"I'll be fine, Alya. It's only a couple blocks." "But it's ten at night, it's not safe. Especially with that Chat Noir prowling around."
"Girl, I can give you a ride. Or you can stay over, you know my mom won't care!"

Marinette simply gave a small smile at her best friend's worrying. "I'll be fine, Alya. It's only a couple blocks."

"But it's ten at night, it's not safe. Especially with that Chat Noir prowling around." Alya practically spat the name of Paris's number one criminal.

The raven-haired teen's top teeth rested on her lower lip. After a few seconds of hesitation, she shook her head resolutely.

"I'll be fine. I doubt I'll even see him."

"But-"

"No buts. I have to get home, we have school tomorrow. I can't chance sleeping late and not seeing Adrien." Marinette practically swooned at that last thought.

Adrien Agreste: a gorgeous, blond model who graced her with his presence everyday by sitting in front of her in literature class. Marinette was convinced the angels lent some of their golden spools of thread to make his hair. Next they found the rarest and brightest emeralds to place in his eyes. Finally, they took a piece of the sun itself and placed it in his heart. How else could he be so warm and kind? Not to mention he was an excellent fencer, fluent in Chinese, and one of the smartest people in their class.

Unfortunately she was the exact opposite of smooth, so every time he merely glanced at her she was a pile of nonspeaking mush.

It was worse when he tried to actually speak with her. Her cheeks would heat up so much she was sure she resembled a tomato. Then she'd stutter and stammer until Alya could save her from any more humiliation.

But maybe one day everything will change. Maybe he'll fall in love with her and ask her to the movies and she'd be cool and calm and then they'd get married and have three kids and a dog and a cat-wait, scratch the cat-and a hamster and-

"Girl, you there?" Alya asked with a small smirk, snapping her fingers in her dazed friend's face. She's been witness to 'Adrien fantasies' one too many times.

"Hm?" Marinette shook her head. "Yeah, yeah, I'm fine." She took a breath, the heat in her cheeks started to wear off. "I should get going."

Alya still didn't agree, but she walked her down to her front door regardless.

"Be careful. Text me when you're home," she ordered.

"I will, promise. See you tomorrow!"

Marinette waved with a bright smile and descended from the porch steps. Alya watched her go until she turned around the corner.

The hopeful designer wasn't stupid. She glanced around occasionally to make sure no one was
following her and didn't stop walking. She kept a hand in her jacket pocket, hopeful that any possible muggers would think she had a weapon.

She shivered a bit at the cool, night air. It was nearing November, she'd have to start wearing warmer clothes soon. Maybe that jacket she was sketching...

Marinette didn't have time to scream before she was roughly pulled into the alley. A large, dirty hand pressed against her lips.

Her eyes were wide with shock and fear. She tried to fight her way out but the man had her pinned to the brick wall.

"Stop fighting," he growled, holding up a small, silver dagger to her throat.

She relented, but not before letting out a small whimper. Is this how she was going to die? In an alley and be discovered some time later by some unfortunate passer-by? Her parents would be devastated, she was their only child. She would never get to become a fashion designer.

The man tilted his head at her. He didn't bother to wear a mask. His hair was a short brown color, although it could've been black. It was hard to tell in the darkness. Angry brown eyes seared into her sapphires.

"You don't look like you have anything of value..." he mused. Marinette relaxed and almost let out a sigh of relief. Maybe he'd let her go!

"But I haven't been satisfied in a long time." All of a sudden he grinned, it was purely predatory.

Marinette felt her blood run cold at his meaning.

No. No, no, no! She can't let this happen, she won't let this happen!

She bit at his hand, sinking her teeth into the disgusting skin with all the strength she had in her jaw. The effect was immediate, he sprang back and howled in pain, clenching the bit hand into a fist.

Marinette turned to run. She almost made it out of the alley but he snatched her backpack and threw her against the wall. As her head made contact she swore she saw stars.

"You little bitch," he growled. "I was going to let you go after I was finished with you and let you enjoy it. But now I'm going to tear your pussy apart and dump your body in the Seine when I'm done!"

Marinette shook. Tears welled in her eyes and another whimper tore from her throat. She was going to die. Alya would be without a best friend, her parents without a daughter.

An angry hiss tore through the air.

The mugger and Marinette both stopped.

Her eyes darted to the right to see a figure clad in all black slowly approach them.

"Chat Noir." The man let out a sigh of relief as soon as he saw him. "You scared me there! Look what I managed to get." He gestured to the poor girl pinned beneath him.

The young designer's eyes bulged. Chat Noir? Her body wouldn't be found in the Seine now. No, it'd be slashed apart by his claws, far past any point of being identifiable.
"I see." His voice was cool, calm, and deadly. It chilled Marinette to the bone. "Let me take a closer look at her."

"Be my guest. But be careful, she already tried to get away once. She's a fighter." The man glared down at the hand she had previously bitten.

Chat Noir chuckled and maneuvered his way until they were practically nose to nose.

The news didn't have any pictures of him, he was that good at his crimes. So she was a bit surprised to see how young he looked.

His hair was blond and messy, a stray lock hung on his forehead and black cat ears were pinned to the top of his head. His eyes, most of his forehead, and cheekbones were covered by a sleek, black mask. The mask ended at his nose in a sharp point.

His eyes were bright green and seemed to bore into her. He grinned, a flash of white escaping past his lips.

Overall, Marinette could gather that he was a very handsome man. But her heart would forever belong to Adrien.

"She is very pretty," Chat Noir observed. He placed a clawed index finger beneath her chin and tilted her head up. His eyes zeroed in on her neck, eyes darkening in...what, exactly?

She didn't dare move, barely even breathe in fear of making him mad.

"Sweet little thing, isn't she? And she's all mine tonight," the mugger gloated. Marinette felt bile rise up in her throat.

"Yeah, about that." Chat Noir turned away from her and removed his finger from her chin. "I'd like to have her."

The mugger gasped in outrage. "What?! I found her first!"

"I don't care." Chat Noir shrugged his shoulders.

"You can't just steal her away from me."

Chat scoffed. "Do you forget you're talking to the best cat burglar and overall criminal in Paris? Stealing is what I do."

"You're not taking her. I haven't had sex in weeks!" The man lunged but Chat Noir was much quicker. He pulled the arm down painfully and kicked the man away from him. The mugger bent over to clutch his stomach with a groan but Chat let his foot fly upward and connect with his chin. His head snapped up and the feline criminal took that opportunity to slash his face with his claws, leaving three distinct lines across the mugger's face.

The man screamed in pain and held his face, blood now seeping through his fingers. Marinette could only watch, horrified, as Chat Noir spun and kicked him again, sending the criminal flying back several feet. His body crashed into some trashcans.

Marinette couldn't move. Chat Noir gathered her in his arms and used a baton previously strapped to his back to get to the rooftop. He carried her a few rooftops over before gently setting her down.

The girl trembled and stared into the criminal's burning green gaze. What would he do to her now?
She knew it would be worse than what that mugger had planned for her.

"Now, you don't think I'm going to hurt you, do you? Princess?" He asked, his lips curling into a smirk.

Princess? Marinette's eyes narrowed, confused.

"Really, I would hope you would have more faith in me after I just saved your life," he sneered. "It would've been pawsitively horrible if I hadn't interfered."

Cat puns? Princess? Saving her life? Not hurting her? "I-" Marinette tried to find some sentence to say, anything, really. "I-"

"Hm?" He grinned, cupping a hand to his human ear. "Go ahead, all my ears are listening."

It took her a minute, but she finally managed to get out one word. "Why?"

He crossed his arms and rolled his eyes. "You'll have to be more specific, Princess. Cats can't read minds."

"I mean-" She shook her head at the absurdity of it all. "You're the most known criminal in Paris."

Said criminal flashed her a smirk. "A pleasure to meet me, I'm sure."

She was thrown off by his cocky attitude, but got back to her question. "Why did you save me?"

He shouldn't have saved her. True, there were no reports of rape or murder connecting to him, but didn't criminals turn their head away when one of their brethren did something? Why would he stop that mugger and save her?

"Despite my crimes, I do have a sense of morals. Besides, I couldn't let that disgusting piece of filth taint you. I wasn't lying when I said you were pretty." He flashed her a flirtatious wink.

Marinette felt her cheeks blush before she could stop herself. "But-uh-I-"

"How about a thank you for your knight in shining leather?" He interrupted, smirking.

"Thank you," she blurted out before she could think.

He reached forward to take her hand. Slowly raising it to his lips, he pressed a soft, warm kiss to her knuckles. He lingered for a moment longer than necessary, then raised his eyes to her.

"You're welcome, Princess." He said before returning her hand and taking a step back. "Now, while I do love calling you that, I would like to have a real name to know you by."

Her eyes widened as she bit her lower lip. Would it really be wise to let Paris's top criminal know her name?

"If you won't tell me I have other means to get it," he drawled, seeing her apprehension.

She paused, raising an eyebrow. "Wh-What means?"

"Nothing you need to worry your pretty head about. That is, of course, you do tell me your name?"

What were these 'other means'? He was right, she didn't want to know.
"Marinette," she whispered.

"Chat Noir, a purrlease." He bowed. When he rose, his demeanor changed from flirty and playful to serious. "It's pretty late, why were you outside at this hour?"

Marinette wondered why he wanted to know that, but answered his question nonetheless. She was still afraid of those claws on the tips of his fingers.

"I was at my best friend's house. We were working on a project and we lost track of time. So I left and was on my way home and then that guy pulled me into the alley and, well, you know the rest." She fumbled with the ending.

He hissed, his lips pulling back and white teeth on full display. "Did he hurt you?"

She absently rubbed the sore spot on her head. "He pushed me into the wall when I tried to run, but I'll be fine."

Before she could comprehend what he was doing he was inspecting her hair, his claws gently peeling away the raven strands.

"No blood," he concluded. "That's a good sign. You didn't pass out or anything, so I don't think you have a concussion. Then again, I'm not a doctor. Does your head hurt?"

She had to admit, it was kind of amusing to see the man she heard so many horror stories about being caring, and towards her no less. "No, the spot just hurts a bit if you touch it."

She unleashed a hiss of her own and Chat quickly flinched away. "Like that," she breathed.

"Where do you live?" He asked.

Okay, her name was one thing, but where she lived? That's pushing it.

"I'm not going to rob you blind if that's what you're worried about," he growled, ears drooping slightly. "Or come in the middle of the night and kill you."

Marinette tilted her head. If she didn't know any better, it sounded like he was hurt by her hesitation to answer.

He's done nothing to hurt her so far. Taking a breath and silently praying she wouldn't regret this later, she spoke.

"Twelve Gotlib Street."

Chat started from his previous position of glaring to the right and gazed back at her. A slow smile stretched across his face before morphing into that grin she was getting used to seeing.

"Then hold on tight, Princess."

Marinette rose an eyebrow. "Huh?"

Without a word he scooped her up in his arms and flipped her around so she was clinging to his back, piggyback style. He pulled out his baton and extended it, and soon they were soaring above the streets of Paris.

Marinette buried her face into his leather-clad back, her grip on him tightening. Each time they fell it felt like her heart was about to leap out of her throat, but Chat Noir never let her go for a moment.
A couple minutes later Chat landed on her balcony. He chuckled at her still form, still squeezing him and head still pressed into his back.

"We're here, you can open your eyes."

In a daze the girl slowly rose her head. She blinked a couple times at her surroundings, as if she never saw her balcony in her life. In a second she regained her bearings and slipped down Chat's back and allowed her feet to touch the floor.

"Here you are, safe and sound, as promised." Chat dropped into a bow.

"Thank you." Marinette smiled shyly. "Really, thank you. My friends and parents would've been devastated if I never came back."

He tilted his head slightly, appraising her and giving a smile of his own. "That's one of the most selfless things I've ever heard."

Her eyebrows drew forward. "What do you mean?"

"You didn't mention how if you never came back, you wouldn't have been able to grow up, get a life, get married and all that. Your family and friends' feelings were your first thoughts."

"Well, how could they not be?" She asked. "They love me."

"Wish I knew the feeling," he muttered bitterly.

"Chat?" She asked quietly, extending a hand towards him.

"Nothing, Princess. Don't worry about it. I hope we meet again soon." He flashed her another grin before taking her hand and kissing the back of it. Then, with a two-finger salute and a wink, he leaped off her balcony and disappeared.

The young designer opened her trapdoor and landed on her bed with a soft thump.

If Marinette could still hardly believe what happened, then Alya wouldn't believe her at all.
Marinette sat on her bed, gazing at her trapdoor in wonder. She was expecting for Chat Noir to come back, laugh in her face (because how could she fall for the 'good guy' act), then proceed to clawing said face to shreds.

But none of that happened. She waited and waited, until she was distracted by her cell phone buzzing in her purse.

Marinette winced at the five missed texts from Alya, each wondering if she was okay. They became more frantic each time, along with the three voicemails she received.

Before Alya could suffer a premature heart attack, Marinette typed out a reassuring text telling her that she was very sorry, she forgot to call and didn't hear her phone but she's at home safe.

She didn't receive an answer, instead, her cell phone buzzed in the way a person calling would, and Alya's name appeared on the screen.

Marinette took a breath to prepare herself for the onslaught of worry disguised by insults. She swiped her finger across the screen and accepted the call.

"What do you mean, 'you forgot'?! I tell you one thing, Marinette. One. Thing! You knew I was worried about you going out so late."

"I'm sorry, Alya," she apologizes, truly meaning it. "I'm really sorry. I know you were worried and I appreciate your concern. I'm sorry for forgetting a simple text. It won't happen again."

She hears her friend release a sigh. "It's alright. Sorry I overreacted."

Marinette giggled at how quick she was to realize that. "It's okay."

She wanted to tell Alya about Chat Noir, but for one thing she probably wouldn't believe her. And if she did she'd scream about how she should've kicked him in the crotch and ran for her dear life instead of talking to him and letting him bring her back home.

As much as she loved her best friend, this is one secret she'll have to keep from her.

... Marinette walked through the doors of her junior year literature class, going straight to second bench in the second row. For now the seat in front of her remained bare, but she knew Adrien would appear eventually.

She sighed wistfully, laying a hand on her cheek in thought. She wished he would notice her in a romantic light, hell, she wished she could properly speak to him! But the former will never happen without the latter, and the latter is impossible for now.
She's sixteen years old, damn it! She needs to grow a spine and talk to the boy. The gorgeous, kind, model, rich boy...Marinette frowned. The boy who was so out of her league. It's like he's the whole solar system and she just the tiny human who loved him unconditionally.

Alya told her to never give up hope. That maybe, one day, he'll see what's right in front of him. Or, behind, technically, since she sits behind him.

"Hey, Marinette!"

Marinette was jolted from her reverie. Releasing a small squeak of surprise she locked eyes with the very boy who was just plaguing her thoughts.

"A-Adrien! Uh, hi! Er-morning to you! Good! No! I mean," Marinette squeezed her eyes tight. She can do this. Do not blush, do not stutter. She opened her eyes and saw his confused expression. Her frown worsened. "I-I mean, good morning...to...you..." The blond chuckled. "And good morning to you, too." He took his place at his own bench and turned around to face her, leaning an elbow on the back of his bench and resting a fist on his cheek.

"So, how's your project coming along? You're working with Alya, right?" He asked innocently.

He cared how her project was going. He remembered that she's working with Alya. She'd whisper to Alya to pinch her because she absolutely must be dreaming, but the auburn-haired girl wasn't there yet. So, Marinette simply had to live through this dream until she came. She didn't mind, any dream involving Adrien was a good one.

"I-uh-yeah! Alya and I! Or...me?" Which was grammatically correct? He's really smart, she didn't want to seem unintelligent to him. "Alya and I," she decided at last. "We're uh-m-making great project on work!" She froze and hurriedly shook her head. "I mean, great work on project! The project!" She gave him a sheepish smile, hoping he wouldn't think she was crazy.

He tilted his head slightly, eyebrows slightly drawn down. But it quickly changed to show his usual relaxed features and charming smile. "Sounds great. Nino and I are doing good, too."

"Yeah, me and-er, Alya and I stayed up pretty late last night working on it." There was barely a stutter in that sentence. She mentally gave herself a pat on the back.

"You must really want to get it done," he observed.

She nodded. "We do." Miraculously, she started to become more comfortable as the conversation progressed. "It's due by Friday and the sooner we get it done the sooner we have more free time."

Adrien chuckled, Marinette lightly sighed at the pleasing sound.

"I guess that's true. How late did you and Alya stay up working on it? Not too late that you'll be tired today, right?" He slightly frowned.

"No, not that late. I left her house at around ten," Marinette replied, smiling to prove she was fine.

"That is pretty late," he countered. "It can be dangerous at that time of night. Especially with that criminal, Chat Noir, loose." Adrien shivered. "That guy gives me the creeps."
Marinette bit her lip at this new information, uncertain in what she should do. Ignore it, or defend Chat Noir?

"Seriously," the model continued. "He's Paris's top criminal, and nobody even has a picture of him!"

Marinette stayed uncomfortably quiet. She could tell Adrien right now that she already knows what he looks like and give him exact details.

"The guy's a monster, a maniac! Sure he only steals now, but what next? Will he resort to rape? Murder, to stay on top?"

Marinette couldn't take it anymore. Chat Noir may be the most notorious criminal in Paris, but he wasn't a rapist or murderer.

"Adrien."

The blond snapped out of his rant and eyed her curiously. "What? You agree with me?"

She shook her head. "No, I don't." So she didn't agree on something with the love of her life, it's okay! Many couples don't agree with each other on certain things. Well, she and Adrien aren't a couple (yet) but the message is still the same.

"I don't agree with you, Adrien. Chat Noir may steal from whomever, whenever he wants. And," she fiddled with her pen on her desk, "scratch people. But he's never killed or raped. I believe he has some sense of morals."

Adrien looked away, seeming deep in thought. She was ready for the instant rejection, how they'll never be together because she doesn't think Chat Noir is the monster Adrien paints him to be.

But at last he smiles...or, grins? It's hard to tell with his head still partially turned.

Alya chose that moment to come through the door, hand-in-hand with her boyfriend and Adrien's best friend, Nino.

"Hey, girl!" Alya greeted, slipping into the bench.

"Dude." Nino nodded to Adrien. He gave Nino a fist bump when he sat beside him.

... Adrien didn't acknowledge her for the rest of the day. Marinette wanted to kick herself for her stupidity. Defending Chat Noir?! She was so dumb! No one likes Chat Noir and for good reason. He's a horrible person who deserves to be put behind bars. She lost Adrien due to that mangy alley cat.

Despite what her brain kept repeating, her heart kept telling her that it was the right thing to do. Chat Noir could've let that mugger rape and kill her. He didn't have to step in. Or after saving her from the mugger, he could've raped and killed her himself, but he didn't. He didn't harm a single hair on her head, he even carried her home so someone else couldn't attack her.

He was a criminal, but a good person? How does such an oxymoron exist?

She shook her head. She needed to stop wondering because she was never going to see him again. He saved her once, that was the only time she would encounter him. Life will go on just as it has before.
"Marinette!"

"Coming, Maman!"

Marinette closed her diary and placed it back in its box. She raced up the steps leading to her bed and pulled out the key from her pillowcase. After locking her diary away she hurriedly replaced the key and ran downstairs to see what her mother wanted.

Her eyes widened when she took in the scene in the bakery. Flour and sugar everywhere, but most of it on her parents. Various baking ingredients were scattered throughout the kitchen.

"Marinette," her mother breathed while her husband poured more sugar into a mixing bowl. "We accidentally misplaced an order. We thought it was for next Thursday, not this Thursday! Could you please go out and buy more milk, eggs, flour, and sugar? The money's on the counter. Please honey, it would mean so much to us."

"Of course," she readily agreed. "I'll be back soon."

"Thank you, sweetie!" Her mother called out after her daughter's form running out the door.

Marinette shivered at the cool air. The sun had just recently set. She'd have to be quick if she wanted to get home before it was completely dark.

...

Thanks to Marinette's clumsiness, she didn't. She dropped the first carton of eggs she had and smashed them all, requiring a worker to clean it up while enduring a teenager's heartfelt and tearful apologies.

By the time that fiasco was over, Marinette was walking down from the local market with a bag in each hand and the moon at her back, joined by the gleaming Eiffel Tower.

She tried to hustle with her heavy groceries. Her parents needed her.

Suddenly she heard a loud crash behind her. Whipping around but seeing nothing, she also heard what sounded like a hiss and a masculine cry of pain.

Not wanting to investigate, she hurried on her way. Her breathing was coming in shallow pants and her arms ached from the bags. Her brain screamed at her to push herself, to get away from the danger. The mugger from last night flashed in her mind.

"Slow down, Princess. Relax, you're safe."

The hopeful designer screamed in terror and spun around.

Chat Noir had his arms crossed in front of his chest, lips formed in a scowl.

"Seriously, are you a magnet for trouble?" He glanced down at himself before letting out a snicker. "On second thought, don't answer that."

Marinette drew in large gulps of air to fill her empty lungs before releasing them in quick pants. Her sapphire eyes widened as she once again looked at Paris's number one rogue.

"I-you-what?" She stammered.

"There was a guy following you back there." Chat Noir inclined his head to the right. His eyes were
narrowed and his teeth were bared in anger. "He was going to jump you. After that, well, I'm glad we'll never know."

She didn't even notice anyone look at her, much less follow her.

"Good thing your knight was on the prowl, Purrincess." He spoke the last word with such a low, seductive tone that a shiver went up her spine.

"So, what do you have in there that's so important that you couldn't wait until tomorrow to get?" Chat Noir asked, acting as if he didn't just make Marinette's heart race.

Marinette released a calming breath. Okay, this was an easy question to answer. "Just baking ingredients, since my parents own a bakery. They made a mistake and thought an order for this Thursday was for next Thursday. So now they're trying to get the baking done and-" she gasped in remembrance. "I've been out this long and they need these! Thank you, Chat Noir, I appreciate what you've done for me but I have to go."

She turned and started speed walking down the sidewalk but Chat laid a hand on her shoulder.

"You think I'm just going to let you walk there by yourself? Sorry, not going to happen." He smirked impishly while she scowled.

"I can walk down a sidewalk by myself at night perfectly fine."

"And not get jumped by men lurking in the shadows?" He countered, raising an eyebrow.

"Maybe he wasn't going to jump me. Maybe he liked me and was just raising the courage to introduce himself to me," she replied easily. Inside she knew that would never be the case, guys were never nervous about talking to her. She can't even think of a guy who ever had a crush on her.

Chat Noir's eyes flashed in an emotion she didn't recognize.

"Come on, let's get to your house." He ordered brusquely, placing his clawed hand at the small of her back to get her moving.

"Won't people think it's strange that I'm walking next to Paris's top criminal?" She asked, darting her eyes around.

"If someone sees then I'll do what I do best: hide." He grinned cheekily.

She rose a playful eyebrow, eyes glinting in mischief. "I thought stealing is what you did best?"

"My princess thinks I'm the best thief? I'm honored." He wiggled his eyebrows and Marinette couldn't suppress a giggle.

Surprising her, he took both bags into his own arms, not once breaking his stride.

"Chat Noir, that's nice of you, but you don't have to do that," she said. Inside she was screaming with questions. The main one being: how can a bad guy be so charming?

"Nonsense. Princesses shouldn't have to lift a finger, especially ones as lovely as you." He flashed her a wink.

Marinette stamped down the butterflies fluttering in her stomach. She likes Adrien, the poster boy for good, not a law-breaking cat.
A few times they would see people walking up the sidewalk. Chat Noir would then duck into the shadows and return when the coast was clear. Along the way they chatted about various, mundane things. Marinette was honestly surprised at how well a criminal could hold a conversation like any of her other friends.

At last they reached the bakery. Chat Noir handed the bags to the thankful girl and dropped into a bow.

"Purrlease to lift a paw to help a princess in need." He rose and stretched his arms above his head, back arching in what reminded Marinette of a real feline. His muscles pulled taut against the skin tight suit, but she averted her eyes quickly so she couldn't see.

"I have to go. Thank you again, Chat Noir." The corners of her mouth drew up in a small smile.

"You're welcome. Maybe bake me something with those ingredients?" He suggested with a playful wink.

Marinette grinned and looked away, pretending to think about it. "I don't know. I don't bake things for thieves." Deep down she was wondering why on Earth she was playing around with Chat Noir of all people, but she quelled it for the time being.

He placed a hand over his heart, feigning hurt. "Me-owch! I save your life twice, bring you home safely after both times, and I even carried your bags for you! What's an alley cat have to do to get some appreciation?"

"Maybe become a hero instead of a villain?" She asked, half-teasing and half-serious. She would love if Chat Noir turned to the good side, he had potential to be a hero.

Chat Noir laughed as if she told a hilarious joke. Perhaps in his eyes, it was.

"Princess, I'm only a hero for you. I could give two shits about anyone else. Good night, Marinette."

He gave her a half-smile before using his baton to leap away.

... 

The next morning, Marinette scrolled through the latest news stories on her phone.

"Authorities believe that last night's bank robbery was committed by none other than Paris's aloof criminal, Chat Noir."
Fun Fact: Chat Noir's suit is the same as it is in the show, except here he's missing his golden bell. After all, only tamed cats wear bells ;)

Marinette read further and saw a picture of the note Chat Noir left at the scene of the crime.

*Purrpleasure doing business with you!*

*-le Chat Noir*

Next to his name was a sloppily drawn paw print. Swiping her finger down the screen she saw another picture, this time it was of three claw marks on the door where you walk in.

She put her phone on sleep mode with an annoyed huff. How dare he save her, have a normal conversation with her, then go steal money from a bank! Then again, what would he have said to her? 'Hey Princess, after I walk you home I'm going to rob the bank. So, what did you have for dinner?'

Not exactly a good thing to bring up. But the fact that he robbed the bank right after she suggested he become a hero. Did he do this just to spite her? To prove that no matter what she could possibly say he's still going to be a criminal?

She sighed as she slipped on her top. Maybe she's blowing this out of proportion. She most likely won't see him anymore. Third time thinking it will be the charm, right?

Something deep inside her told her she couldn't be more wrong.

...

Reading that article delayed her in getting ready for school, so her friends were already sitting at their desks by the time Marinette walked in. Thankfully, the teacher still wasn't there.

"Hey, Marinette!" Alya smiled when her friend slid in next to her. "Did you hear about Chat Noir?"

"I read all about it," she replied sourly. That bitterness still hadn't faded away.

"Something wrong, Marinette?" Nino asked with concern. Adrien only looked at her with the same worried face but...she could swear his green orbs were twinkling with amusement. Nino and Adrien probably joked about something before she came in and it was still fresh on his mind.

Marinette closed her eyes and released a calming breath. She opened them again before answering.

"No, nothing's wrong. Just had a rough morning."

"Ugh, last morning I had to deal with my sisters screaming about who stole whose shirt." Alya rolled her eyes. "I think that was the only time I actually wanted to go to school."

The four friends laughed but were cut off by an all-too familiar squeal.
Adri-kins!

Adrien groaned but put on a half smile when Chloe faced him. Nino covered his mouth with his hand to avoid laughing out loud. Alya followed his example while Marinette settled on trying to burn Chloe alive with her eyes.

"Good morning," Chloe greeted with too much sweetness. She tried giving him a peck on the lips but the model was successful in keeping her at arms length.

"Chloe," he said at last, forcing a smile. "How was your morning?"

Chloe frowned. "It was scary! I wake up and on my tv is a news report about that horrible Chat Noir! What if he breaks in my room one night and steals all my shoes? Or my dresses? He has to be caught!"

"I doubt he wants your clothes," Adrien snickered.

"But it's still so scary! You'll protect me if I ever see him, right?" Chloe leaned closer to the object of her affection. Her eyelashes fluttered and her glossed lips were formed in a small pout.

Other boys might've been affected, but to Chloe's irritation Adrien was immune.

He gently pushed her back. "Uh, if I'm around, then sure," he agreed awkwardly.

"It's a date, then." Chloe said flirtatiously, acting as if Adrien didn't just rebuff her advances. She blew him an air kiss before joining Sabrina on their bench.

"For your sake, I hope Chat Noir doesn't go within thirty meters of Chloe," Nino chuckled.

A corner of Adrien's mouth lifted into a smirk.

Alya turned to Marinette. "So, you want to work on the project after school?"

"Sure!" She agreed. "My house?"

"It's a date," Alya mocked, fluttering her eyelashes and screwing her lips into a pout. Marinette erupted into laughter but quieted down when Mme. Bustier walked in the room.

... 

"Sweet baby Jesus! Finally!"

Marinette laughed at Alya's exclamation. It was around 4:30 and they had finally finished their literature project.

"We better get an A on this," Alya growled. "For all the time we spent on this."

Marinette agreed with a nod. "If we don't then there's no justice in this world."

"Exactly," Alya said whilst packing her stuff.

"Hey, do you want to stay for dinner? My parents love you," Marinette offered.

But Alya shook her head and smiled. "Sorry, can't. My mom is experimenting with this new recipe for the hotel and she wants me and my sisters to taste it first. But I'll take a rain check?" She winked.
The ravenette smiled and agreed.

Alya frowned and rolled her eyes. "I just hope she doesn't put too much cayenne in it again."

Marinette burst out laughing as the memory struck her. Poor Alya was stuck in the bathroom constantly for two days. Good thing it happened during the weekend or else Chloe would've never let her hear the end of it.

Marinette walked Alya downstairs and out the door.

"See you, girl!" The auburn-haired girl grinned.

"Bye!" Marinette waved.

She shut the door after her and was about to go back to her room when her mother called her.

"Marinette, a friend of yours is here!"

Her eyebrows pulled down. Who could be here to see her, and now? Well, she might as well go see who it is and know what they wanted.

"Coming, Maman!"

On her way to the front of the store she passed by her mother, who gave her a teasing wink and smirk. She rose an eyebrow in confusion but understood once she saw who, or rather, what, was out there waiting for her.

A boy. She should've guessed.

"Oh, hey, Nathanael!"

The red-haired artist clutched his sketchpad to his chest, not meeting her eyes. "U-uh, h-hi, Mar-Marinette!" His cheeks developed a red hue over them.

She honestly felt bad for him, he was so shy. So she tried being extremely nice to him, maybe coax him out of his shell.

"Hi! So, evening bakery run, huh?" Keep it light, keep it casual.

"Y-yeah," he mumbled. "My mother was in the mood for a few cookies."

"Coming right up!" She proclaimed, giggling as she got out the tongs. "What flavor?"

"Ch-Chocolate chip. Six, please."

"Sure!"

Marinette got out the desired cookies and placed them in the box. Finally, she placed a flower sticker on the top and handed it to the flustered boy.

