couldn’t bring her down unless she let them.

“Marinette. What inspired you to make this outfit?” Heloise spoke up.

She took a deep breath and began, “This outfit is inspired in the opera Carmen, specifically by the character of Escamillo.” She motioned at Adrien, “The character is a matador, and I tried to express that through the lines of the outfit, trying to bring it real life, so that it was wearable and not just a costume.”

“I can see that.” Heloise said. “It took my breath away. It’s a very dramatic look, but he looks very chic.”

“It’s gorgeous. It’s risky, and it paid off.” Thierry spoke up, “I see a lot of work being put into that outfit, with the jacket and the cape and everything else going on, and it looks very finished. Which is a very important feat in this contest. Congratulations.”

“Using a Matador as guide is a very a very risky move. But it definitely works. It looks very modern,
very now.” Tatiana said, before motioning in front of her. “Can we see the cape?”

Adrien immediately took it off his shoulders, twirling the cape between his hands like a matador would, displaying the dark red blood lining.

“Ugh. I love that.” Margot gushed, “It’s so dramatic, so couture, but still so wearable! You should be very proud.”

Marinette positively beamed “Thank you.” With that, they began questioning another designer; and Marinette still wasn’t sure just how that had happened. They liked it. She had been thoroughly congratulated by the judges; so she was sure she was not the lowest scores. It was everything she’d wanted for her first appearance. She chanced a glance up to Adrien, only to find him smiling proudly at her, nodding his head at her in silent encouragement.

“Alright.” Heloise spoke up, distracting Marinette from Adrien and making her focus back in the contest. “We’ve heard what you have to say. Now it’s time for us to decide who won and who lost this challenge. You may live the runway. Models, please stay.”

The designers were led to a waiting room behind the runway, where the rest of the designers were waiting. “Oh my god!” Anaïs exclaimed, once the group made it through. “How did you all do?”

“It went well.” Raoul said, stretching his limbs as he settled on an empty spot on the sofa. “I think I’m safe.”

“I’m done for,” Halette said, running a hand through her blonde hair. “Mine wasn’t properly finished. I’m honestly expecting to get sent home.” She held up a hand, silencing the barrage of support sent her way automatically. “It’s okay, I know what went wrong.” She turned her attention towards Marinette, “It’s between her and Leo. I can see it.”

Matilda spoke up, nodding along with Halette, “Yours is really good!” She said, patting Marinette’s arm, who still hadn’t been able to speak. “Are you nervous? Breathe!”

“I’m just still processing everything,” Marinette explained, laughing nervously. “This is so intense.”

Leo, a man in his mid-thirties, simply looked at the exchange. He clearly wanted no part of this interaction, and from what Marinette could remember, he wasn’t exactly talkative with the rest of the cast; in the end he chose to sit down on a sofa and look around as they waited to be called back.

It took about forty very long minutes, but Camille popped back into the room. “Designers, time to walk back out!” she instructed, “go, go go!” The six chosen designers followed, walking towards the stage in an orderly line.

“As we’ve said,” Heloise began, once they were all waiting on top of the runway, “Here we have the highest and the lowest scores. One of you will be named the winner, and one of you will be out.” The model paused, allowing a second of silence for a dramatic pause before continuing. “This challenge offered a very wide range of opportunities, yet some of you were not able to grasp the concept and properly display it on your design. Some of you did so excellently and we’re very proud of you. Noemie? You are still on the competition. You may leave the runway.”

“Thank you.” The older woman nodded and walked off the stage, leaving five people waiting.

“Marinette and Leo, you two have the highest scores on this challenge. Leo, your dress was very inspired, and I can definitely see the inspiration of the Swan Lake on your concept. Marinette, your Carmen inspired outfit was very bold and complicated and it definitely worked in your favor. Leo, you are still in competition. Marinette, you are the winner of this challenge. Congratulations. We’re
very excited to see what else you can do!”

Wait, what? The young designer beamed, her smile bright as she processed just what the judges were telling her. She won! “Thank you!” she said, “I’m just really glad that I managed to translate my idea into an actual outfit that I really do feel proud of.”

“Marinette, you have immunity for the next challenge. That means you cannot be eliminated. Leo, Marinette, you both may leave the runway.”

There was only one way to describe the energy of her steps as she walked to the backroom. Once the door was closed behind them, everyone began asking questions. “You won?” Anais asked, and Marinette nodded silently, legs wiggling in excitement.

She was swarmed by at least five designers, who began congratulating her on her success and fawned over the cape she’d designed. "I can't believe I won!” Marinette exclaimed, grinning excitedly as the group surrounded her, showering her in congratulations.

“Marinette?” Camille tapped the young woman’s shoulder. “Interview time, let’s go!” She tapped her watch, clearly waiting for Marinette to follow right away.

“I uh… I’ll see you guys later,” Marinette said, before skipping after Camille. Once settled back on the interview room, Marinette began speaking, not needing Camille’s prompting this time. “I honestly can’t believe I won.” She gushed, grinning at the camera, “I’m just… so shocked, everything happens so fast here. I’m just glad that the judges were able to appreciate the effort I put on my design.” She laughed and exhaled loudly, in a mixture of excitement and sheer exhaustion before turning back towards the camera. “I just might be able to survive this, after all…”

Camille grinned. “And, cut!” the young producer turned towards Marinette. “Perfect.”

Chapter End Notes

I am overwhelmed with the love this story has gotten. Again, shoutout to the creator of the original comic who inspired this.
http://chaiannie.tumblr.com/
Chapter Summary

In which the second episode Airs.

Chapter Notes

I am totally taking advantage of the last few days of vacation before I have to go to class.

"It's starting!"

"I'm coming!" Alya called out, tapping her feet as the microwave finished popping the bag of popcorn she'd just thrown inside. "Is it recording on the DVR?"

"Yup" Nino answered, before letting out a booming laugh.

"WHAT HAPPENED?"

"Just the summary from last week. You have time." Nino's voice came from the living room, where the TV was already broadcasting the highlights from the previous episode. Finally, the microwave beeped, done with her popcorn and Alya opened quickly, pouring the contents of the bag into an awaiting bowl, before racing towards the couch where Nino was already waiting at. With the popcorn safely set between them, their drinks poured, it was time to watch their best friend be humiliated on national television.

"My poor friend," Alya looked at the screen, where a very flustered Marinette was measuring an extremely oblivious Adrien on screen. "This was the best and worst thing that could have ever happened to her."

Nino snorted, leaning back on the couch as the show actually began.

- The panoramic views of Paris were breathtaking, the camera panning across the great landmarks, before centering on the outside of the Le Grand Paris; current home for all the contestants. The camera entered a room, beds still occupied by the slowly awakening contestants.

The alarm clocks began ringing, and in every room the designers began getting up from their beds.

"What's that?" Elisa, a designer around thirty years old stretched as she approached a box on top of the small table inside of their room; before the camera cut to all the other rooms, as all the contestants began getting out of bed to properly investigate what the present meant.

"This morning we get up, and there's a mysterious box..." Anaïs Charpentier's voice narrated, as the
camera showed all the contestants getting up, stretching and yawning, most of them still not fully awake. "I'm intrigued and very confused."

"There's a note!" Marinette said, plucking the envelope from inside the popcorn and quickly opening it. "Good morning designers," she read, "We're whisking you away on a little adventure. We have arranged transportation for you downstairs, be ready at ten. Hugs and kisses, Heloise and Tim!"

The cameras showed everyone chattering around, still in their pajamas, every participant looking through the box's contents. "Look," Marinette said, rummaging through the paper tissue inside. "A captain's hat!"

Anaís plucked the hat from Marinette's hand and put it on her own head. "I'm loving thiiis!"

Raoul appeared on the screen, comfortably settled on the interview room, his monologue used as a voiceover for what was currently happening at the hotel. "Captain hat? Guess we're going for a boat ride." The designer, wearing a green button up shirt, which contrasted nicely with his dark sepia skin, addressed the camera like he was born to do so. "I'm just really hoping we don't have to run through a theatre again, or any kind of obstacle course," Raoul laughed, a dazzling smile lighting up his face, "these people can be vicious"

Back at the hotel, the contestants seemed to be almost ready.

"What do you think we'll do?" Anaís asked Marinette, as she applied foundation to her face, getting properly camera ready.

"I honestly have no idea," Marinette said, standing alongside the other girl in front of the mirror, pulling her hair into a bun on top of her head. "It says nothing about the challenge."

"That's true," Anaís said, frowning a little bit, "What do you think?" She asked, turned to their other roommate, who's been quiet through the whole exchange.

"I think," Noemie said, currently sitting on her bed as she looked at the girls as they finished primping, "that it's getting late and we should start getting ready." With that, Noemie stood up and walked towards the door, leaving both Marinette and Anaís sharing a look before shrugging and going back to their things.

Soon enough they were near La Seine, at Port Henri IV, somewhere close Ile Saint-Louis, where a large yacht was docked by, and its crew clearly waiting for them. Tim and Heloise were waiting on the top deck, bright smiles on their faces as the group quickly made their way onto the large yacht. An impeccably dressed crew helped them in, leading them towards the staircase that led to the open upper deck.

Heloise was wearing a tight fitting blue dress, highlighting her blue eyes perfectly as she greeted them. "Welcome designers!"

"Gather around everyone," Tim spoke up, signaling for everyone to get closer.

"We're on board the Don Juan II, one of the luxurious boats from Yacht de Paris, and our little surprise for today!" Heloise said, as the boat finally lurched into movement, and began gliding along La Seine."

The morning sun cast every monument around them in a soft light, and the water beneath the boat glimmered.
"Paris is the city of lights, love and most importantly, fashion." Heloise continued, as the Eiffel tower began nearing them, "It's been one of the most important cities in terms of architecture, culture, filmmaking and history. Its importance has been portrayed in several forms of art and, as designers, fashion is our art."

Tim nodded along, "We believe it's important to draw inspiration in everything that surrounds you. And I don't think it'll be too hard to get inspired here."

"For this challenge, you have to draw inspiration from this beautiful city and everything in it, to create a look that fits what you think of Paris."

"You'll have until lunch to sketch some ideas, then we'll have lunch here, courtesy of our sponsors." Tim said, "After that we'll go shopping and back to the workshop."

"You will have one day to finish this challenge," Heloise informed them. "Marinette, you won the last challenge, which means you have immunity and cannot be eliminated." The camera panned towards Marinette before returning to Heloise, "Alright! Have fun and I'll see you all on the runway."

"Well everybody!" Tim said, "What are you waiting, get inspired! Chop chop!"

With that, the group scattered, quickly finding a spot on the upper deck to settle and draw.

There was a cut to the interview rooms and Angelina’s voice over took over. "I'm actually looking forward to this challenge. I went to school for architecture, so I can definitely appreciate the Parisian landmarks. I think I can do something very interesting with the concepts offered."

Back on the upper deck of the boat, the designers either walking around, looking for a new angle, or just talking amongst themselves as they appreciated the view. Marinette had found a comfortable spot sitting cross legged on one of the large seats. She modestly arranged her pink flowery dress to make sure it covered everything that it needed to as she sketched, with a secret smile on her face as she alternated her attention between the scenery and her sketchbook.

"Nino. Babe, look at our daughter. Look at how pretty she looks!" Alya gushed, pointing at the screen as they showed Marinette walked towards the location with the rest of the contestants. 

"What are you doing?" Nino asked, glancing as Alya began fiddling with her phone.

"I'm tweeting about her." Alya said, "She deserves all the support social media can offer."

"The show is still being filmed." Nino pointed out. "And it's been like... three weeks since she began filming, she's still doing just fine,” an amused smile appeared on his face as Alya tapped a message on her phone. He knew by now that once Alya started on something, there was just no stopping her.

"I'm having a bit of issue with this challenge?" Anaís said, flipping her hair over her shoulder as she looked at the camera. "I lived in New York for five years. I'm not that knowledgeable anymore on France styles? The lines, and everything is just so different..."

The scene switched to Anaís scrapping another design, frowning at her sketchbook. "I'm just worried."

Soon enough, it was time for lunch, and the group sat together on a large table, set on the main deck of the yacht. The meals were served by the wait staff, who brought the exquisitely decorated plates.
"This looks nice!" Matilda, a purple haired designer pointed out, taking a bite out of her plate before groaning loudly. "Tastes so nice too!"

"Good," Raoul said, pouring himself a little bit of wine, "I am starving."

The group ate in companionable silence for a few minutes, enjoying the meal as some of them still poked around with their sketchbooks.

"So, how’s your design coming up?" Rémi Giraud asked, looking at all the people on the table, before offering some information of his own, "I’m all set, I just want to look at the fabrics we can work with before I settle on what I want to make."

"I have some doodles," Anaís said, digging into her lunch with gusto. "How about you, Leo?"

The thirty seven year old designer gave a carefully controlled shrug. "I have ideas. I'll be deciding which one I'll pick later. See how it develops as I go."

The scene changed from the lunch to the interview room, where Leo Sagnier sat alone, "I'm here to win," he spoke, his dark blond hair slicked back as he looked at the camera with a bored look on his face. "This is not a place to make friends, as much as these kids might be acting that way. It's a competition and that means that everyone can be an enemy. I'm not about to share my ideas with them, and risk them being inspired by me."

Their tour had almost ended, the yacht reaching port and being carefully maneuvered to allow a safe disembarking. Once they were all on port, and eager to get to the vans, Tim stood up in front of them. "Alright designers! I hope you have your designs ready, because we're going shopping!" The group piled onto the awaiting vans and they were off. Most of the designers were still looking through their sketchbooks, finishing up some last minutes details before they got to the store.

"I'm hoping that shopping goes well. Because... I'm not very inspired." Anaís confessed, sitting beside Marinette who then peeked at the girl's sketchbook.

"You just need to pick the right color, it would work!" She encouraged Anais. "That part looks really pretty!"

At the store, the designers were received by Tim, who encouraged them to pick some shopping baskets. The large store was closed for them, and the shop keepers were alert and ready for the requests the group might have. "Designers, you'll have thirty minutes to shop. I hope you're ready, because your time begins now!"

The group disappeared between the aisles, eager to take advantage of the little time they had to shop. There were several fabrics of many, many colors; along with several other types of materials that they were eager to get their hands on.

"I'm getting more ideas now!" Beaufort announced as he plucked several rolls of fabrics from the shelves. “Don’t you just love it when that happens?"

Unfortunately, that wasn’t the case for everyone. "Have you ever been given so many options, that you just get blocked?" Rémi Giraud said, as he looked at a wide selection of blue toned fabrics. "Because that's a thing that happens, and it is happening to me now." A loud bleep censored whatever it was he was going to say, but the message was loud and clear. Rémi was frustrated.

Noemie Roitfeld, seemed to be on the same boat. "This color, I can't match this damned color!" She muttered, as she browsed through the wide selection of lining that the store offered.
Marinette was shamelessly standing on top of a cutting table, looking at the fabric she wouldn't have been able to reach otherwise. The skirt of her pink vintage inspired dress swished around her as she picked at different kinds of fabric, feeling it between her fingers as she tried to settle on one. She pulled two rolls of fabric and set it on the table behind her, before jumping off the table, her hands securing the dress' skirt to her body; only then noticing the camera. "Oops." she said, blushing as she smoothed the skirt of her dress.

"Chop chop designers!" Tim's voice was loud and urgent, "you have five minutes left!"

Raoul seemed to have already finished picking his fabric, and was currently browsing through the rest of the materials, brown eyes clinically examining them against his chosen fabric, before tossing them inside his shopping basket.

"Designers, time is up! Everyone needs to be at the checkout counter now!" The few designers who still weren't done shopping, rushed towards the checkout counter and paid their purchases, and soon everyone was ready, all of them carrying bags of material in their hands. "Alright everyone, time to get back to the workshop!"

The camera cut straight to the workshop, and at once, all the designers began organizing their worktable, placing their purchases on top as they prepared to get to work. There was excited chattering, as they began to work with new energy. Their lovely morning probably helped with that mood.

"I have a good idea for what I'm doing," Matilda said, as the camera showed her placing the black fabric on top of her work table. "I've just never worked with this type of fabric before... so, I just hope it behaves for me."

The camera showed at every designer beginning to cut, and put the scraps of fabric on their dress forms, trying to get a feel of what they were trying to achieve.

The interview cut to Marinette, "I have a good idea on what I'm going to do, but I'm afraid it might not be as architectural or grand as some other designers are shooting for?" Marinette frowned, looking at the camera as she pulled her hair into a bun, weaving a pencil through it. "I've lived in Paris my whole life. I'm just... it's more than just the landmarks, and I'm going to try and show that through what I'm trying to do."

Back at the workshop, everything seemed to be taking shape, until Daniel gasped loudly. "Is that blue tweed?" he asked Elisa, who nodded, confusion clear on her face. "I'm making a tweed skirt." Daniel finished, looking concerned as he glanced at the extremely similar fabric.

A loud bleep censored Elisa's answer as she walked over to Daniels' work table. "Mine's a jacket," Elisa said, holding her fabric to Daniel's, "It's almost the same fabric!"

Daniel covered his face with his hands, panic obviously beginning to set in. "I didn't even see you around it when I picked it!"

"I did it first thing!" Elisa said, looking through her sketchbook to compare it with the other contestant. "What are you pairing it with?"

The camera panned around the room, as Elisa and Daniel tried to solve their little problem, while the rest of the designers tried to keep away from the drama, but most were simply unable to look away.

A couple of hours later, Tim Gunn stepped into the work room. "Well, you seem focused today!" he exclaimed, as none of the designers seemed to react to his arrival. The older man chuckled, "Let's see
how we're doing!"

The first designer to get inspected was Angelina. Her mannequin held a wide skirt with an exposed hoop skirt. "What's going on here?"

"I'm drawing inspiration from the Eiffel tower," Angelina explained, "So it's the bones will be exposed and part of the look,"

"I see," Tim said, "it's very conceptual, which can be very good. But you need to make sure that your outfit doesn't get lost in the concept you're trying to make. Do you understand?"

"I do,"

"I do like the skirt part... just try and merge it properly with the top."

With that, the mentor walked towards Raoul's table, "What do we have here today." His eyes glanced between the sketch and the half made pink dress. "It's very busy... but in a good way."

Raoul smiled, "I'm just trying to get some Marie Antoinette vibe going on... but make it more current."

"I can see that." Tim said, tapping his chin thoughtfully, "I think you need to be really careful with the construction of the skirt, keep it balanced so that it doesn't throw the whole outfit off."

Raoul nodded, "I can do that."

"Keep up the good work!" Tim said, before turning away towards the next table.

The scene cut to Raoul's interview. "I really think I have a good chance to win this one. I've worked in Architecture before, so I understand how to work structures and lines." He chuckled, "And Tim didn't hate it, so that's always good."

Back at the workshop, Tim had approached Elisa's table. "Well... this fabric looks very familiar." He said, before heading over to Daniel's table. "What happened here?"

The two designers looked bashful, but Elisa spoke up, "I think we both really liked the tweed," she rubbed the back of her neck, "I'm just trying to modify my outfit as much as possible so that it doesn't look related."

"I see that... I can see the differences in the fabric here, but I'm not sure whether they'll show on the runway." Tim pointed out. "You need to make sure your own style shines through enough so that the judges don't notice the similar fabric."

Marinette's turn was next. On her mannequin, there was a long light brown coat, "I can see what you're doing in here. Very Last Tango in Paris," He looked at the coat, his eyes examining the sewn seams. "It's simple... which isn't necessarily bad... but if you're making things simple, you need to be very, very polished. Or else simple becomes sloppy."

"Okay," Marinette nodded. "Maybe work on a hat or something?"

Tim looked thoughtful for a second, "Just make sure your finishing details are well done and accessorize properly." He nodded and carried on towards the next table.

"So, how are you doing today, Leo?"

Leo looked up from his work, as he sewed some lining on top of a delicate brocade fabric. "I'm
doing alright with this."

"What's your inspiration?" Tim

"I enjoy the arches on Notre Dame," Leo said, "So I tried to incorporate them into this look."

"It's working very well," Tim said, "I'm looking forward to seeing this on the runway. Keep up the good work."

The camera panned to Anaís, who was currently looking at the interaction between Leo and Tim. "Leo is *veery* mysterious." She laughed, "He wouldn't even tell Tim about his design. I mean... we're not going to steal it! And even if someone did try to steal it? We have less than a day to present it, so it's a bit... you know. Too much." Anaís burst into laughter as the camera panned back towards the workshop, where Tim simply turned away from the silent designer.

Back at the front of the room, Tim turned towards the work tables and adressed the group. "Well, designers... I think you're all doing a phenomenal job." he told the whole group, "Sure, some of you have a little more work to do, but the ideas are there. You can do this. And I can't wait to see where you take this." He clapped his hands. "Keep up the good work, and I will see you all in the morning!"

With four hours left in the day before they had to return to the hotel, the designers were beginning to get a bit antsy. "Ugh!" Marinette huffed, before two loud clunks were heard and her height diminished by at least three inches. "My feet are killing me."

"You have a perfectly good seat right there." Raoul pointed out, comfortably settled in front of his own work table.

"I can't sit down." She whined, wiggling her toes as she walked barefoot around her table. "I can't sit down when I'm stressed.

"You're going to get stuck with a needle on your feet and I'm not taking any blame," Raoul said, before focusing on the fabric lined up in front of him. "Then, you’ll have to go to the doctor and will miss most of the working time. Tetanus shots hurt like a bitch, by the way."

"Well, don't drop any then." Marinette replied, her tone sassy and defiant and Raoul snorted. "Problem solved."

It was then that the models arrived. Quickly, all the designers stood up, grabbing their outfits from the tables and throwing them on the models. There was no time to waste and the fittings needed to be as precise and fast as humanly possible.

Adrien was already wearing the shirt Marinette had designed, and was currently slipping on the coat.

"Oh..." The words might have been bleeped out by the censors, but it didn't take much effort to figure out just what Miss Dupain Cheng had just said. "It's loose on your shoulders."

There was a second where Adrien just looked shocked, but after that wore off, he simply burst out laughing. "I don't think I've ever heard you curse."

Marinette's face flushed, her hands covering her mouth for a second, before she began to apologize. "Sorry, I'm just..."

"No, it's okay, It's just new to me."

"I don't mind, I bet you're stressed." Adrien grinned at her, and Marinette looked up at him with a
bashful smile on her face.

"You have no idea," She breathed out, rubbing the back of her neck, before she clicked back into designer mode. "Right, I need a pencil," Marinette said, looking around her work table for one, lifting the material to see where it had rolled into.

"Like this one?" Adrien said, plucking the pencil from her hair, causing it to cascade down from the bun she had secured it into, to its full lenght, right below her shoulders.

"...yeah," Marinette breathed out, nervously taking it from his hand and successfully knocking her box of supplies onto the floor. Again. Down went the needles, measuring tape, elastic band and spare buttons, scattering around her feet and flustering her even more than she was already.

Adrien glanced down. "Wait, you're barefoot?" he asked, "Don't move, you'll get hurt," he told Marinette before he kneeled down to help pick up most of the needles that were currently surrounding her.

Marinette stood by, her cheeks flushing prettily as she pointedly avoided looking at the camera. But of course, the camera then focused on two other contestants, Raoul and Beaufort, who were currently watching the scene unfold, silently laughing at Marinette’s misfortune.

Back in the interview room, Beaufort burst into laughter, "Bring some water into the work room because the thirst is unreal."

Soon after, the models were gone and the designers were back to work. There were only two more hours until the end of the day. "I think I might have bitten off more than I can chew." Raoul's voice sounded concerned but slightly amused. "The skirt didn't look as great as I thought on the model's body, but I can still work with it. I might need to cut down on some other details though. I don’t know if I’ll have enough time."

The next morning, all the designers hurried towards the workroom, anxious to finish their work in the time they were given until they had to take everything to the runway. As usual, it was never enough time.

Tim arrived soon after, ready to remind the designers of the schedule for the day. "Alright designers, You have five hours, but you have to take your models to hair and make up to get them properly ready for the runway. Style carefully and thoughtfully. And, that’s it! I can’t wait to see you on the show!"

"I did not sleep enough," Marinette appeared on the screen, "But I'm almost..." A yawn interrupted her and she covered her face with both arms as she waited it out. "...ready. But I think it will look okay." She frowned, "I don't think I'll win this one, to be honest, but it's still good. I definitely stand by it."

Hair and make-up were a flurry of instructions, but the artists were good and professional and soon the models were back in the workroom getting ready, with only thirty minutes until the runway show.

Adrien was currently fully dressed, his hair was casually tousled and Marinette was fussing with the coat, popping the collar up and then pressing it down as she tried to decide on the complete runway look. "I can't pick."

"Designers," Tim interrupted, as Marinette was holding a bag and a hat in her hands. "Time to go to the runway now"
"Marinette," Adrien said, taking the hat from her hands, "You're overthinking things..."

"I know," she sighed, biting her lower lip anxiously. "I'm just nervous."

"Well, you won the last one." Adrien reminded her, patting her on the shoulder comfortably. "You're safe... relax."

"Marinette..." Tim's voice cut right through their little moment and Marinette squeaked.

"Right!" she said, "Thanks!" she added, squeezing Adrien's forearm for a second in silent appreciation, before running behind the rest of the designers, ready for the show.

"That's it. I ship it." Alya said, still holding her phone in her hands.

Nino snorted, turning his attention towards Alya as the designers on the screen took their positions on the runway. "You've always shipped it. We've always shipped it." Nino said, taking a sip of his drink as he watched Alya tweet something. "What is it now?"

"Hashtag. Adrienette." she told him, a devilish smile lighting up her face.

"What are you writing?"

"Only the truth babe, only the truth."

Nino reached for his own phone, looking for the tweet in question as fast as possible. His only answer to Alya was simply say: "Marinette will kill you."

The message was sent from Alya's personal account, which, considering her status as sole administrator of the Ladyblog and the fact that she usually posted several videos and news... well, let's just say, Alya had a lot of followers on her social media accounts. The tweet read:

_Aren't @DesignerMarinette and her model the cutest thing ever? #Adrinette, #IShipIt._

"Worth it." Alya said, “Might as well, since I'm already going to meme the hell out of her.”

At the runway, Heloise did a dramatic entrance as required, standing in front of the designers who were already sitting and waiting for the show to begin.

Welcome to the runway,” Heloise greeted them. “As you know, in fashion, one day you’re in and one day... you’re out. There are fifteen of you here, after this show, there will be fourteen.”

"For today's challenge, you had to create a look based on Paris, bringing your own touch to what the city makes you feel. You had freedom to choose your materials, which means we're expecting a high quality show. Marinette, you have immunity for this challenge, which means you cannot be eliminated today."

Marinette nodded, a small smile on her face as the camera panned to her.

"Alright," Heloise continued. "Let's say hello to our judges. We have the creative director for Mode Magazine, Tatiana Geiger. Next to her, we have the creative director for S.E.L.F. Fashion, and famed designer, Thierry Leclère; and today’s guest judge, famous actress, Arlette Botrel,"

"Hello," Arlette greeted the designers with a smile and a small wave.
Heloise continued, “We also have Tim Gunn, but as you know, since he’s your mentor; he will not be judging you. That said, he will have one Tim Gunn Save. If at some point he disagrees with the judges, he can bring an eliminated designer back to the competition.” She said, “We also have an anonymous runway. That means, that the judges don’t know which designer created which look. Let’s start the show!”

There were a couple of obvious show stoppers. Adrien's outfit looked great, the dark red t-shirt and blue pants mixing oddly well with the brown long coat, giving him an old Hollywood kind of appeal. Raoul's pink rococo dress was extremely well received by the judges. Same with Leo's dress. And just like there were showstoppers, there were obvious failures. Unfortunately, Daniel's outfit was seemingly not well received and Anaís outfit generated a clear frown from Heloise.

Finally, the designers were standing on the runway, waiting for the judges' words. Heloise spoke. "If I call your name. Please step forward."

"Noemie, Matilda, Rémi, Elisa, Claudette, Max, Alexander, Beaufort, Jean Philippe, and Angelina." The named designers stepped forward, and she continued, "Your scores have qualified you to move to the next round. You may leave the runway."

The group left, leaving five designers on the runway. There was a beat of silence before Heloise spoke up again. "Marinette. You are safe this week, but you were not one of the highest scores. The judges feel that your outfit looks well made, but it was lazy and uninspired. It feels like something that could have been bought out of any store and put together by any person here. It was far too simple, and that just won’t cut it in the cutthroat world of fashion. But since you have immunity, you cannot be eliminated." Heloise waited for Marinette's acknowledgement. "You can leave the runway." She waited for Marinette to exit the stage before addressing the rest. "The rest of you. You are the two highest and lowest scores. Anaís, explain what happened."

Marinette stepped into the room, just minutes after the safe designers had exited the runway, causing a small uproar. "Oh my God!" Matilda exclaimed, "You're back already? What happened?"

The younger designer shrugged, her pale cheeks tinged red as she sat down quietly, looking dejected after being chastised on television. "They told me it was boring and uninspired. I'm safe because of immunity but... you know. It should have been better."

"Aww," Claudette patted Marinette's shoulder comfortingly, as the younger girl looked around, frowning as she settled in.

"It's okay," Marinette said, wrapping her arms around "I guess I can see their point. I still like how it looked, though."

There was a small shared look between Beauford and Claudette, but neither said anything. In the end, Rémi spoke up, successfully changing the subject. "I think either Raoul or Leo are going to be the winners." Rémi spoke up, earning the agreement from everyone there.

“Anaís wasn’t that bad though,” Claudette commented, “Compared to Daniel’s…”

Beaufort agreed. "Daniel's was just... not finished."

"I think the fabric thing really threw him off," Marinette pointed out. "He spent so much time trying to make it more original, that he really didn't get to finish what he wanted."

Elisa nodded, looking concerned. "I really didn't see we picked the same fabric."

"They did end up looking very different on the runway," Matilda said, "But we really need to not let..."
this happen again, it’s one of my worst case scenarios, along with coming up with the same concept."

It was then that the designers stepped back into the room. Between the four of them, there was a wide range of emotions. Raoul was beaming, Leo was serious but content and Anaís and Daniel were absolutely distraught.

"What happened?" Claudette asked, as Anaís sat between her and Marinette.

"I'm in the bottom two," Anaís said as her eyes swelled with tears, prompting both Marinette and Claudette to wrap their arms around the girl. "They said it looked like a Mime costume."

Beaufort winced, but the look on his face clearly conceded the point.

"She’ll be alright though." Daniel said, running a hand through his hair, "They said mine was trying to be several styles and failed to commit to any of them."

"Ouch." Marinette frowned. Judges didn’t pull any punches.

"They loved Marie Antoinette," Raoul said, in a clear attempt to break up the bad mood; looking thoroughly pleased with himself as he leaned back on one of the seats.

"I did love the ruffley peplum waist." Marinette pointed out. "It was a good look."

There was an echo of agreement around the room, and Raoul acknowledged her compliment with an elaborate hand wave, just as Tim Gunn appeared on the back room. "Designers, back to the Runway."

The commercial break was usually used to check social media, but since Marinette hadn't been on the top scores for this week, Alya had almost stopped paying much attention to the judging. "Mari's outfit was not boring!" Alya defended, barely containing the urge to throw popcorn at the television set. "You’d wear it, right?"

"Yeah, I guess." Nino said, leaning back as Alya’s legs fell onto his lap, as she got comfortable to watch the end of the show. "You know I’m really the worst option to be discussing technical stuff here, you know. But it looked good."

"Ooh, it’s starting again. I really want that Leo to leave." Alya said, "He seems kind of... dickish."

"He barely talks." Nino said, "How can he be dickish?"

"Exactly." Alya said, "They've been pretty much living together. They should talk even a little."

Back at the show, the remaining designers were awaiting the results, and as required, Heloise took her time. "Daniel, Anaís, Raoul and Leo. You have the highest and lowest scores in this challenge. Raoul... your dress showed a great understanding of the challenge and you were able to use a style as difficult as Rococo and make it into something fresh and tasteful. Leo, you took the arches from Notre Dame, and constructed a gorgeous cocktail dress. Leo, you're the winner of this challenge, this means you have immunity for the next one and cannot be eliminated.

"Anaís, your outfit seemed more like a costume than an actual outfit... but you're in. you may leave the runway."
I'm sorry Daniel that means you're out." Heloise stood up from her seat and walked towards the eliminated designer, "Au revoir."

Daniel walked off stage and back into the backroom, where he was hugged by all the designers and Tim, before he was sent to clean his work space.

"Aww, I feel bad for him." Nino said, as they watched the designer’s final walk out of the show. "It was just shitty luck. I hope something like that doesn’t happen to Marinette." Because it was one thing to be eliminated because of bad work, but luck played a big factor on these competitions. “Though she’s usually pretty lucky.”

Alya wasn’t listening, since she’d stopped paying attention after Leo had been declared the winner. "Oh my God!" Alya almost screamed as she reached for Nino’s arm.

"What?" he answered, as he carefully untangled his arm from her death grip.

The only thing Alya did in response was hold her phone up to his face.

#Adrienette was a trending topic.
The filming was currently two episodes ahead of what had aired. Which meant that while the second episode had just aired; they’d just finished wrapping filming the fourth. This left eleven contestants still in competition and nine of those contestants, who were happy to pile up in the emptiest available room… which in this case, was Raoul’s since both of his roommates, Beaufort and Daniel, had been along the first eliminated contestants. Along with Halette and Elisa, leaving just eleven contestants. Elisa had been the last one to leave, eliminated just the night before, leaving the hotel just after clearing out her station.

It was a little bittersweet, because while their day to day life in the competition didn’t allow for much time to bond, there was still a bourgeoning friendship among the contestants that looked for it. Every elimination, despite the relief that came with knowing they made it one more round… came with the sadness of seeing another new friend go.

That friendship was born out of moments just like this one, where they were all piled up in Raoul’s room to watch the airing of their show. Marinette was sitting cross-legged at the head of one of the empty beds, her back resting against the headboard as Anais and Raoul took over the rest of the space on the bed. On the one next to them, Remi, Alexandre and Matilda had settled comfortably, just like Angelina, Claudette and Jean Philippe had done on the remaining bed. Some snacks and drinks were scattered all around them, as they watched and commented the show and found out just how they were portrayed on camera.

After watching the show, Marinette was absolutely shocked and appalled at the way they had edited and displayed her interactions with Adrien. She was most certainly not that bad… was she? Oh God, how was she going to be able to face Adrien after this? Maybe she would be lucky enough and he wouldn’t watch it. But considering the way things seemed to work for her… it just wasn’t going to happen that way. He had probably watched the show, and he’d definitely seen her acting like an idiot.

Eventually, the group began getting up, saying their goodbyes as they began heading to their own rooms. After a while, only Alexandre, Anais, Marinette and Raoul remained, and were currently finishing up their snacks.

“Well, that was fucking adorable.” Alexandre said, grinning brightly at Marinette, who picked up a pillow and hid behind it.

“Shut up, that was really edited.” Marinette defended herself, peeking from behind the pillow. At least, that was going to be her defense, and there was no way anyone was going to sway her from that. Anais laughed, but she was currently preoccupied with her phone, so other than her giggles,
Marinette seemed to be safe. “Okay, this is a bit of a topic change but…Is it just me,” she began, scrolling through updates, “Am I the only one that’s googling my name to see what people think?”

“There are even allowed to?” Raoul asked, “I haven’t looked on anything these past few weeks.”

“Of course we are!” Anaís said, “We just can’t post anything other than what’s been aired. No spoilers and all that.”

After hearing that, Alexandre had grabbed his phone in a hurry. “What’s our tag on twitter? Designer and our name?”

“Yup,” Anaís answered before turning back to Raoul, rolling on her stomach.

“No harm in looking then,” Raoul said, reaching over to the night stand to get to his phone.

There was a moment of hesitation on Marinette’s face, but watching everyone in the room obsessing over their phones made her curious. In the end, she simply sighed and reached for her own smartphone. It was a bit of a surreal thing to read people who had never even met her, send messages of support and just cheering for her. It was actually a very nice thing to read, especially with how the past few challenges had worked out for her. One time on the bottom and the next few just safe. It was good to read that people seemed to enjoy what she did.

It was only then that she saw it.

“Oh my GOD!” Marinette’s voice was shrill and panicked as she looked at the screen, just one thought repeating itself on her head.

She was going to murder Alya. There was just no other person who could come up with something as… terrible as that.

“I’m guessing she saw it.” Raoul muttered, amusement shining through his voice as he finally put his phone down.

“What?” Marinette exclaimed, looking at the other three with narrowed eyes, “You knew?”

“We’ve been texting each other to see who was going to tell you about the trending topic.”

Marinette flopped on her back, awkwardly stretched on the bed as the group laughed at her.

But Adrienette? Really?

Now, not only did Marinette need to worry about the fact that Adrien had seen her awkwardness fully displayed on television but there was a very trending topic about her and Adrien. People shipped it.

Their next fitting was going to be very awkward.

“Well,” Anaís prodded, “What’s going on? Tell us something juicy!”

“There’s nothing going on!” Marinette argued, “We’re just… friends.” If that. “We were in school together. Of course we have a little more to talk about.” Marinette shifted on the bed, stretching out into a more comfortable position.

“How very… rom-com…ey.” Anaís smile turned dreamy, “They knew each other as children and then love blossomed!”
“No. No no no no no… No.” Marinette sat on her bed, furiously motioning at Anaís as she shook her head. “There’s no romance!” Marinette flailed, feeling her face heat up as she tried to explain, “None.” She didn’t have a crush on Adrien. That was a part of her past. Marinette Dupain Cheng was a grown and mature woman who was not going to be falling again down the rabbit hole that was her schoolgirl crush on Adrien Agreste. She just needed to get used to being around him again and everything was going to be just fine. “And it’s also really late, we should probably get to bed.” Was she trying to make a run for it? Yes she was, but she was not going to endure an interrogation about the Adrien Agreste situation.

“Fine. We’ll let you escape.” Raoul laughed, as the group finally begun dispersing back, all of them heading towards their room.

Back in the girls’ room, Noemie was already fast asleep, which meant that they had to be as quiet as possible while getting ready to bed. As usual, Marinette headed into the bathroom, to feed and let Tikki out to stretch out her limbs.

It was routine by now, something she did every day before bed, and whenever they got the chance to be safely alone… which, considering she was on set or surrounded by cameras all day, didn’t happen very often.

But it was the price they had to pay to be a part of this show. After being cast, but right before signing her contract, she’d discussed the whole thing with Tikki, several times. Her Kwami was such a close companion that Marinette was well aware that just one hesitation from the Kwami would have been enough for her to scrap the whole idea. It wouldn’t have been worth to keep one of her closest friends cooped up inside her bag just for her own personal ambition.

Because, even if Hawkmoth had been defeated, which meant that the threat of Akumas was extremely unlikely (but as usual, possible. Magic worked that way); there was still the matter of patrolling. Sure, it wasn’t completely necessary, but it was a well-received service to her city. By now, Paris was one of the safest cities in the world, and Marinette felt the responsibility to keep it that way, at least until she was no longer able to. Besides, being Ladybug had been a part of her life for so long that it just helped her clear her head. She craved the time she spent patrolling at night. It kept her sane.

“Sounds like a plan!” Marinette said, stretching in front of the bathroom’s mirror before opening her bag, allowing Tikki to get settled on the makeshift bed that Marinette had made for her little kwami. It was time for bed.

The next morning they had been ushered towards the studio next morning, it was business as usual, gathering around as they ate breakfast. Marinette stayed simple, holding a large cup of coffee and a croissant, peacefully nibbling on her breakfast as they boarded the vans that would take them to the studio.

“Bonjour, trending topic,” Raoul’s voice was cheery as he slipped into the van, sitting next to Anaís, holding a frothy cup of coffee of his own.

“Oh, shut up!” Marinette hid her face behind her hands, glad that there weren’t any cameras with them at the moment.

Anaís giggled, “She’s blocking that topic, “she told Raoul, who laughed with her.

"You’re terrible and I hate you both.” Marinette did her best to not pout. “I just don’t know how I’m going to face him today with all the stupid cuts the show did.”
“Marinette, darling? Edition had very little to do with this. It was all you.”

“I… Well, Ugh.” Marinette gaped at them, which only encouraged their amusement, which seemed to remind her of something. “Also, Thirsty? If they do a reunion show I will murder Beau too.”

Once at the set, things happened fast, as usual. The crew made sure they all had their microphones attached and tested; their faces properly made up; and they were given a couple of minutes to get their hair under control. After that, it was time to go to the runway room, to the seats arranged for them.

There was some running around, with the crew making sure the lights were ready and set for filming before Camille popped into the room, doing a last minute review before the cameras were officially rolling and the lights turned towards the runway.

It was go time.

“Designers.” Heloise was wearing a dark red dress, with a floor-length hem. “Evening wear is one of the fashion most important looks. It’s what will get your name on the biggest and most important events all around the world; and one of the biggest signs of what style means to you.”

The cameras not focused on the model panned across the contestants, before Heloise spoke up again. “Editorial looks are meant to defy conventions, to go beyond what is expected. Your challenge today is to create and editorial look based on eveningwear… However!”

There was excited chatter, which quickly died down at Heloise’s voice.

“There is a twist. In Project Runway, we want to push your creativity, and push boundaries. For this, I want you to switch things up. You must create a look that doesn’t conform to what people might expect. Designers with male models. I want you to take the gown and make it into a work of art for your models. And the same goes to you, designers with female models, let’s make the tuxedo into a real fashion statement. You will have one day to finish this challenge.”

There was some chatter, and Heloise continued, “Noemi, you have immunity, which means you cannot be eliminated. Designers, you will have thirty minutes to create a design, and then Tim Gunn will take you shopping.” She gave all the contestant a fixed look, a cheeky look on her face as she finished, “Remember, We are in Paris, one of the biggest fashion capitals of the world. I want to see that creativity in each and every one of your designs. Make it great, make it Haute Couture.” Heloise said, “Good luck, and I will see you, on the runway.” With that, the model turned away and strutted out of the catwalk.

Camille appeared, now that the cameras were off, “To the work room people!” She motioned at them with her clipboard, before narrowing her eyes at the group. “Wait. Matilda, Leo, Anaïs, to the interview room; the rest of you, go on ahead.”

The aforementioned Anaïs made a face and pouted at Marinette, who simply grinned and patted her arm before her roommate was dragged towards the interview room. She followed the rest of the group towards the work room, where they quickly settled on their own work stations and started sketching. There was no time to waste.

Except… that she couldn’t come up with anything that felt right. “Ugh.” Marinette ran a hand through her hair, looking at the sketch in front of her with concerned blue eyes. “This is a mess.”

Raoul plopped his sketchbook next to hers, his brown eyes curiously peering at her drawing. “What’s wrong?”
"I don’t know how to make a good skirt for Adrien. Just how much floof is too much floof?"
Marinette asked. “Should it be a tube down, should I make it more gown-like?”

“Technically, there’s never too much floof.” He said, “But, what do you think?”

“I don’t know.” Marinette said, “On one side, I want to go all out? They told me last night I play it too safe, But… I don’t know whether Adrien will be comfortable with it.”

“Well, he’s a model, he should be comfortable with it.”

Marinette gave Raoul an annoyed look. It was different for her. Because while all the designers had good enough relationships with their models, none of them knew theirs like Marinette did Adrien. She cared about his comfort more than what the rest of them did. And frankly, she was just beginning to be able to act like a normal human being. “With the airing last night, I’m already going to be awkward. I would rather not make it worse.”

“I have a solution.” Raoul finally answered, which caused Marinette to immediately perk up. “First, he lowered his voice, as to make sure the cameras wouldn’t catch what he was saying, in a small effort to spare Marinette any more embarrassment. "Embrace the crush. It’s there. Deal with it." He smirked as he leaned his shoulders on her table, watching the annoyance flash on Marinette’s face. “The more you deny it, the more awkward it becomes. Trust me, when I met my girlfriend, I acted like a fucking idiot, until I shaped the fuck up and asked her out; so you see, you can get better! Now, I know that’s not going to happen, but still… it’s an idea.”

Marinette’s forehead met the table in a soft thud, sighing loudly as she pondered just why she thought asking Raoul for advice had been a good idea.

“There there,” His hand ruffled her hair until Marinette swatted at him. “Admitting you have a problem is the first step in solving it.” Raoul said, and laughed. “Now, back to our problem. “Second point. He is a model, you know. He’s probably used to this… and third? You’re a designer and not in Collège anymore. Put on your big girl pants and act like it.”

Marinette lifted her head from the table, turning her attention towards him. “I think I like it better when you just make fun of me.”

“I’m still doing that. I can’t wait for the latest development for Adrienette.” The comment earned Raoul a push on his arm and a hip check from the shorter girl, and he was soon walking back to his own table, laughing loudly as Marinette tried to sneak a rude gesture without being caught by the camera.

Once he was back at his table, he added, “And for the design, the models are probably coming in for a fitting this afternoon. Buy enough material for that, and ask him if he’s okay with it. “Raoul waved a hand, "then work from there. Noooow, if you’ll excuse me, I have to make a tux look stunning.”

“Go!” Marinette waved at him, before diving into her design. She needed to make this work and formulate a plan before they actually went shopping.

Shopping went without a hitch. Thankfully, they had a bigger budget than usual, which meant that Marinette could get enough fabric to wrap everything in her whole work station at least twice. Now she needed to make sure that Adrien was fully comfortable with what she had planned.

Sure, she did have a plan B, but after the latest challenge, she wanted to make things look great. Her time in this competition had started with a glorious win, and maybe, just maybe… Marinette thought that she would be able to truly shine in this competition. That she could be the clear winner out of the
whole group. But then… she’d been among the bottom three, which had been a rather harsh reality check, before she’d been stuck among the middle. She had been safe, but… mediocre. Marinette had known the competition would be difficult but… she had really expected that she’d thrive under the pressure. She’d put her life on hold for this whole thing. She needed to shine again, to feel it was all worth it.

With that in mind, Marinette busied herself with cutting the fabric for the first part; Stitching a sewing a hunter green dress shirt, hoping that the rich fabric would be a nice contrast against Adrien’s skin tone, and that hopefully the shade was right to bring out the green in his eyes.

She was currently pinning the skirt to the waistband when Tim Gun slipped into the room, mostly unnoticed as the designers were busy trying to get their ideas to work.

“Designers!” their mentor spoke up, causing all eleven heads to snap up and offer a half assed greeting. “Wow!” he chuckled, “It’s intense in here! Let’s see how you’re doing!” With that, Tim began his usual rounds, offering his advice to the still barely started projects.

Marinette waited for Tim to reach her station, “So?” he asked, “How are we doing?”

“I’ve a bit overwhelmed with the idea, because I don’t know whether to go all out or just…”

“Well, safe doesn’t get you a win,” he offered, looking at the skirt. “And in the end, this is an editorial look. It should be dramatic.”

“I knoooow,” Marinette frowned, watching as their mentor looked over her sketch.

“I will tell you this. The color on that shirt is really good, and with… what are you using for the skirt?”

Marinette handed over a swatch of the fabric. “This one,”

“I can see it looking very impressive, but if you’re going to do something like this, you need to fully commit. This is a Haute Couture editorial look, and I like what I see so far, but you need to be one thousand percent sold on this idea. Are you?”

The nod Marinette offered was less than sure, which made Tim frown. “I’m sure, I am… really!” She said, her hands frantically motioning as she tried to reassure the older man. “I can do this.”

“Good, that’s good to hear. Now, is it a risk? Yes it is, but that’s where you all should be.” He tapped the sketch on her pad, and “Now make it work!”

Marinette waited for Tim to get some distance from her work station before she sighed loudly and her forehead met the table for the second time this day.

Alright everyone! Your models will be in for a fitting in about 4 hours. You have until midnight today and then until seven PM tomorrow.” Tim had already finished his rounds and was about to leave for the day. “I am so excited about what I see. Now, a few of you are still in your Make it work moment, but that’s to be expected and I can’t wait to see where you take it. And I will see you in the morning. Work work work!”

The models arrived just at the four hour mark, and Marinette braced herself for what could be a very awkward experience. Adrien slipped in with a shy smile on his face, and Marinette found herself mirroring it with one of her own. “Adrien… hey!” she greeted him, feeling thankfully that somehow, by sheer luck alone, her voice did not sound as shaky as she felt.
“Hey,” he said, “How are you doing?”

“Stressed,” she answered, a nervous chuckle falling from her lips as she brushed her bangs from her eyes. “But there’s nothing new there!” Marinette held out the shirt for Adrien and he began putting it on quietly, and even in the large and busy room, the silence between them was beginning to get unbearable.

In the end, Marinette decided to simply bite the bullet and just ask. “Oh my God, did you watch the show last night?”

The blond nodded, “yeah…”

“I’m just…” Marinette began working on the shirt Adrien had on, placing pins on strategic locations and doing her very best to focus on what she was doing and not look at whatever expression he might have on his face. “Isn’t it so weird? How… they edited and everything?” She was rambling and she knew it, but there was no stopping her now. “I’m really learning a lot about reality television… It’s really really weird.”

If Adrien had to confess, he did see the show. He had also looked through the tags on twitter, tumblr and facebook, looking for the posts about Marinette. He was, after all, very proud of her; and working alongside her had shown her a different side of her; one that he hadn’t really been exposed to while they were in school. However, the Adrienette hashtag, (which seemed to have taken over social media) had been a bit of a surprise. Along with several screen caps and gifs featuring the both of them. In the end, he gave Marinette a shy smile, “yeah… I saw.”

“Also, Adrien?” Marinette bit her lower lip, nervously looking up at him as she tried to ask about the design. “I have a design Idea, but…” She held out the sketchbook, where the quickly made doodle (with blond hair, of course), was wearing the long skirted design.

He looked it over, his eyes examining the design thoughtfully before nodding along. “It looks really cool.”

She was relieved, “Really?” She asked, her expression brightening almost immediately, before she squirmed a little and continued, “I’m just… Are you okay with this because some people aren’t and…”

“Marinette,” he said, his voice reassuring as he tried to stop Marinette from rambling again. “It’s okay, you don’t have to worry.”

“I know, it’s just so… out of what I’ve ever seen you do… I wanted to make sure you were comfortable.”

A small noncommittal smile flashed on his face, but it didn’t reach his eyes. “Yeah, my father would have never tried something like this on his shoots.”

“You don’t work with your father anymore, do you?” The words came out of her lips before she could stop them. It was just the truth. Adrien had been the official face for his father’s line until he turned eighteen. There had been about a year of no new pictures and then they started again; the only difference, was that Adrien was now a free agent. He would model for every campaign… but Gabriel’s.

There was a beat of silence and Marinette regretted immediately bringing up the topic. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to pry…” she apologized, looking contrite as she immediately busied herself with the jacket.
“It’s okay.” Adrien answered, looking around as he checked for the nearest camera. “I just haven’t really talked about it.”

“It’s okay.”

Adrien sat on the chair, getting to a proper height to help Marinette fiddle around with the jacket’s collar. After a couple seconds of silence, Adrien spoke up, feeling secure that the cameras were focusing mainly on the small meltdown Alexandre was having over his outfit. “I was supposed to be in Oxford,” he finally confessed, “I mean… I was there. I attended classes for about a semester.” Marinette’s eyes flickered towards his face, but she didn’t say anything, obviously waiting for him to say anything. “It wasn’t what I wanted, so I came back.”

Whatever had happened between him and his father was left unsaid, but Marinette understood. Despite never being as close as she’d wanted to be with him, she was well aware of the complicated relationship he had with his father. “I never knew,” she said, “Wish I’d known…” She had no idea what she could have possibly done to help, but…

“It’s okay,” he said, trying to give Marinette a reassuring smile, patting her shoulder lightly, and Marinette’s heart melted a little bit more. “I got back and then I was just incredibly busy. I suddenly got a lot of work and… you know… life happened.” He attempted to rub the back of his neck and Marinette quickly reached for his hand, stopping it right as it was besides his head.

“Pins.” she reminded him, as she nodded towards the pin cushion attached to her wrist.

“Oh right.” he blushed and let his hand fall. “I actually signed up for the show because I’m back in school again. And… it’s easier on the schedule.”

“Ooh, I had to put my studies on hold for this semester… I really didn’t want to, but it’s just not compatible for me, they don’t make things easier on us…”

Adrien nodded, “I bet!” he said, “They work you really hard, don’t they?”

“They do!” She told him, before pausing for a second. “I’m just… I’m really happy to be here, but I can’t remember the last time I got to sleep more than four hours a night.”

“Well,” Adrien told her, as a gentle smile appeared on his face, “If it makes a difference, you’ve really made my time here better.” He said, “It’s nice to see a familiar face.”

Marinette’s smile was filled with warmth, and she pointedly chose to ignore the way her heart skipped a beat at his words; both of them fully unaware as one camera had subtly turned in their direction. “Same… Don’t move.” She told him, as she carefully placed some pins on his collar. “This is just… so crazy. Everything happens so fast.”

“I can see that,” he smiled, “Whenever we get here, there’s like twenty people running around,” he chuckled, “Headsets and screaming.”

She motioned for Adrien to stand up and she began fitting the waistband of the long skirt around his narrow waist. “I’m always rushed through the entrance and straight into this room or the runway. I barely have enough time to see what’s going on out there…” As in cue, her stomach growled embarrassingly loud, which was a feat, considering they were in a room that was not quiet.

The look on Adrien’s face was a mixture of amusement and concern. “Did you eat?”

“I did!” Marinette was almost sure, and in any case, there were granola bars in her bag that she could reach for and there were protein bars in her bag and she’d yet to feel Tikki’s angry buzzing.
“You know there’s a catering table by the entrance?”

“You know that if I don’t sew this skirt properly you’ll end up naked on the runway?” Her tone was sassy and playful as she motioned for him to stand up.

He snorted, but followed her instructions. “I doubt it. I’ve seen some of the other models’ outfits. There’s always at least one person that’s been sewn into their outfit… And yours have always been finished.”

Knowing that Adrien had noticed was a lovely feeling. Marinette had always been proud of her work; even in the face of all the stress she’d faced in this competition; she’d still managed to finish her outfits. But with how everything had gone for her on the last few challenges… having him notice was extremely well received. “Well, I have to finish my part of the job, you know,”

“And I’ll do mine.” He winked, “You make it good, and I make it look good!”

Marinette laughed, covering her mouth as she giggled. “You’re such a dork,” Adrien grinned at her, and Marinette completely forgot her nervousness about seeing him earlier. “I think it’s all set. Can you move in it?”

Adrien took a few steps, and nodded. “Everything is good. Should I take it off?”

She gritted her teeth, trying not to react for the sake of the cameras. “Yeah! But carefully, there are still some pins on it.” She said, her voice tight but cheery as she turned her back on him and continued working on things, giving him at least a modicum of privacy to get changed again.

Once the outfit was back on the table, Marinette turned around to face a properly dressed Adrien. “We’re set then!” she said, “I’ll be seeing you tomorrow then?”

“Yes,” Adrien said, quickly inching forward and giving Marinette a one armed hug as he reached for his bag with the other hand. “Eat something.”

“I have granola bars, I swear!” She said, stiffening just a little at the sudden hug, but returning it quickly. Despite her usual tendency to spazz out, Marinette was a quick thinker and there were certain opportunities in life that she couldn’t let pass her by. A freely offered hug by Adrien was one of them.

Adrien walked away and Marinette did her best to focus herself with her work, but she couldn’t help but glance in the general direction of the door as Adrien slipped through with the rest of the models. A throat clearing was all that she needed to hear to know she’d been caught and she simply cupped her hands around her mouth, shielding it from the camera and mouthing just exactly what Raoul could do about his suddenly raspy throat.

They were back at the hotel and while it was later than what Marinette would have wanted, she was in a good mood and surprisingly still was wide awake and filled with energy. Tikki definitely disagreed with what she wanted to do, but just a little time outside patrolling, was just what Marinette needed today.

The excuses were quick and vague, knowing that the less she said, the easier it would be to leave, and soon enough she had left the hotel, striding confidently through the main doors. The night was cooler than what she’d expected, but bearable; and as usual the streets were swarmed by tourists. She knew this city like the palm of her hand, and it didn’t take long to find a spot to transform.

It was freeing, and with the stressful few days she’d had during the filming. It was just what she needed. Her face broke out in a smile as she ran over a rooftop, feeling the wind on her face as she
laughed out of pure joy. She went through her normal route; paying close attention to what was happening on the streets below her, making sure to grin at some of the passersby who gaped as she ran through.

If she had to be completely honest, she missed Chat too. While they didn’t always patrol together, they usually took advantage of the times they met to catch up and tell each other how they were doing. Now, with the crazy schedule that the show put into her life, what few times she’d to patrol, she’d mainly dedicated to the areas near the Hotel, making sure that things were in order before returning. Just like what she was doing today.

It was then when she saw it. A girl, no older than sixteen, walking hurriedly through an empty street. Behind her, two older men were looking at her like she was prey to be had. And they were gaining in on her. This would not do.

Ladybug dropped from her spot on the roof, landing gracefully in front of them before standing up to her full height. “I would really think this through if I were you,” She told them, her yoyo ready to aid her in whatever she did next.

The two men were obviously startled and stopped right on their tracks, thankfully giving the younger girl the chance to go away. There was a moment of clear hesitation on their moves, both of them sizing her up as they tried to figure out what to do. “You don’t look very impressive in person.” one of them muttered, as they clearly decided that they could take her. “You don’t even have Chat Noir with you,”

“Yes she does!” A cheery voice spoke up from just behind the two men, causing them to turn around in a hurry. Chat Noir had entered the scene, making sure his baton was extended and ready to battle. “Good evening, My Lady, lovely to see you as always,” he mock curtsied, grinning at her over the shoulder of the two rather befuddled goons.

“You too Chat, you too.” Ladybug couldn’t help but beam as her partner showed up just in time, and with his usual flair for dramatics. “Well,” She told the duo, “What now?”

What the goons had in size, they clearly lacked in technique and agility, so when they tried to rush them, they made quick work on detaining them. After that, it was a matter of waiting for the authorities to arrive and handle the matter legally. It usually didn’t take long, with the amount of tourists that were always in the city, there were always policemen making sure that everything was alright.

And once the police took over the situation; Chat and Ladybug jumped away. Almost out of instinct they headed towards one of their preferred rest spots; atop the roof of a large building that oversaw the Parisian skyline.

“You seem in a good mood tonight,” he pointed out, settling comfortably on the rooftop as he turned towards her. “Not that I’m complaining.”

She laughed, the sound short and breathless. She was in a very good mood tonight. Her fitting had gone great, her design seemed to be really working… she had been able to patrol. Everything was working out just great. “I’m… I’m just glad to be able to go out today.”

“I’ve noticed that.” He said, “I don’t think we’ve run into each other in… weeks?”

“Probably right,” Ladybug wrinkled her nose, the movement barely noticeable under her mask, “I’ve been… really busy with a project,” she explained as she stretched her arms over her head, wrinkling her nose at the half-truth she was telling him. “It’s eaten up all my free time.”
“Oh, I know how that feels,” he chuckled, ruffling her head affectionately, earning a push from her. “For what’s worth, I’ve missed you on patrols.”

A small smile appeared on her face, “I’ve missed you too Chat.”

He grinned, “I knew it,” he told her, “What do you miss the most? My dashing good looks or my astounding wit.”

“Your humility.” she deadpanned. “Clearly.”

Chat laughed, nudging her shoulder lightly and she couldn’t help but join in the laughter. Once the laughter subsided, he asked, “Is the project done?”