"That'll be 2.70 euros."

Nathanael reached into his pocket and gave her the correct amount of money. In turn she gave him the box of cookies with a smile.

"I hope your mother likes them. But here..." Marinette trailed off as she got another chocolate chip
cookie out of the display case and handed it to the surprised artist.

"This is on the house. One of the perks of being my classmate." She winked conspiratorially.

Nathanael's mouth dropped and his blush worsened. "I-uh-th-thank you, Marinette."

"No problem! Have a good night."

"You too," he muttered and hurried out the door.

She giggled at his retreating form. He was kind of cute.

...  

That night Marinette sat on her chaise lounge, drawing out a new design. This time it was of a winter jacket. It would be red, with black faux-fur lining the hood and sleeves. Should she have some trimming along the bottom too? She drew it on but quickly decided against it and erased it.  

*Tap. Tap. Tap.*  

The designer jumped. Her breath caught in her throat. That didn't sound like the wind.  

*Tap. Tap.*  

She rose her head to her ceiling in confusion. It sounded like it was coming from above, from her balcony. But how would anyone have gotten up there?  

Her stomach dropped. What if it was a burglar?  

Marinette shakily climbed the small staircase leading to her bed, but stopped on the top one.  

"Who is it?" She asked. Afterwards she wanted to smack herself. As if the burglar would tell her that he was indeed one.  

She heard a masculine snicker. Then, "your favorite thief, Princess."  

She breathed a sigh of relief. It was a burglar, but one that wouldn't steal from her. Well, hopefully he wouldn't. He didn't seem to want to.  

Marinette grinned and opened the trapdoor and climbed out into the night air. Chat Noir was leaning against her railing in a flirtatious pose, his baton fully extended and draping across his shoulders.  

"Evening, Princess." He winked.  

"Good evening, Chat Noir," she returned the greeting, minus the wink. "What brings you here on my balcony?" She asked smoothly. After two meetings with the infamous rogue she found herself getting comfortable with him.  

But was that a good thing or a bad thing?  

"I was around the neighborhood." He retracted his weapon and attached it to his back. "When I remembered the possibility of pastries?" He trailed off suggestively with a grin.  

Marinette arched a coy eyebrow. "I thought I told you I don't bake for thieves?"

All of a sudden she frowned, this morning’s news coming back to her. "How dare you rob the bank
after saving me!" She declared angrily, her attitude doing a complete 180.

Chat Noir looked taken aback and blinked at the sudden change in demeanor, but recovered with an easy grin. "Do you forget who I am, Princess? I may have saved you a couple times, but I'm still a criminal."

"It's the fact that you did it right after I suggested you become a hero instead of a villain. Did you do it just to spite me?" Marinette's eyes were narrowed and her fists were clenched in anger.

Chat Noir's eyebrows lowered in annoyance. "I was actually on my way to rid that bank of its money when I saw you being followed. Saving you only delayed me, it wouldn't sway my decision."

Marinette released a grumble of frustration. "This would be so much easier if you were the good guy."

"Yeah, well, I'm not, Princess." This time the nickname was practically spat. "You're going to have to get used to it."

"Get used to it? Like I would want to spend my time with a criminal."

Marinette's eyes slowly widened when she realized what she said. Chat Noir's normally bright and playful eyes now looked dulled and wounded.

She instantly wished she could take it back. "Chat-"

"No, no." He waved off her attempt at an apology, eyes hardening. "No, I get it. You don't want to be with a lowlife like me. I understand. Nothing I can do will change your opinion of me, it's alright, I get it."

He dipped into a stiff bow. "Goodbye, Marinette. You'll never have to see me again."

"Wait!"

To Marinette's dismay he completely ignored her plea, instead choosing to jump off into the night.

Marinette walked to the spot he previously occupied, leaning an elbow on the railing.

Well, Marinette, it looks like you got what you wanted.
On Thursday, Marinette walked to class with a frown marring her otherwise happy features.

She still felt horrible for what she said to Chat Noir. He may be a thief, but he was kind to her and saved her life twice. She could've ended up like any other of his clawed victims but he chose to leave her unharmed. And to think their argument started on the topic of pastries.

She wished she could apologize, but how would she see him? She doesn't exactly have his number. Would he even have a cell phone? Since the police can trace numbers and that?

Maybe she could get a spotlight set up on her balcony, she mused with a barely-contained grin of amusement. Yeah, have a giant paw print in the sky and wait for him to show up.

She could picture his annoyed expression.

"What the hell are you thinking, Princess?! Now Paris will know I'm here!"

Then she'd shut him up with a croissant stuffed in his mouth and a giggling apology.

"What's so funny?" Alya asked with a grin as she sat next to her friend.

Marinette hadn't even realized she was giggling out loud. She quickly sobered as she thought of an excuse.

"Nothing! Just something that happened in the bakery yesterday."

"What happened?"

Marinette wanted to groan. Why did she have to pick a best friend that was always on the hunt for any kind of details.

"Ah, I just, dropped some flour and it got all over my dad. Nothing special," she replied with ease.

Alya stifled a laugh. "That sounds pretty funny."

Adrien walked in just then, wearing a frown Marinette thought similar to her own. Marinette visibly drooped. It hurt seeing her crush upset about something.

"Dude, you okay?" Nino asked once Adrien sat down.

"Fine," he answered brusquely.

"Your Pops on your case again?" Nino asked with a half-smile.

"Yeah. That's it."
It was plain as day that Adrien was lying. But she wasn't his girlfriend or even a close enough friend to press him about what was wrong. So, she was resigned to just sit at her bench and watch from afar, hoping he'd feel better soon. Nino resolved to leave Adrien alone and talk to Alya.

"H-Hey, um, Marinette?"

The girl in question swiveled her head to look at her red-haired classmate. He wasn't holding his sketchbook this time, but Marinette knew it couldn't be too far away.

"Oh, hey, Nathanael!"

Unknown to either of them, Adrien bristled in his seat.

"What did you need?"

"N-Nothing," the artist stuttered, a blush growing over his cheeks. "I just wanted to thank you for the cookies yesterday."

A loud and angry hiss ripped through the air.

Startled, Marinette darted her eyes around the room. No one looked like they could have made that noise. Maybe it was someone's cell phone?

Nathanael looked visibly shaken at the threatening noise too.

The young designer rolled her eyes. "Someone probably accidentally left their volume up on their phone." She laughed lightly. "Don't worry, it scared me too."

Adrien covered his mouth with a hand, trying to muffle his devious snickers.

"But you're welcome for the cookies." Marinette smiled, not noticing her crush's behavior. "That's what a bakery is for, right?"

Nathanael matched her expression. "Y-Yeah, right."

Mme. Bustier chose that moment to walk in the classroom.

"Good morning, students. Please take your seats," she instructed as she walked to her desk and set down her planner.

Nathanael was the only one out of his seat. Marinette stifled a giggle as he hastily retreated to his bench with a fierce blush coating his cheeks.

... 

Marinette and Alya went to the former's bakery for lunch.

"I hope we get a good grade. That project took forever!" Alya moaned while eating her pastry.

"Same." The blue-eyed girl nodded.

"So, are you going to Chloe's party tomorrow night?"

On Monday, Chloe sent out a mass text to everyone in their grade, inviting them to a party at her best friend Sabrina's house. Sabrina's parents are going to be gone for the weekend so that left their daughter with the house all to herself. Leave it to Chloe to take advantage of the situation.
"I don't know," Marinette mumbled, glancing down at her pastry. "Parties aren't really my thing."

"You have to go," Alya pressed. "Please?"

Chloe didn't ask them to go because of their wonderful friendship. The only reason they were invited was because Chloe wanted to be known as 'the girl who had the biggest party.' Basically, she only wanted them to contribute to the number of party goers.

"Come on, I heard Adrien will be there!"

In truth, Alya had no idea whether the model would be there or not. He hadn't said anything about the party. But what's a little white lie? And what's a party without your best friend there?

"He will?" Marinette asked.


Marinette rested her hand on her fist. She wasn't one for drinking excess amounts, and she didn't perceive Adrien as the type to get wasted at a party. So maybe during the night they'd happen to sit in the same area and talk and get to know each other and kiss and profess their undying love for each other-

"I'm going," Marinette concluded with a nod of affirmation, determination lighting her sapphire orbs. Alya grinned. "Excellent."

...

Nothing of interest happened on that Friday day. Adrien's mood seemed to lift a little, he was probably thinking about the party. The party that she'd be at. The party where they would finally start dating.

But what to wear? Marinette eyed her closet in distaste. She had no idea what Adrien would like. However, she was positive about some things.

Something flirty, but not obviously so. Showing skin, but making sure to leave some to the imagination. A little color...

Marinette groaned and reached for her cell phone.

"Hello?" Alya answered.

"Please help me!" The ravenette whined.

She heard a sigh. "Having trouble picking the outfit that'll make Adrien fall in love with you?"

"Yes!"

"I'll be there in ten."

Marinette grinned and starting bouncing up and down. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

Alya laughed, saying 'no problem' and hung up.

...
Her best friend happened to find a pretty top Marinette had recently designed hidden in the back of her closet. It was a red peplum top, with black lace just touching up her neck, over her chest, and just barely kissing her shoulders. She wore a black mini skirt to complete the outfit and black pumps. Alya had done her makeup and hair and Marinette could honestly say she thought she looked good.

Alya wore a dark purple long-sleeved mini dress. The skirt poofed out a bit and the top had a leather covering over the chest. She wore high heels that perfectly matched the color of her dress.

When they arrived in Alya's car the place was already packed. Even from the car Marinette could hear the blasting music.

She was about to bite her red-coated lower lip but decided against it when she remembered how Alya would kill her if she ruined her makeup. How would she survive with the entire grade in a single house? Worse, how would she survive being in Adrien's presence? Would he think she looked pretty?

Alya parked the car a little down the road.

"Let's go!" Alya grinned in anticipation. Marinette responded with a nervous nod.

As soon as they were inside the smell of alcohol seemed to choke Marinette. Not to mention the heat radiating from all the drunk bodies. Music she didn't recognize blared out of the speakers, but no one seemed to mind the loud volume.

"Over here!" Alya took her friend's hand and guided her to a few rooms. At last, Alya found her target: the kitchen.

"Here." Alya handed Marinette an unopened beer and took one for herself. While Alya downed a large gulp, Marinette took a baby sip.

"Hey, there's Rose and Juleka!" The aspiring journalist shouted, pointing to the duo.

At the sound of their names their heads perked up. They smiled and made their way over to the two friends.

"Hey!" Rose smiled. "Isn't this party amazing!"

"So cool." Juleka grinned in agreement.

Chloe was nasty to the whole school, (except Adrien, of course) but even they had to admit it was a pretty good party.

"So, um, is everyone in our class here?" Marinette asked, not wanting to make it obvious she was searching for just one student.

"I think so," Rose replied. "I've seen just about everyone except Adrien."

Marinette's heart seemingly stopped. Adrien wasn't there?

Alya waved her hand dismissively. "He's a model, you know how models have to make sure their outfits are absolutely perfect before leaving the house."

The three laughed and Marinette felt a smile lifting the corners of her lips. That's why he's late. He's coming, he has to.

They talked for a little while until Rose and Juleka left to explore more of the house and possibly
dance. Marinette and Alya left the kitchen and stood in the living room, watching a pair of boys play a racing game on the tv.

"Would you mind if I left to find Nino?" Alya leaned down and whispered in her ear. Otherwise she might not have heard her. "I'll come back."

Marinette frowned. She didn't want to hold her friend back from having any fun. She could survive by herself. She might possibly see Adrien.

"Yeah, go ahead, I don't mind." The blackette smiled encouragingly. "Go have fun with Nino, I'll be fine."

"You sure?" Alya questioned, raising an eyebrow. "I don't want to leave you alone..."

"No, no, go ahead! Maybe I'll see Adrien." She smirked.

Alya copied her expression, although her eyes held a more devious look. "Alright. Go search for loverboy. If you need me, text me."

Marinette laughed when her friend disappeared. Alya was the one to get drunk at parties, so that text would be utterly useless in due time.

She started her trek into the next room. Couples were either grinding in the limited space available or making out on the cushions. She spied Chloe and Kim almost sucking each other's faces off on the couch. Gee, for someone who loves Adrien so much, why is she so willing to make out with another boy?

Kim happened to open his eyes and he spotted Marinette. She could see his grey eyes hungrily take her in as they darkened. Feeling an uncomfortable chill run up her spine, she quickly made her way out of the room.

This time the room held groups of friends, all laughing and chatting and chugging their alcohol. The tv played a show she didn't watch and a group of guys in front of it guffawed as a character was being coated with some type of slimey substance.

Marinette still didn't see Adrien, causing her to lose hope. She was so stupid, of course he wouldn't show up. He despised Chloe, why would he come to her party?

Oh well. She sighed. She may as well have fun without him.

She finished her beer and walked back to the kitchen. Hopefully she'd see Rose and Juleka and could hang out with them for the night.

When she got there she reached for another beer from out of the cooler but was suddenly face-to-face with a can.

She blinked in surprise, then looked to see who was holding it.

"Uh, hi, Kim," Marinette greeted awkwardly. What does one say when you just caught them heavily making out with someone on a couch? Should she pretend like it never happened?

Judging by the jock's smirk, it seemed his makeout with Chloe was far from his mind.

"Hey, Marinette. Great party, am I right?"

"Uh, yeah," she agreed, plastering on a smile. "It's great."
"You look great." His eyes were half-lidded and he winked.

Marinette shrank backwards. "Um, thanks. You too."

He only leaned toward her more, only serving to make her more uncomfortable. Her brain was telling her to get herself out of there, this guy was making her nervous.

"Well, I'll see you later," she hastily said and scurried away, to the front door. When she reached the outside she sucked in a mouthful of clean, cool air.

She shouldn't have even come here. Parties weren't her thing, they only made her self-conscious and uncomfortable. Plus, Chloe hated her. She shouldn't have gone to a bully's party, even if Adrien might've been there.

She resolved to walk home, it was only a couple blocks.

That's what she said the first night she was almost mugged.

She tentatively looked back at the house, looking like it was pulsating with the musical beat and with the people dancing. She should probably go back...

"Wait, Marinette!"

Kim raced out the door, albeit a little clumsily. His gaze was unfocused when he reached the confused teen.

"Marinette, l-let me walk you home."

She didn't miss the slurring of his words. But he wasn't teetering on his feet drunk, he could still walk. Also, if she allowed him to walk her home she wouldn't be alone.

"Sure, thanks Kim." Marinette gave him an appreciative smile.

He grinned in return.

As they walked down the sidewalk something kept eating at her head. Should she have allowed herself to be alone with Kim?

She glanced up at the popular boy, and he gave her a smirk.

Nonsense, he was her classmate. He wouldn't try anything.

The streets they walked down were quiet. The Eiffel Tower was lit behind their backs and the crescent moon was high in the sky. Marinette smiled as she was able to spot the Big Dipper.

Kim suddenly grabbed her arm and pressed her against the side of a store's brick wall.

"Kim?!" She cried out in shock. "What are you doing?!!"

"I can't help myself," he slurred, bending his head to rest in the crook of her neck. He took in her strawberry perfume and grinned. "You look sexy."

"Kim, stop!" Marinette tried to wriggle out of his hold. "You're drunk! You don't want to do this."

"I know exactly what I want," he breathed, leaning back to look her in her terrified eyes. "You."
He slipped a hand beneath her skirt and Marinette gasped as his hand hovered over her female area.

"Don't touch me!" She yelled, maneuvering her legs to try to get him to back off. "Get off me, Kim!"

"Come on, Marinette," he spoke, inching closer to her lips. "You want this too."

She squeaked as he crashed his lips onto hers and pressed a finger against her forbidden area. She tried getting out of his hold again but he only gripped her aching wrists harder.

Tears pooled in her eyes and fell when she squeezed them shut. Her own classmate, someone she's known since kindergarten, was going to drunkenly take advantage of her.

In an instant Kim was ripped off of her. Marinette's eyes bulged and she gasped as Chat Noir held the terrified boy up against the opposing wall with a single hand.

His right hand gripped his neck so hard she saw small rivulets of blood fall from where Chat's claws had dug. His left was out at his side, his claws ready to attack. He gave an infuriated growl and squeezed Kim's neck tighter.

"Ch-Chat Noir?!" Kim spluttered, eyes widened in horror.

"Who else?" he hissed.

Chapter End Notes

This is the last time Marinette will be a 'damsel in distress'. Chat wouldn't come back to her balcony after their argument, so I had to kind of lure him out. She'll start kicking ass once she's Ladybug ;)

Also, I know that the characters shouldn't drive yet because you can't drive until you turn 18 in France, but please just ignore that little tidbit? Also how Sabrina's house should probably be more like an apartment, since it's in the city? This story is just for fun, and while I like it to be realistic, sometimes I just have to brush off some parts of reality for the sake of the plot.
"Chat Noir." The ghost of a whisper left the designer's lips.

"Do you," the criminal growled, pressing Kim's head into the wall even more, "have any idea what you just did?"

"I-I'm sorry!" Kim blubbered. Now he was the one crying, in place of Marinette. "Please let me go!"

"Let you go?" Chat snarled. "Like how Marinette was begging you to let her go just now?"

Kim didn't reply, so Chat simply sunk his claws deeper into the drunk jock's neck. By now his gloves were getting covered with blood but the feline thief either didn't notice or didn't care.

Slowly, a grin pulled at the corners of Chat's mouth. It was nothing like the flirty and playful ones he displayed to Marinette. No, this one was purely sinister.

"Let me let you in on a little secret," he said, inching his face closer to the terrified boy. "Cats are very protective of what belongs to them. And when you try to hurt those things...well..."

He rose his left hand and trailed a clawed index finger down the shivering Kim's cheek, the action leaving a small stream of blood in its wake.

Chat Noir smirked at the raw fear in his victim's eyes. "It doesn't end well."

"I-I'm sorry! L-Let me g-go!" Kim sobbed in terror.

Marinette could only watch the scene in a stunned silence. Her hands pressed against the wall behind her, allowing her to keep her bearings. She knew Chat Noir was scary, why else would he be the most terrifying criminal in Paris, but to actually see him be so frightening was another thing altogether. She could be only glad that she wasn't on the receiving end of his fury.

"I think I should punish you," Chat decided. "A punishment fit for the crime."

He lowered his hand, claws stretched and hovering above Kim's lower area.

Chat Noir looked back up at him and grinned.

Kim's eyes widened impossibly further once he realized his intentions. "No, no man! Come on, you can't do that! You understand why y-you c-can't!"

The jock's face was now pale white in suspended horror. The blackette slightly winced when she understood the meaning of Chat's punishment, knowing that it would most definitely hurt a lot, probably one of the most painful things a male could go through.

"Why not?" Chat drawled. "You had no problems touching Marinette there."

Kim paled even further at the new burst of fury flaming in his captor's eyes, new dread making his stomach sink.

"Yes, I saw. You touched a place where no one is allowed to touch. And now I'm going to repay the
favor."

Chat raised his hand, about to shred his target, when he was stopped by Marinette's cry.

"No, Chat!"

The blond turned his head slowly back to look at her, perplexed at her reason for not letting him go through with it.

"Please, Chat, don't do it," Marinette begged, her sapphire eyes still moist. Yes, what Kim was going to do to her was horrible, but she couldn't stand by and let Chat do this. She didn't know if Kim could die, but she wasn't willing to find out.


"But he's drunk! He doesn't know what he's doing."

"He knew perfectly well what he was doing!" He hissed, squeezing Kim's neck tighter in his hold, causing the jock to let out a pained whimper.

"Please, Chat." Marinette's voice broke. "Please don't do this."

Chat Noir stared, icy green eyes slowly thawing. Finally, he shut his eyes with a defeated growl and turned back to Kim.

"Tell anyone what just happened here, and it won't be just your dick I'll be ripping apart," he threatened, teeth bared.

Kim nodded hurriedly, trembling and eager to agree so he could run and cower in his home, under the safety of his blanket.

"You even look at her again, I'll rip you apart. Do we understand each other?"

Kim shut his eyes, let out a few more tears and whimpered.

"I said," Chat growled, leaning closer. "Do we understand each other?"

Kim opened his eyes and nodded more. "Yes, yes, I understand! Please, let me go!"

"Good." Chat Noir brought Kim's head back and slammed it against the wall, effectively knocking him out. As Kim lay sprawled out on the cold ground Chat picked up a gasping Marinette and used his baton to get to the top of the shop. He wordlessly carried her all the way to her balcony and set her down.

Once Marinette's feet touched the familiar floor she shivered and started gasping for air. A few stray tears leaked from her eyes but she wasn't in full out hysterics. Was she going into shock, she wondered?

He gently picked her up and opened the trapdoor leading to her warm bedroom. He placed her on the soft bed and wrapped his arms around her in a tight hug, burying his face into the crook of her neck.

Marinette's hands grasped at the leather suit, her chest was still heaving in pants. Her eyes were open, but more tears fell from her cheeks.

He held her slightly tighter.
"Shh, you're safe, Princess," he crooned in her ear. "I'm here, no one is going to hurt you."

She only buried her head in his neck as the memories sped in her mind. Kim flirting with her at the party, her letting him walk her home, him pulling her into the alley, him touching and kissing her, then Chat Noir tearing him off her.

How Chat Noir's green eyes seemed to blaze in anger. How his lips were pulled back into a vicious snarl. How his claws were so deep in Kim's neck, streams of blood were dripping down...

"You're alright, Princess," came his soft whisper again. "Nothing is going to harm you."

If Chat Noir didn't show up...if he really followed through with his previous vow to her...

Marinette roughly pulled away from his hold to look in his surprised, yet slightly hurt, green eyes.

"I'm sorry, Chat," she apologized sorrowfully.

His eyes widened at her words. "What are you sorry for?" he questioned, her apology not making any sense to him.

"I'm sorry about what I told you. I'm sorry I got in that stupid argument with you. I'm sorry-"

Chat half-smiled and pulled her in for another hug, cutting off her apologies.

"It's going to take more than a little cat fight to get rid of me," he whispered sweetly with a chuckle.

Marinette sighed in relief and smiled, tightening her hold on him.

Until she remembered a crucial detail about their argument.

Once again she pulled away, but this time she eyed him with a grin. "Wait here."

Chat Noir stared after her in puzzlement while she quickly descended the steps leading to her bed. She took a moment to take off her shoes before opening her trapdoor, then quietly padded through the house until she reached the bakery.

In the back she found just what she was looking for. There, covered by a clear lid, was a plate full of the leftover multi-colored macarons from that day. Marinette gingerly took the plate so as not to let any fall and went back to her room as quietly as she could.

When she opened the trapdoor she found Chat Noir exactly where she left him. He was sitting Indian-style on her bed, back and head pressed against the wall. But when his ears perked when he heard the soft creak of the trapdoor open and he still looked at her with curiosity swimming in his eyes.

Marinette swiftly hid the plate of pastries behind her, climbed up the small staircase, and sat in front of him.

With a sly smirk, she pulled out the plate from behind her back and presented it to him.

"I think you've done more than enough to deserve these," she prompted shyly.

His mouth was parted slightly in surprise. He closed his eyes and shook his head with an amused snort.

Finally, his gloved hand took a blue one and he sunk his teeth into it. He moaned appreciatively and
smiled.

"Thank you, Princess."

"You're welcome. I'm sorry they're not fresh, but they were only made a couple hours ago and next time you'll get warm pastries but this is all we had and-"

He switched the half-eaten macaron to his left hand and used his right to stop Marinette's ramble with a finger to her lips.

"Any treat from you is a blessing, Princess." His eyes shined with warmth. "These are delicious, thank you."

He removed his finger to allow her to respond. She said no words at all, she gave a smile and looked away, a blush dusting her cheeks.

After three more macarons and some small talk, Chat began to notice Marinette try to hold back a yawn. Her eyes were beginning to droop, too, her usually vibrant eyes now dulled with fatigue.

Chat chuckled softly. "I think it's time you get to bed."

"No, no." She shook her head and stifled another yawn. "I'm not tired."

A corner of his mouth quirked up at the sight. "Ok. So, you wouldn't mind just laying down? I mean, it's comfortable, right?"

"Yeah." She shrugged, laying down to prove her point. "It is. But I'm not tired."

"Of course not," he denied, shaking his head. "And what's a blanket, too? Anyone who lounges needs a blanket, right?"

She paused. Then, "I guess so."

Chat hid a smirk as he grabbed her pink blanket and pulled it over her, reaching to just over her shoulders. "There, now. Comfortable, right?"

"Yeah," she agreed. She let out a quiet sigh and closed her eyes. "Comfortable."

"And how about a little darkness?" He reached over her form to turn off the small lamp on the shelf above her head that was in the wall. "Peaceful, hm?"

"Chat?" She asked, her voice lowered due to her half-asleep state.

"Yes?" He replied in a smooth whisper.

"You..." She snuggled into the pillow, her eyes not opening again. "You tricked me."

Chat grinned at her declaration before brushing his lips over her cheek. He delighted in the soft skin.

"Good night, Princess."

...

That Monday, Marinette noted that Kim still looked terrified from Friday's events. He wouldn't look her in the eye, and if she happened to be in the same area as he was, he'd quickly hurry to his destination with his head bent down. His nose would almost touch the books that were pressed to his
In fact, Kim hardly talked to anyone. When they would ask what was wrong with him he would only shake his head in response. It was like he was a foreign exchange student who didn't know a single word of French.

Marinette felt bad for his horrified state of mind, but some twisted part of her deep down took pleasure in it. Whenever those kinds of thoughts would present themselves in her mind she immediately squashed them down with thoughts of a smiling, innocent Adrien.

Alya was at first apologetic about her disappearing act on Friday and of how she wasn't there to see Marinette home ("By the way, how did you get home?" "Oh, I just walked.") but she was quickly forgiven.

"Dude, what the hell is wrong with him?" Nino inquired at his bench, peering around to look at the slightly trembling jock. The DJ's lips pulled back in confused disgust by how Kim seemed to be clutching his lower area for dear life.

"I have no idea," Adrien answered in all-too-innocent tone. He turned his head the other way to hide a devious grin.

Chapter End Notes

I originally posted this on my FF.net account, and even though I'm posting the story on here too, I might change some things. Anyway, this is an awesome fan art I received, depicting a scene from this chapter :) http://frazie303.deviantart.com/art/On-the-prowl-Chat-Noir-to-the-rescue-fan-art-622368435
Tuesday passed without anything of significance happening. Marinette fawned over Adrien from afar, as usual, and there weren't any Chat Noir sightings.

But when Wednesday rolled around, Marinette couldn't help herself from thinking, "what is wrong with these people?"

Everyone was glued to their phones. This is usually normal for a teenager, but something obviously big was happening for there to be groups of people crowding around one phone. Was there a new meme out or something?

Giving speculative glances to her fellow class-men, she eventually made it to her classroom. Alya and Nino were looking at the former's phone, too. Their faces displayed looks of shock and suspicion.

"Well, we've never seen him..." Alya mused, tucking a hand under her chin in thought. "No one can be that good."

"Who?" Marinette couldn't help but ask from her place beside her friend. Alya and Nino both jumped, not having noticed her presence.

"Chat Noir," Alya replied. "It's all over the news! Didn't you hear?"

Marinette's eyebrows drew down. "No?"

"Hear what?"

Marinette shrieked in surprise at the sound of Adrien's voice. He seemed to not react to her freak-out, instead he gave her one of his warm smiles. "Hi, Marinette."

"H-Hi, A-Adrien!" She stuttered while simultaneously trying to keep cool. Despite her best efforts, she didn't think she was doing too well.

He directed his attention to Nino. "What's going on?"

"They think Chat Noir doesn't exist!" he exclaimed.

"What?!!" The two teens shouted. Marinette in astonishment and Adrien in anger.

Wait, why was he angry? The three looked at the blond, and took note of his furrowed eyebrows and lips pulled back into a snarl. Noticing this, said blond quickly gained a look of being dumbfounded.

"I-I mean...he leaves notes at all his crimes! How can they not think he's real?"

"They think it's a gang or something that's doing it, using the name 'Chat Noir' for various members and their various crimes," Alya explained. "It's not impossible, I mean, we have no pictures to prove..."
Chat Noir is real."

"And who came up with this theory?" Adrien asked casually, leaning an elbow on his desk.

"Mayor Bourgeois. He announced it last night at a press conference."

"No wonder you're out of the loop," Nino chuckled, throwing an arm around his best friend's shoulders. "You had a photo shoot last night, didn't you?"

"Yeah," he muttered quietly, not meeting him in the eyes.

"So, what do you think, Marinette?" Alya asked, out of not having heard from the blackette in awhile. "Do you think he's real?"

She paled. She knew he was real, but she couldn't say that! "Um-

"I for one think he is," Nino interrupted. "They're just jealous that a guy could be that good at something and not get caught. Chat Noir's a real badass."

Adrien covered his mouth to hide a growing smirk.

"Are you praising a criminal?" Alya rose an eyebrow.

Nino held up in hands in surrender. "Hey, hey, I'm not praising him! I still wouldn't want to meet him in a dark alley. I'm just saying that he's too badass to get caught. Criminals can be badass."

"Say 'badass' one more time." His girlfriend rolled her eyes while Marinette suppressed a giggle.

"Well, I don't believe in him. No one's ever seen him, it would make more sense for it to be more than one person doing all the crimes. How about you, Mari?" Alya once again directed her attention to her best friend.

"I-I...um-" Marinette stuttered. There was no way in hell she could tell them she believed in Chat Noir without giving an explanation. Somehow, she doubted they would fall for the 'badass' excuse. "No," she finally spoke, deciding to play it safe. "I don't think he's real."

"Hm," Adrien mumbled an unintelligible reply. His eyes were looking off to the side. Whatever was plaguing his thoughts, he looked to be deep in thought about it.

"What about you, man?" Nino asked the model. "What do you think?"

Adrien snapped out of his stupor. "I think he's real. Just like you said," Adrien grinned, "he's too badass."

Alya groaned and rolled her eyes while Nino roared with laughter. Marinette bent down to where she was eye-level with her tablet, wanting for class to finally start so this conversation can be over.

...  

At the end of the day the four friends walked out of the school together.

"Bye, Adrikins!" Chloe scampered up and tried to catch Adrien off-guard to plant a kiss on him, but it seemed the model had cat-like reflexes by the way he caught her at arms length.

"Bye, Chloe." He gave a half-smile that screamed innocence. His three friends all knew it was a mask to disguise the repulsion.
Chloe acted like she wasn't disappointed and skipped to her limo. Sabrina followed closely behind and got inside with her.

When Chloe's limo drove away, the one right behind it took it's place. Adrien's bodyguard/driver, the 'Gorilla' as the teenagers secretly called him, stepped out, patiently waiting for his charge.

"That's my cue to exit." He shrugged with a half-smile. "See you guys tomorrow."

"Wait, I thought we were gonna play videogames?" Nino questioned, looking disappointed.

Adrien froze. "Uh-I...g-got a photo shoot today! Yeah, last minute photo shoot. You know how it is." He flashed a toothy smile while simultaneously rubbing the back of his neck with his hand.

"Yeah, I get it, dude. Good luck." As the best friend of a famous Parisian model, Nino knew all too well how plans can suddenly be cancelled in the blink of an eye. But Adrien was his best bro, they looked out for each other. So, he'd take on cancelled plans with a grin and bear it.

"Thanks. Bye, guys!" With that cheerful goodbye, Adrien ducked in the backseat and soon the limo drove away.

"Well, that leaves my afternoon free." Nino sighed and shrugged noncommittally.

"You can always join us," Alya offered. She and Marinette were just going to hang out in the designer's room, work on homework and talk. She didn't think Marinette would mind.

"Actually," Marinette began. "How about you guys hang out? You hardly ever go on dates because you're either hanging out with me or Adrien." She let out a small chuckle of amusement. "If I didn't know any better I'd say you two were just friends."

"Can't blame you for that," Alya agreed with a laugh. Nino simply smiled in agreement.

"I have to help out my parents in the bakery, anyway. You two have fun."

"Really? Are you sure?" Alya asked.

"Yeah. I could go home and leave you two to hang out, it's no big deal," Nino added with a slight frown of worry. He didn't want his friend to be annoyed with him.

"Go on, I insist! Get lunch at one of those cafes or something." Marinette's smile never faltered. "I told you I'm fine with it."

"Well, okay," Alya answered, dragging out the 'ay'. "As long as you're sure. Come on, Nino, I heard about this new place that opened up!"

After a goodbye, Marinette took a minute to gaze at her friends's entwined hands. Will she and Adrien be like that, one day? She could only hope.

Of course she lied. Her parents didn't need her help in the bakery. She just wanted to be isolated so no one could press her about the Chat Noir conspiracy. She wondered what he thought about it. Was he angry? Did he even care? Or did he laugh at their stupidity?

After about an hour of sitting at her desk, Marinette finally finished her homework. Math would forever be her greatest enemy.

She rose out of her chair and stretched. Remembering how Chat Noir did it the one night, she rose and stretched her arms above her head. She closed her eyes with satisfaction when she felt something
in her back ‘pop’. Maybe that alley cat was on to something.

Propping herself on her chaise lounge, she reached for the remote and turned on the tv. It was already on a news channel, and Marinette was about to change it, but the headline made her do a double-take and her mouth to drop.

Chat Noir sighted at the Louvre!

Chat Noir? Out? In broad daylight?!

"It seems Paris's infamous criminal wanted to prove his existence today after our Mayor’s speech last night. At around three today he was filmed walking into the Louvre and stealing a painting, while having some choice words directed at our city’s leader."

The news switched off the woman and showed a video that was captured by a cell phone. Sure enough, there was Chat Noir, striding down the hall like he owned the place. His lips were curled into a wicked smirk, green eyes glinting with mischief.

The camera followed his movements, to where he walked to a random painting and snatched it off the wall.

"Hope you don't mind me getting a few paw prints on it," he said before snickering. He turned to leave, but stopped when he eyed the person holding the cell phone and recording him.

He walked towards him but the camera was backing up.

"Relax, I'm not going to hurt you. I just have something to say." Chat Noir smirked and went up to the now trembling phone.

"Still don't think I'm real?" He sneered. "Still think I'm just a conspiracy? Well, my dear Mayor, I hope this convinces you of the opposite."

With those parting words he turned tail and sprinted out of the museum, leaving many terrified and gasping people. An audible sigh was heard before the video cut off.

With a shaky hand, Marinette reached for the remote and turned off the tv. She brought her knees to her chest and released a breath.

People now knew what he looked like. She couldn't believe he did that, but at the same time, she could believe it. He was that cocky to pull a stunt like that and not expect to get caught. Speaking of which...

She grabbed her cell phone resting next to her and searched for the news story. Just as she suspected, the police had no trace of the feline criminal. But, the article concluded, they won't rest until they've captured him.

They've been saying that for three years, now.

...

Marinette let out a tired yawn as she sketched a new item of clothing in her bed. This time, it was a dress. It was late in the year for dresses, but it's never late in the year to design something. Her creative juices were flowing and she simply couldn't ignore the calling of her sketchpad.

Taking a quick glance at the clock, she saw that it was ten at night. She better get to bed soon since
it's a school night.

She placed the pencil in the sketchpad and closed it, making it her placemark. She turned to the shelf behind her bed and put the sketchpad on the built-in shelf and was about to shut off her lamp when she heard a distinct tapping noise.

Startled, she looked up and saw the smirking face of Paris's number one thief.

She didn't move, mouth gaping at the sight of him. Chat Noir took this as permission to enter. He swiftly opened the hatch and landed on all-fours on her bed before sitting back Indian-style.

"Good evening, Princess. So, I heard that you had doubts about me."

Her mind brought up the memory of that day when she said she didn't believe in him. She gulped, face heating up.

"U-ummm.."

"You know, I figured with all we've been through, you would've believed in me." He closed his eyes and shook his head while clicking his tongue. The action was obviously meant to scold her.

The designer found herself unable to speak. "Uh, I-" What could she say to this? What could be her defense?

"So," he continued as if she hadn't tried to speak. "Was my little meet and greet at the Louvre real?"

Her sapphire eyes were wide as they bored into his emerald ones. Her breath came out in small, quiet pants, her heartbeat began to quicken. The only time this happened was when Adrien was near her...

He leaned toward her, all the while his devious grin never faltered. "I spoke to the man recording me. Was that real?"

"Y-yes?" She stuttered.

Chat Noir only inched his face closer. "You still sound unsure."

"I-I am sure!"

"Really?" By now he had her trapped. His legs were on both sides of her legs and his arms were resting beside her head. She looked up at him, cheeks delving into a soft pink due to his close proximity.

"Are you really sure, Princess?" He whispered. A couple more inches and they'd be kissing. But she only wanted to kiss Adrien. So why wasn't she pushing him away?

"Um..

"That's what I thought." He shook his head, mouth playing into a small frown. "How will I be able to convince you I'm real?"

A shiver went up her spine. Say something, Marinette!

"I-I-"

"Do I look real to you?" He bent his head lower so their noses were touching. Before she could try to think of a response he pulled back and rested his head in the crook of her neck.
"Do I feel real to you?" He slowly dragged his nose along the column of her neck, lips barely brushing over her skin.

Marinette bit her lip. She felt a tugging inside her, begging for something, but she didn't understand what exactly she was mentally begging for.

He didn't stop until his soft lips were at her ear.

"Do I sound real to you?"

She barely managed a nod.

"Good."

With that he sprang away from her, opening the trapdoor and going back into the night air.

"Just wanted to make sure. Good night, Princess!" With that parting remark and smirk, he closed the trapdoor and ran away into the night.

Marinette laid on her bed, breath and composure slowly coming back to her. She still couldn't believe he just did that, leave her all hot and bothered-

Woah. Woah, woah, wait. Hot and bothered? Becoming hot and bothered by Chat Noir was impossible. The only man who would be able to get her like that was Adrien, not Chat Noir.

She absently switched off her lamp, allowing darkness to swallow her room. Maybe she could dream of this tonight, only with Adrien's face instead of that thief's.

But alas, the next morning, she was frustrated when she recalled that Adrien's face didn't appear once in her dreams.
The next day everyone was abuzz for two different reasons. Tomorrow would be Halloween, a night for bad pranks, mischief, and partying. The second reason was because of the painting theft at the Louvre, caused by Paris’s longtime criminal.

"I guess he wasn't too pleased at being called a fake," Alya snickered.

"Guess not," Nino agreed, laughing along. Marinette didn't contribute much to the conversation, last night's events still on replay in her mind.

Her cheeks developed a red hue as she remembered the way he trailed his nose up her neck. The tickle of his breath on her skin giving her shivers.

"Do I feel real to you?"

"Hey, guys!"

Marinette blinked, the memory of Chat Noir vanishing at the sight of Adrien's handsome face.

The corners of his mouth pulled down as he looked at Marinette with concern. "You okay, Marinette? You look a little flushed."

This only made her blush darker. "Uh-I-um-No! No, I-I'm fine! Perfectly fine, peachy fine!" She gave a wide, toothy smile to further try to illustrate her point.

"Okay." He grinned. "If you say so."

She wanted to bang her head off the desk. Would it kill her brain to allow her to speak to her crush without making herself look like a fool?

"Hey, dude!" Nino greeted, holding out his fist. Adrien met it with his own and sat in his seat. "Did you hear about Chat Noir yesterday? We finally know what he looks like!"

"Yeah, it was pretty scary. I hope the cops catch him soon."

"That might be hard since he wears a mask," Nino mused. "He could be anywhere at any time. He could be sitting in this room right now."

Adrien gasped in fright. "You don't think?"

Alya laughed. "I think I'd know if a criminal was right in front of me. Come on, Nino, give us a little credit. Besides, all the police have to do is look for a guy with blond hair and green eyes."

Two comic dubs have been done from this story! Check them out :)  

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxVFSUpTqKo

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHfxVSS1cF4
"Lots of guys have blond hair and green eyes." Adrien smirked. "How will you be able to tell if it's him?"

"Easy. I'm a journalist, I have special senses." Alya winked. "It won't take long to figure out who he is."

"Alya, please don't get involved with this," her boyfriend begged. Alya always dragged him to areas with a possible juicy scoop, most of the time these areas were crime scenes. Nino knew that one day she'd take him there and they'd be face to face with a criminal, and now she might possibly want to get on the Chat Noir case? He wasn't lying when he said he wouldn't want to meet the feline thief in a dark alley.

"Relax," his girlfriend said, rolling her eyes. "This is the first time we've seen him. We have no leads on him at all. I'll wait until more details come along."

"Thank God," Nino moaned, eliciting an amused chuckle from Adrien and a grin from Marinette.

At lunchtime the four decided to go to a nearby cafe. Alya and Nino walked ahead, holding hands, leaving Adrien and Marinette trailing behind them.

"So, Halloween's tomorrow," Adrien stated, trying to make a conversation.

"Uh, y-yeah, it is!" She stuttered and nodded.

"Got any plans?" He asked casually.

"No." Marinette shook her head. "I think I'm just going to stay home and watch horror movies."

"Really? You're not going out? At all?" The blond inquired, eyes widened a bit.

She blushed under his disbelieving gaze and shrunk back. Great, now he thinks she has no life.

"Nah. I'm too old to trick or treat and...well," she paused, giving a shaky grin. "I don't feel like going to any parties anytime soon, or feel like walking home late at night."

Adrien smirked at her reply.

And now he thinks she's a baby. Perfect.

"Nino was telling me about this one party, I think I might go to that." He rubbed a hand on the back of his neck. "Not sure though."

"Oh. Well, if you do go, I hope you have fun!" Marinette tried to give her best smile. Adrien returned it with a smaller one and a 'thank you', and then they were back to awkward silence.

Adrien looked away, and seemed to be mumbling to himself. Probably about how lame the girl walking next to him is, Marinette assumed with a frown.

"I overheard some girls talking about Chat Noir earlier," Adrien suddenly spoke. He closed his eyes and shook his head. "They thought he was hot. Could you believe that?"

Marinette's eyes bulged and her cheeks had a soft pink dusting over them. "Really?"

"Yeah, ridiculous, isn't it?" Adrien continued. He looked surprised at the mere prospect of a thief
being considered attractive. "What do you think?"

"Y-yeah, ridiculous. I-I mean, he can't be that hot, I mean, not as hot as you-!"

Marinette squeaked in a panic.

"I-I mean, he-he's not that bad looking and neither are you? No! Uh-"

Meanwhile Adrien's lips didn't stop twitching, as if he wanted to grin at her flustered state.

Finally, they arrived at the cafe. Marinette hurried inside, wanting a hole to just swallow her. Alya and Nino gave puzzled looks to Adrien, but the blond simply shrugged his shoulders in innocence.

Marinette pulled Alya close to her. "Please sit next to me," she whispered in her ear. "Please!"

Alya rose an eyebrow at the blackette's panic-filled voice. But, they were best friends, and as much as Alya wanted to sit next to her boyfriend, friends came first.

"Alright. But I expect to hear why later."

Marinette could've kissed her. "Thank you!"

They were seated at a regular, four-person table. Alya and Marinette sat on one side, with Adrien across from Marinette and Nino across from Alya.

"Welcome!" A waiter walked over, pen and pad in hand. "My name is Remy and I'll be your waiter this afternoon. Can I start you off with something to drink?"

After they ordered their drinks the waiter scurried off, leaving them to figure out what they wanted.

"I think I'll get an omelet," Alya spoke after a minute. Marinette wanted the same while Nino opted for the quiche and Adrien the classic jambon beurre. When the waiter came back and they informed him of their choices and got their drinks, he left again. Nino took his departure as the sign to talk.

"I can't believe it's almost Halloween, soon it'll be Christmas, then New Years, then summer, then we'll be graduating-"

"Woah, woah!" Alya cut off Nino, laughing. "Slow down! Let's just get through this weekend, yeah?"

The four started to laugh, and Marinette found her gaze travelling to Adrien. His eyes were closed and his mouth was wide open, dazzling teeth on full display as he laughed. She couldn't help but think back to the day they first met, back when she didn't like him because of a certain gum incident. When he offered her his umbrella, and the umbrella ultimately closed in on her, he gave a laugh similar to this one.

Adrien's eyes slowly opened to see her looking at him. He flashed her a quick wink before turning to Nino and talking about something else.

Dear God. Did he really...?

Marinette whipped her head to the side to look for Alya's reaction. Judging by her grin, she definitely saw it.

The young designer took in a deep breath. She can do this. It's just lunch with her friends...and Adrien. And even though she stuttered like an idiot earlier and he winked at her just now, she can get
When they got their food Marinette took extra care to take small bites, chew with her mouth closed at all times (sometimes she slipped up, it happens to everyone) and make sure no food got on her face. She was the perfect little lady who Adrien would be impressed with.

She mentally scoffed. She wished it was that easy, to have good table manners and have the blond fall instantly in love with her.

While she was focused on her food, her head rose when she heard a clatter. Adrien smiled sheepishly at his friends.

"Sorry! Accidentally knocked over my spoon."

His blond locks disappeared as he dove under the table to get the spoon back. Marinette continued eating her omelet, only stiffening when she felt fingertips brush her ankle.

"Mari? You okay?" Alya questioned, concern swimming in her hazel eyes.

"I-I'm fine!" She squeaked.

Adrien popped back up a second later, spoon in hand and wearing a victory grin. "Got it!"

... 

The next day was a half day due to it being Halloween. Marinette chose to wear the Dorothy dress she designed, after the famous American movie character. Alya was a witch, Nino a DJ ("I already have the outfits and equipment, so why not?") and Adrien had on a near-perfect Paris Police outfit.

Marinette thought he looked good before, but with a uniform that fit him just perfectly...

She released a dreamy sigh from her seat.

Chloe dressed as a nurse, with too much leg showing along with cleavage to be deemed appropriate for a school setting. But she was the Mayor's daughter, so the school staff couldn't do anything about it.

"Do you like my costume, Adrien?" Chloe asked, smiling and giving him a twirl even though the skirt clung to her thighs.

"Yeah, it's nice," he replied absently.

"I'm going to wear it at Aurore's party tonight. I hope you'll be wearing your costume." Chloe leaned over the desk, giving the blond model a good view of her assets. She licked her lips as she eyed him up and down.

Despite her physical taunts, Adrien's eyes remained hard and glued to her eyes. "I told you, Chloe, I might not be going."

"But, Adrikins, you have to go!" She clung to his arm in desperation. "You're the most popular boy here, you simply must go!"

"I don't have to do anything." Adrien took her hand to remove it from his arm. "If I'm not there, then too bad."

Chloe frowned. She knew riling him up wouldn't get her anywhere, so she settled with an air kiss
and retreated to her seat. Adrien closed his eyes for a few seconds, took a calming breath, then opened them again.

Marinette drew her attention away from him to look back at the new design she was sketching. Her tongue poked out of her mouth as she drew the detailed swirls on the inside of the pants.

"Hey, Mari!"

She looked up at the sound of her name. Alya called her from her place beside Nino.

"Could you sharpen my pencil please?"

Marinette's eyebrows drew down. She was already up, why couldn't she do it? But, friends do favors for each other, so with a smile she picked up Alya's pencil and went to sharpen it.

She didn't notice how a blond's green eyes trailed after her, or the knowing smirks from a boyfriend-girlfriend duo.

...

"Are you sure you don't want to go to Aurore's party?"

Marinette held her phone with one hand while using the other to change the tv channel.

"I'm sure. I'd rather just stay at home this year," she replied.

"Alright, if you say so. If I see Adrien I'll send you some pics, since I know you liked his officer costume." Marinette could practically hear her best friend's smirk. She felt her own face heating up at the memory, and before she knew it, an audible sigh left her lips.

Alya laughed while Marinette winced. "You're too much, girl. If I don't see Adrien, I'll talk to you tomorrow."

"Talk to you then," she agreed. The line went dead so the blackette placed her phone next to her on the chaise lounge. She picked up her bowl of popcorn and waited for the five minutes of the previous horror movie to be over and for the new one to start.

"Hope I'm not too late."

Marinette shrieked and nearly dropped the popcorn in her terror. Chat Noir was lounging on his stomach on her bed, boots crossed in the air and hands placed on his cheeks as his elbows dipped into the bed.

"What are you doing here?" She hissed angrily. She fought against the mental images from their last meeting.

"Just wanted to spend Halloween with my princess." He smirked and started walking down the stairs. He plopped himself next to her, forcing her to move over so there was enough space for the two of them.

"So, what are we watching?" He asked as he casually dipped a hand into her popcorn bowl, then bringing the buttery treats to his mouth. Marinette scowled and moved the bowl away from him.

"Who said anything about 'we'?" She teased. "Isn't Chat Noir always supposed be active on Halloween?"
Since there was a Chat Noir, every Halloween you would be able to find paw prints spray painted on various walls and buildings. Multiple businesses were stolen from, leaving many owners angry and forced to replace the glass windows that would also be scratched by the black cat.

Chat stretched, placing his hands behind his head in relaxation. "Normally, yes, but I decided to take a break this year."

Marinette mockingly gasped. "The year without a Chat Noir?" She found herself giggling at her reference. "The horror!"

"Ha. Ha," he deadpanned, but the hint of a grin was on his features. "You didn't answer my question, by the way."

"Halloween, a classic," she answered, before eating a few more pieces of popcorn. Chat Noir tried to take some too but she stubbornly moved the bowl further from his reach.

"Hey, give me some," he pouted.

"Or what?" Her sky blue eyes twinkled with glee. "You'll steal it?"

Chat leaned back and placed a hand on his chest. "Me-owch! Low blow, Princess."

She giggled and turned her attention back to the tv. "Ooh, it's starting!"

Turns out, Chat Noir had more fear then he let people believe. Plenty of times he jumped, and more times he visibly squirmed at the sight of blood.

Marinette, barely holding back a laugh, turned to her stiff companion. "Are you scared, Chaton?"

He pivoted his head to glare at her, not at all amused at the name she called him. "I'm a full-grown Chat, not a Chaton, who isn't afraid of a stupid movie."

Just then the music blared as a character discovered yet another body. Chat jumped and a squeak left his mouth, leaving the designer howling with laughter. She had to hold her sides as she gasped for air. Thank God her parents went out tonight, or else she would have a hard time explaining why exactly Paris's top criminal was in her room and why she was laughing at a horror movie.

She switched the tv off, the movie was almost over, anyway. She didn't want the cat to dart under the chaise in fear. Oh, boy. Now that's a thought. She started laughing all over again at the picture her mind painted.

"It's not that funny," he grumbled, turning away from her.

"But, Chat," she breathed. She paused to wipe stray tears from her eyes. "You're this bad-boy criminal yet you're scared by some jumpscares and fake blood. It's hysterical!"

"I should be more concerned about you," he retorted, looking back at her. "You didn't scream, or jump, or try to cuddle with me once! It makes me wonder if you're not as innocent as I thought."

"Well, I'm friends with you, aren't I? So obviously not." Marinette winked at the still-annoyed thief. "Any innocent person would've called the police if Chat Noir came in their room."

A slow, sly smirk made it's way across his features. His green eyes flickered with mischievous intent. His face leaned closer to hers.

"Maybe I'm a bad influence, then."
Marinette quickly sobered as she leaned away. "M-Maybe."

"Wouldn't want to corrupt you," he murmured, slowly getting closer.

"That wouldn't be good," she agreed.

"Too bad I never listen to my own advice."

Chat's hand moved to make its way around her waist. Marinette was still shrinking away, Adrien's face appearing in her mind. She shouldn't kiss him, she likes Adrien! But she kind of wanted to kiss the criminal...no! Yes? No! Ye-?

All too quickly she found the wind knocked out of her as she fell to the floor. Chat Noir blinked in surprise and looked over the chaise lounge. "Are you okay?"

"Fine," came her answer. She made her way up, cheeks flushed and panting. "Just fine!"

He nodded before slightly frowning, no doubt about the mood being killed. Marinette took a look at the clock on her wall, which read 12:15. It was officially November 1st.

"Happy late Halloween." Marinette shrugged, wearing a small smile.

Chat snorted and shook his head. "Happy late Halloween."

They stayed quiet for a few more moments, she standing and he sitting, until Chat Noir stretched.

"Well, it's getting pretty late, and princesses need their beauty sleep. I'll be heading out now."

"A-Alright."

Marinette followed him up the stairs leading to her bed. Wordlessly he opened the hatch and climbed out, stopping to peer down at her.

"Thank you for the movie date, Princess." He smiled. "I hope we can do this again sometime soon, though maybe without the horror."

The ravenette giggled while he took her hand and pressed it to his lips in a quick kiss.

"Good night." He grinned before dashing away. Marinette smiled fondly as she shut the hatch.
Chapter 8

That Monday, Alya texted Marinette before school to let her know that she wasn't coming in. Apparently, she got a really bad stomach bug over the weekend and she couldn't move from her bed.

The designer frowned as she zipped up her jeans. If Alya wasn't there, then it was going to be a very long, and very boring day.

When she walked inside her class she found Adrien already sitting in his bench. His head perked up when he saw her come and and he gave her a wide smile. She fought down a blush and tried to return it without her smile looking too creepily big.

"Hey, Marinette!" He greeted as she was about to pass by his desk to get to her seat, thus stopping her.

"Hi, Adrien!" She practically squealed. *Keep it together, Marinette!*

"Nino told me he'd be absent today." He frowned. "Guess it'll be just the three of us today."

"Ah, actually, no." Marinette awkwardly bit her lip and looked away. "Alya won't be here either, she texted me this morning."

Adrien rose his golden eyebrows. "Really? Huh. Then I guess it's just us two for today." He winked, it was so quick that she found herself wondering whether he really committed the action or not. Maybe he had a bit of dust in his eye and it was irritating him.

But he didn't give any more eye twitches after that. He just kept beaming at her, until he asked, "Since Alya and Nino won't be here, want to sit next to me?"

Marinette died. She officially died and her soul went to heaven to frolic on hills of emerald green and skies of gold.

"Marinette?" Adrien raised an eyebrow, a frown beginning to marr his handsome features. "It-It's okay if you don't."

"Yes!" She cleared her throat when realizing her answer came out a bit too high-pitched. "I mean, yes, I'll sit with you."

"Great!" He scooted down so he took Nino's usual spot so she wouldn't have to walk to the other side. Marinette held back a dreamy sigh at the kind gesture as she sat down.

Wait. Her butt is now touching the place where Adrien's butt always is.

She's never washing these jeans again.

He turned to her, propping an elbow on the desk and resting a fist on his cheek. "So, how was your Halloween?" He asked innocently, a pleasant smile stretching his lips.

Marinette couldn't help but think of how Chat Noir got so scared by the fake blood and gore, prompting a few light giggles to escape her. "It-It was g-good. Very nice."

Adrien's eyebrows furrowed at her giggling, but a tender smile played on his mouth.
"How was yours?" She questioned. "Did you go to Aurore's party?" Alya hadn't sent her any pics, claiming she didn't see him there, but that didn't mean that he wasn't.

He shook his head. "Nah. I didn't feel like going."

"Oh."

Marinette tried to find something else to say. It appeared Adrien did too, because when both of them opened their mouths, an angry screech tore through the air.

For the first time in her life, she saw a flicker of irritation pass over the blond's face. But in the blink of an eye he masked it to show a look of concern. Chloe and Sabrina stomped over, both girls glaring daggers at Marinette.

"Adrikins, why the sudden seat change?" Chloe asked sweetly, yet through gritted teeth.

The model shrugged. "Nino and Alya aren't here, so I thought it'd be nice to have Marinette sit next to me."

Her eyes narrowed and her next response was a shout. "Why didn't you ask me?!"

"You have Sabrina, I'm sure you wouldn't want to abandon her," he replied without missing a beat.

"B-But we're childhood sweethearts! I'd always sit next to you."

"We were not childhood sweethearts," he corrected with a slight scowl.

"But-"

"Good morning, class! Hope you all had a nice Halloween!" Mme. Bustier warmly greeted as she walked in the classroom. Marinette almost breathed a sigh of relief, she was honestly getting scared that Chloe would pester Adrien so much that he'd force her to move back to her regular seat just to appease the blonde.

Chloe gave one last murderous look to the designer before strutting to her bench. Sabrina followed closely behind, only she turned her nose up in the air at relieved ravenette.

Marinette watched as Adrien rubbed a hand along his face, mumbling what sounded like a 'Thank God' but she couldn't be too sure.

She tried to pay attention to the lesson, really she did, but it was just so hard to focus with Adrien Agreste sitting right next to her. A hint of his cologne hung in the air and his blond locks gently feathered downwards as he bent his head to write in his tablet. Every now and then he'd glance up to look at the notes, then back down to copy them. They were notes that she should be copying too.

She shakily picked up her stylus and tried extra hard to focus. She copied each word on the slide, but soon fell back to her thoughts about Adrien. She cautiously peeked at him out of the corner of her eye and was surprised to see him looking at her. He offered a grin and returned to his notes.

Another slide came up, Marinette copied down the words verbatim. Mme. Bustier spoke some of her own words for the lesson then changed the slide again.

She didn't hear him scoot closer to her. Instead she was aware of his presence when her nose caught more of his pleasing cologne and she saw his arm. She turned to him with wide eyes and a fierce blush on her cheeks.

He smiled warmly at her. "Hey, I missed some of the notes from the last slide. Can I copy?"

Marinette gulped, then nodded. Is it possible to die twice in one day?

His arm bumped against her own as he wrote on his tablet. His face slowly moved closer to her own as he looked closer at her notes.

She bit her lip and froze when a stray lock of blond hair brushed her burning cheek.


Adrien turned to her as if nothing out of the ordinary happened. "Thanks, Marinette!"

Marinette hurriedly nodded. "Y-yeah, s-sure! No, no problem!" She whispered.

However, he didn't move back to his previous spot. No, he opted to stay there for the entire class, leaving her with nothing to do but inwardly panic and blush and wonder if this is the best thing that's ever happened to her or the worst.

Just when she thought she was going to die, the bell rung, signifying the end of class. Marinette let out a breath of relief as Adrien stood and began packing his things.

"Thanks again for letting me copy," he said to her as he was about to leave.

"No problem!" She squeaked.

"You know," he trailed off. He gazed up at her with a sly smirk. "I don't think Nino and Alya are really sick today."

Marinette tilted her head. "What do you mean?"

Adrien chuckled, a sound that she always found pleasing to her ears. "I think they just took the day off to do other activities."

It took a minute to dawn on her at what he was insinuating. She nearly gasped and fell over at the shock that Adrien Agreste was making a...well, that kind of suggestion.

Adrien laughed at her expression and lifted his hand in a parting wave. She stared open-mouthed as he walked out the door.

...

At lunchtime she fled to her parents's bakery before Adrien could find her and possibly ask her to join him for lunch. The previous cafe trip was still fresh on her mind and Literature class didn't make things better.

She avoided him for the rest of the day. Without Alya and Nino there she'd be a mess around him, she couldn't take the chance.

So, it was after school, where she was safe in her room, that she could finally relax and sigh. She hadn't made herself look like a total idiot in front of the love of her life, she survived without Alya.

She was so happy she could get to work on making the jacket from one of her latest designs. And she'd do just that.
It was well into the night when she heard the familiar tapping sound on her upper trapdoor. Marinette didn't bother to get up, he was no stranger to letting himself in.

But the tapping continued. She growled in aggravation and went up to open it. That alley cat, it was obvious she wanted him to let himself in.

Marinette’s frustration vanished when she took in his twisted lips and eyes screwed shut in pain.

"Chat Noir? What happened?"

He didn't answer. Instead, while still holding his lower side, he fell inside and landed on her bed. He audibly groaned and leaned his head back.

She looked over him, mouth dropping when she noticed his pale face. The glove at his side was covered with blood seeping from the wound beneath.

"Chat...what happened to you?" She whispered.

The feline criminal clenched his teeth. "Bastard had a knife," he bit out. "While I was busy with the three assholes the fourth jumped me and one of them slashed at me with the knife."

Marinette’s eyes bulged at his story. "Are you okay?" She wanted to slap herself for asking that as soon as the words left his lips. Of course he wasn't okay, he was just slashed by a knife!

A wry grin crossed over his face. "I will be, if you can do what I hope you can do."

She faltered for a second before asking, "what can I do?"

"This is a pretty big cut, Princess. It's not something a band-aid will take care of. You're going to have to give me stitches."

The designer balked at his idea. "Are you crazy?! I'm not a doctor!"

"Well it's not like I can go to a real one!" He snapped, then immediately relaxed and looked at her apologetically. "I'm sorry, Princess. I didn't mean to yell at you."

Unbelievable. Here he was, a stab victim, and he was apologizing for snapping at her.

"It's okay," she replied automatically. She closed her eyes and shook her head. "How am I supposed to help you?"

"Get a needle and thread and sew me back together."

Marinette nearly gagged at the way he worded it.

"You're a designer, Princess. You know what to do."

"I sew clothes, not people!"

"Please," he begged, clenching his teeth. "Please, help me. I'm losing more blood than I would like to at the moment."