It was odd, how they shared their lives, telling each other at least vague details of what they did with their lives. Their relationship was still platonic, though not for lack of temptation. It was just… that after everything they’d gone through… it was terrifying to try and risk everything they already had. Chat Noir was her best friend in the world, she’d die for him and she knew that the feeling was reciprocated (She had seen the actual evidence on that one). Despite all they didn’t know about each other; they’d found a balance to their friendship that felt natural and had only grown strong. She didn’t know his name, but she knew him. And until the scales tipped further in any direction, until someone asked for some sort of resolution on their undefined relationship, it would have to do.

“Not yet.” she finally told him, rolling her shoulders as she felt the tension of the day beginning to settle. “I can handle it though.”

“Good.” he said, putting an arm on her shoulders and squeezing her lightly. “Let me know if that changes, I can keep up with things over here until you are free.”

Her smile was bright and grateful as she leaned her head on his shoulder. To be honest, she hoped it wouldn’t come to that, because these little breaks were good for her sanity. Sneaking away from the hotel helped her take a break from the madness of filming the show. “I’ll…” her words were interrupted by a yawn, and despite her best efforts; now that she had relaxed, she could feel the days’ worth of exhaustion hit her like a freight train. “I’ll tell you if it comes to that, okay?”

A small smile appeared on his face, but Chat didn’t move an inch, letting her rest her head on him without question. “I mean, It’s no trouble for me!” he said, his tone light as he tried to reassure her. “I can handle it, and you know that if it came to that… I’d let you know.” So far, his schedule was flexible enough that he could definitely pick up the slack, should she need it.

“I know, I’ll let you know. Promise.” She said, her voice certain though softer than before.

“Good.” He said, turning his gaze towards their surroundings as they remained in companionable silence for a moment. It was then that he caught sight of a billboard in the distance, featuring the cast for the reality show. There, looking straight at the camera, was Marinette. “Are you watching that?” He asked, wondering if Ladybug cheered for his friend as well. If she didn’t, then he would definitely try to convince her to cheer for Marinette.

There was no answer.

He carefully tried to look at the young woman, who was almost slumped on his shoulder and shook his head, green eyes glancing amusedly at her. It seemed that she was more tired than she’d let on.

He chuckled, the sound low as he tried not to disturb her and he began thinking just what he should do.

Eventually, he just pulled her into his arms as he laid on his back, dragging her along with him in an
attempt to get her into a more comfortable position. She didn’t even stir. Well… shit. She was dead to the world.

“Oh, bug,” He muttered, shaking his head as he let her sleep for a little longer. Thankfully, not using their abilities meant that their miraculous wouldn’t run out. Their identities would be safe. With Ladybug resting against his shoulder, her breathing soft and even; Chat decided to just let her rest. Whatever was happening in her life, it was really draining her and she definitely could use the rest.

Almost half an hour passed before she began to stir. The first thing that she realized was that her cheek was resting on leather. Damp leather, if she had to be precise. The second thing she noticed, was that she was not in her hotel room. The third thing was that she was sleeping on Chat Noir and had thoroughly drooled on his suit. “Oh shit!” the words slipped out of her lips before she even thought about it and Chat, who’d been currently looking at the phone on his staff turned his attention back to her, as she scrambled back to a sitting position.

“Sleeping Beauty!” he joked, pulling himself up with her. “You’re up!”

“How long was I out?” she asked, wiping her face with the back of her hand, thoroughly embarrassed after drooling on his partner.

“Just a little over thirty minutes. Barely a Cat nap, if you will,” he joked, before his gaze turned worried. “Everything alright?”

“I’m just…” she looked bashful, which was not a usual look on her, “I guess I’m more tired than I thought.”

“I stand by it, you know.” He told her, “You don’t have to come meet me if you’re tired. Actually. I’d rather if you didn’t.” As she attempted to try and argue with him, he held up a hand. “I prefer my partner awake, you know. And not at risk of going splat.”

Ladybug snorted, and shoved him lightly. “Stop.” she whined playfully and stretched, “But… I guess you might have a point there.” The look on her face turned slightly concerned, “I might end up missing more patrols.”

“Take care of yourself.” he told her, his voice sounding oddly chastising, something she was definitely not used to hearing from him. “Sleep, and…”

She stuck out her tongue at him as she readied her yoyo, ready to make her way back to the hotel, “Yeah, yeah. Thanks mom!”

“Hey!” Chat did his best to sound offended, but the sound of her laughter as she disappeared into the night was enough to set him at ease.

The next day, as Marinette busied herself with work… she began to regret staying out as late as she had. Thankfully, the little nap she’d taken had helped with her exhaustion; but it didn’t change the fact that she’d stayed out awfully late. Anaís had asked her in the morning where she’d gone during the night. But after making a half assed excuse, telling Anaís she liked to walk around the city, which wasn’t entirely untrue; but it was all she was about to share with them.

But there wasn’t much to do about that; it was time to get everything done for the runway show; merely six hours away. In the end, she’d finished most everything that she could. Everything that she hadn’t managed to do, was easily hidden and shouldn’t pose much of a problem.

“Hey!” Adrien’s voice startled her from where she finished sewing hemline.
“Oh!” her head snapped up, “Hi!”

He pulled up a chair and sat down in front of her machine, taking good care to not drag or step on any of the overflowing fabric that surrounded them. “Still hard at work, I see…”

She laughed, blue eyes focused on the fabric she was processing. “I just need to finish this up and we can go to styling. How was your night?”

His long legs stretched carefully as he relaxed for the time being and watched her work. “Alright, I just did… homework.” He shrugged lightly and he focused his attention on her. Her hair was pulled up in a bun, secured with… a pencil. Again. Her blue eyes were narrowed, as she carefully maneuvered the fabric so that the machined sewed a pin straight line across the fabric. She allowed no room for mistakes “What are you studying?”

“Physics.”

Her eyes looked up from her fabric and Adrien’s turned towards it, avoiding her gaze for no real reason. “You were really good at that, I think…” she mentioned, switching up some of the buttons and levers on the machine, as she changed the stitching to finish up properly.

“I’ve always enjoyed it.” he said, “It comes easy to me.”

“Okay. I’m done.” Marinette carefully cut the threads and tied up the knots to make sure everything was finished. “How ‘bout this,” Marinette gathered the overflowing fabric carefully, folding it in her arms. “I’m dropping this at my work station and I’ll meet you at styling?” She lowered her voice. “Make sure you get on Marc’s chair. He’s good.”

“Noted,” Adrien saluted and hurried towards the other room.

Marinette placed the clothing carefully on top of her table. They were two hours away from the show, and while the bulk of the work was done, there were still some details that needed to be worked out; so hopefully, Adrien’s styling wouldn’t take long. Once she was sure everything was in place, she jogged towards the styling room, maneuvering through the crew walking on the hallway with a startling ease.

Adrien was already sitting down on the chair, making small talk with the hairdresser when Marinette arrived. Thankfully, there wasn’t that big of a queue, since most designers were either dressing up the models, or still finishing up some details on their outfits, which meant they could get to work right away.

“Marinette!” Marc, the hairstylist greeted her warmly, air kissing both her cheeks before motioning at Adrien. “What are we doing here today?”

Adrien didn’t spend that much time on set, but he would later have to admit that he did enjoy what little time he did. The look on Marinette’s face was serious, more serious than he’d ever seen her look during the time he’d known her. It was a new side of her that he was just now beginning to get to know. There was something incredibly fascinating about Marinette when she was on a mission.

Marinette moved to stand behind Adrien, looking at his reflection on the mirror. “I think it should be lightly tousled.” She told the stylist, before her fingers ran across the sides of his long-ish blond hair. “Maybe a little low on here and messier up top?” Her eyes found Adrien’s in the reflection, “What do you think?”

He would later have to admit, her fingers through his hair felt very, very nice. But this wasn’t the time for that. “I’m your model,” he told Marinette, closing his eyes as the make-up artist dabbed
some primer on his skin, “You can do anything you want with me.”

“Mon Cher, you need to be careful,” the make-up artist winked at Adrien and grinned up at Marinette, “with those looks and those words, someone might just take you up on that offer.” she laughed, as she looked through her make-up swatches, “Oh, no no no, no blushing, darling!” She admonished, grinning brightly at the blond, “I need to match this foundation to your face!”

With that, Marinette was thankful that she was not the only one blushing today.

After finishing with styling, they rushed back towards the work room, where everybody was getting their models dressed and ready for the runway show. It took no time for Adrien to slip into the outfit, and Marinette began to help him get fully ready, and was currently tying the knot on the silk black tie she’d made for his dress shirt, working the knot around her own neck before taking it off and placing it around his neck.

It was, technically, a simple look. A dark green dress shirt, and a longer jacket on top. The main aspect was that the jacket flared out into a long skirt, made out a matching yet different kind of fabric. His hair was lightly tousled, just enough to remind you of bed hair, but tamed enough to make it seem a little more polished. His make-up was for once, mostly subtle, contouring the natural lines of his face, enhancing the natural sharp edges of his face, high cheekbones and luscious lips. He looked… really good. And it was her work that made him look like this.

Adrien was currently walking around, testing the motion and getting more comfortable with the outfit as he strutted around, pulling out his best smolder. Marinette had to confess, it was very effective. Honestly, there was a reason people still pursued him to do campaigns, even if he tried to follow a somewhat normal life. He was stunning.

But then, he turned towards her, flashing her what was quite possibly the dopiest grin she’d ever seen on anyone; and Marinette found that she liked that look even more than the smolder. She couldn’t help but smile back at him as he began approaching her once more.

Yup. It was a done deal. She was definitely free falling down the rabbit hole that was crushing on Adrien Agreste once more.

Fuck.

“Designers and models!” Tim peeked through the door, as he looked at the madness happening inside the work room. “Time to go to the runway!”

Marinette squeaked, and Adrien laughed, watching as she poked and prodded at the outfit on him, making sure everything was settled. “We’re good,” he said, before they began walking towards the door. “Hey,” he said, waiting for Marinette to turn her attention back to him. “Good luck!”

“You too.” She grinned and was quickly ushered down to the runway.

Once they were all properly sat down, the lights went down and Heloise Auger walked back on stage. “Designers, welcome to the runway show. As you know, in fashion, one day you’re in and one day… you’re out.” She waited for a second, as the light focused on her for a minute before continuing, “Your challenge today was to create an editorial Avant garde look based on eveningwear.”

“Alright. Let’s say hello to our judges.” As usual, there were four people sitting on the opposite side of the room. Marinette readied herself for the usual introductions, “We have the creative director for Mode Magazine, Tatiana Geiger.” The woman waved at them, “Next to her, we have the creative
director for S.E.L.F. Fashion, and famed designer, Thierry Leclère; and today’s guest judge, an extremely talented photographer, whose fashion spreads have appeared on magazines around the world, Marco Vecchiarelli.”

The man, around 50 years old, greeted them enthusiastically, his words tinged by a heavy Italian accent. “Hello designers, I am excited to see what you do.”

Heloise continued, “We also have Tim Gunn, but as you know, since he’s your mentor; he will not be judging you. That said, he will have one Tim Gunn Save. If at some point he disagrees with the judges, he can bring that designer back to the competition.” She said, “We also have an anonymous runway. That means, that the judges don’t know which designer created which look. Let’s start the show!”

With that, Heloise headed back to her seat, grabbing her note cards and reading herself for the show. The lights dimmed and the music began blaring and soon, the first model appeared on the runway.

Raoul’s outfit was definitely a job well done. His model wore an elaborate white jumpsuit with a halter top. On top of it, there was an asymmetrical black coat, with an almost floor-length hem, which hung off her left shoulder and tied around her waist, leaving her right shoulder bare as it flowed behind the model as she made her way down the runway. On her right arm, a long glove completed the look, giving it some sort of balance in its own way. It looked stunning.

Marinette nudged him, “it looks really good,” earning a bright grin from the other designer. “The coat is genius.”

Then, Adrien walked out. His blond hair caught the light pleasantly as he walked on the runway, and Marinette realized that she had been right. The color on his dress shirt definitely made his eyes pop out. The skirt moved pleasantly around him as he walked, and it definitely worked. It had been a good risk to take.

“Good job on yours too,” Raoul said, “Your muse thing seems to be working swimmingly.” he whispered, and Marinette barely resisted the urge to smack him. The older designer just had far too much fun making fun of her tiny, itty bitty crush.

But then, the show was over, and after a break to make sure everything was perfect, the eleven designers were brought on stage. “Action!” Camille called out and the show was back on.

“We have learned who created each look. Once we name you, please step forward. Noemi, Angelina, Claudette, Max, Rémi, Jean Phillipe. Your scores have qualified you to move to the next round. You may leave the runway.”

After thanking profusely, the designers left the runway, leaving six people on stage: Raoul, Marinette, Leo, Anais, Matilda and Alexandre.

“You are the highest and lowest scores in this challenge. Let’s bring out the models.”

Frankly, this was the moment Marinette was beginning to get nervous. IF there was a talent the judges had was the ability not to react until it was time to give out their critique. There was no way to know whether they were safe.

“Anaís, tell us about your design.”

“Well, my idea was to take a tuxedo into something more modern. So I decided to focus on the jacket, and make it as fashionable as possible. I like the oversized shoulders; I think it adds a touch of art to the whole outfit.”
“Anais, I… I honestly don’t know what happened here,” Tatiana said, shaking her head mournfully. “Those pants are ill fitted and the jacket seems lopsided and not on purpose. I’m just not a fan. I’m sorry.”

“I can see how the jacket has potential,” Heloise said, “But I’m not sold on the outfit as a whole.”

Anaís face paled, but she nodded, silently accepting the judgement.

Finished with the first girl, it was time for the next critique. “Raoul.” Heloise said, “Do you think you’re among the top scores of the bottom.”

“Top scores.” Raoul said, his voice devoid of any hesitation.

“You’re right.” Heloise said, smiling. “Tell us what you tried to do.”

“Well,” Raoul began, “The suit is basically a very simple construction. The idea here was to take that concept and tear it apart into something new. I thought about doing coat tails, but the concept was Avant garde, so it had to go the extra mile. Which is why it ended up being an asymmetrical coat.”

“Raoul, I love this suit. I really do.” Thierry Leclère said, “I just adore how the coat flares behind her as she walks and the asymmetry brings a whole new aspect to it. Very good job.”

“Yes, I can definitely see it on a spread… maybe futuristic themed,” Marco said, motioning. “The styling seems on point as well. I like.”

“Thank you.” The male designer said, his expression satisfied at the praise.

“Leo,” Heloise said, “Tell us about your design.”

“Since we were supposed to follow the idea of a tuxedo,” Leo started, turning towards his model, who was wearing a fitted jacket that reached mid-thigh. After that, there was a long skirt with a train made out of black sheer fabric. “I decided to make a sophisticated gown. As you can see, the top is very fitted, enhancing the figure of the model, and down, it showcases her legs, but the long train gives it an extra edge.”

“Leo, I think this is a very good dress…” Heloise said, “It just doesn’t fit the challenge.”

“There’s nothing really avant-garde about this, certainly not compared to the great designs you saw here today.” Thierry said, shaking his head. “It’s a good dress… but boring.”

Leo’s jaw tensed, but he nodded, “I see.”

Heloise turned to Alexandre, her voice reproachful as she asked, “Alexandre… What happened?”

The designer fidgeted nervously. “I… ran out of time, to tell the truth, and I wasn’t able to really finish what I wanted to do.”

“I think that’s rather obvious.” Tatiana said, frowning. “It just doesn’t look good. I’m sorry.”

“It’s like you took a skirt and stapled it on the jacket. It’s just not good. And it doesn’t even look finished! We expect far more from you all by now.”

Alexandre nodded, before sharing a concerned look with Anaís, before Heloise continued, “Marinette?” Heloise said, “Tell us about your design.”

The younger designer spared a small glance to Adrien before clearing her throat and beginning her
small speech. “I think that full skirts on a gown are just such a strong statement that I had to go all out with this idea. What I tried to do was take the gown skirt, something that’s bold and very histrionic, and combine it with certain elements of the suit, which is considered far more masculine and bring them together into a new creation.”

“It definitely fits him well,” Thierry said, “I think the full skirt is something that you either go all out or just stay clear away from it. I think you took a very big risk here and you did it beautifully.”

“See,” Tatiana said, “this is what we expect from you. Something new and fresher than what you’ve shown us these past few rounds. I just adore the whole look.”

“I love this.” Heloise said, looking appreciatively at Adrien, “It looks absolutely powerful and strong, and the lines of your whole design bring a cohesive look that’s just wonderful. Also, I really like how the coloring seems to bring out his eyes. It really completes the look. Great work, Marinette!”

Marinette smiled, her face lighting up as she thanked the judges for their words, before Heloise spoke again, finishing the critiques.

“Thank you. That’s all for today. We’ll be examining your designs closely and we’ll call you back.” With that, the designers were dismissed and they were free to leave the runway.

Adrien’s reached for her wrist, softly squeezing her hand. Now, he was well aware that cameras were on them, but the pride he felt at seeing his friend being praised by the judges mattered more than whatever hashtag internet might create. After all, he’d been there as she was judged among the bottom two; and while Marinette had played it off, reassuring him that they would do better next time, Adrien knew that it had taken a toll on her. Marinette beamed at him as she was led off the stage, leaving him and the rest of the models on stage, making a small gesture as they were quickly led away.

Then, it was time for the judges to take a close look at the models; doing what they always did, there was poking and prodding and basically trying to find the mistakes on each design. There was absolutely nothing he could offer here, so he simply stood tall and waited for them to make their decision. After that, it was time to leave.

Backstage, the designers were called back on stage. They barely crossed path with the models, as they were led towards another room, where the crew would take pictures of each design to be posted online once the show aired. But in the small second their eyes crossed, Adrien gave her a quick thumbs up, ignoring the way the producer was barking out directions at them. Marinette grinned brightly at him, before Raoul ruffled her hair and she turned towards him. “Knock it off!” she whined, as they too were led away into the runway by another producer.

Once they were all settled back on stage, it was time for the elimination. “As I said before, here we have the highest and lowest scores. One of you will be named the winner, and one of you will be out.”

“Matilda, you are in. You may leave the runway.”

“Thank you,” the designer said, and scurried away, relieved to know that she had made it yet another round. That only left Marinette, Raoul, Leo, Alexandre and Anaïs on stage.

“Raoul, your design was very well done, and the construction was definitely Avant Garde. Marinette. You finally returned to taking risks, the skirt was strikingly done and your craft was worthy of an haute couture label. It was not an easy decision. Marinette…” Heloise paused, “you’re the winner of this challenge, Congratulations.”
“Thank you so much!” Marinette smiled brightly,

“This means you have immunity for the next challenge and cannot be eliminated. Raoul, you’re also in. You too may leave the runway.”

The pair quickly made their way out of the stage, looking positively giddy as they went back to the backstage room.

“You stole my win, Dupain-Cheng.” Raoul said, his voice filled with playful anger, “I’ll get you next time.”

“Pfft. Try.” Marinette answered, opening the door to where the rest of the designers were waiting. “I won!” she announced, a girlish giggle falling out of her lips as Matilda and Jean Philippe congratulated her.

Camille was waiting for her as usual, “Do I really need to say it?” She asked, raising an eyebrow as she motioned towards the door. “Chop chop!”

“Interview time!” Marinette said, before cheerily following the blue haired woman out.

“And Action!”

“I won!” Marinette beamed at the camera, her whole face lighting up as she continued, “I actually, really needed this… with how the last few challenges ended…” Marinette wrinkled her nose, “It’s just really good to feel that I’m good enough for this again.” Marinette brushed her bangs out of her face. “I guess I need to just trust what I want to do and go for it.”

She laughed, mostly out of pure relief at having won another contest, with a risky design, “I’m definitely feeling more confident about my abilities.”

“Cut!”

Chapter End Notes

Marinette's design (But with a green shirt: https://41.media.tumblr.com/77b37ec225c2e1b8e921dd442fe159e0/tumblr_o3c7zyanBw1umqlvbo2.

Raoul's design. (the one in the middle). https://36.media.tumblr.com/c924b55fad3277f3a13302eeec6ecbd/tumblr_o3c82r0eUq1umqlvbo1_2
Chapter Summary

In which there's a Team Challenge and Marinette is done. with. people.

With every new airing, and every hilarious (if she said so herself) review that Alya posted on social media, the group that gathered at their home grew. At first, it was Nino, who'd run into Rose while running errands. They'd talked for a little and then she had been invited to their apartment for the next airing.

In the end, she’d ended up showing up with Mylène, both girls still good friends after they’d graduated Lycée. They’d brought along enough snacks and drinks to honestly last them all. In the end, they’d decided to make this a thing.

A facebook group was created, to coordinate arrivals and directions; but it was mostly an open invitation. Everyone who wanted to watch the show could join them. By the time the sixth episode was about to air, the small apartment was definitely crowded with the majority of their class. Because right now, Nino, Alya, Rose, Ivan, Mylène and Alix were squeezing themselves in front of the television set as it blared the commercials prior to the show’s opening credits.

The good thing about this whole thing was that it provided them with a chance to reconnect. After they’d all graduated, they’d tried to keep close ties with one another; but life had a tendency to pull people apart, despite how hard one might try to hold on. Cheering on the participation of a common friend was just what they needed.

“A Scoot,” Alya said, before crawling to the sofa in between Rose and Alix who’d taken over the only soft surface in the home. The rest were scattered all around them, using whatever throw pillows they could get their hands on to make themselves more comfortable.

“Have you heard anything from Marinette?” Mylène asked as she scooted to the back of the sofa, trying to make sure all girls were able to fit comfortably.

Alya sighed. “She’s doing great, but she can’t say anything about the show, or else production will kill her.” It was a bit of a sore spot, because Alya really wanted to know, and the fact that she just knew that Marinette was holding back was almost enough to cause physical pain. She was a journalist. She wanted to know everything.

“At least she’s still on?” Rose offered, smiling at Alya.

“Yeah, we think so,” Nino answered this time. “But even if she wasn’t? I think their contract says that they have to lay low until their show airs.”

“Well, the other important question is,” Alix said, leaning forward as she got more comfortable on the sofa, “Is she finally hitting it or not?”

“That’s my friend you’re talking about, you know,” Nino said, shaking his head, because while he was part of the hashtag crew, he had been truly traumatized by some of the things people had written about their friends. Some things were just not easily forgotten.
“Oh, he wants it too,” Alix grinned, “The thirst is real. In both of them.” There were some scattered
snickers. Honestly, the entire class had expected that at least some sort of romance would have
blossomed between the pair during their school years, but they’d been left waiting, hoping that either
one of them would take the first step. But then… they all graduated and went their own ways. It had
been a very anti-climatic ending.

“Shhh,” Alya stopped the conversation right on it’s tracks. “It’s starting.”

The show started right away, with all of the designers entering the work room. The mood was
relaxed, as they happily chatted amongst themselves. Marinette was being currently sandwiched
between Anaís and Raoul, the three of them sipping on their coffee as they waited for the show to
actually start.

Tim Gunn arrived alone, holding a small black velvet bag. “Alright designers!” their mentor greeted
the group with a smile, “I hope you had a good night’s sleep, because you’re going to need it!” He
shook the bag, and everyone knew right away what it meant.

It was a team challenge.

Still, Tim made no attempt to use the bag just yet. “First of all, I’m very excited to announce that
we’re going to have a special guest today!” he announced, his voice excited as he looked at the
curious designers. “She is a famous actress, and whoever wins will get to dress her for an upcoming
event. So, please, give a warm welcome to our guest judge!”

The door opened and a very young looking woman stepped inside. The younger crowd were quick
to recognize her, their heads perking up immediately. The blonde actress was slim, and was wearing
a comfortable looking pair of jeans, a simple red blouse and a black hat, her face mostly devoid of
any make up; save whatever production might have slathered on her face to make her look alive
under the cameras. “Hey guys!” Céleste Chabert stepped inside the room, going to stand besides Tim
as the designers greeted her excitedly, most of them recognizing her from her earlier television work.

“Cèleste here is going to be our judge today. Your challenge will be to create the outfit she will wear
on the red carpet to the world premiere of her new movie.”

“Yeees!” The blonde girl waved her hands excitedly. “As you all know, I’m actually crossing over
to mainstream movies now, so I want whatever you try and make to reflect that. To be… cool, but
you know? Really sophisticated?” She pushed a long strand of hair behind her ear, as she looked
over at the group. “Tim’s said that you’re all really talented, and I’m really excited to see what you
can come up with.”

Matilda looked positively glowing, looking straight at the camera as she began tying up her black
hair in a ponytail. “This is really exciting!” she said, grinning at the camera, her whole body shaking
with excitement. “Celeste is really famous and obviously whatever she ends up wearing will be seen
all over the world. It’s a great opportunity to get some exposure.”

“Alright, we will draw your names from this bag,” Tim explained, waving a small black velvet “And
I’ll be forming the pairs.”

“Raoul, you’ll be partnering up…” Tim reached again into the bag, “Max.” The two men
moved towards one of the work tables, as Tim continued calling out some names. “Matilda… you’ll
be working with Rémi. Jean Philippe with Anaís”, Tim reached again into the bag; “Noemi, you’ll
be with Angelina and that leaves Marinette with Leo. Obviously, you’ll be designing only women’s
clothing this time, so we’ll only be working with the female models we have on staff; but that doesn’t
mean the male models are gone!” he said, and several heads turned towards a slightly tense
Marinette, who either didn’t notice or simply decided to ignore the attention.

But by now, the name bag was empty, so it was time to get to work. “You will have thirty minutes to
sketch some ideas and then we’ll be going shopping!” The mentor clapped his hands together. “So
make good use of the time you have, and plan your shopping!”

“Bye guys!” Cèleste wiggled her fingers at the group. “I’ll see you at the show! Good luck!”

Marinette’s face scrunched up. “I’m just not sure how all of this’s going to work out.” She tapped her
chin, lips pursed as she seemed to be thinking what else to add. “Out of everyone here, he’s the one
person I know nothing about. He’s won a couple of challenges, but I have no idea if we’re going to
be able to work well together.” There was a brief moment of silence, and she exhaled loudly, before
adding, “I really hope it goes well.”

At the store, the whole cast was walking around the store in pairs, discussing the fabrics and the
designs they were going to attempt. The situation between most of them was amicable, there were
mostly discussions on what shade of a particular color they should use; but other than that, the teams
seemed to be in sync.

And then, there were Marinette and Leo.

“This is going to be hell to sew,” he pointed out. “We have one day to finish this dress.”

“But it’s the best fabric here!” she argued, her fingers trailing over the fabric as she showed it at Leo.
“And the shade suits Cèleste perfectly!”

“I still prefer scuba.”

Marinette looked downright offended. “Scuba has no movement at all!” Marinette reached for
another fabric, pulling it from its shelf and presenting it to her partner. “Even this would work
better!” She huffed at the look on Leo’s face. “It’s better than what you’re picking.”

There was a moment of silence as the duo sized the other one up. Thankfully, Raoul decided to
intervene. “You know?” he spoke, wedging himself between the two of them as he took a roll of
fabric from the self. “If you pick something like this, you get the best of both worlds!” he told them,
his brown eyes carefully looking between Marinette and Leo, “You’ll probably find some sort of
middle ground… hopefully.”

With a hum of agreement and a curt nod from Leo, it seemed that the designers were finally agreeing
on something and Raoul went back to Max, looking satisfied at having been able to help. It was then
that the argument over what colors to pick started.

Marinette exhaled loudly as she began pointing out all the good parts of her own design, and just
why they should change Leo’s vision immediately.

So to sum things up. The other teams seemed to be working just fine. Raoul’s only argument with
Max was whether they should use silk charmeuse in blue, or emerald green. Anaïs was arguing
whether to buy more yards of tulle. And… Leo and Marinette were still arguing over what design to
choose.
Back at the workroom things didn’t seem to be any better. While Leo and Marinette had reached a small agreement as on what fabrics they were going to get; they were nowhere near close on deciding the details on their design. Their ideas were far too opposed to reach some sort of middle ground.

“I honestly don’t think that’s a good idea,” Marinette said, eyeing the pattern that Leo was cutting and attempting to use. “It’s too stiff and formal.”

“It’s supposed to be formal, it’s a red carpet event,” Leo pointed out, fitting the pattern over the dress form as he tried to see how his plan would work.

“I just think that if we use this from your design,” she said, and held out her own sketchbook to Leo, “and we do this from mine, it can be something a little more interesting.”

Leo exhaled loudly, before turning an unamused glance towards Marinette. “Mademoiselle Dupain,” he started, his jaw tight as he clearly tried to keep his voice even. “You have your immunity. You are safe no matter what you choose to do today. I do not have that luxury, so if you’ll excuse me, I will do this dress the way I see fit.”

“But…” Marinette started, her blue eyes widened as Leo promptly ignored her and went back to work.

“Mademoiselle Dupain, either you help me with what I want, or please get out of my way.”

Back in Alya’s home, Alix had no trouble saying what she thought. “Diiiiick.” Alix’s mumble was soon followed by an overwhelming agreement in the room.

Alya poked at Nino with her sock clad foot, “Babe, I told you I didn’t like him! I told you!” She sighed, crossing her arm as Leo continued his interview, and the camera panned out to show an extremely frustrated Marinette. “I hate being right all the time,” she lamented, earning a snort from the bespectacled young man sitting on the floor in front of her. Alya decided to ignore this and picked up her phone. “ #DesignerLeo has to go home now. #SaveMarinette.” She nudged at Mylène, who grinned and reached for her own phone.

Let the tweeting begin.

Noemi was in the interview room, arms crossed as she sat back looking oddly relaxed. The camera panned towards the work room, where Marinette was still arguing with Leo over something that wasn’t heard while Noemi narrated. “I’m going to be honest and say that I was actually very concerned when they were paired up.” Noemi’s face looked almost amused as she continued. “Both of them have won challenges, and they are very talented.” An eyebrow raised as amusement took over her expression. “However… if they manage to get a dress done by the time the show starts? I’ll be surprised.”

There was a small chuckle, one of the firsts caught by camera during the whole competition. “It’s kind of funny, to tell the truth.”

Tim was already doing the rounds, and as usual began to offer his advice to all the tables.

“I like this!” he told Raoul, whose outfit was already somewhat set on the dress form. “What are you going to do with the top part?”
Raoul spoke up, “We’re thinking of an asymmetrical neckline. So it’s very structured on top and then it flows down.”

“I love it,” Tim said, “You should just make sure that the terminations are in good shape. Anyway, keep up the good work!”

He continued moving through the tables, but when he reached the final table, Marinette and Leo had yet to cut any piece of fabric. Marinette was currently sitting down on her work table, furiously drawing on her sketchbook, as she tried to come up with something she could salvage from this challenge.

“How have you been working together?”

The tense look shared between the team said enough. “It’s been difficult,” Marinette finally said, her shoulders tense as she waited for Tim’s opinion.

Difficult was a good way to put it.

“Well, it’s a collaboration,” Tim said, his posture betraying deep concern at the fact that they were at least four hours into the day, and they had nothing to show for it. “Here’s the happy news,” he said, turning towards Marinette with a serious look. “You have immunity so you’re not going anywhere. But if I were you I’d want to win again!” This prompted a very enthusiastic nod from Marinette, “And you should want to be part of a winning team!” he told Leo, who simply looked begrudged. “I honestly expected to be absolutely wowed when I approached this table. I’m frankly disappointed on what I’m seeing so far. You have to find a way to make this work!” With that, Tim turned around and continued his rounds.

Leo was a serious man. He clearly didn’t enjoy doing these interviews, but it was part of the job and he had to get through them. He was most definitely not someone who shined in reality television, but he was a very good designer and he knew this. “I feel at a disadvantage today.”

His fingers tapped his chin thoughtfully as he looked away from the camera, his posture rigid as he frowned. “Tim has a very good point. She has immunity. And I’m probably her biggest competition in this show. Which means, that she’s in the perfect position to get rid of me today and I’m not about to hand that chance to her. I’d prefer to work alone.”

The small truce had lasted for as long as Tim Gunn had been in the room. And after he’d left, the duo had gone right back into their argument. At least they’d cut some fabric for a straight skirt. And while Leo was a very good designer, Marinette did not agree in the slightest about the design they were making.

“We should do a different top,” Marinette said, “This cut is too classic and it doesn’t fit Céleste’s style.”

“Mademoiselle Dupain…”

“It’s the truth!” Marinette said, “There’s nothing fresh about that idea!”

“I’ve already said…” Leo started, and Marinette’s eyes narrowed, both of them squaring for the next argument, absolutely ignoring the still rolling cameras. Thankfully, a hand fell on either of their shoulders, lightly forcing Marinette to take a step back.

“What?!” Both Leo and Marinette turned towards the current intruder in their argument, an extremely
uncomfortable (as much as he was trying to hide it), Raoul.

“Children, behave,” Raoul’s joke came with a tight voice, not quite sure of how to deal with this situation, but already in too deep to back out. “Just take a minute and play nice.”

“I am not g…” She was interrupted as Raoul tugged her away.

His arm slung over Marinette’s tense shoulders, leading her as far from the work table as he was able to. “Come on little lady, time to walk it off for a couple of minutes.”

“I just…” Marinette scowled, and for a second, it looked quite possible that she could have growled in sheer frustration. “Can you believe that man?”

“Come on,” Raoul urged her, his brown eyes glancing quickly at the camera as they walked, before he lowered his voice for only her to hear. “Cameras are still rolling and…” Raoul sighed, running a hand through his short hair, “you need to pause and regroup for a minute.”

“He’s going to lose the challenge,” Marinette hissed, as the two of them were almost at the door, “and they’re going to think it’s my fault too!”

“I know,” Raoul said, “Go, walk… And I’ll go back to my work since your team is making it really easy on the rest of us.” Marinette’s eyes narrowed and Raoul held up his hands in silent surrender. “Go eat or something. You’ll feel better and you can come up with witty comebacks to use later.”

“Yes. Let the girl have her tantrum,” Leo’s voice called out from inside of the room and Raoul had to almost physically prevent Marinette from reentering the room and possibly maiming Leo.

“Really? Really?!” Raoul’s voice was heard from inside the room as the cameras showed Marinette walking out.

[Raoul’s face was flat and slightly concerned. After all, it was the closest thing they’d ever had to a blow out in the workroom, and while Marinette’s grumpy face was something he’d certainly grown accustomed to… Well, he’d never actually seen her mad before.

Still, the interviews were for funny tidbits and Raoul always delivered when it came to light-hearted fun. “Well, someone had to do something!” Raoul looked at the camera with widened brown eyes, shaking his head as he clearly thought about the incident. But his face brightened again; his brown eyes twinkling at the camera as he joked. “Besides, getting blood out of fabric is a pain in the ass.”

This trip had been absolutely useless; Adrien had arrived at the studio as usual, ready to get to his fitting. However, no one had informed him that the challenge for the day did not require his help.

The camera was on him, as he talked to someone in the crew. There were subtitles on the screen that showed what their conversation was about, since they were a bit too far away for the ambient microphone to fully pick up his voice.

“The challenge is with teams and a female celebrity,” the young staffer said, fiddling with the headset attached to his ear.

“Oh,” Adrien said, rubbing the back of his neck, “Did they call? I don’t think I got a call about that.” He reached for his phone, trying to see if he’d seen any sort of call or message he’d missed.

“You should have been called,” the other man said, looking thoroughly confused. “I’m sorry you
had to come all the way here, really… I just don’t understand how this happened!” The young crew member fretted as he tapped on his headset. “I'll find out so that it doesn’t happen again!”

“Don’t worry, It wasn’t your fault.” Adrien comforted the staffer, “I’ll just head on back home… Is this challenge going to last until tomorrow?”

“Yes, tomorrow they’ll have the runway show and then its business back as usual.” There was a beat of silence and the staffer added, “You can go by catering if you want. There’s some good stuff there today!”

“Thanks, but I’ll just head on home, no worries.” Adrien was about to head on home when he heard a loud huff and the small, yet extremely determined stomps of one Marinette Dupain-Cheng as she stalked through the hallway, muttering something under her breath that the camera also didn’t catch.

“Marinette?” Adrien asked and the crew member made sure to make himself scarce right away.

The designer in question froze at the familiar voice and turned around to look at Adrien with a confused look on her face. “Adrien?” Her voice was startled, but the bitter edge had been stripped almost immediately. She walked over to him, her voice softening as she asked, “What are you doing here?”

“Scheduling mishap.”

Blue eyes widened, “They didn’t tell you!?” Marinette exclaimed, the heated annoyance opening up to display mild surprise.

“Nope,” Adrien said, his fingers playing across the strap of his Project Runway official messenger bag. “They only just told me that it was a special challenge.”

Marinette flustered, looking almost upset on his behalf. “I’m sorry, they really should have told you.”

“It’s alright,” He shrugged, “I was reading for class, it’s a nice distraction.” The image of the two of them standing in the hallway came a little more into focus, though it seemed obvious that the pair was unaware of its presence. Adrien leaned against the wall, “And you know, It was a good chance to check on how you were doing.”

She sighed, leaning against the same wall beside him, “I never thought I’d hate group challenges so much,” she told him, rubbing her temples with an exhausted look on her face.

The comment certainly peaked Adrien’s attention, “Who are you paired with?”

“Leo.” Marinette said, “And… I honestly wouldn’t have minded working with anyone in the cast, but… Leo.” She sighed, looking up to see Adrien’s face, who was currently very focused on what she was saying. “Well. It’s been really difficult, you have no idea.” Her back hit the wall behind her with a light thud and she closed her eyes. “He’s impossible. And he completely rejects any idea I have to offer! Just because! He is honestly bossing me around like I’m his assistant and I want to take that sketchbook of his and hit him right on the middle of his goddamned face.”

Adrien laughed, full and hearty, his green eyes gazing down at Marinette with an charmed look on his handsome face. “Is it really that bad?”

“Worse.” Marinette’s laced her fingers and stretched her arms. “I mean, group work is always complicated but it’s like he’s trying to make it even worse. And I’m tired and we still have the rest of the afternoon to go.
The look on Adrien’s face was sympathetic, and for a second he shifted his position, his arms moving before he let them fall again. “I remember,” he finally said, hooking his thumbs on his belt loops as Marinette continued.

“And, we’ll be working with Leo’s model this time, so I’m sure she’ll back him up on anything.”

That was possibly the truth. During the competition, it was best to get along with your designer… after all, the fates of the designer and the model were intertwined. If the designer won, the model would do a fashion spread on a big magazine. In terms of money, it was enough to motivate every single model to power through the stressful filming schedule.

Marinette shook her head. “But anyway,” she sighed as she rolled her shoulders, “I’m done whining, how are you?”

“Just school,” Adrien said, “with shooting and school, I pretty much have my whole day booked… except for today.”

“They really should have called you,” Marinette insisted.

He smiled, it was obvious that it didn’t matter all that much to him. “It’s okay. I was studying physics for tomorrow… and I had already planned to be here, so it’s not a big deal.”

“Tomorrow?” Marinette asked, turning her attention towards him, “Do you have a test?”

A nod answered her question, but before Marinette could say anything more, Adrien continued, “Besides, you know what they say, think like a proton.” Marinette stared at him in silence, “Always positive!”

His grin was absolutely pleased and Marinette gaped at him before pushing him away, causing Adrien to stumble back a step, while he laughed at her horrified reaction. Because the joke, as silly as it was, had the desired effect of finally tearing down the last bits of frustration left in her body and the previous remaining tension in her posture seemingly evaporating.

“I quack you up?”

The look on Marinette’s face was absolutely incredulous and she blinked repeatedly before breaking out into giggles, covering her face in amused horror. “No, you are the worst.”

He laughed, his shoulders shaking at the look on her face. “Still worked, didn’t it?” He grinned, his green eyes sparkling as he looked extremely proud at the fact he’d turned her sour mood around.

“Well…” she started, but didn’t get to finish; as there was a loud clatter coming from inside the workroom, along with a mournful bellowing from someone not quite identifiable, all the words censored and changed into a beeping, to ensure that viewers were spared the foul language.

Marinette jumped, blue eyes widening almost comically before she covered her mouth with her hands, giggling at the noise, before turning towards Adrien, “I should probably…” she nodded towards the workshop.

“Yeah,” Adrien nodded, his hand rubbing the back of his neck as he fidgeted in place, “I should get back to my place. Test tomorrow and all that.” He made the beginning motion to turn around, but stopped abruptly. Adrien reached into his messenger bag, rummaging through the contents before pulling out a handful of cereal bars. “Here. Just in case you don’t have time to go to catering again.” He handed her the snacks, which Marinette received with a look of wide eyed appreciation.
“Oh.” Marinette looked down at the snacks in her hand, and turned up to flash a beaming smile at Adrien, “Thank you!”

The young designer was about to turn away when Adrien lifted a hand up, “Wait!” He called after her, and Marinette swiveled around after taking a couple steps away. “Just…” The look on his face was bashful, as he caught up with her, and he looked away from her face as he continued talking. “You’re good at this. Really good.” His voice was softer, this conversation clearly intended just for her. His hand landed on her shoulder, squeezing it lightly as he continued, “Don’t let him get away with this; he’s probably scared of you.”

Marinette bit her lower lip, “Thank you.” She waited for a minute, holding his gaze as she clearly wanted to say something. After a few seconds, she finally said, “I really needed this today.”

“Good.” He said, his hand sliding away from her shoulder, down her arm before he realized it. “I’m glad I could help.”

“Oh my God!” Alix’s voice was a frustrated groan as she muffled her complaints against a throw pillow. “Five episodes already and all we get are some light shoulder touches? Just get to it already!”

“I didn’t think they’d be worse as adults.” Mylène looked at the screen, shaking her head as she watched Marinette’s bashful grin as she placed the chocolate bar back in her pocket. “I was wrong.”

Marinette’s return to the work room was completely unexpected. With the way she’d stormed out, people did not expect her to return with a small smile on her face and holding a couple of cereal bars in her hand. Raoul, who’d seemingly deemed himself as the unofficial referee for the Leo vs Marinette battle, raised an eyebrow at the girl. She shook her head at him, but her smile betrayed her.

She began setting up on the work table she was currently sharing with Leo, eager to get back to work. It would seem that her time outside had given Marinette some ideas, and she was going to try and break down the wall that Leo had put up.

Some curious glance were headed her way, but fortunately for Marinette, the rest of the cast was too busy finishing their designs to really try and find out just what had happened.

Jean Philippe wore an amused look on his face. “Alright. So…” the young man started, “I wasn’t outside to see whatever happened, but gee, I wonder just what could have happened that made her mood a hundred times better.”

The scene panned to Marinette, who was wearing a satisfied smile on her face as she examined the materials they had and added some details to her sketch, all the while being purposefully ignored by Leo.

“To be honest,” he continued, “at this point in time, we’re all waiting for something to happen.” Jean Philippe looked at the camera and raised an eyebrow. “What? It’s entertaining for us too.”

“Leo,” Marinette spoke up, holding up some pieces of fabric as she was set on getting something ready.

“Hem that piece of fabric for me,” Leo instructed, “That’s all the help I need from you.”

Purposefully ignoring that, Marinette looked at the dress form and wrinkled her nose. “It’s too
bulky.”

“It’s the most appropriate design.” Leo said, “She needs to look grown and sophisticated.”

“That doesn’t mean matronly!” Marinette argued and there were wide eyes all around the room at the mention of the m word.

“Well Mademoiselle Dupain, you don’t have to worry about this.” His voice was lower, clearly only intended for her to hear. “You have your immunity. You can let me work on this and you’ll skate by.”

“Well, Monsieur Sagnier,” Marinette argued back, her voice firm and determined. “You see, I will not do that! First, I’m not your assistant, and second, I am not going to allow you to bring my name into something half made because you’re too stubborn to listen. We're the same in this competition, and you will listen to me!”

“We decided that…”

“You decided,” Marinette squared her shoulders, her hands planted firmly on her hips as she glared up at Leo. “Your design is going to lose,” Marinette stated, her position firm as she stared him down to the best of her abilities. “And I don’t want my name attached to it,” he hissed, before going to the dress form and tugging on the fabric draped on it. Honestly, the models were going to be arriving soon and they had nothing to fit them with.

Leo stuttered, looking on in horror as Marinette draped a piece of fabric over the dress form, “What are you even doing?”

“This is too old looking and Matronly!” Marinette argued back. “She’s twenty six years old, not fifty!” Marinette pulled up her sketch. “And did you see her today, she’s not going to like a train on her dress! Make it simple, sleek!”

Leo gritted his teeth. “What’s your idea then, Mademoiselle Dupain.”

Marinette’s voice was cool, but there was small hint of victory edging into her words. “It’s Dupain-Cheng, actually, but for now let’s stick to first names.”

“You take the top part, I’ll do the bottom,” Leo grudgingly said, probably realizing that either he gave into some of her demands or he wasn’t going to have anything to show at the runway the next day.

Behind Leo’s back, Raoul offered Marinette a grin and a thumbs up.

Anaïs was shocked. The young designer sat in the interview looking at the camera with an amused look on her face. ”That went surprisingly well. Better than I thought it would.” The twenty eight year old woman, made a small face, her nose wrinkling slightly before adding, “Well, I’m sure that even if he didn’t like her before, he probably hates her now, but at least they’re working… No clue if they’ll manage to get it to work before the runway tomorrow, but at least there’s no fighting.”

There was a brief pause, as the corner of her lips twitched in a small smile.

“It was kind of funny to watch though.”

From off camera, the producer asked, “What do you think happened?”
“Well, what happened off camera?” Anaís asked, and shrugged. “I don’t really know, but I have a one guess and that guess is tall and it’s blond.”

The following day at the work room, it was insanity as usual. While most designers had managed to get everything set up, Marinette and Leo were racing against time. He was working on a straight skirt, using one of the fabrics they had to give it some depth, while Marinette quickly stitched up a crop top.

No, their relationship had not improved, but at least they weren’t fighting anymore. Only working silently.

“I’m done!” Marinette cried out, as she jumped with the top and placed it on top of the dress form, “Do you need help?”

Leo’s reply was a gruff shake of his head.

“Good. I have an idea.” With that, Marinette ran towards the rest of the tables, “Raoul!” She grinned at him, “Can I take the fabric scraps?”

“Uh… sure?” Raoul’s eyebrow rose as he watched Marinette gather the small pieces of fabrics, useless and discarded around their worktable.

“Thanks!” she beamed and went to the next table, asking the same thing from everyone else. In the end, Marinette had gathered a small amount of scraps and began quickly hand sewing some flowers. Small flowers, medium, from every size she could manage. The small pile in front of her quickly grew and Marinette looked thoroughly pleased with the results.

“How’s the skirt?”

Leo looked up, “Almost finished.” he told her, “What do you want?”

At this point, Marinette had decided to simply ignore Leo’s sour mood and just inform him of her next step. There was really no point in trying to reason with him because the older man simply refused to listen to her.

“I’m going to put some flowers on the top, just a few, to decorate it and then I was thinking of scattering some around the side of the skirt. Just to tie the whole look together.”

“I suppose.”

It was as good of an answer as she was going to get from him, so Marinette got to work.

“That’s my girl!” Alya grinned as Marinette seemed to take control of the situation.

“#DesignerMarinette completely saved the dress. #DesignerLeo should go home. And… posted.”

On the screen, the whole cast was making sure that the models were properly dressed and made up for the occasion. Marinette seemed to have relinquished the styling to Leo, which seemed like a smart thing to do, considering that she’d already won the battle for the design. Picking what battles to fight and which ones to let go was an important part of war.

“Leo’s still an asshole though,” Alix pointed out, between mouthfuls of popcorn. “At least what they’re making is nice. I’d wear it.” Nino directed a very skeptical look her way and the short pink haired girl scowled. “I can think a dress is pretty without having to wear them all the time, damn.”
she argued back, eyes narrowing as Nino’s amusement was mirrored in the rest of the group. “Oh, you all suck,” she grumbled, flipping them off with a very well executed gesture.

“Shhh!” Rose said, her soft voice interrupting the rest of the cast, “The runway show is starting!”

The next scene had all the designers settled on their spot beside the runway. Heloise was standing on top of the runway, dressed in a short black dress as she addressed them. “Designers. Welcome to the runway,” Heloise greeted them. “As you know, in fashion, one day you’re in and one day… you’re out. For today’s challenge, you created a red carpet look, for a young actress. The winner of this challenge will get to dress this actress and she will wear the winning design on the red carpet premiere of her next movie. Marinette, you have immunity for this challenge, which means you cannot be eliminated today.”

Marinette nodded, a small smile on her face as the camera panned to her.

“Alright,” Heloise continued. “Let’s say hello to our judges. We have the creative director for Mode Magazine, Tatiana Geiger. Next to her, we have the creative director for S.E.L.F. Fashion, and famed designer, Thierry Leclère; and today’s guest judge, famous actress, Celeste Chabert!”

"Hi guys!” Celeste, now wearing a simple skirt and a blouse greeted them, “I’m really excited to see what you made!”

Heloise continued, “We also have Tim Gunn, but as you know, since he’s your mentor; he will not be judging you. That said, he will have one Tim Gunn Save. If at some point he disagrees with the judges, he can bring an eliminated designer back to the competition. We also have an anonymous runway. That means, that the judges don’t know which designer created which look. Let’s start the show!”

The show had a variety of looks; which was to be expected, considering that the concept of a red carpet outfit was a very open one. Raoul and Max had their model wearing an emerald green gown, with a flowing skirt that felt simple and free but elegant enough to be absolutely stunning.

Matilda and Remi had created a show stopper as well, an elegant red gown that would make every woman feel like a bombshell, accentuating all the necessary curves in the model. Noemi and Angelina had a pant suit; with an loose and flowing jacket. It seemed comfortable, but the pants were not fitting as good as they probably should, and the finishing touches were less than stellar, a fact that was accentuated by the way the camera focused on the fact that the model tripped on the hem as she walked on the runway.

Marinette and Leo’s design actually looked well made, which was quite possibly the biggest surprise of the episode. The skirt fit the model perfectly and the flowers trailing down the fabric was enough to give it a cohesive look. That, paired with the simple gold sandals and black clutch that the model was styled with completed the look into something sleek, modern and very agreeable.

Jean Philippe and Anais had made a short cocktail dress, in black with gold accents, which was… safe, but not very interesting.

Finally, the designers were standing on the runway, waiting for the judges' words. Heloise spoke. "If I call your name. Please step forward."

“Jean Philippe and Anais!” Heloise said, and the two designers stepped forwards. “Your scores have qualified you to move to the next round. You may leave the runway.”

The two designers did so right away, thanking the judges profusely before disappearing through the
“The rest of you have the highest and the lowest scores. And we will be asking about your process and your designs.”

“Raoul and Max, tell us about your design.”

Max started, “Well, we wanted to do something that was simple but stunning; because it needs to be worn to an actual event and it needs to not overshadow the star.”

“I love the color you picked,” Celeste piped up, “It’s one of my favorites!”

“And it’d go so great with your skin tone,” Thierry said, “It was a good choice for this challenge.”

“And how did you two work together?” Heloise asked.

“We worked very well,” Raoul said, “We have a somewhat similar work style, so it was very easy to mix our design styles into something we were both proud of.”

“Thank you.” Heloise turned then to Marinette and Raoul. “Leo, Marinette, how did you work together?”

There was a beat of silence from the pair, followed by Raoul’s loud (and very clear) snort. “Sorry. I…” He quieted down, after Marinette directed cold blue eyes at him. “Cough. I’m better now.”

“It wasn’t the best,” Leo said, “I’m not used to working with someone so… young.”

“It’s very hard to work with someone who’s not open to suggestions,” Marinette argued back.

“Oh,” Tatiana said, “So it seems that it wasn’t a very good mix?”

“I’m afraid not,” Marinette said, “But at least we somehow managed to get something on the runway.”

The judges took notes, and Celeste was the one who spoke up, “I love it!” Celeste said, “I like how you made it a two piece… it looks lovely and very comfortable!”

“It does look comfortable!” Alya said, taking the job of Marinette’s official cheerleader far too seriously. “Far better than what that old fart was about to make!”

“He’s like forty,” Mylène pointed out, “not that old.” She ignored the look Alya flashed her and continued, “Do you think they have a chance?”

“I don’t know,” Nino said,shrugging his shoulders as he leaned his head against his girlfriend’s legs. “I mean, I think that the ones who made their model almost fall on the runway have it worse.”

“True,” Mylène looked at the screen, as the designers were being chastised before sent back to the waiting room. “At least Celeste looks like she likes Mari’s outfit!”

“I just really don’t like how he’d win too if it gets picked.” Alix pointed out, “With how he treated her all through the episode? He doesn’t deserve it!”

On the screen, Tim was currently standing next to Marinette and Leo’s design. “You know, when I dropped by they had nothing done. Not one stitch on the fabric.”
“Nothing?”

“Nothing at all!” Tim told them, “They’d been arguing all the time, and they were arguing at the store, and… ugh. It just seems like an absolute nightmare.”

“They did manage to pull it off, though,” Heloise said, “It’s so modern looking,”

Tatiana sighed, “Which makes me sad. Can you even imagine what would have happened if they actually worked together?”

“Well, unfortunately we won’t know that,” Heloise said, “Tim, can you go get the designers?”

The next scenes, with the designers on the runway, the elimination process began. “As I said before,” Heloise said, “You are the highest and the lowest scores. One of these teams will be named the winner, and one of you will be the loser.”

“This was a very simple challenge, where you had to create something special for a client. It was to test how your instinct worked, and just how well you were able to create something with a specific client in mind.”

She allowed time for a dramatic pause and continued. “Raoul and Max, your gown is effortless and such a lovely addition to any star’s closet. Marinette and Leo, your outfit is sleek and very modern, and it completely fulfilled the expectations of our client. It did surprise us to know the behind the scenes issues; but that’s not what we were judging right now. Leo and Marinette… your team is the winner. We heard about the issues behind the scenes, and the only reason we’re awarding the immunity to Leo is because you had it this week. You both may leave the runway.”

There was no cheery celebration this time, just a curt ‘Thank you’ from both designers as they strolled out of the runway.

“Raoul, Max. You’re both in, you may leave the runway too.”

Back at Alya and Nino’s home, the outrage was evident. “What?!” Alya almost dropped the remote, “How did he win the immunity!”

Alix concurred, “That’s so unfair!” she complained, “He was an asshole all through the show and now he’s safe from elimination? He should have been out already!”

Alya had picked up her phone, “#DesignerLeo stole that win, #JusticeForMarinette”

“Really,” Mylène said, “She fought with her partner, she didn’t get the immunity, and she didn’t get to work with Adrien. Mari had a very bad day.”

Despite snorting at Mylène’s words, Nino stood up, “You are all terrible and I’m not going to be part of this conversation.

“Why not?”

“Because,” Nino said, reaching for an empty bowl, “if Mari finds out you’re all tweeting about her and Adrien, she will murder everyone.”

“Well,” Alya tugged on Nino’s sleeve, forcing him to turn his attention back to her, “It does work pretty well…” she turned her cellphone screen towards Nino, showing him the current Trending Topics on Twitter, grinning proudly at him.
“You’re all dead.”

Nino could only hope that Marinette didn’t check the trending topics all that often.

France Trends  · Change

#DesignerMarinette
#ProjectRunway
#WhereisAdrien
#ApresMoiLeBonheur
Chapter Summary

Unconventional Materials Challenge!

Marinette was currently alone in their room, which was quite possibly one of the only times something like this had happened during the whole duration of the show. Anaíš was at Raoul’s room, watching the airing with the rest of the cast. Noémie had gone off with what was left of the cast to use the spa facilities, accompanied by the camera crew. After all, it was a great way to show the wonders that Le Grand Paris Hotel had to offer.

Despite many invitations to join either group, Marinette had decided that she was going to save herself from the humiliation and just stay in her room. After all, with Noémie and Anaíš gone, it finally gave her and Tikki the freedom to just relax like they used to.

The kwami was evidently enjoying this situation, and after stretching her limbs a little, began zooming across the room, clearly having missed the exercise. Marinette stretched out on her bed, watching with an amused expression on her face as Tikki finally tired and came to a stop on top of her bed.

“I’m really sorry about the bag,” Marinette apologized, feeling Tikki cuddle up to her side in peaceful relaxation.

“Don’t worry Marinette,” the tiny kwami smiled, looking clearly happy to have more room to roam, instead of being cramped up in the bathroom. “It’s for a good reason!”

Despite the enthusiasm in Tikki’s voice, there was still doubt in Marinette’s mind. She couldn’t fight the feeling that she had been neglecting some very important responsibilities in order to pursue this. Chat had been patrolling for weeks now, and while she knew that he had it under control, she still felt bad… Speaking of… “Maybe I should take the chance to go patrol,” Marinette mused, tapping her chin thoughtfully, “I haven’t really been out since last time…”

“Absolutely not!” Tikki’s voice was strangely firm. “You’re tired and you haven’t slept a full night in weeks.” Tikki’s arms crossed in front of her. “I won’t allow it!”

Technically, Tikki didn’t have to allow her to do so, but Marinette trusted the kwami enough to follow her advice. It was the truth: she felt like she was awake now, but things would probably end up like they did the last time she went patrolling.

“I’m not that tired,” Marinette argued, though it was obvious that she was not being entirely truthful. While today hadn’t been as exhausting as other days, the consistent lack of sleep was beginning to catch up with her.

“Marinette…” Tikki’s voice was stern, “I just really don’t you to hurt yourself.” The kwami landed on Marinette’s stomach, and looked straight at her chosen. “Chat said he’d handle it for now.”

“I know…” Marinette sighed, her expression somber as she remembered the support from her partner. “He just shouldn’t have to.”
“There’s only a few more weeks until you can go home,” Tikki reminded her, “then everything can go back to normal.”

“Yeah…” Marinette’s voice was soft and whispery. There were now only eight contestants left. Soon, the winner wouldn’t get immunity and things would get really serious.

Bing!

Marinette turned her attention towards her phone, quickly tapping away to see what the new message was about. Raoul had texted her a picture… which of course was from the show. It was a somewhat blurry picture taken of the television as it showed a glimpse of Adrien and Marinette, having their little moment, when she’d taken a break from Leo. “I didn’t even know they filmed this!” She was dismayed, just how were they able to film those scenes? Marinette hadn’t even seen them around when she left the workroom.

“Oooh.” Tikki patted her hand comfortingly. “Well, they’re clearly keeping close tabs on you. Another reason why you should be completely alert if you go patrol.”

Sighing, Marinette nodded. The kwami certainly had a point, because if they managed to sneak in that shot when she was supposedly alert? If the cameras got a glimpse of her transforming, or even worse, Tikki? It’d be all over.

Still, even if she understood why, it didn’t mean she didn’t want to go.

Tikki snuggled Marinette. “You’re doing great here,” she told her, patting her chosen’s face lightly, “and it’s only for a little bit longer!” she added, before she moved to settle on the girl’s stomach to rest alongside her for what little time they had before people returned.

Marinette patted her friend’s head affectionately. “I know,” she said, “I’m just… I really wish that you didn’t have to be hiding all the time.”

“We’ll make it through,” Tikki told Marinette before her antennas went rigid and she dove straight into the bag.

Marinette didn’t have to ask what was wrong, since two seconds after the door chimed and Noemie was making her way back inside. The older woman looked surprised that Marinette was in the room. “I thought you’d be at the viewing party,” Noemie said, as she went to gather her clothing to change for bed.

“I thought I’d rest,” Marinette explained, already wearing her pajamas. “It’s been an intense couple of weeks…” she trailed off. It wasn’t a lie. After all, as the group got smaller, the challenges increased in difficulty and it became even harder to skate by hoping that someone would mess up. There were not enough people to hide behind. “And since tomorrow we have a new challenge, I thought I’d face it well rested.”

Noemie had already changed and was currently settling into her bed. “That does seem like the smart thing to do.”

Marinette made sure to sneak in a cookie into her bag before she crawled under the covers and settled in for a peaceful sleep.