If she didn't help him, he'd most likely die. He saved her life three times, and now it was time to repay the favor.
"Alright," she decided. "Come on." She gently helped him off the bed, down the small staircase, and laid him on the floor. She hurriedly got him a pillow for his head and grabbed her sewing kit.

After running to the bathroom to clean the needle she would use, she sat down beside him. He tentatively removed the hand covering the wounded area and Marinette flinched at the deep gash that ran through a good portion of his lower left side.

He wordlessly pulled down the front zipper of his suit, revealing tanned skin and a six pack.

A six pack. Of muscle.

Marinette's cheeks tinted a rosy pink at the sight.

"While normally I'd love for you to admire my body," he drawled dryly, her ripping her gaze away from his muscle to meet his lidded green eyes. "We have a more pressing matter at hand."

She nodded, fully embarrassed, and worked to wrap the thread in a knot on the eye of the needle. When finished she took a cautious look at the gash, wondering how on Earth she'd be able to do this.

"Just like your clothes," he encouraged, closing his eyes. "Just imagine I'm a shirt or something."

"Won't this hurt you?" Marinette asked quietly, tears beginning to pool in her eyes from worry. She didn't want to put him in any more pain than what he was currently in.

Chat Noir let out a bitter laugh. "Princess, no matter what happens I'm going to be hurting. Just get to work."

She nodded, swallowed away her nerves, and gently poked his skin with the needle. He bit his lip, but then had to make an effort to hold back a shout as it went through the other side of the piece of skin.

She froze in fear and looked at his face which was twisted in agony. "Get on with it," he growled. A nervous whimper tore through her throat as she went to work on the second stitch. She needed something to distract him, something to distract both of them.

"Why were you fighting four guys?"

He didn't give an answer right away. He waited a minute or two before starting. "Went to rob a jewelry store, four bastards also decided to rob it. They interrupt me, I tell them to leave because I was there first, then they fight me. I can take on four guys at once...without weapons. Two, maybe three, if they have weapons. Anyway, I got stabbed. Normally I'd continue to fight, but he got me good. I knew I wasn't going to win that battle. So I left, and now all that jewelry is going to be in their hands. That's the real tragedy of this story."

Marinette scowled and would've needlessly poked him with the needle, but she wasn't like that.

"Chat, you can't try to take on four guys at once."

"I did it before."

"And you said you would normally continue to fight. Have you gotten stabbed before?"
"Yes. But they were only minor cuts. This one is the worst I ever got."

She didn't look at him. "You need to be more careful."

"I know." A corner of his mouth twitched up. "If I died then you wouldn't have a knight to protect you, Princess."

"I mean it, Chat Noir. Not for me, but for yourself. You need to stay safe for yourself."

"Can't do that."

She stopped her work, which was halfway done, and glared at him. "Yes, you can. I don't matter. I want you to stay safe for yourself."

His eyes narrowed. "Don't ever say that. You do matter. Stop arguing with me on this, you're not going to win."

"Chat-

"I'm still bleeding, in case you haven't noticed."

She grumbled as she got back to work. She was too angry and frustrated with him to be afraid to do her task anymore. Chat leaned back and tried to relax even though a needle kept piercing him over and over again.

At long last, it was done. Marinette gave a long look at the black stitching over what once was a deep gash.

"I'll clean it up."

"No need." He bit his lip, shakily standing. "I can clean it at home. Thank you, though."

Marinette grimaced at Chat's dried blood staining her hands. Chat Noir looked at his stitched up wound, a grin of satisfaction came on his face. He zipped up the suit and stepped towards her.

"Thank you, Princess." He took both of her hands, still bloodstained, and kissed them. "I am forever in your debt."

Marinette closed her eyes. "Please. Please be more careful."

He placed a finger under her chin and tilted her head up. She slowly opened her moist eyes to meet his warm ones.

"I'll be more careful." He smirked. "Purrromise."

"I'm serious, Chat. I don't want you getting stabbed again."

"You'll never have to stitch me up again."

"That's not it!" She snapped, sapphire eyes blazing in an emotion she herself didn't recognize. "It's not about me stitching you up, it's about you getting hurt. I don't want you to get hurt again!"

He paused, eyes slowly enlarging. He stared at her, mouth slightly parted, but he still kept his hold on her hands.

At last a slow smile spread across his lips. His green eyes seemed to swirl with that same emotion she
had earlier, though much less hostile.

"I will be more careful." He bent his head down to deliver another kiss to her knuckles. "Promise." Chat closed his eyes and touched her hands with his lips once more, making the blackette’s cheeks softly flush.

He gently let go of her hands and carefully made his way to her bed. He bit his lip to prepare for the pain before he hauled himself out the trapdoor. He made a small groan, but made no other noises to show his agony.

"Good night, Princess."
"I'm going to kill you," Marinette hissed angrily to Alya once she sat in her seat the next day.

Alya turned to her wide eyes. "What did I do?"

"You left me alone, you and Nino! I sat next to Adrien! He was so close to me!" Marinette brought her whisper to an even lower level. "His hair touched me."

Alya threw back her head and laughed at that last one. "Girl, shouldn't that be a good thing?"

"It is! But I couldn't handle it." She laid her head miserably on the desk. "It was too much."

Alya kept chuckling but patted her shoulder in sympathy. "It's okay, I'm sure you did fine."

"Alya," she groaned. "It's not fair. Why can't I just talk to him like anybody else?"

"Because he's Adrien, the supposed love of your life?" Alya guessed with a giggle.

Marinette felt her stomach do a little flip at that. *Love of her life...*

Her best friend laughed at her lack of answer. However, she perked up once she saw the boy duo walk in. "And here he is, now!" She whispered in the designer's ear.

Marinette sat up like a bullet, eyes darting to find the blond. He was laughing at something Nino said, but, it looked just a bit forced. He also limped the slightest bit. Did he injure his ankle while fencing or something?

She frowned at the thought, hoping he would get better soon.

Adrien paused at his desk. His mouth tightened into a thin line as he eased himself in his seat.

"Dude, you okay?" Nino asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Just hurt my leg in fencing yesterday." He gave a reassuring smile.

"That sucks," Nino remarked.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Just hurt my leg in fencing yesterday." He gave a reassuring smile.

"That sucks," Nino remarked.

Adrien chuckled. "Yeah, it does." He turned to face the girls. "Morning, Alya. Hi, Marinette!"

"Hi, Adrien," Marinette automatically replied with a smile lighting up her face. "I c-couldn't help but overhear earlier...I-I hope your leg gets b-better soon." She felt her face warm as she said those last words. She hoped he wouldn't think she's a nosy eavesdropper or a creep.

He grinned, and Marinette's fears faded away. "Thank you, Marinette. Me too."

...

"That-That stupid, mangy alley cat!"

Marinette was seething as she paced her room that Saturday afternoon. She had stitched Chat Noir on Monday night, and he was already committing crimes again. A jewelry store had some diamonds
stolen from on Friday night. He only waited four days to get back on the field, that surely wasn’t enough time for his wound to heal properly.

"If his stitches come undone, I'm not fixing him!"

"Looks like the Princess has some claws of her own."

Marinette shrieked in surprise at the new voice. She glared at Chat Noir as he walked down the stairs and sat comfortably on her chaise lounge, all the while giving her a smug grin.

"What are you doing?!" she growled. "It's daylight, and you're committing crime when it's only been four days since you were stabbed. What the hell is wrong with you?"

Chat snickered at her anger, which only made the blackette's eyes narrow impossibly more.

"Relax, Princess. I made sure to hide myself well when coming here. As for my stab wound, it's *feline* better. In fact, I think I can remove the stitches soon. So no need to get your panties in a twist." He winked, her reaction was to huff in annoyance and turn away from him.

He frowned when she still refused to look at him. "Really, Marinette. I'm feeling better. And even at the store I made sure no one else was there. If there was I would've," he stopped, his mouth twitching. He couldn't resist. "...*high-tailed* it out of there, just to be safe. You have nothing to worry about."

"I'm not worried," she scoffed, turning back to face him. "I don't care."

"I seem to remember you telling me you didn't want me to be hurt? To be more careful?" he inquired lightly, a smirk taking over his features. His green eyes twinkled with sadistic delight. "I think you do care."

Marinette refused to reply, instead choosing to look away.

"Princess," he called, starting to stand. "I know you care. It's okay, I care about you, too."

She growled and stomped away, sitting with a huff in her desk chair. Chat Noir laughed at the little pout on her lips.

She left the cat to do whatever he wanted while she checked her news feed on her computer. Marinette gasped at the top story that came up. Apparently two armed men were trying to rob one of Paris's main banks. They took hostages, and the police were trying to figure out what to do to prevent any casualties.

He noticed her pale face. "Princess? What is it?"

"Two guys are robbing the bank," she replied, still in shock. Those poor hostages, they were just innocent people who needed to take out money or put some in. Now they could possibly die because of two crazy men.

He shuffled over, bending his head to Marinette's shoulder level to peer at the computer screen. He hummed when he read the article, then crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"Why are you so surprised? These things happen." he remarked dryly.

She swivelled around in her chair to face him with a stern look. "This doesn't happen everyday, Chat. Normally they'll go in, get the money, and leave, not take people for hostages."
"This is why it's better to perform at night, so that you don't have to deal with all the unnecessary hassle of people. Looks to me like these guys are amateurs." He scoffed. "Some people just shouldn't be criminals, it makes the rest of us look bad."

"Are you seriously worried about your ego right now?" Marinette snapped.

"No, it's already pretty well stroked." He smirked and rubbed a hand against his chest. "Paris's number one criminal, remember?"

Marinette rolled her eyes. When she turned back to the computer screen her mouth dropped at the update.

The men demanded the police leave in ten minutes, otherwise all the hostages would be killed.

She looked back at Chat Noir, to see that he opted to recline on her chaise lounge again. His eyes were closed in bliss as he relaxed. Marinette bit her lip in hesitation. He said he was feeling better...and he's the only one who could sneak in there and help.

But that's the thing. Would he actually help? She highly doubted it, but she had to try. She didn't want those innocent civilians to die, even though she didn't know them.

"Chat?"

He opened an eye, a corner of his mouth turned up. "Yes, Princess?"

"You did say you were feeling better, right?"

He grinned. "I'm feline purrty well."

Marinette frowned, still wondering if she should ask him. All too quickly her eyebrows furrowed and her eyes gleamed in determination. Those people were unknowingly counting on her.

"Could you go help the hostages? The men said they'll be killed if the police don't leave in ten minutes."

Chat sat up and looked at her as if she grew two heads. "I'm a villain, not a hero, Princess. I don't save the day."

Marinette wasn't giving up. "You're the only one who could sneak in there and help. Please, Chat, people can die!"

He faltered for a second before shrugging his shoulders indifferently. "People die everyday."

"Chat!" She couldn't believe how insensitive he was being.

"Marinette, I'm a criminal. I'm no hero, I'm not helping."

"Please, Chat!" She pleaded. "What if it was me in there?"

He glared at her before laying back down on the chaise. "That'd be different."

"How different?" She demanded.

"Because I care about you. I told you before I could give two shits about anyone else. Why do you want me to go help so bad, anyway?"
"Because they're innocent people! And now they could have their lives taken away all because of money. I know you're not a hero, but..." She trailed off, hanging her head low. She willed the tears not to come.

Well, she tried. It was stupid of her to even consider that he might be willing to help.

"...I'll help."

Marinette brought her head up so fast to look at him it was a miracle she didn't break her neck. Chat Noir had his arms crossed and his mouth was set in a thin line. He held a clawed finger up.

"On one condition."

Marinette hurriedly nodded. "Anything!"

His mouth curled into a vicious smirk. "I want the value of all the banks in Paris."

Her jaw dropped at the condition. "H-How...?!" She didn't have that kind of money, she doubted even Chloe had that kind of money!

"Clock's ticking, Princess," he informed her lightly. "This offer won't be on the table for long."

She bit her lip in panic. The only thing she could do was bake...but she'd be baking for him for years. Still, it was a small price to pay for people's lives.

"Okay," she decided. "I accept."

The smirk curled deeper. "Excellent. I'll be back later, Princess." He rushed over to her to take her hand and give it a parting kiss. He raced back up the stairs and hauled himself out of the trapdoor above her bed.

She felt herself deflate in her desk chair, still in disbelief of what happened. She was indebted to Chat Noir, to give him the value of all the banks in Paris. She couldn't even begin to imagine how many pastries she'd have to make him.

Marinette brought a hand to her forehead. Years. It would take years to make all those pastries. How much of a sweet tooth did he have?

Idly she began to check the article for updates. Lo and behold, soon it was written that at the last minute, when one man was screaming that he was going to kill every hostage, his voice suddenly stopped. Everyone was confused, no one knew what was going on.

A few minutes later the hostages ran outside, safe and completely unharmed. When asked what happened, they said that they were sworn to not say anything. When police and reporters pressed for details, they only shook their heads and thanked the 'hero' that saved them.

Marinette couldn't help but smile. She indirectly saved ten lives today. And any minute now Chat Noir was going to come back and tell her exactly what and how many pastries he wanted.

She was confused when seconds turned into minutes, and minutes turned into hours. Before long Sabine called her down for dinner, and Marinette walked down in a puzzled haze. Maybe he changed his mind, relinquished their deal out of the good of his heart?

Marinette mentally snorted at that. He does have a good heart, she knew, but from his wicked smirk when she accepted the deal she knew she wasn't getting out of it.
"You okay, Mari?" Tom asked her. "You look like there's something wrong."

"No, Papa, I'm fine," she replied without missing a beat. "Just worried about a test on Monday."

"Well, make sure you study hard, then," Sabine told her gently. "Honestly, though, a test on Monday is pretty cruel."

Tom laughed. "It is. I remember I'd goof off during the weekend and then I'd fa-"

Sabine cut him off with a harsh look.

Tom choked and quickly backpeddled. "And that's why it's important to study, so you don't end up like me!"

Marinette giggled at her parents' antics. "I'll study, don't worry."

...

It was around 11:00 when she heard the unmistakeable tapping on her glass trapdoor. Sighing, she opened it and Chat Noir dropped down on all fours, just like his namesake.

He grinned. "I've come to collect, Princess."

Chapter End Notes

I'm cruel with these cliffhangers ;)
Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas! And if you don't celebrate it, then Happy Holidays! :)

Marinette froze in astonishment. He came to collect, now?! He knows she's not rich, nor would she have had the time to bake so many pastries! Was he insane?

"Now?" she managed to squeak out in disbelief.

"Yes, now." That stupid grin never left his face. "You agreed to give me the value of all the banks in Paris if I saved the hostages, which I did. I even wrapped the two idiots in a big, pretty bow as a present for our city's finest. And now I've come to collect."

"B-But I don't have it!" she spluttered out, hands beginning to do their classic frenzy of moves whenever she got overwhelmed.

"Yes, you do. You've always had it. What, did you think I was talking about pastries or something?" He chuckled, green eyes lighting with mirth.

Marinette could only look dumbfounded, which spurred on more noises of amusement from the thief. If he didn't mean pastries, then what else did she have that could hold the value of all the banks in Paris?

"I think you know exactly what I want." His voice dropped to a low murmur as he brought a hand to her cheek. The cool metal of his ring contrasted greatly with the warmth of the leather glove. Marinette stilled as he trailed his thumb over her parted lips.

Her eyes followed the thumb's movement before she brought them back up to meet with Chat Noir's. She could barely hold back the gasp of realization.

He removed his thumb when she began to speak. "You want a-a kiss?"

"Correct." He shuffled closer to her, green eyes holding her sapphires captive. "But I would never force myself on you."

The unspoken words, 'do you want this', were left hanging in the air. Marinette swallowed and a chill ran down her spine. However, she couldn't help but be surprised at what her kiss valued to him. He considered a kiss from her to be worth all the money from the banks of Paris?

Chat Noir didn't move, it seemed he wouldn't until she gave an answer.

Did she want this? With the room lit only by the small lamp behind her, his emerald eyes seemed to glow. His hand was still resting tenderly on her cheek.

She was aware of how handsome he was, it was a fact she observed when they first met, and it only seemed more so with the intimate lighting. She couldn't deny the small spark of attraction she felt for him.
Despite his crimes, he never harmed her, and always acted like a gentleman. Like now, for instance. Instead of demanding for the kiss and stealing it, he was waiting patiently for permission.

Marinette let out a long, slow breath. Not looking him in the eyes, she nodded her head and whispered. "W-Well, I can't go back on my word."

She only glanced up to see his reaction. He wasn't displaying one of his signature smirks or grins. No, a rare, warm smile took over his features.

He leaned closer and placed his other hand on her other cheek. His head bent down so only a hair's width of distance was between their lips. She felt his warm breath on her sensitive skin which only served to cause another shiver to run down her back.

"You're right, it isn't a good thing to break your deals," he murmured lowly.

"Especially when I'm dealing with a thief," she breathed.

He smirked wickedly. "Especially then."

After those words he planted his lips on hers. Marinette's eyes automatically closed in bliss.

All she could register was warmth. His lips were warm, and soft as they moved and molded against hers. Unconsciously she raised her hands to bury them in equally soft blond locks. He seemed to like that as he made a groaning noise from the back of his throat and increased the pressure of their kiss.

He didn't break the passionate kiss as he maneuvered her to lay down, she was barely aware of the pillow hitting the back of her head. Her eyes opened for a second to see their current situation: her resting on the bed with him holding himself above her, hands secured across both sides of her head.

She closed her eyes and sighed when she felt his tongue hesitantly touch her top lip. She let him in and soon their tongues were in a heated dance. She tightened her hold on the blond strands and he again made a noise of pleasure.

He pulled away and lightly nipped her bottom lip with his teeth. Marinette tried not to make a sound, but his husky chuckle told her she ultimately failed.

With no lips available to muffle her own she let out a gasp as his mouth trailed down her neck, pressing sensual kisses on the flesh. He bit down on the area where her neck met with shoulder and she had to bite her lower lip to keep the satisfied moan at bay.

"Ma Princesse," he purred.

Marinette swore she saw stars when he began to lightly suck on the spot. Her hands wandered from his hair to his shoulders, where she gripped them tightly without fear of hurting him.

When he was finished he swiped his tongue on the spot before moving his head to the hollow of her throat. He pressed a kiss there and made his way up, never breaking the heated trail. At long last he returned his lips to hers where he gave them the same amorous treatment.

Marinette could barely remember her own name with how he was kissing her. How could someone be that skilled? How-

He maneuvered his tongue in her mouth again, cutting off her already dazed thoughts. She gripped his shoulders tighter as a pleased moan escaped past her lips.
She thinks it's too soon when he separates his lips from hers. With lidded, darkened eyes she observes his pink, swollen lips and hungry green gaze. He's gasping for air as he observes her.

"I'm sorry, Princess," he apologized huskily. "I got carried away."

That's the understatement of the year, she thinks.

She takes a breath to try to calm her rapidly beating heart. "It-It's okay."

"You only allowed one kiss, but I took it too far," he continued shamefully. He grazed his knuckles affectionately over her cheek, his ring barely brushing over her skin. "I'm so sorry."

"Chat, it's okay," she repeated, wanting to wipe that distressed frown from his handsome face. "I-" she blushed, "I liked it."

His frown gradually lifted into a soft smile. "I liked it too."

Chat bent his head to nuzzle in the crook of her neck. "I should go, it's late," he mumbled.

She nodded in agreement, even though she wanted him to stay. She mentally had to sort out what just happened. It would be hard to concentrate with his burning gaze settled on her.

"Good night," she spoke softly.

"Good night, Princess." He lifted his head to kiss her forehead in a farewell. Seconds later he was up and out the hatch and back into the starry night.

Marinette sighed and brought her knees to her chest.

She just made out with Chat Noir.

She willingly participated in a make out with Paris's most notorious criminal.

And she liked it.

Her heart stopped when a familiar blond boy's face appeared in her mind. With a gasp her eyes popped open further in stunning realization.

She betrayed Adrien, the boy she has been in love with for two years now, to kiss a guy she's only known for about three weeks. What did that make her? Was she a slut?

She remembered in horror how Chloe was making out with Kim at Sabrina's party. Was she just like Chloe, to claim to be in love with Adrien but when he wasn't around to go on and kiss any willing man?

Marinette buried her face in her hands, already feeling the hot tears seeping through her fingers.

She was just like Chloe.

...

Marinette didn't meet anyone in the eyes that Monday. Her mouth didn't lift into a smile, her shoulders slumped, her whole demeanor screamed 'sadness'.

Alya tried to coax out of her the reason she was acting like this, but the blackette would only shake her head and stay hidden in her arms.
When Adrien walked in she expected Marinette's sorrow to completely vanish, for nothing could make her happier than the model's presence. He was smirking about something but when his eyes landed on the gloomy, aspiring designer it dropped.

"Marinette?" he asked gently with concern. "What's wrong?"

To his terror she made a garbled sound that sounded like a sob. She buried her head even lower into her folded arms.

"What's wrong with her?" Adrien demanded to Alya. Nino looked at the designer in pity and concern.

Alya helplessly shrugged her shoulders. "She's been like this all morning. I have no idea what's wrong."

"Marinette?" Adrien lightly touched his fingertips to her elbow. To his surprise she recoiled as if he burned her. She made another sound that suspiciously sounded like a sob of pain.

Adrien frowned at her reaction and retracted his hand. Without another word he sat down in his seat.

... When she was safely at home she ignored her parents's request to know how her day went. She might've mumbled a 'fine' but she couldn't be bothered to remember.

She laid on her side, still as miserable as when the realization of her betrayal hit her.

She didn't love Adrien, not truly. She was just a slut that went around kissing other men.

She was just like Chloe.

Just like Chloe.

These words kept repeating themselves, each phrase louder than the last, until she no choice but to bury her head in her pillow in despair.

She felt the bed dip a little in the change of weight. She didn't react when Chat Noir hugged her form to his side.

"Princess, what's wrong?" He asked gently. "Please tell me so I can claw the perpetrator's eyes out."

"You'd have to claw your own eyes out," she mumbled.

Chat, in shock, removed his arms from around her waist. "What did I do? Whatever it is, I'm sorry, Marinette."

She sighed, before rolling over to face him. Her red cheeks were stained with tears. "I lied. It's me. I-I kissed you and-and I love someone else. I-I'm a-a-a," she could barely get the next word out, "slut."

Chat Noir's eyes blazed in fury. "You are not a slut! Don't ever say that about yourself!"

"But it's true!" She screamed, not caring that her parents were in the bakery and might hear. "I love another man and I kissed you! What does that make me?"

"Smart?" He guessed with a half-grin.
Marinette growled and slapped his shoulder. "I'm serious! I've loved this guy for a long time and when a willing guy comes along I just kiss him! I'm a horrible excuse for a girl."

"Stop talking about yourself like that," he hissed, half-grin replaced with a scowl. "You're a wonderful, beautiful, amazing girl. You're a princess. Don't ever defile yourself with those hateful thoughts."

"You may love another man, but even though you kissed me, it doesn't make you a slut. You're the furthest thing from it. Please stop crying, Princess."

Marinette paused, considering his words. Maybe she was overreacting, it wasn't like her and Adrien were a thing. She never technically cheated on him. But still...

The designer let out a calming breath. "Okay."

Chat smiled and wrapped his arms around her once more. His lips connected with a tear trail on her cheek in a kiss.

After a minute, he spoke. "So, who's this guy who needs to have my claws buried in his heart?"

Marinette, in what felt like forever, let out a small giggle. "I'm not telling you."

"Come on, I need to know who my competition is," he pressed playfully.

"I'm not telling you, Chat," she laughed.

"Not even if I promise not to hurt him?"

"Not even then."

"At least tell me what he looks like. He can't be more attractive than me."

Marinette chuckled. "Well, he has blond hair and green eyes."

"What a copycat," he scoffed. "What's his name?"

"Still not telling you." She smirked.

"What does his first name start with?" He asked. He was being relentless. Maybe she could soothe his curiosity by answering this one question. After all, the answer wasn't too revealing.

"A."

Chat's arms tensed around her sides. It was a few moments until he responded.

"I see."

"Don't be jealous, it's not attractive," Marinette teased with a giggle.

"But my princess has someone else occupying her heart. This can't do," he moaned. "I shall conquer your heart yet. I would say I'm off to a pretty good start." He peered down at her with a sly grin, the blackette immediately knew what he was referring to. Memories of their kiss caused a blush to color her cheeks.

"I'm glad you're feline better, Princess. Don't ever think so lowly of yourself," he ordered softly and finished it with a tender kiss on her forehead.
He untangled himself from her arms and leaped out the trapdoor. He looked down at her smiling face.

"I must be off, Princess. This knight has a prior engagement. By the way," he smirked, "nice love bite, there."

Marinette gasped in mortification, hand slapping on the exact spot. She growled out angrily, "Chat!"

The criminal laughed in delight as he scurried away.
Chapter 11

Marinette didn't bother trying to cover the love bite with makeup, all she needed was a t-shirt that didn't reveal too much below the neck. That way for sure no one would see it. No one would've seen it yesterday, since she kept her head down for the whole day.

When Alya came in she was bombarded with questions about her behavior yesterday. She thought it was safe to ask since the designer seemed to be in a better mood. Marinette responded that she was just having some personal issues.

Personal may not have been the best excuse, because it only made her best friend even more curious about her dilemma. But she reassured that it was over and done with, that Alya didn't even need to worry. She rose and eyebrow and later grumbled about it, but for the most part she let the issue rest, something that Marinette considered a miracle.

Adrien bid Marinette his usual 'good morning' but left it at that. He didn't turn around once to speak to her, give her any secret smirks or winks, nothing. He acted like they were simply acquaintances. They kind of were, Marinette thought, but she hoped he thought they were something a little more given his recent behavior. She frowned, she was really hoping they were getting somewhere.

Speaking of getting somewhere, what about her and Chat Noir? Were they getting somewhere? Should they just forget about the kiss and remain friends? Although he didn't seem to want to be 'just friends'. But she likes Adrien-

"Miss Dupain-Cheng? Are you with us?" Mme. Bustier called out to the daydreaming student.

Chloe and Sabrina snickered from their seats. Marinette sent a quick glare in their direction before replying, "yes, I'm sorry, Madame."

"Pay attention, this will be on the test on Friday."

"Yes, Madame."

Mme. Bustier continued with her lecture while Alya rose an inquiring eyebrow to her friend. Marinette grinned sheepishly and shrugged.

...

At the end of the day Marinette and Alya hung out in the former's room.

"Girl, you know I'm going to keep asking until you tell me." Alya smirked. "Journalist's intuition."

Marinette sighed and placed a hand against her forehead. Okay, Alya, here's the truth. I love Adrien but I made out with Chat Noir, yes, the same Chat Noir that steals from Paris on a daily basis. I thought I was a slut because of this but Chat convinced me of the opposite and now I'm feeling kind of better.

"It was nothing, Alya. Just-I-" She had to make this excuse good. "I was on my period!"

Hm. It seemed plausible. How she acted yesterday could easily be blamed for that.

Alya's face immediately softened in understanding. "Oh my God, I'm so sorry. And my bothering you probably didn't help. You must want to kill me right now." She chuckled good-naturedly.
Marinette let out a shaky laugh that she hoped didn't sound too nervous. She was never a good liar. "It's okay, I'm feeling better."

"Let's have some chocolate, chocolate makes everything better!"

Before Marinette could stop her the sneaky girl left the room, most likely to head to the bakery. She shrugged to herself with a smile, she didn't mind feasting on chocolate from time to time.

...  

Since Sabine wanted to make sure Marinette and Alya would have room for their respective dinners, she only gave them two chocolate éclairs to have each.

"So," Alya spoke through a mouthful of the delicious food. "Any luck with Adrien? I think he's starting to show some interest." She winked mischievously.

Marinette blanched and almost choked. "No! No way, he doesn't like me..." Her heart started pumping faster at the possibility. "Do you really think so?"

"I really think so." Alya grinned. "Nino's trying to get it out of him, too. We got nothing yet, but the model has to let go of his perfect facade sometime..."

She squealed in delight. "He might like me! What do I say? What do I do?"

"Just act cool and calm," she advised with a smirk. "Don't let him know you like him."

Marinette tilted her head. "But I do like him, shouldn't he at least get the hint?"

"No! You have to make him think, make him wonder if there's a possibility the cute girl that sits behind him may like him." The aspiring journalist winked.

Marinette couldn't help the blush that rose to her cheeks.

Alya checked her phone. "Crap, I got to be home soon. I'll see you tomorrow, girl!"

"See you!"

Alya grabbed her stuff and went out the trapdoor. Marinette bit her lip to suppress another happy squeal. Adrien might like her, the boy she's been in love with for two years may like her!

It was before dinner that Marinette realized that Alya left her science book at her desk. No matter, she could return it to her tomorrow at school.

...  

Later that night, Marinette was sewing a dress she designed when she heard the tapping on her trapdoor she was getting used to.

"Come in!" she called, not too loudly to alert her parents.

Chat Noir dropped down on the bed, then made his way down the staircase to see her sewing. She stopped and turned around to see him smirking with a red rose settled between his teeth.

He dropped to one knee and held out the flower to her. "For you, my Princess."

Marinette accepted it with a blush coloring her cheeks. Great, Adrien may like her and now this alley...
cat steps up his game. The choice should be simple: reject Chat because he breaks the law and Marinette shouldn't want any part of that. Adrien was the safe choice.

Although, what if she can make him a hero? But then that'll complicate everything even more! But if she didn't try then she'd be selfish-

Marinette groaned and placed the thornless rose on her desk. She covered her face with both hands and let out another groan of indecisiveness.

"Everything alright, Princess?" Chat rested a comforting hand on her shoulder and began to rub in small circles.

The girl sighed and revealed her face to him. "Why do you have to be so..."

He smirked. "Sexy? Charming? Irresistible?"

She chuckled. "Annoying."

He gasped with false hurt. "You think I'm annoying? Why do you think so lowly of me?"

She tapped a finger against her chin, glancing up at him playfully. "Well, your cat puns are one thing."

"My puns are clawsome! How do mew not think so? You need to get a sense of hufur."

Marinette grinned. "That last one was pushing it, and you know it."

He shrugged. "I shall nefur admit depaws." The thief brightened. "Get it? Depaws, but since cats don't have feet, and the real word is defeat-" 

"I get it." The designer shook her head, though with a small smile playing on her lips.

"You like my puns." He grinned. "Admit it."

"I will admit no such thing."

"Okay," he trailed off to grab her hand and haul her up. She squeaked in surprise at the sudden movement but fell silent at the close proximity between them.

He wrapped an arm around her waist, pulling her closer to his body. "You like me, at least admit that." He grinned.

"I-I-"

"I know you do." He bent his face closer to hers. "You enjoyed every second of our kiss."