The next day started as usual. They headed towards the restaurant, where a group of tables were reserved for members of the cast. It wasn’t their favorite thing to do, because that meant running into a lot of people and they had already started being recognized by people. Even if the show had only
been on for a little over a month.

And there was another reason why Marinette preferred to have breakfast in the safety of someone’s room. That reason was that she didn’t want to run into Chloé Bourgeois. Marinette was almost sure she’d seen her blonde former classmate as she’d been ushered through the lobby, and frankly? Marinette was already tired, there was no energy whatsoever to deal with the girl. She would also need all her energy to deal with the challenge today.

The table was filled with enough coffee to wake up an army of the undead, and some pastries so they could pretend to be having a normal meal. As strong as they could possibly get it, since by now every other type of coffee just did not cut it.

It was a good way to start the day, actually. They’d been given instructions to head to a certain address, but they still had plenty of time before they had to leave. Marinette was simply waiting for the unavoidable.

In fact, it took about five minutes after everyone had settled on their table, for it to start. “You’re still trending little lady!” Raoul’s cheery greeting was met with a narrowed eye glare. “And people were extremely concerned about your boyfriend’s absence.”

“He’s not my boyfriend,” Marinette said, rubbing her head with an annoyed look on her face. It was far too early for all of this and there was a reason Marinette had decided against watching the show.

“You’re already on YouTube, if you want to watch the clip,” Raoul informed her. “Actually, let me just load it here…” He grabbed his cellphone and began tapping at it, before Marinette eagerly reached for it.

“No, nononono,” Marinette squeaked, swatting at the phone to prevent the video from being shown. “I don’t want to see it!”

Raoul laughed, but put the cellphone back in his pocket. “Honestly, you’re giving the cameras everything they want.”

Anaís giggled, as she nibbled on a croissant and they got up to make their way out of the hotel. “I don’t get why you don’t want to look at the show!” she said. “I mean, he probably did…”

“I’d just prefer not to be aware of what they did,” Marinette said, before turning to Raoul and arguing back. “I’m not giving them anything. They edit it to look that way.” At least that was her story and she was going to stick to it.

“Mhmm.” Raoul nodded before they finally began to file out of the restaurant. It was still early to leave, but the address was close by, within walking distance; so it would be a lovely chance to walk through the streets of Paris and enjoy the morning sun. The trio walked in silence for a second, just basking in the morning sun. “I just don’t get it,” Raoul finally said, “last night we got a replay of your match against Leo and you were brilliant. I don’t see why you get so weird around this guy. I mean… he’s cute, but not that cute.”

“I disagree!” Anaís interjected, her eyes twinkling as she nudged Marinette’s arm, “he is very cute.”

The look on Anaís face was far more appreciative than Marinette would have liked, and she had to push back the jealousy that appeared at Anaís’ words.

“He’s more than that,” she finally bit back, her tone harsher than what she meant it to be. Honestly, if Adrien was just a pretty face, it’d be a non-issue. She’d been studying fashion; she’d attended some shows. Marinette was not about to be derailed by just a pretty face.
“So, puppy love?” Anaís asked, the expression on her face morphing into a gleeful smile.

It was such a simple way to describe the whole thing that Marinette couldn’t help but wrinkle her nose. It felt too juvenile. “It’s a long story,” she finally answered after a few seconds of silence. “I met him when we were in collège. We were like… fourteen.” Marinette shifted awkwardly, looking around for any presence of cameras.

Thankfully, the camera crew wouldn’t walk with them, just wait for them at the location. This meant that they were in the clear for this conversation… Marinette did not want any of this making its way into the show. “I had a crush on him back then.”

“And nothing happened? Ever?” Raoul asked, sounding somewhat surprised.

“Nope.” Marinette sighed, “I never told him, and whenever I tried, something happened, so I think he never really noticed.” Or if he did notice, he politely pretended not to. Frankly, Marinette didn’t know which option was worse. “By the time we graduated Lycée, we were all friends. My best friend started dating his best friend and we were basically third and fourth wheeling their dates.”

“And then?” Anaís pressed, eager to find out more. “He went to University?”

“Yes, but not in France, so I never saw him again… until he came back, and then the show started and here we are?” That was basically the summary of how it had all gone down. Granted, she’d only found out the last bits recently, when Adrien himself had told her; but really, other than what she’d shared so far, this was not her story to tell.

Raoul spoke up this time. “And you silently pined away for all these years? Never dated or anything?” One of his eyebrows raised, and he gave Marinette a very skeptical look.

Well. No. Marinette was far too busy to spend her life pining. She was a romantic at heart, this hadn’t changed, but she was also pragmatic. Her life after Lycée had taken several spins; defeating Hawkmoth, Chat Noir leaving for a couple of months. There was no time for her to deal with whatever remains of dreams about romance and marriage she’d had when she was fourteen.

“Well… I dated. But… it never really lasted.” Alya was extremely determined in letting his best friend find true love, especially since it seemed that Adrien just had not been it, and had set Marinette up with plenty of her classmates. She had fun, most of them were really nice, but she had been far too busy after defeating Hawk Moth, trying to find some sense of normalcy back in her life and keeping up with her own personal goals to ever give dating and relationship an actual chance. It had never felt right. “I was applying to the ECSCP, I barely had enough time to breathe, let alone date.”

“Honestly, no wonder you’re all stupid around him. You have like ten years’ worth of pent up sexual tension.” He took a sip from his coffee, brown eyes sparkling with mirth as he looked down at his friend. “Really, it all makes a lot of sense right now. I’m honestly surprised that you haven’t passed out from sheer thirst during your fittings.”

Marinette gaped, and pushed at Raoul, causing him to take a good stumble on the sidewalk, “Shit!” she cursed, reaching to grab and steady him, meanwhile Anaís laughed. Traitors, both of them. Once she was sure he wasn’t going to fall, she glared at him again. “I am not thirsty!”

“Well, that’s up for debate, but what you are is scarily strong,” Raoul pointed out before squeezing her biceps. “Damn.”

“Shut up,” Marinette grumbled, adjusting her light blazer back on and walking ahead of her so-called friends.
He caught up quickly, laughing loudly, Anaís following close behind. Despite Marinette being in very good shape, her legs were shorter than Raoul and Anaís, both of them having a good couple of inches on her. A technical advantage, if you will. “Well, if I may offer what I hope is not new information to you, I think he’d definitely be up for a date if you did ask him out. Or even, if you asked him out to a supply closet.”

The look Marinette flashed him was downright murderous. “Don’t even start,” she told him, before looking down at their feet. “I just… I can’t deal with all the cameras.”

“Well, the production team is just waiting for whenever you do look at him. You might as well milk it for all it’s worth.”

“You’re a fan favorite,” Anaís pointed out. “It really plays in your favor.”

“I’m not doing that.” Marinette shook her head. “I don’t want to win that way…“ She sighed, exhaling loudly as she pondered how to phrase exactly what she wanted to say. “I’m just… I get really nervous. First, because Adrien, and second, because I know the cameras are right there. I know they’re waiting for me to slip.”

Raoul slung an arm over his friend and patted her shoulder. “That’s the fun of reality television… you really didn’t think this whole thing through, did you?”

“I was vaguely threatened into auditioning.”

Raoul laughed. “You need to toughen up. Reality Television is a rough business, you really have to be on all the time.” He nodded far ahead, where the entrance of the store they had to go to was sealed up, cameras set up to film the cast’s arrivals. “Time to get your game face on, little lady. Show’s about to start.”

Marinette bumped his shoulder and the two of them quickly headed over the entrance. “I know this place!” Marinette grinned, almost bouncing on her feet as she recognized the entrance. The store’s name was Mora; she’d been here with her father and mother as they shopped for baking supplies and other things for the family shop.

Tim Gunn was inside the shop, standing alone with a woman dressed in full chef attire. Behind them there were three more chefs, and some tables set up behind them, with some materials and pastries.

“Wellcome designers!” Tim greeted them, “here we have Émilie Charrier, a famed Chef and one of the best professors at Le Cordon Bleu. We have a very fun activity prepared for you today!”

“Yes!” the other woman began explaining, a gentle smile on her face. “As you know, France has a very distinct cuisine and some of our dishes and pastries are considered among the best in the world.” She looked at the other chefs and they all went to their places, settling behind the tables. “First. You need to get dressed.” She motioned towards a hanging rack where a bunch of white uniforms were hanged.

The group quickly dressed up, using the white jackets to cover up their outfits and the hats to cover their hair.

Once they were all ready, they returned towards Tim and Émilie Charrier. “Very good!” Tim said. “Now, for the activity today, we’ll be assembling and decorating some traditional French pastries.”

“Exactly,” Émilie Charrier said. “Now if you’ll gather around each table… there are four of them, so two on each is enough. My assistants will help you with what needs to be done. They’ll instruct you on the techniques you need to use.”
“You’ve heard her!” Tim said. “Now go!”

Marinette headed immediately towards the *Petits fours* table, where an assortment of small cakes were set up and ready to be decorated and assembled. Some of the other tables had macarons, éclairs and many other things, all of them ready for the contestants to work with. Raoul followed, since the macaron table had been quickly taken over.

“Why Petit Four?” he asked her.

“They’re really fun to decorate,” she told him, “and there’s a lot of different things you can do with them.”

The instruction was simple: most of what they had to do was decorate, using fondant, sugar paste, icing and some small colorful decorations.

Marinette began to work with the sugar paste, forming a small flower with dexterous fingers.

“… How?”

“My papa,” Marinette grinned proudly, as she piped a small rose onto her decorating nail. “I loved to help decorate cakes and pastries when I was younger. Sugar paste was like play doh to me.”

“That’s so weird,” he muttered, picking up a piece of paste and rolling it between his fingers. “What else?”

“He handled the baking, I’m not very good at that.” Marinette placed the newly made flowers back on the table. “But playing with decorations? It was the absolute best.”

After that, the tables were done and the cast was faced with a gorgeous array of many different pastries. Some of them better decorated than others, but all of them looked absolutely delicious.

“And now, courtesy of Le Cordon Bleu and *Mora*, one of the best supplies store for *pâtisserie* and *boulangeries* all around Paris, we’ve prepared a little bit of a coffee break for you, so you can truly be inspired by these delicious treats,” Tim said before motioning towards the tables. “Go on, try them!” Tim urged them and the designers swarmed the tables.

“I’m regretting that breakfast,” Raoul said, as he began picking at some of macarons. “But at least I’m glad I’m not the one who has to model.” He patted his stomach. “Nothing would fit.”

They tried as many pastries as they could, sipping on some coffee or tea as they did so. After a while, they were all satisfied and ready to continue with the day.

“Was that fun?” Tim asked, as the designers were finally ready, gathering in circles as they chattered peacefully. “Well, go back to your stations.” He waited for everyone to move back towards their position. “Your challenge today will be to make an outfit inspired on what you just made. For that you will only use the supplies you had in your own workstation and your uniform.” He smiled at the group, who were now frantically looking around the tables to see what they could work with. “Oh yes, this is an unconventional material challenge!”

Marinette turned her attention to their table and to her outfit, with some minor stains. “Oh God.” She groaned, looking at the size difference between her jacket and everyone else here. She was going to have to get *really* creative for this one.

Coming up with a design was extremely difficult. She didn’t have that much fabric. Thankfully they
were still able to use some white fabric from the work room, or else Adrien would have had to walk out almost naked. She should have seen this challenge coming, and she should have picked a bigger jacket. Now, she was scrambling to make the small piece of fabric work for her. It was very difficult.

The idea was to make a simple outfit. Just a pair of pants and a simple shirt. But it would have to be decorated, and now she needed to find a way to make it work.

She’d filled a tub with water and poured some food coloring in it, and she was currently dying the fabric into a dark brown. Granted, doing so would mean that she’d need to finish the pants in the morning, since it was unlikely that the fabric would dry before the models arrived for the fitting.

“I’m going to need more lessons with flower making,” Raoul spoke up, “I have an idea and I have no clue how I’m going to get it done.”

“Fine!” Marinette said, as she began tearing apart the chef’s jacket she’d been using today. Clearly it wouldn’t be enough fabric to cover Adrien, but… she could work with this.

She needed to decide what material she was going to use to decorate. Most simple materials might melt under the hot lights of the runway. It needed to be something that dried fast. One look at the ingredients on her table gave her some ideas. But first, the fabric. She stretched the fabric on the wall, using some thumbtacks to hang it properly, and pretty much pray that it would be ready by morning.

Now she needed to focus on the top. Looking at the little bits of fabric she had… maybe a jacket wasn’t a good idea. Her original material wasn’t enough to be a full jacket, but maybe if she got creative with the extra fabric… yes. Then, some very thick icing could be used to decorate and make some swirls and patterns on it. She had everything from sprinkles to piping sleeves to an ungodly amount of icing and food coloring.

Everything was under control.

Mostly.

Marinette had somehow managed to get the clothing situation under control, but it was all hanging on whether she’d be able to decorate it properly. She was still rather unsure on whether she was going to use fondant to make some accessories or not, but once the fabric was dry, she was definitely going to use the glue to make everything work out.

Thankfully, the fabric was drying well enough; but there was no way it was going to dry enough for a fitting by the time Adrien arrived.

The other positive thing about this challenge, was the amount of snacks and sweets laying around on the work room. Granted, they were supposed to be for decoration, but no one minded if they tried a little bit of the chocolate or some candy melts.

For once, Marinette was not hungry. And the other thing, the steady intake of sugar did wonders for her attention span. If anything, she might have been a little too energetic.

The shirt was done and the jacket was mostly ready too. She just needed to see if it fit Adrien properly before adding the finishing details.

“… This is new.” Adrien’s voice startled her from her work, and she looked up from her table straight into the blond’s green eyes.

“Adrien… hey!” she greeted him, chancing a smile as she motioned towards the stool by her table.
I’m almost done with this.”

The model looked around the room, where everyone was busy trying to fit their models into strange looking outfits; the whole room permeated with the smell of sweets and chocolate. It was… actually a nice smell, to tell the truth. “What’s the challenge?” he asked, eyeing a piece of chocolate, on top of Marinette’s closed sketchbook.

“Unconventional materials,” Marinette explained, biting her lower lip as she finally pinned the fabric to the right spot. “Couture challenge with bakery supplies.”

He leaned his elbows on the table, paying close attention to what she was building. “Not working out how you wanted?”

Lips pursed as she looked at the fabric, Marinette’s shoulders moved in a noncommittal shrug. “Kinda.” She huffed as she looked at the jacket. “I’m just mad, I didn’t pick a big enough chef’s jacket and now I’m scraping for fabric.” She muttered, nodding towards the piece of fabric in her hands.

A corner of Adrien’s lips quirked up in a small smirk. “You had to use your own?”

“Mhmm,” she hummed, passing him the jacket as she gathered her supplies. “I had to get creative to make the jacket.” She put on the wristlet pincushion and grabbed a small bit of chalk, and she set to work.

“I could rock a crop top,” he offered, flashing her a bright grin. “Just putting that out there.”

Marinette giggled, “Good to know.” She then started to poke at the fabric, and used the chalk to mark some spots on where she was going to attach the decorations. She began pulling and poking at him, and Adrien had to suppress the need to giggle when she brushed against a particular ticklish spot.

“Stay still!” she reminded him, after Adrien’s sharp intake of breath almost caused her to stick him. “Oh!” Marinette perked up, as she marked with chalk on the spots she had to work on. “Did you ever get the results on that test?”

“I did!” He nodded, giggling when her thumbs pressed against a ticklish spot on his stomach. Her attention snapped up immediately. “What was that?” Adrien Agreste had giggled. And that was a sound that she had never expected to hear from him.

“I’m… Nothing.” The expression on Adrien’s face was carefully neutral. Which meant that Marinette was definitely not convinced, but she continued, using the chalk to trace some spots where she would attach some of the decorations she was about to start making.

The barely contained squirming continued. “You’re ticklish!” Marinette said, grinning as Adrien blushed. “I never knew that!”

Well, she had no way of knowing, considering she hadn’t quite poked at him during their school years. Their physical contact had been hugs on birthdays and greetings.

“I don’t really advertise it,” he offered, and giggled when Marinette accidentally tickled him again, before directing stern green eyes towards her.

“It was an accident!” she told him, holding her hands up in a failed attempt at looking innocent. “I just need to make sure this fits.”
The look on his face was thankfully amused, even if he clearly didn’t believe her. “Mhmm.”

“It really was!” Marinette defended herself. “If I really wanted to tickle you, I’d do this!” She poked at his ribs, causing him to yelp and squirm away.

“I will retaliate.” His threat was really not very believable if only for the fact that his smile was far too bright to even begin to be threatening.

“I’m not ticklish,” Marinette said, a smug look crossing her face. Technically, she was. But it wasn’t such a big problem for her, at least not the way it seemed to be for Adrien. She could tough it out if she had to, which she figured that she would have to do now, since Adrien at least trying to tickle her would be inevitable.

However, she didn’t account for goosebumps.

As stupid as it might have been, feeling his fingers tapping her ribcage, coupled with the impish look on his face was enough to at least make her squirm. Even if it wasn’t exactly because of the tickling.

“Aha!” The look on his face was triumphant.

“You startled me!” Marinette said, looking triumphant when his second attempt didn’t elicit the reaction he clearly was after.

“You win. For now,” he finally conceded, before turning his attention back to the design, as he carefully took the jacket off. “What’s the plan with the rest?”

“Well…” Marinette nodded towards the fabric still drying, “I’m making you some pants out of that. And a shirt, which I need to finish early tomorrow.” She then nodded towards a box on her work table, which held a bunch of different items used for decorating cakes and pastries. “Then I’m using that icing mix and probably pipe some designs on the jacket.”

“Marinette,” Adrien grinned, “Are you going to frost me?”

His smile was infectious and absolutely disarming. “Yes. Yes I am. I’m turning you into a cupcake,” she replied, and a small part of her, no doubt encouraged by Raoul’s teasing earlier couldn’t help but think that following this particular line of thinking could get very inappropriate, very quickly. “I’m kidding… mostly.”

Adrien began gathering his things, since the allotted time for fittings was clearly coming to an end. “So,” he began, his posture casual as he leaned a little towards the designer, “What you’re saying is that tomorrow is going to be a piece of cake.”

Marinette laughed, much to her own horror. “Adrien, oh my God.”

The aforementioned blond laughed as he put on his own jacket and grabbed the messenger bag, taking good care to display the logo towards the camera as they’d all been instructed. “You laughed,” he tapped her nose, laughing again when she swatted at him. “I’ll see you tomorrow then?”

“Mhmm!” Marinette nodded, wiggling her fingers at him as he finally retreated.

Once the models had all left, Raoul took the time to swirl by her table, where Marinette was busy cutting out the fabric she’d need for the pants.

“And like that,” he began talking, his voice a soft monotone whisper, reminiscent of the kind you
heard in nature documentaries, “we just witnessed the rare and fascinating mating dance of the *Marinettis wildus* and the *Modelus Adrienus*. As you can all see, his chosen moves consist of making horrible jokes and hope his mate will laugh. The mate will encourage him by exhibiting a bright red color upon her face, laughing at terrible jokes and flirting in ways that should not happen beyond the age of thirteen.”

Marinette hip checked him, making Raoul stumble away a couple of steps, laughing at the reaction he was able to get from her. “And for that, I’m not helping you with your flowers.”

“Noooo.”

Adrien did not like modelling. At first he’d done it because it was what his father wanted. Then… he left France and he’d thought that his modelling days were finally behind him. It wasn’t until returning from England, when he’d tried to find another source of income to try and sustain his newly independent life that he realized something absolutely undeniable. He was good at modelling. Years and years of posing had left him with a great understanding of his own body and Adrien knew that he was good at portraying whatever emotion that the photographer might ask of him.

And besides, the fact that he could work for one weekend and have enough to last him through the month was also a very good incentive to keep up with the work. And the fact that the photoshoots and campaigns were not all that often helped him stay on track with his studies. It was easier to take a couple days off and make up with notes from other classmates or asking his professors for help; than it would be to work any other job that had been available.

In the end, Adrien had decided to be practical about it. Modelling wasn’t something he enjoyed, but it was useful. Of course, Adrien knew that the second he graduated and got a steady job, his modelling days would be a thing of the past.

But still, he had to be grateful. After all, if it wasn’t for modelling, he wouldn’t be able to live in Paris, or go to University. His apartment wasn’t big, but it was comfortable, and for the first time in his life, Adrien had freedom. His schedule was his to do what he thought appropriate, and it was a new kind of thrill he had yet to get used to. No lessons other than what he truly wanted to do, no modelling jobs other than what he’d actually agreed for.

His stay in Oxford had barely lasted three months (though settling back in Paris did take another month), and much to the dismay of his father, who had strongly disagreed with Adrien’s choice and began pressuring him to go back.

In the end… the break had been a clean one. If Adrien didn’t want to follow what his father required of him, then he could very well do without the perks that came with being an Agreste. Meaning, the money and connections.

That was where modelling was useful. Because there were a lot of fashion labels and small design houses that had offices in Paris. Most of them were only too eager to hire who had been Gabriel’s main model for years. It worked in his favor for once.

But it wasn’t all bad. Modelling had ended up being very lucrative for Adrien, and he’d managed to snag a very comfortable apartment, which he furnished all on his own. Plagg definitely enjoyed the fact that he no longer had to hide when he heard footsteps.

But leaving Paris the first time had been one of the hardest things he’d ever had to do. He didn’t tell Ladybug where he was going. He had tried, he really had; but he had chickened out at the last second. Instead, he told her that he needed a small break and that he’d return as soon as possible.
She had probably thought he’d meant a week, *a month at most*. But when he finally ran into her again, it had been almost four months later and the look on her face was a mixture of disbelief and hurt. But he’d tackled her into a hug and told her that he was finally back to stay.

Ladybug, being as smart as he always knew she was, had caught on to the fact that there was more to the story. He figured that much if only because she didn’t press on further, instead returning his hug and playfully complaining about mangy strays that just *wouldn’t go away*.

She had been the one friend he’d return to, and the one *constant* presence in his life. He treasured their friendship, he really did.

There was a part of him that knew that should she ask more of him, he’d give it without question. He adored the girl and they’d been through so much together that their partnership was even better than before. It was effortless, two halves of a whole. Having only her friendship wasn’t a loss. It was an absolute treasure and Adrien appreciated it.

After all, his time in England hadn’t been lonely, even if it really hadn’t been very exciting. He was aware that his model status provided him with a very high profile. That fact alone meant that, should he really want to, he would never lack company at night, but he preferred to let that rest. It wasn’t that he didn’t love Ladybug, of course he did, and he always would. But the years had passed between them and that raging fire simmered into a low steady *unwavering* flame. And he was okay with that.

It all boiled down with Adrien’s decision to *not settle*. He respected Ladybug enough to not pursue her as he had any longer, but he also respected himself enough to not settle for anything other than real, earth shattering love.

Adrien was a romantic, he had already come to terms with that.

And so he’d settled back in France, free for the first time in his life and in a home of his own, *finally* forging a path for himself, even if said path was probably beneath what his father thought Adrien and the Agreste family name deserved.

Getting on the show had been a simple financial decision. The money they’d pay him was enough to ensure some security for a few months, which would leave him free to focus on his studies. Besides, the steady schedule with the fittings and everything else made easy for him to plan his day around his commitments. It was a routine, and he had always been used to them.

At least this time he was the one to make the decisions.

However, running into Marinette had been a complete surprise, but it was quickly turning into the highlight of his day.

Back at his apartment, he fed Plagg, making sure the kwami had enough cheese to make up for the fact that he’d been stuck in his bag for the whole day.

The kwami floated around the apartment, holding a piece of cheese as he savored it. The apartment wasn’t necessarily cheap, but it was comfortable and worth every euro he spent on it. There was a small terrace, which provided a safe place to land after his patrols, and he’d made sure to have enough plants and decoration to hide from anyone that might be watching.

“I think we should patrol tonight.”

Plagg paused, still holding his piece of cheese, “Do we really have to?” he said, “We were out *all day*.”
Adrien pinned his kwami with an annoyed look. They were always busy. “I didn’t patrol yesterday, I should today.”

“Well, you were too busy watching your show,” Plagg pointed out, coming to a stop in front of Adrien’s face. “That was your choice.”

Yes, Adrien watched the show. He watched it every day and he made sure to look at the online response Marinette got. So far, it was overwhelmingly positive. Marinette was not only talented, but she was effortlessly charming. People related to her and they cheered for her. Granted, they also cheered for them, but that was another matter he was not going think too much about.

“I know,” he finally answered Plagg. “I’ll throw on some more pieces of cheese when we get back?” he bargained, his tone being one of a man well versed in dealing with a non-cooperative tiny god. He smirked when Plagg swallowed the cheese, in silent agreement to his proposal. “Good. Claws out!”

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The city was quiet. Well, as quiet as Paris could be, while still being filled with tourist and its thriving nightlife. Still, he enjoyed patrolling, because the regularity ensured that it would be an easy job. Just knowing that Ladybug or Chat Noir were around was usually enough to stop most crime from happening.

Being Chat Noir had once been his only source of freedom: the one time in the day where Adrien didn’t have to bother following the instructions of his father and could finally do as he pleased, without worrying about letting the family name down. It was the one time he didn’t mind people taking pictures of him, or asking for autographs. Because they were looking for Chat Noir and the superhero did something which Adrien considered worthy of the praise. Adrien Agreste and Chat Noir were still two separate people, and that fact was enough to give him the freedom he still wanted.

But if he had to confess something, it would be that he had definitely missed Ladybug. It had been weeks since that one patrol when she’d fallen asleep and she’d missed all the others. Granted, he did remember that he’d told her to do so, if she’d needed it, but since he hadn’t heard from her after all this time… he was a little bit worried.

So when the phone application on his staff beeped, he was only too glad to answer. Chat Noir came to a stop and found a comfortable space on a rooftop before pressing the glowing green paw and answering her call.

The image on the screen appeared right away, her face clear and her expression worried. “Chat?” Her voice was soft, and there was music playing in the background. From what he could see, the room was brightly illuminated and impeccably white.

“Bug!” he said, smiling despite himself. “It’s been weeks!”

Her expression turned sour. “I know, I’m sorry,” she apologized, pursuing her lips for a second before continuing. “I just… It’s been really hard to get time for myself lately.”

So it seemed that whatever project was still taking over her life was still there. “Don’t worry about it,” he told her, a relaxed smile appearing on his face. “I told you I’ll take care of things until you’re free to return.”

“I know…” She looked absolutely dejected, and he could definitely relate. Not being able to go out as their alter egos was not something they liked to do. Because it was their responsibility and because they both truly enjoyed it. “I’m just… you really shouldn’t have to. I just really wanted to patrol today… I just wasn’t able to get time off.” He could see how miserable she was, and he honestly
could understand. He had never been in that position. To tell the truth, the closest he’d been to that kind of limitation, was having to keep Plagg hidden in his bag when he went to the studio.

“Is everything okay?” he asked. “Are you still busy?”

“Really busy!” she answered, walking a little, letting Adrien hear the sound of… rain? Water? “And I am… I don’t really have enough time to myself and…”

“Bug, is everything really okay?” he asked again. The room she was in looked odd, and that, coupled with the fact that her voice was merely above a whisper was enough to give him pause. “Is anyone there with you? Say … apple if you need help and I’ll come find you.”

Apple was probably the dumbest word he had ever thought about saying; but it was all he could think of. Perhaps they should plan a safe word to use whenever they might be in danger. Just a code for the two of them.

She laughed. “I’m fine,” her voice was reassuring, though still amused. “Just a few more weeks, I promise. I just really wanted to go out tonight.”

He felt better, and he visibly relaxed, leaning against a chimney. “I told you already, take care of your things LB. Paris and me will still be here.”

“Thanks,” she smiled. “Just wanted to let you know I’m okay. Busy… but okay.”

“Always good to hear from you, L.B.” He grinned, and the smile only widened when she rolled her eyes. “I’ll let you go back to your project, my Lady. I’ll make sure Paris is still standing when you return…”

“Thanks Kitty,” she said, and judging from her voice, Adrien could almost see her posture relaxing, even he could only see her face on the small screen.

“Oh, wait!”

It looked like Ladybug had been just about to end the call, but her blue eyes turned back to the screen. “Yes?”

“Well… you know those email accounts we set up, just in case people wanted to reach us?” Chat waited for her nod before continuing. “Do you know Project Runway? Because they want us to make an appearance and I’m really busy so I can’t really do that… so if you had the ti…”

“No!” she exclaimed, blue eyes widened as she shuffled nervously. “I’m… I’m really busy and I really don’t have the time… pity though.” She laughed, but it didn’t sound as natural as it usually did.

“Right then. I’ll reply with our deepest regrets then…” Pity, it would have been fun to see Ladybug at the show, even if she wouldn’t have known it was him. “See you soon!”

The call disconnected and he pressed the button again, making the staff return to its normal setting. Well… there went his chance to see Ladybug tonight. It seemed that whatever she was doing was not easing up on her, and he kind of felt bad for her.

Well, time to finish his patrol and then head on home. He had school early in the morning and then filming would take up a big part of afternoon. Best to get sleep while he still could.

The next day, Adrien got to the studio a little before three in the afternoon, eager to see just what the
show was going to be like. Honestly, since his return to modelling, Adrien had never thought that he’d look forward to a job, but coming to the busy studio was honestly one of the highlights of his day.

The models met up, and Adrien greeted them with a warm smile. They were only eight by now, with half the competition being done and half the designers having been eliminated, but unlike the designers, who had forged a closer bond (probably due to living together), the models were usually on friendly, if only casual terms with each other. They were free to go around as they pleased, just making sure not to give up any spoilers on what had been filmed. The routine went like this: The models would arrive and wait until everyone was there. Once the whole group had assembled, a member of the production crew would lead them towards the work room. They would wait until three thirty on the dot before they were allowed into the workroom. They were extremely concerned with keeping their schedules.

He heard her laugh from where they were waiting outside, and her voice calling out to someone, words he couldn’t really make out from where he was standing. But then they were given the signal to enter and Adrien stepped inside, his eyes searching for her before he realized it.

She was dressed for the show, he could see that by now. She was wearing a dress, a simple dress, with black and white flowers over a muted pink background. It was delicate and feminine, and just so intrinsically Marinette that it made him smile. She was over her own work table, putting some items inside a box alongside Raoul Deveraux when the models finally entered the room.

“Time to get back to work Little Lady!” Raoul said, winking at Marinette before heading back to his own table. Marinette snorted and rolled her eyes, before turning her attention to him. “Adrien!” She smiled up at him. “How was school?”

“Hey…” he greeted her back, though a small part of his brain was still concerned with the little exchange. Little Lady? Why did Raoul call Marinette little lady? Chat Noir called her little lady. He’d seen them talking on the show, but he hadn’t know they were that close. “It was okay,” he answered, pushing the thought from his brain for the time. “How is this going?”

His question obviously got her back on work mode. “I finished most of it,” she told him, laying the outfit on the table. It was a simple outfit, but he could see that there were already details set on them. “Everything that needs to be sewn is ready, the rest I’ll just put on when you’re dressed!”

He nodded. “Styling now?”

“Yup!” With that, they walked over the salon, with Marinette explaining some of the ideas she had for his outfit.

There was something about Marinette. Something that not even the camera was able to capture the right way, even if they were on her almost all day, because even with all the careful editing they did, they weren’t able to fully portray the complexity of her character. They’d been so obsessed with showing small bits and pieces of her interaction with him, in what Adrien considered a cheap attempt to bait for more ratings that they missed some great parts of her.

Adulthood suited her just fine. While not vertically, since he still towered over her, the years that had gone by since they graduated Lycée had definitely agreed with her. The years had brought on a certain matureness to her face that was definitely good. Some things hadn’t changed though, she was every bit as determined and strong as she’d been in school, but she was even better now. Her innate talent for creation, now nurtured by her schooling at École de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne, had only taken that talent and expanded on it, making an even greater designer out of her.
The way she spoke with the hairstylist and the makeup artist was polite but determined. She knew what she was trying to create and had no trouble conveying that thought to them. Her fingers dove into his hair, mussing it up so that it created enough volume. It remained there while she talked with the stylist, who nodded along to her instructions.

Adrien also hadn’t noticed that he’d been staring at her reflection in the mirror, a small smile on his lips.

However, the make-up artist, a young girl by the name of Elisa, had. The look on her face told him that he’d been thoroughly caught. And the red blinking light of a camera, flashing somewhere behind told him that it was probably filmed as well.

Fuck.

Back at the workroom, when everyone was running around making sure that the models were properly dressed, Adrien decided to quickly slip into what Marinette had made. Marinette was busy grabbing the things she’d need to finish his look.

“So you are frosting me,” he grinned, watching as Marinette started pouring a colored mix into the plastic sleeve.

“Technically, it’s icing,” she told him, her bright blue eyes watching as Adrien carefully slipped on the jacket. “It’s thicker, and less likely to melt under the lights.”

He buttoned his shirt easily, and it was no surprise that the jacket fit him perfectly as usual. She was very good at this. The jacket was good fitting, and it had some colored accents that were made out of something he couldn’t quite identify. “What’s this?” he asked, trailing his fingers over a coarse texture on the jacket, which shimmered under the work room’s lights.

“Sugar,” she told him, looking proud of herself at having integrated it on the fabric so seamlessly. “Well, colored sugar and, and… those are sugar paste flowers.”

He looked at the flowers, small and fragile and almost looking like they were made out of ceramic. It was pretty good. “Did you make these?”

“Mhmm!” She smiled, the expression on her face confident and proud, “My dad taught me when I was little…” she trailed off, putting the tips on the piping bags before turning towards Adrien. “Perks of being a baker’s daughter!”

“So, I could eat them.”

“Please don’t!” she told him, before laughing and swatting at his hands, which hovered dangerously close over one of the flowers. No, he wouldn’t have eaten them (nor touch them, really), of course, but her reaction made it worth it.

He smiled at her, watching as she reached for an oversized shirt, slipping it over her dress and completely covering her whole outfit.

She looked adorable.

“I don’t want to stain my clothes!” she said, blushing a little at the look on his face, before grabbing her supplies and getting back to work. “Alright. I’m going to do some swirls over here, and it’ll tie together with these flowers… As for this… I’ll just get creative.”
“Go ahead,” he said, before he was pushed back on the stool.

“Sit,” she told him, one of her hands firmly planted on his shoulder. “You’re too tall, I can’t reach you.”

“Maybe you’re too short,” he argued, settling more comfortably on the seat, which left them closer to the same height. His face was somewhat aligned with hers and it made it difficult not to pay close attention to her expressions.

Her eyes narrowed playfully, but her full lips quirked up into a smile. “I’m armed, Agreste, you better watch out,” she told him, waving the piping bag in front of his face.

“Duly noted,” he conceded, before asking, “What do I do?”

“Just stay still and we’ll be ready soon,” she told him as she began to work. Her movements were precise and calculated, and he watched attentively as she carefully drew designs.

Had she always had so many freckles?

“Yes,” she said, her big blue eyes blinking at him as pink tinged her cheeks. Wait, had he spoken out loud?

Marinette was holding the bag up, blue eyes darting around nervously, “Um…” she started, looking unsure of what else to say.

To tell the truth, he didn’t know either.

It was then when he saw it, a small bit of blue icing began peeking from the metal tip, since she didn’t seem to be paying attention. The problem would be if it landed on his clothing; it would definitely stain and possibly ruin it. And with the runway show looming over them, any mistake would be extremely risky.

Her reflexes were quicker than what he’d expected, faster than his, and she caught the falling bit of icing on the tip of her fingers. “That was close,” she said, before lifting her hand and doing the unthinkable.

She licked it.

His eyes were glued to the motion, as she brought the tip of her fingers to her lips and he could see the tip of her tongue flicking over her skin, removing any trace of the blue icing. Her eyes remained on his all through the motion, which didn’t last more than two seconds, and he might have thought it was on purpose, if it wasn’t for the nonchalance of her movements.

“It’s pretty good,” she commented, “even if it’s not from scratch.”

“Oh.”

He didn’t really know what else he could say, instead choosing to simply watch her as she finished the decoration on his clothes.

Once done, she took a step back, admiring her handiwork. “I think it looks good,” she told him, her big blue eyes trailing over the newly made intricate designs on his clothing before they turned back to his face. “What do you think?”

Adrien turned his attention to the mirror nearby. “I wouldn’t know that they’re made out of cake
stuff, if I hadn’t seen you do it,” he told her, admiring how the designs seemed like a simple embroidery at first sight. “It looks really good.” She beamed at him, and Adrien felt warmth spread through his chest at the expression on her face.

“Designers and models, time to go to the runway!” Tim Gunn’s voice was enough to bring him back to reality.

“Showtime!” Marinette’s voice was cheery and Adrien followed her, the two of them joining the group as they all got prepared for the runway. “Good luck!” she called out to him as she got led towards the other room.

This was the part where everyone got separated. Models went one way, and the designers the other. Designers had to get ready, fixing up their hair and makeup to be ready for the show. The staff would be trying to make sure that the settings, lighting and everything else would be ready.

In general, it meant that people were running all around him. All he had to do was wait for the music to start and his cue to walk on stage.

“Your girlfriend did a good job,” a young girl by the name of Noëlle told him.

“Huh?” Adrien couldn’t help but stutter a little at her implication. Now, he could understand people watching to get the idea, since all they saw was the edited version of the show, but the models too? “What?”

“Oh, come on. Everyone knows,” Noëlle said. “You guys are not very subtle about it.”

“I don’t get it,” Adrien said, shifting in place as other models looked at them with amusement. “She’s my friend.”

Noëlle snickered. “Sure thing,” the female model turned amused grey eyes towards one of her friends, who giggled along with her.

Adrien felt his face heat up, and he was extremely glad to hear the sound of Heloise giving out her usual speech before the show started.

“Well,” a male model named Vincent spoke up. “Even if you are just friends, you are playing it perfectly. The audience is eating it up.”

“It is not like that,” Adrien bit out, his green eyes narrowed at the implication. As if Marinette would do something like that. People here were too sullied with how Reality television worked to understand how they worked. Not everyone was concerned with angles and strategies. Some people were truly trying to win in their own right and Adrien knew that Marinette was that kind of person.

So in the end, he decided to ignore the amused snickering and just wait for his turn.

“Adrien. In thirty seconds,” Camille said, placing a hand on his arm as she listened to the instruction on her headset. “Ten… five… go!”

Adrien walked out on the stage, all previous reluctance long forgotten. He knew he was a good model, his stride was the right speed for the runway, and his presence was just enough to make sure the outfit look good, but not enough to distract from what he was supposed to show. After all, lack of stage presence had never been a reason for him to quit the business.

The runway show didn’t take very long, his participation lasted little over ten seconds as a whole. As usual, he simply focused on a spot above the cameras as they filmed his walk. He turned, ready to
begin his walk to the back, his green eyes catching Marinette’s glance as he continued on his way back. He indulged in a little smile, knowing that the cameras were no longer facing him, before he finally walked off to the left and finally off stage.

Backstage, it was a new waiting game. Once the runway show was over, they had to await the judging, and they would be brought back on stage if the look was either among the top or bottom scores. After that, once it was clear that there was nothing more for them to do… they would take him to another studio, where every look would be photographed and uploaded on the website after the show was aired.

“Adrien,” Camille’s directions had become something of a backdrop of his time backstage, her voice steady and determined as she ordered him around. “She’s safe for today. Photoshoot now.”

Routine.

After the pictures were taken, an assistant came by to retrieve the outfit he’d just modelled and give back his clothing. To tell the truth, Adrien didn’t know if they could really do much with the outfit, since the decoration was edible and likely to spoil soon; but it wasn’t his problem. Now, time to get the rest of his things back and finally head on home.

The hallway was empty, but one of the doors was opened and he could hear the quiet chatter of the designers.

“Congratulations!” he heard Marinette exclaim, and as he walked by the now opened door, he saw Marinette tackle Raoul in a warm hug. “I hate you, you got the last immunity!” she playfully punched his arm, laughing as the rest of the group congratulated Raoul.

“You have to deal with me for at least one more week,” Raoul said, winking at someone in the cast as he left his arm slung over Marinette’s shoulders, playfully ruffling her dark hair.

Adrien hadn’t known how long he’d been staring, but once his green eyes crossed with Raoul’s, he could see the amusement on the designer’s face, brown eyes sparkling at him. Adrien quickened his pace, he needed to retrieve his bag and head on home to feed Plagg.

Adrien didn’t know why, but he really was beginning to dislike that man.
FIRST. All the comments and kudos and Everything MAKE MY DAY and I'm so happy.

Second: the amazing Ci made some art. Raoul and Mari!
http://glitterglamspark.tumblr.com/post/141240857550/runningoutofink-asked-me-to-draw-raoul-and

THIRD. I hope you enjoy :D <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Babe. If you keep inviting people, we’re going to have to rent a place to fit them,” Nino told Alya as he carefully walked among the people settled in their living room, balancing a bowl of snacks in one of his hands.

“It’s for Mari!” Alya explained, grabbing another bowl and dumping some popcorn on it. “Stop whining.”

There was honestly no more room in the living room. But somehow, the whole class (save Chloé and Sabrina) had reserved time to visit and watch the show with them. It was nice. Even if Nino did miss the times when he could walk in their apartment without stepping on a former classmate. Every possible sitting surface had been taken, and there was enough food to feed an army.

Or one Kim. It all depended on whether he’d just trained or not. Alix could do some serious damage too; roller derby was no joke.

“So, do you have any inside scoops?”

This was still a sore spot for Alya. “Nothing.” She crossed her arms before settling on the floor, allowing her boyfriend to settle against her as they made the best use of the little space they had left. “I did talk to her yesterday,” she announced, causing many heads to turn in her direction. “But she can’t tell anything about the show. She’s just exhausted and missing people.”

“And what about Adrien?”

“I did ask!” Alya explained, rolling her eyes “But I’ll give you one guess as to what she told me…”

“I think it’s cute,” Rose said, smiling as she turned towards the television. “How they found each other after all these years? It’s like a movie!”

“Movies usually have some sexy kissing or sexy times. So far? Nothing. They need to get on with it, there’s like… what? Five shows left?”

Nino looked green. “I don’t know what kind of show you think this is Alix… but I really hope we don’t get to see any of that.”

“Pfft.” Alix rolled her eyes. “Sexy people doing sexy things is hot. It’s a fact.”
“Show’s starting!” Nino interrupted. “Let’s talk about our friend’s sex life... never.”

The show opened with the views of the city, panning across the busy streets of Paris before leading up on Le Grand Paris. The hotel was busy, filled with wealthy tourists and more importantly, the seven remaining designers for Project Runway.

“Today was a very easy day,” Marinette’s voice narrated over different scenes of the cast spending time in the hotel. Some of them were lounging at the pool, and a few of them were simply reading in their rooms. “We actually got to sleep in, so that’s always good.”

The cameras showed the designers assembling near a tablet in their rooms, which had just begun transmitting a video. It was Heloise, smiling brightly at the camera. “Dear Designers, we have a very special surprise planned for you. We want you to dress to the nines, and let’s meet in the lobby at six.”

The cameras followed the contestants as they began getting ready. The three remaining girls, Marinette, Matilda and Anaís had gathered in what was their new room and were currently getting ready, looking at different possible outfits for their secret outing.

“How is this?” Marinette asked the girls, as she twirled in a purple dress.

Matilda, already wearing a black dress nodded her approval. “Perfect.” With that, the three girls exited their room to go downstairs.

At six, all the contestants had made their way downstairs, ready to go wherever production was going to take them. Outside, two town cars awaited them, shiny and elegant and overall expensive. Two men from the hotel walked over to open the car door for them.

“Nice!” Raoul’s voice was appreciative as he looked at the cars, before he held out both arms. “Ladies?” He looked towards Anaís and Marinette, who each took an arm, giggling as they walked towards the open door.

They piled into the awaiting cars and were off. It didn’t take long until they reached their destination. The building was brightly illuminated, with neon red lights and with the windmill sails slowly turning around, giving the place it’s famous name.

The Moulin Rouge.

There was already a crowd outside, people waiting until the maître d’ showed them to their tables. The cast waved excitedly as people began to recognize them, and even stopped for a couple of selfies. They walked through the red carpet at the entrance, bypassing the line of people waiting as a VIP staff member led them to another room.

“This way!”

Once inside, they were greeted by Tim alone, who was standing inside a private lobby, fully set up with cameras to record them and a couple of chairs to interview them if necessary.

“Welcome!” he said. “So what did you think of our surprise?”

The cast answered excitedly. It was a very fancy set up and it was very likely that they were going to have a very good evening. The shows at the Moulin Rouge were famous and had only increased in popularity after the movie with the same title had appeared.
“First things first,” Tim said. “We will go and enjoy a lovely evening. Now, if you’ll just follow the maître d’, he will lead you all to your table. After that, we’ll meet back here and we’ll have a talk.”

The maître d, a man dressed in an impeccable tuxedo, led them towards their table on one of the VIP balconies, giving them a great view of the whole stage. The seven designers sat down, taking their places around the exquisitely set table and getting comfortable.

Once they were all settled in, the Maître d’ spoke up. “Welcome to the Moulin Rouge. In front of you, you have the options for your dinner tonight. Our staff will arrive shortly and you can inform them of your choices.” As if on cue, three waiters arrived with some champagne and amuse-bouche, to keep them fed until dinner was served. Once they were all ready, orders taken and comfort ensured, the maître d’ spoke up again, “The show will start shortly. Please enjoy your stay!” With that, he retreated, probably to work with another group of guests.

“This is so cool!” Anaís gushed, sipping her champagne as they watched the rest of the people begin to fill the large auditorium.

The show wasn’t broadcasted, of course. The Moulin Rouge allowed the cameramen to film the reactions of the cast as the show started and a couple of takes during the middle, though most of their expressions were hard to see with the low lights. Still, they looked thrilled at the show. Filming resumed once the show was over, as they waited to be led back into the room. The waiting staff had given them some gift bags, which they were all eagerly looking through as they waited for the maître d’ returned to lead them outside of the theater.

Anais looked thoroughly excited about the whole thing. “It was absolutely wonderful.” she gushed, grinning at the camera. “The artists and the dancers were just so talented and I can already see it, this challenge is going to be amazing!”

The brunette looked at the camera, grinning excitedly as she spoke, “I can’t wait!”

Tim was waiting for them backstage. “Alright, I hope you enjoyed the show?” the mentor asked, and smiled at the enthused nodding. “We’re going backstage now.”

They were lead into a behind the scenes tour, walking by the dressing rooms and looking at many costumes from previous shows. The amount of glitter and feathers was absolutely glorious. They were greeted by the two lead artists before they were ushered back into the room they’d been in before.

Tim waited for everyone to settle down before he started talking. “Alright, I hope you enjoyed the tour, but it’s time to get back to business!” Tim clasped his hands as he stood in front of the group. “As you might have guessed, your challenge is obviously related to the show.” He pointed to some boxes placed on top of a table. “These boxes right here have some props from the show. Your challenge will be to create an outfit inspired by the show. The winner of this challenge will get their design made and used by the lead artists on the upcoming show.” He clapped his hands together. “Are you ready? I’ll pull names out of the button bag and you’ll get to pick a box without opening it.”

He quickly started calling them up, and the designers chose among the boxes. Soon enough, they were all holding a box and they were ready to leave.

Raoul got a feathered headdress, Marinette a gorgeous top hat, Leo some pearls and Anaís a feathered hand fan. Jean Philippe got a nice rhinestone choker necklace, and Max got some elaborate
looking gloves made out of glittering stones.

“Now, you’ve all seen your props. You can either use it as it is, deconstruct it into something new, or simply use it as guiding inspiration. The important thing is that you make it into a costume that can be used in an upcoming show at the Moulin Rouge. You will have one day to finish this costume, and you will be judged by the two lead dancers of the show. Let’s get to work!”

The next day, they went directly to the store, and after Tim announced their budget and shopping time… they were off.

Raoul was getting everything blue and black he could get his hands on. “ANYONE WHO TAKES BLUE FEATHERS FROM ME IS DEAD!” he announced, calling out to the rest of the group as he put everything in his shopping bag.

Leo was looking between different red fabrics, trying to make up his mind, while Marinette was quickly filling her shopping bag with various types of fabric and accessories. The seven were running across the store, trying to make the best use of the time and money they had.

“Five minutes!” Tim called out. “Everyone needs to be ready and paying!”

After paying, the seven designers were carted to the workroom again where they quickly began working. They had to make something spectacular. Purchases unloaded and spread over their tables, they quickly began working.

There was an almost ungodly amount of satin, feathers, and pearls in the workroom, but everyone was already hard at work. Marinette was cutting out some patterns and pinning them to the dress form to see if her idea was going to work.

They were quiet, most of them focused on their own work, with only the sound of scissors and sewing machines interrupting the quiet ambiance. There was a moment of quietness, with all the designers working on their outfits… but said silence was soon broken.

By Raoul, of course.

“Love is a many splendored thing, love, lifts us up where we belong, all you need is love.” The talented designer had a sense of humor that equaled his talent, and he was never afraid to let it show, even in front of the cameras.

There were assorted snickers across the room, the camera panning over every work station to film their reactions. “Oh my God!” Marinette laughed, and it was just what Raoul needed.

A reaction.

“All you need is love!”

Marinette paused her working to look at the designer with concerned blue eyes. “I’m not doing this,” Marinette said, shaking her head as she pinned some more fabric to the design.

“All you need is love.” The look on Raoul’s face was of gleeful amusement, just waiting for any response.

“Nope! Gotta work.” Marinette shook her head again, pointedly avoiding looking in her friend’s direction.

“All you need is loooove.”
Marinette sighed, and looked towards Anaís and Matilda, trying to find some sort of support from her cast mates.

“You do know he’s not going to stop, right?” Matilda pointed out, not lifting her eyes from her embroidery, and Raoul nodded. “You should have just ignored it.”

Marinette exhaled loudly and without looking up from her work, sang back in the flattest voice she could humanly muster. “Love is just a game.”

Anaís giggled, and Raoul beamed before continuing with the lyrics. “I was made for loving you baby, you were made for loving me…”

“Love is just a game,” Leo said, his expression somber and thoroughly annoyed. “Singing.”

The scene cut back to the workroom, where everyone was busy at work. Even though they would pipe up with some more lyrics every now and then. “Coooomee what maaay!” Jean Philippe offered wailed in a terrible rendition of the famous song.

By this point, it wasn’t just Raoul: the fever had caught almost all members of the cast. They’d used some of the props they’d gotten before as they fooled around.

Well, all of them except Leo.

There was a beat of silence and Leo finished up quickly. “That’s all I have to say. This group is a disgrace.”

“You guys do remember that the show had nothing to do with the movie, right?” Marinette asked, as she cut some fabric on the table.

“Don’t ruin the fun!” Matilda giggled, before throwing a crumpled up scrap of paper at Marinette’s back.

From another table, Jean Philippe had different concerns. “I just don’t know how you all know all the lyrics.”

Matilda grinned, as she pinned some fabric to the dress form. “The question is how do you not? It’s the elephant love medley and if you don’t like it, you’re dead inside.”

It was nice to see the group getting along so well. Considering how their numbers had dwindled during the course of the competition, it was rather nice to see a group that got along well… mostly. Especially with Fashion Week looming just a few more eliminations ahead.

They were interrupted by Tim, who entered the room chuckling. “Did I just hear singing?”

“We were inspired.”

“I can see that!” Tim smiled, before clasping his hands together. “Alright then, let’s see how you’re doing!”

Leo had a dress made in shades of red, the fabric glimmering under the harsh lights of the workroom. The skirt was full, aided by a petticoat.

“And how has the day gone?”
Leo’s eyes flickered towards his cast mates for a second, but he refrained from making any comment. “I’ve been hard at work,” he told Tim. “And my idea is to make this a dress that could work on any trapeze number.”

“I like it so far,” Tim said, “I would just be worried that the train also works on the runway. That’s where you’re going to show it, and if it drags forever, or it doesn’t move correctly, it’s going to make your design look faulty.” With that, Tim nodded and headed over to the next table.

“Go away, Leo.” Alya’s well wishes were echoed around the crowded living room. Being the good host, Alya had settled on the floor, leaning against one extremely occupied sofa.

“I just want Adrien to arrive soon,” Mylene pointed out, still snuggled up to Ivan. “That’s honestly the highlight of the show for me.”

“Not much of a fashion person?” Alix asked, and Mylene nodded. “Yeah, me too. If it wasn’t for Mari and Adrien I would not be watching this show. There’s not enough drama to keep my attention.”

Marinette was pinning some fabric to her dress form when Tim reached her work table. The outfit was a sleek dress shirt, the black satin looking luxurious against the dress form.

“How are you doing today?” The mentor approached the dress form, arms crossed as he looked at Marinette.

“It’s been a busy day!” Marinette answered, waiting for the inevitable critique. With every passing challenge, the judges became more and more picky. The standards were raising and every mistake would be called into question. Their work had to be flawless.

“Oh, this looks interesting.” The mentor looked at what was pinned on the dress form with a careful and technical gaze.

“Yeah.” Marinette pushed the hair from her face as she turned all her attention towards Tim. “I’m trying to incorporate different aspects of the shows and all the costumes we saw into something new and fresh.”

“I’m… I’m actually interested to see how this works,” he said, tapping his chin thoughtfully. “What prop did you get?”

“Top hat,” Marinette said. “I’m not sure yet whether I’ll use it on the show or not.”

“Hmm. It all depends on how your look comes across, to tell the truth,” Tim said. “This,” he tapped at the fabric Marinette was currently working, “is a costume, so it has to be exuberant, but there’s a line between that and clownish, so you need to make sure everything works. Also, you need to remember this isn’t just a runway outfit. It’s a costume for a performance, so it also needs to be functional. So you need to make sure that the artist will be able to move freely in it, not just look good.”

“I know…” Marinette said, looking thoughtfully at the design. “I did think of that. Would it work if I made it less rigid?”

Tim nodded. “I do like the structure, but maybe playing around with the illusion might make things easier to work with.” Marinette nodded at him, twirling her pencil between her fingers as Tim continued, “You do have a good idea, you just have to make it work for you…”
Marinette was sitting in the interview room, nervously biting her lower lip. “The competition is halfway done. And by now, the judges expect so much more from us, that every time we send a design to the runway, it’s… nerve wracking.”

The show cut to the workroom, where Tim was still visiting the rest of the work tables as Marinette’s voice over continued, “And the fact that we don’t get to win immunities anymore makes things a little more real. I made it this far and I really don’t want to go home just yet.”

With all the rounds finished, and helpful critique given out, Tim was ready to leave for the day. “Well, I am very fond of everything I’ve seen so far. And I can’t wait to see how they look on the runway. You have until ten tonight, and your models will be here at five, so remember, use your time wisely,” Tim told them, standing by the opened door. “I will see you tomorrow!”

With that, they were alone again, and it was to get back to work. With all the critiques from Tim, the group had more energy than before. Almost everyone took Tim’s critique to heart and were quickly adjusting their designs to integrate the advice, so there was fabric being ripped from the dress forms and being adjusted into something new.

Raoul, however, was looking befuddled.

“I am an idiot!” Raoul told the camera, smoothing the front of his purple shirt, a color the designer seemed to favor in his wardrobe, and which accentuated his sepia skin tone perfectly. “I got a little carried away with my design, and I’m kind of in over my head.”

The camera panned to the workroom, where Raoul was looking at the dress on the mannequin with a thoughtful look on his face. He ran a hand over his short but wavy hair, glancing between the pieces on the dress form and the ones on the table. There were several pieces of fabric sewn together and ready to be pinned.

Back in the interview room, he made a face at the camera. “I have far too many feathers to deal with.” He laughed. “And not enough time. I may have made a terrible mistake,” he finished, laughing again as the camera cut back to the work room.

They had six hours until the day was done, and the models had arrived. Noelle headed over to Raoul and squealed happily at the outfit on the dress form. Marinette was standing in front of the dress form, carefully undressing it so she could hand the outfit to Adrien.

The cameras always took great care to leave them in the background, filming their interactions from a small distance. The not-quite-a-couple was not exactly camera forward, so the production team made sure to let them have a little bit of distance so they would act more naturally.

“Hey!” Adrien greeted Marinette with a smile, before he placed his bag on top of her work table.

“Hi!” Marinette smiled. “It’s not fully ready, so you have to be careful, but go on!”

“Nice.” He took the outfit from her and began to carefully slip it on, mindful of the pins that were holding certain parts of this together. “What’s the challenge about?”

“Moulin Rouge,” Marinette told him. “I’d never gone to a show before!” Which was no wonder since each seat could be around a hundred euros and up. “But it was really fun.” She began pulling at the jacket. “Have you ever been there?”
“Not really,” he said, standing up straight to let her fiddle around. “Not really what the brand would encourage.” He shrugged at the concerned look on her face. “But how was it?”

“It was really good!” she said, before tapping his shoulder to motion for him to move. He did so without needing any other direction. “We got a tour behind the scenes and… some gifts.” Marinette looked at her bag. “I have some macarons! Want one?”

“Sure!” Adrien reached for the treat. It was red, perfectly shaped, and matching the box it had come from perfectly. “It’s your fault if I can’t fit your outfit later…”

Marinette snorted. “If you can’t fit then that’s probably more my fault than a stray macaroon.” She took one for herself, taking a quick bite out of it. The young designer placed the bitten macaroon on the table, as she grabbed her pin cushion and began marking the suit, making sure it was form fitting enough. She stepped back, to look at Adrien as a whole. “You know,” she mused, as she reached for the half bitten treat on the table, “these are really good, but…” She looked around for a second, before lowering her voice. “But to be honest, I like the ones my papa makes more.”

He flashed her a sympathetic smile. “How long since you’ve seen them?”

“Since we started,” Marinette said, her expression a little somber, as she pulled the waistcoat. “I have called them, though, but it’s not the same.” Besides, they had filmed some calls, and that tended to kill the mood when trying to talk to people.

“You’re doing really great though.”

The smile on Marinette was warmer than the sun. “How has school been?” she asked as she moved the garment attached to Adrien’s waist. “Is this okay? Not too tight?” She slipped two fingers inside the fabric, tugging it away from his body.

“Class was good,” Adrien said, “and it’s okay. You can actually make it a bit tighter…” His green eyes gazed over her work table, and stopped on the big box that held the top hat. “What’s that?”

“Oh,” Marinette stood up and opened the box, taking the top hat out of it, carefully standing on her toes to place it on top of Adrien’s head. “It’s a hat. You like?”

He laughed, and took it off right away, placing it on top of Marinette’s head. “Yup!”

“Honestly,” Matilda narrated, as the camera showed Adrien and Marinette’s playful banter. “I just wish they’d get on with it.”

A voice from behind the camera asked, “Make a move?”

The designer laughed, leaning back on the chair before continued. “Well, yeah… or just stop with the whole thing, we all know they’re already a thing…” Matilda trailed off, before looking off to the side, clearly having babbled too much.

Alya and Nino’s living room was deadly quiet as the show cut to a commercial break. “They’re a thing? Already?”

Nino shook his head, “No, I don’t think so. I know my man, and he’s the sappiest sap there is. If he was with her, they wouldn’t be able to hide it.”

“Yeah, and honestly, Mari wouldn’t be able to hide it… She couldn’t hide it at school, she can’t hide
A joined murmur of agreement filled the room. It did seem rather out of character for both of them if they were together and were able to keep quiet. To tell the truth, no one believed that they could be that subtle… they weren’t subtle now.

“But what if this is them trying to be subtle?” Kim asked.

“I would kill her and him if the way we find out about this is because someone made a comment off screen.” Alya’s narrowed eyes were focused on the screen. “Give her a kiss, a passionate embrace! Something! Not someone suggesting that something had happened.

To tell the truth, no one in the group could really believe that their famous two friends could have gotten together and be subtle about it. It was just not believable at all.

They’d been waiting for almost ten years for this, they deserved some decent pay off.
The camera panned towards Marinette, followed only by a camera that was apparently well hidden, given the awkward filming, and the fact that Marinette did not even glance in that direction. The pretty designer headed towards the staircase and exited the shot. Her next appearance was downstairs in the lobby, where she looked around before quickly marching outside.

The scene changed until they were outside, where Marinette was walking away from the hotel, and they recorded as best as they could. The streets were busy with people, so it wasn’t hard to stay mostly unnoticed.

As she walked, her shoulders tensed and she swiftly changed directions and headed towards one of the busiest streets. Marinette paused beside a street vendor and ordered some food. Once she received her freshly made gyro, Marinette headed to a nearby bench to eat her meal.

The blue eyed designer picked at her food for some minutes, fiddling with her cellphone with one hand before she finally decided to walk back to the hotel.

In the interview room, an extremely annoyed Marinette was sitting in front of the camera. It was obvious this happened right after her little excursion outside the hotel, since she was wearing the same clothes she’d been wearing outside. “I’m not talking about that. That’s not true.” The young woman crossed her arms in front of her chest, her posture tense as she looked straight at whoever was standing beside the camera.

“Someone said that it’s something you do,” the voice off camera said, in an attempt to prompt more from Marinette.

The designer’s jaw tightened. “I’m not… I need to rest for tomorrow.”

The next day started with the designers returning to their tables, eager to get back to work and finish the design before the show. Marinette was uncharacteristically quiet and wasn’t really interacting with people as they got settled into the workroom, deciding to go straight into work.

The change was noticed immediately, because while their competition was stressful, the workroom was always filled with talking and joking, and seeing Marinette retreat into herself for no reason was strange.

There were attempts to coax some response from her, but Marinette was simply focused on her work.

Tim made his appearance in the room as usual. “Designers!” he called out, bringing the work to a halt. “Your models will arrive at four and you’ll have thirty minutes to fit them, then one and a half hours to get them to hair and styling.” He looked around at the room. If he noticed the mood change in the room, he said nothing. “I’ll see you before the runway.”

The group kept on working, though they kept mostly to themselves now, since the feel in the room was less than cheery, compared to the singing from the day before.

In the end, Raoul had enough. “Hey little lady, what’s wrong?” The designer leaned on Marinette’s table, concerned brown eyes trying to gauge the girl’s mood.

“Raoul, not now,” Marinette said, not looking from her design to look at her friend. The camera panned towards Anaïs, who was pointedly not looking in their direction.

Well, Raoul was definitely concerned now.
“I’m going to the sewing room, excuse me.” Marinette picked up her fabric and walked out of the room.

Raoul made his way to Anaís’ table, ready to gather some clues. “Do you know what happened?”

“Uh…” Anaís focused on her fabric, pointedly avoiding Raoul’s questioning gaze. “I don’t know. She left the room last night and came back like that.”

Raoul wasn’t really believing Anaís and it was obvious in the way his eyes narrowed at her. The other girl was being shifty. “Really? And you didn’t ask?”

Anaís shook her head, still looking down at her work. “She probably argued with you know, and was pissy, I don’t know!”

The look on the dark skinned designer’s face was confused. “Argued with… when?”

“Well, Anaís said that they were already dating,” Matilda said, “and that she sneaks off to see him.” The other designer shrugged. It was common knowledge as far as she knew.

The glare from Raoul to Anaís was positively murderous as he ran a hand over his face. Raoul let out a long suffering sigh, before muttering a low string of curses, bleeped by the airing, of course, before he grabbed his own fabric. “Because I have nothing else to do,” he muttered as he headed to the sewing room.

He settled on a machine near Marinette’s and began to work with his fabric. “So. Something happened,” Raoul said, looking only at his fabric as he pushed it through the machine.

“Raoul…”

“I’m just stating a fact. Something happened.”

Marinette sighed loudly. “I was interviewed last night. About my supposed frequent rendezvous, which someone apparently told the producers about?” Her tone was bitter, and her cheeks were tinged pink.

“I heard.”

The rhythmical sound of the machines working was the only sound in the room as both designers focused on their work. Marinette working on some black fabric and Raoul with some blue.

“We don’t have to talk about this, I just wanted to see if you were okay.”

Marinette gathered her fabric. “I’m not happy… But I guess I’m okay.” She turned to Raoul. “So, it wasn’t you?”

“I am offended you even have to ask,” Raoul said, giving Marinette a playfully annoyed look. “I will mock you to your face. What’s said off camera stays there.”

Marinette looked deep in thought. “I know.” She pursed her lips as she seemed to ponder how to go on. “I’m just… really mad about it. She’s talking about things that she doesn’t even know about!”

The scene cut back to the other room, as the models had just arrived. Adrien had walked over to Marinette’s work table and looked around, because she wasn’t there yet.

Soon enough both Marinette and Raoul returned, with Marinette looking a little less annoyed. “There we go little lady.” He squeezed her to his side, his smile playful, ruffling her hair as he let her go.
“Time to get to work.”

The camera showed Adrien, watching the interaction with an odd expression on his face, one that was definitely caught by the cameras and Raoul, who grinned at the model over Marinette’s head.

“Stooop,” Marinette whined as she pushed at Raoul, before she flounced over to Adrien, a bright smile on her face. “Adrien!”

The expression on Raoul’s face was pure and absolute amusement. “What?” he said, the corners of his lips twitching upwards. “I didn’t do anything. And if I did do something, which I’m not saying that I did,” the expression on his face was pure innocence, but one look at his twinkling brown eyes was enough to realize that he was definitely enjoying this, “no one can blame me.”

“Hey,” Adrien greeted Marinette with a small smile. “What was all that about?” he asked, curiously motioning in Raoul’s general direction.

The expression on Marinette’s face grew slightly somber. “Ugh. There was a little bit of drama,” she told him, keeping her voice soft so that it wasn’t heard by the other designers. “I was a bit…” She wrinkled her nose, “annoyed. I’m okay now.”

Adrien’s smile was sympathetic, “Sorry to hear that. Things are getting a little more agreste-ive?”

“I guess…” Marinette said as she made sure Adrien’s clothes fit him right. “I just didn’t think that it would turn…. wait, did you say agreste-ive?” The look on Adrien’s face gave her all the answer she needed and Marinette finally laughed. “Oh my God, Adrien!” she covered her mouth with her hands, trying helplessly to prevent giggles from spilling out.

“You laughed!” Adrien pointed out, the look on his face awfully proud considering just how bad of a joke he’d just told.

“I can’t believe I ever thought you were cool!” she told him, playfully glaring up at him as she folded the clothes back on her desk.

Adrien laughed, before reaching into his bag. “Can I get you to rethink that?” he said before subtly slipping a small box into her reach.

Marinette’s eyes widened, immediately recognizing the logo on the box. “You didn’t.”

“I did,” he replied, his smile brighter and prouder than before.

“Thank you so much!” she beamed up at him, almost jumping in for a hug, but refraining at the last minute. He closed the distance though, and they shared a timid one armed hug, letting go after a few seconds, both designer and model bashfully looking away. “It really made my day better.”

Brushing her hair from her face, Marinette tried to act normally as she opened the box, displaying four macarons from her parents’ shop. “Want one?” she offered, and when Adrien seemed to be about to decline her offer, she held out the box to him. “Come on!”

From their own home, Tom and Sabine were watching the exchange with widened eyes and ear splitting grins.

“Sabine. Look at our future son-in-law,” he told his wife, as Adrien and Marinette were shown going
to styling. “He’s a smart boy, you know.”

Not like Sabine disagreed, but she was curious. “Why?”

“The way to Cheng women’s heart is through the stomach. I learned that the hard way…” he answered, laughing loudly when his wife playfully swatted at him.

“I had no idea he was buying them for her!” Sabine mused, clearly remembering the tall flustered boy as he ordered some sweets just a few weeks ago. “I would have given them for free!”

Tom patted his wife’s arm as they continued watching the show. “Next time.”

Back at the show, it was the last few minutes before the show. “Everyone has to be ready in five minutes!” Tim called out. “Five minutes and it’s time for the runway!”

Raoul was tightening Noelle’s corset, and adjusting the headdress on the model’s head so that it fit properly. “Comfortable?” he asked the girl, who nodded. “Good. We’re set to go then.” And the two of them left through the opened door.

Marinette was fiddling with the corset garment on Adrien’s waist. “You can move, right?” she asked him.

Adrien wiggled around. “Yup!” She continued fiddling around with his clothing, even though there really was nothing else to be done by now. “Marinette?” He watched her as she dropped to her knees, using her fingers to measure the hem of his pants as she tried to ensure they were even.

“Hmm?” she was too concerned with seeing if the hem on the black slacks was even to look up at him.

“We’re ready. Relax.” He offered her his hand and pulled her back up. “We can go.”

“Right,” she said, rubbing the back of her neck but nodding. “I’m just… making sure everything’s ready.”

Tim was calling out to them from the doorframe; it was clearly time to go. Adrien offered her his arm and she took it, even as she shook her head at the silly gesture. They all joined the rest of the models and designers and Tim finally closed the door behind them.

Time for the show.

Alya looked at the television set as the show paused for a commercial break. “Alright, I’m going to say it. Raoul is okay in my book.”

“He’s taunting Adrien,” Nino pointed out, looking a little put out by his girlfriend’s support for the other designer. “It’s pretty obvious…”

“Exactly!” Alya said, and her sentiment was echoed by Alix.

“Well, at least Adrien is worried now!” Alix pointed out. “I just want them to do something. It’s been too long and I just gah!”

Kim had been surprisingly quiet through the whole airing. “I gotta agree with the ladies, dude,” he told Nino, shrugging at the offended look on the bespectacled man’s face. “Sorry! But… he digs her… and if thinking this dude is moving in on her gets him to make a move, he’s okay in my book.”
“Traitor.”

It was time for the show, and the seven designers were currently settled on their usual spot beside the runway. Heloise stepped onto the runway, wearing a gorgeous and form fitting red dress. “Designers. Welcome to the runway,” the host said, smiling warmly at the contestants. “As you know, in fashion, one day you’re in and one day… you’re out. For today’s challenge, you had to create a costume to be used at the Moulin Rouge. The winner of this challenge will have their design featured in an upcoming production at the Moulin Rouge. Raoul. You have the last immunity for this season, which means you cannot be eliminated today.”

“Alright,” Heloise continued. “Let’s say hello to our judges. We have the creative director for Mode Magazine, Tatiana Geiger. Next to her, we have the creative director for S.E.L.F. Fashion, and famed designer, Thierry Leclère; and today’s guest judges, the lead performers at the Moulin Rouge, Bernard Gallois and Mariette Solé.”

The two performers greeted the contestants with a bright smile, and Heloise waited for the designers to acknowledge them before continuing with her usual speech. “We also have Tim Gunn, but as you know, since he’s your mentor, he will not be judging you. That said, he will have one Tim Gunn Save. If at some point he disagrees with the judges, he can bring an eliminated designer back to the competition. We also have an anonymous runway. That means, that the judges don’t know which designer created which look. Let’s start the show!”

It was a new atmosphere since the lights had been dimmed to a reddish color and the music was far more instrumental and reminiscent of the music at the Moulin Rouge than the usual electronic beats that accompanied each runway show.

All of outfits looked gorgeous. Leo had created an amazing red can-can outfit, with a train that trailed behind the model as she made her way through the runway.

Anaís had created a white outfit for her model, with its sequins sparkling brightly under the lights, giving it a pinkish glow. It wasn’t as tasteful as the other ones, but it seemed like it fit her model well enough.

Marinette’s outfit had Adrien wearing an opened black tuxedo jacket with coattails with a high waist that displayed the form fitting corset under it. The pants were black with a dark leather trim on each side. The top hat gave Adrien a playful look, making the model look the part of an actual performer, and he looked absolutely dashing as he posed before walking off the runway.

“He looks really good, Mari!” Anaís cheerfully commented, which only earned her a cold glare from Marinette.

But if there was an actual showstopper, it was Raoul’s. He’d created a dress in black and blue, with the corset imitating the upper part of a butterfly and the bottom using feathers and fabric to imitate the wings. The head dress stood proudly on her head, the feathers giving the illusion of antennas, and the long black gloves completed her look, making her look absolutely gorgeous as she twirled playfully on the runway.

After a small commercial break, the designers were standing on the runway, waiting for the verdict. “If I call your name, please step forward.” Heloise said, before looking at her card. “Jean Philippe, Leo and Matilda.” she said and the two designers stepped forward. “Your scores have qualified you to move to the next round. You may leave the runway.”

It took no time for the designers to do as instructed, leaving four designers, Marinette, Raoul, Max
and Anaís on stage.

“The rest of you, have the highest and the lowest scores.” Heloise said. “Let’s bring out the models.” Soon enough, the models had joined the designers on stage and were quietly waiting for Heloise to continue. “Marinette, tell us about your design.”

“Right,” Marinette began, and turned towards Adrien. “Well, my concept was to mix a little bit of everything we saw on the show, and try and put it together into an outfit that could work. I think that the corsets are such a big aspect of dressing up for burlesque performances and everything along those lines that I just had to bring it into my design.”

“I do love that it’s black,” Bernard said, “It’s very sexy and sophisticated, but without being overtly flashy. I’d wear it.”

“It has a very dark… circus ringleader theme to it,” Heloise said, “I can see how it could work.”

“I’d like to see it photographed and I love it…” Tatiana said, “It looks very editorial.”

“Thank you,” Marinette said, before Heloise directed her attention towards Max.

“Max, go ahead.”

“Well, since it’s the Moulin Rouge, you have to fit a certain aesthetic. Which is what I tried to do here.”

“It’s kind of interesting,” Heloise said, “how you used patterned fabrics for your design. It’s an interesting look.”

“It’s not!” Tatiana laughed. “It cheapens what could be a very good outfit!”

Max looked concerned, but said nothing.

“I’m afraid that the patterns won’t show well on the stage,” Mariette said. “It’s kind of a waste to use fabric that’s so lovely when it won’t be appreciated the right way.”

“The outfit looks nice,” Bernard said, “I’m not completely sold, but it’s a good idea.”

“Thank you Bernard,” Heloise said, before turning towards Anaís. “Anaís, tell us what you wanted to do with your outfit.”

“Well, at the show we saw several outfits and I wanted to make something new, inspired in what I saw there.”


“Well, you have to take risks in fashion.”

“Hmm.”

Mariette frowned. “But this looks kind of similar to what we already do in the show. Why would we settle for something like this, if we have already used it?”

“Well… it’s not really the same, because those were suits, and this is a dress…” Anaís explained.

“It’s still similar enough…” Tatiana shook her head. “You were supposed to create something and I
don’t think this is creative enough.”

Heloise nodded. “Thank you Anaís. Raoul, tell us about your design.

“Well… since this was a costume, I had to push the envelope a little bit. I think that using the model’s natural shape and bringing in something as beautiful as a butterfly, you can create an outfit that’s reminiscent of the classic Moulin Rouge aesthetic, but with something new.”

“The colors, the contrast… I am in love,” Tatiana said, motioning at the design on the runway, causing Raoul to beam in reply.

“Definitely, I can see how you used the wings for the skirt and the result is amazing.”

“It is also very editorial,” Thierry pointed out. “I can see how these colors would print very well in a fashion spread, and just how well they’d look on stage. It’s a very good job, Raoul. We’re proud.”

“Thank you.” Raoul nodded, thankful at the praise he’d been receiving. It was well deserved.

“Alright… designers, you can leave the runway. We’ll be examining your designs closely and we’ll bring you back once it’s done.”

“Raoul is gonna win this again,” Rose said, “Mari made Adrien look great but… butterfly.”

Everyone nodded in agreement. The details Raoul had managed to show with the butterfly, incorporating feathers and fabric almost seamlessly guaranteed him another win.

“Pretty much,” Mylene agreed, before asking, “Who do you think will get kicked out? Mari is definitely still in.”

“Anaís,” Alya said. “Well… I hope so, at least. I don’t like her and I was right.” She poked Nino’s shoulder with her finger, “Nino said I was jealous because she had befriended Mari. I knew better.”

“You were jealous,” Nino pointed out, rubbing the spot where Alya had poked him. “Though it was really uncool of her to say all that to the camera…”

“Backstabbing little…” Alya narrowed her eyes as the judges looked at each outfit, giving out their opinions. “At least Mari realized that she wasn’t to be trusted.”

“Elimination started!” Alix called out, and everyone focused back on the screen.

With all the designers standing up on the runway, it was time to see who won and who was eliminated. “Like I said earlier,” Heloise said, “you are the highest and the lowest scores. One of you will be named the winner and one of you will be out.”

“This challenge needed you to focus and be inspired by the sexy and creative performances at the Moulin Rouge, and create an outfit worthy of being worn by the stars, and be looked at in awe by a captivated audience.”

“Raoul, Marinette… you have the highest scores for the challenges. Marinette, you created a great outfit for a male performer and made it fresh and sexy. It’s not an easy task, but you managed to succeed greatly. Raoul, your butterfly dress was an absolute dream come true, and you’ve managed to create a piece that will inspire people who see it on the stage. Raoul, you are the winner of this challenge, Marinette, you were so very close, and we’re so happy that this competition had brought
the best out of both of you. You may both leave the runway.”

“Max, Anaís,” Heloise continued, once Raoul and Marinette had finally left the stage. “You’ve made unfortunate choices in this challenge. Max, your fabric was a mistake. It cheapened the value of your outfit, which was very good. You are a very talented designer, but you lost sight of the challenge and it showed. Anaís. You needed to create something for this challenge, and what you presented was a rehashed version of something we had already seen. It wasn’t new, and it’s not enough at this level of the competition. Max, you’re in, you may leave the runway.” Heloise turned to the remaining designer and looked at her with an apologetic expression. “I’m sorry Anaís, that means you’re out.”

The scene cut to an interview. Leo was sitting on the interview chair. “I think I found who my biggest competition is.” The show followed Anaís as the designer cleared out her work space. “I’ll have to keep a close eye on Raoul and Marinette, if I want to win this show.”

“Called it!” Alya said, as the television showed Anaís walking back to the workroom to gather her supplies. “So long, she wasn’t even that good!”

Alix had different concern. “Leo’s creepy,” she said. “Like, dude. Just work on your stuff and win if you can, but, don’t look so… super villain-ey?”

“Well, at least Mari made it, and it seems like my boy Adrien is finally going to make a move. Did he really go to her parents’ shop?”

Rose smiled, “I think that’s so sweet!”

“I wish I could have seen that, maybe I’ll go visit them to get some deets.” Alya grinned. “After all, we’ve been waiting for almost ten years.”

Chapter End Notes

Honestly, after ten years everyone would be a little bit annoyed.
Edit: Since some people asked!
Raoul's outfit.
https://41.media.tumblr.com/3bb539c1daadbbao000867a0774ab4b81/tumblr_inline_o4bne4lA1f1tg5d70_540.jpg
Marinette's (not exactly, but... close enough.)
https://41.media.tumblr.com/2b58e05f46dce8050d8348d8de694790/tumblr_inline_o4bne501at1tg5d'
#BattleOfTheBaes

Well… Marinette tried. But despite her best attempts she was not able to keep from watching the show, and she was unable to not look at the trainwreck that was the moulin rouge episode. She had gloriously relived through the whole incident with Anaís, the following and everything else. It had honestly been the last time she’d even attempted to go on patrol and Tikki was completely on board with the idea. Last time it had been too close and thankfully Tikki had reacted and warned Marinette against the idea.

But even Marinette had to admit it, watching the show, especially watching Adrien, made her heart skip a beat. Because while she was aware that a lot of it was edit room magic, but… there was still that little bit of her that really wanted it to be more. Because while she had admitted that she used to have a crush on Adrien Agreste, she’d yet to admit that it was no longer a past tense issue, and was quickly becoming a present tense problem.

But that was not something Marinette wanted to focus on right now. If she’d entered this contest, she was going to win it. She couldn’t afford to be distracted by dreamy blondes with bright green eyes. Even if they were considerate enough to bring her pastries to remind her of home.

Also, for God’s sake, that hug was so awkward to look at, Marinette almost felt physical pain.

Anaís’ departure had been a bittersweet experience, because while Marinette had been fond of the girl as her roommate through all of the competition, she couldn’t quite get over the fact that Anaís had carelessly spread rumors about her. Because, sure… she did leave the room to go on walks, but for her to easily make the jump and accuse her of something like that? And the fact that it seemed like they believed she was playing at something hurt the most.

Although the experience had told her that she needed to be more careful. Ladybug would have to take a small break until she was able to leave home without risking her secret identity.

It absolutely sucked.

“You could just switch rooms,” Raoul offered, laying back on his bed as the show’s credits began rolling.

“Nah,” Marinette said, shaking her head as she leaned against the headrest, sitting at the head of the bed as she talked with her friend. “It’s not bad now, just awkward… I think she’s guilty after watching the show so… I’m just going to hope it gets better.”

Raoul nodded, before his expression turned quizzical. “Where do you go when you leave the hotel? Frankly, with all of this? I’m curious now.”

“I go for a walk,” Marinette said, feeling like the lie was coming out way too naturally now. “I’m just a bit overwhelmed and I need… air.” The blue eyed designer paused. “You don’t think I actually go to hook up with him, do you?”

“Honestly?” Raoul said. “I don’t. You’re way too tense to be actually getting some regularly.” He immediately dodged the pillow flying towards his face. “It’s not just me!” he said. “My baes said so as well.”
“They said what?” Marinette glared at him.

“They said…” He looked at his cellphone screen, “She needs to climb that boy like a tree.” He grinned and held up his hands in playful surrender. “I said nothing, they were going by what they’ve seen on the show. I have no blame in this…” He paused for a second. “I didn’t tell them they were wrong though.”

“You’re awful.”

“You’re not wrong,” Raoul conceded, winking at Marinette. “I’m still right though.” He yawned, stretching his arms above his head, grinning at the miffed look on Marinette’s face. “I’m exhausted… So either you take that bed or go face Matilda.”

Marinette wrinkled her nose. “Fiiiiiiine.” She stood up, reaching for her bag and slinging it over her shoulder. “I’m going. Go have your beauty sleep.”

“Thank you. Try not to flee the hotel before morning.” The groan that came from Raoul as Marinette successfully hit him with a pillow was reward enough. With that, Marinette headed back to her room to finally go to sleep.

Marinette was right. The room she shared with Matilda was awkwardly quiet, but come morning, it started to clear. Granted, it wasn’t a big step, but Matilda apologized for the way things had appeared on screen. They had never really been friends, more like civil acquaintances, but it was something.

“It’s not true, you know. I’m not…” Marinette said, rubbing her forearm nervously.

“Oh, I figured that… later.” Matilda shrugged nervously. “I’m… really sorry though.”

“It’s okay,” Marinette finally said, truly wanting this awkwardness to be over. “I just don’t want people getting the wrong idea.”

“You like him, though, don’t you?”

Marinette’s jaw tensed immediately and her shoulders went rigid. With everything that had happened during the Moulin Rouge episode, Marinette wasn’t ready to be sharing her personal information with anyone, but she couldn’t quite find the words to be polite about it.

Matilda realized her mistake immediately, shaking her head frantically. “Sorry! That’s none of my business, don’t answer that.” Matilda looked around embarrassedly, before pulling her hair into a ponytail. “Let’s go for breakfast, we’re going to have to go film soon.”

Marinette relaxed and let out a breath she never realized she’d been holding before nodding and following her castmate.

After finally having some breakfast, the group was transported to the studio and immediately directed to the runway room. Raoul approached her quickly, quirking an eyebrow in silent question.

“It’s solved. Mostly,” Marinette said before side eyeing him. “Thank you for your concern, mom.”

“Good,” Raoul said, before they came across the show’s main producer, Camille. “Hey Camille!”

“Designers,” Camille said, waving a hand at Raoul in greeting and quickly motioning towards the runway room’s entrance. “Into the runway room! Chop chop!”
They hurried into the room and took their seats. The room was beginning to feel so empty now that more than half of them were gone. Today they were filming the eleventh challenge, which meant there were now only five people left. Marinette, Raoul, Matilda, Leo and Jean Philippe. Max had been eliminated right after Anaís, and the feel in the workroom was beginning to shift slowly. The final elimination before Fashion Week was looming ahead, and it was becoming hard to believe in the camaraderie that they had before. Because the closer they got to the finish line, the more everyone looked like a threat rather than a friend.

Now they all knew that they would get the chance to create a collection, though the two designers who didn’t qualify for Fashion Week would only make decoy collections. They’d be shown, yes, but they wouldn’t be featured in the show, or given the same budget as the actual finalists. It was a consolation prize and while the idea of still showing should be enough… they were all too close to the prize to settle for any less.

Marinette sat next to Raoul, who’d quickly ended up being her only friend in the show. Surprisingly, she still trusted him despite the fact that he was competition.

Sure, Raoul got way too much satisfaction out of making fun of her actions around Adrien, and after watching the show, she realized that he was also amused by poking fun at Adrien. Marinette was sure she should do something about that, but until she figured out how to broach the subject with her model… it would have to wait. However, the idea of Adrien actually feeling some sort of jealousy about her was kind of… interesting. He was always such a gentleman towards her, which made it hard to really discern what his intentions were. And if maybe, just maybe, he liked her back? Even just a little? Marinette was going to die of happiness right where she stood.

Now, that didn’t mean that Marinette wouldn’t pay close attention to what her friend did while Adrien was in the room. Clearly someone had to supervise Raoul.

Camille stood on top of the runway, looking at the group of designers before the filming began. It seemed like she was making sure that the lighting was set up correctly, and she mumbled some instructions on her headset, before hurrying off the runway. “We’re filming in three, two… one…”

And they were off.

Heloise walked on the runway as she usually did. Today’s outfit was an extremely well fitting pair of frayed jeans and a t-shirt with a logo. “Hello designers!” The tall model gave the group a warm smile before she continued speaking. “There’s only five of you left, which means that the competition will only be harder from now on. You are so very close to Fashion Week, and I’m really excited to see what the finalists will do.”

Marinette grinned at the thought despite herself. Honestly, she wanted to win this competition, she truly did; the idea of even presenting at Fashion Week was a dream come true. And it was so close she could almost taste it.

“For today’s challenge, I want you to think… Rock and Roll baby.” Heloise laughed, as she winked at the group. “For this challenge, you’ll have to design an outfit inspired by everything Rock and Roll, and I hope to see some gems.” The host smiled. “We will have a surprise guest judge at the show, so you’ll have to work hard to surprise them.”

Rock and roll? Pfft. Marinette had this.

Heloise continued, seemingly used to the speech she had to give every challenge. “Your budget will be one hundred and fifty euros, and you will have one day to finish this challenge,” she told them, pausing for a second. “You will have thirty minutes to come up with a design and then Tim will take
you shopping. I will see you all tomorrow at the show. Good luck!” With that, Heloise turned around and strutted out of the runway.

“And cut!” Camille said, climbing up on the runway. “Everyone. Back to the workroom, Tim will meet you all there in ten minutes.”

“Rock and roll,” Raoul said, as he walked beside Marinette towards the workroom. “I foresee a lot of leather in our workroom…”

Marinette snorted. “It’s not bad. And you don’t have to use leather if you don’t like it.”

“Pfft. I never said I didn’t like it,” Raoul said, before his expression turned playful. “Actually, there’s nothing better than when my boyfriend wears his bike jacket. Mhmm. Irresistible.”

Marinette couldn’t help but think of Chat Noir’s outfit, and she couldn’t find it in herself to disagree with Raoul. Leather could be very agreeable on the right person.

Chat Noir. Oh, she really missed her partner. Marinette hadn’t realized she’d taken for granted his companionship before joining the competition. It wasn’t just the running around and patrolling that she missed, but the talking too. Sitting on top of a rooftop and simply talking about how their day had gone. She missed it. But she had never really thought about really letting him know what she was doing, and just why she had to miss their usual patrols.

Why did she still keep the wall up? She had no idea, but it was something that she did. Chat didn’t press on the issue and without that urgency she just… didn’t push back. Sure, Chat had left for a couple of months, but she figured that they were the same age. University and higher education was probably something they both were dealing with and perhaps he’d had a rough start. In any case, she hadn’t asked and he didn’t offer. The important thing was that Chat had returned.

Her relationship with Chat had taken a turn for the… weird, after Hawkmoth had been defeated. And it had been the starting point for every following change in her life. They had graduated from Lycée, which meant that she had to give up on the illusion of being with Adrien, especially since he moved away, since life seemed to separate them into new paths. Even spending time with Alya had been difficult once they both started studying. She couldn’t keep on holding onto the hope of being with someone who wasn’t even in her life. Marinette Dupain-Cheng was an adult. And adults were not hung up on school crushes.

She’d dated. Yes. But things didn’t usually work out. There was just no one who’d support her as she needed to be supported, or who was even worth the time she would have to take off of work and school to date. So yes, she dated. But her longest relationship had lasted around four months and everyone was surprised they stayed together that long.

And yes, it would take some honest threat of violence to get her to admit this, she hadn’t even written it on her journal, but she’d thought about Chat. Of course she thought he was good looking, Marinette could be stubborn, but she wasn’t obtuse. Chat was swoon-worthy, and she had no doubt that he knew. It was more than just his looks though; her cat had so many different qualities that captivated her. He was smart and loyal and just, and so much more that she couldn’t list it all. So yes… there were times during their partnership, when she hadn’t been blinded by Adrien, that she had thought ‘This is it. I could leap and he’d catch me.’

And she’d been tempted, so tempted.

But she had been terrified. So she never did, and in the end, that was okay. After all, even with the limitations that secret identities imposed on them, their friendship was the strongest bond Marinette
had in her life. Just because they never crossed the line to something more didn’t mean that their relationship wasn’t strong.

How could she even put to words just how important Chat Noir was to her? There were bonds that went beyond regular labels, and Chat was her partner. He was an ever-present force in her life. The one person she’d risk her life for and who she’d know would do the same for her without the need to ask why.

But Chat belonged in the night. Under masks and hidden identities. Because as much as she’d mused about the options, for all that she was brave, Chat was one risk she wasn’t ready for.

And then Adrien came back into her life. And her former classmate had been even better than before. Adrien had become her lifeline. He’d offered support when she’d really needed it. And she didn’t even need to ask him. Once again, she’d been helpless against it, and she’d fallen head over heels… again. He’d brightened up her day, talking her down from the proverbial ledge and she honestly counted the hours until the fittings. It was pathetic.

Honestly, this wasn’t what she’d signed up for, but then again… she wasn’t really complaining.

While Marinette was running across the hallways of the fabric store, Adrien was having a small crisis of his own. He’d actually gone on patrol during the time the show was airing. He had kept it brief, since he had an important test the next day that he needed to finish studying for.

Adrien had recorded the episode and was now settling in to watch it after he was done with classes for the day. He’d made himself a light lunch (nothing too bloaty, he had a fitting after all) and brought it to his living room, where he settled on the sofa and pressed play.

“Previously, on Project Runway…”

As if alerted by the sound, Plagg appeared in the living room, yawning as if he’d just been woken from a nap. “Are you going to watch your girlfriend now?” the kwami sounded somewhere between mocking and bored as he floated over to Adrien’s side, stopping at the table where some the blond had laid some pieces of cheese for him as he usually did. On the screen, Marinette was already with the cast, working on their designs. Singing. “Well, she likes romantic musicals. She seems right up your alley.”

“Plagg…” Adrien didn’t even lift his eyes from the screen, refusing to acknowledge the kwami’s teasing any more than he really needed to, instead choosing to look at the show.

It was good though, to see Marinette having fun on the screen. Her laugh was infectious and the camera seemed to love her. They really did give her more screen time than some of the others. He honestly couldn’t blame them.

Plagg, however, wasn’t done with his teasing. “I’m just saying… you’ve been obsessed with this girl for a while now.”

“She’s a friend,” Adrien insisted, for what seemed the thousandth time since the show had started. “I just want to see how the show was before I have to go to the set.”

“Right.” The kwami sat on the back of the sofa, which made him able to look at Adrien without craning his head. “And the treats? You went out of your way to buy them.”

“I go out of my way to buy you your cheese,” Adrien pointed out, really hoping that Plagg would drop it.
The kwami seemed to ponder for a second. The television showed Marinette’s interview, his pretty former classmate speaking to the camera after the review from Tim. “True. But you don’t look at me like that.” Plagg narrowed his eyes as he motioned at Adrien’s face. “I hope not, at least.”

Adrien decided not to answer for now. Marinette had ended up being a constant source of mockery for Plagg to use against him. And his former classmate, now designer, had ended up taking a lot of his free time. He wanted to see her smile. Adrien had, however, not thought the whole macaron thing through. She just mentioned them and the need to bring them had been born. Sure, he had been nervous when he stopped by her parents’ bakery. They had clearly recognized him but said nothing, though the smile on her mother’s face was enough. But Marinette’s smile had been so bright it almost blinded him and it was somehow… worth it?

It was difficult to explain it, but there had been a small shift.

Oh, he was aware of how production was editing the show; he wasn’t stupid. It was a very smart angle to play. Have an extremely pretty and likeable designer have romantic tension with her model was definitely a smart move, and judging by the rising amount of trending topics, GIFs and videos on social media about the two of them… the strategy had definitely worked.

The problem, Adrien was realizing, was that the show didn’t need to edit and piece together as many scenes to create an atmosphere of tension as much as he had thought at the beginning. In fact, Adrien couldn’t find one moment that he could call out as being cut together into something more than it was.

It should have definitely felt more problematic than it was. But Adrien was slowly coming into a small realization. This… was a thing now. He hadn’t even noticed when this had turned into a thing. But watching himself interact with Marinette, how they talked, the goofy look on his face when she smiled at him was proof enough that there was at least something there.

And the look on his face when Raoul was with her had not gone unnoticed by the cameras. God damn it.

“You look like an idiot.”

Hadn’t gone unnoticed by Plagg either.

Already finished with his lunch, Adrien placed the empty plate on the coffee table. “Thanks a lot,” he said, turning his attention towards the television.

“But really,” Plagg said, pointing a tiny paw at the television, “I haven’t seen that face in a long time.” The kwami snickered, “I did not miss it…”

“What face?”

“Like you want to groom her and have kittens with her.”

Plagg had never really been fond of, or even around much of his dating ventures, to tell the truth; but for him to say that Adrien hadn’t made that face in a long time made no sense at all. Adrien had dated, but never long enough for Plagg to know….

On the television screen, the image of him giving Marinette the macarons was being played with mood music. She smiled and looked like she wanted to tackle him into a hug, instead choosing a quick and awkward hug. But the way he had smiled when they hugged was so raw and honest; and the way his eyes followed her as she moved back, bashfully looking away from him, was unmistakable.
Back at the studio, things were going smoothly. Marinette was working with some dark blue taffeta fabric, and the start of a jacket was placed on the mannequin. She needed to finish the pants, but that was never an issue. She’d made pants all through the competition, save for two challenges; she was familiar enough with Adrien’s measurements to not be able to finish it in her sleep.

That thought was not nearly as innocent as she had intended, and Marinette was glad she did not say it out loud.

“Designers!” Tim had just arrived, and was ready to start with the rounds and offer the critique. “Let’s see how you’re doing!”

To tell the truth, Marinette was far too busy with her work to listen in to anyone else’s conversations. From what little she’d seen, there weren’t any clear losers for this round. The competition was serious now; everyone had to bring out their best to be able to stand a chance to get to the next stage.

“Well,” Tim had already reached Marinette’s table and she lifted her head from where she was cutting fabric to talk to the mentor. “How are you doing?”

“I’m actually doing great!” she said, “I’m going to try and do something like this.” She showed him the design, and Tim glanced between the sketch and the jacket already placed on the mannequin.

“Well, I would hope that by now you don’t have to try,” Tim’s expression was gentle and somewhat teasing and Marinette chuckled bashfully. “I know you can handle this. What are you going to do with the pants?”

“I’m going to make a straight leg and make them fitting. Not the same color though. Something a little bit clashing.”

“I see,” Tim said, nodding appreciatively. “Well, you’re on your way… keep up the good work!”

A little while later, Tim was standing in front of the room. “Alright everybody, it’s three in the afternoon now. Your models will arrive later today, so you have until seven thirty to get something put together for the fitting and that will last one hour. After that, you’ll have three hours, meaning you’ll be working until eleven before going back to the hotel. So, make it work and I’ll see you all tomorrow.”

Once the door closed, Marinette dove right back into work, cutting the pattern for the shirt that Adrien would be wearing under it. Her black messenger bag was resting on the floor and sitting against her leg, so she could feel if Tikki moved or wanted something. Usually her kwami would make sure that Marinette ate something, but since Adrien had taken to bringing her snacks for fittings she’d backed off.

A small smile appeared on her face at the memory. She honestly couldn’t believe he’d gone through all the trouble of getting her things from her parent’s shop just so she could have a little taste of home.

‘This boy…”

“Day dreaming?” Raoul leaned his elbows on her table, looking at her with a mixture of concern and amusement. “I’m going to catering, want something?”
“Cereal bars are fine,” Marinette said. “Thanks.”

“Got it.” Raoul nodded. “Also, there’s like… two hours to go until the fitting. Hold your horses, woman!” Marinette threw a wad of paper at him, hitting him square in the face. “Hey! That’s not nice.”

“I’m not nice.”

“Pfft.” He snorted, clearly not finding Marinette menacing at all, but deciding against saying anything else. “I’ll get you your food, little lady. Please don’t murder me!”

Marinette rolled her eyes but got back to work, mumbling a quick, “Thanks!” when Raoul dropped two cereal bars in front of her, before quickly tearing through the opening and devouring it. It wasn’t pretty, but there was no real time for manners when having to finish a full outfit.

By the time the models arrived, Marinette had already finished cutting out the pants, and the jacket was mostly assembled. She just needed to make sure to mark where she’d have to take it in.

“Hello!” Adrien’s voice was cheery as he reached her table, and Marinette finally looked up.

“Adrien!” Marinette’s smile was warm as she stood up to greet him. “I… was a bit distracted, sorry.” She chuckled, leaving the current pieces of fabric she’d been cutting laying flat on the table.

“It’s okay,” he said, leaving his black messenger bag on the floor by the table. “How’s everything going?”

“Actually, great. I’ve gotten so much done already, I just have to make sure it fits and it should be all set for tomorrow.” Marinette handed him the shirt she’d made for him. “How was your day?”

“It was good, I had a quiz today, but other than that… everything was fine and normal.” As usual, Adrien slipped the shirt on quickly, giving Marinette the chance to look him over, to make sure there weren’t any mistakes she’d need to fix before the show.

“Oooh.” She looked up at him, her fingers playing with the shirt’s collar, and it took all of Adrien’s self control to ensure he didn’t squirm under her touch. “How did you do?” she finally asked.

“I think it went great.”

Marinette nodded and smiled after pulling at the shirt a little more. “All done with the shirt,” she told him. “You can take it off now.”

With the shirt up to her standards, Marinette turned around to write some notes on her sketch to make sure she’d remember the spots she needed to focus on. She turned back around and stepped towards him right in time to get a very close look at Adrien’s very, very toned torso, as it was being covered by the blond’s own shirt.

Out of pure shock, she took a quick step back, her hip hitting the side of the table and making the things on its surface rattle precariously. Her bump also managed to knock out the scissors that were resting near the edge off of the table and towards the floor.

Marinette reacted quickly, flinging out her hand as she attempted to catch the falling scissors. The good news was that she managed to reach them. The bad news was that she caught the tip of the blades on her arm.

“Ow!” Marinette yelped as the scissors bounced off of the skin of her arm and then onto the ground.
She winced, biting back the urge to curse loudly, and pressed her palm over the affected spot.

“Are you okay?” Adrien placed a hand on her back as he leaned closer to her hunched over frame. The scissors seemed sharp enough and there was the telling red smudge on its blades. It had cut her and it had done a great job of doing so.

Marinette raised her arm closer to her face to look at the cut, hoping that it wasn’t too bad and she could just put on a band aid and continue working. “Oh no. That’s bad,” she said as she looked at her bleeding skin. Her voice was shaky and she looked up at Adrien with panicky blue eyes. This was the worst time for her klutz behavior to rear its ugly head again.

Adrien turned to the camera right away, concern clearly etched on his features. “We need a first aid kit here.” He turned to Marinette, putting an arm on her back to lead her to another room, before turning back to the camera man. “Now!”

A lot of things happened at once. Adrien led her away, towards the bathroom outside of the workroom, with Marinette covering her injury with her hand. Marinette heard Raoul’s voice asking how she was doing and Adrien’s gruff response as he told the other designers to send the help there.

A few minutes later, a paramedic arrived in the bathroom and Adrien let him through. The model stood behind Marinette, carefully watching as the paramedic set his supplies on the counter and began to treat her. The blonde placed a hand on her shoulder, his eyes widening slightly when he felt her hand come to rest over his, squeezing lightly when the disinfectant hit her injured skin and she bit out a hiss.

It only took a few minutes for the paramedic to make his call. “You needs stitches.”

Marinette’s eyes widened. “No!” she said, shaking her head emphatically, “I can’t, I need to work and then…”

The paramedic shook his head, interrupting Marinette’s rambling. “I can’t let you carry on, I’m sorry. Production is liable and we have to take you to the emergency services.”

“Marinette,” Adrien seemed to agree, his hand still on her shoulder, squeezing it lightly as he tried to convince her to go along. “That cut looks nasty and it would be even worse if it got infected.”

Marinette was quiet for a few seconds, clearly trying to ponder what the right course of action would be. In the end, the designer simply exhaled loudly, knowing fully well that despite everything, she had to go. This was quite possibly the worst outcome for today. “Fine…” she finally said, surrendering to the paramedic’s order.

“Alright, we’re taking you in a production van.” The paramedic motioned at Camille, who was watching from the hallway, and the blue haired woman quickly began to speak on her headset, probably making sure that the vehicle would be ready by the time they went out.

The paramedic began to lead her outside and Marinette stopped by the workroom. “Wait,” she told the paramedic, before hurrying towards Raoul. “I know this is a lot to ask…” she started, biting her lower lip nervously as she fidgeted.

Thankfully, she didn’t even have to ask. “Go get your arm fixed. I got you,” Raoul said, nodding at the door, where the paramedic was waiting for her. “Just tell me what you need me to do.”

“Jacket, make sure it’s form fitting and mark it so I can work on it when I get back.”

Raoul nodded, flashing Marinette a reassuring smile. “Easy enough,” he said, before narrowing his
brown eyes at her as he added, “Now go away, you’re bleeding everywhere.” He mock glaring her for a second, until he got his intended result, which was making Marinette crack a smile, something they all needed after the whole incident.

She reached Adrien next. “I’m really…” she began, clinging her arm to her chest, her mint green blouse already stained with blood. This whole situation was a mess and she looked stressed and worried. “I’m such a klutz, and…” she exhaled loudly, ignoring the paramedic who was anxiously tapping his foot as he waited for Marinette.

“It’s okay,” Adrien said, his voice soft as he tried to calm her down. “Go with them, you’ll be back before you know it.”

“Can you wait for a little longer?” she asked him, biting her lower lip. Technically, since Marinette had to leave, Adrien was free to do so as well. “Raoul will see if the jacket fits, everything else I’ll fix tomorrow.”

“Got it,” he said, his hand moving to squeeze her hand, but changing directions at the last minute and falling on her shoulder. “I’ll be here. Don’t worry, go take care of your arm.”

“Thank you.” Marinette grabbed her bag from the floor, quickly hanging it from her shoulder before holding her covered injury with her good hand. “I’ll see you tomorrow…”

“Yeah,” Adrien said, his green eyes following her as she was led outside of the room and the door closed.

It was an odd feeling, to tell the truth, to be the only one who wasn’t being fitted at the moment. And despite fact that the room was filled with people and noise, it felt empty. Maybe Plagg had a point…

After a few minutes, Raoul approached him. “Adrien…”

Well, this was awkward.

“Raoul,” Adrien nodded greeting the designer with a polite yet cautious smile. Marinette trusted him, which should make Raoul okay in his book, but Adrien didn’t know him.

And the fact that he called her little lady did not help.

“Alright, let’s get started,” Raoul said, picking up the jacket from the table. “Try it on and I’ll try and make sure it fits right.

It was quiet for a minute as Adrien carefully put on the jacket.

Raoul broke the silence, “How bad was it? The cut?”

“It was… kind of bad. She’s going to get a couple of stitches for sure.” Adrien paused, as he watched Raoul gathered the supplies. “You’re helping her, right?”

“Yup.”

“Good. She really didn’t want to leave because of this,” Adrien said. “And she really needed to go to a doctor.”

“You worry,” Raoul pointed out, the corner his lips quirking up as he looked at Adrien.

“Well, yeah.”
“Good. She’s a good one,” Raoul said, checking the sleeves of the jacket. “Arms out, please.”

Adrien did as instructed, but couldn’t help the way his eyes narrowed. “I already know that.”

The designer nodded, as he checked Adrien’s shoulders, making sure that they were even. “Good to hear that. Just making sure.”

Adrien couldn’t be entirely sure, but he had the feeling that this conversation was more important than what it actually sounded like. “Why?”

“You two know each other from school, right?”

“Collège, actually,” Adrien confirmed as Raoul moved around, now checking on the seams on the back of the jacket.

“Aaah,” Raoul nodded along, before carefully placing some pins on the jacket. “That’s a long time,” Raoul mused, before taking a step back and giving the whole look a once over. “It’s done. You can take that off now.”

Adrien did as instructed, just in time for the actual fitting to be over. “Um. Can you check on her when she gets back?” Adrien said, “I won’t be seeing her until tomorrow so…”

The designer tilted his head at Adrien, “I’ll do that,” Raoul said, as the corners of his lips quirked in a kind smile. “Don’t worry.”

Putting on his jacket, Adrien nodded at Raoul and grabbed his messenger bag, crossing it over his chest before he too left the room with the rest of the models.

In the end, Marinette didn’t get to return to the studio as fast as she had wanted. There was some waiting before getting seen by a doctor and then several procedures (as well as a tetanus shot) before she was finally released from the hospital. By the time she was done, it was forty minutes before they had to stop working; there was no point in going back to the studio.

The van dropped her off outside of the Hotel, and Marinette paused before she went in and bought some cookies. It wasn’t Tikki’s favorite brand, but it’d have to do. The designer gripped the strap on her black messenger bag with her non-injured arm and walked into the lobby, completely defeated.

Today had been horrible.

The contestants were making their way into their rooms when Marinette arrived, and Raoul quickly approached her.

“How’s the arm?”

Marinette held it up, the bandage wrapping around her forearm to protect the injury. “Still attached!” she answered, before her expression turned concerned. “Did you have time to…?”

“Yup. I made sure that the jacket was nice and fitting. It needs some adjustments on the back, but nothing you can’t handle tomorrow. I marked it with pins.”

“Thank you.”

“Your boy was very worried, you know,” Raoul pointed out.

Oh God. Marinette realized that she left Raoul unsupervised with Adrien. Her blue eyes narrowed
immediately. “What did you do?”

He laughed, and Marinette felt like she was going to punch him. “I didn’t do anything!” He held up his hands. “I reassured him, actually.”

“What? What does that ev… no. I don’t want to know.” Marinette shook her head. This day had been crazy enough and she did NOT need any more stress.

Raoul laughed, enjoying Marinette’s panic far too much, “I behaved, I promise!” He grinned. “And you should go to sleep. You had a very shitty day, you deserve it.”

“Yeah…” Marinette said, sighing loudly before looking at her door. “Actually, I want to take a long shower. I smell of disinfectant.”

“True.” Raoul nodded, smiling wryly. “Go shower, and if you’re up to it later, come watch a movie with us.”

“Okay, I’ll let you know,” she said, swatting Raoul’s arm off of her hair; he seemed to have become very fond of ruffling her hair. “I will kick you if you don’t stop that, Raoul, I swear to God.”

She rolled her eyes as she finally turned around to leave, and headed to her room. Matilda was already there and had already changed for bed. “Oh, Marinette!” she said, once Marinette had entered the room. “How’s the arm?”

“It’s fixed… I’m just, really mad that I lost so much time.”

“It’s alright. At least your arm is fixed,” Matilda said, “Honestly, you can probably do so much even with the little time we have tomorrow. You advanced a lot today before the accident!”

“Yeah, I have to say it, I’ve never been so glad to be a workaholic,” she replied, a small bittersweet smile on her face. Marinette sighed, and rolled her shoulders, feeling the day’s tension knotting the muscles in her back. “I’m just going to take a bath and go to bed.”

Matilda nodded, crawling into bed and turning on the television.

As usual, Marinette stepped into the bathroom, turning on the tub faucet. Today had not been a good day, and the thought of dipping herself in hot water sounded absolutely heavenly. Besides, she’d already given up on the idea of patrolling while this whole competition was on, so there was no other way to unwind. Maybe the pool, but she’d prefer not to dip her recently injured hand in a pool just yet.

Her ritual began, as usual, by taking her phone from her jacket’s pocket and hitting play on her favorite playlist. She placed it over the counter, beside her black bag. Using her uninjured hand she started unbuttoning her green colored blouse before slipping it over her head.

Ooh. Marinette looked at the basket beside the tub. Several small bottles held different cosmetic and bath supplies. There was one that read bubbles, and after a small deliberation, Marinette realized that yes, she deserved it today and poured the liquid over the running water, watching as the bubbles began to appear.

“I got you some cookies,” she told Tikki, before placing them on top of the bathroom counter. “They’re not your favorite brand so tell me if you don’t like them and we’ll get some from room service.” She dipped her hand into the tub, and hummed pleasantly at the temperature.

It was then when she realized something very, very important. The bathroom was extremely quiet.
“Tikki?” Marinette said, turning around to see if her kwami was enjoying the meal she’d bought. “Are the cookies not good?” she asked, when Marinette realized something extremely important.

That was not Tikki.

“Actually,” the black creature said, emerging from her bag as Marinette froze. “I prefer cheese. By the way, you’re naked,” he snickered as he looked at one paw, waiting out the inevitable meltdown.

Marinette squawked as she took a step back, the back of her legs hitting the border of the tub and topping backwards into the porcelain, splashing water and swallowing a good mouthful of bubbles. “Shit!” she cursed, flopping gracelessly in the tub as she tried to climb out.

Now she was hurt, bruised, soaking wet and very, very screwed.

There was a black cat kwami. A kwami that wasn’t Tikki. A. Black. Cat. Kwami.

“Fuuu…”

A soft tap on the door interrupted her personal (but mostly quiet) meltdown. “Marinette? Are you okay?” Matilda’s voice sounded concerned, which made sense, considering Marinette had pretty much toppled backwards into the tub. Marinette had already been injured today, Matilda was right to be concerned.

“I’m okay! Just slipped for a second!” she said, chuckling nervously and hoping that her castmate wouldn’t open the door. “Nothing to be worried about here!”, she reassured her roommate, before awkwardly climbing out of the bathtub, and sitting on the edge, watching as the black kwami looked at her with an extremely amused expression on his tiny face.

It was then that she realized her less than appropriate state of undress and Marinette quickly reached for a towel, using her bandaged hand to hold it up, and her other hand to wipe off bubbles from her face.

The kwami cleared his throat. “I’m Plagg. It’s extremely amusing to finally meet you.” The kwami grinned at her, his tiny fangs shiny under the bright lights of the bathroom.

Well, shit.

Chapter End Notes

Alternative Title for this one. #AbGameTooStrong (Courtesy of AdJit.)

Adrien, with great power comes great responsability. Be careful with that thing you almost KILLED HER.
Chapter Summary

In which we deal with the fall out.

Chapter Notes

Honestly, I got so many comments on the last part, I started writing like crazy and I can't believe I got this BEAST of a chapter done so fast.

Earlier that same day, and before Marinette’s discovery, Adrien Agreste arrived to his apartment. As usual, he’d left his black messenger back on top of the kitchen counter, before looking for some camembert for Plagg. But there was something particularly strange today. He’d been home for about ten minutes already and Adrien had yet to hear Plagg complain about their day.

“Plagg…” he said, opening the bag and peeking inside of it. One look at the inside confirmed his suspicions. Yup. This was not his bag. God damned production. Making all participants use the same black bag had finally come out to bite him on the ass. Inside the bag there was a pink wallet, a small notebook, a cosmetics bag, a lot of clutter and… a red kwami who was staring at him with big blue eyes.

Oh.

Adrien’s first reaction was stare right back, because really what were the chances of something like this actually happening? Almost none, to be honest, but here they were! “Uh…” he finally said, his voice hesitant as he tried to get a grip on the ridiculous situation. He had Ladybug’s kwami. Ladybug was in the studio. Ladybug, whose identity he’d been wondering about for almost ten years… was in the studio. With him. Ladybug had seen him parade around in his underwear, because Ladybug was in the studio.

He’d been flirting with Ladybug without the mask. Because he was about ninety percent sure he knew who she was.

Adrien wasn’t going to focus on that just yet, because he wanted to at least try to keep his sanity for now. So instead he greeted the kwami (Ladybug’s kwami, oh good God). “Hello there?” he croaked out, his voice sounding higher than it usually did.

The red kwami slowly came out of the bag, cautiously gauging him and not leaving the bag’s side. “Chat Noir, you will not look inside this bag,” she told him, her little arms crossed in front of her as she put as much determination into her small voice as she was able.

“Wait what?” Adrien blinked repeatedly at the small creature, who was jealously guarding what was obviously Marinette’s bag. “How do you know I’m Chat Noir?” Adrien asked, confusedly staring at the small god.
The look on the kwami’s face told him right away that she considered it an extremely dumb question. “Of course I know who you are! I’ve always known!”

“What, really?” Did this mean that Plagg knew too? Because if Plagg always knew, he never mentioned a thing. Or knowing Plagg, he probably did in an extremely confusing way. Wait… Plagg!

“Really,”

“Plagg…” Adrien’s expression morphed into panic, as he took a step back, until his body hit the refrigerator. “I need to find him!” He needed to know where Plagg was, and he could only hope that Marinette had his bag.

“He’s safe,” she told him, her expression softening at the worry on Adrien’s face. “He’s with her.”

“How do you know that?” Adrien asked, needing an actual reason to believe that his kwami was safe.

“We can sense each other,” the kwami explained. “I’d know if something had happened to him.”

Adrien fell quiet, looking at the small creature as he tried to process what was happening. The tiny red bug was still guarding Marinette’s bag, and Adrien realized that he might need to say something to her. “I’m not going to look inside the bag.” He didn’t need to, in any case. If there was anyone’s bag he could have taken, it was Marinette’s. He’d left his bag on the floor near hers, and other than taking Marinette to the bathroom after she’d gotten hurt, he hadn’t lost sight of it.

It had to be Marinette.

“Good!” the kwami answered softly, and while she didn’t move from her spot near the bag, she clearly relaxed.

Adrien walked away from the kitchen, fully aware that the kwami’s eyes were following his every move. He grabbed a chair and dragged it back to the kitchen, placing it in front of the kitchen counter and taking a seat, facing the heavily guarded black bag. “First,” he asked, leaning his arms on the counter and supporting his chin on them. “What’s your name?”

“I’m Tikki.”

“Adrien,” he introduced himself,

“I know,” Tikki chirped, and Adrien realized that the kwami’s tough act was out of protectiveness for Marinette’s identity. Even so, he was pretty sure that the kwami was going to protect the contents of Marinette’s bag until she was physically unable. Adrien wanted Tikki to be at ease; this situation wasn’t ideal for any of them.

“Tikki,” Adrien started, “I know.”

The look on Tikki’s face faltered, but the kwami narrowed her blue eyes slightly. “What do you know?”

There was a moment of hesitation. If he finally said it, then everything would be confirmed. Years of wondering would finally come to an end, and it was a little bit too much to handle. “I know who Ladybug is,” he finally said.

Tikki didn’t offer any answer, simply waiting for Adrien to blurt out his guess. Still, she was not
leaving her post unless she really, really had to.

Since Tikki didn’t say anything, it was time for him to finally verbalize it. “It’s Marinette,” he said, his voice barely above a whisper as he finally put into words the realization. The way Tikki’s eyes widened at his words only confirmed what he already knew. “Ladybug is Marinette, isn’t she? No one else would make sense. She was the only one near my bag…” And since she’d left in a hurry, it was obvious that it had to be her who took his.

Tikki looked around nervously. It seemed like she really didn’t want to give up Marinette’s secret. It was admirable, to see how loyal Tikki was towards Marinette.

“It’s kind of obvious now,” Adrien added, smiling wryly. “It all fits now.”

“What do you think about it?” Tikki asked.

“That I’m an idiot?” Adrien exhaled loudly, running a hand through his hair. Frankly, despite how warm and easygoing Tikki was, all of this was still a lot to take in. Adrien had just started to to deal with the feelings that Marinette seemed to have unearthed in him; he was barely beginning to accept the that there was a wonderful and beautiful girl that he wanted to get to know better, only to find out that she was also the same partner he’d shared almost ten years with. This whole realization had shaken everything he knew and thrown his idea of normal out the window and into the busy street. He had no time to adapt, to wrap his mind around all this new knowledge that he’d just come across. It was too much all at once.

“With the cameras there, we couldn’t let you know until it was really late.” The look on Tikki’s face was remorseful, it was as if the kwami blamed herself for not being able to alert them any sooner. “I’m sorry.”

Of course he was that much of a sap, he would end up falling for her civilian identity as well. “How did I not see this before?”

“You weren’t looking.” Tikki finally sighed, holding her hands together as she looked up at Adrien, “You didn’t have a reason to look, so…” she shrugged her shoulders and hesitantly walked forward, patting Adrien’s hand with hers. “What’s important is whatever you both decide to do.”

Oh God, this brought a whole new aspect that he hadn’t considered… What would Marinette think of this whole thing? Would she want to discuss it further? How was she even doing now?

As if sensing his self doubt, Tikki floated in front of his face. “You’ll figure it out,” she told him. “I know you will.”

He smiled. Tikki was so sweet, it was easy to forget the problem that they were facing. “She’s probably really worried about you,” he told her, following her movements as she landed back on the kitchen counter. The kwami’s expression went somber, and it was evident to Adrien that Tikki missed Marinette. They needed to solve this soon, and Adrien already had a plan. “I’ll go to the hotel and bring you back to her.”

“No!” Tikki called out, shaking her tiny head energetically. “You can’t do that!”

“What? Why not?” Adrien asked, settling back into his seat as he looked at Tikki, his eyebrows knitted close together. As far as he thought it was the easiest way to fix this situation. Besides, he really needed to talk to Marinette. They’d found each other, even if they hadn’t been trying to, and they had to do something about it. It was something that he needed to discuss with Marinette. Hell, he didn’t even have her number! (He had thought about asking Marinette for it, but… with the
cameras there, everything was really, really difficult.)

“The cameras follow her all the time.” Tikki’s told him, looking sad as she tried to explain. “They’ll know the minute you step into the hotel.”

“What if I… Right.” He could not transform, he would need Plagg for that. So no Chat Noir until they were able to sort this out. But it still left a bit of a question. “Are they really that bad? The cameras, I mean…”

Tikki nodded, a sad look crossing her face. “That’s why she can’t go patrolling. They follow her everywhere to see if she goes…”

“If she goes to meet me,” he finished for her. “That’s why she went out on the last episode,” Adrien said, mostly to himself as the all the pieces began to finally fall into place. It was the reason she was so tired on their last patrol together. And of course, now he was beginning to see that Ladybug had disappeared pretty much when the show had started filming. He was an idiot.