Marinette bit her lip, fighting back the furious blush that she knew was probably already staining her cheeks. "I still like that other guy in my class."

"You like me," he purred, dropping his head to her neck to plant a kiss there.

"I, well-"

"Marinette?!"

The two, startled, whipped their heads to face a very shocked Alya Cesaire.
Marinette immediately paled. "A-Alya, it's not-

"Not what it looks like?!" She screeched. "I come back to get my science book and you're rendezvousing with Paris's top criminal?! What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Alya-

"Now wait a minute," Chat interrupted, feeling angered by the insult combined with having the instinct to protect his (kind of/sort of) girlfriend.

"No," Marinette refused, turning to Chat. "I think you should go."

"But-" he began to protest, shocked. Why was she kicking him out?! Marinette fixed him with a stern look. "I mean it. I can handle this on my own."

"Yeah, don't you have a store to steal from?" Alya sassed, crossing her arms in front of her chest. He narrowed his eyes at her, releasing an angry hiss before stomping on the ladder to Marinette's bed like a child and leaping out the trapdoor.

Marinette looked down at the ground shamefully. "Alya-

"Don't 'Alya' me! What are you doing with Chat Noir?!!"

She looked up to meet her hazel eyes. "Can we please talk about this?" she pleaded.

Alya glared at her best friend. "You better have a hell of a good excuse to explain why you're-gallivanting with that criminal!"

"Please, not so loud," Marinette hurriedly begged, not wanting her parents to hear and get involved.

"And why shouldn't your parents hear? They deserve to know their daughter is an accomplice to the city's number one thief."

Marinette growled and angrily glared at her. She was beginning to get tired of her friend's attitude. "I'll explain everything if you'll just shut your damn mouth!"

Her eyes widened. She'd never seen the friendly designer so angry before, and to have that temper targeted on her?

Marinette, not relenting on her furious look, sharply pointed to the chaise. "Now sit down, shut up, and let me talk."
Alya complied and sat down where Marinette's finger pointed. Marinette sat next to her and faced her while folding her hands in her lap.

"I want this to go calmly and smoothly," Marinette spoke in a strictly business tone. "Let's not yell at each other."

Alya paused. "Alright," she relented. "How long has this been going on?"

Marinette bit her lip. Well, she certainly didn't waste time on asking the questions. "About a month, now."

Alya's eyes bulged and her mouth dropped. "You've been seeing Chat Noir for almost a month and didn't tell me?"

"Look at how you reacted when you found out!" Marinette, realizing her voice was rising, took a deep breath and slowly let it out. After all, she was the one who suggested they do this calmly and rationally. "I haven't been exactly seeing him, at least not in the romantic sense as you probably think. I've just been talking to him."

"Talking?" Alya rose an eyebrow. "Why does the city's most notorious criminal want to talk to you? No offense, Mari, you're awesome, but why you? How did you two even meet?"

Marinette took another breath before beginning. "Remember that night when we had to do that literature project and I had to leave at ten?"

Alya's face began to pale. She silently nodded, urging her to continue.

"Well, I lied when I said I had no issues getting home."

Alya's demeanor quickly changed from anxious to furious. "Did he mug you?!"

Marinette was quick to answer in the negative. "No! He actually saved me from being mugged...and raped."

"Who was he?! I'll kick his ass!" Alya growled, protective instincts kicking in.

Marinette had to grin at that. "I don't know, I'm sorry. Anyway, I tried getting away, but it didn't work. Then out of nowhere, Chat Noir showed up. I thought he was going to claw my body to shreds, but I couldn't believe it when he beat up the mugger and saved me instead."

"Wait, wait, wait, hold on." Alya held up a hand. "Chat Noir saved you?"

The designer nodded. "That's right. We introduced ourselves." She spoke the next sentence in a hurried, lower tone of voice. "Although I already knew who he was. He took me to my balcony, and I thought that would be the end of it."

Alya nodded, again pressing her to continue.

"But the next night my parents sent me to the store for baking supplies. I was walking home and heard a loud crash. Chat Noir appeared, and told me there was a guy following me and planned to jump me but he beat him up. Then he walked me the rest of the way home and carried my bags for me."
Alya's eyes widened. Who knew the feline thief was secretly a gentleman? Maybe he wasn't all that bad...but she'd save judgement for later.

Marinette frowned. "Our third meeting went...less than ideal. It was the night he visited me on my balcony for the first time. But we got into a fight because I got mad he robbed a bank after saving me the previous night. He vowed I'd never have to see him again. And to think it all started over pastries." She started to giggle at that, it really was a stupid opening for an argument.

She continued. "I didn't see him again until Sabrina's party."

Alya gasped. "I was there, where was he?!"

Marinette shook her head. "He wasn't at the party. Kim was walking me home and..." Who knew what Alya's reaction to this next part would be.

"And what?" The aspiring journalist asked. "What happened?"

She swallowed before going further. "Kim pulled me into an alley and-and...wanted to take advantage of me."


She nodded. "Really."

"And he's our classmate, you said you knew everybody since Kindergarten...I'm going to kick his ass!"

"Alya, don't-"

"Oh no, Mari." Alya resolutely shook her head. "That first mugger may be able to get away with it since we don't know who he is, but Kim is within reach! I'm going to make sure he can never father children. I'll claw his eyes out, I'll-"

"Alya!" Marinette held up her hands. "It's okay. He was drunk and Chat Noir took care of him."

"What did he do?" She asked, an eager smile lighting up her features.

Marinette couldn't help but giggle. "He was actually going to tear his...ah-thing to shreds but I stopped him."

"What?! Marinette, why would you do that?"

"Alya..."

"I'm serious! You should've let him do it! He would've done the world a serious favor."

"I wasn't going to let him claw him, Alya. That would've seriously hurt him."

"And raping you wouldn't have?" Alya countered.

Marinette closed her eyes and sighed. "Look, it's over and done with. Let's just move on."


"Anyway, Chat took care of it and took me home and we made up. Then on Halloween he came over and we watched a horror movie. Although, he was way more afraid than I was." Marinette
started laughing.

Alya's mouth was formed in an open smile. "Are you serious? What was he scared of?"

"The blood and jumpscares."

"But he's a criminal! Shouldn't he be used to-"

"I know!" Marinette cut in, still chuckling. "I couldn't believe it, it was hilarious!" She took a breath to calm down. She frowned when she remembered their next meeting. "After the weekend he came to visit me again. But he got stabbed, and I had to patch him up."

"You did what?!" Once again, Alya's mouth was open. "Girl, what-you-what did you do?" She stuttered.

"I had to give him homemade stitches. It was rough, but, I was able to do a good job." Marinette couldn't help but glance down at her pale hands, that were once coated with Chat's blood. She willed the image out of her mind.

"He was in my room visiting that day when those two guys took those ten people for hostages at a bank. Remember that 'mysterious hero'? That was him."

"Are you serious?" Alya asked. "For real? He saved them?"

Marinette nodded. "I was able to convince him to do it, but," she blushed, "I had to give him the value of all the banks in Paris."

"Are you crazy?!" Alya shrieked. "You don't have that kind of money!"

The designer fidgeted in her seat as she twisted her fingers together. "He didn't want money..."

"What did he..." Alya trailed off in confusion but then her face contorted into rage. "He did not! Girl, tell me he did not! I swear I'll kill him!"

Marinette, catching on to Alya's misunderstanding, blushed furiously and held up her hands. "No! No, he didn't want," she whispered the next word, "sex, he just wanted a kiss."

"A kiss?" Alya rose an eyebrow. "He considers a kiss from you to be worth the value of all the banks in Paris?"

Marinette looked away and bit her lip, trying to fight the butterflies fluttering in her stomach. "Yes."

Alya leaned back, clearly blown away by this revelation. "Damn. That's actually kind of sweet. So what happened?"

"We, uh, kissed."

"You actually did?!!" Alya squealed. "Oh my God, Mari! How was it? Was he any good? Was there tongue?"

"Alya!" Marinette shushed her, mortified by these questions and how all the answers were in the positive.

"No you don't, girl. You are giving me all the deets, I can't let this slip by. Tell me!"

"Alright, alright," Marinette conceded. "He was good...amazing, actually." She felt her face heating
up again at the memory. "And yes, there was tongue."

Alya smirked. "Damn, girl, I didn't know you had it in you. Who knew sweet, innocent, naive Marinette would make out with Chat Noir?"

"Alya..."

"Marinette! This is...I don't even know what this is." Alya shook her head in incredulity.

"Me neither," her friend admitted.

"Is that why you were so upset? It wasn't your period, was it? But why, you said it was good and-ohhh." Alya fixed her gaze on Marinette, completely serious. "You like Adrien."

Marinette nodded. "I do."

"And you kissed Chat Noir."

She nodded again.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know!" Marinette exclaimed sadly. "I like them both. Adrien is clearly the safe choice but Chat-"

"Is the badass criminal who can give, and I quote, amazing kisses?"

Marinette flushed. "Yeah."

"Girl, by what you told me, Chat Noir is a pretty cool guy. But he still breaks the law daily. You're right, Adrien is the safe and better choice."

"But I still like him," Marinette retorted. She groaned and plopped down on the chaise, leaving Alya to rub her shoulder comfortingly. "Why can't they just be the same person?" She moaned.

"Because that would be too easy," Alya laughed. "And seriously? Sweet, innocent, naive Adrien being that law-breaking cat burglar? I don't think that boy has even stolen a pen in his life."

"I did have a plan though, but I'm not sure if it would work."

"What is it?" Alya asked.

Marinette sat back up and faced her friend. "I was planning on reforming Chat Noir, to turn him into a hero instead of a villain."

"That's crazy!" Alya shook her head. "He's been a criminal for three years. I doubt he's going to stop his streak now."

"But it wouldn't hurt to try! He's saved me three times and he helped those people in the bank. I really think he can pull off being a hero."

"Are you sure about this?" She questioned. "I really don't think it's going to happen."

"It can!" The blackette argued. "He can turn his life around, I know it! I just need some time. Meanwhile, you can't say anything about me and Chat Noir to anyone. Please, Alya, you need to keep this a secret."
"I'm a journalist, it's my job to get the truth out," Alya scoffed, crossing her arms and turning away to leave Marinette sulk. "However," she turned back with a grin, "as best friends I'm required to keep your secrets. Friendship beats my job any day."

Marinette gasped happily and hugged her. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"No problem, girl." Alya smiled, releasing her. She checked her phone and stood up. "I better head back, it's getting late. I'll see you tomorrow!"

"See you!" Marinette waved.

Alya paused before going out the trapdoor. "By the way, be careful, Marinette. I know he's most likely not going to hurt you, but please, be careful and think every decision through."

Marinette nodded. "I will."

"So, any luck on the 'Adrien vs. Chat' decision?" Alya whispered to her the next day.

She shook her head. "No. I don't know what to do."

"You'll figure it out." Alya patted her shoulder.

"Guys!" Nino burst through the door, out of breath. He ignored everyone's eyes on him and sprinted to his seat. He leaned in conspiratively towards the girls. "Chat Noir saved me last night!"

"What?" They both exclaimed. Alya's eyes quickly darted to Marinette before settling her eyes on her boyfriend. She cleared her throat. "What happened?"

"I was on my way back from Musique, I had work until nine. This guy shoved me into an alley and pulled a knife on me! He wanted my money but then Chat Noir appeared and beat the shit out of him! I couldn't believe it. I was just standing there and then he just said 'see you later' and took off! Oh, man, it was awesome!"

"Nino, calm down," Alya soothed. "Chat Noir really saved you? You're sure it was him?"

Nino smiled excitedly. "Positive! He had blond hair with cat ears and he was wearing that black suit with the tail! It was really him."

Alya stole a glance to see Marinette's reaction. She was staring at her desk, mouth parted slightly. Could she be right, Marinette wondered. Could Chat Noir really be turned into a hero?

"Hey guys!" Adrien chirped. He faced the group of three with a large smile. "What's going on?"

"Dude, you'll never believe it!" Nino grinned excitedly. "Chat Noir saved me last night!"

"Really?" Adrien gasped. "You're kidding."

"Nope!" His best friend shook his head. "I was almost robbed but Chat Noir came in and beat the shit out of him! It was awesome! I thought he was a criminal but maybe he's becoming a good guy."

Adrien chuckled. "Don't mean to burst your bubble, Nino, but I highly doubt he's going to change his ways."
"But he saved me!" Nino retorted. "He could've let the guy take my money or taken it for himself but he helped me. Why would he do that if he wasn't a good guy?"

Adrien shrugged. "Maybe he felt generous last night."

"Or he's becoming a good guy." Nino stood his ground. "You're not him, so you wouldn't know."

"You're right, Nino." Adrien sighed, shook his head and then grinned. "I wouldn't know at all."
Chapter 13

Mme. Bustier came in the room a second later, hushing her students and telling them to sit in their seats. She eyed them with a wide grin, prompting the teens to look at their respective benchmates with curiosity.

"Class, we have a special addition to our school," she announced. Marinette's eyes widened, because she uttered those same words when Adrien transferred to their school last year. Whoever this new student is must be famous by some degree.

"Please welcome, Lila Rossi!"

Everyone's mouths dropped (except Adrien's, he was used to being in the presence of famous people) as they saw the famous actress walk in the room. She brushed some of her brown hair away from her shoulder, olive green eyes surveyed the class. They lingered on Adrien before she stared straight ahead and waved.

"Hi, everyone! I'm so happy to be a part of your school!" She introduced, clapping her hands together in eagerness.

Marinette narrowed her eyes, there was something strange about her that she just couldn't put her finger on.

"I can't believe it, a real actress is going to our school!" Alya squealed, leaning in to her friend's ear so the others wouldn't hear. "I'll be able to get so many interviews."

"Yeah, it's great," Marinette replied absently. Something told her not to trust this girl.

"We're glad to have you," Mme. Bustier answered, still smiling. "We actually have another famous person attending, do you happen to know Adrien Agreste?"

Said blond shook his head. "No, we don't know each other."

"But I've heard about you," Lila cut in. "Your dad makes amazing clothes!"

Adrien rose an eyebrow, but thanked her nonetheless.

"Since we don't have anything closer to the front, you're going to have to sit in the back, Lila. I hope this is okay?" Mme Bustier asked.

The Italian actress nodded. "It's perfectly okay!"

With an innocent smile she walked to her seat in the back, with most of the boys's eyes trailing after her.

..."Hey, check this out!" Alya spoke, eyes glued to her phone. The four were on their lunch break at Marinette's bakery. Tom and Sabine were happy to provide tasty treats to their daughter and her nice friends.

"What?" Marinette inquired, taking a bite of her kouign amann.

"Apparently there's a new criminal in town," Alya answered, never taking her eyes off the phone.
"She robbed a jewelry store last night and she goes by the name 'Volpina'."

Adrien swallowed his piece of tarte tatin before speaking. "Volpina?"

"Yeah, she's kind of like Chat Noir in a way. She leaves notes at her crimes and leaves a fox drawing on them." Alya showed everyone the picture of one of those notes. "She's from Italy originally, so Paris police are wondering why she's suddenly here."

"That's what I'd like to know too," Adrien muttered, looking away to gaze out the window in thought.

"Hey, maybe Volpina and Chat Noir will fight for the top spot," Nino joked, snickering.

"That'd be the fight of the century!" Alya slammed her fist on the table. "I'd totally be there to get it on video!"

Meanwhile Adrien didn't look away from the window, his eyes continued to stay locked on some spot that Marinette didn't know.

"Adrien?" She asked softly. "You okay?"

The model turned to her and gave her a half-grin. "I'm fine. Just thinking about my schedule."

"Oh, okay." Marinette looked back down at her pastry. She ate in silence while Adrien still seemed deep in thought and oblivious to Nino and Alya's chatter.

... 

That night, Marinette hauled herself out to her balcony, spray bottle in hand. She figured it'd be nice to give her plants a late-night drink. She watered her first three plants to her left before moving to her prized roses. Well, she thought they deserved a prize. They really were beautiful, in her opinion.

"Evening, Princess."

She stiffened in surprise, before slowly turning to face the sneaky alley cat. She wondered if she would ever not jump due to his sudden voice.

"Good evening, Chat Noir."

"So, how'd it go with your friend last night?" He asked, a frown tugging the corners of his mouth down.

"It went pretty well, actually." Marinette grinned. "She kinda likes you."

"You and only you own my heart, fair Princess." He pointed at her and winked.

She giggled, hoping the darkness hid her blush. "I didn't mean like that, but good to know. I told her how you saved me, she really appreciates it."

"It was my pleasure." He bowed and eyed her with a smirk before rising again. "This cat is furever your protector, Princess."

"Speaking of protecting," Marinette trailed off. She put the spray bottle on her spool table and walked closer to him. She smiled gratefully up at him.

"I heard you saved one of my friends last night. Thank you for that." She reached up on her tip toes
and gave him a shy peck on the lips.

Chat Noir smirked at her blushing form. "A kiss for every act of heroism? That might be enough to *purrr*suade me to do it more often."

She idly wondered if he was serious. Would he turn his life around if she offered a kiss every time he did something good?

"Then that means you'll have to have a punishment if you do something bad," she theorized.

His eyes lidded, his lips curled into a suggestive smirk.

"And what happens if I'm a bad kitty?"

Marinette hid her left arm behind her. She used her right to trail an index finger seductively down his chest. She peeked up at him from behind her lashes, his head bent down closer to hers.

She chose that moment to whip out the spray bottle and spray him in the face.

"What the hell?" He spluttered, wiping furiously at his eyes.

Marinette burst out laughing, though she was mindful to not be loud enough to alert her parents. "That-" She had to stop to breathe. "That's what happens if you do something bad!"

He wiped the last of the droplets from his face, his eyes narrowed at her. "You little tease."

Marinette covered her mouth to stifle more giggles threatening to escape. Her demeanor quickly changed as Chat Noir sprung into action. She squeaked as he picked her up and dove into the lounge chair, though he made sure the impact wasn't too hard. He straddled her and wiggled his claws into her sides.

The effect was immediate. Marinette gasped and laughed, her body writhing uncontrollably. "Chat-Chat stop!"

Human fingers tickling her was bad, but his claws made it ten times worse.

The feline thief simply smirked at her agony. Marinette tried maneuvering her body out of his hold but his legs kept her pinned to the chair.

"Chat please!" She panted out, tears coming out of her eyes.

"Please what?" He questioned, still smirking.

"Please stop!" She breathed out in reply. A few more chortles escaped her before she tried biting her lip to keep them at bay.

"You want me to stop?"

"Yes!"

"Will you ever tease me like that again?"

"No!"

"*Purrr*romise?"
"I-I-I promise!"

Chat pressed a kiss to her cheek, he stopped his tickling assault much to Marinette's relief. He flipped them over so he was lying down on the chair with her over him. Her head lolled to the side, towards his neck.

She took a moment to regain her regular heart beat and took deep breaths. Chat Noir leaned his head against her own, choosing not to say anything.

They lay there for a few minutes in comfortable silence. The moon shined above them, stars glittered the sky, and the Eiffel Tower shone like a beacon of light. Marinette gently took Chat's hand, her fingers ghosting over the warm leather of the glove. She eyed his ring. It matched the rest of his suit, except in the center there were five emeralds cut in the shape of a paw print. There was a protective glass-like layer over it so the precious stones wouldn't get damaged.

"May I?" The words were out of her mouth before she could stop them. Her fingers were on the ring, ready to pull it off when he gave the word.

"Hm?" He mumbled distractedly. It was at that moment she noticed his head had been buried in her hair. "Oh," she heard him say. "Yeah, you can try it on." The ghost of a chuckle left his lips before he exhaled in bliss and his nose went in her hair once more.

Marinette smiled and slowly pulled the ring off. She put it on her own ring finger of her right hand but almost laughed at how loosely it fit her. She had to clench a fist in order for it to stay on. She'd need to put it on a chain in order to wear it-

No. This was his ring, not hers.

She picked up his now ring-less hand, wondering what his hands looked like without the leather hiding them. Would they be rough and calloused, or would they be smooth and soft?

Biting her lip, she picked up the glove by the middle finger and slowly began peeling it off. She paused, allowing him to object to the action, but he paid her no mind. With that silent approval, she resumed her task.

With the glove now removed, she was a bit surprised to see long, tan, lithe fingers. She was honestly expecting to see callouses, to feel rough skin from years of performing crimes. But somehow, smooth hands fit him just perfectly.

His fingers curled around her own, until their hands were entwined. He dropped them to the side of their bodies, not once speaking to break the silence.

After another minute or two of peaceful silence, Marinette spoke.

"I heard there's another criminal around here. Volpina, I think her name is."

He hummed, removing his face from her hair. "Yeah, it is."

"Have you met her?"

"No. I've heard of her, she was pretty good back in Italy. I'm still trying to figure out why she's here, though."

"Is there some new, priceless object here or something?" Marinette guessed, trying to help him.
"Nope. It's a mystery why she's here, and I don't like mysteries."

She found herself giggling. Of course he didn't like mysteries, cats are very curious creatures.

She shrugged. "Maybe she just wants to claim Paris for her own, maybe she got tired of Italy."

"Paris is mine," he hissed. "It took three years to gain the top spot and I'm not letting it slip out of my claws."

"You could always catch her," she suggested, holding their still joined hands up. "Imagine all the kisses you'd get if you caught a criminal like her," she teased.

"Hm," he murmured, pressing his lips to her temple in a warm kiss. "Tempting."

They sat in silence once more, enjoying the peaceful Parisian night. Marinette snuggled into Chat's body, she thought him to be a very soft and warm pillow.

"So what do you do when you're not committing crime?" She inquired. Did he just pace up and down in his evil lair and rub his hands together while chuckling evilly and plot his next evil plan?

"A little of this and a little of that," he replied vaguely.

She furrowed her eyebrows. "What does that mean?"

Chat Noir snickered. "Looks like cats aren't the only curious creatures."

"Come on," she pouted, even though he still couldn't see her. "Tell me!"

"Say 'purrretty purrlease' and I might just let a detail slip." She heard him release a chuckle of amusement.

She sighed. "Pretty please?"

"Nope. You have to say it like I did."

Marinette huffed, annoyed. "Fine. Purrretty purrlease?"

"Purrfect! Hm, now what secret could possibly satisfy an inquisitive princess like you?" He raised his free hand to tap a finger against his chin in thought. "Decisions, decisions..."

"Chat," she whined, getting impatient.

"Alright!" He laughed. "Well, I go to this club sometimes."

That got her interest piqued. "A club? But wouldn't people scream and call the police if they saw you?"

"This isn't an ordinary club. Only Paris's elite criminals are allowed in."

"Soo," she paused, thinking. "It's like a secret underground club?"

"Correct."

"Can I come?"

"Hell no," he immediately refused. "That isn't a place you should be in."
"But I want to see!" She protested. She's never been in any club, let alone a secret underground one. The curiosity was practically eating her alive.

"I said no, Princess. Didn't you hear what I said about Paris's elite criminals'? There's no way I'd let you in a place like that."

"What if you accompanied me?" Marinette asked, trying a different tactic. "If I'm with you they won't touch me."

Chat Noir audibly groaned. She took this as a sign that she was wearing him down.

"Please, Chaton?" She begged, turning to face him. She puffed out her bottom lip and looked up at him through her thick eyelashes. He grimaced, clearly torn. "You said you're my protector forever, I know I'd be safe with you. And if there's any danger we can leave, no questions asked."

He closed his eyes and groaned again.

"Please, Minou," she tried again, taking their entwined hands and kissing his knuckles.

"I hate you," he ground out through clenched teeth.

Marinette waited with baited breath.

"Fine!" He hissed, fixing her with his frustrated eyes.

"Yay!" She squealed, wrapping her arms around his neck in a hug. "Thank you!" A thrill ran through her veins. She was going to see a secret underground club meant purely for Paris's top lawbreakers, she knew it was going to be way better than any party Chloe or Sabrina could throw.

When she released him he began to talk.

"Saturday, ten at night. Wear a disguise so no one will target you." He closed his eyes in misery and covered his face with a gloved hand. "I can't believe I'm actually doing this."

"We'll be fine," she assured, brushing off his concern. "What's the worst that could happen?"

Chat Noir groaned again and leaned his head back against the chair.
That Wednesday in class, instead of paying attention to the lesson material that would no doubt be on the test on Friday, Marinette found herself thinking of a different event that would take place on that day.

Of course she didn't tell Alya; the girl would have a stroke if she learned what her best friend was up to.

The designer tapped her stylus against her lip in thought. Instead of copying down notes, Marinette had drawn sketches of possible outfits. Most of them ranged from baggy hoodies and sweatpants to full-on face masks and dresses, like the kind worn at a masquerade party.

But she wasn't going to be attending a masquerade. She was going to a club, inhabited by the best lawbreakers in the city. She had to look good, but Chat Noir had told her to wear a disguise. It was understandable, the last thing she needed was a criminal targeting her, her family, and/or her friends.

What could she wear...

"Girl, pay attention," Alya muttered, bumping her elbow into the distracted girl's arm. "Bustier is gonna ask you a question if you don't at least act like you know what's going on."

Marinette nodded and tried to get her head back in the lesson. But that's the thing, it's even harder to concentrate when you're actually trying to do it.

Her mind wandered to the previous night, the delicate chain around her neck seemed to press harder into her skin.

Before leaving, Marinette tried to give his ring back to him. But he only grinned and bowed, telling her, "You might as well keep it, Princess. I'm all yours, anyway."

Marinette had relented with flushed cheeks and a flustered gulp. Chat Noir winked, gave her a two-finger salute, and rushed back into the night.

She decided that morning to attach it to a silver chain, she had a few from experimenting with different outfits. After slipping it around her neck she hid the ring under her shirt; she didn't want people to start asking questions.

However, of all people, Adrien seemed to be pretty interested in it. He couldn't stop grinning at the chain, asking her if he could see the main piece of the necklace. Marinette refused, her cheeks gradually tinting to a light pink as she stuttered and stammered for an excuse. The blond eventually relented on his curiosity, held both hands up as a sign of surrender and turned around in his seat. Alya and Nino walked in a minute after.

Her fingers absently found the small bulge below her neck, idly toying with the hidden ring.

She was wearing Chat Noir's ring, did that make them a couple? So far, they kissed, they flirted with the other, they held hands, and snuggled with each other.

But not once did they discuss whatever it was they had.
Marinette visibly drooped as she let out a barely audible sigh. She still had feelings for the unattainable blond in front of her, yet Chat Noir found his way into her heart as well and now she was wearing his ring.

Which brings her back to her previous concern: did that make them official?

Her thoughts played out a scenario of her flirting with any guy in their class, and a feeling of guilt soon made it's presence known in her stomach. She felt like she would be cheating on him, but technically they weren't a thing!

Suddenly it hit her, like she was reaching on her tip toes to reach that sack of flour but instead the bag hit her in the head.

She had no idea who Chat Noir was. She had no idea whose ring she was now gripping. She only knew him as the city's notorious thief, not at all what he was like behind the mask.

She didn't even have a hint to what his name was.

The bell rang, cutting off Marinette's mental groan of misery. Why did her life have to be so confusing and complicated?

She stalled in packing her things, previous thoughts still racing through her mind.

"Marinette?" Alya asked, pausing in her trip to take Nino's hand and walk out the door with him. Said boy was waiting for Alya, though giving Marinette a concerned glance. "You alright?"

"Yeah, yeah," she automatically responded. "Go on without me, I'm good."

Alya arched a brow. "Are you-"

"Yes, I'm sure. I'm fine, promise." Marinette felt bad for lying, but now wasn't the time or place to discuss her confusing love life. She forced a grin to come to her face. "Go get that interview with Lila."

Now it was Alya's turn to smirk. "Sure thing, girl!" Alya grabbed her groaning boyfriend's hand and ran out of the room.

"Marinette?"

Marinette stilled at the sound of her name coming from her crush's mouth. By now everyone was gone, even the teacher, but for some reason Adrien stayed.

He tilted his head in worry. "Everything alright?"

"I'm fine, don't worry about it," she replied.

"Funny, Alya seemed to be fine with that answer, but I'm not buying it." He crossed his arms and shot her a half-grin.

Marinette, wide-eyed, gaped at his answer. He wasn't usually so...cheeky? Cocky?

She bit her lip and looked away. "It's nothing to be concerned about."

"Come on, we're friends, aren't we?" He prodded, lips twitching into a hardly-concealed smirk. "Talking about it makes you feel better, and I've been told I'm a good listener."
Marinette sighed in defeat. She knew she wouldn't be able to get out of this one.

"I-I guess..."

"Great!" Adrien exclaimed. "I don't think there's another class in here for awhile, so we can talk here."

"But what about our other classes?" she asked. The sense of doom washed over her as the bell rang after she spoke, the sound signaling the beginning of the next set of classes.

Adrien shrugged and gave her a mischievous grin. The action further puzzled her, it was so out of nature for him. "Oh well."

Oh well? Oh well? The boy was practically an angel, never skipped a class in his whole time at their school and all he had to say to their skipping class was 'oh well'?

"Friends are more important than grades," he elaborated. He scooted down and patted the empty bench space, the action meant to draw her closer.

Marinette fought off a blush as she shakily made her way down to the seat. She slowly sat and set her backpack on the desk in front of her.

"Whenever you're ready to start," Adrien said. He flashed her a reassuring smile for encouragement.

Marinette wanted to bury her face in her hands. How could she possibly talk about her problem when he was involved with it? Well, sort of. She supposed she had two main problems, her Chat vs. Adrien problem and her not being aware of who Chat Noir really was.

Maybe she could talk a little bit about the second one. She didn't meet him in the eyes when she started to talk. "Adrien?"

"Yes?"

"Is it possible to lo-like someone whose name you don't even know?"

When he didn't say anything she chanced a peek at him. His unblinking apple green eyes were wide, his mouth slightly parted. A rosy color rose to his cheeks before he cleared his throat and tossed her an easy grin.

"Of course. Psyche fell in love with Eros and she only knew him by his voice."

Her stomach dropped at his answer. She didn't love Chat Noir, she just liked him. That's it. Who cares if they kissed, and flirted, and snuggled, and held hands, and she wore his ring-

Shit.

Well, the evidence certainly wasn't in her favor.

Marinette felt her face heat up. How does she respond to that? "I-uh-well-"

"What's wrong, Marinette?" Adrien asked, voice dropping to a low murmur. "You can tell me."

She shook her head. "I can't."

She felt her heart beating faster. She had to get out of there.
Marinette jumped out of her seat, grabbed her backpack, and sprinted out the door.

... 

That afternoon after school, Marinette sat in her room, once again finding herself tapping her lip with her stylus.

Right now she couldn't think about her boy troubles. She was going to the club with Chat on Saturday night, which only left her three days to design an outfit. She already made the decision to not go in a baggy hoodie. Sure, it would serve as a disguise, but it'd hardly be fashionable.

Marinette grabbed a worn yoyo from her computer desk and trudged to her balcony. Leaning on the rails, she slowly brought her hand up and down, watching the yoyo drop down towards the street, then back up into her waiting palm.

A wry grin made it's way onto her face. When she was younger she used to try doing a tricks with this same yoyo, but every time she'd end up smacking herself in the head with it.

She gazed at Notre Dame with a wistful look. What could she wear that served to hide her identity and impress others?

She wished she could have an outfit like Chat's. It was perfect: practical, stylish, and did it's purpose to hide his identity.

Her sapphire orbs flickered down to the railing for a split second, in that time she noticed the ladybug making it's way towards her arm. She smiled while reaching a finger down and letting it crawl on the appendage.

She's always liked ladybugs, believed in their luck even though she found herself to be unlucky most of the time.

A sudden thought came to her mind.

A ladybug-printed mask.

Marinette glanced down to the insect still crawling on her finger, to herself, to finally Notre Dame.

A calculating smirk stretched across her lips. Her thoughts wandered to her piggy bank... did she have enough money for some spandex?

... 

Chat Noir didn't visit her the previous night, which Marinette didn't mind in the least. It gave her time to further design the outfit she was sure was going to be her greatest creation yet.

She almost skipped to the classroom that Thursday morning in giddiness, eyes twinkling as she surveyed the classroom as if it was a new year filled with wonderful opportunities.

Alya eyed with her with a bemused smirk. "What's got you so happy this morning?"

"Nothing, just had a good morning," Marinette hummed contentedly.

Alya leaned in and lowered her voice to a whisper. "Does it have anything to do with your thief?"

Marinette blushed at her best friend's words. All too quickly it seemed his ring was burning on her skin. "No."
"Liar." Alya grinned. "Come on, girl, tell me! As your best friend I'm obligated to know all the deets of your love life."

"It's nothing! I'm just in a good mood, that's all!"

"Mhm."

"I'm telling the truth!" Marinette insisted.

"Your flailing hands tell me otherwise."

Marinette groaned and rested a hand on her forehead. "He didn't visit last night, I'm just designing a new outfit and I'm excited for the outcome." There we go, not a total lie, right?

Alya frowned, still suspicious. "I'll let that slide, for now. But nothing's changed, right? You guys aren't official or anything?"

Marinette shook her head. "Nope."

Alya cocked her head to the side, surveying her neck. Or rather, what was on it. "Is that a new necklace?"

Marinette swore her heart stopped. She hoped her face wasn't as pale as she thought it was in that moment. "No."

"I've never seen you with it." Alya gasped. "Did he give it to you?! Let me see!"

"It-It's nothing!" Marinette bit her lip.

"You're lying! You stuttered!" Alya pointed her finger at her, mouth twisting into a grin. "He gave you that necklace didn't he?" She frowned as a thought came to her. "Oh, God, he didn't steal it, did he? Marinette are you wearing a stolen necklace?! What if the police catch you? Why would you wear it in broad daylight?!"

Marinette shushed her before the girl could spout any more nonsense. "No! The chain is mine, I have a bunch of them for when I'm working with different outfits. But..." She trailed off. She might as well tell Alya, there was no getting out of this one.

Marinette chanced a look around to make sure no one was paying attention to them. With the coast clear, she reached inside her shirt and pulled out Chat Noir's ring.

Alya's eyebrows furrowed, wondering what was so special about it, until Marinette turned it so the emeralds were in sight.

"That-" Alya stammered. "That's his symbol!"

Marinette's eyes wandered away from Alya's scrutinizing gaze. "Yeah..."

"Are those emeralds?!

"Yep."

"This must cost a fortune!"

Marinette blushed. "I guess..."
"Girl," Alya whispered in disbelief. "Is this an engagement ring? Did you get engaged and not tell me? How could you not tell your best friend that you got engaged?! But you're sixteen, you can't unless...Oh. My. God. Are you pregnant?!"

"No!" Marinette squeaked, balking at the idea. "No, we're not engaged and I'm not pregnant. He just wears this ring all the time and he gave it to me."

"Ohh." The journalist thankfully calmed down. "Phew. You're lucky, because I was about ready to smack you. I want to be the cool aunt to your kids and all, but not this soon."

Marinette laughed. "I promise I won't get pregnant until I'm much older."

Alya grinned. "Good. So...he gave you his ring, huh? But you told me you guys aren't official! This is like a guy giving his girlfriend his class ring."

"I know. But we haven't had that kind of talk, yet."

"Then talk to him, God damn it!" Alya hissed. "This is serious! He gave you his ring, you can't act like that's nothing."

"I know," Marinette repeated, moaning. "I like him but I still like-"

"I know," Alya echoed her earlier words. "But honestly, Adrien isn't doing shit, and I don't think he's going to make a move anytime soon. You said Chat can be a hero. I say pick him."

"Just like that?" Marinette whispered in horror.

"He obviously cares about you enough to let a ring worth thousands hang around your neck," she commented dryly.

Marinette banged her head off the desk. She did like Chat Noir and he obviously liked her back, so what was holding her back from trying to make things official between them? Why couldn't her heart just drop Adrien?

Said Adrien walked in just then, walking beside a laughing Nino.

What was she going to do?
Chapter 15

"So, Lila, welcome to our school!"

Marinette stared at her best friend's phone screen, listening to her previous interview with the famous actress. That afternoon they decided to have lunch by themselves to have some girl time, though Marinette suspected it was because of Adrien. They didn't talk at all that morning, and she knew it was because she practically ran out on him on Wednesday.

She was already awkward around her crush, but this was a whole new level.

Meanwhile, on the screen, Lila Rossi simply let out a girlish laugh that Marinette knew was fake. "Why thank you! It's such an honor to go here!"

She could hear Alya chuckle. "We should be saying that to you! So, what made you decide to come to Paris?"

Lila's olive green eyes looked skyward, her mouth heaving an awed sigh, the picture of innocence, before settling her attention back on the interviewer. "Paris is so beautiful! The city of romance; it's always intrigued me. I simply couldn't resist any longer!"

They go back and forth, with Lila mostly just complimenting their city. She claimed Italy was getting boring, which was another reason why she moved to France.

"I can't wait for this to get in the paper, and not just the school one. Imagine how many outlets would kill for this interview!" Alya squealed, taking her phone back and biting her lip to try to keep her excitement at bay.

"I'm happy for you, Alya," Marinette told her truthfully. She honestly wondered how much money Alya could get from that exclusive interview.

"Yeah, I-girl, is that Kim?!!" Alya picked up a menu to partly shield her face, hazel eyes on the small group of football players like a hawk.

"Really?" Marinette asked. She could turn around and see for sure, but it'd be obvious she was looking. A small bubble of fear grew in her stomach, memories of the night of Sabrina's party making a comeback in her brain. She instinctively gripped the hidden ring in her shirt and couldn't help the smile that came to her lips.

Chat Noir made sure Kim wouldn't even look at her. The jock still followed through on his promise, although he was gradually regaining his normal attitude. Kim wouldn't dare to try to approach her in the restaurant.


"He has to eat too, you know," Marinette said quietly, taking a sip of her drink.

Alya paused, then started lowering her menu. Her mouth was revealed to be twisted into a wicked smirk.

"Mari, go outside. I got the bill."

Marinette rose an eyebrow. "But-"
"Go. Outside." Alya's smirk never wavered as she gave the order. "Trust me."

Marinette knew better than to try to dissuade her from whatever it was she was going to do. With a sigh, she grabbed her purse and walked out of the cafe, making sure to keep her head down lest she accidentally lock eyes with her attempted rapist.

The raven-haired teen watched through the clear windows how Alya grabbed her half-consumed milkshake. She slapped some money on the table then started walking determinedly to the back of the cafe.

Marinette felt a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. Her eyes widened in realization as her face paled.

Alya approached the table of jocks with a sweet smile. Kim picked his head up to grin and say something, and that's when his face, chest, and legs were drenched with the strawberry milkshake.

As Kim stood up, bewildered and angry, his teammates all started howling with laughter. Alya whipped out her phone and took a crystal-clear picture before charging out of the cafe.

"Come on, girl!" Alya shouted, laughter seeping out of her voice as she grabbed a shocked Marinette's hand and ran back towards the school.

"I can't believe you did that!" Marinette panted, still being dragged by her best friend. "Why would you do that?!"

"That asshole deserved it!" Alya called back over her shoulder. "He had it coming."

Marinette chose not to say anything to that. After a few more minutes of running, the girls stopped at the steps of the school, breathing deeply with their hands on their knees.

"That," Alya stopped to take another breath, "was hilarious! Want to see the pic?"

"I still can't believe you did that." Marinette shook her head. "What if he-"

"I seem to remember you saying that a certain thief was going to rip him apart if he even dared to glance in your direction." Alya grinned. "Kim's not going to do anything."

"But what about you?" Marinette retorted, concerned for her best friend.

The aspiring journalist rolled her eyes. "Please, I can take whatever roid-boy comes at me with."

Marinette couldn't help the burst of laughter that sprang from her mouth. Alya joined in too and soon they were a mess of laughter and tears on the school steps.

"Did we miss something?" Nino asked, amusement lacing his tone as he and Adrien met up with the pair of girls.

"Just something amazing!" Alya answered, still cackling. "Look!"

She whipped out her phone and four huddled around it to see the picture. Marinette bit her lip at Adrien's close proximity. But he didn't seem to mind being close to her.

There, in perfect quality, was a standing, raging Kim, drenched in strawberry milkshake.

"Oh my God!" Nino laughed. "What the hell happened?"
Adrien covered his mouth with his knuckle to hide his own chuckling, his green eyes were dancing with devious mirth.

"Let's just say Kim made a big mistake, and it was high time he paid for it," Alya replied cryptically with a grin. Marinette shot her a thankful smile, glad she didn't spill on the real reason why.

"Well, looks like you got him good." Nino snickered. He wrapped an arm around his girlfriend's shoulders and planted a chaste, but loving kiss on her cheek.

... 

After school Marinette hurried to her room, but remembered to greet her parents, of course. She whipped out the roll of spandex and got to work, her sapphire eyes were gleaming in anticipation.

Saturday was in two days. Two days to create this costume, two days to show off her artistic genius. Hey, this design is her favorite one, she can afford to be a little confident about her designing skills.

"Marinette! Your friend is here to see you!" Tom's voice calls out, partly muffled from the closed trapdoor.

She groaned. She loved seeing her friends, but now wasn't exactly the best time. Still, she can't be rude and ignore them. So, she rose out of her chair and walked downstairs to the bakery.

Her lips automatically widened into a smile at the sight of her red-haired classmate. He clutched his sketchpad, shuffling his feet nervously.

"Hey, Nath!"

The shy boy looked up, a blush coloring his cheeks when his eyes land on her. "H-Hey, Marinette!"

"So," she trailed off, going towards the display case. "Chocolate chip, again? Or something different this time?" She asked sweetly with a smile.

"Ch-Chocolate chip, please," Nathanael mumbled.

"Coming right up!" She grabbed the tongs. "How many?"

"Ten, please."

While Marinette was getting his order ready, she heard the bell go off, signaling a customer coming in. She couldn't see, due to her back being turned, so she announced that she'd be right with them.

Marinette finished putting the cookies in the box and placed a sticker on it, a leaf one since it was still Autumn. She beamed as she sat the cookies on the counter. "Okay, that'll be-

Her mouth dropped as she saw Adrien right behind Nathanael. He smiled warmly and waved.

"Uh...t-that'll be..." Marinette could barely get the price out with those stupid green eyes practically staring into her soul. What was Adrien doing in her bakery? Didn't he have fencing, or a photo shoot, or at least have to keep up a strict diet, meaning no sweets? Facing him in school was one thing, but in her bakery?

Marinette breathed and told the price to the waiting, albeit slightly puzzled, Nathanael. She can relax, she has the home field advantage.

Nathanael pushed his hand in his pocket and handed her the correct amount of money. "Thank you,
Marinette," he said, smiling though still blushing madly.

*Focus on Nathanael, ignore the wonderful blond standing behind him*, her mind chants.

"You're welcome!"

His eyebrows suddenly furrow, his skeptical gaze trained to just below her collarbone.

"Is that a ring?"

Marinette blanched at his words. Her hand snatched the makeshift necklace and tugged it back inside her shirt. It must've fallen out while she was bent over getting the cookies.

"Uh-ah-no! I-I mean, yes!" She stuttered. Her eyes flickered to Adrien, who green eyes twinkled with what looked to be amusement...although with a hint of smugness as well, for some odd reason.

"It's just a ring I designed," she lied smoothly. "I think it turned out well." Thank God he didn't see the emerald paw print.

"So, a boy didn't give it to you?" Nathanael asked shyly. Marinette noticed Adrien's jaw tighten for some reason.

"Nope!" She lied through her teeth.

"M-Marinette?"

Nathanael's face was as red as a tomato by now. She wondered worriedly if he could pass out with too much blood rushed to the face. "I-I-so you don't have anyone special in your life?"

The designer frowned, looking down at the counter whilst biting her bottom lip. Why was he asking these personal questions?

"Umm," she mumbled. "Not really, at the moment." What was she supposed to say, that she may be dating Chat Noir?

His lips curved up in a shy smile. "Marinette, I was wondering-"

"Some of us have other things to do," Adrien barked out.

Marinette's startled blue eyes snapped to Adrien's fiery green ones. She blinked in astonishment, having never before heard Adrien use that tone of voice on anyone before. It was bizarre, to say the least.

She never pegged him to be an impatient person, usually he was patient and sweet to everyone, even Chloe.

But, she surmised, even he must have his limits. He must have a photo shoot or something to get to and only had a limited amount of time to be in the bakery.

Nathanael startlingly turned back to the model, effectively blocking her view of both men's faces, before he locked eyes again with Marinette. "Um, I'll see you in class tomorrow!" He grabbed the box and practically ran out the door.

"I-I'm sorry, you were left waiting for so long," Marinette apologized to Adrien. "I didn't think-and you must have a photo shoot-"
Adrien calmed her down with an easy grin. "It's alright, sorry I got a bit impatient back there, it's a horrible flaw." He chuckled. "I just couldn't wait to try one of these pastries, they all smell so good."

Marinette found herself blushing, pride surging in her veins at her parents' work. "Thank you, I'll tell my parents you said that."

"You're welcome," he replied. His eyes trailed over the many treats in the display cases set up around the bakery.

"I was able to convince the Gorilla to let me stop by here before my photo shoot," Adrien said suddenly, chuckling.

Marinette giggled, she couldn't help it whenever he referred to his bodyguard/driver by that name. It was mean, she knew, but she just couldn't help herself.

Adrien looked at her out of the corner of his eye and grinned.

"So." Marinette cleared her throat, "Anything in particular you're looking for?"

"Not really." He shrugged. He turned to her and smiled. "What do you recommend?"

"We-Well, macarons are a classic. And they're not that fattening." Marinette eyes bulged and she gasped when she realized what she said. "N-Not that you're fat! You're not fat at all! You're in good shape, great shape! You have nice muscles and-"

Oh God. Did she really just say that?!

Adrien's smirk just kept curling deeper and deeper.

Marinette's face reddened deeper and deeper.

"I'm so sorry!" She apologized. For the accidental insult, or for her embarrassing rant, she couldn't say.

Adrien let out a chuckle. "It's okay. Macarons actually sound great!"

"I-I'll get them for you, then!" She squeaked, almost choking. Could a hole just please swallow her up now? "H-How many?"

"Five will be good. Oh, and with buttercream filling, please."

"S-Sure! O-Of course!"

Marinette hurriedly gathered the pastries, taking care to give him the best looking ones. After gently putting them in the box and placing a sticker on it, she turned to the counter, and almost dropped the box.

Adrien was leaning on elbow on the counter, lips pulled up in an innocent smile, looking every bit the model he was. Even his hair was styled perfectly, not a golden strand out of place.

After her initial awkward pause, she strode up to the counter and shakily told him the price.

He reached into his jeans pocket and fished out the money, though it was more than the total. Marinette turned and was about to get his change when he lightly touched her wrist to stop her.

Marinette's cheeks flared at the gesture.
"Keep the change," he informed her with a wink. He picked up the box and casually strolled out of the bakery.

Marinette lifted her wrist to her face so she could be eye-level with it. It still tingled from his touch.

"Marinette, who was that?" Sabine came in, asking curiously.

But her daughter couldn't tell her, due to her being a pile of passed-out mush on the floor.
That night, when Marinette got done with dying another black spot on the suit, she absently rubbed the back of her head, finding the small bump with a slight wince.

She supposed her fall on the bakery floor could've gone worse, what with her luck.

She pressed a hand to her head and let out a breath. All afternoon and tonight she'd been working furiously on this suit. But her hard work paid off, because she got the arm sleeves and legs done, now all she had to do was finish with the black spots and design a mask.

*Tap. Tap. Tap.*

Marinette froze with a sharp intake of breath.

She can't let him see the suit, not yet!

"Uh, j-just a minute!" she called out hurriedly, hiding the black dye and hastily throwing away scrap material.

"I'll be counting the seconds, Princess," came his amused reply.

Marinette grabbed the sleek suit in both hands, eyes darting wildly about the room for a good hiding spot. She grinned when she spied her closet, Chat Noir would have no reason to go in there.

She opened the door and tossed the suit in the back. Not wasting another minute she pumped two squirts of hand sanitizer onto her hands to rid them of the black dye. It helps a bit in the situation, but she had no time to run to the bathroom to properly wash her hands.

Taking a breath, she smoothed her hair down, which was devoid of her pigtails. She climbed up the ladder and let the feline criminal inside, who didn't wait another moment to land on the bed on all fours.

Chat Noir lounged back against the wall, crossing his boots and bringing his hands behind his head. The action made his muscles visibly bulge slightly due to the suit. Marinette averted her eyes.

"So, I heard from a little birdie that you've been wearing my ring." He smirked. "I have to say, I'm honored, Princess."

How did he know about that? What 'little birdie'? "I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do," he insisted, smirk growing. "I gave it to you so you'd remember that...special person in your life."

Marinette held back a gasp when her eyes widen in surprise, the memory of Nathanael asking her that question earlier hitting her. Chat Noir's words had to be a coincidence, he wasn't in the bakery at
"But, it seems my efforts were in vain." He shook his head and clicked his tongue in disappointment. "I guess I'm going to have to give you something that leaves a longer-lasting impression."

Marinette slowly meets her eyes with his, confusion swimming in her orbs.

She has her mental question answered when he suddenly pounces, bringing them down on the bed and capturing her startled gasp with his lips.

Whereas their last kiss was slow and loving, this one was insistent and demanding. Chat Noir kissed her greedily, leaving Marinette only able to close her eyes and grasp at his blond locks as she tried to return his affections just as fervently.

His tongue pokes at her mouth and soon they're at that heated dance again, leaving her melting at the desire radiating off him. She released a sound of pleasure from his actions, in response he tears his mouth away from hers and presses hungry kisses down her throat.

Marinette gasped when he bit at a certain spot on her neck and soon began to suckle on the delicate skin. She knows he'll leave a mark, one where she can't cover it up with a t-shirt, but she couldn't bring herself to care at the moment. Not with the way he lightly bites, sucks, pulls her skin into his teeth again, suckles, bites a bit harder...

When was done he swiped his tongue over the mark and repeated his kiss trail up her throat to back to her lips. She felt his body hover away from hers slightly, and distantly hears the sound of something being pulled off...leather?

Then she felt his warm hands encompass her cheeks and his lips press themselves harder against her longing mouth. The gloves, she realizes absently. He took off his gloves.

Marinette couldn't back the moan when he takes her bottom lip between his teeth. She could barely think, barely remember how to breathe with the way he's kissing her.

He pulled his mouth away again, and Marinette lets out a small whine at the loss. She didn't give a shit if she sounded desperate, all she could think, could want, was more. She wanted more and she was going to get it.

She opened her eyes, dazed, to look at him. He still had that determined spark in his eyes, though the green was considerably darkened. She leaned up and tried to reconnect their lips, but he only leaned away with a satisfied smirk.

He bent his head to her ear and playfully nipped at the lobe, inducing her to close her eyes again and bite her lip to hold back those noises she knew she already made too much of.

"I hope next time you won't be so forgetful, Princess" he purred lowly, the tone full of sinful intent.

Marinette's breath hitched.

"Or I may just have to come back here and give you another reminder. Although..." He chuckled, a husky, wicked sound. "I won't mind if you need one. Make sure you're ready Saturday night."

Saturday? What's a Saturday?

Marinette could only gaze at him in a hazed confusion when he leaned back to look at her in the eyes. He casually picked up his previously discarded gloves and slipped them on.
"Sa...Sat..?" She could barely form words after his kiss. *Mon Dieu!*

Chat Noir grinned devilishly, a hint of his white teeth becoming exposed.

"Farewell, Princess."

He tilted his head at her, seeming to be mentally debating something, when he just shook his head and dove in for another kiss.

Marinette brought a hand up and gripped his hair, trying to make him stay. But he easily managed to remove it in no time and pulled away.

He flashed her a wink before opening her balcony trapdoor and leaping outside.

It takes her a few minutes to calm down. To regain her breath, her regular heartbeat, and normally pale-colored cheeks. After she has relaxed, she wanted to kick herself. That was the perfect time to talk about the ring situation, and what it meant, but that damn tomcat just had to swoop in and kiss her senseless.

She glowered at her ceiling. She had to get him back, she *will* get him back. One day she's going to get him all tongue-tied and stupid, and she won't even have to kiss him.

Marinette's eyes trailed down to the closet down below.

That day was Saturday.

...

Friday passed by in a blur for Marinette. She made sure to cover the harsh love bite on her neck, pass her test, and avoid Adrien. She couldn't have the model plague her thoughts, she was too busy planning on finishing her outfit and mask.

Alya asked about the designer's strange sense of determination that day, but Marinette rebuffed her concern, telling her it was just an outfit she was excited about designing. Alya grinned and said if it was that good then she'd have to see it one day.

When she got home she ran to her room and got to work. Because of Chat's mark on her neck, she had to add a turtleneck to the costume, but honestly, it only made the suit look even better.

When Saturday came around, Marinette could hardly help out in the bakery with a clear head. She just couldn't wait to see what an underground criminal club was like, couldn't wait to slip on the spandex outfit and become a whole new person.

At six her parents closed the bakery and let her go to her room. She walked up the stairs, the picture of innocence for her innocent parents, before sprinting up the rest when out of their sight.

She took a shower, taking care to use her favorite strawberry shampoo and soap. If she going out on the town, she had to smell good for it.

Afterwards she gently blew her hair dry. When she got on her undergarments, she couldn't help but grin in the direction of the closet, where her suit lay hanging on a hanger.

Marinette glanced at the clock and saw it was 7:32. Good, that still gave her plenty of time.

She slipped on the spandex material, sliding up the hidden zipper in the back. Next, she took out two hairties and put her hair into her usual twin tails, but this time attached a red ribbon to each tuft of
Marinette giggled and couldn't help but do a twirl in front of her reflection in the mirror. She looked like a human ladybug, a kickass human ladybug.

She sat down at her vanity and pulled out the tube of red lipstick she only saved for special occasions. After applying a coat of chapstick to keep her lips moist, she spread on the red coating of makeup over her lips.

Her eyelashes were dark enough, so she didn't bother with mascara. She gave a hesitant smile in the mirror, debating on her look. Was the lipstick too much? It did match her suit, and she didn't think she looked too bad with it.

The blackette shook her head resolutely. She couldn't have insecurities now, she wasn't Marinette anymore, she was the brave, confident Ladybug.

A corner of her mouth lifted up. The Miraculous Ladybug.

Well, she will be, when she puts the mask on.

She applied the sticky substance to the back of the mask before carefully pressing it over her eyes. She tapped a couple places to make sure it stuck properly, before blinking and looking to her reflection for approval.

A rare, confident grin overtook her features.

Oh boy, she approved.

...

Marinette learned that night that Chat Noir was a punctual person. For at 10 p.m., right on the dot, came the unmistakable tapping on her balcony trapdoor.

Marinette took one last look in her mirror, the only light being the moon seeping in through her windows, and called for him to come in.

She stood in a pose against the wooden stature beneath her bed and waited.

It was the moment of truth.

She heard his boots come down the staircase. "Hey, Princess!" He greeted offhandedly, not looking at her yet. "Ready to g-go?"

His green eyes were wide as they stared at her, unblinking in the darkness. His mouth was partially open in shock. A rare blush bloomed over his cheeks.

Marinette smirked, taking this as a good sign. She sauntered up to him, taking note of how his breath hitched in his throat.

His pupils dilated when they became nose to nose.

"M-M-Mar-" He stammered, mouth still hanging open.

"What's wrong, chaton?" She murmured smoothly, voice never wavering from it's seductive tone.

Chat Noir swallowed.
"Cat got your tongue?"

He licked his lips in silence, as if to correct her of her misunderstanding. Marinette, or rather, Ladybug, laughed at his current state.

"Don't we have a club to get going to, Chat Noir?"

He bobbed his head up and down, blinking hard and fast. "Y-Yeah. Club. We club get going..."

Marinette's smirk curled deeper. Damn, she should've dressed in spandex a long time ago if she knew she'd get this kind of reaction out of him.

He stared into her cerulean eyes, instinctively going in for a kiss, but she halted him with her fingertips on his lips.

"Ah, ah, ah. No kissing for tonight, minou."

"N-No kissing." He nodded, seemingly in a daze. "G-Got it."

"Now, are you going to stand there and stare at me all night or are we going to this club?" Marinette teased, playfully placing her hands on her hips to illustrate her point.

He closed his eyes and shook his head, as though to clear it.

"Let's go," he finally says brusquely, meeting her in the eyes. But it's too soon that his grin is back on his face. "After you, my ladybug." Something akin to amusement flickered in his eyes. "My Lady."

Marinette rolled her eyes at the new pet name, but didn't reprimand him for it. She starting climbing up the ladder leading to her bed when she remembered something.

The spandex suit is skin tight, not leaving much to the imagination...

She glanced over her shoulder to see Chat Noir staring shamelessly at her derrière, a corner of his mouth lifted in a grin.

She cleared her throat. His gaze snapped up to hers, as if suddenly realizing that they actually stopped.

"Bad kitty," she scolded with a smirk.

He met her expression with one of his own. His teeth glinted in the moonlight.

"Oh, My Lady, you have no idea how bad I can really be."
Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

I'm finally going to start posting the final chapters to this story. This was originally published on FF.net, and when I uploaded it here I wanted to 'polish' it a little bit. However, these chapters won't be revised at all (except for a spelling or grammar mistake) and will be copied directly from the FF.net copy. I'm sorry it's taken me this long to do this, for awhile I just wanted to push this story in the back of mind and ignore it, as I feel it's one of my poorer attempts at writing. But now I see that while this story may not be one of my best, it's a nice comparison to see how much I've grown as a writer. Thank you all for your support ;)

Marinette had been expecting a top secret club, held in the shadiest part of the city. She expected Chat Noir to knock on the door, then a small panel would open and only a man's eyes would be visible. He'd speak in a gruff voice and ask for a secret password. Then Chat would confidently say it, and then the door would open. Inside there would be a bar and a few tables around, with the pungent smell of cigarette smoke in the air while men leered at each other over their mugs of beer or playing cards.

What she wasn't expecting, was a warehouse. It was in a shady part of Paris, that part she got right, but still.

"A warehouse?" Marinette asked in confusion. "You said you're taking me to the club, not an abandoned warehouse."

"Not everything is as it seems, Princess," he answered smugly. He pulled open the door and waited. When she didn't move he turned back and called tauntingly, "Well? Are you coming?"

Marinette, still puzzled by all this, reluctantly went inside. Chat Noir shut the door behind her. Moonlight seeped in through the windows, or rather, what was left of them. Most were just holes in the wall, glass shards littered the floor under them and all around the big, empty space.

She turned and saw Chat press his hand against the wall. She heard a low creaking, and suddenly the flooring in front of her parted to reveal a hidden staircase. Marinette bit back a startled gasp.

"Extra security," he explained casually over his shoulder, descending the steps. "You coming, My Lady?"

"Yeah, I'm coming," she replied in wonder as she followed behind him. Low bulbs decorated the walls, providing just enough light so they wouldn't miss a step.

After so many steps, low beats of jazz music crept into her ears. Marinette felt a bubble of excitement and anxiety swell in her chest, they had to be getting close!

Finally they arrived at an open doorway, accompanied by a single, burly man. He reminded her a bit of Ivan, only bigger and with a deeper scowl.

"Who's that?" He demanded, gesturing with his head at the red-clad girl.
"My guest," Chat Noir replied. Honest, but just vague enough.

The bouncer gave her a once-over, as if looking for any signs that she was a spy or something. But he relented and stepped aside to let them pass.

Marinette’s eyes widened behind her spotted mask.

Chat Noir chuckled beside her. "What were you expecting? Some hole-in-the-wall with bar fights like in those old movies? Come on, we criminals have more class than that."

She scoffed in amusement. Chat led her to one of the many tables, choosing an empty one close to the stage where the jazz band was playing. A neon purple sign was lit above the stage, the letters spelling out, 'Akuma'.

"Akuma?" Marinette mumbled to herself in curiosity.

"That's the name of this place," Chat, having heard, informed her. "Good food, good music, what more could you want?"

Marinette had to actually remember that most-no-all the people in here were lawbreakers of some sort. She stared at all the tables, which were covered by a snow white tablecloth and a candle providing intimate lighting in the center.

A waitress came over, wearing a grin that unsettled Marinette. She wondered what her crimes consisted of, or maybe she was a family member of a criminal and freely worked here.

"Haven't seen you here in awhile, Chat Noir." She handed the pair a menu each.

"I've been..." his voice trailed off, his emerald irises sliding over to Marinette. He smirked. "Busy."

"I see." Her grin never wavered. "So who is your spotted friend?"

Marinette looked into the waitress's brown eyes. "I'm Ladybug," she replied with confidence.

"Ladybug. I look forward to seeing news of your crimes. You look promising." She snickered, probably picturing Ladybug's wanted poster already, and walked away.

Marinette paled in the sudden realization once she glanced down at the menu waiting to be opened. She forgot to bring money. How could she forget to bring money?!

She bit her lip and placed an elbow on the table, supporting her cheek with her fist. Looks like she wasn't eating tonight. Now she just had to wait for Chat Noir to order.

The thief looked at her from above his menu. "Don't you want anything?"

"I-" Her cheeks colored from embarrassment as she looked away from his concerned gaze. "I didn't bring any money."