Tikki nodded, and shifted in place. There was no longer a reason for her to protect Marinette’s bag as jealously as she’d been before.

“Tikki?” Adrien said, “I may need to look inside her bag.”

And just like that Tikki was guarding Marinette’s bag like before. “Why?” The look on the kwami’s face was wary, as she waited for Adrien to explain his reasoning.

“I’m not being weird, I promise!” Adrien held up his hands, reeling already by the switch in the kwami’s behaviour. “I just, I need to see if I can find her phone number!”

Tikki still wasn’t sold on this new plan, and her blue eyes were narrowed at Adrien. So he felt the need to continue. “We should call her and let her know you’re okay…” he said, “she’s probably worried sick about you.”

This seemed to convince Tikki. “I guess…” The small kwami fidgeted in place before finally stepping aside. “I’ll look it over with you!” she said. “There might be something you shouldn’t see.”

Adrien nodded and carefully, carefully reached for the wallet. It was pink, and it looked very worn out. There were spots that had been clearly patched over and the front had something written in what he assumed was Alya’s handwriting.

[Stop losing your wallet, you nerd, ~A]

Adrien snorted, before finally opened the wallet. There were several things that popped into his head. One, Marinette needed to clear out her wallet. There were enough receipts for coffee, grocery stores and other shops that probably were at least a couple years old. After sorting through them, placing them carefully on top of the counter, all under Tikki’s watchful gaze, Adrien finally looked at the actual documents in Marinette’s wallet.

There was a metro card, some credit and debit cards, her school ID and her studio pass. There were some punch cards for Parisian fabric and craft stores, with little notes jotted down the edges, like ‘bests selection of chiffon’, ‘cheap sewing machine supplies’ and all information Marinette probably found very, very useful. He smiled despite himself and placed them back carefully. He then picked up her student ID, hoping that there was at least something that could lead him to her. Adrien could tell that the picture was old, her hair was shorter than it was now, and her face looked like the girl he remembered.
There was a small bunch of pictures, some of them low quality, probably taken at those photobooths at certain events, but there were some that were clearly just small clips of other pictures that she just liked to keep in her wallet. There was one with Alya, both girls making funny faces at the camera; there was one that was absolutely adorable, of Alya, Nino, and Marinette squished uncomfortably inside a photobooth. They were clearly too busy laughing to even try and be still for the pictures.

He’d missed so much.

In the end, there was absolutely nothing that held Marinette’s phone number, not in her wallet and not in the lone notebook that was inside the bag.

“Well, I guess we’ll just have to wait until tomorrow,” Adrien said, rolling his shoulders as he realized that he hadn’t fed Tikki at all today. He’d been so used to Plagg demanding his food the moment they entered the apartment, that he wasn’t used to Tikki’s gentler demeanor. “Are you hungry?” Adrien asked, standing up from his seat to look around. “What do you eat?” Marinette’s bag lacked the now familiar scent of cheese, so Adrien was almost sure it had to be something else.

“Do you have cookies by any chance?” Tikki’s timid voice was absolutely endearing.

“I definitely do,” he answered, smiling at the kwami as he stood up and rummaged through his cabinets to get some cookies out for the kwami.

There was nothing else to do but wait until he could see Marinette. Might as well spend some time with the sweet little kwami that was inhabiting his home for the moment.

This could not be happening.

Out of every single day in her life that this could have happened? Today was probably one of the worst days. Her injured arm was now sore, after whacking it against the wall on her way down; her mouth still tasted of soap; and she was cold, since she still hadn’t changed out of her wet clothing.

“Plagg,” Marinette said.

“Out.”

Plagg. That was his name. The name of Chat Noir’s kwami’s name was Plagg. The kwami here in this bathroom instead of Tikki, who was…. Oh God, Marinette went suddenly pale.

Where was Tikki?

Breathe.

“Where’s Tikki?” Marinette asked. She couldn’t lose Tikki. She would leave right now to find her, Marinette did not care about the cameras, she would find Tikki even if she had to go on a rampage through Paris.

Plagg seemed unconcerned. “She’s okay, Tikki’s with…”

“Oh ah ah ah!” Marinette held out a hand, waving it frantically as she tried to stop Plagg from saying the one name that she definitely already knew. “Don’t say it.” If Plagg said it, then there was no way of denying what was happening here and she could not deal with this right now.

Plagg floated closer to Marinette, circling her around with an odd expression on his face. “You don’t want to know?” he asked, before his expression turned dubious. “Or… you really don’t know?”
Of course she knew. It was pretty damn obvious by now, but Marinette had to deal with the denial first. “I need a minute,” Marinette said, her blue eyes following Plagg as he floated around the bathroom. The kwami really did look like a small cat, down to the weird… whisker like things that sprouted out of the sides of his face, to the tail that swished around as he looked at her.

“So, uh… Tikki’s okay?”

“Mhmm.” Plagg nodded, holding both arms behind his back.

“How can you be sure?” Marinette asked; when it came to Tikki’s safety, Marinette did not want to leave any space for doubt.

Green eyes rolled at her insistence. “We’re ancient godly beings. I’m sure.”

“Right.” Marinette stood up, wrapping the towel around her chest as she moved towards The Black Bag™.

“So, Tikki’s safe with ah… Chat Noir?” She waited for Plagg’s nod before calming down. “And you’re sure?” she insisted for the last time.

“Yes.” Plagg’s exasperated answer was enough for her… for now.

Marinette knew it. She could peek. She could open the bag and get all the confirmation she needed. Just one tiny look and she could find out whether Adrien was in fact… She could find out Chat Noir’s identity. Her fingers trailed delicately over the flap, as she tried to work up the courage to open the bag and look through its contents.

“Finally.” It would see that Plagg was very comfortable with that idea, as he quickly dove under her hand and straight into the bag. Marinette took a step back, cautiously watching to see just what would Plagg do.

“Here.” The kwami dropped something in her hands and Marinette looked at it. A wallet. Adrien’s wallet.

“What?” she hissed, looking at the kwami and then at the wallet in her hands.

“You want confirmation. There it is.” He looked at Marinette’s doubting face. “Look. I just really want to skip this part. It’s been almost ten years already!”

Could she open the wallet? Should she? It was a terrible invasion of privacy, even if Chat Noir had been the one who’d wanted to share identities from the beginning. However, this was not the right way to do it. They hadn’t discussed this, they hadn’t prepared! She most definitely shouldn’t open that wallet!

Of course Marinette opened the wallet.

Technically, Marinette knew it was Adrien’s wallet. That fact really wasn’t up for discussion, because while Marinette was usually very oblivious about things like this, she was not nearly dumb enough to ignore the glaring evidence in front of her. It was obvious to think how this happened. She remembered there were two bags on the floor and she’d simply grabbed the one she thought was hers, not even thinking that it could have been Adrien’s, but then again, she had a gushing wound that needed attention. Her mind wasn’t very focused on a lot of details at that time.

The wallet, now opened in her hands, felt heavy, even if it wasn’t loaded with things and papers like hers was. The first thing she saw was his student ID, placed on the transparent window of the wallet. Adrien’s hair looked neat and orderly, shorter than it was now, and there was the subtlest hint of a smile on his face, the corner of his lips threatening to quirk up in what was either a playful smirk or a
full on smile. He looked happy. A mystery they’d never find out, since the photographer had captured just the moment before either could actually happen.

There were also some debit cards, his ID, his metro card and… a piece of newspaper? Marinette carefully pulled it out and found a small newsclip. “Ladybug and Chat Noir defeat monster at the Louvre.” The news clip was at least eight years old, and it featured the two of them standing in front of the Louvre, after one of the many times they’d stopped an akuma. Her finger traced over their faces, round cheeks and dopey grins as they looked around at the press that assembled after every battle. God, they had been mere babies when they started.

That was back when she rejected every single attempt he made to woo her. And to think that she’d spent all that time rejecting Adrien? It was too much to bear. It wasn’t enough that her feelings for Adrien had returned with a vengeance, but Adrien was also Chat Noir? That same partner that she had convinced herself was only her friend and that she didn’t love him that way.

The fact that this whole moment of realization happened when Mika sang about *always having a pretext to take off his “fruit of the loom”*, added a whole new layer of absurdity to the crazy show that was Marinette’s life.

*Boum boum boum.*

Marinette shuddered, and she decided to blame that on the wet clothing she was wearing and not the fact that she’d yet to stop looking at the picture on his school ID.

“I need to change. Go back in the bag,” Marinette told Plagg.

The kwami sighed. “Humans,” Plagg muttered, before gripping the edge of the bag, and crawling inside. “I’m hungry,” he told her, his small body hidden from view and his voice muffled as he spoke from inside the bag.

Once she was sure that Plagg was inside, Marinette quickly stripped and dried herself off before slipping into her pajamas. When she was completely dressed again, she tapped the top of the bag. “Okay. I’m done, you can come out,” she told him, pulling her damp hair on top of her head into a bun.

Plagg emerged from the bag, floating towards her and landing on her stretched out hand. “What do you eat?” she asked him, remembering that he’d rejected the cookies.

“Camembert!”

That was oddly specific. Marinette bit her lower lip, pondering how to get around to find some. Maybe room service could help; she was sure there had to be at least one sandwich that had camembert as an ingredient. She just take out the cheese and give it to Plagg. “I think I can work with that,” she said, nodding as a plan formulated in her head. After all, she hadn’t eaten at all and chances were that Matilda was already asleep. She’d take her sandwich to the small balcony and they could eat in peace.

But by now, Marinette had spent a lot of time in the bathroom; it was time to get out. And probably time to give Plagg some instructions on the sleeping arrangements for the night. “You’re going to have to sleep in the bag. I still have a roommate and she can’t see you,” Marinette told Plagg, her expression apologetic as she absentmindedly scratched the kwami’s head. Plagg visibly relaxed, and Marinette heard and felt the soft rumble of a purr as his bright green eyes closed.

“Did you just…” Marinette asked, her blue eyes twinkling with amusement as the purring came to an
“No!” Plagg floated away, flustered as he landed back on the bathroom counter. “I’m just…” He looked at Marinette with narrowed green eyes. “Not a word to Adrien.”

“Deal,” Marinette said, before smiling at the kwami. “You’re not really that grumpy, are you?” Marinette rubbed the top of his head again, watching with a grin on her face as Plagg tried to indignantly hold back his purr. “Come on, let’s get you something to eat.”

Marinette thought she had been okay with the idea of seeing Adrien, after all… the worst had passed, right? She’d talked with Plagg a little bit, and the kwami had eaten the cheese she’d managed to get while hiding inside her hooded sweatshirt, resting comfortably inside the front pocket.

But today, stepping into the studio made the whole situation terrifyingly real and she wasn’t sure she could deal with it. Because Adrien would be coming to the studio today. That meant Chat Noir, who was also Adrien Agreste, currently a frequent star in her daydreaming, was going to come to the studio and see her. Talk to her.

It also meant that Chat Noir, who’d she inadvertently fallen for, was going to come in for the final fitting and the mere thought of seeing him made her heart beat rapidly inside her chest. She knew who he was, after so many years, she knew. And he knew as well, unless Tikki had successfully hidden, which she doubted.

Tikki would have hidden if it had been anyone other than Adrien, but she wouldn’t have let him with the doubt of what had happened to Plagg. It made sense.

So to sum things up. Chat Noir knew who she was. Adrien knew.

Marinette stopped working, leaning back on the chair she was sitting on, trying to take a minute to clear her head before she went back to sewing the fabric she was working on. She’d already managed to stab herself with scissors, so if she could avoid running her hand through the sewing machine and sewing her hand to the outfit, it would be amazing.

Marinette took a couple of slow, deep calming breaths. She could do this.

Thankfully, her arm, while sore, wasn’t too much of an obstacle for her to keep working. But there was still the fact that Marinette was very behind on her work. The little emergency yesterday had cost her the best hours of work yesterday, right after the fittings when they’d know whether their work was going well. She was going in without much reference, since Adrien’s fitting was finished by Raoul.

They arrived on set at around nine, right after breakfast, and the runway show would be at four. Marinette was running out of time. She still needed to finish the jacket, pants, and all details she had planned to add in about five hours, because Adrien would be arriving somewhere around two for the final fitting and the styling.

Adrien. Every single time she remembered that he was going to arrive soon, her heart came to a halt in her chest. Calm down Marinette. There was still too much work to be done to have a full on meltdown.

She had allocated all of tonight, after Adrien came and they could exchange their bags, to continue her meltdown. But that was tonight. Not just yet.

“Hey!” Raoul sat down on the table next to hers, holding a bundle of fabric in his hands. He
carefully settled it on his lap, making sure to place the fabric correctly before running it through the machine. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, I’m just a little distracted today.” Understatement of the century. “I’m okay. I just need to get these pants sewn… and then finish up the jacket.” She had this under control, mostly.

“How’s the arm?” Raoul’s voice was cheery, but there was a cautious edge to it. He wasn’t stupid, he knew there was something happening, but he also knew that with the cameras there, Marinette wouldn’t say a thing.

Her eyes flickered to the bandage that covered part of her forearm. “It’s sore, but it doesn’t bother all that much. I changed the bandage before breakfast.”

“Are you even supposed to do that?” Raoul asked, eyebrows furrowed as he chanced a glance at his friend before turning back to his work.

Marinette shrugged. “I fell in the tub last night, the bandage was soaked through already.”

The rhythmical noise of Raoul’s sewing machine came to a halt. “You fell into the tub?” Raoul’s expression was disbelieving, blinking repeatedly at Marinette’s story. Just… how?

“I slipped,” Marinette explained, shrugging her shoulders as a bashful blush tinged her cheeks. “I flailed a lot and… “ she winced, lifting her arm, where a large bruise was forming near her elbow. “I hit my arm on the edge.”

“Fuck.” Raoul shook his head, before activating his machine again, “How did you make it to twenty three alive?”

“Ha. Ha.” Marinette rolled her eyes, glancing towards the cameras before making a rude gesture at Raoul, hiding it behind some fabric.

“Rude,” Raoul said, though the look on his face was anything but offended, “And here I was going to tell you what Charlie wanted me to say to you.”

“Tell meeoo,” Marinette whined. “I’m hurt and injured. I deserve it.” She had also received a great amount of news that she wasn’t quite ready to deal with just yet, but she decided that Raoul did not need to know that just yet. “Also, will I ever meet them?”

“You will when I kick your ass all over fashion week,” Raoul told her, grinning at his friend.

“Pfft.” Marinette rolled her eyes, a smirk playing on her face. “I’m glad they’ll be there to comfort you when I sweep the floor with you and your collection.”

Both designers had finished and were heading back to the main work room, playfully teasing each other when Camille stopped them. “Marinette? Interview time!”

Marinette did not want to be interviewed right now, since she already had a lot of work to get done, but she hadn’t given any sound bites the day before… they were not going to let her skip them today.

Once inside the interview room, she settled quickly, eager to get this done so she could go back to work. “Yeah… I cut my arm yesterday,” she told the camera, the expression of her face bashful as she recounted some details. “I had to get stitches and a tetanus shot because I managed to stab myself.” She frowned at the camera before continuing. “It’s not one of my proudest moments, I have to say that.”
Camille nodded, “How are you doing today?”

“It’s… going.” Marinette said, wrinkling her nose as she thought of all the things she still needed to get done. “I’m just a little behind and everything is so much work, and there’s so little time to finish everything.” Marinette’s expression changed to upbeat. “But there’s still a few hours. I can do this!”

With that, she was dismissed and Marinette ran back to the work room. She needed to finish her work. She settled in and quickly picked up the jacket. It was finished, mostly… she needed to do the alterations that Raoul had marked for her the day before and she quickly set to doing that, making sure to follow the natural lines of the fabric. Taffeta was not an easy fabric to work with, and it had a tendency to show every little mistake one made. She needed to be extra careful.

“What the f…” Marinette stopped herself as she spotted a stray thread. “Oh no.” The hem was fraying. Her eyes narrowed and she positively growled. Out of everything that could happen today? This wasn’t what she needed.

“Designers!” Tim appeared through the open front door. “Your models will arrive in two hours. You’ll have thirty minutes for the final fitting and then one hour and a half to get them to hair and makeup. You can use some accessories from our wall,” he motioned to the wall, lined with shelves filled with different accessories, “but use them wisely.” The mentor clapped his hands together, “That’s all. So work hard and I’ll see you all later to come and get you for the show.”

The minute Tim disappeared through the door, Marinette ran with her fabric to the sewing room. She needed to work on these seams, and sew in the embroidery she’d made earlier.

Two hours later, Marinette was absolutely frazzled and had just managed to fix the jacket and add the details she’d wanted. She still needed to sew in the button on Adrien’s pants, and… oh God, the models had just arrived.

Marinette stood up straight by her table, only to find that Adrien’s eyes had already spotted her. The model walked towards her table, and they were almost physically unable to break eye contact. Meanwhile, the only thought playing through her head was Chat Noir, Chat Noir, Chat Noir…

“Hey.” Adrien’s smile was shy, and he clutched the strap of the messenger bag with his fingers.

“Hi,” Marinette’s reply was breathless, her eyes switching from him to the bag. Tikki.

“Your arm…” Adrien asked, and his arm twitched, as if he wanted to reach out to her, but thought better of it, letting it fall down at his side again.

“It’s sore,” she said, her right hand holding to her left elbow, nervously breaking eye contact. “I’m okay though. It might not even scar very badly.”

“Ah,” Adrien nodded, “that’s good.”

“Yeah…”

He placed his bag next to hers, on top of the work table, and the look exchanged between them was all they needed to say to reassure the other. Their kwamis were okay. The exchange was finished. But the cameras were on them so there was no time to say all the things they probably needed to.

“Uh,” Adrien started. “I’ll put this on then?” His voice was hesitant and Marinette just didn’t know how to respond to that, so she simply nodded and turned around to give him some privacy.

Marinette just couldn’t deal with his shirtlessness on top of everything else today. It was what had
started this whole thing, after all.

Once he had the shirt on, Marinette turned around to look at him, and looked around to try and spot some mistakes on her sewing. This would have been the moment where she’d be pulling at his shirt. Adrien would feel her fingers trailing on the collar of his shirt, and perhaps he’d even try and add a small flirty comment. But not today.

Today was far too loaded with unanswered questions and the new discoveries they’d made weighed heavily over both their heads. But she could see the camera man standing behind Adrien, and she knew this wasn’t the time, as much as they both might have wanted to solve this. They just couldn’t.

Marinette held out the jacket for him to try on and she hated the fact that her hands seemed to shake. She needed to get ahold of herself. “Try this on, and um… the pants too, please.” Her voice was softer than it usually was and she couldn’t even look at his face, instead looking at the scraps of fabric on her table.

“Okay,” Adrien said, quickly and quietly putting on the clothing Marinette had made. She examined the fit, but her eyes never went above his neck, as if she was afraid to look at his face. Adrien’s eyes, however, followed her every move.

There was a weird line. A crease on the fabric that definitely shouldn’t be there. “I need to fix something,” she told him. “Can… could you give me the jacket, please?”

Adrien did as asked, and held it out to her. She took it from his hands quickly, and mumbled a thank you, before saying, “Hold on a second.” Marinette turned around, running out towards the ironing table and throwing the jacket on it. Marinette quickly began running the iron over the ugly looking line, hoping that it would be enough to at least hide the imperfections.

This couldn’t be happening, not right now. She was already nervous today and she didn’t have the time to fix any mistakes. Get yourself together Marinette, you don’t have the…

The edge of the iron brushed against her hand and Marinette hissed, her eyes closing tightly as she tried to bite back the angry string of cursing that threatened to slip out of her lips.

“Are you okay?” Adrien’s hand touched her back, before retreating as if touching her burnt him as well. “Do I…”

“I’m okay!” she said, not looking at him, and pointedly ignoring the angry pink line on the back of her right hand, and how it hurt. “It was just a graze. Really. It was nothing.” She kept her eyes down and looked at her work table. “We really need to get you to styling.”

Adrien had already slipped out of the pants. He turned towards her, shifting his weight between his legs as he fidgeted nervously. “Let’s go.”

Right. She needed to go too, and give the team the instructions of what she wanted them to do. “Right.”

The two of them walked in silence, not really knowing what to say. This was when they would usually talk about their days, and joke around. And once at the salon, she’d try to look at his face, admiring just how good looking he actually was, and sometimes she’d even catch him looking back. But not today.

“Marinette…” Adrien began, his voice hesitant as he tried to reach out to the designer. He needed her to be okay with this, he really did. “Are you…” his gaze caught the blinking red light, coming
from one of the cameras that was filming their walk, and he inwardly cursed. This had happened on
the worst way possible.

“I just…” she whispered, “I can’t. I can’t here.”

Once at the salon, Adrien simply sat down, and the stylist approached Marinette right away. The
man’s usually cheery behaviour seemed slightly grating to them right now, given the circumstances.

“What are we doing today?” the stylist asked, his smile warm as Adrien sat on the chair.

As much as Marinette wanted to, she couldn’t quite find it in her to answer to his levels of
enthusiasm. “I think a messy haired look would work.”

“And make-up?” the make-up artist Stella asked, her smile wide as she looked at Marinette.

“Um… some dark eyeshadows probably would work.” She kept her replies polite and short, because
she really needed to go back and finish work.

The stylist and makeup artist shared a confused look, but said nothing. It was for the better; Marinette
couldn’t really handle much right now. “Alright, got it!” the stylist said, doing his best to sound
cheery. “We’ll have him looking ready for the show.”

“Thank you,” Marinette said, avoiding Adrien’s gaze, which she could almost feel right now, as he
looked at her through the mirror. “I’ll go back to the work room then, I need to finish the outfit,” she
said, and she turned around to run back to the work room.

There was less than one hour to go and she needed to make sure that everything was finished.

Once she made it back to the workroom, Marinette was furiously sewing some decoration on the
jacket.

Raoul looked at her from the other side of the room, mouthing very clearly “what the fuck is
wrong?”

If only she could explain. But she couldn’t so she simply shook her head and continued sewing.

“Designers!” Tim appeared at the door, clapping his hands together as he announced his arrival.
“Ten minutes until the show. Get your models dressed and ready!”

Adrien arrived, fully made up and it was time to get him dressed, “We need to…”

“The button.” Marinette moaned, “Can you put them on? I’ll have to sew them closed.” It
would be the first time during the whole competition, but it was the only alternative she had right
now. If his pants fell during the runway show, she was good and gone.

Adrien looked at her as she quickly gathered the implements to ensure the pants stayed on him as he
made his way down the runway. She was frazzled, and hurt, and this was just too much and there
was absolutely nothing he could do to help her. It was the worst feeling in the world.

“Designers! Time to go!” Tim urged from the doorway, and soon, every participant was hurrying
out. Adrien was dressed, and while the outfit was not up to her usual standards, it was the best she
could do today.

Raoul took her arm, ready to lead her into the runway room. “You okay?” She nodded and Raoul
glanced towards Adrien, who was watching the exchange with a mixture of concern and… longing?
“Did he do something?”

“No. I just… I can’t explain, I’m sorry.” She was looking down, fidgeting nervously. It wasn’t his fault, it wasn’t hers either. It was just a mess and she didn’t know how to fix it.

“Fuck.” Raoul didn’t like this, because he’d been far too busy with his design to check on Marinette’s, until it was far too late to try and help her. No wonder she was frazzled, Marinette was above the top competitors in the show, and today had been rough. “Come on, It’ll be okay.” He turned towards Adrien and mouthed ‘What happened?’, hoping that perhaps the model would give him some answers.

The model’s lips formed three words that Raoul understood well enough, even if they didn’t provide any answer. ‘Is she okay?’ Well, Raoul had no clue just what the hell had just happened today, but Marinette had been weird all through the day and it was rubbing off on her model/potential boyfriend. Honestly, these two just needed to go into a supply closet and work things out, because whatever they were trying to do was clearly not working and this tension they had was ruining everything around here.

Once they had all taken their spot by the runway, the remaining members of the filming crew scattered towards their spots and the lights turned on, ready for the show to start.

“Designers!” Heloise greeted them, walking onto the runway with a smile on her face. “Welcome to the runway show. As you know, in fashion, one day you’re in and the next day… you’re out.” She waited for a second, subtly striking a pose, before continuing. “Your challenge today was to create an outfit inspired in the amazing Rock and Roll! You had one day to finish it and a budget of one hundred and fifty euros.”

The lights shifted to light up the area behind Heloise, where the judges were already sitting. “Alright. Let’s say hello to our judges.” As usual, there were four people sitting on the opposite side of the room. Marinette readied herself for the usual introductions, “We have the creative director for Mode Magazine, Tatiana Geiger.” The woman waved at them, smiling kindly at the few designers left. “Next, we have the creative director for S.E.L.F. Fashion, and famed designer, Thierry Leclère; and today’s guest judge, the extremely famous and extremely talented, one of rock’s greatest stars, Jagged Stone!”

Jagged Stone, looking as cool as always, with his purple tipped hair and wearing his dark jacket and slouched back against his chair, held a hand to them, throwing the classic rock on sign at them. “Rock on!”

Heloise continued, “We also have Tim Gunn, but as you know, since he’s your mentor; he will not be judging you. That said, he will have one Tim Gunn Save. If at some point he disagrees with the judges, he can bring that designer back to the competition. Let’s start the show!”

After that, Heloise walked back to her seat, grabbing her note cards, ready for the show. After a few minutes, the lights dimmed and the music began blaring, heavily featuring guitars as the first model came onto the runway.

For the first time ever, Marinette wasn’t in the mood to participate in the hushed conversations that ensued after each outfit came out on the runway. She was too worried. Not only because her personal life had taken over her mind, but because she wasn’t completely proud of this particular outfit. Despite the fact that she’d lost time, she knew that she couldn’t fully blame this on the accident. She’d let her emotions cloud her judgement and it had definitely hurt her performance
today.

Adrien walked on the runway, wearing form fitting black pants and a dark blue jacket. There were small black metallic accents that adorned his shoulders, catching the light as the blond made his way on the runway.

It was a good thing that this challenge didn’t demand a playful look or any sort of acting, because with how the day had gone, she wasn’t sure either of them would be able to sell any sort of carefree attitude. And of course, it was then when she saw it, one of the short chains, a small metallic accent on Adrien’s right shoulder slipped off, dangling from it’s place before becoming completely loose and tumbling down onto the runway. Oh no.

Her fingers gripped Raoul’s forearm, and her friend held onto her hand in an attempt to reassure her. But it wasn’t enough. Adrien soon disappeared backstage and the rest of the show was a blur. She messed up, and she messed up bad.

Marinette looked towards the judges’ who were sharing a very concerned look. They all saw it, it was obvious. Even Jagged Stone had perked up on his seat and was looking at the runway, where the little chain was still laying on the floor. It took all of her self control not to run and get it. Her eyes were fixated on it, looking at the small chain as if she could attach it to the jacket using sheer force of will; but she knew that it was pointless.

The designers were led onto the runway and Marinette had to control her shaking. Thankfully they didn’t start with her outfit right away, but they called the models on stage and feeling Adrien standing beside her wasn’t good for her peace of mind. The judges’ voices were a mere blur in everything that was happening around her, it was like she had already disconnected. She knew they were talking, but it sounded so far away that it was almost impossible to focus on anything they said.

Until it was her turn, of course. “Marinette? What happened?” Heloise asked.

All of them were focusing on her now, and Marinette did her best to act normal. Because sure, she could try and give out excuses, but it was too late for that to do her any good. It was already all said and done and she just had to face the consequences. “I…” she started, feeling Adrien’s presence behind her. “I was a bit short on time.”

“I’m very disappointed,” Tatiana said, shaking her head, “It’s not what I would expect from you at this point in the competition.”

“Whoa, Marinette.” The look on Jagged Stone’s face was dubious, and hearing the critique in his strong american accent was somehow even worse than the comments coming from the other judges. “I know you’re good but I’m not feeling this, you know?” He looked troubled, “I mean, I’ve seen you do so much better…”

Somehow, hearing a comment like that from her childhood idol, and knowing he was right, hurt more than what she had been expecting. Jagged Stone knew what she was capable of, and she’d probably just failed every expectation he had. She’d made an album cover for him, for crying out loud! “I know,” Marinette nodded, as Thierry began commenting, agreeing with what the other judges had said.

“Thank you designers, we will be giving your designs a closer look, and we will call you back when we have reached a decision.”

The designers walked out of the runway and into the little room where they had to wait until they were called back. Marinette didn’t interact with anyone, refusing the words of encouragement that
were coming from Raoul and Matilda.

This was the stupidest thing she’d ever done. Marinette couldn’t believe she’d allowed herself to be so caught up in what had happened that she’d completely let go of every single one of her responsibilities. Marinette knew it, she was better than this, and she was absolutely disappointed in herself. Yes, things were weird, but she could have done so much better, she should have pushed it from her mind until they could deal with it. Instead, she’d allowed it to ruin this opportunity.

But it was too late for that now. And now, all she could do was try and keep her composure as the cameras swept around the waiting designers, trying to get some reactions that they would splice in with the rest of the footage of the judges commenting.

Marinette leaned her elbows against her legs and covered her face with her hand, exhaling loudly. At this point, Marinette just wanted things to be over, so either she could go to her room or just have a good cry. She needed both.

Camille entered the room. “Designers, time to go back to the runway!” she announced and quickly disappeared, leaving the door open behind her.

Time to face the music.

“You are an amazingly talented group,” Heloise said. “We’re extremely proud of all the progress all of you have shown during the competition. But unfortunately, this is the end of the road for one of you.”

Marinette felt her chest tighten up, she could feel her heartbeat echoing in her head, this was intense and she’d never really feared elimination more than she had tonight.

“Raoul, Leo,” Heloise looked at the two male designers. “You’re safe. You may leave the runway.”

Raoul squeezed her arm lightly as he walked by, the knowledge that he was safe for another week not enough to override the concern he felt about Marinette’s fate. He was her friend, he cared a lot.

Once they had left Heloise said, “Matilda, congratulations, you’re the winner of this challenge. You’re in; you may leave the runway.”

In the end, she was standing on the runway with Jean Philippe.

“Jean Philippe, Marinette,” Heloise continued, “You’re both incredibly talented, but unfortunately, one of you will be out. Jean Philippe. The color of your outfit was beautiful, and I loved it, the others… not so much. Marinette, you are clearly a very talented designer and you have blown us away many times. That is why we were so disappointed today. The finish on your jacket was sloppy, and it just wasn’t up to the standards we’re expecting from you all right now.” The look on Heloise face was serious and Marinette simply nodded, her expression somber as she waited for the final decision.

“Jean Philippe,” Heloise said, “You’re in. You may leave the runway.”

Marinette’s breath caught in her throat, as Jean Philippe thanked the judges and left the runway, leaving her all alone in front of the judges. This couldn’t be happening, no. Not now. She was so close!

It was as if everything was happening in slow motion. “Marinette…” Heloise said, sighing, her expression sympathetic, “I am so sorry, but that means you’re out.”
The young designer nodded, unable to hide the disappointment that crossed over her face, and not trusting herself to speak just yet.

“We’re so disappointed,” Heloise said, “We really think you are very talented and it breaks my heart to see you go. It was one of the hardest decisions we’ve had to make while judging this show.”

“I understand, but… It’s been a great experience. I’ve learnt a lot. Thank you everyone,” Marinette said, as Heloise stood up to give her a small hug and say her goodbyes. “Au Revoir,” she said, nodding at the remaining judges, and nodding at Jagged Stone with a tight smile on her face before turning away and leaving the runway.

She opened the door to the room where the designers waited, only to find the remaining group expectant as she appeared. “This is it!” she said, forcing herself to smile and sound more cheery than she actually felt. “I’m going home!”

Raoul stood up, ready to crush his friend into a hug, but Marinette held up a hand. “I just… really can’t right now.” She let out a teary laugh, fully aware that if someone hugged her she would cry and she wanted to keep her wits for just a few minutes, at least while the cameras were still on. “I’m just… I need a moment,” she told him, and he nodded.

Matilda reached for her hand, squeezing it tightly, “I’m so sorry Marinette.”

“It’s okay.” Her voice was tight, and she wasn’t okay, but she would accept it for now. She’d made mistakes and her emotions had played against her this time, and she’d allowed them to ruin her work. It wasn’t something a professional would do, and she would have to accept her mistakes.

The door opened and Tim Gunn slipped in. “Well, I just can’t believe this!” Tim told her, as he crossed his arms over his chest, looking indignant at the whole affair. “I feel very numb. I’m not okay with this.”

Marinette shrugged her shoulders, still not trusting herself to say much.

“I have to say Marinette, look at how far you come. You’re still a student and you made it all the way here. You’ve won Challenges! You’ve made some of the most famous outfits from the season!” His fingers tapped at his chin. “I am incredibly proud of you. You’ve grown so much as a designer and it’s been a delight to see.”

“I know, I think I’ve learned a lot,” Marinette said, trying to push at least a little bit of enthusiasm into her voice.

“And you finished a full outfit, even after your trip to the hospital!” Tim paused for a second as the room fell quiet, all of them waiting for Tim to send her away and tell her to clean up her station.

Raoul was carefully looking at their mentor, hoping that he would say what he had been expecting him to say.

And he did. “Well, you’re not going anywhere. I’m using the save on you.” He leaned over to wrap his arms around Marinette, who was still in shock at the whole thing. “This isn’t the end of the road for you. I know it.”

Today was filled with far too many emotions, and Marinette had pretty much reached her breaking point. “Thank you,” she breathed out, choking up despite herself, as the cameras caught the emotional moment gleefully. “I’ll make you proud, I promise,” she told Tim with a small smile on her face, before being tackled into a bear hug by Raoul.
“This is great!” Raoul cheered, squeezing the life out of his friend, despite Marinette’s protests. “Thanks Tim!”

“She deserves it!” Tim said, smiling as the small designer was being crushed by her friend. “She’s very talented and we have to see more from her.”

But of course, the little moment couldn’t last very much; filming never stopped in Reality Television. “Marinette?” Camille said, interrupting as she peeked inside the room, “We need you in the interview room.”

“Now?” Marinette was still shaking, and used the back of her hand to wipe the tears that had somehow fallen down her cheeks without her even noticing.

“Mhmm. Gotta keep those reactions fresh.” She waited for Marinette to follow and the door closed again.

Everyone left, and now Raoul was alone in the room. Well, that had certainly been an emotional day. He picked up his jacket and opened the door to leave, knowing that the van would be waiting for them outside. Most cameras were already off by now, since the filming was mostly contained to the final interviews; most of the crew was free to go home after the actual runway show finished. But as he opened the door, Raoul realized he wasn’t alone. Adrien was there, dressed in his normal clothing and waiting.

Well, this was awkward. Again.

He spoke first. “I heard she…” Adrien asked, an even mix of concern and guilt evident on his handsome face. “Did she get cut?”

He looked guilty, Raoul noticed, which he probably felt, considering that all through the day Marinette had been acting weird, and the weirdness had only increased once Adrien had arrived. Whatever had happened between them had been huge. However, Raoul couldn’t understand just when something could have happened, with the crazy schedules they all had. Still, none of his business.

“She’s okay,” Raoul explained, reassuring the model. “She was cut, but Tim used his save, so she’s still in.”

There was a relieved sigh from Adrien. “Is she here?” he asked, his green eyes looking around the room, looking for her. “Where did she go?”

Now, Raoul knew that he shouldn’t really get involved. Something had definitely happened and it had affected Marinette. It had affected her enough to throw her off her game and it got her eliminated. So yes, he knew he shouldn’t get involved. However, he still was going to. “Look,” he started, his tone serious as he spoke with the model. “I don’t know what happened between you two, but it affected her a lot.”

He waited for Adrien to say something but the model simply nodded, looking contrite. “Okay, so she’s probably the one honest person I’ve met in this competition, and I care a lot about her… Like a sister though, so don’t give me that look.” Raoul ran a hand over his head, sighing loudly before continuing. “If you can’t be the person she needs you to be, then be her model and don’t pretend that you can handle more than that.”

The look on Adrien’s face was serious, as he clearly didn’t approve of Raoul’s intrusion. “It’s not like that,” he told Raoul, squaring his shoulders as he stood up to his full height. “But… I do get
“what you mean,” Adrien finally said.

“Well, can you?” Raoul asked and Adrien looked taken aback, and the flustered look on his face was all the answer Raoul needed. “Look,” he said, rolling his eyes, “she’s doing some interviews now, so go wait for her near the sewing room. There’s that little passageway that leads to a bathroom?” He waited for Adrien to nod before continuing, “I’ll send her there.”

“Thanks,” he said. “For… you know, looking out for her and everything.” With that, Adrien disappeared and Raoul sighed. Honestly, these two lovesick idiots were going to be the death of him.

Minutes later, Marinette returned to the room, looking absolutely exhausted and looking for her jacket so she could finally go back to the hotel. Raoul grabbed her and pulled her into a hug. “Now that the interview’s over, you’re officially back!” he said, before whispering into her ear “Prince Charming is waiting for you by the sewing room. Please fix this, I can’t deal with you two anymore.”

Marinette looked up at him with wide blue eyes, and any thought she might have had to chastise his friend for the word choices was forgotten. They really did need to fix this. “I…really?” At his enthusiastic nod, Marinette squeezed him into a hug again, “Thank you. I’ll… I’ll fix this. Promise.” She was about to leave when she stopped abruptly. “Cameras?”

“All gone except the interview room, you should be safe.”

“Thanks!” she said, before slinging her bag on her shoulder and hurrying towards the spot Raoul had signalled to her. It was the truth, most people had already cleared out and the ones that were still here were mainly the cleaning crew and whoever was left to close up shop. So sure, there were some people still around, but no cameras. And that was a relief on its own.

He was there, right where Raoul said he would be. For a second, she thought she would be just fine, but the minute their eyes met, when she finally saw the worried look on his face, her stomach dropped and she lost it. There were so many things she wanted to say to him. Tell him that she wasn’t angry. That they had made a mistake, and that they needed to work through this.

So of course, her first reaction was to scold him. “This was the worst possible moment for this,” she rambled, gesturing wildly around the empty hallway. “What if it hadn’t been me who got your bag?” This wasn’t what she had meant to tell him, but clearly she couldn’t stop now. “What if someone else had taken them!” She paced in front of him, keeping her voice no higher than a hissed whisper. “We messed up Adrien, we really did! What if we had really lost them!”

Adrien’s eyes widened. He wasn’t sure what he was expecting from this conversation, but it was clearly not something like this. “But we didn’t!” He pointed out. Marinette was focusing on the bad, on the what ifs, and it clearly wasn’t helping her, but Adrien didn’t know how to help.

She was still too wound up to really calm down now, it had been a long day and too much had happened. “And then, with everything today?” she was breathless, barely getting through the sentences as she rambled them away, “and the accident,” Marinette lifted her injured arm, the motion jerky as she fidgeted in place. Why was he not freaking out too?! “And then I… the show-I” her voice was rising in volume, as she gestured wildly with her hands, too concerned with letting everything out to truly care about the fact that there were still people in the studio.

“Marinette…”

“No. Adrien, everything was wrong today, everything, and I—” Marinette rambled on, her hands on her head, messing up her hair, as she tried to calm down. She was keeping a tenuous hold on her
emotions; feeling like her heart was going to beat its way out of her chest every time she looked at
his face. “It’s just that… here? Here?!”

Frankly, Marinette would have liked to think that she could have handled all this new information.
But here, where every single camera was set on her, on them! When everyone was trying to capture
their intimate moments (which were not as intimate as she would have liked, to be honest, but that
wasn’t the point here), they couldn’t get the chance to talk. To figure this thing out, because
something had definitely changed. “And I lost, Adrien,” She said, unaware of just how much she
was shaking at this point, her eyes tearing up as she tried and failed to convey everything she wanted
to say. ”I messed up and I feel so stupid because—"

“It’s okay,” he said, and an odd look crossed his face as he finally figured out what to do. His arms
reached for her shoulders and he wordlessly pulled her close to him, crushing her against his chest
and wrapping his arms around her body. “Breathe.”

Breathe. It was what he’d told her on the runway, when she had been too nervous to react as the
judges asked for her explanations. Breathe. Because everything had gone wrong today, but it was
okay. Her arms wrapped around his waist timidly at first, only feeling encouraged when his hold
tightened and she felt him rest his head on top of her head. And so, she finally let go. She tightened
her arms around him, her fingers gripping the fabric of his shirt as she took a deep calming breath,
breathing in the scent of his perfume and his clean clothing and something so nice and masculine that
she would later come to easily recognize as just Adrien.

“Today was horrible,” she mumbled, her eyes closed as she simply enjoyed the warmth of his body.
“I just…”

He closed his eyes too, keeping his arms wrapped around her, his fingers tracing small circles on her
back. “Shh,” he said. “I know. We’re okay.”

They were okay. And it was like those words had lifted a weight from her shoulders and she smiled
against his chest, still holding him tight. Of course they were, it was them. Everything was going to
be just fine. “I can’t believe it was you. All this time, it’s been you.” It was stupid to not see it now,
but the thought had never even crossed her mind.

“I can’t believe it took me this long to see it,” he chuckled, his arms loosing their tight hold on her as
he finally let his hands run in circles on her back. “It makes sense why you disappeared when the
show started filming.”

She laughed, a low and still teary chuckle, but Marinette was beginning to feel more like herself. “I
tried. But they keep on following me.”

“I heard.” Adrien’s conversation with Tikki had clued him into several aspects of Ladybug’s current
disappearance from the streets.

“I still don’t know how they didn’t get me that one night I did get to go out.”

“When you fell asleep on me?” Adrien asked, smiling as he felt her nod against his chest. “I was
trying to talk to you about the show,” he remembered, amused at the memory.

“Oh my God, I might have died,” she groaned, though the words sounded somewhat muffled against
his chest.

“Well, it’s nice to know you weren’t kidnapped,” he told her, feeling a warmth spread around his
chest as things finally began feeling normal. And even better than normal, he could actually see her
whole face right now.

She looked up at him, remembering their last conversation as their superhero personas, as she tried to finally merge her two favorite boys into one person. “But really, Adrien? Apple? That’s the worst safe word I have ever heard.” Her face was flushed, and her eyelashes were damp, but she didn’t care. Finally things were coming into place, and despite the fact that it hadn’t been the ideal way… they knew. And it was okay.

“I tried,” he said, grinning down at her. “At least it made you laugh!” Adrien added, keeping his voice low, just for her and preventing anyone else from hearing. He had absolutely no idea how to even begin to put into words what he felt. It was almost comical, if he thought about it, he’d managed to get over his debilitating infatuation with Ladybug, only to completely fall for the fearless girl behind the mask.

She chuckled, but anything she might have said was interrupted by Raoul’s loud voice as he talked to Camille. “CAMILLE HELLO! YOU’RE STILL FILMING TODAY, WHAT A SURPRISE!” It sounded awfully close, so Adrien and Marinette turned their heads towards that general direction as Camille’s voice was heard arguing back with Raoul in a hushed but very annoyed tone.

“I guess I should probably go now, before they get here,” he said, stepping away from Marinette, but still keeping one of his arms loosely around her waist.

“Yeah,” Marinette chuckled, doing the same. “They’re going to be really annoying now.” They would probably have to be extremely careful. “I’ll see you tomorrow?”

“Yup.” He pulled her close for another hug, and pressed his lips to the top of her head. “I’ll see you tomorrow… Bug.”

She laughed, biting her lower lip as they finally separated. Marinette reached for his hand, squeezing it before letting him go. “Goodnight Kitten.”

Adrien grinned and winked before slipping away, trying to make sure he avoided Camille and her camera crew. Which left Marinette alone in the hallway and feeling… lighter than she’d felt in what seemed like forever. She opened the bag, happy to see Tikki looking back at her and she reached inside to pet the kwami’s little head. She’d missed her.

She hurried back to where she heard Raoul’s voice come from and her presence was enough to dishearten the attempt to keep filming them. Camille sighed loudly, glaring at Raoul, who did his best to look as innocent as humanly possible. Camille said her goodbyes and the two friends were finally free to go.

Marinette laughed as they began walking. “Thank you for the heads up.” She honestly couldn’t have dealt with being interrupted by cameras again. There were moments that were meant to be private and she was glad Raoul helped her make sure it stayed that way.

“That’s what friends are for,” Raoul grinned and bumped her shoulder lightly. “So?”

“Everything’s good,” she told Raoul, unable to fight the smile that had taken permanent residence on her face as she nudged him with her shoulder. “Come on, let’s go back to the hotel, I’m starving.”

“No details?” Raoul seemed personally offended, when Marinette simply shook her head, denying him of any information. “God Marinette, you suck.”
Honestly, all the comments you all leave on this FUEL ME.

Thank you to everyone who's drawn stuff for me, you've seriously made my day. I've made pterodactyl noises and showed EVERYONE I KNOW. It's a problem. (plz don't stop).

Alya had spent all her free time scavenging through the internet. Finding different message boards and trying to look up whether Marinette had been saved. The previous episode had ended with Marinette’s exit interview and the preview said nothing. The outrage was immediate and for once, Alya didn’t have to start it. People were completely angered at the fact that Marinette had gotten cut, after being injured during the show. #BringMarinetteBack, had been trending seconds after the show had ended.

It made Alya proud.

But despite how much Alya looked for hints of what had happened, the studio was extremely good at keeping secrets. But Marinette had yet to announce she was back home, which Alya could interpret as her being hidden until her elimination was fully confirmed. After all, Marinette was one of the fan favorites in the competition, it would make sense to keep her hidden until it was confirmed that she was leaving. But Alya still held onto the hope that her best friend was still in the competition.

There had also been a break in the broadcast. Now, Alya understood that they had to give the contestants time to prepare their Fashion Week show, but for them to do the four week hiatus right after Marinette’s elimination had been cruel punishment.

But Marinette had yet to reappear and return to their friends. They all knew that if Marinette had indeed been eliminated, there was no way she wouldn’t have ran towards her best friends for comfort. So Alya just knew, and more than that, she held onto the hope that her friend was still in the competitions and had gone back home, locking herself in her room to finish her designs for the Fashion Week show.

“Well, you already know she’s presenting on Fashion Week,” Nino said, leaning back against the sofa as they all waited for the show to start.

They only had a little information. First, Marinette was still not home. That could be interpreted as either not being allowed to spoil the fact she hadn’t been saved, or… she had been saved and was currently working on her collection. Second. There was a delay between filming and airing times. The filming of the episode that they were just about to watch had probably been filmed more than a month ago; which would mean that all filming had already stopped as the designers prepared themselves for Fashion Week, since the show was only five days away.

How did Alya know this? She knew this because Marinette’s parents had called her once they got the invitations from the show. Three tickets to their special showing, so of course Tom and Sabine had reached out to Alya, knowing that the budding journalist would love the chance to cheer on her friend. But still, they would go, watch the show but they wouldn’t know who the winner was until
the finale aired. And that was two full weeks away.

Honestly, all this secrecy was really hard to handle. Alya needed details. She thrived on them.

“But we need to know if she’s going to be competing!” Mylène insisted, “It’s not the same.”

Nino nodded, he completely agreed with that. After everything that had Marinette had been through, she deserved to at least make it to the finale. Nino looked thoughtful, “What do you think happened with Adrien? He wouldn’t say anything when we talked…”

One of Alya’s eyebrows rose up, as Rose giggled from her seat. “I thought we weren’t talking about our friends’ love lives?”

He had the decency to look embarrassed, “Well, you have to admit it was weird.” It was true; something had happened between Marinette and Adrien, there had been a definite change with the way they talked. He looked miserable, she looked miserable. Everyone was miserable and no one in the room understood just why.

“I swear if they got together and broke up during the show and I never got the chance to gloat I will be so mad!”

Previously on Project Runway

“I’m sorry Marinette, that means you’re out.”

“We know this already!” Alya complained, and the room echoed her thoughts as bits of Marinette’s exit interview played on the screen.

Once the new episode actually started, the scene cut to right after the elimination, when all designers were waiting for Tim to dismiss Marinette. But the scene felt different when Tim entered the room “Well, I just can’t believe this!” He said, arms crossed over his chest. “I feel very numb. I’m not okay with this.”

The scene cut to a somber looking Marinette, who was simply trying to smile politely as the older man continued speaking.

“I have to say Marinette, look at how far you’ve come!” He motioned with his hands, emphasizing his points. “You’re still a student and you made it all the way here. You’ve won Challenges! You’ve made some of the most famous outfits from the seasons.”

“I know, I think I’ve learned a lot.” Marinette was obviously just trying to be a good sport about the whole thing, but there wasn’t much she could say.

Tim wasn’t done just yet. “And you’ve finished a whole outfit, after your trip to the hospital!” The scene panned around to all the faces in the room, expectant and waiting to hear what Tim was about to say.

He didn’t disappoint. “Well, you’re not going anywhere. I’m using the save on you!”

The living room exploded in cheers as they watched Marinette be hugged by Raoul as the designers celebrated the save. “I KNEW IT!” Alya almost jumped out of the sofa, as Rose beamed, clapping her hands together in excitement.
“‘She couldn’t leave. Not until she gets to the finale!’”

Alya was already busy with her phone, already checking social media to see what the reaction was. “Hashtag BashfulQueenIsBack! Oooh, I’m loving this one!”

The interview cut to Marinette, who was smiling brightly at the camera. It had obviously been shot right after the elimination, considering that she was wearing the same white blouse and she looked exhausted. “I guess I’m not leaving after all!” Marinette grinned at the camera, letting out a relieved chuckle. “I am really grateful for this opportunity and I’ll do my best to show Tim that he didn’t waste his save on me.”

The next day, the designers were not led back into the workroom. Instead they were driven to a big warehouse.

“Welcome designers!” Heloise said, dressed in a navy blue romper. “Today’s challenge is a little…messy.” Behind the model, there were several containers, in different colors. It didn’t take them long to realize that this was not a regular challenge. It was time to get creative. “But, first things first. Welcome back Marinette!” the model said, smiling at the younger designer. “I am so glad to see Tim used his save, and I can’t wait to see what you do to dazzle us.”

That said, Heloise walked back, heading towards one of the containers and opening it. Paper; then, the next one, plastic, and the last one, metal.

“I’m staying well away from anything metallic” Marinette muttered, earning an amused snort from Raoul.

“Just don’t get a papercut and die.” Raoul said, rolling his eyes at Marinette. He’d spent enough time with Marinette to know that it was a likely possibility. “If someone here’s capable of that, it’s you.”

Marinette swatted at his arm, but said nothing, since Heloise spoke up again and commanded their attention. “Now, as you might have gathered by now; this is an unconventional materials challenge.” Heloise held up a hand, as if interrupting any complaints, “I know you already had one, but considering the very special characteristics of this competition-” the camera panned towards Marinette, the recipient of Tim Gunn’s save, “we’re going to be testing your creativity. As you know, there are only two more eliminations before we get the finalists that will present at Fashion Week, and with Tim’s save having been used already… there’s no more safety net. You have to make your work count!”

All the designers nodded along, fully aware that by this point, two of them would definitely be going home; and with the save already used up, there was no chance of returning.

“Well, here’s your challenge!” the model said, “You’ll have to make an outfit for your model, using only what you’re able to scavenge here. You’ll have thirty minutes to gather your materials and you’ll be able to take back to the work room, all you can carry yourself.” she paused, looking at the group. “Are you ready? Go!”

“Translation: Have fun digging in the trash, fuckers!” Alix’s helpful ongoing narration was a good way to get through the slow parts of the show, and this particular commentary earned her a lot of snickers all around the living room.

“But look at her go!” Mylène nodded towards the screen; where Marinette was rummaging through a
pile of paper, clinging to everything that looked even remotely useful. Paper, plastic bags, canvases were all over the floor, surrounding each container as the group of designers searched.

“Did he… he did.” Nino blinked at the screen as the designers showed no qualms snatching material that someone else clearly coveted. “Damn. That’s vicious.”

“It’s war, babe. You know how Mari gets when she has a goal.”

Marinette gathered loads of different colored paper, and every single plastic bag and tarp she could get her hands on. The pile accumulating in her arms was growing almost comically large, especially considering her size; but she still fought to grab onto more material. The pastries challenge had been a bit difficult in regards of how little material she’d actually gotten and that was not a mistake that Marinette was making again.

“One more minute!” Heloise called, looking at her watch as she watched the group at work. “Hurry up!” She encouraged them, smiling as the designers became more frantic, clinging to their material as the timer displayed on the screen quickly approached zero; “And time!”

The group looked comical. Since most the material they’d gathered was very bulky, although almost weightless, all of them looked like piles of garbage with human legs.

“Oh my, you all look… hilarious!” Heloise giggled, before some members of the crew showed up to help the group with some large bags where they were able to stuff their work material. “There. Much better. Now, it’s time to go back to the work room and I’ll see you all at the show.”

“I really don’t like the unconventional materials challenges very much;” Matilda wrinkled her nose as she spoke to the camera. “There’s just so much that can go wrong?

The designers had already arrived at the workroom, and were busy carefully unpacking all the material they’d gathered earlier, as Matilda’s voice over continued. “It’s already hard enough to work with some types of fabric, and the materials we’re working with today is just… very unpredictable, and with the save already been used…” The shot focused on Marinette, her expression serious as she sorted through different types of paper, organizing her work table to see just what she had before working on her design. “Well, I guess we’ll see how this goes!”

It was time to come up with sketches, and the group was quickly drawing on their sketchbooks as they tried to come up with the best idea. Jean Philippe was scowling at his sketchbook, before shaking his head and starting over. There were many things to take into account. The weight of the material, how it folded and just how easy or hard it would be to work with. All those things mattered before making a design. It wasn’t smart to commit to an idea if halfway down the road, the material just refused to cooperate.

Marinette was draping paper over her dress form, trying to test the give of the material. She crumpled some of the paper, trying to see how it held on before trying it on again.

“How’s it going?” Raoul appeared beside Marinette, holding a rolled up piece of black paper. “I have an offer!”

“What kind of an offer?” Marinette asked, looking curiously at her friend, before narrowing her eyes suspiciously at him. “What are you up to?”

“Paper for that plastic?” Raoul held out the paper at his friends, his brown eyes focusing on the desired prize. It was a large piece of blue shrink wrap, probably used to wrap shipments.
She looked at the two materials with a critical eye. “Hmm,” she reached for the paper, feeling it between her fingers as she tested the texture. The pattern was actually lovely and it was obvious she started to cook up an idea in her head. “I could actually use this. Deal!” She grinned, sliding the material Raoul’s way and greedily taking the paper from him. “I could use this for the pants…” Marinette said, her voice trailing off as she clearly came up with an idea for her design. “Thank you!” she called out to Raoul’s retreating shape before quickly amending her design.

“You’re welcome!” he called out to her, quickly going back to work.

“Of course I’m glad she’s back! She’s my friend!” Raoul exclaimed, giving the camera an odd look as he replied to whatever prompt the producer had said to get him to talk. “Well, sure, there’s a lot of fake people in this thing. It’s a show, and it’s a competition, but I’m not about to change who I am because of it.”

What about winning the competition?

“Yeah, of course I want to win.” He shrugged, tilting his head at the camera, “That’s why I entered the show…” one of his eyebrows rose as he looked at the producer standing by the camera. “But, she’s my friend. And I think it’s unfair for her to leave because of something that was an accident. She’s a good designer, she deserves to be in the finale. If I win, it’ll be fair and square.”

The group had been working for around four hours by the time Tim arrived. “Hello designers!” Tim’s voice was cheery as he quickly made his way into the room. “I hope your work is going well!” With that, he approached the first table.

Leo was working on a cocktail dress made entirely out of paper. “This is looking good!” Tim said, “What are you going to do with the waistline?”

Leo had never been good with allowing Tim’s critique, and today was no exception. Unfortunately for him, it was part of the show, Tim was going to offer critique and they all had to do small interviews. Leo was never happy about them but he powered through them all the same. “I’m going to add a small peplum.” Leo told him, holding up a matching piece of fabric, “I’ll probably use this.”

“I think it’s looking great, but you need to make sure it doesn’t look too stiff.” With that, he turned and walked over towards Marinette’s table.

“How are you doing today?” Tim asked Marinette, who smiled brightly at him.

It was obvious the young woman was very grateful for Tim’s help. “I’m doing great. I have almost everything cut already.” Marinette turned to her materials, carefully arranging them on the table to explain to Tim what her plan was.

“Let’s see what you’re doing…” The mentor clasped his hands together as his attention was solely focused on whatever Marinette was about to explain.

Marinette grabbed her sketchbook, motioning between the design she’d sketched out and what little she did have ready. “Alright, so here, this will be a shirt. And I’m going to use these stripes of plastic to make a raincoat, but I’ll line it with this piece of wallpaper to give it some depth.” She placed the piece of clear plastic over the wallpaper, trying to show what her idea should end up looking like.

“Interesting.” Tim said, tapping his chin as he nodded along to Marinette’s explanation. “So, you’re going to try for a fall winter look?”
“Yes, I am,” she said, then turning to the dress form, where a simple shirt was almost finished. “I want the raincoat to be the focal piece of the whole outfit, and I’m going to be working on lining it before I either sew or glue it all together.”

“Yes, the plastic might be a bit too thick for the machines, but if you do glue it together, you have to make sure that it looks clean.”

“Got it,”

“Overall, I like it. Make me proud!” he said, before turning around and walking towards the next table.

I feel like I have a big responsibility here—” Marinette bit her lower lip. “Tim used his save on me and I can’t do a disappointing job in this challenge. I need to prove to him and the judges that it wasn’t a mistake and that I do deserve to be here.”

The young designer squirmed, before the scene switched back to the workroom, where Marinette was carefully arranging the material for the raincoat. The look on her face was serious, focusing all her attention on the job at hand. Meanwhile, her voice over continued, “Yes, I feel a little bit of pressure to succeed, but it’s a good thing. I can handle it.”

“Alright designers!” Tim was standing at the front of the room again, “I have seen some very interesting things today, and I am looking forward to see the finished product. You’ll work until eleven today and your models will arrive at seven. That is all… Make it work and I will see you all tomorrow.”

The designers were left alone again, and they quickly began adjusting their work to whatever critique Tim had told them. The mentor was usually right in his assessments, and his comments were good to provide an extra set of eyes to help spot little mistakes that would have likely gone unnoticed.

Marinette was currently gluing the black paper to the plastic she was going to use for the rain coat. She wanted it to look nice and class and not just like… Adrien Agreste wrapped in a trash bag. There was not much she could do with the rest of the outfit until Adrien arrived, but there was plenty of work to be done with the raincoat.

On Raoul’s table, he was currently battling the shrink wrap. It was the perfect color, but the clinginess of the material was definitely playing against him; and Raoul was extremely vocal with his frustrations. Thankfully, production had edited most of it to a harmless bleep.

But there were only a few more hours until the models arrived, and they all had to have at least something ready. There was no point having a fitting if there was nothing to fit after all.

The hours passed and then the door opened, directing the five remaining models into the room.

Marinette was tying up her hair up in a ponytail when the door opened and she perked up immediately. Her cheeks tinged pink and her smile was warm and bashful, the same look was mirrored on Adrien’s face and the model quickly headed towards her table.

“Hi…” her greeting was almost breathless, and she fidgeted in place, twirling the pencil between her fingers.

“Hey.” His fingers were also playing on the black strap of his messenger bag, before carefully placing it on top of the table.
The look on both their faces was a stark difference from the somber awkwardness from the previous episode. Bright green eyes focused on Marinette as she carefully picked up the clothing on top of the table. “

“Did you rest?” It was harmless small talk, but considering just how different their last seen interaction had been last time they’d been together… it was a welcome change.

“I did,” she answered, holding out the clothes for him to take. “You?”

“Mhmm,” Adrien nodded, standing up straight as he watched Marinette gather her things.