He paused. Then the jerk had the audacity to laugh! "Even if you did I wouldn't let you use it."

Her sapphire eyes flickered to him, an eyebrow quirking up in confusion. "Why not?"

"What kind of gentleman doesn't pay for his lady's meal?" He flashed her a smirk and winked.

He wanted to pay for her?! "No, no!" She hurried out. She didn't want him wasting his money just
for her. "You don't have to do that! It's okay, I don't have to get anything."

"I'm paying for you and that's that," he insisted, still smirking. "Now pick up that menu and get whatever you like."

She frowned.

He leaned his face closer to hers. "If you don't I'll just order for you. And if I wind up getting something you don't like and you don't eat it, then I'll just be throwing money away. Your choice, My Lady."

Marinette scowled and picked up her menu, only furrowing her eyebrows when she noticed a clear detail that seemed to be removed after every dish listed.

"Chat?"

He glanced up above his menu. "Yes, My Lady?"

"There aren't any prices on this."

He lowered his menu slightly and laughed. "That's because it's the women's menu."

Woah. Only fancy, not to mention expensive, places did that. "I don't know what to order then," she softly said. She didn't want for him to be broke all because of some food.

Chat grinned. "Whatever it is you desire. If you want it, get it."

Marinette's eyes bulged at his blatant disregard to the prices. "B-But I don't know what anything costs!"

"That's the point, so you won't feel bad ordering it." He rolled his eyes. "Trust me, I can afford everything on this menu. Is that what I'll have to do, order everything on the menu to find the food you like?"

She shook her head furiously at such an absurd suggestion. Her eyes began scanning the menu, all the while she ignored his chuckles of amusement.

At long last the waitress returned, notepad in hand. "Have you decided on anything yet?"

Chat rose an eyebrow in Marinette's direction, silently asking her for the answer.

"I'm ready," she replied quietly. She still felt guilty for him paying for her.

"What will you have to drink?"

The pair ordered their drinks and food. Marinette made sure to pick something that she both liked and was sure that was low in cost.

Out of the corner of her eye she noticed a man walking closer to their table, wearing a strange green and purple suit. A black mask was painted over his eyes, matching the large black bow tie on his suit.

Marinette could barely bite back her gasp. It was Jackady, notorious for hypnotizing his victims, mostly store employees, to get money from his robberies. Was he going to hypnotize Chat?

"My Lady? What's wrong?" Chat Noir asked, sounding worried. Marinette didn't take her eyes off
the approaching criminal to see her companion's face.

"Oh, that's just Jackady." He chuckled after breathing a sigh of relief. He must've followed her stunned gaze. "He's a friend of mine. Don't worry, he won't hurt you."

She tore her eyes off the smirking man and turned to the feline rogue. "What if he hypnotizes me?!" She whispered shrilly.

His mouth morphed into a line, showing he was serious. "I'd rip his face to shreds before that could happen. I promise I won't let anything ever happen to you."

Marinette tried to hide a smile at his declaration but ultimately failed. Chat Noir gave her a playful wink and turned to the approaching Jackady.

"Chat Noir! Haven't seen you in awhile, how have you been?" The criminal greeted with a laugh. His voice was high, the laugh even higher. Marinette glanced down, not wanting to meet his eyes. He was still dangerous, despite Chat's reassurance of her safety.

Chat Noir chuckled. "I've been good. It's nice to see you, too. So, I hear you've developed a partnership with The Mime?"

Marinette held back a gasp of surprise. The Mime was another criminal, famous for not saying anything during his crimes. His face was painted like a mime and his weapons were all devoid of color, giving the appearance that he wasn't using a weapon at all, rather just 'miming' them.

"Yes, and I have to say it's coming along splendidly." He gave another laugh, then looked down at Marinette. His lips curled into a leering grin. "And who is this fetching woman?"

"I'm Ladybug," she announced boldly.

"Pleasure to meet you, Ladybug." He grabbed her hand and tried to kiss it but she pulled it away.

"I don't let just anyone kiss my hand," she teased with a grin. Chat Noir's eyes gleamed with amusement and his lips twitched.

"Feisty, I like her!" Jackady proclaimed, chuckling. "I think she may be able to tame even you, Chat Noir."

Said criminal laughed and leaned back in his chair. "Who knows? She's already got me doing things I wouldn't think about doing normally."

Marinette stifled a giggle. It was true, after all. For example, he'd never have saved those people at the bank if it wasn't for her.

Jackady smirked. "Watch that you don't turn into a housecat, now."

"Wouldn't dream of it," he assured with a simper.

"Well, I must be heading off to my own table. Me and Mime are working on our next heist." Jackady turned to Marinette and smiled. "It was an honor meeting you, Miss Ladybug."

She found herself smiling back and nodding. "Likewise."

Jackady turned and walked to a few more tables over, where Marinette instantly recognized The Mime. She turned back lest he look at her, she didn't want any attention.
"See? Told you he wouldn't hurt you." Chat's arm reached across the table to take her hand and rub his thumb on it in small circles. She melted at the affectionate gesture.

"I know," she replied softly.

"And now, Akuma presents, Lucie!" A hidden announcer shouted. Instantly all the men in the vicinity started hooting and hollering, some even making wolf whistles. Chat Noir only rolled his eyes and thanked the waitress who had delivered their food.

Marinette looked towards the stage to see that the dark blue curtains were drawn, the jazz band that was playing earlier had completely stopped.

"Who's Lucie?" Marinette whispered from across the table.

He didn't bother giving her a glance as he stabbed at his meat with a fork. "A singer," he answered, obviously not caring at all about this Lucie who all the men were catcalling over.

Low, slow music began playing over the speakers. A woman's voice began to sing, matching the music's tone. Suddenly the curtains were drawn, revealing a woman wearing a spaghetti strap dress that clung to her impressive figure and ended just below her butt.

A few men whistled but soon quieted down to listen to her sing, or simply to gaze at her body in lust.

Marinette's gaze was drawn to Chat Noir. He kept his head down and was eating his food, acting completely normal and not looking up at the stage for a second. She lowered her eyebrows in confusion. Every male in the vicinity ogled this singer, so why not him? She was obviously very attractive.

She returned her eyes to the stage, where the woman was singing while also doing a sensual dance. Her feet glided across the stage, marveling Marinette on the fact she was doing it all in sky-high heels.

Finally, her song ended with a flirty note, and men stood and clapped while letting out more wolf whistles and cheers. Chat Noir gave a few polite claps, not looking away from his food, and resumed eating.

Marinette rose an eyebrow. "Why?"

He peeked up at her, a stray lock of hair hung over his forehead. "Why what?"

"You didn't look at Lucie the whole time!" Marinette explained.

He rose an eyebrow. "So?"

"So?" She repeated in surprise. "So, all the guys were staring at her and whistling at her. But you didn't seem to care about her."

"That's because I didn't."

"But, but she was flirty and talented and-"

"The only woman I'll ever be interested seeing on that stage is you." A corner of his mouth lifted deviously. "But you wouldn't even get to sing, because I'd pounce on you before you could even open your beautiful mouth."

Marinette's breath hitched as she felt her face warm at his words.
Chat Noir nonchalantly returned to his dinner, acting like he didn't just make the girl sitting across from him speechless and flustered. Marinette shakily grabbed her fork and began eating as well.

The jazz band started playing again, and Marinette couldn't help but let her eyes soak in all that was Akuma. It was a place criminals frequented, but you wouldn't even know it if someone didn't inform you of that face. Fancy tables, food, a stage and singers and dancers? Chat Noir was right, criminals do have class, after all.

Still, it doesn't excuse their actions when they're outside of the place.

"Hey, Volpina!"

The random man's words reached the her ears, followed by more cries of greeting. Chat perked up, eyes narrowed and trained on the entrance of the club. This would be their first time seeing the new criminal.

A girl, looking no more than their age, sauntered through the door. A long flute was attached to her back, and her long hair was held back by a tie near the end of her locks. She wore an orange, white, and black suit resembling a fox, like her namesake. She smirked prettily at the men's calling, even winking in a random direction.

Her green eyes trailed around the place before settling on their table. Marinette looked back to see her companion's reaction, but he remained openly glaring at the vixen beauty.

She turned back to Volpina, whose eyes didn't move from Chat Noir's. If anything, her smirk curled deeper.

Volpina began walking to their table.
Chapter 18

Volpina walked over, somehow making her hips move in a flirtatious fashion that wasn't ridiculously obvious. Marinette found herself wishing she could walk like that at any given moment.

The vixen criminal arrived, and stared at Chat with predatory, half-lidded eyes.

"So you're the famous Chat Noir, hm?" The words seemed to roll off her tongue, like honey. "Cool outfit."

Chat Noir rose an unimpressed eyebrow. "Thanks."

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you."

Chat eyed her with suspicion swimming in his green eyes. "Likewise."

Marinette's eyes narrowed at the exchange. She honestly wanted to stick out her tongue in disgust and let out a 'bleh!' but she was too civilized for that. So she just tightened her grip on her fork instead.

"I'm surprised you're here, I'd expect you to be busy at this time of night. And on a Saturday," Volpina continued in that same flirtatious tone that made Marinette's teeth grind.

"Even the best of us need a break," Chat answered, giving her a smug half-grin.

It didn't hit Marinette until then on what a catch Chat Noir really was. Tall, young, handsome, and devilish, not to mention he's the best at what he does. It was no wonder why Volpina was flirting with him.

It still didn't make Marinette any less angry about it, though.

She could've at least acknowledged her existence, could've asked for an introduction from Chat. But she acted as if she and Chat were completely alone.

"How does the number one criminal not have a single scratch on him?" Volpina brought her finger to his chin and tilted his head up, inspecting his handsome features. "This is dangerous business, you know."

"You just have to be careful," he replied with a grin, although he angled his head just right to get out of her finger's hold.

Marinette's patience was wearing thin.

"I hope Paris proves to be better than Rome," Volpina pouted. "Rome grew boring after awhile, I hope Paris has some more excitement." Her eyes seemed to glitter when she said 'excitement'.

Chat shrugged. "It's exciting, I guess," he answered, indifferent.

"Would you like to show me around the city? I'm afraid it's a rather big place, a girl could easily get lost."

Marinette gripped the edges of the table, seething. If looks could kill, Volpina would be burned to a crisp.
"It seems you already know your way around," Chat replied easily. "You already performed a crime and you made it here. I think you're not in any danger of getting lost."

Marinette smirked. Ha! Take that!

But the vixen didn't seem deterred in the least. "Then how about we hit a bank sometime? I think we'd make a good team."

"I work alone," he told her, not missing a beat.

"A lone cat, huh?" She licked her lips. Did this girl not know how to take a hint?! "That's an attractive quality."

Marinette couldn't take it anymore. She stood up furiously and stomped over to Chat, startling the two criminals. The polka-dotted girl sat herself in Chat's lap, and ignoring his surprised and confused gaze, grabbed his face and slammed her mouth on his.

He let out a small squeak, but eventually moved his lips with Marinette's harsh coaxing. She placed her palms on his stomach and moved them upwards painfully slow, fingers going over every muscle covered by the leather suit.

He wrapped his clawed hands around her waist, she began nibbling at his bottom lip, earning a groan from the back of his throat.

Marinette pulled away with a smirk. Her eyed danced with delight at how his lips were slightly swollen, he panted like he just got done running a mile.

"Jesus, Princess," he whispered in awe.

Marinette grinned wider. Her eyes glanced to where Volpina was standing but the fox was gone. Good.

Marinette rose out of his lap and walked back to her own chair. She resumed with eating her dinner, acting like nothing had just transpired between them.

She could feel his eyes searing through her, she chose to ignore his gaze and continued to casually eat.

A man's throat cleared.

The girl's eyes went up to see the bouncer from the entrance, standing next to Chat Noir.

"Hawk Moth wishes to speak to you," he said lowly.

Chat's eyes flickered to Marinette's. In that second, she saw something in them she'd never think she'd ever see: fear.

Marinette's stomach twisted in anxiety. Chat Noir was never scared, well, except for when he watched that horror movie with her, but this was different. This was real life, and if this 'Hawk Moth' could gain such a reaction from him, she knew he was bad news.

Chat Noir nodded and stood from his seat. He wore a calm mask and even tried to grin at her, although she could definitely tell it was forced.

"I'll be back soon, My Lady," he promised, kissing her hand in parting before leaving with the
bouncer.

She bit her lip when she couldn't see his form anymore. She was alone, alone in a room filled with dozens of criminals. Well, at least none of them seemed like they wanted to harm her.

Her head turned to see Volpina storming back to her table.

None of them except her, anyway.

"What the hell was that?" Volpina seethed.

Marinette stared at her with fake innocence. "What was what?"

"We were flirting," she growled. "We would've went out if you hadn't put your hands and lips all over him."

Marinette's mouth curled into a wicked smirk. This was going to be fun. "Trust me, he wasn't flirting. Take it from the girl who he flirts with every day."

"And who are you?" She barked.

"Ladybug, it's not nice to meet you."

"The feeling's mutual," she spat. "Listen, Chat Noir needs to be with the best."

Marinette rose an eyebrow. "You mean you want him to date himself? Is that possible?"

"I meant, you idiot, that he needs to be with the best girl criminal, and that's obviously me. He doesn't need an amateur."

Marinette shrugged with cool indifference. "Well, he brought me here tonight, so obviously he wants me around."

Volpina scoffed. "That's because he didn't meet me until now. Face it, Ladybug, your days with him are over."

She grinned smugly. "Given to how he responded to my kiss earlier, I think he's going to be coming back for more."

Volpina exhaled a furious breath through her nose, reminding Marinette of a dog.

"Just stay away from him, he's mine."

"On the contrary," Marinette started, making a show of inspecting her gloved nails. "He said he's all mine, when he gave me his ring." For proof she took the ring hanging around her neck and held it up.

Volpina scoffed. "And how do I know that's not just any ring? You could've bought that anywhere."

"Not one with his symbol on it." She flashed the front of the ring in her direction, letting the gem paw print catch in the candlelight.

Volpina's teeth clenched in fury.

"Listen, little fox." Marinette scowled, she was done with this conversation. "As of now Chat Noir likes me, not you. I'll admit, that can change one day. But until that day may hypothetically come, I
"That day will be soon," Volpina hissed. She took whatever shred of dignity she had left and walked away from Marinette. The designer exhaled a tired sigh and brought a hand to her forehead.

She just basically told a girl to stay the hell away from Chat Noir, that he's hers. They weren't dating, she still wasn't even over Adrien. But she couldn't ignore the anger that traveled through her veins at the thought of Volpina's hands running over Chat's back and sifting through his hair, her lips moving against his in a passionate lock.

She and Chat really needed to talk.

As if right on cue, Chat Noir speed-walked to their table, his mouth pressed into a line but his eyes betraying his nervous state.

Marinette's eyebrows lowered in puzzlement. "Chat? What's wro-"

"Time to go," he barked, grabbing her hand and hauling her out of her chair. He unzipped his front pocket, ripped out his wallet and slapped a roll of money on the table. He replaced the wallet and began tugging her away.

"Chat? What is it?" Her voice rose in volume. "What's wrong?"

He whipped his head back to her so fast she was surprised he didn't get whip lash. "You said no questions asked if there was danger. Now let's go."

He didn't say anything more. Marinette clamped her mouth shut as he continued pulling her towards the entrance/exit.

The door was clear, Chat didn't release his firm grip on her hand when leaving Akuma. But they only got to the second step when she was suddenly ripped away from him.

Marinette was roughly pinned to the wall by the bouncer. "Let me go!" She cried, trying to wriggle out of his hold. "What do you want?"

"You're not going anywhere, Ladybug," he sneered.

Marinette dropped to the ground when Chat Noir kicked the bouncer in the side, sending him back about a foot away. His eyes blazed with fury, his claws were out and ready.

"Stop this, Chat Noir!" He snapped, temper rising. "You don't know what you're doing."

"I know perfectly well what I'm doing," he hissed. He tried to swipe at him but the bouncer dodged. He may have been big, but he moved with the agility of a dancer. He was able to grab Chat's arm and hold him against the wall.

Chat struggled furiously in his hold, prompting the bouncer to press his hand to his throat. He started pushing forward, and Marinette gasped at his intentions.

If she didn't do something, Chat would either pass out from lack of oxygen, or die if the man so chose.

Gritting her teeth together, she brought up a hand and punched him in the arm. She was too short to reach his face. The guard slowly turned to her and growled, not relinquishing his hold on Chat. Meanwhile Chat's movements were slowing, choking noises escaped his throat.
"Leave him alone!" she ordered. The bouncer turned to her and rose his arm for an attack, finally letting go of the feline thief. He dropped to the ground in a heap, coughing and gasping for air.

In a quick flash her mind brought her back to the night when she and Chat Noir first met, to when the mugger was going to try to hurt Chat.

She bit her lip. Hopefully she'd be able to perform the move right.

When he got close enough she pulled down his arm, the same as Chat had done, and delivering a hard kick to his stomach, harder than she had kicked any soccer ball in gym class. He took a few steps back and groaned, clutching his stomach. Marinette brought back her leg and let her foot fly upwards to his chin, making his head propel backwards. She didn't think she could kick him and make him go back several feet like Chat had, so she settled on connecting a punch to his temple.

The man was out cold before he hit the ground. Chat Noir got up then, looking back between her and the knocked out bouncer. His eyes were practically bulging out of his head.

"Huh," he mused, softly smiling. "Good job."

"Thanks," she mumbled, blushing due to the praise.

"We can't stick around, we have to leave." Chat took her hand again and the pair sped up the steps. Soon enough they were out of the warehouse and were flying across the buildings of their city, with the moon and Eiffel Tower at their backs.

When they were safely back at her balcony, they both dropped into the warm bedroom. Marinette turned on her bedside lamp to provide light to the pitch black room, and that's when they could finally relax.

Chat Noir leaned against the wall and exhaled.

"Chat?" Marinette asked. "What was that all about?"

He moaned and didn't look at her.

When he didn't say anything, she repeated her question.

"Hawk Moth wanted to know about you," he finally spoke. He opened his eyes to gaze into hers with a strange mix of anxiety and relief.

Marinette tilted her head. "Why? Who is Hawk Moth, anyway?"

"He's basically my boss. He wanted to see if you were worth employing, as well."

Her blue eyes narrowed, still confused. "What do you mean?"

"I don't keep any of the stuff I steal," he explained. "I give it all to him."

"What? Why?"

"Because I don't need it. I'm," he paused, taking the moment to look away from her curious stare. "Well off. I don't need the money."

"But why do you give it to him?"

"He's the one who supplied me with the suit and baton, he made me Chat Noir. I wanted freedom,
and of course it came with a price."

"So you resorted to crime?" She inquired, curiosity rising, along with annoyance.

He sighed, gaze turning to her ceiling, a wistful look on his face. "All my life I followed the rules. I couldn't deny the rush I got when I was finally able to break some."

Marinette's face softened. It was kind of hard to remember that behind the criminal persona, he was still just a boy, a regular Parisian who walked the streets by day and robbed those streets at night.

He was wealthy, and lived a suffocated life. "Chat?" She whispered. "...Who are you?"

He shook his head. "That's not a conversation for now."

She furrowed her eyebrows. "Why not?"

"Because it's not the right time yet," he answered. "I'll tell you eventually."

"But-"

"Marinette, please," he stressed, squeezing his eyes shut. "You almost met the crime king of the city and I barely got you out of there. I betrayed him, there's no doubt he's sending all his men after me for my head. I wouldn't be surprised if some of them are out looking for me right now. I'd like to relax for a bit."

Seeing his features wrought with worry, she backed down. She wondered what this meant for Chat. Would he still commit crimes?

Wait a minute...if he was enemies with all the criminals in Paris now, then this was the perfect opportunity for him to become a hero!

Her eyes wandered to his broken expression again.

She'd save that little suggestion for later.

"I should've never brought you there," he growled to himself. "It was so obvious!"

"What was obvious?" She inquired.

"I always go there alone, figures when I bring somebody, and in a costume no less, he'd want to know about them. God, I'm so stupid."

"You're not stupid," she retorted. "It's my fault, I kept bothering you to take me."

"I should've kept saying no."

A slow grin stretched across her lips. She shuffled closer to him, the noise causing him to open his eyes and look down at her in wonder.

"It's not your fault you can't resist me," she purred in a tone that was so overly flirtatious it was comical.

Chat Noir chuckled in amusement and wrapped an arm around her shoulders, pressing a warm, loving kiss to her hair.

"You're right," he murmured. "You're impossible to resist."
They lay there in silence, just enjoying the others's company. Marinette had long ditched the costume, having gone to the bathroom to change into her sleepwear. She and Chat were curled up on her bed, with her in a slightly higher position so she could easily sift her fingers through Chat's hair.

The feline thief basked in the wandering fingers and rested his head against Marinette's side, eyes closed in relaxation.

"So," he said at last. He rose up, causing her to remove her fingers from his hair. He gazed at her with a grin and a strange gleam in his eye. "You told me you like some guy in your class. Tell me about him."

Why did he want to know this now? Marinette bit her lip and shifted her eyes to the right, avoiding that curious gaze. "Why?"

"Cats are curious animals," he replied easily with a shrug. "Come on, Princess, tell me about him. He has blond hair, green eyes, and his name starts with A. I'm interested to hear more."

"I don't want to tell you more."

"Please, Princess?" He rested a finger against her chin and slowly brought her to face his own. "Give me a first name, at least."

"Fine," she huffed, rolling her eyes in annoyance. "His name's Adrien."

"Adrien? That's a stupid name," he remarked.

"It's not stupid!" She snapped angrily. Like Chat's real name could be any better?

"Sure it is," he insisted. "Okay then, what's he like? Does he have a job?"

Marinette paused, unsure if she should tell him. After all, how many models in Paris were named Adrien?

"You know I won't hurt him, right? You care about him, so I won't hurt him," he promised. He lifted up her hand to kiss the knuckles as if to seal the vow.

She didn't say anything for a few seconds, thinking it over. "Well," she spoke, believing she could trust him. She has trusted him for a long time now. "He's a model."

Chat Noir scoffed. "A model? Seriously?"

The designer rose an eyebrow. "And what's wrong with that?"

"He's just an air-headed piece of eye candy! No substance."

"That's not true!" She retorted, anger rising. She sat up in bed to glare at him.

"Adrien is much more than that! He's sweet, polite, generous, selfless, caring, smart, talented, humble, loyal, helpful, and many other things! He's nice to everyone, even to those who don't deserve his kindness. Despite his busy schedule he always manages to make time for his friends, especially if they're in trouble. He has perfect grades and will help you out with yours anytime. He may be famous and rich, but he doesn't let it go to his head. Honestly, if they're weren't pictures of
him all over the city, you wouldn't even know he had money unless he told you! So don't you dare say he's an 'air-headed piece of eye candy' because you couldn't be further from the truth. And before you ask, yes, he's handsome. Gorgeous, even, but that's just a bonus compared to all his other amazing traits."

Marinette was red faced from her tiring rant, she had to suck in large mouthfuls of air to get her breath back. Her fiery sapphire eyes pinpointed on Chat's, she was ready to slew another rant on him if he said one more wrong word.

Chat Noir sat back, staring at her with his lips parted. He blinked in astonishment. His mouth opened and closed, but no words came out, resembling a gaping fish.

Maybe she shouldn't have praised Chat's rival the way she did, but she didn't care at the moment. She would defend Adrien with her dying breath, she hated when people would assume things about him just because he was a model. He was so much more than that, why couldn't people see it?

"I-I didn't know you felt so strongly about him," Chat whispered. "You...you really mean all that? Every word?"

"Every word," she promised. She was aware she may lose Chat Noir forever now, and while that gave her pain, she didn't regret defending Adrien. A part of her would always love him, and she would always be his friend.

Chat Noir's eyes flickered down to the mattress. He seemed to be lost in thought. Marinette braced herself for the rejection.

She squeaked in surprise when he pounced on her, his lips capturing hers in a searing kiss. Her eyes flew open when she felt tears leaking on her cheeks, she realized with a muffled gasp that they were his own.

He pulled back to stare deeply in her eyes. He cradled her face in his hands, using his thumbs to wipe his escaped tears from her cheeks.

"My Princess," he whispered. "I-I-"

He gave a happy, teary laugh and dove in for another kiss. Marinette didn't know why he was reacting like this, especially since she just got done screaming at him, but didn't resist his affections.

He ripped his mouth away from hers and gave her a dopey grin that was full of anticipation. It was strange to say the least, whenever he usually grinned it would be mischievous and sinful, not eager and silly.

"What do you think of me?" He asked breathlessly.

"I-what?" She stuttered in confusion. What was he talking about now?

"What do you think of me?" He repeated, once again utilizing his thumbs to wipe the stray tears from her cheeks. "Please, I have to know."

"Um, well," she stumbled. She had to take a few moments to think since his question threw her off guard.

"You're a criminal," she started at last. "But you're kind. You're protective and brave. You saved my life four times, yes I include tonight as one of those times. You even saved me after we had a fight. You're a gentleman, you never force me to kiss you. If I didn't want to you'd respect my wishes."
You're sweet." Marinette smiled warmly. "You're so sweet to me."

Chat Noir's grin relaxed into a fond smile.

"You're generous, you paid for my food tonight even though I asked you not to." She looked up at him with a teasing smirk to which he chuckled at. "You're a wonderful person, Chat, and I feel horrible because I like both you and Adrien. That isn't fair to either of you."

"You like both of us," he stated softly. His eyes were shining with an emotion Marinette couldn't place. "Both of us..."

She rose an eyebrow. "You shouldn't be so happy about this." It was starting to freak Marinette out. She admitted she likes two guys at once, shouldn't he be mad or jealous or something?

Chat snickered. His lips curved into that devious grin that she had seen dozens of times. "Oh, my Princess, you have no idea how thrilled I really am. So, both of us, huh?"

She bit her lip nervously and nodded.

He laid down on his stomach and rested a fist beneath his chin. His eyes twinkled with amusement. "This is quite a predicament you're in."

"I guess it is," she answered awkwardly. Where was he going with this? He acted like there was some big joke and only she didn't understand the punchline.

"If you had to choose," he drawled, fluttering his eyelashes playfully at her. "Which one would you pick?"

Marinette frowned. "Why are you saying 'if'? Don't I have to choose?"

Chat Noir smirked wider, something flashed in his emerald eyes. "Of course. Forgive me for my slip of the tongue."

"It's not that hard, Princess. Adrien or Chat Noir? Surely you must prefur one personality over the other."

Marinette arched an eyebrow. "Personality?"

"Excuse me, I meant to say 'person'. Another mistake."

She bit her lip. Innocent Adrien, or devilish Chat Noir?

"Both of us must've really done a number on your heart for you to be so indecisive." He rolled onto his back, placing his hands behind his head. "But doesn't one make your heart beat just a tad faster than the other?"

Honestly, Chat Noir has been making her heart beat faster more than Adrien had.

"Adrien or Chat Noir," Chat mused quietly. "Hm. Adrien or Chat Noir, Adrien or Chat Noir, Adrien, Chat Noir..."

"You're not making this any easier," Marinette bit out.

"On the contrary, I am. The answer is right in front of you." Chat shuffled closer to her, grinning.
"Always has been. Right. In. Front. Of. You."

She scowled and rolled her eyes at his antics. Chat scoffed in amusement and went back to his original spot. He looked at her from the corner of his eye and grinned.

Marinette inhaled deeply, then exhaled. She took two more breaths like this, eyes closed in thought. She had liked Adrien since last year, when he offered her his umbrella, but recently the feline criminal had been sneaking his way into her heart.

Sure, her heart beat faster in Adrien's presence, but she couldn't deny the spark of attraction and fluttering of butterflies in her stomach whenever Chat shot her that devious smirk of his.

In all honesty, Chat has been way more vocal in professing his feelings to her, while she wasn't even sure if Adrien liked her as more than a friend. She liked Chat and here he was, ready to start something yet she kept holding back for Adrien. If she kept waiting, Chat Noir would slip away and she wouldn't even have an opportunity for Adrien.

But Chat wouldn't be a rebound, no. She knew she liked him, and possibly in the future that 'like' could turn into love and she could forget about Adrien.

Marinette hesitated. "Chat?"

"Yes, Princess?"

"I...I like you more."

His head perked up at that.

"Don't get me wrong, I still like Adrien. But...you..." She paused to gather her thoughts. "Maybe with you, I can get over him. I-my feelings can grow for you."

Did she word that right? She winced as she dared to look at the thief.

He blinked, face betraying no emotion. He seemed to be processing her words. At last a large smile spread across his lips. He reached over and cupped her face with his hands.

"You really like me more? The criminal?" He whispered.

Marinette nodded. "Y-Yes. I do."

He closed the gap between them and enveloped her lips with his in a soft, passionate kiss. Her eyes automatically closed at the tender way his mouth moved against hers.

She felt one of his hands being removed from her face. She heard something soft hit the bed, followed by two other soft thumps.

Marinette slowly opened her eyes...

She froze.

Her stomach dropped.

He noticed her cease movement and opened his own eyes to look at her own.

"A-A-Adrien?!!"
Marinette drew back as if he burned her. She rose a hand to cover her gaping mouth. Adrien Agreste is Chat Noir?! But how?

She took him in. Same suit as Chat, same body, same blond hair, same eyes...but it was Adrien. It was like she was playing one of those games were she had to match the feet, torso, and head of a person. She got Chat's feet and middle right, but missed the head and got Adrien's instead.

Her eyes flickered to the discarded black mask on the bed, along with the two cat ears.

"Adrien?" She repeated. "What-how-when-?!" How could this be possible? How could sweet Adrien be a criminal?

"Surprise?" He smiled sheepishly and shrugged. He rubbed a hand along the back of his neck, an action she'd seen Adrien do plenty of times, but looked plain weird when he was in the catsuit.

"Surprise?!" Marinette shrieked. "I don't understand! This whole time-!

This whole time Chat Noir was Adrien Agreste. It was Adrien who had saved her that fateful night when she thought they first met. It was Adrien who had saved her from being jumped. Adrien who had saved her from Kim after the party, the same Adrien held a sobbing and bleeding Kim against the wall with a single hand, threatening to not even glance in Marinette's direction.

She had often wondered how Chat would even know if Kim had indeed looked at her.

She had stitched Adrien when he had gotten stabbed. She made a deal with Adrien and kissed him, the same Adrien left a hickey on her neck and again when they next kissed. Adrien had taken her to club Akuma and paid for her meal.

Those kisses, those flirtations, those smirks, those grins...all Adrien.

"It was all you," she whispered, breathless. "I-I-I can't believe this."