There was another change and this one had to do with camera angles. While before they were much more subtle with how they filmed Marinette and Adrien, they were far more direct this time around. While they weren’t up front every moment, they were easily found on every single shot.

It was almost as if someone was desperate to catch a moment between the two of them.

Adrien had changed into his outfit, the pants fitting loosely around his narrow hips. Adrien lifted the shirt for her, getting it out of the way so she could work on the pants. Marinette dragged her chair towards him and sat down facing Adrien. The chair left her at the perfect height to work on him, without having to bend at an awkward angle. It also left her at the perfect angle to have a first row seat to the abs show.

Honestly, this wasn’t a good idea, considering that her last exposure had ended up with her at the hospital. She still had the stitches to show for it.

Adrien squirmed. The feel of Marinette’s fingers seemed to be a little bit much for the ticklish model. She mostly kept to the waistband of his pants, but every now and then the pads of her fingers traced softly over the skin of his stomach. The muscles twitched slightly as the breath caught on his throat. He was clearly trying not to distract her. Judging by the pinkness on Marinette’s face, it was obvious his plan wasn’t working.

“There,” she said, standing up and looking up into Adrien’s face. “Can you walk without the paper ripping?”

The model walked around carefully. The problem with unconventional materials was that they needed to be really careful not to ruin them before the show. That had happened on other versions of the show and it was never a good thing. But it seemed that Marinette had picked the right material for the pants, with the little alterations she’d just done, the fit was comfortable enough to walk normally, and while they did feel a little bit stiff, it was nothing he couldn’t work with. She’d done a good job treating the odd material, and it felt good enough to pass as fabric. “They seem great!”

“Good!” Marinette turned her back toward him and wrote some notes on her sketchbook, making sure every little bit of useful information was recorded.

Adrien waited, carefully stretching to see what Marinette was writing, but seemingly decided to give her some space. Eventually, his curiosity won and Adrien inched closer, eager to know just what she was going to make for him.

“What’s your plan?” Adrien finally asked, peeking over her shoulder and placing his hand on top of the table.

Her hand brushed against his, and Adrien’s hand jumped, falling quickly by his side as his eyes widened. Marinette jumped as well, and she looked up at him with a bashful look on her face, as she clasped her hands together in a useless attempt to play off the awkwardness. But then, blue eyes met
green and something shifted. There was a moment of silence between model and designer, one long meaningful look shared for just a couple of seconds.

Then, they laughed.

It made no sense at all for everyone in the room, and a lot of them perked up to look at the blond model and the dark haired designer laugh as the tension and awkwardness finally melted off of their shoulders.

Still laughing, they shared a new glance, smiles gracing both their faces before letting the giggles subside.

His hand reached for the ponytail that swung from her head, giving it a playful tug. “We should probably…” Adrien glanced at the pieces of material on her table, carefully piled on top of her table and then back at her.

“Yeah,” she nodded, picking up her materials to make sure not to mix them up and mess up her whole system. While Marinette did this, Adrien grabbed her pen and inconspicuously wrote something on the edge of her sketchbook, placing a bit of fabric on top of the paper to cover it from the camera’s view.

The camera panned across the room, where most designers were getting back to their work again. Noelle was giggling softly under her breath, as she too glanced towards the duo, who had somehow fallen back to their usual small talk.

“Did you have classes today?”

Adrien shook his head, his eyes following her movements as she placed the pieces of paper over his shoulders. “No classes today. I actually slept in.”

She poked his shoulder with her finger, blue eyes narrowed playfully, “Don’t brag.”

“Sorry.” he said, the smile on his face unapologetic and smug, looking down as Marinette worked.

“I just got emotional whiplash.” Nino was looking at the screen, blinking repeatedly as he tried to make sense of what had just happened.

“Are the episodes shot out of order?” Mylène asked, frowning before shaking her head, “That can’t be, it wouldn’t make any sense.”

“I think they’re cute.” Rose smiled, blue eyes twinkling. “They worked things out!”

“I don’t even understand half of what’s going on.” Alix grumbled, eyeing the screen with narrowed eyes. “And what did he write for her? I need answers!”

“At least the ship is going strong.” Alya muttered, checking her her phone as a text notification lit up the display. “One tweet says, #Adrienette, just kiss dammit” Alya looked away from the cellphone, a smug expression on her face. “Now that’s my kind of people.”

The time production allowed for the fitting was over, and the group of models were quickly led out of the work room. The camera focused on Marinette as she looked at the group, a small smile on her face as the door closed.
“You’re gross.” Raoul’s voice startled Marinette, eliciting laughter from him. He had somehow managed to sidle up to Marinette without her noticing.

“Don’t do that!” Marinette cried out, before stretching her arm towards him, quickly and effectively flicking his earlobe. Raoul yelped loudly and Marinette’s expression turned smug. “Go back to work!” She told him, decidedly ignoring him as she focused on the half-made outfit on her table.

“So cuuute,” he cooed, grinning at her, before quickly getting out of her arm range, lest she really tried to hit him this time.

“Go awaaaay!” Marinette laughed, before turning her attention back to the materials on her table. She needed to get to work. It was then when she picked up her sketchbook, noticing something that the cameras couldn’t quite catch. An elated smile appeared on her face, despite her best attempts to hide it behind her hands and she carefully cut out the piece of paper and placed it in her pocket.

The day went on, and soon, it was time to head on back to the hotel. They needed to get some sleep before finishing everything up in time for the runway show.

“Time’s up!” Someone said, and they all began to pack up their things.

“I don’t think it was a good use for the save.” Leo’s voice was curt as he looked at the camera. There weren’t many interviews from the man, since he rarely looked pleased to be there. “But production knows who is more theatrical and will probably give more ratings.”

The designers were ready to leave at the workroom, looking exhausted but in good spirits, as they quickly filed out, chatting amongst themselves as they headed back to the hotel. The lights in the workroom were turned off and the door closed. Leo’s voice over continued. “I know that theatrics and drama is appealing at first, but talent is what wins in the end.”

The next day started with the designers hard at work. The group entered the workroom quickly, throwing away cups of coffee and cans or energy drinks away in the trash before heading to their table. After all, liquids and paper were usually not a very good mix.

There was a small, pleasant chatter going around, as they finally assembled the outfits together.

Tim slipped into the room, an amused smile on his face as no one seemed to really notice his arrival. “Well, aren’t you focused!” Tim laughed, as he finally saw the designers perk up at the sound of his voice. “Your models will arrive at two!” he continued, now that he had finally gotten everyone’s attention. “As usual, you’ll have thirty minutes to fitting and an hour and a half for styling.” he looked around the room, “I’ll come get you in time for the runway show. Be ready!”

Once Tim was gone, everyone got right back to work. By this point, there were only three hours left until the models arrived, and in that time they had to both finish the outfit and decide on whatever they would do for styling.

Marinette was finishing up the coat, having already lined it up with the black paper and assembled it. Once she was done, she carefully draped it over her mannequin, where it would be safe and sound until the moment Adrien arrived for the last fitting and the show. Right now, she was focused on other things. Using some bits of black plastic, from a trash bag, Marinette was assembling an umbrella, to be used as a prop in her outfit. “Does anyone have more glue?” She asked, looking around, “And something that looks like a stick?”

“I have the glue!” Matilda made sure to put the cap on properly and tossed it towards Marinette, who...
caught it in the air.

“Thanks!”

“Uh,” Raoul lifted some stuff off of his table, “Does this work?” Raoul held up some cardboard tubes and a roll of tape. “I also have some tape.”

Marinette’s eyes narrowed. “That… can work,” She smiled brightly for a second “Give me!” she quickly headed over to Raoul’s table and grabbed a handful of before heading back to work

“I got to say,” Raoul looked at the camera, a relaxed expression on his handsome face. “This work environment is pretty cool. Everyone is happy, everyone talks with each other.” The camera panned towards the room, as Jean Philippe had gone off on a food run, dropping cereal bars and bags of cookies on everyone’s tables. “Well, almost everyone,” He snickered as the camera cut to Leo, who was decidedly ignoring the group, fully focused on his work.

The models arrived at two on the dot, quickly walking towards their designers, so they wouldn’t waste any more time than they actually needed to. They were against the clock, and while almost everyone was happy with how their outfits were looking, they still had to make sure it fit properly.

Marinette was finishing the umbrella when Adrien returned. “What’s that?” he asked, leaning against the table as he watched her.

“Oh, I made it as a prop!” Marinette explained, holding the fake umbrella out for him to take. “You shouldn’t open it, but it completes the look.”

Adrien took the umbrella from her hands, a half smile tugging at a corner of his lips. He twirled it carefully, examining the dark fabric between his fingers.

“What?” Marinette’s voice was laced with curiosity as she saw the smirk on Adrien’s face blossom into a full on smile.

He turned his attention towards her, “You never gave me my umbrella back.”

Marinette’s eyes widened. “What?” she squeaked out.

“You stole my umbrella.” Adrien accused, doing the best to keep his expression serious, but failing, as the smile was impossible to stop.

Marinette gaped at him, as if unsure of just what he was talking about. It seemed to dawn on her after a few seconds and a blush took over the entirety of her face. She could have tried to ignore him and the playful jab, but the look on his face was just too delightful to let that happen, “It’s been almost ten years. It’s clearly my umbrella now.” she stated, stubbornly holding up her chin, playfully arguing back.

One blond eyebrow quirked up at her defiant declaration. “I demand restitution.” Adrien mock complained, as Marinette took the fake umbrella back, making sure that the glued fabric was dry and set so that it wouldn’t fall apart during the show.

Overall, the umbrella looked good, it was a decent enough fake. It wouldn’t open, of course. Marinette lacked the time and tools (and the knowledge), to make a fully functioning one, but it would be enough for the runway show.

Marinette narrowed her eyes, “Never.” she answered, smiling back as she placed the umbrella back on the table.
Now, Marinette had finished the few adjustments she needed to make to the outfit, so all they had to do was get him to hair and makeup and they’d be done for the day.

Adrien leaned against her work table, watching as she organized everything she needed to do before they went off to hair and makeup. “Do you have it?”

“Maybe. I don’t know-” Did she? Marinette couldn’t be one hundred percent sure, but there was a high chance that it was in stacked somewhere in her room. She’d boxed up most of her Adrien fangirling things after they graduated from Lycée, and there was a big chance that the umbrella had ended up with the rest of magazine clippings that she hadn’t had the heart to throw away.

Not that she’d ever tell him that.

“What umbrella?” Kim asked, looking around the room as he tried to figure out the meaning of the secret conversation.

“Marinette has his umbrella,” Alya said, “He gave it to her one time and apparently it sealed the contract of their never ending love story.” It had taken some time for Alya to know about the umbrella incident; but once Marinette had told Alya, it was obvious that the aspiring designer was absolutely smitten. “And I would bet money that she still has it.”

“Not taking that bet, dude.” Alix muttered, though her expression was amused. “That’s a losing bet if I ever heard one.”

With just thirty minutes left until the show started, it was time to get everyone dressed and ready for the runway show.

Matilda was pinning the last details on her model, a tall dark haired man, she looked at the couple-to-be. Marinette and Adrien were quietly talking amongst themselves, seemingly done with the awkwardness from before, settling into a quiet familiar type of conversations.

“You two know each other from school?” Matilda asked, as Marinette secured the outfit on Adrien, making sure that everything was where it was supposed to be. It was a bit of a relief to see the duo acting normally again, especially after the awkwardness from the previous challenge.

“From collège.” Adrien answered, lifting his arms in front of him after Marinette tapped his forearms. Marinette nodded along, curiously looking as the conversation carried on between Adrien and the designers.

“That’s really cool!” Matilda looked sincerely amazed.

Raoul piped up. “So tell us, what was little Marinette like when she was younger?”

“She was really nice. Everyone liked her,” He told Raoul, turning back to Marinette after he heard a snort coming from her. The corner of his lips quirked up in a smile, fully aware of just what had prompted that particular reaction. “Almost everyone.” Adrien turned back to Raoul, “I think at least half the class had a crush on her at some point.”

“They did not!” Marinette argued back, swatting at Adrien’s chest to get him to quiet down.

“It’s true!”

Marinette rolled her eyes, pink tinging her cheeks. “Says the actual model.”
Said model simply grinned at Marinette, “Nino had a crush on you.” Adrien reminded her.

This bit of information caught Raoul’s attention. “Who is this Nino?”

“Uh…” Adrien had the good grace to look embarrassed.

“His best friend, who Adrien tried to set me up with when we were in school.” Marinette finished for him, an amused twinkle lighting up her pretty blue eyes. Sure, it had been rather awkward when it had all happened, but in the end, it had led to Nino’s relationship with Alya. They were very happy and Marinette loved them. All had worked out just fine if they asked her.

“Wait, wait wait.” Raoul stopped checking on Noelle’s outfit for a second, to fully devote his attention to Adrien and Marinette. “You,” he pointed at Adrien, “tried to set her up,” his motioned towards Marinette, whose glare was clearly a wordless warning for Raoul to cut the topic short. “with your best friend.”

“Yeah…” The blond looked embarrassed, but nodded, ignoring the amused look on Marinette’s face.

“And how did that work out?”

“He’s engaged to my best friend now.” Marinette answered, “They’re getting married next year.”

The look on Raoul’s face was delighted. “So,” he told Adrien, pointing at Marinette, “she could have been your best friend’s fiancée?”

The look on Adrien’s face told everyone that he’d only just realized where his matchmaking skills could have gotten him.

“Bro. Really?” Nino was looking at the screen, eyes wide in horror as Adrien recounted his ill-fated date with Marinette. “On national television, too?”

Alya snorted, “You did have a crush on her. You went on the World’s Worst Date to the Zoo when we were in collège.” Alya kissed his cheek obnoxiously, “I remember. I was there.” Alya’s memory was sharp as ever, and she could recount the whole afternoon she spent hiding and coaching Marinette through what they thought would be a date with Adrien.

Nino sputtered, fully aware that all attempts to defend himself were futile, but still not ready to give up. “It wasn’t a date!”

“Well, you didn’t know that!” Alya grinned, leaning to rest her chin on Nino’s shoulder. “You were pretty sold on it being a date, if I remember correctly.”

Nino’s arms crossed in front of his chest, and he glared at his fiancée, “We were fourteen, it doesn’t count!”

“Sorry dude, still counts!” Kim said, smirking after taking a gulp of his drink, “actually, it counts even more, since you went on an actual date.”

“In which I ended up locked with my now fiancée in the panther cage.” Nino pointed out, glaring at every single person in the room.

“Kim says that because he had a crush on her too!” Alix piped up, grinning at the scowl on Kim’s face. “But he never asked her out so he’s making up rules.”
“What?” Kim interrupted her right away, but Alix dismissed him with a hand wave.

“You went on a date with your fiancée’s best friend, dude. Weird.” Alix slurped her way through her drink, a weird looking concoction that was supposed to be filled with vitamins or something.

“Yeah dude.” Kim smirked, seemingly glad that the spotlight was off him, though his happiness was cut short.

“You,” Alix turned to face him, “couldn’t even get a fake date, so don’t even laugh.”

Kim gaped at Alix, and attempted to sputter a reply, before mumbling under his breath. “I trusted you.”

“I know, but… glass houses dude, seriously.”

Nino was not impressed. “You are all terrible.”

“Stop mocking my fiancée!” Alya grinned, lacing her fingers with Nino’s.

He didn’t trust her. “Babe. you started it. You get no love tonight.”

“Designers, five minutes to go! Finish your designs and let’s go to the runway!” Tim’s voice interrupted every conversation and they all started to quickly finish up what they were doing. Conversation quickly set aside, it was time to make sure every model was runway ready.

The camera panned around the room, as every designer was assisting their model into the outfit, getting them ready and fixing any last minute mistake that could ruin their outfits and would give the judges any reason to eliminate them.

With all of the models fully dressed, there was only enough time to check some last-minute details before it was time for the show.

Marinette took a step back, looking pleased with her work (and possibly the model), before she picked up the umbrella she’d made. “Here. This is your umbrella now,” There was a bright smile on her face as Marinette handed over the prop to Adrien, who twirled it in his hands. “My debt is paid.”

“But what if I wanted my actual umbrella?” Adrien held the prop carefully, quirking an eyebrow at her.

“Well, I don’t have it here!” Marinette poked at his chest, “So, it will have to do!”

Adrien poked at her ribs, causing Marinette to squirm for reasons that had nothing to do with being ticklish. “I demand restitution!”

The camera panned towards Raoul, who was carefully musing up Noelle’s hair to ensure that it was up to his standards when he heard bits of Marinette’s and Adrien’s conversation.

“Well, come get it whenever you want.”

“Excuse me!” Raoul piped up, the look on his face absolutely devious as he asked, “He’s free to come get what exactly?”

Marinette froze for a second, turning her attention towards the other designer. No, surely they didn’t think it meant that? “I didn’t…” Now, she could simply turn around and explain that she meant the umbrella, but after glancing around and seeing Tim Gunn looking at the exchange with an
extremely amused look on his face… she realized that there was absolutely nothing for her to do, but walk away towards the runway room and hope that the cameras didn’t catch her little blunder.

But then again, her luck only went so far.

Alya’s arm clung to Nino’s shoulder as she watched the awkward exchange on the show. “Oh Nino, look at our poor awkward child.” She giggled as Marinette quickly hurried out of the workroom and towards the runway.

Nino snorted, looking on as the camera focused on an extremely embarrassed Adrien, who simply stared as Marinette left with a dumbfounded look on his face and a blush that threatened to make the poor model combust spontaneously. “Which one?”

After a brief commercial break, the fashion show was about to start. The five designers were sitting on their regular post as Heloise entered the room “Welcome to the runway. As you know, in fashion, one day you’re in and one day… you’re out.” She turned towards the group, so small in comparison to how it had begun. “For today’s challenge, you had to create an outfit based on recycled materials, and only that.”

The camera panned around the room, giving a good view of the five remaining designers.

“Alright,” Heloise continued. “Let’s say hello to our judges. We have the creative director for Mode Magazine, Tatiana Geiger. Next to her, we have the creative director for S.E.L.F. Fashion, and famed designer, Thierry Leclère; and today’s guest judge, fashion blogger Margot Baudelaire.”

Heloise continued, “We also have Tim Gunn, but as you know, since he’s your mentor; he will not be judging you. That said, he already used his Tim Gunn save, bringing back Marinette back into the competition. With all that said, let’s start the show.”

The music started and the cameras focused solely on the runway.

Matilda’s model came out first, wearing a combination of pants and a dress shirt. The outfit looked a little bit stiff, but if it bothered him, he didn’t let it show. Her model was wearing a vest was made out of newspapers, folded carefully into stripes and attached together.

Adrien walked out second, and Marinette smiled at her finished work. The pants looked like they were made in fabric instead of thick wallpaper, thanks to Marinette’s careful treatment of the material prior to sewing. The raincoat hung from his broad shoulders, completely unbuttoned, flaring behind him as he walked on the runway. The raincoat was sleek, making Adrien look tall and slim, and the dark pattern of the lining peeked through just enough to give it some texture and depth. Somehow, Marinette had managed to make the plastic coat look elegant and more like leather than the trash it was actually made from. The mock umbrella tied the whole outfit together, and it would be easy to create an editorial based on this same look.

Raoul’s outfit was dazzlingly bright, the blue was layered up just right so that it looked bright and shiny and not… see through and gross. It was a lovely cocktail dress; short, flirty and fun. The tin foil was used around the bust, and the metallic shine was a delightful contrast against the blue.

The next model was wearing a black dress made out of regular trash bags. Jean Philippe had constructed a gown out of the materials he’d gotten, and while the fit was awkward, at least the bags were glued correctly. The hem reached the floor and trailed delicately behind her as she walked through the runway.

Leo’s was a cocktail dress too; made out of beige paper cut and pieced together carefully. The straps
were made out of black plastic and there was a lovely detailing around the hem, made out of paper doilies.

“Let’s bring the models on the runway!” Heloise asked and soon, every model had stepped back on.

As Matilda explained her outfit, the camera panned over every person on the runway, managing to catch Marinette leaning into Adrien for just a fraction of a second, her shoulder brushing against his arm. It was almost an imperceptible moment, but the corners of Adrien’s lips quirked up slightly and Marinette turned up to look at his face. His eyebrow rose a little and Marinette’s face mirrored the look, blue eyes narrowing playfully at him as Matilda carried on with her explanation.

“That’s some high quality eye fucking,” Alix commented, snorting when Rose choked on her drink.

“I just want answers.” Alya complained, crossing her arms in front of her chest.

“What did her parents say?”

“She was locked inside her room working all day.” Alya explained, frowning as she recalled most of the conversation. “She did answer texts, but it was at the most random times, and her parents said that she ate… as far as they knew. But she was sewing all day long, so it was like she was still gone. It was absolutely insane.”

“Well, she’s probably presenting then.” Mylene made a face, it was far too much stress for her taste. “It wouldn’t make sense to go that crazy if she wasn’t competing, right?”

“Probably.” Alya conceded. Not wanting to think that her friend could be one of the decoys. “She’s already filming again, so there’s no way to ask her until the show is over.”

“Oh right!” Alix perked up, “So, when is the show?”

“Next Thursday.” Alya said, almost shaking with excitement. “I’m not allowed to bring cameras, cellphones and I have to sign a nondisclosure agreement.” It was obvious that Alya was not happy with the terms, but she would suck it up for her friend’s sake.

Nino leaned back, remembering the bullet point list of dos and don’ts which came with the tickets. “It’s serious business!”

“She’s on!”

After the rest of the designers had explained, it was Marinette’s turn. Heloise gave the girl a bright smile before asking, “Marinette, tell us about your design.”

The designer straightened up, “This is an outfit for a rainy day. The raincoat is actually fully functional, and it could be used under the rain. It was made out of a plastic, and I lined it underneath with some wallpaper, so that it gives it a little depth and texture.

“I was about to ask that!” Thierry said, tapping his chin as Adrien took a step forward, “can we see the inside of the coat.” Adrien opened the coat, showing the black lining. The pattern was visible on the outside, dulled under the plastic’s thickness, and the back provided a dark lining that made it look like the real thing.

“It really does look like fabric and I applaud your work Marinette.” Tatiana smiled, nodding along with the rest of the judges.
“We’re so glad to have you back,” Heloise said, “And we’re even more glad that you made such a stellar outfit.”

“Thank you!” Marinette beamed, and Adrien smiled right along with her. It didn’t go unnoticed.

“The judges and I will give a closer look to the designs, and we’ll call you back. You may leave the runway.”

The designers walked off the runway, Marinette flashed a small smile at her model before leaving the runway.

“What happened?” Alix whined, motioning towards the screen. “Last episode, they were barely looking at each other, all longing glances and shit, and now they’re all flirty again?” The pink haired girl huffed, glaring at the television set, which clearly provided more questions than answers.

“Who knows? They probably found a way to solve their issues, if you know what I mean…” Kim offered, wagging his eyebrows at Alix, who threw a wadded up napkin at his face. He caught it easily.

“No way!” Alya pointed towards the screen, “That is not the behavior of two happily sexed up people.” She waited, letting that idea sink in for a second, “that’s the behavior of two people who would happily sex up each other. That’s an important difference.”

Nino’s hand rose up, “Can we not?” he asked, in an evident attempt to change the topic. “Do we really need to talk about our friends’ hypothetical sex life?”

“Yes.”

He sighed, giving his fiancée a resigned glare. “You’re all horrible people.”

“I believe we have a decision. Let’s call back the designers.”

The designers were called, and they all quickly took their place on the runway, awaiting the judges’ decision.

“As you all know, by this point in our competition, we expect the absolute best from all of you. First. Raoul?” She turned towards the designer, who was anxiously waiting for the model’s next words. “You’re safe. You may leave the runway.”

“Thank you.” Raoul nodded and walked off the runway.

That left only Leo, Marinette, Matilda and Jean Philippe.

“The four of you are the highest and the lowest scores. One of you will be named the winner, and one of you will be out.” There was a beat of silence, to allow suspense to build before announcing who the winner would be. “Marinette, your outfit was absolutely wonderful, and you managed to make us forget that we were looking at an unconventional materials challenge. We are very glad to have you back, and we knew we wouldn’t be disappointed in your performance. Leo, your dress was absolutely wonderful. We loved how you integrated all the textures to make a lovely outfit.”

Leo nodded, and waited for the final decision.

“Leo…” Heloise did her best to drag the whole thing as long as humanly possible, “you’re safe, you
may leave the runway. This means, Marinette, you’re the winner of the challenge, congratulations!”

“Thank you!” Marinette smiled, looking absolutely thrilled with the news.

“We are really happy to have you back, and we’re so glad that you made your return so triumphant!” the model smiled at Marinette, “You may leave the runway.”

With that, Marinette walked off the runway too, only to enter the waiting room where she quickly caught up Raoul with the comments the judges had made.

“That’s my girl!” Alya cheered, before flipping off the screen as Leo griped about the unfairness of everything.

“She’s definitely going to win this thing!” Alix grinned, “suck it, Leo!”

“I wonder what the next challenge is about.” Rose mentioned, and Alya’s expression sobered immediately. “What?”

It was Nino who answered, “That’s the thing that cannot be discussed.” He told Rose, before turning towards the television again, “Oh, look! Jean Philippe was eliminated!” he exclaimed, in an obvious attempt to switch the subject.

It didn’t work. “It’s just not fair!” Alya started, looking absolutely distraught, “How could I have possibly known!”

“What’s she going on about?” Alix asked, motioning at Alya as she continued ranting. “I’m lost.”

“Uh…” Nino shrugged his shoulders, “I’m not really sure I can actually say something…” he trailed off, as the previews for the next show started. “Oh, wait. I might be able to explain, chill for a sec.” He waited for Heloise’s voice as it announced,

Next time on Project Runway.

“Ladybug and Chat Noir are Paris’ own superheroes, and today we’re going to create a small tribute to them.”

“Oooh.” Alix hummed, before glancing at Alya, “but what’s up with her?”

“She could have been the guest judge.” Nino explained, and everyone’s eyes widened, “But they realized that she’s Mari’s best friend and she’s been tweeting for Mari on the Ladyblog account so…”

“Oh.” Alix frowned a little, finally realizing what the problem was. Clearly they wouldn’t take a biased judge. “But…”

“Don’t say anything. I’m still not over this.” Alya was sitting on the sofa again.

“Got it.” Alix motioned zipping her lips closed.

Alya, however, was not done. “I could have been on television,” she moaned, throwing herself on the sofa dramatically, while Nino patted her shoulder comfortingly.
Chapter Summary

The one with the Ladybug and Chat Noir Challenge. Dorkyness ensues.

I hope you enjoy!

Chapter Notes

Honestly, all your comments give me LIFE. And the art people drew for this? I CRY. Here they are listed at the top <3 Thank you guys omg.
http://runningoutofink.tumblr.com/post/142557938925/chasing-the-chatwalk-10

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It turned out there was a lot less magic into shooting a reality show than what people at home were able to see. Everything was usually made in advance, usually weeks, with reaction interviews either coached, shot after whatever had happened or simply edited out of existing bits and pieces to create the perfect reaction. It was why Marinette knew she had to be careful.

They were also kept isolated from most people; the studio was extremely wary about spoilers leaking, especially since the show had been such a success. Keeping things quiet would be an even bigger challenge now, considering that they would all be going home after the next challenge to work on their collection.

The last episode that had aired was the Moulin Rouge episode, which meant that the Rock Star challenge would be right after that one. Because the show would go into a hiatus after airing the Rock Star episode, leaving the cliffhanger of Marinette’s elimination, it was extremely important that no spoilers were leaked. No one could know that she’d been eliminated and saved.

The hiatus lasted approximately five weeks and a couple more days, which was not nearly enough to produce an entire collection, but this show liked stressing out their contestants.

Production had already approached Marinette, telling her that it was extremely important that she kept a low profile. People wouldn’t know that she had been saved until the hiatus ended, and her return was one of production’s best kept secrets. They’d offered to keep her in the hotel, giving her a new, large suite where she could work on her designs comfortably, but by now Marinette just wanted to go home and have some sort of normalcy in her life. So no… as fun as it was to have room service, nothing beat the home cooked meals her parents made.

Besides, since there was so much she needed to do, Marinette was pretty sure she wouldn’t have the time to do anything other than work. Other than the fact that Marinette was going to become an actual hermit, not much would change.

But other than learning she would have to hide for the next few weeks, Marinette was in a great mood. Not only had she won the recyclables challenge, but she’d come across a very important piece
Once he’d left the workroom after his first fitting, Marinette checked her notes and found the new handwriting. There was a string of numbers, which she correctly guessed to be Adrien’s cell phone number and he’d doodled a cat smiley next to it. Marinette had quickly ripped the page out and saved it in her pocket, lest the cameras see it (and broadcast Adrien’s number to every fangirl he ever had in France). They’d gotten back to the hotel, and Marinette had spent around an hour and a half wondering how and when to call Adrien and whether it was a good idea or not, until Raoul had snatched the phone from her hands and tapped something into her phone before holding it out for her to take again.

“There. Solved,” he said, and Marinette snatched the phone from his grasp to see what he’d written.

[M - Hi :) ~Marinette.]

It was actually okay. When Raoul got involved, Marinette usually prepared herself for the worst. But she had to admit that the text he sent on her behalf was casual enough to not be too embarrassing. After that, all she could do was wait for the reply. Around five minutes later, her phone beeped.

[A - Marinette! I was afraid you didn’t get my note.]

Marinette squeaked, flashing an excited grin at Raoul as she read the message on the screen. Ignoring Raoul’s laughter, Marinette started typing her reply, and that was the start of their texting spree.

Sure, Marinette wasn’t able to pay attention to her phone while filming, but that didn’t mean that she wouldn’t look at it once she was off duty. Marinette would text little things she thought of, or just reply to the messages he left her through the day. It was a good use of all the time they spent in cars from and to the Hotel.

They texted about everything and nothing at all. Adrien was particularly fond of sending her pictures of the outside world, to make sure she remembered what the sunlight actually looked like. In response, Marinette sent pictures from her hotel room, of what she’d had for breakfast, and the view from her balcony at night. They couldn’t really talk at the studio, it was always far too cramped, and honestly Camille was just eager to catch anything. The producer had no qualms explaining Marinette just how much she had ruined her life.

Just one kiss, Camille had said. It was all she asked for. Marinette had politely declined.

At least she had privacy in her hotel room. After the challenge had been over they’d been carted off to the hotel, and with Camille hovering everywhere. Adrien and Marinette kept their goodbyes short and sweet, adding onto Camille’s frustration. As soon as Marinette was safely hidden away in her ride back to the hotel, she started texting. Their conversation was light and fun, mostly focusing on random details of their day. It wasn’t much, but it made her smile.

Like today, Marinette reached for her phone the moment the car started moving, already finding a couple of replies. Apparently Adrien had bought cheese today, Plagg being extremely specific with his demands. Marinette scrolled through them, until she finally reached the last one, sent little less than an hour ago.

[A - Are you back at the hotel?]

[M - just getting in. in the lobby]
Marinette held her phone to her chest while in the elevator, feeling the buzzing against her sternum and smiling. Once she was safe in her room, and Matilda had taken over the bathroom, Marinette finally checked the text.

[A - I’m going for a stroll. I’ll talk to you later?]

A stroll. That was Adrien’s way of telling her that he was about to head out for a night patrol, and Marinette couldn’t help but be slightly jealous. But unfortunately, she was well aware that even trying to leave was a risky move, especially with production being so desperate to get a shot of them. For tonight, Marinette would have to just settle with sitting down on the room’s balcony and relaxing. Marinette took her usual shower, allowing Tikki free reign inside the bathroom as they quietly chatted about their day. But even the kwami noticed that Marinette kept on checking her cellphone and wasn’t afraid to playfully tease her. It hadn’t buzzed even once, so obviously he was still patrolling.

Marinette couldn’t wait until she was home. Without the cameras, it would be so much easier for her to sneak in and out of her house. But she needed to get through this challenge, and after everything that had happened, Marinette wanted to go home a winner.

And to do that, Marinette should probably be well rested. Which meant that she needed to go to sleep now. Marinette crawled back into bed, typing up a small goodnight before finally dozing off to sleep.

The next morning started as it usually did, with the group ordering some room service, with copious amounts of coffee and some pastries and croissants to nibble on as they had breakfast.

The new addition was Marinette texting. It didn’t go unnoticed.

“Marinette, I swear to God.” Raoul glared at her phone, which was still firmly attached to her hand as she carried on with the good morning texts.

The younger designer had the good grace to look guilty, before tapping quickly on the screen, sending the message and throwing the cellphone back inside her purse. “Sorry!”

“No, you’re not.” Raoul snickered, shaking his head as he drank some coffee. Curiosity won in the end, and he nodded at the bag, now closed. “How’s that been working out for you?”

“Nuh uh.” Marinette took an oversized bite out of a croissant, her hand brushing off some stray crumbs off of her blue t-shirt. “You don’t get to ask questions now!”

“I do get to tell you to knock it off because it’s rude. Text lover boy later.”

She turned a narrowed eye glare at Raoul, but finally relented. Marinette was well aware that it was rude, but well... the whole texting Adrien thing was still very new and exciting. The buzzing of the notification was enough to make her heart skip a beat... “It’s been fun.” Her smile was hesitant, trying to play down the whole thing. “It’s nice to talk to him when we’re not at a fitting.”

“And without cameras.”

“Especially with no cameras around.”

He snorted, shaking his head as he sipped on some coffee, “I can’t believe you guys didn’t have each other’s number before today.”

Marinette made a sound that was between a squeak and a gasp. “Well!” she started, her voice higher than usual, “I’ve changed mine... he’s changed his!” There was no point adding that she did have his
phone number when they were younger, her crazy collège shenanigans were not something she was entirely proud of. “Also, you know Camille would love it and then it would be a thiiing, and they could edit it and—” Marinette shook her head, clearly dismissing the whole idea, “it’s just better like this.”

“If you say so.” He told her, before they were called downstairs. Time to get to the studio. Last challenge started now.

“Alright everyone!” Camille stepped in front of the group, as they waited for the last intro to be filmed. “Last challenge, so let’s make this a good one!” She directed people, making sure that everyone was in place. “We’re good to go!” She scurried away, and soon enough they were filming.

“Designers!” Heloise entered the room, wearing all black and a rather interesting accessory. Cat ears. “Welcome to our last challenge! Are you excited?”

Actually she was very excited, but more than anything Marinette was intent on going back home a winner.

Heloise continued, “As you all know, Paris is famous for a lot of things. But today’s inspiration will be Paris’ own superhero couple, Ladybug and Chat Noir!”

Oh no. No no no no no. Not a Ladybug and Chat Noir challenge. Marinette forced herself not to react, because… Couple? Not really! Or… not yet? She tried to look as casual as possible while freaking out a little on the inside.

“Ladybug and Chat Noir kept Paris safe during the terrifying attacks on the city by Papillion and his akuma, and they keep watching over the city today!”

Oh Hell no. Despite how surprised she was once Heloise announced the challenge (which honestly, she shouldn’t have been, Chat had told her that someone from the studio had approached him about the two of them appearing as the guest judges. She’d just thought the idea had been scrapped), Marinette kept a cool exterior; which was a good idea since Heloise addressed her directly and a good number of cameras were fixed on her. “Well, Marinette, as our resident Parisian, I’m sure you have a lot of stories about the famous duo!”

Oh shit. “Oh, they’re really cool, and my friends and I loved seeing them help out in the city.” Wow, that had to be the most generic answer she could have given. Usually Marinette had a speech prepared for the rare occasions someone asked about Ladybug and Chat Noir. With Alya as a best friend, it didn’t take much prompting for the budding journalist to start gushing about the heroes. It saved her around ninety percent of the time. Today she’d been caught off guard.

Thankfully, Heloise had moved on. “Your challenge will be to create a look inspired by the famous Parisian heroes! We want you to create something cool, sexy and powerful. You will have one day to finish this. So, unless you have questions, you’ll have thirty minutes to come up with a design, and then you’ll go shopping with Tim.”

The lights switched to their normal intensity and Heloise left, which meant that Camille took over. “Alright everyone!” The blue haired woman spoke up, motioning at the group to follow her. “Thirty minutes until you leave. To the work room!”

This was where things got complicated. Now, one would think that Marinette had a lot of luck on her side to make something absolutely amazing, especially since she would be dressing Chat Noir himself. But that didn’t make it easier. It was overall a weird feeling, to tell the truth. Drawing
something based on her or her partner felt… almost arrogant.

She frowned at the poorly made doodle on her sketchpad, rubbing her face as she tried to come up with something. “Ugh,” she groaned, tapping the pencil against her chin. She was a professional! She could do this!

“Everyone to the cars!” Camille said, peeking through the work room’s opened door. “Time to go shopping!”

“Come on little lady!” Raoul pulled Marinette along, looking curiously at the dejected expression on her face. “What’s wrong?”

“I’m not sure about the design,” Marinette answered, her shoulder’s slumping as she closed the notebook, making sure to leave a bookmark in place.

“And here I thought you’d jump at the chance to dress your boy in leather- Ow!” Raoul said, before rubbing his arm after the well placed punch Marinette threw at him.

Raoul wasn’t wrong but that wasn’t the point here. “Ass,” she laughed, as they made their way to the car.

Tim met them at the store, and as usual, gave them the instructions. “You will have thirty minutes to shop and your budget is two hundred euros. This is the last challenge, designers! Make good use of your budget and make a strong impression on the judges! Time starts… now!”

And they were off, running through the aisles as they tried to pick the best fabrics for their designs. Marinette had decided on a general idea, but she was having a bit of trouble with the colors. Should she go the Ladybug or Chat Noir route? She could make the design work, with just some minor adjustments to make it fit each theme, but that was a decision she needed to make now.

And that was how Marinette came to a standstill in front two swatches of leather, one red and one black.

“Eight minutes left!” Tim called out from somewhere near and Marinette started panicking. She needed to make a decision now, and she mentally tossed a coin, picking a color scheme and just going for it.

“Give me four yards of this one,” she finally told the attendant, waiting for them to cut it before running off to pick up the rest of the supplies.

The jacket was looking great, if she did say so herself. And there was a small part of her that didn’t want to see how Adrien looked wearing it. But until they got to the fitting, Marinette decided to focus on the rest of the outfit. She had to cut and sew a pair of pants, a dress shirt and a tie. And see what she’d do about accessories. Cat ears? A yoyo?

So many things she needed to decide.

A couple hours later, Marinette had at least a semblance of an outfit to show, and as expected, Tim Gunn made his appearance. “Designers!” he greeted them, taking a look around the room, where everyone was hard at work. ”How’s everyone doing today?”

Whenever Tim entered the room, a couple extra camera operators came in too to catch everything from a variety of angles. By this point Marinette was used to them, but she would never lower her guard. She knew that they loved getting her reaction (damn her expressive face), and she knew she
couldn’t make it easy on them. Marinette already knew that they got enough footage when she interacted with Adrien.

Damn, damn her expressive face. She needed to get that under control!

Tim was making his rounds and giving out the advice as he saw fit. With just four people left, the mentor could easily take his time with each contestant. Marinette had a good amount of time to work until it was her turn.

“Marinette, let’s see what you’ve been up to.”

The young designer smiled, and quickly set about to show what she had made. “Well, my goal is to mix aspects of both heroes into an outfit.” She showed the jacket. “It will have some detailing here, and here,” she motioned at the jacket, touching the spots where she was going to add some more details. “And these will be the pants.”

“You’re making a tie?”

“Mhmm.” Marinette nodded, picking up the scraps of fabric that were going to become the tie. “And I want to see if I can make some accessories that fit with the theme, but my priority is getting the outfit done.”

“I see,” Tim nodded, looking thoughtfully at the design. “I think you should definitely work on integrating those aspects into the final outfit; so that you can really tie in the theme properly.”

“Like on the sleeves?”

“Exactly.” Tim clasped his hands together, “Overall, I like what I see. Make it work!”

With that Tim turned around and walked over to the next table to give his last bit of advice to Matilda.

There was a lot of work to be done. Marinette began cutting out some leather, trying to make some cuffs that would suit the outfit. “Hmm,” Marinette hummed as she eyed some scraps. Perhaps, she could do something with those little bits.

“All right designers!” Tim spoke up. “I am very excited about what I’ve seen so far! Remember, your models will arrive at five and you can work until eleven.” That left three hours until models arrived and nine hours to finish as much as they could. “I will see you tomorrow!” With that, he said his goodbyes and exited the room, leaving them to work at their own pace.

Around thirty minutes later, they were interrupted again. “Marinette?” Camille peeked inside the room. “Interview time!”

The young designer glanced between her work in progress and the door, and carefully placed the scissors back on the table. It wasn’t that these interviews took a lot of time, but they certainly disrupted her work flow. “Coming!” Marinette announced, as she stood up from the table.

[M: you’ll never guess what today’s challenge is]

Marinette texted as they walked towards the interview room, before slipping the phone back into her pocket. As usual, once they got to the interview room and Marinette made herself comfortable as the crew fussed with everything like they usually did. Soon after, the camera was on and Camille began prompting her.
“So what do you think about the challenge?”

Now that she’d thought about it, Marinette was feeling a little more at ease with the idea of the challenge. After all, she’d made a Ladybug hoodie for Alya when they were younger (and the matching Chat Noir for Nino). This was almost exactly like that, if she chose to ignore the fact that she was dressing up Chat Noir himself. So she smiled. “I’m really excited about my design.” And she really was. It wasn’t as grandiose as some of her other creations, of course. Their suits (and especially Chat’s) were much more complex and it would be extremely difficult to translate that into an outfit that was even remotely wearable. The line between costume and couture was extremely thin.

“How do you feel about this being the last challenge?”

This she could easily answer. “It’s going to be weird to go back home after spending so much time here.” A wistful little smile appeared on her face. “But I’m really looking forward to seeing my family.”

“Today there’s one more elimination, how do you think are your chances?”

“I think I’m good.” Marinette looked confidently at the screen. “Everyone here is very talented, but I think I’m really good enough to go to fashion week.”

Camille nodded and looked down at her notes. “Anything you’ll miss from staying here?”

“It will be very weird to go back home to work in silence. I’m getting used to everyone joking around. But I’m really glad that I got this whole experience.”

“That’s good,” Camille said, clasping her hands together as the red light on the camera went off. “We’re done for today.”

“Oh, great!” Marinette stood up from the chair. “I’ll be heading back then!”

[A- What is it?]

[M- youll seeee~]

[A- That’s just mean]

Marinette grinned at her phone and pushed it into her pocket before entering the work room.

By the time the models arrived, Marinette had already finished most of the jacket (save from the small details she wanted to add). The pants were halfway sewn, but by this point Marinette had so much experience with making pants for Adrien that it really wasn’t her biggest concern.

Marinette had finished attaching a pair of cat ears to a headband, as she tried to play around with the idea of accessories she could attach to the outfit. And yes, the ears seemed kind of cheesy, but knowing her partner’s theatrical personality, cheesy wasn’t necessarily out of character.

But then Adrien arrived, and she left the cat ears back on her table. There were more pressing matters to deal with right now. They only had a limited amount of time to get all the fitting done, so it really wasn’t in her best interests to flirt the whole time away. As fun as it could be.

“Hey!” Adrien smiled brightly at her as he greeted her, and Marinette responded in kind. “I’ve been waiting for hours, what’s the challenge about?” He quickly looked at her table, trying to find the clues.
She decided to spare him the guessing game. “Today’s challenge is about Ladybug and Chat Noir!” she announced and laughed, gathering the clothing she wanted him to try on. “Fun!”

“Oh, really?” he asked, taking the clothing from her hands as he began slipping the jacket on. “And what was yo- ooooh.” Adrien was quickly distracted from whatever he was going to say the minute he spotted the cat ears.

“I was trying to make some props,” Marinette explained, watching as Adrien picked them up and examined them.

“Mhmm…” he hummed, leaning against her table as he put the ears on, flashing her the cheekiest grin he could muster. “How do they look?” he asked, one eyebrow higher than the other. The tilt of his lips was just so…feline that Marinette could almost imagine the black mask.

Marinette pushed at his chest, grinning as she replied, “Extremely dorky.”

He laughed, despite his obvious attempt to fake a hurt expression. “You wound me.” Nonetheless, he removed and examined them for a second before placing them on top of Marinette’s head. “Hmm…” he hummed appreciatively, green eyes focused solely on her and Marinette found the attention made her a bit…jittery. “This works too.”

But there was no time for that, and since he was still looking at her, Marinette tried to be intimidating. She looked up at him, both hands placed on her hips, and the ridiculous cat ears perched atop her head. “Really?”

“They look good on you!” he insisted, flicking one of the ears.

Marinette swatted at his hand, which only made him laugh, “We should get back to business,” Marinette nodded towards the outfit. After all, they did only had a small amount of time to get fittings done and there was still a lot to be done.

Adrien nodded and quickly slipped on the jacket, feeling rather pleased that she still hadn’t taken the ears off. “How long will you guys work tonight?”

“Um… eleven.” Marinette glanced up at him as she marked some spots with white chalk. She’d make sure to put on some accents there. “So I’m not too worried, we still have a lot of time left to work today. How’s school?”

“Winding down, which is good. But we still have final exams soon, so I’m already studying.”

“Such a good student,” she joked, before taking a step back to see how the jacket looked. “I think I know what this needs,” she muttered, mostly to herself than to anyone else. By now Adrien was getting used to her design ramblings and just let her talk to herself uninterrupted.

She turned back to him. “Hold on a second, I need to get some paper and I’ll be back.” With that, Marinette hurried towards the shelf where the paper used to make patterns was kept and pulled out a few sheets. She needed to make some cuffs. Like the ones Chat had but toned down.

But of course, she slipped on a piece of fabric, some discarded slip of cotton which made her slide on the tiled floor after stepping on it. The paper flew away immediately, her arms flailing around as she braced herself for impact.

But the floor never came. Instead, she felt two strong and very toned arms wrap around her waist as they caught her. It didn’t take a lot of guessing for Marinette to figure out what had happened. Marinette was very familiar with the fake leather jacket her hands were leaning against, since
she’d made that jacket. Said jacket was currently covering a very warm and toned chest and Marinette suddenly wanted to die.

She wasn’t so familiar with the neck her face was hiding against, but she would be willing to work on acquainting herself with it, should she get the chance. Uh, not now, Marinette. Not. Now.

“You okay? Nothing broken?”

“Nope, fine,” she squeaked as she regained her footing. Because despite how decidedly nice this was (she hadn’t been this close to him since… how long ago was their talk and hug in the hallway?) now was not the time. “…thanks.” His arms loosened their grip and Marinette was all too aware of his hands at her waist, and how warm his hands felt even through the material of her t-shirt.

A muffled giggle called her attention and it was then that she realized that people were staring, Raoul and his model, Noelle, looking undoubtedly amused as they tried to stifle their snickering. Even Leo had spared a glance at the group. He looked thoroughly unamused.

There was an audience. As usual. Shit.

Fully aware that her face was alarmingly red, Marinette did her best to play the whole thing off. “We should probably finish the fitting…” she told him, before she realized something important. Hands still on his chest Marinette. Her hands retreated, falling at her sides as if burned. “Can you roll your shoulders?” she asked him, nodding along when he followed her instructions. The good part was that the jacket worked fine. There were no major alterations that needed to be done, which meant that Marinette was running ahead of schedule.

It was a lovely feeling.

“Jacket done!” Marinette announced, and Adrien took it off carefully, making sure not to disrupt the adjustments she had done, before carefully placing it back on the table.

“It looks good,” Adrien told her, curiously inching towards her to peek over her shoulder at the design on her sketchbook.

“Don’t snoop!” Marinette laughed, swatting back at him. “And no doodling either!” She poked his arm lightly, before turning her back on him as she arranged the clothing on top of her table.

So what could Adrien do after those sterns instructions? Of course he doodled. A goofy smile appeared on the blonde’s face as he lifted the page and did a small silly doodle of a cat.

Soon they had used all the time they had allotted for the fittings, and Adrien had to take his leave. “I’ll see you tomorrow!” Adrien winked and left with the rest of the models.

Once he was gone Marinette flipped the sketchbook fully knowing that she was going to find something, but smiling at the doodle nonetheless. Using her phone, she took a picture and quickly typed a message.

[M - What is the meaning of this?]

[A - Art.]

Marinette laughed and put her phone back in her bag. She needed to focus on her design and if she started texting, she’d spend the rest of the afternoon checking her phone for replies.
There was a brief moment of silence as everyone started adjusting the clothing after the fittings.

“That was…” Raoul started, brown eyes glinting with mirth as he looked at his friend.

“Don’t say it,” Marinette interrupted him, not even lifting her eyes from the fabric she was looking at. “…Adorable.”

“I will end you, I swear.”

Lucky for Raoul, the whole cast survived the afternoon. But by the time eleven rolled around they were dead on their feet and very ready to go back to the hotel.

“I just want to crash,” Raoul complained, as the four remaining members of the cast. “Just drop on my bed and sleep until new year’s.”

Leo, who was currently Raoul’s roommate, sighed loudly, but declined to participate in the conversation.

“Dibs on the shower,” Matilda said and Marinette frowned at her. “You take forever,” the other designer argued, “I’ll be out in a few minutes, I really just wanna go to bed.”

Marinette had to agree. She did take forever in the bathroom, partly to make sure that Tikki got enough time on her own, and because the hot water felt amazing against her tired muscles. “Fiiiine,” she conceded, “I’ll order some room service meanwhile?”

“Yesss,” Matilda said, “I could kill for a veggie burger.”

“Done,” Marinette nodded and they quickly said their goodbyes to Raoul (and technically Leo) and found their room.

“Do you want the wedge potatoes too?” Marinette asked, looking at the menu as she picked her own meal.

“No potatoes, and just some water please,” Matilda said as she gathered her clothes to change into in the bathroom. “I don’t want a sugary drink keeping me awake.”

“Got it!” With that the door was closed and Marinette quickly dialed the number to order their dinners. A simple sandwich for her, nothing fancy. She just wanted to sleep. But since Matilda was still in the bathroom, Marinette took the opportunity to text Adrien again.

[M - finally back at the hotel. Im tiiiireeeeed]  
[A - Sorry to hear that. I just finished studying.]  
[M - How was that]  
[A - It was good. I’m going to be leaving for a stroll soon though.]  

The bathroom door opened and Matilda emerged, looking relaxed and ready for bed. “All yours!” The designer was towel drying her hair as she settled on top of her bed, quickly checking her phone for messages.

“Oh good!” Marinette said, “Food’s ordered, should be here in fifteen minutes.” She gathered her things and headed towards the bathroom. Once the door closed, Tikki immediately flew out of the bag, stretching her tiny limbs as she floated around.
[M - lucky! I'm taking a shower in a bit. And dinner after.]

[A - Yes please eat, I'm almost sure you survive off of cereal bars and coffee]

[M - I can't confirm nor deny that]

Once her shower was done, Marinette took her time drying her hair. He was going on patrol, which meant Adrien would leave his civilian phone at home. But her dinner was waiting when she left the bathroom, so Marinette quickly snapped a picture and sent it to him. It was proof that she did eat more than cereal bars.

There was a small table and chairs outside on the small balcony in which Marinette made herself comfortable, taking her sandwich with her. Tikki was hiding in the pocket of her oversized hoodie and Marinette snuck some cookies into it for the small kwami to eat. Marinette did love having her kwami close like this even if they didn’t get to talk much these days. The small creature was one of her best friends (despite the fact that she wouldn’t say anything about what happened when she stayed with Adrien).

One look at her phone told her that her last message was still unread. Oh God, I’m pathetic. Marinette shook her head, taking small bites as she looked out over the rooftops. The hotel wasn’t that high, not compared to skyscrapers in other cities, but the view was lovely. The breeze outside was just cool enough and it felt comfortable against her still damp hair.

She had just started to wonder where he was when she caught sight of him. The fast shadow running on top of the roofs was enough explanation as to why he hadn’t replied. Instead, Marinette activated the camera on her phone and snapped a picture before he disappeared. It was blurry and while her phone was not good enough to capture anything newspaper worthy, but they could both tell who it was.

[M - Look what I saw tonight]

Marinette hit send and watched the message go through, giggling to herself. She put the last bite of sandwich in her mouth and headed back inside to run a brush through her hair, lest it was a tangled mess next morning. Her roommate was already cozy and trying to sleep, and she realized that she should do the same. Marinette reached for the phone again and typed…

[M - Off to bed, goodnight!]

Marinette connected her phone into the charger and snuggled under her comforter. It was far too late. She should at least try to sleep.

Her phone rattled noisily against the surface of the bedside table as a bunch of new texts arrived. Matilda groaned and Marinette quickly snatched it from the bedside table.

[A - What? When?]

[A - I didn’t see you]

[A - Did you take that tonight?]

[A - Sorry. Did I wake you? Never mind! Ignore this! ]

Marinette giggled, earning a loud shush from the bed next to hers, and she quickly answered the text.

[M - Already awake. No worries]
[A - You’re sure? It is kind of late]

[M - I am! I just got in bed]

[A - Go to sleep!]

Marinette giggled again, her fingers tapping against the screen quickly as she replied.

[M - You texted me!]

“Go outside!” Matilda groaned, throwing a pillow at Marinette before turning her back and making a show of getting comfortable. “I’m tireeed…”

“Sorry!” Marinette whispered, still suppressing her giggles as she headed back to the balcony, dragging a comforter out with her.

[M - matilda yelled at me, i hope youre proud]

[A - Why? What Happened?]

[M - we woke her up]

[A - Oh.]

Marinette grinned at the screen, before snapping a picture of the outside with the little balcony table before adding it to the message.

[M - I was sent out into the cold, and it’s your fault.]

The message said it had been read, but there was no answer. She frowned at the screen, suddenly wondering if her message could be taken the wrong way. Marinette started typing up a new message, biting her lower lip as she considered sending it. “No,” she muttered, deleting it and changing it up before hitting send again.

[M - kidding, btw]

The tiny notification under that one said sent. After a few minutes Marinette figured that Adrien had probably fallen asleep, and resigned herself to doing the same. With one hand holding onto the comforter and one clinging to her phone, she stood up to head back inside.

But then her phone buzzed, and Marinette held it up to read the new message. The light illuminated her eager face.

[A - Look up]

She did as asked, confused as to what she was looking for in the darkness until she saw it. On the roof of the building in front of the hotel, there was a small light waving at her. A screen.

“You did not…” she muttered, sitting back down and grabbing at her cellphone screen, where a cat emoji was clearly winking at her. Sleep forgotten, she typed quickly, unable to stop the smile that appeared on her face.

[M - omg I cant believe you’re doing this!]

He wasn’t close enough for Marinette to really see his face, but she could see him, sitting on top of the roof, tapping away at an actual cell phone. The dorky cat had dragged out his own cellphone to
text her. Honestly, this was insane.

[A - I already woke you both up, might as well chat]

[A - Pun most definitely intended.]

Marinette looked at the text with a raised eyebrow, before shaking her face and laughing.

[M - that was really bad]

[A - You laughed. I saw you]

[M - I did not laugh and you did not see me!!]

Still, Marinette stuck out her tongue, warily looking at the silhouetted rooftop as she waited for an answer.

[A - Saw that too. Night vision, remember?]

Marinette gaped at the phone screen, before typing out her reply as fast as she could.

[M - You are terrible. nd i cant believe you did this]

[A - Honestly… This is as far as I planned]

[M - omg. How was your stroll tonight]

The little animation on her screen said that he was still typing and Marinette looked up, spotting him leaning against a small chimney as he tapped away on his phone. He was mostly hidden from sight, thanks to the black suit, but Marinette could see his shape outlined against the chimney, and his masked face lit up by the cellphone screen.

Everything still felt very surreal.

Adrien Agreste was the face behind Chat Noir’s mask. To say that Marinette had not taken the news well was a bit of an understatement. She’d gone absolutely insane and had almost gotten herself eliminated.

To be honest, for someone who was a superhero, Marinette certainly needed help with handling big emotions.

A small, rational part of her brain thought that the fact that Adrien was Chat Noir should have helped her get a hold of the bubbling feelings that threatened to take over every time they talked. Because logically, matching his face to the one person she had already decided would be just a friend should have helped her rein in her traitorous heart. But in the end, knowing it had made the feelings even stronger. Marinette felt like an idiot, having denied him for so long… having kept herself from this for so long and now- Well, now she was looking across the street as he texted her, in what was probably the world’s dumbest date.

At least, Marinette hoped this was a date. No, strike that. She would definitely prefer her first date with Adrien to be with a little less distance between them.

Her phone kept on buzzing, and Marinette smiled as she read Adrien’s excited (and perfectly written) texts.
She was at least ninety percent sure that Adrien reciprocated her feelings, even if it was just a little. The texting was nice, but this? This was a Grand Gesture™, right? Like what they did in the movies, right before the ending. If that was the case, then either she’d go to him or he’d cross over to their balcony for a heartfelt confession and a steamy kiss. Hmmm… that would be nice.

But there was still the whole issue of Matilda sleeping inside the room, and the risk of getting photographed. Also, she wasn’t sure she was brave enough to actually invite him in just yet, so that was another roadblock.

[A - Hello? Still awake?]

[M - Yeah, sorry… i spaced out.]

[A - Thinking of me? ;)]

Yes. But she wasn’t about to write that into a text. Instead, she typed up a reply that was just as saccharine before she paused, and deleted it right away. It took her about three tries before she was satisfied with the reply. Marinette used deflection!

[M - Hey! You’re the one who came to visit!]

[A - Hey, I’ve always wanted to know who you were]

The phone fell with a clatter onto the table as Marinette covered her face with her hands. A high pitched squeak left her lips as she felt her face grow almost uncomfortably hot. God damn it Adrien!

Marinette could almost see the pleased smirk on his face. In the end, she couldn’t think of anything to say, so she chose to change the topic and hope that Adrien wouldn’t say anything about it.

[M - This is nice]

[M - minus the fact we’re texting]

[A - I could visit.]

Marinette’s breath hitched the second she read the message. Oh, she wanted to, she really did. But Marinette was also aware of all the reasons that made this a bad idea.

[M - matilda would wonder why Chat Noir is visiting me]

[A - True.]

Marinette stood up, walking towards the railing and leaning against it, the comforter still draped over her shoulders as she looked at him. From her spot she could see him moving, shifting from his previous position to face her balcony. She could only imagine how curious he was about what she was doing. Marinette held her phone tightly in her hands and smiled when it buzzed.

[A - What?]

How had this even happened? She ended up not just crushing on Adrien once more, but falling for him again. She had completely, entirely without a doubt, fallen for him. She pondered how to answer, but she decided to keep it casual for now. Because it would be her luck that her grand epiphany would happen when they couldn’t really do much about it, or when she was going to be too busy to actually enjoy the culmination of a decade worth of pining.
The message she started to write took a lot of time, mostly because she wrote and deleted it at least five times, and she just knew that Adrien was watching the screen eagerly. Finally, she sent it.

[M - I’m glad it was you.]

The response didn’t take long.

[A - I’m glad it was you too]

Marinette looked at the screen, smile stretched over her face and a lazy warmth in her chest. A breeze snuck under her protective comforter and she shuddered, clutching the comforter closer to her body.

[A - I should probably let you go back to sleep. What time does filming start tomorrow?]

Despite the fact that she knew he was right and it was already past two in the morning… she didn’t want to go to bed just yet.

[M - We start at 9. I guess you should probably go home too]

[A - Get your sleep bugaboo, I’ll see you tomorrow.]

[M - yeah. goodnight adrien.]

[M - text me when you get home?]

[A - Will do ;)]

Marinette waited until Chat Noir stood up and vaulted off to the next building and out of sight before finally walking back into the room. Matilda’s breathing was soft and even, a sign that the other designer was fast asleep, and Marinette quietly crawled back into bed.

She peeked into her bag, and Tikki was peacefully sleeping as well. Marinette smiled and petted the top of her kwami’s head, before covering her up. Her eyelids felt heavy now that she was comfortably settled into her bed, but she refused to fall asleep until she had confirmation that Adrien had gotten back home okay. Thankfully, her phone buzzed a couple of minutes later and Marinette quickly checked the message, even if she did know what it was.

[A - Safe and sound at home.]

Marinette smiled, still holding the phone and sending a ladybug emoji as answer, before she finally dozed off to sleep.

There was a predictable downside to staying up late. Marinette was exhausted when she woke up. Five hours of sleep was certainly not enough, but it was what she was going to have to deal with today. After all, it was her own damned fault. Maybe just a little bit Adrien’s fault.

Just in case, Marinette made sure to grab all the energy drinks the room’s refrigerator. She was probably going to need them today.

She opened the first one before even bothering to drink coffee, gulping it down as she chose her outfit for the day. Since they were going to be on the runway, she decided on a cute little dress.

She also tried to do a little makeup, but that was a battle that she wasn’t qualified enough to win. Maybe she’d have time to ask for help once at the studio. And maybe she didn’t look as tired as she
felt!

That dream lasted all of two seconds after Marinette stepped out into the hallway. “Well, you look like shit,” Raoul stated, as the group made their way downstairs to the lobby. She made a face at him.

“I didn’t sleep much last night.”

“Damn.” Raoul’s eyebrow rose. “What kept you up?”

Well, this was kind of awkward to explain. “I was on the phone?” she finally said, hoping that he wouldn’t make her explain any further.

Raoul rolled his eyes. “I swear, if tonight wasn’t the last day we spend here, I would confiscate your phone.” She held her bag to her chest protectively and stuck her tongue out at him, making him laugh.

It turned out that the energy drink provided just enough of an energy bump for Marinette to get back in gear. Because once she started stitching, the young designer found that she was in the zone.

Perhaps the ungodly amount of caffeine and sugar coursing through her system made her a little twitchy, but at least she was awake and working.

The group worked through the morning easily, with enough time for Marinette to run to catering and grab some snacks to eat during small breaks. Marinette was knowledgeable enough to be aware that tiredness and low blood sugar was rarely a good idea. And mixed with sewing machines and sharp scissors was definitely a thing she wanted to avoid… for a second time.

It was somewhere around noon when Tim appeared through the front door. “Designers!” The mentor announced, and everyone looked up. “Your models will arrive in one hour. You will have thirty minutes for a fitting and then one hour and a half to get them to hair and makeup.” The speech wasn’t new, but Marinette paid attention nonetheless. “This is the last show people! I will come get you when it’s time for the runway show! Make it work!”

Looking at her table, Marinette was… proud. The jacket was done, zippers properly attached and the decorative studs already in place. The pants were sewn and hemmed, and she just needed to iron them once she was one hundred percent sure they were the right hem. She just needed to do some last-minute stitching and attach the buttons on the dress shirt. Could it be that for once, she was… nearly done? Before Tim started yelling for them?

This was an actual miracle.

One hour later the models came in, right as Marinette was attaching the last couple of buttons. Adrien arrived at her station and Marinette laid the shirt carefully on top of the table in order to greet him.

“Hey!” Adrien smiled at her, sneaking a small bag into her hand. “I thought I’d bring you coffee, but I settled for this,” he said as she pulled out the macaroon.

“Oooh.” Marinette took the offered treat and took a bite, intending to finish it before she actually started with the fitting. It wouldn’t be good to get crumbs or worse, filling on the fabric.

He looked pleased at her reaction and Marinette couldn’t help but wonder if he actually tried being this adorable or if it came naturally. “I figured, I kept you up late, this is my peace offering.”

She was about to tell him that she didn’t mind when Raoul interrupted. “You what?”
Marinette glared at Raoul, who simply grinned as he turned to Noelle, making sure her outfit fit correctly. Marinette shook her head as she turned to Adrien, who was somehow battling the amusement himself. Honestly, did Raoul have a sixth sense? A strange ability to catch anything that was said that could be taken the wrong way? It’s like he was telepathic… or a Jedi or something.

“Don’t laugh!” Marinette told Adrien, poking him lightly right in the middle of his chest. “You’ll encourage him.”

“Sorry.”

The pants fit great and the hem was close enough for her to be satisfied. Marinette would just need to iron them, but there was still plenty of time. “I think we’re done here,” she told him, and Adrien quickly began changing back into his regular clothing. Once he was dressed, Marinette asked, “Styling?”

He nodded, used to the routine by now. “Let’s go.”

The distance between the work room and the styling room wasn’t far, but it gave them a little time to talk without cameras around. Usually.

“Are you going home tonight or tomorrow?”

“Tonight,” Marinette answered. “I want to sleep in my bed.” And let Tikki fly free as much as she wanted. Marinette was going to put plants all over her room for Tikki to dig in. Free reign. After everything Tikki had to put up with, she deserved it. “And I miss my parents.” Despite all the comforts found at the hotel, nothing compared to the warmth of her family home.

They had already made it to the stylist room, and the first thing that Marinette noticed, was a very, very familiar face. “No way!” A lot of black and purple hair, and a whole sleeve of tattoos that Marinette hadn’t seen before but that suited their former classmate perfectly.

It was Adrien who greeted her first. “Juleka?” The model grinned and offered her a hug, which she accepted.

“Adrien? Hi!” Juleka didn’t seem shocked at seeing Marinette, but Adrien was definitely a surprise.

Marinette joined them, her smile bright as she too hugged the purple haired girl. “I can’t believe it’s you! What are you doing here?”

Marinette hadn’t seen Juleka since they graduated from lycée. The current make-up artist had ditched her long hair, now she had messy layered bob that barely went past her jawline. The purple was still there and taking over most of her hair. She wore her usual style, preferring mostly black, though now she clearly wore a sleeveless blouse to show off a full arm of intricate tattoos.

“I just got back to Paris a couple days ago!” Juleka explained, smiling at the duo. “And I knew someone who worked here who had to leave for a while and they recommended me, so… here I am!” She turned to Adrien and patted the back of the chair. “Come on, Agreste, sit down. Catch me up! What did I miss?”

Where could they possibly start, summing up four years in a matter of minutes? “Um, Nino and Alya are engaged and they live together.”

“Ooh yeah,” Juleka said, tapping some foundation on the back of her hand before getting her brushes out. “I saw they changed their statuses on Facebook.” Juleka looked at Marinette while Adrien had his hair brushed by the stylist, pointing at her and considering. “I knew you were competing. I didn’t
know you were her model.” She turned to Adrien and raised an eyebrow.

“Oh yeah, we were paired together early on. We didn’t even know the other was going to be on the show.”

“Oh,” Juleka said, as she resumed comparing make up to Adrien to get the right tone. “That’s actually pretty lucky.”

Marinette squirmed, knowing what Juleka was probably dying to say. Thankfully, Juleka was also aware that discussing whatever was going on here with a camera on them was not ideal.

“Apparently there’s a group from Francoise Dupont that gathers to watch the show,” Adrien offered.

“Oh God,” Marinette groaned. “Alya mentioned something, but she didn’t say there was a whol...group.”

“It’s a weekly thing at their place,” Adrien explained. “Everyone we know who’s still in Paris goes if they’re free.”

“You don’t talk to Alya?” Juleka asked.

“About the show I don’t,” Marinette explained. Alya had exactly two concerns regarding Marinette right now. Whether Marinette had won and whether she had finally done the do. Marinette chose not to answer either of those questions, and after a while of thinly veiled attempts at digging for information, the reporter begrudgingly gave up. “She wants a scoop and you know how she is when she gets her mind set on something.”

As they all knew Alya, they didn’t need any further explanation.

“I just didn’t know it was a… a thing,” Marinette’s hand moved futilely in the air while she tried to describe whatever “getting together to watch our best friends compete in a reality tv show” was, watching as Juleka applied foundation on Adrien’s face in precise practiced movements.

“Oh yeah,” Adrien didn’t seem bothered by it at all, “Last I heard; Kim, Alix, Mylène, Ivan and Rose were all there last week.”

Marinette didn’t miss Juleka dropping a brush she was trying to pull out of her bag, the little intake of breathe when Rose was mentioned. She feigned nonchalance, focusing intently on moving the brushes around like she’d dropped the right one back into the bag on purpose and still needed to find it and carefully asked, “Oh. How are they?”

“Kim and Alix train and work out a lot,” Marinette started, thinking up everything she could recount about their friends. “Alix is terrifyingly strong and she’s pretty good in Roller Derby.” Marinette went to a match once. Alix might be small, but she was vicious. And this was coming from someone who actually fought crime regularly.

“Rose goes to my university. Different department though,” Adrien offered and Juleka’s eyes flickered ever so slightly towards the model.

Marinette finally asked it. “You haven’t seen her?” She had been aware that Rose and Juleka were no longer involved, but the soft spoken blonde had never mentioned much about it. They offered their support, of course, but since Rose wasn’t opening up, they decided not to push. With Juleka living so far away, it was easy to forget that it wasn’t only Rose hurting. Juleka had been alone through all of it.
“Haven’t really heard from her since we, you know…” Juleka said, her expression sorrowful, and Marinette regretted asking. “Time zones, you know? California and Paris were just too…”

Marinette nodded, allowing the other girl to simply trail off. After school it had not been easy to stay in touch, even for the small group that remained in Paris. Life made it hard for them to stay close like they’d promised after graduating. University and jobs meant that their schedules just wouldn’t match up as easily as before, and that was without the added complication of having to deal with different time zones.

There was a brief moment of silence, but thankfully Adrien helped. “What did you do in Los Angeles?”

“I worked on television; a couple of movies here and there. I worked with some photographers too… that’s how I ended up getting called.”

“It’s really great to see you,” Marinette added. “And that sleeve is really cool. You’ve wanted something like that since before graduation, right?” Raoul came in with his model, and she hurried past them to get her own styling done.

“Thanks, yeah!” Juleka smiled at the pair, “I designed-”

“Wait,” Raoul interrupted her as he joined their little group, a strange look on his face. “Sorry, that was rude. Hi, I’m Raoul. You went to school with these two?”

“I’m Juleka,” the artist answered, before her expression turned confused at Raoul’s question. “Uh, yeah.” She tilted her head, not really sure where this was going.

The other designer then turned towards Marinette, his expression befuddled as he glanced between the three former classmates. “Was anyone at your school ugly?”

“What?” Marinette narrowed her eyes at him in confusion as Raoul continued his mock complaining.

“I’m just saying.” He held up his hands before motioning at the girls and Adrien in turn. “Hot. Hot. Actual model. Did your school demand headshots with the rest of the paperwork?”

“Oh my God!” Marinette rolled her eyes, but a blush tinged her cheeks at the odd compliment. “Go back to-”

She didn’t get to finish the sentence before Raoul leaned in and said, “Seriously. Your children will be gorgeous.” Thankfully, he kept his voice low enough so that Marinette was the only one who could hear him.

Marinette squeaked, eyes widened before she pushed him away, back towards Noelle, who was giggling at the exchange while the stylist messed with her hair. “Go away!”

Juleka followed Adrien’s gaze, realizing at once just who’s blushing face he was looking at. One dark eyebrow raised, but she tactfully drew his attention away with a low “Is it always like this?”

“Pretty much,” Adrien said, glancing back at Marinette for a second as she flicked Raoul’s earlobe. “You haven’t watched the show?”

“I just got back,” Juleka said, brushing Adrien’s face with a setting powder. “I was jetlagged for a day, then I got a call about the show, and now I’m here!” The makeup artist paused, her expression turning into something more curious. “Did something important happen?” Adrien blushed under her brush and Juleka’s interest was piqued. “I’m totally binging when I get home today.”
“What?” Marinette had joined them again and carefully watched Juleka’s progress in the mirror.

“I haven’t watched the show,” Juleka explained, leaning back to examine with an almost clinical eye the application around Adrien’s eyes.

“Oh.” Marinette blushed, realizing that Juleka would eventually see every awkward edit and flirtatious remark Adrien and her had shared on the show. And she wouldn’t even have the week between each episode to act as a buffer.

Juleka looked between them with a quizzical look, but figured she’d have her questions answered later. “Anything more from makeup, Marinette? Or is this good?”

“Um… I want some red on his eyes. Like this,” Marinette motioned over her own face, signaling what she wanted to try.

“Oh, like a mask?”

Marinette wrinkled her nose, she wanted to hint at that aesthetic, but she didn’t want to risk too much. “Kind of, but not as… big? Just a line.”

“Got it!”

Marinette sat back against the table, and watched in the mirror as Juleka started working. “Are you moving back to the city for good?”

“I think so,” she said, holding an eyeshadow brush in front of the model’s face. He was a little distracted. “Adrien, close your eyes or you’re gunna be in a world of pain.” The model did as instructed, and Juleka started working.

“We should get together when this is over!” Marinette said, eager to welcome Juleka back into Paris. “Are you working fashion week too?”

“Probably, it’s not settled just yet, but they hire a lot of artists to keep up, so… I’m hopeful. Seriously, Adrien. Close them or lose them.”

Marinette smiled, but her smile died on her face when Juleka turned to catch her eye, just one eyebrow raised before her caramel eyes flickered towards Adrien. Well, it clearly hadn’t taken Juleka long to catch on. But then again, her crush had never been too subtle, or so she’d been told.

In a brave, yet obvious attempt to save face, Marinette said, “I… uh, I hope you get to work on Fashion Week. It’ll be great to have you there.”

“Oh, I really want to go. I’ll need to talk with uh… the one with the blue hair?”

“Camille?”

“That’s her name!” Juleka said, “After the show.” The artist took a step back. “I think we’re done. What do you think?”

Marinette looked at Adrien’s reflection, his eyes flicking up to meet hers. “Perfect,” she said, before quickly adding, “The makeup. It’s perfect.” Just so there weren’t any misunderstandings. The look on Adrien’s face told her she had not been successful, at all.

The duo returned to the work room with thirty minutes to spare. “I need to sew in two more buttons!” she told Adrien, before quickly sitting down. “You can put on the pants for now. I’ll have
this finished in a few minutes.”

The rest of the designers were returning to the room, and the formerly quiet environment turned loud as everyone rushed to get their models ready for the runway. The shirt was finished soon and Adrien slipped it on. He looked quite handsome, and she almost said so out loud. The jacket fit him perfectly and there was just enough Chat Noir in the outfit to balance out all the Ladybug red.

“So, Marinette, who is your favorite hero of the duo?” Raoul, in his never-ending quest to make Marinette die of embarrassment, had decided to ask that god forsaken question.

Marinette stiffened, noticing immediately how Adrien had perked up at the question. God damn it, Raoul! “They’re both very important.” It was a non-committal answer, sure, but it was the best she could give right now. “I’m a big fan of both of them.”

“Pffft, that’s not even an answer. I’m thinking you’re more of a Chat Noir kind of girl. Seems like your type.” Raoul’s teasing grin was just waiting for an answer, and Marinette wondered whether anyone would blame her if she threw a shoe at him.

She didn’t even have to look at Adrien to know that he was grinning down at her. Smug bastard. Marinette reached for his jacket and tugged him towards the seat, willfully ignoring the look on his face.

“Come on Mari,” Adrien pressed, barely containing his glee, “which one is your favorite?”

The look on his face was playful and dangerous and Marinette just wanted to wipe it off of his face. The designer narrowed her eyes at him, finding only innocent mirth staring back at her. It was then when a small idea appeared in her head.

“Well, if I have to choose…” Marinette played with the collar of his jacket making sure it was all in place as it should have been, “I’d say Chat Noir.”

“Really?” Adrien asked, almost sounding surprised before he raised an eyebrow at Marinette and tested his luck. “Any particular reason?”

Blue eyes narrowed at sparkling green ones, and Marinette quickly came up with the answer. “Well, you’ve seen Chat Noir… and that suit. Leather leaves nothing to the imagination.” Marinette finished her sentence with a slight and ‘accidental’ trail of her fingernails against the skin of his neck, relishing at his sharp intake of breath and the bob of his adam’s apple as he swallowed. Success.

Meanwhile, Raoul scoffed and laughed. “I’m not sure what just happened,” he told Noelle, who was currently putting on a small necklace, “but I’m pretty sure I don’t want to know.”

“Designers, time to go to the runway!” Tim interrupted and everyone hurried towards the opened door. “Last show! Let’s not make the judges wait!”

“I think we’re ready,” Marinette said, examining Adrien’s outfit one last time.

“We are,” he said, standing up from his seat and allowing Marinette to fuss over his outfit for one last time. “Come on, time for you to get to Fashion Week,”

Marinette exhaled loudly and smoothed the skirt of her dress, trying to ready herself and calm down. This was it. Last elimination before Fashion week. “I’m ready.”
They started walking towards the door, following the group as they got in position. As usual, the models were sent to another part of the show, so Marinette had to say goodbye to Adrien. “Talk to you later?”

“Yeah,” he said, squeezing her hand in his before Marinette was led away from the models’ waiting area and onto the runway room.

Once there, they all took their seats, as the rest of the crew ran around getting everything ready. “So, are you going home? Or are you…” Raoul wagged his eyebrows at Marinette, the implication in his words clear.

“Stop!” Marinette covered her face, glad that the crew didn’t film these brief moments before the runway show. “I’m going to my parents’.”

“Why?”

“Because!” Marinette sputtered, feeling the warmth of what was obviously a blush appear on her face. “I miss my parents.”

“Mhmm.”

“Well,” Marinette hissed, leaning towards her friend as she whispered. “First, he hasn’t asked, and second, I haven’t even kissed him, I’m not going home with him!”

Raoul gave a noncommittal shrug. “That is easily solved but fair enough,” he said, his brown eyes looking as the crew set up the spots for the judges as Camille ordered people around. “But are you lovebirds going to do something during the hiatus?”

Did she want to? Yes. But there were a lot of things that one had to take into consideration. “I don’t know?” Marinette fidgeted in place. “I know it’s going to be absolutely crazy, and I really don’t want to have a moment with him and then have to ignore him for a month because I need to finish the collection.”

“By moment, you mean sleep with him?”

“Yes. No! I don’t know! Shut up!” Marinette hissed, hitting Raoul’s arm as she urged him to be quiet.

“I think you make your life overly complicated, but… I can see your point.” Raoul acknowledged, sighing loudly, an amused expression on his face. “Only you would end up having a relationship crisis during a show like this.”

“Just my luck, I guess,” she muttered.

Marinette was saved from more unwanted relationship advice when Camille’s voice interrupted them. “We’re filming in ten seconds, places everyone!” Once everything was up to her standards, they heard her voice call, “ACTION!”

Heloise walked onto the runway, smiling brightly at the designers as she greeted them. “Designers! Welcome to the Runway show. As you know, in fashion, one day you’re in and the next day… you’re out.” The model struck a pose, looking down at the designers sitting on their usual spot. “As you know, today’s challenge was inspired by Ladybug and Chat Noir, and since it’s the last Challenge before Fashion Week, we expect to be wowed!”

Well, Marinette didn’t doubt that. As the weeks had gone by, the judges had stopped holding back
and the critiques had gotten more vicious. And with Tim Gunn’s save out of the equation now… everyone felt the pressure.

“Let’s say hello to our judges.” This was part of the usual speech, Marinette was used to it by now. “We have the creative director for Mode Magazine, Tatiana Geiger. Next, we have the creative director for S.E.L.F. Fashion and famed designer, Thierry Leclère; and today’s guest judge, the owner and creator of The Daily Ladybuggle, biggest blog dedicated to our heroes, Stéphanie Delcroix!”

The young woman waved at them, and Marinette smiled politely.

Well, Marinette could definitely argue against the title of Biggest Blog, but she figured that they couldn’t really reach out to Alya to be a judge. Her best friend would have no qualms being obviously biased in Marinette’s favor if her twitter feed was anything to go on.

Still, the idea of the show announcing another blog as the most famous Ladybug and Chat Noir blog was definitely going to sting. She could already imagine Alya’s reaction at hearing that, and she could only hope that her best friend didn’t go on an online rant again.

“We also have Tim Gunn, but as you know, since he’s your mentor, he will not be judging you. With all that said, let’s start the show!”

Shows weren’t usually long affairs. After all, it only took around thirty seconds for a model to finish their turn on the runway. But with only four designers left, the shows were even shorter.

First was Raoul. He’d created a black strapless jumpsuit for his model. It was tailored to fit her correctly, but it was overall a simple and straightforward design. There were little details around her waist that tied into the Chat Noir theme that Raoul had obviously been inspired by. She held onto a black, studded clutch purse. Her makeup was simple, smoky eyes and a red lip.

Matilda’s outfit was next. Her model wore a black suit made entirely out of leather. It was entirely too reminiscent of Chat Noir’s outfit, and Marinette thought that if Adrien had ended up wearing that, people would have definitely caught onto his secret identity. The leather jacket was form fitting and the leather pants were tight, and ended in a pair of studded boots. The model was wearing a lot of black eyeshadow on his face, simulating a mask, which then reinforced Marinette’s idea that going with red was a good choice. It was well put-together, but Marinette would have to admit it looked… kind of like a high-end costume. It was probably going to weigh against her when the judges gave out their opinion.

Adrien appeared next. His dress pants were a dark red color, and the dress shirt was a dark grey, almost black. The red tie brought a flash of color against the dress shirt. The jacket was made of black fake leather, and the stitches were done in red thread, mixing up the colors of both heroes into one outfit. Marinette had tried to follow the general direction of Chat’s outfit, adding the amount zippers and pockets that his suit had, but gave it a twist. The cuffs on the jacket looked reminiscent of the cuffs from Chat’s gloves and they were a favorite part of the whole outfit. In the end, instead of giving him an actual yoyo to accessorize, she’d made sure that the belt buckle would look enough like one to fit into the theme. Was it the most creative outfit she’d ever made? No, but it was solidly made; after all, it had been difficult to come up with something that fit the theme without giving too much away. Marinette liked the end result.

And the fact that Chat Noir was the one who was wearing it, well… it helped.

Leo’s model was the last one to appear. Marinette had to admit that he’d chosen the best fabric. The pattern on the dress gave the illusion of polka dots without being too gaudy. The main color was red
and it fit the young model perfectly, accentuating her body without seeming constricting. The sweetheart neckline gave it a hint of coquettish appeal, without pushing too far. It was perfectly constructed too, the best feature, at least to the designers in the room, was that it looked almost seamless, there was no hint of a zipper or where the fabric had been cut. It was accessorized with a large black and red spotted clutch and red shoes. It was a solid outfit and Marinette had to admit, Leo was good.

And just like that, the final runway show was over.

"With only four designers left, we’re going to hear you all and we’ll be examining every outfit,” Heloise said, before she announced. “Bring out the models.”

As usual, they stepped onto the runway and stood by their designer.

“I’m very proud of what you were all able to do here today,” Heloise said. “Every outfit here looks wonderful, and I’m very happy to see you all grow so much.” But after saying that, she turned towards Marinette. “Marinette, what can you tell us about your design?”

To tell the truth, the designer was happy that she got the chance to get this over soon, and stepped a little to the side, allowing Adrien to stand fully beside her. “My idea was combine several aspects of both Ladybug and Chat Noir into a design, rather than favor just one of them; since they’re both very important to our city and they were a very big part of my life while growing up.” They had no idea how much. “The jacket is modelled after Chat Noir’s suit, but with red stitching to add in Ladybug’s color scheme. Which also why the tie has this circular pattern, and the overall color scheme is red and black.”

“I love how the belt buckle looks like a yoyo!” Stéphanie commented, motioning with her card. “Did you do it yourself?”

“Yes, it was a bit difficult, but I’m pleased with the result.”

“It looks great. And that jacket? I would love one just like that.”

“Yes,” Heloise added. “I do think that you succeeded integrating aspects of both heroes into a coherent outfit.”

“I can definitely see something like this being sold for grown up fans of the duo,” Tatiana said. “It’s them, but without being too in your face.”

“Great job Marinette.”

And just like that, her last critique was over. Marinette’s shoulders relaxed as the attention finally moved towards the remaining designers. She had done all she could, and now all there was left to do was wait until the judges announced who would go to Fashion Week.

“You did well.” Adrien’s voice was barely above a whisper, but it made her smile nonetheless.

Since she had a microphone attached to her outfit, Marinette simply nudged his hand with hers. Despite everything, Adrien had made the competition a better experience. She only hoped they’d have more time to talk after everything that had happened.

Heloise broke into her little moment of introspection. “Alright designers, you can leave the runway. We’ll be examining your designs closely and we’ll bring you back once we have made a decision.”

The designers turned around to leave the runway, and Marinette bumped her fingers to Adrien’s
once more, before she too had to leave, to let the judges examine the outfit peacefully. Apparently, Marinette wasn’t as sneaky as she thought was, judging by the amused look on Heloise’s face as Marinette walked out.

Well, shit. That was definitely going to make it into the show.

After a while, the designers were brought back on the stage, ready to hear the results. Heloise didn’t make them wait long. “Designers. You have come a long way this season. You are an amazing final four. Three of you will move forward to compete at Fashion Week, and one of you will be out.”

“Marinette.” Heloise paused, obviously to add a dramatic effect and Marinette held her breath as she waited for the next words. “Congratulations! You’re moving forward to Fashion Week.” The model smiled at her. “How do you feel?”

The young designer was smiling brightly, finally letting go of the breath she was holding. “I am… so happy.” Marinette laughed, mostly out of nervousness. “I feel so lucky!”

Heloise smiled. “You’re very talented, and we are looking forward to your collection. You can leave the runway.”

Marinette nodded, saying, “Thank you,” as she finally walked off the runway.

She made it!

Leo had been the winner of the challenge, praised for making an effortless and timeless outfit, and unfortunately for her, Matilda had been eliminated. By now, everything was wrapping up, and everyone was running around, since it was almost time to go. Raoul had already said his goodbyes and headed back home, since he had to go to the airport to catch a flight that would take him to his parent’s home in Bordeaux. Apparently Charlie and Mar couldn’t decide on an apartment in Paris just yet, and he preferred the peace of his home to work on his collection. It was probably a smart move.

Matilda had already left, and Leo was off giving his winner’s interview. But Marinette had been asked to stay for a little longer to make sure she signed some new paperwork, so she had to wait. Then, she saw him. “Adrien!” Marinette called out to him, and Adrien perked up, still wearing the outfit Marinette had designed. “I made it to fashion week!”

“I knew you would!” he told her, beaming at her as he made his way towards her. “Did you win the challenge?” The look on her face told him immediately that she hadn’t. “You didn’t win the Ladybug and Chat Noir challenge?” Adrien asked, bemused.

“I feel almost personally offended,” Marinette said, though it was obvious she was joking. She was going to Fashion Week, so this challenge was only a blip in her radar.

Adrien laughed. “You did well,” he told her, his fingers trailing over the jacket he wore.

“Marinette, ready to review the rest of the paperwork before you go home?” Camille, who had a gift for interrupting her moments, stood by the end of the hallway, wearing her headset as usual.

“I have to go…”

“Yeah, me too,” Adrien said. They still needed to drag him for the necessary photoshoots and everything else they had to do. Adrien pulled her in, cameras be damned at this point, and wrapped
his arms around her. She sank into his embrace, feeling her heart skip a beat when she felt him murmur by her ear, “Can I visit you?”

Her lips stretched into a smile, as her arms tightened around him. “Yes, please.”

Camille, who was probably quite miffed that they weren’t filming now, sighed loudly, and Marinette broke apart from the hug and followed the blue haired woman.

“Bye!” She wiggled her fingers at Adrien, before hurrying up to catch up with Camille. They entered an office, and Marinette took a seat as Camille began explaining everything that would have to happen.

“Alright. You need to sign here, here and here,” Camille pointed out. “This is to keep on getting a small stipend that should allow you to remain indoors for the time being. That should cover work expenses for the month you’ll be working on your collection.”

Marinette nodded, quickly looking at the documents. “What about shopping for my collection?” She would need to go out and purchase a big amount of things.

“You can. You just need to make sure you don’t spoil anything,” Camille explained. “The best way would be to just lay low. People will find out you were eliminated soon, and we need them to hold onto that idea until the next show airs.”

“I’m guessing that none of my friends can know I’m home, can they?”

“Not really. We already made Adrien sign a NDA.”

“NDA?”

“Non-disclosure agreement. He already signed one when we hired him, but since you two are close, we had to have you guys sign a new one. Just to be safe.”

Marinette nodded, as she glanced between the documents and Camille.

“Trust me, you’ll probably won’t have time to actually go out as it is.” Camille laughed, flashing Marinette a sympathetic look.

A little over a month to create a full collection? Camille was probably right. “That’s probably true.” The young designer read up the rest of the documents, signing the spots she had to. After a while, she was finally done. “Alright, what now? My things?”

“They’re inside the car. Where will you be staying?” The curious look on Camille’s face was clearly expectant. Because while Marinette’s address was still the same (her parents’). Some people… wondered.

Marinette didn’t miss the implication in that question, but there was no reason for her to go to Adrien’s. Besides, she actually needed to work, which wouldn’t be likely if she stayed with him (in the event that he actually wanted her to stay with him). Besides, he’d already promised to visit her, which was a thrilling idea. But mostly she thought about how much she missed… “My parents,” she answered, before glancing at the clock behind Camille’s head. It was already nine? Oh God she just wanted to get back home.

“Alright then,” Camille said, opening the door and leading Marinette out. It felt awfully reminiscent of when she entered the studio for the first time. “Here’s my number. I’ll be your liaison with the studio if you need anything. Also, Tim will drop by somewhere between the second or third week of
work. You’ll have at least three days’ notice but it’ll be mostly a critique visit and we’ll have a little tour, interview with your family just get a little soundbites for the finale.”

“Okay. And the show? How many tickets will I get?”

“Two, we’ll send them to your parents’ home,” Camille explained.

“Can I get more?”

The look on Camille’s face was doubtful, but she still asked. “How many more?”

“Two?”

Camille wrinkled her nose. “Difficult,” she told Marinette, “There’s a lot of people fighting to get into the tent. There’s an actual waiting list. Who do you want to invite?”

“I wanted to invite my best friend and her fiancé,” Marinette explained, blue eyes looking hopefully at Camille. It would be a dream come true if she could include them in what was probably going to be one of the biggest days of her life.

Camille frowned as she seemed to think Marinette’s request. “I can probably get you one ticket. Would that work?”

It wasn’t ideal, but it would work. “Yes! Thank you!”

“I will have a very angry celebrity yelling at me, so you better be thankful. But if I can manage to get you another one, I’ll let you know. They won’t be front row, of course.” Camille smiled, as she led Marinette towards the awaiting car. “Alright. This is it.” Camille opened the car door. “Marinette, you were an absolute pain in the ass and you refused to let me have the best shot of my career, but I wish you all the luck in the world in your collection.”

Marinette laughed, hearing the humor and fondness in Camille’s complaining. “See you at Fashion week, Camille.”

“See you at Fashion Week,” Camille said, watching as Marinette stepped inside the car, shutting the door as soon as she was settled comfortably inside.

The ride back home was short, but the closer she got the more excited Marinette felt. She’d finally be home! The car parked near the side door and the driver helped her get her bag out of the trunk and up the stairs.

Marinette still had her keys, so it didn’t take her long to find them and finally set eyes on her familiar living room, wheeling her suitcase behind her as she entered.

“Mamman? Papa?” she called out, closing the door quietly behind her. “I’m home!”

Her mother was standing by the kitchen, drying off some dishes as her father, read over a newspaper. At the sound of Marinette’s voice, both of them looked towards the door, their faces showing the wide range of emotions, from surprise to excitement as they realized that Marinette had finally come back home.

“Little bug! You’re home!” Tom pretty much exploded, a wide smile splitting his face as he quickly dropped what he was doing to head over to his only daughter and crushing her into a hug.

“Papa!” Marinette laughed, her smile growing wider once Sabine reached them and joined in the
hug. “Maman, I’ve missed you both.”

“I didn’t think you’d come back until tomorrow.”

“I could have… But I wanted to get home.” Despite the comforts of Le Grand Paris, nothing beat the warmth of the Dupain-Cheng’s home.

“Come on then,” Sabine led her daughter to the kitchen. “Are you hungry? Did you eat?”

“I… I could eat.” She was starving. Adrien was right, she had survived mostly on coffee and cereal bars, only having substantial meals during breakfast and dinner. But the idea of her parent’s home cooked meals was enough to make her mouth water and her stomach growl.

“If you told us before we could have made you your favorite food,” Tom chastised her, as he sat next to his daughter at the table.

“I know,” Marinette said, eyes widening as her mother worked her magic around the kitchen. “Surprise?”

“A very lovely surprise,” Sabine agreed, placing a plate in front of Marinette. “How was everything, tell us!”

“I am actually dead tired,” she said, but sat at the table, sighing happily at the smell of Sabine’s food. “And I can’t say anything about the show.”

“We already signed stuff saying that we can’t say a word,” Sabine explained. “People from the studio came earlier today.”

“Really?” Marinette shouldn’t have been surprised. “Well, in that case,” she said, shoveling some food into her mouth, humming at the taste. Oh, this was good. Marinette looked at her parents, who were paying close attention to what she was about to say. The young designer almost vibrated with excitement as she grinned, “I hope you’re ready to go to Fashion Week!” she announced.

“That’s my little bug!” Tom high fived his wife. “We knew you’d make it.”

“But you can’t tell anyone just yet,” Marinette said, “There’s a show where… I didn’t do so well, so I have to stay hiding until everything airs.”

“We’ll be quiet,” Sabine said, before looking at her daughter. “We’re so proud of you.”

Marinette smiled at her parents and yawned, the weight of everything that had happened during the time she had filmed catching up with her now that she was in the safety of her home.

“You should go to sleep,” Tom ruffled her hair, smiling warmly at her. “We’ll have time to talk tomorrow… when you’re a little more rested.”

“Yeah…” She needed to start designing and planning her schedule to work.

There was an odd look shared between her parents, but Marinette paid it no mind; she was far too preoccupied with savoring the dinner her mother had given her. Which meant she was absolutely defenseless when Sabine asked, “So, when are you going to formally introduce Adrien to us?”

Marinette choked on the quiche, coughing and wheezing as she tried to catch her breath. Tom patted her on the back and Sabine wordlessly handed over a glass with water. “Mamman! Oh my God!”

Meanwhile, Tom laughed. Marinette wondered if it was too late to go back to the hotel.
Chapter End Notes

I might do some extra drabbles and stories to expand on some things mentioned here; I might make a collection on AO3 to group them all up whenever I do end up posting them. :D

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If you've made it here, Feel free to enjoy the marichat fluff right here!!
The group was settling into the crowded living room as usual. Alya stepped out of the kitchen, holding several bowls filled with delicious snacks.

“Is Rose really not coming today?” Myléne looked disappointed.

Alya nodded sadly. “Well,” she started, unsure of how to explain. It wasn’t like Rose actually said that there was anything wrong. But Alya was sure that seeing Juleka on television had shaken her. “She said she couldn’t make it today.”

There’s a moment of silence. They all felt sad for their friend, but they had no way of fixing things unless either of them speak. Until then, all they could do is wait.

Myléne decided to thankfully change the topic. “How was the show?”

The aspiring journalist passed a bowl of popcorn to her former classmate. The subject change had been successful, and Alya almost vibrated in excitement. She had been waiting for someone to ask. “Oh my God! She did such a great job, you have no idea! We were so proud of her.” The words tumbled out at a faster speed than usual. “She looked gorgeous too. I mean. I’m betting good money that my ship is finally sailing.”

“Wait. You don’t know?” Alix asked, crawling onto the sofa and wedging herself between the two girls. “Damn it Cesaire, you needed to bring me real scoops. Not this half assed shit!”

Myléne ignored Alix. “Were there any celebrities there?”

“Oh yes!” Alya grinned, “All the judges were there; Jagged Stone too, of course.” She paused for a second, as if thinking. “There was... oooh, that girl from the movie with the zombies?”

“Audrey Baasch?”

“That’s the one! I think I saw Chloe there, but she was being all haughty with the other Socialités. I’m too below her level for her to talk to me, you know.” She snorted.
Ivan settled on the ground, somewhere close to Myléne. “Are you gonna be on the show?”

“They interviewed me!” Alya said. The budding journalist looked incredibly giddy about her the possibility of being on television. “So I think I will be on!”

“That’s so cool.” Kim shuffled on the floor as Nino sat down. “Show’s

“Previously on Project Runway.”

[Two weeks before Fashion week]

The contestants had all gone home. There was a lot of work to be done. Raoul had gone to Bordeaux, where his parents’ lived. Leo had gone back to Lyon and Marinette had gone back to her parents’ home, in Paris. The scene showed Tim inside a car.

The camera showed the French countryside as Tim made his way towards the first contestant’s home. “I’m going to visit the finalists, I’ll be visiting Leo, Marinette and finally, Raoul.”

Leo’s family was surprisingly pleasant. Tim was greeted by Leo’s wife, Marguerite and their thirteen year old daughter, Adeline.

“He’s married?” Alix exclaimed, eyes widened in shock.

“And she seems nice!” Kim added, as the show followed the famous grump around his home.

“They look… normal. I’m scared.” Kim clung playfully to Alix’s arm, who shoved him away with a snort.

“Jackass.”

Nino insisted. “I have not computed anything but the fact that Leo is married. To a human.”

“She might be a robot.” Myléne joked and snuggled against Ivan.

“He’s probably not a television person.” Ivan wrapped his arms around Myléne who smiled in delight.

“I am very proud of Leo.” Marguerite held on to her husband’s hand as they shared a meal with Tim. “He’s not the easiest guy to get along with.” Leo had the decency to look abashed as his wife chuckled. “But we love him. And we are very proud of him.”

Leo’s interview followed. “I don’t care about looking good on television. I just took this chance to jumpstart my career, and I think I have the talent to make it through. I’m not going to play into some role they pick out for me. I’m here to win.” He shrugged at the camera, as the scene cut into their little dinner.

After a little while, Tim had to leave the Sagnier’s home. After receiving a hug from Marguerite and a firm handshake from Leo, Tim was off.


The car stopped outside the boulangerie and Tim stepped out of the car. He made his way up the stairs until he reached the Dupain-Cheng’s front door.
Marinette opened it quickly, “Tim! Welcome!” She smiled as she greeted him.

“Marinette!” Tim smiles back and stepped inside of the apartment. “I’m so thrilled to see you!” The door closed behind him and they walked into the living room. “Your home is lovely!”

“Thank you. It’s a bit crowded because I got everything out of my room to work from there.” Marinette explained, her smile bashful as they walked around her pink lounge chaise. “Shall we?” She asked before leading Tim towards her improvised work room.

The scene shifted to her interview, filmed as she sat at her kitchen table. “Being home helped a lot with my process. I really missed my parents so having them around is a lot of support.” The cameras showed as Marinette pushed open the trapdoor and walked into her room.

“This collection is… very me. I love dresses and I think formal wear is one of my favorite things to design. The process was very organic, and I am very grateful that I didn’t hit any major creative block. We only have so much time, so I’m very happy of what I’ve done so far.”

The next scene showed Marinette holding out one of the dresses out for Tim. “This one was made from white silk, and I dyed it myself.”

“You did it yourself?” Tim asked, holding the long flowing skirt in his hands. “That’s amazing. How long did it take you?”

She chuckled, as if remembering a harrowing experience. “Well, it took a couple of days, actually. I started with a sample, and tried to work out how the coloring would work. Once I got a result I liked, I tried it with the actual silk.”

“That’s a big gamble.” Tim felt the silk between his fingers, careful not to ruin the work Marinette had already put into the piece. “That had to be a lot of fabric.”

“I know, I was terrified.” Marinette chuckled and she looked at the dress fondly. “My hands were purple for a week.”

“I think that the colors look stunning. What about the bust?”

“The bust will be kind of a knitted look?” Marinette looked for her sketchbook, and after finding the page, she held it up for Tim. “It will be structured, of course. And I’m debating a belt, but that’ll be something I’ll settle once I start on the styling.”

“Good idea. Have you thought about the styling at all?”

“Yes, I made some prototypes, I’m not sure.” Marinette placed a hat, a flower headdress, some feather pins, a headband and a couple of necklaces.

Tim looked at the accessories laid on top of the table. “Here’s the thing. Your dresses are very eye catching. And you need to be careful not to detract from that. The hat is lovely, but it can be a bit overwhelming.”

Back at Alya’s home, Alix made her thoughts known. “Fuck that. I want that hat.”

“You’ll look like a mushroom.” Kim ruffled the top of Alix head and earned a well-aimed punch from her. “Ow, fuuuck!”

Alya’s sigh was extremely over the top and it made the people in the room curious. “Babe.” Alya
poked at Nino’s arm, until the DJ turned towards her with raised eyebrows. “I’m in love. Help me convince Mari to make my dress?”

“I thought she already offered?”

Alya frowned, arms crossed in front of her chest. “She did but I’m an idiot who told her that just having her at the wedding was enough.”

“And…”

“It is enough, but I want that dress toooo.”

Nino snorted and patted his fiancée’s shoulder.

After the review was over, Marinette led Tim towards the boulangerie. “This is the shop,” she explained Tim as they walked through the front door. “Mamman? Papa? We’re here!”

Tom and Sabine looked up right away, their smiles wide as they see Marinette and Tim arrive. “Hello!”

“Hi!” Tim greeted them. “You have a lovely home, and oh my…” Tim was momentarily distracted by some pastries. “These look amazing,”

“Best macarons in Paris,” Marinette smiled and the camera panned over all the different macarons and pastries in the shop.

The sign at the door switched to closed. Tom placed a small sign, alerting their customers that they’d open later. “Well, monsieur Gunn, let’s get you an apron so you can have the whole experience.”

“Oh my,” he said, as he received and put on the apron that Sabine held out for him. “I love it!”

Apron on, Tim started working. The task for today was decorating some cookies and pastries with Tom and Sabine. Marinette helped him, trying to give him some tips on how to properly apply the icing.

”I’m just… really grateful for all the support my parents have given me.” Marinette’s voice narrated over the footage of Tim and Marinette’s parents working. “My mom still checks on me before going to bed, and brings me tea or coffee when I pull all-nighters. My dad makes sure I always have something nice for breakfast.”

The scene shifted back to Marinette speaking to the camera. “I love my family, they’ve always been there for me. They’ve always supported everything I’ve wanted to do, and it made me believe in myself.”

The next scene had Tim sitting with Marinette, Tom and Sabine. The group shared some tea and a lovely arrange of pastries. “So,” Tim sipped on his tea. “How did it feel to have Marinette gone as she competed on the show?”

“It was a difficult.” Tom glanced at Marinette with a fond expression on his face. “We missed her. She’s our only daughter and she’s uh… filled with energy. The house felt very empty without her.”

“How was Marinette as a child?”

“She was always creative. She took control of the sewing machine when she was barely ten years old.” Sabine laughed and shook her head at the memory. Marinette only blushed as Sabine talked. “I
had to hide it under lock and key, because I was terrified she would hurt herself."

Marinette held up her hand where the pink scar from her latest accident was still quite visible. "And we all know how that never happens now."

Sabine swatted lightly at her daughter’s arm and continued. “But eventually I just let her have it. And she started making shirts, and bags and dresses and everything she could get her hands on. Her allowances were usually spent on fabric and materials.”

“She started getting little commissions, when she was what, fourteen?” Tom interjected. “She won some competitions too.”

“Oh wow.”

“My little girl’s a go getter.” Tom ruffled the top of Marinette’s hair, who laughed and tried to move away. “I never doubted she’d go far.”

“I am excited to see how Marinette will do on the final show. She was one of the big players from the first episode!”

Marinette looked between Tim and her parents with a bashful smile on her face.

After spending a lovely afternoon, Tim had to say goodbye. “I love what you’re doing already, so keep up the good work! I’ll see you in a couple of weeks!”

Alya beamed. “That’s my girl.” It was a surreal experience, to see a longtime friend being praised by someone with so much experience. She deserved it, of course.

“Her parents are kind of awesome.” Nino said. He paused for a second, lost in thought. “They are invited to the wedding, right?”

“Yup. Oooh! Did I tell you? Tom wants to make our cake.” Alya grinned at him, “he said that we should go to try some flavors.”

Nino nodded appreciatively. Who was he to refuse cake, after all? But then, a thought crossed his mind. “If Marinette’s making your dress and her dad’s making our cake… I think we’re kicking our parents off the main table and putting Mr. and Mrs. D in their place.”


“The dresses we saw were beautiful!” Mylène smiled, comfortably snuggled against Ivan. “You really don’t know if she won?”

Tim was going over to Raoul’s place. While the group liked him well enough, they took the moment to talk about Mari again.

“Nah.” Alya frowned. “I was there for the show, but only her parents went to the final judging.”

“And Adrien, right?”

“Oooh!” Alya clapped her hands together. “I just remembered something! You’re gonna love the runway show.”

Alix narrowed her eyes, unable to deal with surprises. “What did you see? Nino? What’s she talking about?”
Nino shrugged. “No clue, she wouldn’t tell me!”

“Oh, come on! You are the worst.” Alix groaned and threw some popcorn at Alya.

“Hey! No food throwing, please!” Nino chastised. “It’s my turn to vacuum this week and popcorn is a bitch to clean up.”

[Five days before Fashion Week]

Le Grand Paris became the home to the contestants once more. And while they enjoyed the glitzy and glamorous hotel before… The Studio had a surprise for them. Because this time, they weren’t led to the small rooms from before. The designers were led towards the higher floor, to one of the big and fancy suites.

Raoul opened the door and the three designers stepped into the room and had a moment.

“Well, damn.” Raoul muttered and moved to the side to the rest in.

The suite was bigger than the ones they’d used before. It had a large common area with a couple of sofas and a small breakfast table. The decoration was a lovely mixture of classic and modern. The wine colored sofa was plush and soft looking, as if made for a lovely nap. There were several fashion Magazines on the coffee table, all focused on the upcoming fashion event. Paris lived and breathed for Fashion week.

“Nice.” Marinette hummed appreciatively as she rolled her suitcase inside and looked around.

“I’m thinking that one’s your room.” Raoul said, after peering inside one of the rooms. “Since Leo and I are probably sharing the other one, right roomie?”

Leo simply carted off his suitcase into the next room.

“Well…”

Since it was just the three of them now, Leo’s disinterest in his castmates’ lives was even more obvious. “Don’t!” Marinette swatted at Raoul’s arm. “We have to be like… like a week in here, don’t make it weird!”

“It’s already weird.” He hissed. Raoul had already roomed with Leo during the last few challenges. He was used to Leo’s… sunny disposition. Still, he chose to distract Marinette. “Look. There’s a note.”

“A note?” Marinette reached for the envelope and pulled out the piece of paper and started to read out loud. “Dear designers, welcome back to Paris,” Marinette wrinkled her nose for a second. After all, she lived in Paris; “we’ve missed you. We’re very proud of you, and we’ll see you soon. Make full use of the Le Grand Paris’ wonderful accommodations, and prepare yourself for some days of hard work. Hugs and kisses, Heloise and Tim.”

“I think I deserve some spa time.”

Marinette’s eyes glazed over. “Massages…” She breathed out. The idea of pampering themselves before all the chaos that loomed ahead was just so tempting.

A victorious grin lit up Raoul’s face. “Unpack and we’ll meet here in ten.”

“Deal.”
The two designers marched into their respective rooms. The camera followed Marinette as she quickly started unpacking her bag. She hung some dresses inside the closet, and her shoes were carefully placed on a shelf. “I just couldn’t decide what to wear on the show so… I brought everything.”

“Marinette, if you don’t hurry up I will go on my own. I’ll leave you behind and I won’t even feel bad.” Raoul’s voice came from the common area.

“I’m ready!” Marinette answered and grumbled under her breath. She grabbed her bag and a few essentials and rushed out of her room.

Leo was sitting in the interview room, an impassive look on his face. From behind the camera, someone asked. “Don’t you want to spend some time with your castmates?”

“I just don’t see the point in being all buddy buddy when that never happened before. It’s not that I hate them, it’s just that I don’t care.” Leo rolled his eyes. The scene showed Raoul and Marinette, now back from their trip to the Spa. The duo flopped down on the sofa and watched television as they browsed the room services menu. Leo shrugged towards the camera. “It’s stupid and pointless and I’d much prefer getting my rest.”

Two days until the final show.

The week had almost flown by. They went shopping, for themselves and some last minute shopping for their designs. The final Show was looming ahead and they needed to be ready. Marinette had picked some shoes for herself as well as some sewing supplies.

They had a new photo shoot, which would be used to advertise the finale. All this new attention was somewhat overwhelming, and everything started to feel so real. After that, they were carted off to the Workroom.

Tim joined them at the workroom and given a clinical look to every outfit. His critique had been straight to the point and it caused some of the designers to take a closer look at their outfits.

“Yes.” Raoul sat in front of the camera. “Well, I’m a bit concerned right now. The critique was a bit… ambivalent? Apparently I have to tone down the styling, but I’m not sure I completely agree with that.” The designer sighed. It was obvious that Raoul was tired. They worked long hours and other than the little break to go to the Spa when they arrived, they did not have any time to rest. They either worked on the show, or on their collections. “I think I need to really look into the order to make sure I can find some way to compromise. I don’t want to throw this competition because I was too stubborn to take critique into account.”

Back at the workroom, everyone was putting the room to good use. Since it was just them, they had more space and their work areas were generously expanded. Leo took over the back, and set out to finish his collection.

Leo’s voice started narrating as the cameras showed everyone getting settled for work. Meanwhile, Marinette pulled out her outfits from their garment bags. She would straighten them and carefully hang them on the racks or mannequins around her table. It was time to make sure everything was up to standard.

“Are you worried about Fashion week?” A crew member asked Leo.

Leo shook his head. “My collection is more classic. It’s minimalistic style and elevated
deconstructuralism. I understand how Tim might want to *spruce* it up. Especially compared to how colorful the other collections are. But my style is timeless and classic, so I don’t think that really applies to me.

Back at the studio, Marinette slipped a dress over her shorts and shirt and paired it with one of the necklaces. She walked towards one of the large mirrors in the room and looked at her reflection. “Hmm.”

Raoul was hard at work at his table, but when he saw Marinette *modelling* one of her outfits… she got his attention. “What are you doing?”

“Imagining how to style it.” She answered as she held up a necklace against her collarbone. “Necklace or no necklace?”

Raoul rested his forearms on the table and carefully gauged the look. “Are you using the headband?”

She tapped the headband on her head. The delicate flowers matched the colors of the dress, and it contrasted nicely against her dark hair. “Yeah.”

“Then no necklace but hair down. Probably straight.”

“Hmmm,” Marinette posed in front of the mirror. “Makes sense.” She walked back to her table and wrote down every detail on her notebook.

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Marinette fidgeted in front of the camera. “We have less than forty eight hours until the show, so I need to be one hundred percent sure about every single thing we do here.” The camera showed Marinette, trying on every accessory she had, trying to figure out how to pair it. “I also need to make sure that the fitting is perfect. They’re going to be looking at *everything.*”

“How much time do we have to work today?”

“Until eleven.”

The clock showed still four hours left, much to the relief of every designer. There was still a lot of work to be done and they had to make sure everything was perfect. They had reached the point where there was no time to make big changes. No time to create a new outfit, just make sure that what they brought was the best it could be.

“I think I’m ready with these.” Marinette looked at the table where she’d pair every single item in tiny matching groups. “I’m happy with how they look.”

“Hello designers!” Tim greeted the trio as he entered the room. “How are you all doing today?” He walked towards Marinette’s table. “How’s everything going over here?”

Marinette looked up from her work and smiled at her mentor. “Hey Tim!”

He looked at the items on her table. “You made a lot of progress since my last visit.” Tim said, looking at all the dresses arranged around her station. His hum was appreciative. “I love how airy your dresses are!” Tim exclaimed. “They have a lightness to them that’s very beautiful. Have you tried walking them?”

“Kind of… I tried walking in them, but I’ll be more sure when we get the models in.”
“Good.” Tim said, “You need to make sure that the every detail is under control.” He patted Marinette’s shoulder lightly before going over to Raoul’s table.

Raoul’s table looked somewhat like Marinette’s. There were headdresses, feathers, necklaces and gloves arranged everywhere.

“I’m just finishing some little things and I think I’m actually ready for the fitting.” Raoul told Tim as the older man approached him.

Tim looked at the items on the table and nodded thoughtfully. “Good. Is everything ready?”

“Yes, I need to assign all the outfits, but I’ll do that once we do the last fittings.”

Tim crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Fit is essential.” He told Raoul, “You need to make the most of the time you’ll have with the models today. Take measurements, make notes, do everything you have to take advantage of the time you have.”

“Right.” Raoul nodded. He reached for one of the dresses hanging on the rack. It was a long red gown. “My other issue is this outfit. It’s my closer and I’m not sure…”

“Why? It’s a beautiful dress.” Tim noticed Raoul’s hesitancy. He took a step forward and examined the gown. “Look. You have a very definite look and style that’s shone through everything you’ve made this season. If you believe in what you’ve made, then trust your vision. Own it and make a collection you’re truly proud of.”

"Thanks Tim!” Raoul smiled and got back to work.

It was time to go to Leo’s. “How are you doing?”

“I’m alright.” Leo was looking up from his table to face Tim. “I’m trying to decide the order for the outfits.”

The mentor hummed, and looked at the pieces. “You need to make sure your opener and closer are your strongest pieces. Those are the ones that people remember the most. People don’t have long attentions spans, so don’t forget to focus on the first and last thing they see. You need to make sure that they are something worth remembering.”

“Thank you.” Even gruff Leo could appreciate Tim’s advice from time to time.

Tim walked towards the front of the room, “Alright designers.” he said once he was standing by the entrance door. “You have a lot of work to do. Five of your models will be in at nine. And you will have one hour with them. Then the other five will arrive tomorrow morning. Make good use of the time you have left. Remember, we have cameras for you over there.” Tim pointed at shelf which held three Polaroid cameras. “You can use them to take pictures and organize your show. Show those pictures to the stylists tomorrow, to make sure everything fits. Alright? Work hard, and I will see you all in the morning!”

“Bye Tim!”

“Thanks Tim!”

The models arrived at nine on the dot, and the fitting frenzy began. There was so much work they needed to finish and they were running out of time. They could only do so much in the brief time allotted.
“Hey!” Marinette grinned at Adrien, who swooped in for a hug. The camera followed the two, knowing that the whole place would turn into insanity in just a few seconds. Adrien let go after a few seconds, and his hand slid down her arm until their fingers laced for just a second. “How’s work going?”

Marinette puffed her cheeks and blew the hair, too tired to look bashful. "We had a critique and… well, there’s so much work to be done and, I want to sleep…” It was then that the other models approached her, and Adrien sat down and let her work in peace. The models were new. And Marinette, true to her character, greeted them all cheerfully. “Hi, I’m Marinette. Your names are?” The models introduced themselves to her and it was time to get to work.

The camera didn’t focus all that much on the models. Showing the collection before it was time for the runway would spoil the show for the viewers. So the fitting session was mainly quick shots of the designers as they made sure everything fit.

There was no time for small talk. They only had minutes to make sure that there weren’t any big mistakes that needed to be fixed before the show. They took notes. The Polaroid machine came into play once a model was ready. The picture would help the designers decide not only the order, but the styling as well.

That didn’t mean that they weren’t close to their muses. It was different when interacting with the models that had been there for all the show. Noelle was chattering with Raoul as he took in some measurements for the gown she was wearing. And while Adrien let Marinette work in peace. He was still around her, helping out however possible. He sat down beside her table and passed her pencils, scissors and whatever she needed as she worked. He even took some pictures for her with the Polaroid camera the show provided.

Even Leo had a bit of a rapport with his model, Claire. As much as they could, of course.

With three minutes before the fitting was over, Marinette walked among her dressed models. She took careful notes, her loopy handwriting writing down all the information she’d need. Raoul was doing the same. The serious look on his face seemed oddly out of place, but he was completely focused. Everyone was.

Soon enough, it was time for them to return to the hotel, sleep and start all over again.

“Poor Mari,” Mylène looked concerned as the camera showed Marinette zombie-walk towards her room. The girl waved at her temporary roommates before closing the door. “She looks exhausted”

“They all do.” Alya pointed out. “I can’t even feel bad for Leo, they all look like crap.”

“Well, fuck. This show is brutal.” Alix wrinkled her nose, huddled up in her corner of the sofa.

The cameras entered the suite. Raoul was in the common area, sipping some coffee, still wearing pajamas. “Everyone’s sleeping and I’m bored,” he explained, frowning as he took a bite of a cookie. “I can’t sleep when I’m nervous so… Here I am!” He had ordered some breakfast and was currently sorting through the food in the tray.

“… I don’t want to eat alone.” With that, Raoul marched towards the door to Marinette’s room. The lights were off and the curtains drawn, though the sunlight still seeped through. “Wake up Little Lady!”

The lump under the covers shuffled, curling into itself. A long drawn out “Noooo,” was heard from
under the comforter.

“Come on,” Raoul tugged at the covers, and Marinette’s hand emerged from under them to swat at him. “Come have coffee with me. I already ordered it. It’s here.”

The hand was not interested. “Let me sleep.”

“I ordered some fresh orange juice and pastries!” He offered, and the top of Marinette’s head peeked from under the covers.

Sleepy blue eyes regarded him with caution. “Chocolate croissant?”

Raoul nodded. “Chocolate croissant.”

That little tidbit seemed to get her attention. Marinette pondered the situation for a few seconds before sighing overdramatically. “FINE. Now get out so I can get dressed.”

Once they were back at the workroom, they settled into their routine fast. There was no time to lose, since they would have to go and meet up with the head of styling to decide the looks for the show.

“It’s our last day in the workroom. When we go back to the hotel, everything in here will be carted off to le Carrousel du Louvre and then, it’s show time.” Raoul’s voice was cheery, but there was a hint of nervousness that even the cool designer couldn’t downplay.

At around eleven in the morning, the remaining models arrived. The fitting process went just like the day before. They took pictures and notes to ensure everything would be perfect.

“Right now,” Raoul said, hands clasped together as he looked at the camera. “It’s all about the details. We just have to pair up every outfit with the accessories. Make sure the styling is right, and well… make it work.”

Marinette was currently assigning the remaining outfits to the models. “Yes. That fits you perfectly” She said, as a tall male model walked in one of her suits. “I think it would look great with…” Marinette looked around on her table and grabbed a pin. “There. That’s perfect.” She turned to her notebook and wrote it all down.

Leo sat in the interview room. “It’s a lot of work. I wish we would get more time to get everything ready… but I guess that’s how this show works.” He looked at the camera, exhaustion evident on his face. “I am making sure everything is done and I’m not stopping until I win.”

The models left soon after, and right after they were gone, Tim entered the room again. “Good morning designers!” he said, hands clasped together as he addressed them. “You will all be going to styling to meet Edgar Gigot, for your hair consultation. After that, you’ll meet with our consultant with Laffite’s cosmetics, Nadia Lacan. Now, go on and have fun and I will be back a little later.”

At the hair salon, they each had time with Edgar. Aided by the Polaroids they’d just taken, it was easy to create a look based on the theme of each collection.

Raoul was standing next to a hair model as Edgar showed him what he planned to do. “Your collection has a lot of drama, and judging by these pictures I think that the hair needs to be flat and minimal.”

It seemed Raoul agreed. “Yeah, I want to use some hats and headdresses so I think the hair needs to not be mostly out of the way.”
“Oh, definitely. You can’t have a wild tousled look. We will do updos, and sleek, cool ponytails with a lot of shine.”

“Perfect.”

At the makeup consultation, Marinette showed Nadia the Polaroids she had taken. The camera caught a brief look of the outfits, but not enough to really see them.

The makeup artist picked different items from her table. She opened a little eyeshadow case. “I think we need to use the color palette you have on your designs. Keep it light and youthful. As for the lips.” She picked up several tubes and opened them to show Marinette the colors. “I think we need to stick with a very classic pink, peach, soft reds. Then, some long lashes and glowing skin.”

Marinette beamed. “I love it”

“Great. I’ll see you tomorrow, and go kick some ass!”

The little Polaroids were not enough for Alix. “Come on, show the things!” she booed, arms crossed in front of her chest. “I want to see the outfits!”

After a brief moment of silence, Alya blurted out what they were all saying. “I thought Juleka was going to be there.” She had been disappointed to see the other woman give out a consultation.

“Maybe she’ll be there at the show?” Mylène asked. It would make sense to have more people at the actual runway show.

“I don’t know.” Alya said, biting her lower lip, lost in thought. “I mean, I didn’t see her, but I wasn’t even close to backstage.” That’s not to say Alya hadn’t tried. But security at this show was tougher than she had expected.

Mentioning Juleka made everyone think of Rose. The tiny blonde’s absence was glaringly obvious. “Did she say anything else?” Alix asked. “When she said she couldn’t make it?”

“Nope. Not really.” Alya answered. It was so like Rose to downplay her discomfort. But she’d seen the way she’d paled when Juleka appeared on the screen during the previous show.

Nino frowned. They were all concerned about their friend. “She didn’t take seeing Juleka on TV very well, did she?”

“Fuck, that’s an understatement.” Alix sighed and pursed her lips. “I mean, seeing her was crazy as balls for me and I never dated her!”

With the styling decided, everyone was hard at work at the studio. There were only a few hours left in the day and many things needed to be altered. “Alright designers, I know everyone is stressed out. You have one hour to pack everything for tomorrow and I will see you all backstage at Fashion week. You’ll have a limo to take you to the Carrousel du Louvre tomorrow and I expect you all to arrive ready to win.” With that, he turned around and everyone started running.

Marinette grabbed her boxes and garment bags. She placed them all over her table and quickly started to store everything with as much care as possible. Each box was labeled and then put inside a bigger box. Then, the time was up, and it was time to leave.
Back at the hotel, Raoul and Marinette were lounging on a sofa as some cartoon played on the television. There was a knock on the door and Raoul stood up to answer. It was room service, bringing a large pizza and some beverages.

“Dinner is served!” Raoul said, closing the door as he carried the food into the room. “Table or sofa?”

“Sofa.” Marinette said, “I’m not moving from there until I have to drag myself to bed.”

“I believe it.” Raoul laughed and placed the pizza box on top of the coffee table in front of the couch.

“Yesss,” Marinette pulled out a slice and settled comfortably on the sofa again. “I was so hungry,” Marinette groaned as she bit into the pizza.

“I can see that.” Raoul lounged back on the sofa again, legs fully stretched out as they watched television in peace.

In the interview room, a voice behind the camera asked, “What do you say to people who think you’re playing your friendship for the cameras?”

Marinette gave the camera an odd look, confused about to why this was actually an issue. “I know people say it’s weird that I get along with Raoul so well. But… we’re friends, and with how crazy this whole thing is, it was a relief to find someone who I can trust. Even if he’s a bit of an ass sometimes.” Marinette laughed, rolling her eyes at the memory. “I think I’m a good judge of character and if we had met in other circumstances I think we’d be friends regardless.”

“This whole competition is great, but it’s exhausting and very taxing on you.” The smile on Marinette’s face faltered for a second. “It’s nice to have a friend and, you know? I think it’s good to know that no matter what happens tomorrow I’ll still have Raoul as a friend.”

“You have made very interesting friendships this season. With Ad…”

“Well,” Marinette interrupted, eyes widened once she realized where the question was going. “I don’t do things to please the cameras. I came here to design and create and I hope that the people are able to see that. Whatever friendships I may have made are just that. Mine.” With that, Marinette cut off whatever Camille might have wanted to ask.

The interview switched to Raoul’s, who was seemingly asked the same question. “She’s like the little sister I never had.” He answered. The camera showed the two friends watching television and eating ungodly amounts of pizza. “Look. I know I’m good. I don’t need to pull little stunts to get ahead. I think it would be a cheap move to fake something like that for. She’s very sincere, almost too much sometimes, which I know the show has loved.” He aimed a pointed look to the side of the camera, since that was where Camille usually sat. “But she’s a cool girl, and since so many people are just so fake in this show, it’s good to meet someone like that.”

“Like, Leo doesn’t like anyone, but he could fake it for the cameras. But he doesn’t want to, so more power to him. He’s staying true to himself. He’s talented and, y’know… No one at this finale needs drama to be a major player, and that’s cool.”

Raoul paused for a second and tapped his chin, mirth glinting in his brown eyes. “And honestly, someone has to keep that little human disaster alive.”

The camera panned across the Parisian morning and a perimeter was set around the Carrousel du
Louvre for the shows. Inside, the stage was finished and everything was ready to receive the designers.

Back in the hotel, the three finalists were busy getting ready. While they preferred comfortable clothing for the workroom, this was the show. They needed to look good and make an impression. Leo chose a smart black suit, classic and well fitting. Raoul went something close to that, but his suit was a dark blue color with a black dress shirt. He chose to not use a tie, leaving the look a little more casual. After what seemed forever, according to Raoul’s whining. Marinette chose a simple black dress with a flower print. Simple, sleek, it complemented her figure just right and paired with high heels? Perfect.

“Looking good, little lady!” Raoul laughed as Marinette finally came out of her room, he offered his arm out to her. “Shall we?”

“You too!” She giggled and took his offered arm as they left their suite.

They reached their transportation, a limousine parked right outside the hotel. Leo opened the door and climbed inside. Just as Marinette was about to do the same, Raoul pointed out, “You look tall.” he looking down at the shoes Marinette was wearing. “You’re bringing some backups, right?”

She patted his arm affectionately. “Roll-up flats are right here, mom.” Marinette tapped the bag, where her emergency footwear was kept. “I just wanted to make a dramatic entrance.”

And a dramatic entrance they had. It was still early in the day when the car parked right outside le Rue de Rivoli and the three designers stepped out. The building was tall and imposing and the camera followed them as they entered the front doors.

They were deep under the Louvre’s pyramid. Where an exhibition hall was ready and waiting for them. Le Carrousel du Louvre was a coveted venue for Fashion Week. It would not doubt be filled with many influential people. After all, it was booked solid all through the week.

The designers walked through the hall’s doors and into a large empty room. There were rows of empty seats on each side of the runway. Every seat had a small card attached to it, naming whose seat it was. The camera panned across some of them, teasing at the celebrities that would be in attendance. Every guest judged who’d participated in the season had a seats reserved on the front row. There were also some award nominees actresses and a lot of influential people.

It was nerve wracking.

The runway was black, and it was elevated just a foot above the floor level. At the back, there was a big white wall, with the Project Runway logo proudly emblazoned on it. The stage lights, aimed at the runway, would ensure that every detail of their collections was visible and appreciated.

Marinette’s shoes clicked against the hard floor and she came to a stop at the beginning of the runway. She looked around, taking in the immensity of the room. “Just… How many people are they expecting, oh my god!” Marinette breathed out, as the reality of what was about to happen seemed to finally set in.

It was a feeling that Raoul shared. “A shit ton of people.” he murmured, pulling at his shirt’s collar.

Even Leo looked around with something akin to nervousness. “We should stop wasting time and get to work.” he finally said, and everyone agreed. There were only hours before the show had to start.

Raoul held out his hand and helped Marinette climb up the step on the runway. “Well.” He said, as he they reached the end. “Good luck to us all, I guess.”
“Yeah,” Marinette bumped her shoulder into Raoul’s. “May the best designer win.”

“I’m actually… very excited to be here.” Leo said, though there was no real change to his usually inexpressive voice. “I have worked hard to achieve this. And I have been waiting a long time for this opportunity.”

The camera showed as the designers walked by the back wall and entered backstage.

Camille, for once in front of the camera, directed them quickly. “Marinette, that’s your station, Raoul, yours is over there and Leo, you stay right here.” She motioned around, making sure they all understood the information. “You each have three hair stylists and two make-up artists. The show starts in one hour, aaaand, Leo goes first, then Marinette and finally Raoul. Alright, that’s it… get to work!” Camille disappeared into the crowd, and the three designers scrambled towards their stations.

It was easy to divide the work. After each model finished with styling and makeup, they got dressed. Their designer would examine them and, if everything was okay, they’d deem them ready.

“Juleka!” Marinette beamed, once she saw her former classmate around her station. “I’m so glad you’re here!” She hugged her tightly, ”And at my station too!”

“Mari!” The makeup artist hugged her back. Juleka was wearing dark fitted jeans and a tank top with the show’s logo. Clearly it hadn’t been her choice but at least her tattoos were proudly on display. “I’m so glad I got assigned your station.”

“Me too!”

“Hello!”

Marinette jumped at the sound of Adrien’s voice, but Juleka greeted him with a smile. “Hey you! Ready for the big show?”

Adrien’s smile was dazzling and he winked at Juleka, “always ready!” he answered, casually dropping his arms on top of Marinette’s shoulder. Who, much to Juleka’s and everyone who was around’s surprise, only blushed mildly.

Back in the main room, guests were arriving in droves. With celebrities and guests finding their assigned places. The camera panned over an extremely good looking man and a gorgeous girl with her natural brown hair curled and styled. The byline read: ”Raoul’s Family.” The two talked, bright smiles on their faces, while seats filled all around them.

Leo’s family arrived as well. Marguerite and Adeline, who looked around the room with widened eyes and bright smiles. The young girl looked star struck at all the celebrities in the room.

Finally, the camera showed three people entering the room. Two women and one tall and broad man. The byline on the bottom of the screen informed the audience that it was Marinette’s parents and best friend.

“YES I MADE IT ON TV!” Alya exclaimed, fist pumping into the air.

“Damn girl. You look hot as fuuuuck!” Alix commented. Alya was wearing a pencil skirt (gift from Marinette) and a dainty little top. The aspiring journalist blended in perfectly with the crowd at the show.
“Yeah she does,” Nino’s voice is appreciative as it is slightly lewd, and he shares a playful look with his now giggling fiancée.

“Guys, don’t be gross, come on!” Kim exclaimed and makes a face at the couple, who are still playfully flirting with each other.

Alya stuck her tongue at Kim and Nino glared. “I will not be silenced when talking about my hot ass fiancée. Sorry dude.” Alya grinned and whispered something into his ear. His eyes widened. “Awesome.”

“Someone’s getting laid tonight.” Alix snickered, and held her fist out to Nino.

Backstage, everyone was running around like headless chickens. Juleka was working on one of the models, while Marinette supervised the styling. “Mari? The boss said you wanted natural looks, right?”

Marinette nodded and confirmed just as Adrien walked up behind her and playfully poked at her ribs. “Hey!” She turned around to face him, “I told you I’m not ticklish!” she chastised him playfully before poking at his stomach.

He squirmed immediately. “Just reporting for duty, my lady.” He grinned and bowed with a flourish. “Making sure you’re okay with everything.”

Marinette gave Adrien a quick once over and held up a finger. “Just a sec!” she exclaimed and hurried towards the box which held the accessories. She returned with a small feather brooch and showed it to Adrien. “There we go. Better.”

Adrien looked at the accessory distrust evident in his green eyes. “You’re trying to kill me.”

“Wait, what?” Marinette flashed him an odd look until she looked at the brooch. Right. Feathers, “It’s a fake feather,” she brushed it under his nose. “Like I would forget.” Marinette pinned it on his jacket, against the right lapel. Once done, she poked his stomach playfully, giggling as he squirmed again. “Besides, I have no plans to kill you. Not until the show’s over at least.”

“You wound me.”

Juleka rolled her eyes at the display, but she smiled nonetheless. She turned away from the pair and waved the next model over for their makeup.

The runway room was full and the camera showed all the celebrities in attendance. Jagged Stone was on the front row with his pet crocodile sitting by his feet, much to the horror of the people on the next seats. Some famous Hollywood actresses also sat on the first row, chatting amongst themselves. Right behind them, on the second row, Paris’ favorite socialite, Mademoiselle Chloe Bourgeois. Though she looked fairly uninterested for someone attending one of the season’s biggest shows.

Backstage, everyone was getting more nervous by the second. Leo was checking every single detail for about the third time in a row.

“We’re walking in ten minutes!” Tim announced and he approached Leo. “You’re ready, right?” It took one look at the models to realize that yes, he was. “Good. Make sure everything else is in order and get everyone by the door. Good luck!”

Raoul walked around his models, carefully checking that everyone was ready. They were all styled
and the makeup was finished. All he had to do now was make sure that nothing fell apart before they walked.

Camille tapped him on the shoulder, “Raoul, You have around twenty minutes until you have to go on. Be ready!”

“I am!” Raoul said, winking at Camille.

"Good!” Camille patted his arm and went away. She disappeared amongst the crowd backstage.

Once she was gone, Raoul sighed before he turned back to his models. “I think I am,” he muttered. The camera followed as he walked by all the models, until he got to Noelle, “You ready, gorgeous?” Raoul asked her, holding up his fist to her.

The model grinned, and fist bumped him. “I was born ready.”

“How are you feeling?” The cameraman asked, and Raoul turned to face the camera.

“Well, I’m a little bit nervous, if I have to be honest,” Raoul chuckled and rubbed the back of his neck. For a second, it seemed like he was going to say something. But the words died on his lips as he seemed to see something just behind the camera. “About damn time!” Raoul cheered and wolf whistled, before turning to the camera. “Oh… wait. Did- you guys missed it, didn’t’ you?” He burst into laughter, “oh man, this is priceless.”

The camera turned to Marinette’s station. The young designer was standing in front of Adrien. One of her hands was on his face, fingers trailing down his cheek. Her other hand was gripping the lapels on his jackets, pulling him closer to her. Adrien’s hands were on her waist, his expression dazed and enamored. Marinette’s smile was small and bashful.

They were standing so close, and they looked so absorbed with one another, it was obvious what had just happened. If the lovesick look on their faces wasn’t enough to clue people in, the hints of red lipstick on Adrien’s lips sealed the deal.

A little to the side, Juleka stared with her mouth hanging wide open. She only realized she was staring when her eyeshadow brush slipped from her hands and clattered against the table.

The noise seemed to bring Marinette back to reality, her cheeks flaming red. It seemed that a certain designer just remembered they had an audience. “We… uh.” The two of them shared a look, some sort of wordless communication, and finally separated.

So yes. The cameras missed it.

“What. What, WHAT?” Alya was not pleased by this development. At all. All those memes, live tweeting the show, and creating a fan base, and this happened? She was going to write a very strongly worded letter, because that sort of camera work was just sloppy.

Alix was definitely more straightforward about her feelings. “YOU HAD ONE JOB. ONE FUCKING JOB!” She shrieked at the screen. “I can’t believe they missed it!”

Nino just laughed.

The show cut to the interview room. Marinette sat in front of the camera as she usually did, looking straight at it as the corners of her mouth tilted upwards. It was her best attempt at a poker face, as she
was clearly trying to hide her mirth.

It wasn’t working.

“What?” Marinette asked, smirking at the camera.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry.

Lovely Smug! Marinette was drawn by the amazing Kate, http://daughterofthestars08.tumblr.com i love her so much. <3<3
#What?

Chapter Summary

Fashion Week continues and the show ends. For realsies this time.

Chapter Notes

FIRST. Thank you so much to @daughterofthestars08 for betaing this for me and making it SO MUCH PRETTIER, since my brain functions half the time tbh.

ALSO, Thank you to @adjit and @ozxiii for listening and encouraging me to finish this monster. I love you all. <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After the break, the camera panned across the runway room again. It was finally filled to capacity, there was not a single empty seat in the whole place. The audience chatters excitedly, greeting one another, posing for pictures as they wait for the show to begin. The novelty of the new talent they’re about to see is overwhelming. The electricity was almost palpable as they wait for the show to begin.

The lights dimmed for a second and the stage lights turned on, directing all attention to the catwalk. The show’s theme music started and the hosts came out to a thunderous applause. Side by side, the four judges walked the length of the runway, waving at the audience before posing for the obligatory pictures. Once that’s done, they walked back to take their seats on the first row.

Backstage, everyone was running around. Stylists fussed with hairstyles, designers made sure their outfits were ready for the upteenth time. Meanwhile Tim stood by the door that led towards the runway and he glanced at his watch with concern. “Leo, we are walking!” he insisted. Leo’s models lined up quickly after that, nervously waiting for their cue.

Juleka was still amused at the kissing incident. “Agreste, sit down and let me fix your make up!”

“What?” He answered, a dopey smile still present on his face.

The make-up artist laughed, “Red lipstick isn’t part of your styling, Adrien. Sit down,” He finally did, still blushing after being caught so obviously. “She messed up your hair a little bit,” Juleka commented and turned over her shoulder “Maureen!”

Said women was already charging in, brush in hand. “On it!”

“It only took you guys, what? Ten years?” Juleka joked as she held out a makeup wipe to Adrien,
who wiped any remains from red lipstick from his lips. “Much better!” Juleka grinned and fixed up his face.

Outside, Heloise walked on the runway again, alone this time. She held a microphone in her hand as she waited for the applause to die down before speaking. “Hello everybody and welcome to the first finale for Project Runway France.” She laughed as the audience cheered again. “I have to say. It’s been an amazing experience, and it’s been so great to be surrounded by so much talent!” The audience cheered, and Heloise smiled. “I can’t wait for our designers to show you everything they’ve worked on. It’s going to be an amazing show!”

She paused in front of the rest of the judges. “Before we can continue, I want to introduce you to our judges. We have the creative director for Mode Magazine, Tatiana Geiger. The creative director for S.E.L.F Fashion and famed designer, Thierry Leclère. And our special guest judge, Academy Award winning actress, Sophia Morin!” She waited for people to applaud and then added, “Enjoy the show!”

Once the host was sitting down. The lighting focused on the back wall, the Project Runway logo proudly illuminated. Leo stepped out, microphone in hand and waited for the clapping to subside. “Good afternoon. I’m Leo Sagnier. And I am very eager for you to see my collection. I took inspiration in minimalist art, and I tried to find the beauty in simplicity. I believe that fashion needs to flatter the human body. I hope you enjoy.” The clapping resumed and Leo walked backstage again.

A couple of seconds after, the music started blaring again. A simple electronic beat that provided the perfect rhythm for the walking models. Leo’s collection was indeed minimalistic. It started with slip dresses in soft colors, peach, white, before going with darker colors like grey and black. The dresses played up the curves on the models, the hemlines flowing with every step the models took. Some dresses had pleats that accentuate their waist and hips. The tailoring was on point, on both men and women. The men wore simple suits as well, well tailored and broadcasting the male models’ broad shoulders and long limbs. The color palette did not vary that much, keeping to black, beige and grey. It was as solid collection. A delicate balance between the minimalist look that Leo always preferred, mixed in with some modern lines. That, was clearly an adventure for the older designer.

“I am very proud of my collection.” Leo narrated over the footage of the models, as well the reactions in the audience. “It took a lot of work to get here, and being away from my family was not easy. But I’m glad to have made it this far.”

Once the final model made her way over the runway, the whole group came back out, along with Leo. The older designer managed to crack a smile as the audience applauded. The group walked all the way to the end and back, and Leo bowed before disappearing into backstage.

There was silence in Alya’s living room. “Well,” Nino said, focused on the television as Leo took his final bow. “It wasn’t that bad.”

Alya pulled at her engagement ring, eyes narrowed as she tried to wiggle the stubborn thing off. “BETRAYAL.” She cried out.

Nino laughed and grabbed at her hands, but she stretched up to keep her fingers away from the reach of his long limbs. “It’s horrible, disgusting, a disgrace!” he corrected quickly, settling for wrapping his arms around her and tickling.

“Wedding’s back on!” Alya screeched, touching her face to his chest and giggling when his fingers
“Great job Leo!” Tim patted the designer’s shoulder as Leo made his way backstage, free at last. “Marinette, are you ready?”

She turned around to take one last look at her models. Adrien winked at her from his place at the back of the line and mouthed ‘good luck’. With a smile, Marinette turned back to Tim. “I’m ready.”

There’s a cut to the interview room. “In this moment, I am extremely proud of everything that’s gotten me here. I had to put off school, time with my family, friends and so much more to compete in this show. But being here at Fashion week, minutes away from showing my first collection… it’s worth it. I’m thankful for all the opportunities that got me here.”

Camille stood by the exit, “Go!” she said, motioning for her to move. “Time to shine!”

Marinette walked onto the runway and her smile broadened as the cheering grew louder. “Thank you!” She smiled and waited for the applause to die down. The camera found her family quickly. Tom, Sabine and Alya were seated on the third row, beaming at Marinette and waving enthusiastically.

She took a long look around the room. The runway was long and impressive. Filled to the brim with many important people who would see her collection. “This has been an amazing journey. I want to thank my family and friends for all their support,” Marinette looked into the crowd, smiling once she spotted the familiar faces. “I wanted to dedicate to collection to them, and to everyone who’s supported me and my dream. I hope you enjoy it.” The crowd cheers again, and a smiling Marinette made her way backstage once more.

The lights shift again, and the familiar music of *La Roux* starts playing. The first model sported a white tuxedo, making it obvious that Marinette’s theme was eveningwear. Flowing gowns in different pastel colors were the star of her collection. Embroideries and appliqués were featured in several dresses, highlighting Marinette’s painstaking attention to detail. The music, *In For The Kill*, provided a counterpoint for the collection with smart lyrics and synchronized lights. The whole show felt modern and upbeat while giving off an air of youthful confidence.

“I’m so nervous. This doesn’t even feel real,” Marinette muttered to Tim who laughed and patted her arm comfortably.

“It really is happening, and you did a great job!” he reassured her, as they watched the show from a screen backstage. The crowd seemed to really like it. The reactions looked appreciative, especially for her favorite dresses, which brought a smile to her face.

One of the dresses that got the best reaction was a flowing dress with ombré violet skirt. The suits she created were in several colors, from white, to the classic black to some dark reds. The suits became more embellished as the show progressed.

Just before her closing outfit, the music dropped into a slow and soulful bridge and the lights shifted and dimmed. Adrien swooshed out dramatically into his spotlight wearing a dark wine colored suit.

*Let’s go to war*  
*To make peace*

The opened jacket allowed a peek to a waistcoat adorned by embroidered tulips and a dark dress
shirt. The lights synchronized the music and his movements. He walked in time with his part of the
song, almost gliding. The lyrics and Adrien’s slow movements drew the audience in.

\textit{Let’s be cold}
\textit{To create heat}

The camera focused on his face as the lights shifted around him during his pause at the end of the
runway. They played over his form, his blonde hair slightly fluffed up and glowing when the light hit
it, and fell softly elegantly down the lines of his apparel. He was near ethereal; his watchers
enthralled.

\textit{I hope in darkness}
\textit{We can see}
And you’re not blinded by the light from me

He stood frozen and glowing for a moment in silence, and then perfectly timed with the returning
beat Adrien tossed a smirk at the camera before turning back and walking back the way he came at a
more normal speed. The spell was broken.

Backstage, Marinette watched the show through from a different angle, as her vision was brought to
life. Adrien’s performance was stunning, and she felt full of emotion. Gratefulness mostly, but also
overwhelming affection for the dumb cat boy who had completely stolen her heart. When he hustled
back through the curtain and grinned at her, the feelings remained and the nervousness returned at
full force. Unfortunately, there wasn’t time to delve on that… the show had to go on.

“Everyone back on stage now!” Camille said, “Marinette, you too!”

The designer nodded, apprehension plain on her pretty face. Adrien stayed close to her as one by one
the models began returned to the runway for their last walk.

“Mari?” Adrien studied her expression and reached out for her hand, “come on!” His smile was
bright and encouraging, practically glowing with enthusiasm, and it seemed to melt her
apprehensions away.

Marinette had looked a little far away, but the touch of his hand seemed to snap her back into reality.
“Right.”

They walked out right after all the models, and the look on Marinette’s face soon turned from
apprehensive and determined to overwhelmed and ecstatic. She could hear the applause as the
models did their final walk, but the sound only grew louder when she stepped onto the runway.

It was surreal.

Her parents were there, sitting next to Alya. Their smiles were so broad and genuine that Marinette
couldn’t help but laugh and wave at them. They made their way down the runway and then back
after a pause at the end to soak up the energy in the room. She shifted her hand and laced her fingers
with Adrien’s as they walked towards the curtain, feeling him squeeze back against her hand. It kept
her grounded. This was not a dream.

Once they reached the back of the runway, Adrien let go of her hand. Marinette turned around one
last time and took a small bow. She waved at the audience and finally walked out of sight. After
everything that had happened, after all of her hard work… her part was over.

She’d finished her first fashion show.
“Oh my God!” Myléne gasped, and she covered her mouth with her hands. “They look so cute I want to die.” The words were muffled but still understandable.

Alya grinned, almost vibrating with excitement. “See? I told you! I almost screamed when I saw them.” Alya looked back at the television and shrieked as the camera did a close up on the two. “Their fingers are laced together, oh my God I didn’t even see that then!”

“They look… so comfortable with each other,” Nino said, tilting his head at the screen as he watched his friends disappear backstage. “It’s so weird.” He added, clearly remembering their teenage years, filled with stuttering and obliviousness.

“It’s looooove.” Alix grinned. “And maybe a grope or two. And tongue. It changes people.” No one dared question her sage advice.

Adrien received the food from the delivery man, and after paying he closed the door. Meanwhile, Plagg floated towards him, grumbling loudly. “You’re being dosey on television again!” he accused and rolled his eyes. “I can’t believe I get stuck with a lovesick kitten again.”

“Kitten?” Adrien perked up, amusement evident in his green eyes as he placed the food on the counter. “Did you just call me kitten?”

Plagg looked absolutely horrified. “You’re kitten with me. I mean… you’re deaf or something, because I said… uh. Mitten. Because you’re useless. Like a mitten.”

Adrien wasn’t dissuaded, his grin broad and amused. “You like me.” He reached to pet the top of Plagg’s head. The kwami purred softly, but the humming sound came to a screeching sound once Plagg realized what was happening.

“Well, she made you tolerable. So no touching!”

The blond laughed, and cut a small piece of cheese for the offended and embarrassed kwami before heading back to his room.

Back on the show, Marinette was in a daze. The crew was making sure everything was ready for Raoul’s show now, she was suddenly disconnected from the business around her. Everyone was too busy to pay her any attention after the last shoulder pat and “Great job, Marinette!”

Well, that wasn’t exactly right. Not everyone.

Marinette stood alone in a sea of people, all them moving around faster than she could track. She cast her eyes past the crowds, searching for someone. He was standing a few yards away, leaning against a wall far from the craziness of the show now that his part was over and her masterpiece was back on its hanger.

A smile appeared on her face as she walked over to him. Adrien glanced up and grinned when he saw her coming. She could hardly believe that his eyes lit up that way just from her presence alone. She was just starting to comprehend the last ten minutes of her life. It felt like a dream, even in the
way the noise and bustle around her seemed to fade as she got closer to Adrien.

One thing that also disappeared was one smart camera man who fought to get a good angle without disturbing the two lovebirds. The camera zoomed in, just enough to center them on the screen as the rest of the cameras focused on Raoul’s preparations. This could be their moment.

There was determination in her steps. Adrien perked up when she didn’t slow down and barely had time to brace himself before she launched herself at him. He caught her in the air, his arms wrapped around her waist as her feet dangled inches from the ground. Marinette wound her arms around his neck and smiled at him, ignoring everything else. “I did it.” she grinned proudly, blue eyes twinkling in excitement.

Adrien’s smile was beaming as he gently swayed in place, ”You did great.”

Nervous and relieved laughter bubbled from her lips, amazed by everything that had just happened. She had just presented a fashion show in front of hundreds of people. Who seemed to like it! “I… I can’t believe it. This is so amazing...”

He rested his forehead against hers, green eyes gentle and adoring. ”You’re amazing.”

Marinette laughed again before she gently cupped his face and kissed him for the second time that day. The kiss was playful, and over far too soon. Marinette's adrenaline was still at an all time high. She was too fidgety and smiling too hard to kiss him properly. She giggled and gave up, letting her fingers trace softly over his jaw. Adrien laughed too, her smile was contagious and he was utterly unable to get over being allowed to kiss her. To touch her and just be around her. Everything related to them was new and uncharted territory, and it was exciting. Marinette leaned back in and smiled against his lips. She whispered something unheard by the cameras before kissing him again, a little more soundly.

Adrien placed her on the ground carefully without breaking contact. It had been a long time coming and he just didn’t want to let her go. Not yet. His hand trailed over her face and brushed the hair away from her eyes. He smiled against her lips, accidentally breaking the kiss and making them both laugh.

It was hard to understand what they were saying. The nearest boom microphone wasn't close enough to pick up their conversation. But the bits and pieces it did manage to get and subtitle were enough to satisfy a thirsty audience.

“Thank you for being here.” she bit her lower lip as she beamed up at him, both her hands still laced around his neck.

“Nothing could have kept me away.” He said, tilting her face up for another kiss. His hand glided along the sides of her face and delved into her hair. She pulled him closer, her fingers gripping the lapels of his jacket as she pulled him down to her height. Their kiss was soft, sweet even, unaware of the rest of the world as they finally found their place. One of Adrien’s hands slid up and down her back, one finding its place in the dip of her lower back as the other delved back into her loose hairstyle, keeping Marinette flush against him as he deepened their kiss. They seemed to completely forget where they were, feeling safe in the distance they had from the rest of the bustling crew and beginning of lights and music for Raoul’s show. Her fingers trailed over Adrien’s hair, messing up his perfectly tousled look and -

A loud wolf whistle was enough to bring them back to reality. The blush that flew over Marinette's face meant she just realized how open they'd been. Marinette looked like a deer caught in headlights, “Oh god,” she muttered, before hiding her face against Adrien’s chest. There was no point in hiding
anymore. Adrien spotted the camera easily now that he was looking, so he just flashed a bashful smile towards it and whispered something to Marinette.

“YES!” ALix jumped up from her seat, fist pumping in the air. “HELL FUCKING YES, TOOK YOU A LONG GODDAMNED TIME YOU FUCKERS” The string of profanities and victorious dancing continued, in shapes and forms that no one present had ever heard before. It was quite impressive, really.


“My ship is finally and officially sailing!” Alya exclaimed, hitting the quick rewind button on the remote and watching it again with a satisfied look. Her expression almost hit dreamy levels of content before she realized, “What I wonder is why haven’t I heard about any of this when the fashion show was more than a week ago.” Alya glared at her phone. “I really hope that she finally got laid, because I’m going to wring her neck for keeping this from me.”

“Well, the show hadn’t aired yet.” Nino offered and shrugged. ”Maybe they weren't allowed to talk about it.”

"Babe. I've listened to Marinette swoon over every single thing Adrien said and did for years. I deserve resolution."

“Tom?” Sabine took a sip from her tea as the television set showed her only daughter making out with her favorite model.

“Yes dear?”

“Do you think this is why Marinette didn’t want to watch the show with us today?”

Tom snorted. “I’d think so.” He looked at the television where Marinette was bashfully hiding behind Adrien. “Too bad for her, the box is recording it.”

“Oh good, we’ll play it at their wedding.” Sabine said.

Tom looked down at his wife with an appreciative expression. “This is why I married you.”

“I know.”

“Marinette, your phone is ringing.” Tikki floated above Marinette’s cellphone, which hadn’t stopped ringing and buzzing for the last five minutes.

Curl up in bed, Marinette held a pillow to her face and groaned. She peeked after a few seconds, only the top of her head visible as she glanced at the buzzing device. Considering the scene that had just played out on the screen... the one that had made her hide her face in the first place much to someone else’s delight, Marinette didn’t have to guess hard to figure out who was trying to get her attention. “Uh. Is it Alya?”
“Let me see,” Tikki said, and nodded. “The first message says, *You sneaky fu*… Oh!” Tikki turned towards Marinette, blue eyes apologetic as she floated away from the phone. “I don’t want to keep reading.”

“It’s okay.” Marinette patted the top of the kwami’s head, who nuzzled her face. “Don’t worry about it, Tikki. I got a pretty good idea what it said.”

Raoul looked at the camera, comfortably settled in the interview room just before he was supposed to go on stage. “This is the moment I’ve been waiting for my whole life.” His smile was wistful as he seemed to remember times past. “I’ve worked a lot of different jobs. Tried to follow the path I was told to. Trying to do what was expected of me. But… fashion has always been such a big part of my life, and I’m so grateful to my loves for encouraging me to follow my dream.”

The final competitor, the one and only Raoul, stepped out onto the runway with a bright smile on his face. His cobalt suit complimented his dark skin tone nicely, and Raoul looked quite handsome. “Hello!” he greeted the audience, “I’m really happy to be here with you today. It’s been a lot of work and a lot of sacrifices. I’d like to dedicate this collection to the two most important people in my life. Mar, Charlie. I love you. This is for you. Enjoy the show!”

Raoul’s collection was exuberant madness. His music was themed to a track that had a rock feel to it while still having the beat needed as the models strutted out and down the runway. It started simple, black dresses and black suits, but the illusion of normalcy was shattered after the next models stepped onto the runway. There was lots of satin, wind-flapped sleeves paired up with sleek leather skirts. Elaborate looking evening dresses were crowned with plumed headdresses that swayed gracefully with every step the models took. Leather mixed with silk, elaborate embroidery… Raoul had pulled out all the stops and people could tell. Noelle, his muse, walked out wearing a red gown with long black leather gloves. There was a certain cockiness to her step as she made it all the way through the runway. She blew a kiss at the camera and walked back.

Finally, the models returned, and Raoul joined them for his final walk. The designer was euphoric and there was almost a skip in his step as he walked out on the runway. He trailed behind the models, waving enthusiastically. He kissed the tip of his fingers and aimed them at Mar and Charlie, who reciprocated with proud smiles on their faces. Charlie went a little above and beyond, and called out “Love you too babe!” despite Mar’s attempts to quiet her down.

And then, all the shows were over. Backstage everyone was cheering, and the guests began leaving the runway room. Some crew members went towards the family members and ushered them backstage.

“This is so exciting!” Mylène exclaimed, huddled up against Ivan. “I mean, no matter what… Marinette is an actual designer. Who did a show!” Mylène was thrilled.

Meanwhile, Alya was less excited. “And that was it for me at Fashion Week.” She sighed, as Tom and Sabine were led through an exclusive door by security guards. “Only her parents were allowed past that point. Trust me… I tried.” The security guards were incredibly good at their job.
Marinette was waiting backstage, barely coming down from her high and still leaning on Adrien. There was a lot of noise, as people outside started gathering their belongings and leaving the exhibition hall. Marinette couldn't find it in herself to calm down just yet. It was still thrilling. So many people coming for their show. Adrien stood in front of her, one of his hands planted on her waist as the other ran circles on her back. She smiled at him, leaning her head on his shoulder as she took a calming breath.

They broke apart when her parents arrived. Tom and Sabine took mere seconds to reach their daughter. “Marinette!” Sabine called out.

Marinette turned towards them seconds before she was squeezed into a hug by Sabine and both of them were enveloped by Tom. “We’re so proud of you sweetheart!” Sabine said, unable to stop the smile on her face. The older woman brushed the hair off her face lovingly. "You've grown so much. I'm just... in awe of you."

"My little girl!" Tom pulled her into a tighter hug as Sabine stepped aside, "You've always been a winner. No matter what happens in that judging room, remember that."

Adrien had taken a couple of feet back, giving the family their privacy, but Tom waved him over. “Come here, my boy!” he exclaimed, clapping Adrien on the back with a mischievous smile on his face and having seen the way Adrien was holding Marinette when they arrived. “About time, I say.”

“Papa, oh my God!” Marinette exclaimed, hiding her face in her hands as Adrien smiled shyly.

Back on the runway room. The cameras were following some people, asking for interviews. Alya appeared on screen, the byline read: Alya Césaire, Ladyblog. “Marinette’s collection is all I’ve dreamed about and never knew I wanted.” She gushed. Alya didn't even pretend to have a scrap of unbiasedness. “She’s really talented, and I would love to see her evening gowns for sale in a store someday.”

There was another critic in Marinette’s corner. Ava Moulier, director of a renowned fashion Magazine spoke confidently at the camera. “I think there was a clear winner today. Marinette’s collection was wonderful, and I can see her stepping straight from this into red carpet fashion and formalwear, and she could own it!”

“Marinette rocked it! And how come no one told me she got hurt in the round I judged? That was a low move people. Low!” Jagged Stone narrowed his eyes at the camera. “She’s the most talented one here, and listen, listen, Marinette. If by some travesty you don’t win, I definitely want you designing all my outfits. Don’t waste this talent people!”

Backstage, Raoul was tackled by Charlie and Mar, his beloved partners. If there was something said to be shared by them, it was that they were both incredibly good looking. Charlie was a slender woman, tall in her heeled boots, her American accent obvious despite the fact she was very fluid in french. Her long brown hair was pulled back in a slick ponytail which swished with every skipping step she took. Mar was broader and had olive skin, dark brown eyes, and a charming smile to rival Raoul’s. Mar's Spanish accent was far more prominent, and it was probably why he preferred to not speak as much on camera.

“Mon chou, you did great!” The french term of endearment sounded funny with Charlie’s accent but her enthusiasm made up for it. She grabbed Raoul’s face and planted a big kiss on his lips. “We missed youuu.” She grinned, arms laced around his neck, staring up at him adoringly.
“I missed you too!” Raoul said, grinning at Charlie before reaching for Mar’s hand and pulling him for a kiss. “Amor, did you like the show?”

“You did amazing!” Mar said, smiling broadly at Raoul. Mar’s accent was thick but neither he nor Raoul seemed to care.

Out in the runway room, people were beginning to leave, but some of the less camera-shy guests were still giving out interviews. “Well.” Chloe looked at the camera and sniffed, “I think Raoul’s collection was the best. Marinette’s wasn’t bad, but I think having Adrien Agreste model for you can definitely save an otherwise average show.”

The Fashion Editor from E! was next. “I don’t even know why they’re deliberating. Raoul. You won. I loved everything.”

Leo’s family joined him backstage. Marguerite embraced her husband with a broad smile. “I’m so happy for you!” She said, kissing her husband with a smile.

“You did great Papa!” Their daughter Adeline joined into the family hug. Even Leo couldn’t resist smiling.

“I have to say,” Melanie Morrison, famous actress looked at the camera. “I loved how timeless Leo’s collection is. He’s very polished and I’d love to see what else he has in store.”

“I love flashy clothings and colors, but I think it’s really impressive to be able to create a nice collection with simple lines. I love Leo’s work and I think he outdid himself. I’m rooting for him.”

Another interviewee wasn’t so decisive. “I think the whole show was solid. I can’t make up my mind. It’s anyone’s game at this point.”

“Solid my ass.” Alix exclaimed as she glared at the television. “Marinette won. Just SAY IT.”

“And of course they have to go into the longest commercial break in the history of ever.” Nino complained

“I’m texting Marinette and telling her to get her sneaky ass over here and bring boy wonder with her.”

“Oh, that’d be cool,” Nino smiled, leaning his chin on Alya’s shoulder to try and peek into her screen. “What did she say?”

“It just says message read.” Alya glared at her phone, and if her glare had been any more powerful, the poor device might have burst into flames.

Nino winced. “Hey babe, show’s back on!” he said. Deflection was sometimes the only course of action when Alya was annoyed.

The designers had gone back to the studio, and were currently standing on the same runway they’d
been judged on in all the previous episodes.

“Welcome back to the runway!” Heloise greeted them. The model sat with all the judges on their usual spot. “Today was your big fashion show. There were lots of hits and a few misses, but overall it was a great show. We are extremely proud of all you.” She smiled, before turning towards her judges. “Well, you know our judges. We have the creative director for Mode Magazine, Tatiana Geiger!”

Tatiana clasped her hands together. “Congratulations guys. It was a superb show. I am so proud to have seen the evolution of your work through the season. You grew, and you found your voice and your style and we could definitely see it in your collection. I’m so happy for you all.”

Heloise smiled and continued. “Creative direct for S.E.L.F Fashion and famed designer, Thierry Leclère.”

“There’s nothing like the feeling of your first show. And you presented at Paris Fashion week! That is something that a lot of people only dream of. I want you to cherish this moment, and I hope it’s the beginning of something amazing for each and every one of you. Let it be the first of many.” Thierry smiled at each designer before turning back to Heloise.

“And our special guest judge, Academy Award winning actress, renowned by her red carpet style. Miss Sophia Morin!”

Sophia smiled, her red hair shiny under the studio lights. “Hello designers!” She said, hands waving excitedly as she spoke. “You should all be very proud. You are all so talented. I hope you know that. No matter who wins today, you are all amazing and deserve to be here. Don’t forget that.”

Heloise took over the show again. “Before we decide the winner of Project Runway, we have some questions for you. Bring out your muse models!”

The models stepped onto the runway, each one taking their place beside their designer and wearing their closing looks from the fashion show. Adrien and Marinette shared a little smile, not completely unnoticed by the cameras.

Heloise continued with the show. “Raoul, tell us about your inspiration and your collection.”

“Well,” Raoul said, as Noelle took her place next to him. “I drew inspiration out of nature. I think one of my proudest accomplishments in this show was the butterfly dress. And I wanted to do something inspired by that, but with an edge. I wanted to add a lot of fabrics that looked like wings, almost fairytale like, but with a modern and sexy twist.”

“Those headdresses were certainly something.” Thierry laughed as he glanced down at his card. “I’m not one hundred percent sold on the idea, but I think you made it work. Your brand is fun and sexy, filled with colors and everything suits your style perfectly.”

Tatiana was far more positive. “I was very impressed. My favorite look of yours was the leather gown. I think it was rich and stunning and it just… it just took my breath away!”

“Thank you.”

“I did have some outfits I didn’t like.” Tatiana continued. “The first dress, your opener, was weak. It wasn’t a bad outfit per se, but it’s not up to your standards. You’re are a talented designer and that it was kind of forgettable.”

Heloise spoke up. “I personally love the design here. I think the red looks amazing on her and the
styling is to die for. She looks sexy and confident and I love it! I was a bit concerned about the headdresses at first, but it was just the hint of theatrical fun that your show needed.”

"Thank you all." Raoul smiled, feeling relieved at the positive feedback.

“Leo, tell us about your inspiration and your collection.”

“I believe in the simplicity of fashion, and in using simple lines to create something beautiful.” Leo explained. “Slip dresses are a classic staple in fashion, and a must have for every woman. I tried to use that and create something new and interesting.”

“I loved the colors.” Sophia said. “I think it was the fact that your colors were so soft and neutral. It was a very pleasing job to watch. I would have loved to see more colors though, some brighter jeweled tones, perhaps. Your closer was beautiful, but it didn’t have the strenght that it probably needed.”

Heloise looked at her notes and spoke up. “I did like your collection, but I think it’s a bit dull. You have a clear sense of style and It’s something that’s made me proud of you. But you had the chance to experiment, to go crazy and nothing you made surprised me. Fashion, especially a runway show, is a place you have to play with the element of surprise. And I didn't see that here.”

“Booo Leo!” Alix threw popcorn at the television, much to Nino’s chagrin. “You’re boring.

“The green dress was the only thing I liked,” Mylène said, head tilted at the screen as the judges commented on Leo’s collection. She quickly recanted, after Alya glared in her direction. “I mean, it’s the lesser evil, Alya. We’re all team Marinette here.”

Ivan snickered.

“Babe. It’s Mari’s turn now.” Nino directed his fiancée’s attention to the screen once more.

“Marinette.”

“I wanted to try something classical. My inspiration was beautiful, classical icons of fashion. I want to make dresses that every women dreams of wearing and suits that men don’t find boring. I think that menswear can step a little out of the box and I wanted to try and show that.”

“You were eliminated and saved, during the last few challenges. How does it feel to have such a comeback and show in Fashion week?”

Marinette breathed out, a smile playing on her face. “It’s a dream come true. I will forever be grateful to Tim for giving me that chance and believing that I could get this far.”

“I do think Tim used his save with the right person," Heloise said, before looking down at her cards. "Now, on to your collection. There were outfits I loved. ” Heloise said, one hand placed on her chest. “That coral gown was beautiful, and the flowers embroidered on them were just to die for.”

Thierry nodded. “I loved your suits. You played with textures, you played with colors. You surprised us. I love the look you brought today. The fabric looks a little unconventional, but it works!
Did you glue the tulips?”

“I embroidered them by hand.”

“See? This is what I love about your collection. You have such an eye for detail and you work hard to put in those personal touches.”

“I loved your overall collection,” Sophia said, looking down at her notes. “But I think you should have stayed with eveningwear. The first two shorter dresses were lovely, but I would have loved to see more gowns from you. Those two felt a little out of place. They were beautiful dresses, but they took away from the cohesiveness of the show.”

“The outfit I absolutely fell in love with, was that ombre dress.” Tatiana sighed dreamily. “Oh my god. It was stunning. Did you dye it by hand?”

“Yes,” Marinette chuckled nervously, subconsciously inching closer to Adrien. “It took around a week to get the fabric the way I wanted it to look.”

“Superb work Marinette. The dress was fabulous.” Tatiana finished, smiling at the designer.

“Thank you.” Marinette smiled.

“I think you’ll be a great red carpet designer. I can see your outfits on award ceremonies. On galas and black tie events. You have a great future, Marinette.” Heloise finished, before looking at the models. “Models, you can leave the runway.”

Adrien reached for Marinette hand and gave it a soft squeeze, before leaving the runway with the other two models. Soon enough, it was just the designers and the judges, waiting for the end to come.

“Well, it seems that you ended up with more than just a collection!” Heloise joked, and Marinette blushed profusely. “I’m very happy for you.”

Marinette laughed nervously, unable to hide her blush. Raoul decided to intercede. “We all are. It drove us all crazy watching them dance around. Just ask Camille.” The judges bursted out laughing and Marinette seemed to barely restrain herself from punching Raoul’s arm.

But the time for playing around was over. Heloise turned to Leo. “Leo. Why should you be the winner of Project Runway?”

Leo straightened up. “I believe I have the talent and that there’s a place in this industry for me. I’ve been working in fashion for so long that I think this is the push I need for my designs to finally explode.”

The judges nodded and Heloise turned to the next designer. “Raoul?”

“I can’t wait to take the world by storm. I just feel that if I won, there would be so much more I could do. My design style is always evolving and I think I can make it in this cutthroat world of Fashion.”

“Marinette.”

“Fashion has always been a part of my life, ever since I was a little girl. I think that there’s no thing I’ve wanted more than to be a fashion designer and put my fingerprint on the world. I believe that people would want what I make and that there’s just so much I can do.”
“Alright designers,” Heloise said, sharing a look with her fellow judges. “We've heard what you have to say, and we have a very important decision to make. We’re proud of you. But only one of you can be the winner of Project Runway Paris. You may leave the runway.”

The three designers walked out into the waiting room and took their usual places on the sofas. “And now… we wait.” Raoul's voice was relaxed, but the tense lines in his face betrayed his true feelings.

Marinette smiled at him, nerves betraying her cheery facade. “You both did a great job.” she told them. “It’s anyone’s win by now.”

“It was a good show,” Leo conceded.

“Hey, little lady.” Raoul draped his arm over Marinette’s shoulder. “You got this. We got this. No matter what happens in there, right?” he offered his hand out to Marinette and she shook it, accepting his nervous and comforting grip on her hand.

“I’m just nervous.” she said, leaning her head on her friend's shoulder.

“Don’t forget we put on a hell of a show.” Raoul said, “We did good.”

“We did, didn’t we?” Marinette smiled.

“I’m so nervous I could puke.” Alix had almost climbed on top of Kim as they awaited the results. “Stupid reality tv with stupid drawn out tension. Ahhhhh, just let this be over!” she cried out, eyes averted from the television and making little gagging noises like she was serious.

Nino turned around to look at the pink haired girl. “Please don’t.” He was still quite aware that it was his turn cleaning out the living room. He had no experience cleaning up puke and he didn't want to start now.

“Mari did a great job.” Alya said, but it sounded like she was reassuring herself and she was as nervous as the rest of them. This was a big moment for Marinette and there was a small part of Alya that was sad about not being there for her. “She’ll do great.”

Back in the runway room, the judges were busy deliberating. “I think we can agree that all three designers were very true to their voice. I think we could definitely see their personality shine through their whole collection. And that’s something really rare and beautiful.”

“I liked Leo’s” Sophia pointed out. “It was very thorough and cohesive.”

“I personally loved Raoul’s.” Thierry said, as the camera showed a clip from his runway collection. “I think he has a very artistic soul and you can definitely tell.”

Tatiana shook her head, “But Marinette has so much talent. Those gowns? To die for. And I love that she didn’t use regular colors for the tuxes! She’s very creative. She thinks outside the box but without making it too costume-ey.”

“But we can only pick one.” Heloise said. A cut away, a dramatic sound byte, and then a shot of the judges looking at each other. “Do we have a decision?” One by one the judges nodded. “Let’s bring
them back out.”

The designers came back on the runway and waited quietly for the judges’ decision in their usual places.

“Designers. This decision was a very difficult one. Your collections were absolutely amazing and we are so proud that it was such a close competition. But we have made our decision. Only one of you can be the winner of this season of Project Runway.”

The camera showed each of the designers. Their faces were serious and expectant as they awaited whatever Heloise was about to say.

“Designers, you each showed a collection that was one hundred percent you. You let your voices shine through your work and it made for an amazing show.” Heloise smiled, “Leo, while there were a few pieces that we didn’t love. You made your models look effortlessly cool and your skill shines in your work.” She paused for a minute as the music grew louder in anticipation. "Leo, I’m sorry. You’re out.”

“Thank you.” Leo bowed his head lightly.

“We loved getting to know you, and we hope to see more from you in the future.” Heloise stood up, and said her goodbyes to the designer. “Au Revoir. You may leave the runway.”

With that Leo took his leave, an increasingly nervous Marinette and Raoul remaining. The two friends linked arms, looking between each other with anxious eyes.

“And then, there were two!” Heloise said, “Marinette, Raoul. One of you will be the winner of Project Runway and one of you will be out. Raoul. Your collection was wild and colorful, and it paid off. You clearly have a great artistic ability and it shines through in your design.” Heloise turned to Marinette. “Marinette. You are so talented. Your designs were awe inspiring. Your creativity and attention to detail are obvious in everything you make. Both of you put on an amazing show. One of the best I’ve seen.”

“Thank you.” The designers chorused, and flashed each other smiles.

“Marinette.” Heloise continued, giving a second for a dramatic pause. “I’m sorry, but you’re out.” The model’s face softened. “We really loved your collection, and we’re sure that there are great things in your future. Keep at it, and I’m sure we’ll see more of you.”

“Definitely.”

“Au revoir. I wish you the best.” Heloise kissed both her cheeks, as it was her customary send off.

“Thank you.” Marinette said her goodbyes to Heloise before turning to Raoul and hugging her friend. “I’m really happy for you” She told him, her microphone muffled in the hug. “You deserve this.”

“So do you.” Raoul’s voice was slightly choked up, even though he looked relieved too. “I’ll see you soon, little lady.” he said as he hugged her just as tight.

After that, Marinette left the runway.
Her parents and Adrien were waiting in a special room, and despite her best efforts, her face fell once she entered the room. Sabine and Tom ran to her immediately, but she simply shook her head. “I’m... it was so close.”

“We’re proud of you anyway,” Sabine said, hugging her daughter tight. “You outdid yourself today, truly.”

“You’ve always been a winner in my eyes. And now the whole world saw just how amazing you are!” Tom cuddled his daughter, almost crushing her in a hug.

Marinette smiled, her eyes shining with tears. She wiped them off quickly as she allowed herself to bask in the affection of her parents. “Thank you.”

In the interview room, Marinette looked sad, but calm. “I’ve learnt a lot. Being on Project Runway made me grow as a designer. I’m sad, of course, it’s tough... knowing I was so close.”

The image cut to Marinette, still being cheered up by her parents. Her voice over continued. “I know there’s still so much more for me. I’ve learnt things about myself... and about the people close to me... that I wouldn’t have otherwise.”

Backstage, Tom and Sabine released their daughter. Adrien took the chance to step forward and pull her into his arms. Marinette’s arms wrapped around his waist. Adrien brushed his lips to the top of her forehead. “You okay?” he whispered, barely loud enough for the cameras to get.

“I will be.” She sighed, sinking into his embrace.

Marinette gave a last look at the camera, her smile hesitant as her participation finally came to a close. "I'm thankful for everything. I feel like I won more than I lost.”

Back in front of the judges, the mood was much more cheerful. “Raoul, that means you are the winner of Project Runway! Congratulations!”

“Thank you so much!” He said, his smile broadening as all the judges congratulated him and the music swelled.

“Now, there are other people who want to congratulate you, come on out!”

Charlie and Mar almost run onto the runway and tackle their boyfriend. The three of them melt into a loving embrace. “You won baby!” Charlie exclaimed and kissed his cheek with almost enough strength to bruise. Raoul just laughed and wrapped one arm around each of them.

A very happy Raoul spoke from the interview room. “These two are my rock. If it wasn’t for them, for their support... I wouldn’t be here right now. I love them. I... I just can’t believe how lucky I am!”

“Congratulations.”

“Thank you so much!” Charlie said, “We are just so proud of him. You can’t understand how happy we are for him.”

Tim stepped out last. “Congratulations Raoul!” He said, and hugged the designer. “You did a terrific job and I hope you know that we only expect more from you.”

“I’m ready.”
The show ended up with Raoul, Mar and Charlie leaving the runway, hands linked together.

The credits began rolling, and Adrien rolled onto his side. “You okay?” He repeated the question he’d just seen himself ask on television a moment ago. It couldn’t be easy to see her defeat playing out again in front of her. But she’d insisted that she should watch it, and he wanted to be with her when she did. So they’d watched the show from the comfort of his apartment bedroom, which had been their base of operations for the last few days anyway. Adrien certainly wasn’t complaining. If he’d known a few months ago that he’d witness Marinette… witness Ladybug wearing only one of his t-shirts and nothing else… well.

Marinette was casually chewing on a slice of pizza. She wiped her fingers on a napkin and settled her back against his chest. It was easier here, sequestered from the rest of the world without anybody staring at her. Well… without anybody staring at her out of sympathy. So far it had been a great decision. “I am. **Now.**”

She scooted away and he made use of the moment, grabbing the empty plates and placing them on the bedside table. Once the bed was cleared, Marinette crawled back over him, placing her hands and chin on his bare chest and looking him in the eye.

“I do wish it was me, you know. I wish I would have won.”

His hand ran down over her back and he smiled when she relaxed against him. “You did an **amazing** job.” Adrien said and brushed the hair out of her face. Despite everything, Marinette had been rather tight lipped about the whole competition. It was good to finally hear her talk about it. She had been really close. It couldn’t be easy to lose when it’d been just so within her grasp.

“I’m proud of that. I know I did great. I worked **so hard.**” Marinette smiled and lifted one hand, running her fingertips over his face and trailing them over his lips. He kissed the fingertips and she laughed.

“But it’s not like I lost everything, I see that now. I have a great portfolio and real commissions thanks to the show. People want to wear my dresses, my clothes! And I’m happy about it. I mean, winning would be nice, the prize would have been nice. But… I think I’m good.”

Adrien flexed his arms, muscles tensing as he playfully showed off for her. “Well, bugaboo, you **did** get one purtty great thing out of it.”

“**Eh.** I suppose.”

He gaped at her, playfully offended, “Hey!” he rolled them so that she laid flat on her back. “Take that back!”

She looked at him with hesitant approval, “For a runner up, I guess I did alr-NO stoppp!” She burst out laughing as Adrien buried his face on her neck and Marinette could not stop giggling and squirming.

Despite not being very ticklish otherwise, Marinette’s neck was incredibly sensitive. Adrien had spent a couple days taking full advantage of that discovery.

“Okay, okay I take it back!” She finally relented, and Adrien lifted himself up. He’d crawled on top of her completely, holding his weight on his hands and knees and staring down at her. “I love you, you ridiculous human being.”
“I love you too.” He answered warmly, allowing Marinette to pull him down for a kiss. Kissing her was still a new thrill, every touch and murmur a new adventure for his nervous system, he was sure he would never get bored of it. He didn’t know how his heart could feel so full and flutter so often and not give out on him.

Her arms looped around his neck, her fingers trailing over the nape of his neck. He traced her lower lip with his tongue and her lips parted with a sigh. He felt that now familiar heat spread through his body as bare and very soft legs wrapped around his waist, pulling him much closer to her.

His hand was sneaking under the hem of her shirt... his shirt, touching the smooth skin of her stomach. His fingers inched up her ribcage, tracing over beauty marks and moles he'd only recently discovered. Drinking in every sigh and small gasp he could draw from her-

A very insistent buzz sounded from the intercom near the front door.

They broke apart with a groan. “Tell me Alya doesn’t know your address.” Marinette pleaded. She loved her best friend, she really did. But Alya was relentless if she had a goal in mind.

Adrien let his head hang, his forehead resting against her shoulder, defeated. “Nino does.”

Marinette sighed. So much for play time. “Well, it was good knowing you. I’m going to go accept my death-by-Alya with dignity.”

Adrien crawled off of her and helped her up. He picked up her leggings, discarded at the foot of his bed. "Pants?"

"Yes please." She caught them easily and Marinette pulled on her yoga pants, wiggling them expertly past her hips. Adrien took a second to admire how they looked on her before getting back into the task at hand.

The intercom kept buzzing and Adrien walked towards it, pulling his shirt back on. "Hello?"

"Dude, I tried to stop her but you know..."

"Hey Nino," Adrien flashed Marinette a knowing look. "Here's the deal. Buy us all some drinks, I have enough pizza and you can come right up after. There’s only caveat... Alya is not allowed to kill my girlfriend." His straight face broke and a delighted smile pulled at his lips.

There was a muffled squeal coming from Nino's side. Alya's.  "FINALLY!" There was some shuffling. "I'm not killing her, I just want details!"

"About damned time, bro." Nino chuckled and the sound of clinking glass was audible on his side of the communication. "I think your terms are fair. I brought drinks with us, so hurry! Let us up."

Adrien pressed a button, and a long buzz signalled that the main door had opened. They'd be up in minutes.

"I'm your girlfriend?" Marinette grinned, having changed out of his shirt into one of her own shirts. While he mourned the fact that she was no longer wearing his shirt. He appreciated the fact that her long sleeved shirt did not reach her thighs, like his shirt did. Yoga pants.

"Well..."

He didn't get to clarify or second guess. Marinette's arms snaked around his waist and she leaned into his side. "So we're official now."
He tugged at her arms, pulling Marinette to his front so he could hug her properly. "Well, Bugaboo..." He tucked her head under his chin as they waited for their friends to arrive. He’d always loved her. Mask, no mask. Marinette, Ladybug. It was all the same. He’d loved her as a friend, he’d loved her as more. And now he felt like they’d reached an odd sense of completion. “I think we were always meant to be.”

Marinette twisted a little, placing a kiss under his jaw. It was hard to believe sometimes that the same person who was holding her close was her beloved Chat. But while the discovery had shaken her to the core, it just felt… natural now. She laced her fingers with his, still wrapped around her waist. “We just needed to sync up a little?”

Adrien kissed her temple. “Precisely.”

Chapter End Notes

I want to thank EVERYONE who's followed this story. All your comments have really cheered me up. There was FAN ART about this, which I still can't believe and I'm honestly so touched. <3 THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING ANd I hope you like what's coming next :D <3

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