Chat-no-Adrien nodded. "I'm sorry to have kept this from you. But, you have to know why I did."

She absently nodded, lost in thought.

Wait a minute.

She just confessed her devotion to Chat, she admitted she liked Adrien. Chat has known for awhile that she liked a guy named 'A' in their class, no doubt Adrien solved the puzzle and figured out it was him.

Marinette's eyes narrowed, hot, embarrassed tears threatened to spill to her cheeks. "Was this all just a joke to you?!!"

Adrien looked taken aback. "What? No! Marinette-"

"I admitted to Chat I liked you! He's known for a long time. But you didn't reveal yourself, and-and-were you just laughing at me this whole time?!!"

Her brain was beginning to hurt as one realization after another kept hitting her. Her thoughts were a swirled, jumbled mess and all she wanted was clarity.

"Marinette."

She was snapped out of her tornado-like thought process as Adrien grabbed her hands in his. He
gazed at her with imploring eyes.

"Listen, Marinette. I-I have liked you for awhile now. But I kept my distance because you didn't deserve to be with a criminal. But when I saved you that first time...I admit it, I got selfish. I tried winning you over as Chat first, but flirted with you as Adrien too, so that you'd fall for both personas. When I found out you liked Adrien, I backed off but paid more attention to you as Chat to get you to like him too. I wanted to make sure you could like and accept both of us."

Both of us, still a strange thing to say. This whole thing is strange!

"Princess," he spoke. He rubbed small, comforting circles on her palms with the pads of his thumbs. "I never laughed at you once. I love you so much, more than you could ever know. I just had to know that you can accept both the criminal and the civilian."

She felt the air leave her lungs. Adrien loved her? Her? Marinette?

"You," she stopped. Her blue bell eyes stared into his emeralds. "You love...me?"

He smiled, warm and hopeful. "With all my heart." He brought her hands to his lips in a silent promise.

Adrien Agreste loved her. He loved her.

"Both as Chat and Adrien," he vowed, dropping his head to kiss her hands again.

It felt as if a weight was released from her shoulders at this new revelation. She didn't have to choose between two wonderful guys, they were one in the same. And he loved her.

Marinette couldn't hold back the giggles. She started full-out laughing at the absurdity of this whole thing. All this time she was worrying herself sick of choosing between them when in reality they were the same guy!

"Princess? Marinette, are you alright?" Adrien asked cautiously.

"Yes!" She squeaked, grabbing his face. "Yes I'm alright!"

She smashed her lips against his, though the romantic spark was lost because she couldn't control her giggle fit. But it was okay, this was purely a 'happy kiss'. Adrien smiled against her lips and started laughing too.

When they both had sufficiently calmed down, they pulled away.

Adrien's face sobered. "Are...Are you disappointed? That the innocent guy you liked is really a criminal?"

"Disappointed?" Marinette questioned in shock. "You have no idea the torture I was going through with trying to pick one of you! I'm glad I don't have to choose because you're both amazing."

"Not as amazing as you," he replied instantly. She rolled her eyes at the sappy response to which he grinned at.

"How does this change things? I mean, what about school?" She inquired.

Adrien furrowed his eyebrows and stopped to think. "It depends on you, I guess. Do you want to start dating?"
"Ideally, yes, but Alya knows I like Chat Noir. I don't want her to ask too many questions if I'm suddenly going out with you. Plus, it really would be out of nowhere, we've given no hints that we like each other."

Adrien nodded, pensive. "I can see your reasoning." Quickly, a wicked smirk lifted his lips.

Marinette felt heat shoot through her. Seeing Adrien make that face, wearing the tight leather suit, it was even more attractive than when he was wearing the mask.

He leaned his head closer to hers. She blushed, eyes widening in anticipation.

"I like the idea of a secret relationship. Imagine how many janitor closets we can take advantage of."

Her breath hitched. Dear Lord, was this boy trying to kill her?

Her mind conjured up an image of her walking innocently down the hall, then a hand darting out of a closet and pulling her in. She'd squeak in surprise but it'd be silenced by a pair of hot lips. Before she'd close her eyes she'd see a burning emerald green gaze...

Marinette blinked to dispel the fantasy. Adrien grinned, as if he knew exactly what her brain had just imagined.

"I better get going," he said softly. "It's really late." He scooted away from her to pick up the mask and ears, quietly replacing them on himself.

Marinette bit her lip in worry. "Ch-Adrien, it's not safe out there."

He gave a wry grin in response. "It hardly ever is."

"You said yourself that Hawk Moth's men will be looking for you. All the criminals in Paris want to hurt you." She refused to say the word 'kill'. She couldn't imagine her Adrien dying at their filthy hands.

"I'll be careful, promise." He cupped a hand to her cheek and pressed a kiss to her nose before placing a chaste peck on her lips. "I'll see you tomorrow."

It did little to appease her worry.

Adrien stretched, about to go out the trap door, when he saw Marinette's crestfallen expression and halted. He bent back down and took her face in his hands again.

"Listen, I'll be fine. My house isn't far from here, I'll be extra careful. I promise you I'll be fine."

Her sapphire orbs looked away.

He half-smiled. "Have I ever lied to you, Princess?"

She reluctantly shook her head.

"And I don't plan on starting now." He tenderly kissed her forehead. "Good night, my love."

A small smile broke out on her face at the endearing name he called her. He grinned and reached up for the trapdoor. Once open, he slipped out into the night.

"Good night, Adrien."
Marinette awoke the next morning with a yawn complete with the standard stretch. She smiled at her ceiling, taking note of the sun lending some of its light in her room.

Her eyes widened as last night's memories hit her, the action making her sit upright in bed.

Adrien is Chat Noir.

She pressed a hand to her forehead and slowly shook her head. If someone told her that fact before Chat revealed himself she would've laughed in their face and consider them to be crazy.

A chuckle of disbelief left her lips. The whole thing was crazy, every bit of it.

She gasped when she remembered a particular detail. Every criminal in the city was after Chat. Did he even make it home alright last night?

Marinette unplugged her charged phone and checked for messages. She had none, surely if Adrien suddenly went missing Alya would've found out and informed her.

She exhaled a shaky breath. Don't worry, Marinette. He's fine. He's Adrien Agreste, if he went missing your phone would be blowing up with texts right now.

She got out of bed to go change into her day attire. Once completed she walked to her vanity to fix her hair. She decided to leave it down, Sunday was a day to relax, after all. The bakery was closed on Sundays, so she had the whole day to herself.

After brushing her teeth, having lunch, and just having normal talks with her parents, she ventured back into her room. Maybe she could sketch a new outfit, or maybe sew one of her current designs? Or maybe she could call up Alya, if she wasn't busy with Nino, that is...

A few, sharp knocks sounded on the trapdoor on her floor.

Marinette's eyebrows furrowed as she quickly checked her phone which was devoid of any new messages. That was odd, Alya always texted her when she was coming over.

She rose out of her chaise and walked to the trapdoor and opened it, only instead of a girl with auburn curls and hazel eyes she got a blond with apple green eyes.

"Adrien?!" She squeaked, surprised. What was he doing here? She had to admit, it was strange having him visit her without the catsuit on and coming in through her balcony trapdoor.

The model grinned. "Your parents let me up, all I had to do was say I'm a friend of yours. After they made sure I was properly fed, they sent me up. You know, they really ought to be more careful. They could be sending criminals up here and they would be none the wiser!"

Marinette snorted and rolled her eyes, moving to the side to allow Adrien in her room. He winked and walked around her, choosing to settle on her chaise.

"I was worried, you mangy alley cat," Marinette chided softly, crossing her arms.

"Which brings me to the reason of my visit, well, one of two reasons."

He visited her to appease her concerns? She beamed at the considerate gesture.
"The other reason is that I just wanted to see you. Now I get to spend time with you in the day and at night!" Adrien rested his hands behind his head, peering up at her with a lazy grin. "But we should exchange numbers. Not only for this reason, but..." He smirked. "How else are we going to contact each other about our secret rendezvous?"

She looked down as a blush developed over her cheeks. She turned away from his smirking expression and went for her cell phone. They exchanged numbers and soon Marinette settled down on the chaise with her secret boyfriend.

Adrien Agreste, her secret boyfriend...she never thought she'd ever be able to think of that phrase and have it be true.

She smiled up at him. He returned it and leaned down to press a kiss to her hair. She picked up his hand, moving her fingers to absently trace swirls on his palm.

"Does Hawk Moth know your identity?" She asked. "Is Adrien in danger too?"

"No," she heard him reply. "When I first met him I was wearing a mask and a baggy sweatshirt. Up until I got the costume he didn't even know what color my hair was." He chuckled. "Adrien is completely fine. Chat Noir, is not. But don't worry, they may be after me, but they're still afraid of me."

She had seen up close to what Adrien was capable of in the leather suit. Even she had been scared of those claws when they first met. Well, when she first met 'Chat Noir'. She didn't blame his enemies for being afraid of him.

"What's Chat going to do now?" Marinette inquired curiously. "Is he still going to steal stuff?"

"I don't know. I have all the money I could ever need, maybe I'll just use the suit to escape at night. You know, jump across buildings and that. Freedom is all I ever wanted."

"Jump across buildings? Won't you get bored?"

"I suppose so. But then I could just visit you." She felt his lips press against her hair again.

She closed her eyes, preparing herself for this next question. She had to slowly ease him into the plan to become a hero, she still believed it was possible. And now with all the criminals as his enemies? That just made the plan easier.

"Yes, but, wouldn't you rather be doing something? You must've gotten a thrill at stealing and fighting other criminals."

Adrien snickered. "Yeah. I'll never be able to describe the feeling I got when making out with money and jewelry and the like. Fighting other criminals was uncommon, but I'll admit I got a rush when it happened."

"You can still fight them you know." Okay, here it is. Just a little closer...

He laughed. "Yeah, if they try to catch me or something."

"Well...maybe you can do the catching." She braced herself.

Adrien paused. "What do you mean?"

Marinette took a breath. "Well, maybe you can catch them and...bring them to the police?" She
inwardly winced at the harsh rejection she was about to receive.

Instead, Adrien sighed. "Princess..."

She turned around so she was facing him. "C'mon, Adrien, think about it! You'll still get your freedom, and you can fight bad guys! You can be a hero. Besides," she raised her mouth to his ear teasingly, "I think heroes are sexier than criminals."

The designer smirked when she heard his sharp intake of breath. But he quickly got over it as he looked down at her with a grin. "I thought girls were into the whole 'bad boy' thing."

She shook her head with a coy smile. "Not me. I prefer a hero who defeats all the bad guys and can carry me off into the sunset without having to worry about the cops chasing us."

Adrien leaned back and let out a bark of laughter. She giggled in reaction.

He eventually sobered and sighed, running a free hand through his golden locks. "I don't know."

Well, it was better than a 'no'. "Think about it, at least?" She prompted.

"I'll think about it. For you." He rose her hand to his lips to seal the promise.

... 

That Monday, it was hard to not walk right up to Adrien and plant a kiss on his cheek in greeting. But she and Adrien had decided that they were going to 'build up' their feelings and then publicly date. Marinette could tell Alya that she and Chat broke up and that would be the end of it.

Still, she kept the ring on her silver chain clasped around her neck. As always, she kept it hidden in her shirt.

When she walked in the class she found Nino in her usual seat. She rose an eyebrow in silent question.

"Hey, girl!" Alya grinned. "Adrien had the idea for you and Nino to switch seats so we can be together more." She and her boyfriend exchanged smiles. She turned back to her best friend and frowned. "Do you mind? 'cause you can totally switch back-"

Marinette's eyes switched to Adrien, who sent her a subtle wink and smirk.

She returned her attention to Alya. "Sure, I'll switch with Nino! I don't mind."

"You sure? Because I'll move if you really want me to," Nino spoke but Marinette insisted that the switch was fine. She took her place next to Adrien and scooted closer to him.

"Nice idea," she whispered with a grin.

"Always full of them," he replied and chuckled.

The two of them sat close to the other and whispered to each other for the entire class. Thankfully Chloe was absent, so nothing could distract the pair. Alya grinned at the interaction, but it faltered when she remembered that Marinette was seeing Chat Noir. Maybe she'll pick Adrien after all? Who knows.

After class, Marinette clutched her books to her chest as she walked to her next class. Literature with Adrien was great but...also kind of funny. To pretend to have budding feelings for each other when
they were already secretly dating, it felt like a joke that only she and Adrien were in on. Was this what he felt like whenever they had talked about Chat Noir and he would comment on how scary he was?

She bit her lips to stifle her giggle. She clearly remembered a time when Nino and Adrien argued over the possibility of Chat Noir turning over a new leaf.

"You're not him, so you wouldn't know!"

"You're right, Nino. I wouldn't."

She snorted in amusement. She had no idea how Adrien could keep a straight face after that one. If she was him she would've burst out laughing.

Marinette shrieked in alarm as a hand latched itself onto her arm and pulled her into a dark and secluded room. Passing students who saw looked at the spot the girl previously occupied in confusion, then shrugged their shoulders and continued on their way.

Her heart went into overdrive in panic. Her kidnapper must've noticed because he eased his grip on her arms.

"Relax, Princess, it's me."

Adrien. She narrowed her eyes in the darkness, hoping she was looking into his own. "You scared me, you-mmph!"

Just like in her fantasy, she was silenced by his lips. Her annoyance evaporated and she closed her eyes in bliss, letting out a pleased sigh. Adrien made a muffled noise that sounded like laughter and continued kissing her.

She had to admit, she had daydreams about her and Adrien making out in a secluded area somewhere in the school plenty of times since she had fallen for him, but now that it was actually happening? Simply miraculous.

Her arms rose and wrapped around his head, her fingers starting to tangle themselves in that soft, golden hair she loved to touch. She felt Adrien pull out her hair ties and dig his fingers into her own raven locks.

Adrien pulled away and began trailing kisses down her throat.

"I've been waiting to do this for years," he mumbled in between kisses. "Do you know what it's like, wanting someone for so long and wanting nothing more than to pull them aside and kiss them senseless?"

Yes, she thought breathlessly, gasping as heat shot through her at his latest remark.

He chuckled and playfully nipped at her skin. Oops. Did she say that out loud?

She felt him smirk against her skin. "Yes, you did," he teased.

Damn it. It's his fault, making her forget her name and causing her to have no filter on her mouth. Why did he have to be so good at this?

He returned his mouth to hers and delved his tongue inside, entwining it with her own.

What was she annoyed about, again?
They continued for what felt like an eternity for her, before they reluctantly pulled away from each other.

She heard him inhale deeply to catch his breath. "Told you I'd take advantage of a janitor's closet," she heard him say cheekily.

"You could've warned me," she shot back, trying to regain her own breath.

"No, this way was more fun," he insisted, snickering. "Besides, how romantic is it when you already know about it?"

He had a point. If he had told her when he was planning on pulling her inside a janitor's closet, she would've been anticipating it and some of the spark would've been lost.

"What about class?" She questioned. There was no doubt they were extremely late.

She heard him chuckle, if she had to guess, she would say that he was grinning. It would've been nice if there was at least one light bulb in here.

"Chloe isn't the only one who can influence the principal. I got us two passes, saying we were in the nurse's office."

"Adrien!" Marinette squeaked, face heating in mortification. "Did you tell him we were going to be doing...this?!" She didn't exactly want Mr. Damocles to know about her secret rendezvous with Adrien, or her love life in general.

"Of course not," he scoffed. "I just asked for two passes, I didn't tell him what it was for. I filled out our names and that."

Marinette sighed in relief. "Thanks."

"A knight would never try to embarrass his princess," he reassured. "Her reputation and safety is his greatest priority." She felt his soft lips touch her forehead lovingly.

His hands shifted to her hair, when he began tugging on it.

"Adrien, what are you doing?"

"Fixing your hair," he replied as she felt him tie a hair tie on the newly-made pigtail. "I'm the one that ruined it, only fair that I fix it."

Marinette bit her lip to suppress the grin. He was such a sweetheart, she didn't deserve him.

He moved on to the other tail and when she was finished she cupped his face and guided his lips to meet hers.

"Thank you," she told him gratefully. "I'm lucky to have you."

"I tell myself the same thing about you." He planted another soft kiss on her forehead. "You should get going." She felt the pass slip into her hand.

She hesitated before nodding. She really didn't want to go, she wished she could just stay in this closet all day kissing Adrien. But she knew that would be impossible, their friends would come looking for them sooner or later.

Marinette felt for the doorknob and turned it, walking out of the closet. When she turned back, she
caught Adrien's sly grin and wink before the door closed. Taking a breath, she marched to her class, hoping no one would be suspicious of her. No, why would they be? She was clumsy, so the nurse's office was a perfect excuse.

Curious, she brought the pass to her sight. In loopy, cursive writing was her full name, along with the time she left the nurse's office. She had been to the nurse before and received passes from her, and she was surprised to see that Adrien's writing looked just like hers.

Although, should she really be surprised? Forgery is probably second nature to the city's number one lawbreaker.

She shyly walked in her class. The teacher narrowed her eyes at being interrupted, and questioned Marinette on why she was so late.

"I-I was at the nurse's office," she stammered. She always hated liars, partly because she was so bad at the art.

She timidly handed the pass to the teacher, who looked at it and nodded before throwing it away. "Please take your seat."

The young designer found her seat close to the back. After settling down, she felt someone's studious gaze on her. Slowly, she turned to lock eyes with the new student, Lila Rossi. The actress's eyes narrowed in what seemed like suspicion.

Marinette turned away, wondering why she was suspicious. She didn't know Marinette at all, why would she even bother with her?

Peering down, she noticed her shirt was rumpled...and Chat Noir's ring was on full display.

Suppressing a gasp, she grabbed it and shoved it back inside the safety of her shirt. Her blue orbs shifted to Lila, who had returned her attention to the lesson.

She bit her lip. Lila probably didn't believe that she was at the nurse's, she wouldn't know the significance of her ring. She couldn't, it was impossible. Unless she saw the paw print? No, she was too far away for her to notice it.

Right?
"So, I saw you and Adrien getting cozy in class. And then you guys had lunch together! Is there something going on that I should know about?" Alya grinned and wiggled her eyebrows.

It was after school, Marinette and Alya were standing next to the main school steps. Adrien and Nino had already left, leaving the best friends to their 'girl time'.

Marinette blushed, but managed to brush off her suggestion. "Me and Adrien? Psh! You know I'm seeing Chat Noir."

Alya's mouth dropped. "It's official?! And you didn't tell me? Does this mean you're completely over Adrien?"

Marinette bit her lip, knowing she'd have to say just the right words. "Yeah, um, we have been for awhile. But to tell the truth...no, never mind."

"What? What is it? You can't just start off like that and not tell me!" Alya demanded.

Marinette suppressed a smirk. She had Alya right where she wanted her. She frowned and heaved a dramatic sigh. "To tell the truth...I just don't know if it's going to last. He's a criminal, I'm a good girl. We're total opposites! Plus I don't think I'll ever be fully able to get over Adrien."

"But you said that you can make him into a hero," Alya protested, crossing her arms in front of her chest.

"I don't know, he's been very adamant that he doesn't want to be one. Oh Alya, I just don't know what to do!"

"You'll figure it out." Alya patted a comforting hand on the designer's shoulder. To Marinette's internal glee, Alya didn't have any clue that she was faking all this. "Who knows, maybe Adrien is the one for you."

Marinette sighed again. "I don't know. Plus I think me and Chat's relationship just...fizzled out. The spark is just gone, I guess I got used to him."

Good thing Adrien had already left, because she knew that if he heard that line, he would've made her regret it dearly. A blush began to rise on her cheeks on what kind of payback Adrien would have in mind for her, but she breathed and calmed down to dispel it.

"Got used to Chat Noir?" Alya's mouth dropped in shock. "How could you get used to him? Nino and I still have that spark, and we've been dating for two years!

Marinette smiled, hoping that Alya and Nino would be together for much longer than two years. They made a great pair.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know, but it's happened. I better get home, I'll see you tomorrow."

Alya shook her head. "Whatever, girl. See you."

...That night, Marinette couldn't stop smiling as she sketched a new blouse design. Granted, her pencil
strokes kept going where she didn't want them to go, but she couldn't have been happier.

She and Adrien were (secretly) dating, something she had wished for two years. She had planted the false information to Alya, so her gradual romance with Adrien would seem believable, and then they could publicly date.

Her gaze turned cloudy. They would be able to do all the couple stuff in public whenever she wanted. They could kiss, hold hands, cuddle...

She heaved a heavy, dream-like sigh at the possibilities.

Also, he might become a hero! Her dashing hero in shining leather would soon turn over a new leaf and help protect Paris instead of terrorizing it.

A small frown marred her features. She kind of wished she could go along with him and help save the city. Jump across buildings, with the moon at her back, feeling the wind through her hair...

She cast a tentative gaze to her closet, where her Ladybug costume was stored.

Maybe-

**THUD**

Marinette jumped at the sudden noise. Her gaze snapped to the trapdoor on her ceiling, half expecting for Chat to drop down on her bed and give her that Cheshire grin. But all she found was an empty bed.

Her eyebrows drew down, fully puzzled. He was never that loud when he visited her, he only made noise whenever he tapped on the glass panel of the trapdoor. She never heard him land on her balcony before, he was a master at silencing his footfalls.

So what the hell was that noise? Maybe he just wanted to scare her? It was a jerk move, but he proved to be a mischievous kitty.

Setting aside her sketchbook, she shifted her legs over the chaise and rose out of it. Clad in her sleepwear, she climbed up the ladder to her bed. When she got there, she looked outside hatch for any sign of the thief, but all she was met with was darkness and silence.

Gulping, she pushed open the door and ventured outside into the cool, night air. Shivering, she examined her surroundings.

No Adrien or Chat Noir to be found. Not a single trace.

She looked at her plants, looking for evidence that one of them fell, but they were all in the right place, not even touched. Her spool table was still upright, indicating that it hadn't fallen over.

So what caused the noise?

The blackette switched her gaze to her pink and white striped lounge chair, where she found a small piece of paper.

Curious, she walked closer and picked it up, gasping when she read the words.

**Seems like your little kitty wanted to play! If you want to get your cat out of the bag, come back to Akuma. We'll be waiting for you ;)**
A fox symbol was drawn beneath the seemingly innocent words.

"Volpina," Marinette whispered in astonishment.

The note dropped from her shaking fingers.

Adrien got kidnapped by Volpina. He was being held at Akuma, who knew what they were doing to him over there.

She took ragged breaths and pressed her hands to both sides of her head in a panic. What was she going to do? He could hold his own in a fight, but kidnappers generally didn't let their victims go to let them beat them up. There was no way he'd be able to escape.

Marinette's eyes darted around frantically, as if someone would leap out of the darkness and take her too. With another panicked breath, she raced inside back to the safety of her room, locking the hatch behind her.

She sat on her bed, staring at the opposing wall.

*We'll be waiting for you*

They were expecting her to go there and rescue him. She was just Marinette, she couldn't do anything.

But-

Her blue bell orbs gazed at the closet below.

-Ladybug can.

...

After slipping on the costume again, she frowned at her reflection as she put on the spotted mask. She thought she'd never put this on again, but desperate times call for desperate measures.

Wait. Wasn't she wishing before to join Chat Noir, leaping across rooftops in the night while performing heroic deeds? Could this be the start of that?

She shook her head. Now wasn't the time for heroic fantasies, she had a cat to save.

Good thing her parents were asleep. She tip-toed out of her room, down the stairs, and soon she was out of the bakery. She hoped any possible muggers would keep out of her way for tonight, hopefully the costume will repel them.

She ran down the many streets to get to Akuma, taking many back streets along the way to stay off the main street. She wished she had Chat's staff so she can extend it and propel herself on top a building. Or maybe something that can help her swing by the streets with ease, something like a yo-yo perhaps.

Luckily, no one bothered with her that night. Hell, she didn't even see any suspicious people. With empty lungs and tired legs, she arrived at the not-so-abandoned warehouse.

She wasn't surprised to find the front entrance left open. Not even a touch surprised when she smacked a hand on the hidden button, revealing the secret staircase in the floor.

Without wasting another second she dashed down the staircase, Adrien being the only thing on her
mind. How would she save him, exactly? She doubted a little sweet talking would do the job.

When she reached the end, she was met with an empty doorway. It was eerily dark and quiet, a stark contrast to the lit up club with the jazz music from the last time she was here.

Biting her lip, she walked inside. The stage was empty, tables abandoned of tablecloths and candles, bar empty of alcohol. The only light source being a couple lights scattered around the area, providing just enough light so you wouldn't trip over your own feet.

A fearful chill went up her spine. This must be what it's like to go into your school at night, only much more creepier.

But the worst part? Adrien was nowhere in sight.

She flinched, startled, when the sound of a microphone fuzzing echoed around the room.

"Ah, Ladybug. How nice of you to show up," a cold, masculine voice greeted.

Her eyes widened.

"Don't worry, Chat Noir is alright...for now. Be glad I spared his life so far, I don't take betrayal lightly."

"Hawk Moth," she gasped softly. Volpina must be working with him.

"You are correct. Such a smart girl you are, I'm never wrong when I sense a future criminal."

Future criminal? Her eyes narrowed.

"But I would much rather speak to you with this face-to-face. Come to the back left corner, you'll find a staircase. And then you will find me."
Chapter 22

When Ladybug reached the room, her eyes immediately took in the situation.

There was a man, dressed in a purple suit with a silver head mask on, clutching a purple staff. A smirking Volpina was standing beside Chat, who was tied to a chair with rope. Jackady and Mime stood in the background, with the former grinning madly and the latter peering at her with a stony expression.

Chat Noir picked his head up, blond strands were hanging in front of his eyes but she didn't miss the way they lit in fury. "What are you doing here?! Are you crazy?"

Her lips pursed, not at all appreciating his words or his snappy tone. "I'm here to save you, idiot!"

"I don't need saving. You should've stayed home!"

"Ah, ah, ah!" Hawk Moth cut in, chiding gently. "If she stayed home, then we never would have had the pleasure of meeting, since you stole her away last time."

Chat turned his head to him and hissed.

Hawk Moth ignored him and bowed to the lady in red. "I am Hawk Moth, the crime ruler of this city. It is an absolute pleasure to meet you, Miss Ladybug." His lips curled into a vicious smirk.

Ladybug tried not to let her fear show. "Alright, you got me here. Now, release Chat Noir!"

"Did you really think it would be that easy?" Jackady cackled. "You're so naive. But hey, you're a work in progress."

She rose an eyebrow beneath her mask. "A work in progress?" she echoed.

"He's right," Hawk Moth intervened. "I see potential in you, Ladybug. You could rise quickly to power."

Volpina scowled. "What about me? I'm the one that actually got the damn cat."

"You hit me from behind," Chat hissed angrily. "That wasn't a fair move."

"Oh, didn't you know, kitty?" The vixen grinned flirtatiously, leaning down closer to him. "All's fair in love and war."

Chat grimaced and leaned his head away. "Okay, kidnapping is one thing. But letting this bitch flirt with me? That's overkill, don't you think?"

Volpina clenched her teeth and growled before smacking him across the face, his head moving to the side from the impact. Ladybug's sapphire eyes flared when she eyed the red mark left on his skin.

"Do. Not. Touch. Him!" Ladybug screamed, taking a menacing step closer to the fox villain. Volpina narrowed her olive green eyes and matched the step.

"My, my, my, quite a temper, Ladybug." Hawk Moth grinned knowingly. "You can be frightening when you're angry."

That made the spotted girl stop, looking over at him with wary eyes. Volpina stopped advancing as
well.

"I have a proposition for you, Miss Ladybug."

Ladybug took a step back. "What kind of proposition?"

"Stop this!" Chat shouted to his former boss. "Leave her alone, she's innocent!"

Hawk Moth merely shrugged his shoulders. "A trait that can be remedied. Now, what was I saying? Oh, yes. Ladybug, how would you like to join me?"

"Never," she spat, blue bell eyes narrowing. "I will never become a criminal."

He continued on as if she didn't just refuse him. "But let me finish! Of course, you'll get a percentage of everything you steal. I'll also release Chat Noir and let you two become partners in crime. Now, isn't that just romantic?"

Chat hissed threateningly.

Ladybug cocked her head to the side, observing the crime lord. "A percentage, you say?"

Chat's eyes widened in fear. "Ladybug? What are you doing?"

She didn't answer him, keeping her eyes trained on Hawk Moth. He smirked at her, grey eyes twinkling in anticipation.

"Yes, of course you'll get a percentage of what you steal. It's only fair. Imagine how much you could buy. Why, you could get anything your little heart desires. And, if you accept my offer, I'll give you some gifts."

She rose an eyebrow. "Gifts?"

Hawk Moth's smirk never wavered when he snapped his fingers. The Mime walked over, giving a shoe box to his boss. He nodded in thanks and shooed the criminal away.

"Yes, gifts. I think they'll be very useful. Come closer and see."

Swallowing her nerves, she stepped closer to him, all the while avoiding a certain cat's incredulous eyes.

He opened the box to reveal a pair of ladybug printed earrings and...was that a yo-yo?

Ladybug shakily reached in and grabbed the earrings first, gazing at the studs in wonder. Why would he give her jewelry?

"The earrings are an accessory, a symbol of all the elite criminals. Like Chat's ring, Jackady's cards, Mime's clear weapons," he listed casually. "You'll need something too."

Ladybug's eyes flickered between the crime lord and the pretty earrings.

"Go on, put them on," he prompted in a light, teasing tone. "I'm sure they'll look wonderful on you."

Numbly, she lifted her hands to each earlobe, taking care to carefully slide each earring in and attach the push back in afterwards.

Hawk Moth circled around her like...well, a hawk. "Very, very nice," he observed. "And now, onto
the second gift."

He took out the red and black spotted yo-yo. "This isn't an ordinary yo-yo, my dear. The string can
stretch for meters, and is almost unbreakable. With this you'll be able to swing across the city with
ease instead of walking like I'm sure you did to get here. If the police show up to a crime, you can
swing away in the blink of an eye."

He handed it to her, and Ladybug took it. She held small thing in her palm. It looked like any other
yo-yo, and felt like one too.

"Also, it will come in handy for combat, like Chat Noir's staff. It helps him get to places, and it also
useful for fighting," Hawk Moth informed.

Speaking of Chat's staff, in the corner of her eye there it was, lying innocently on a table.

"Join me and this can be yours," Hawk Moth spoke smoothly. "I'll release Chat Noir, you get the yo-
yo and earrings, and a percentage of whatever you steal. Fair enough trade, don't you think?" He
extended his hand for her to shake.

"Ladybug," she heard Chat whisper in disbelief. Her eyes shifted to his hunched form, green eyes
sorrowful.

Ladybug cleared her throat and shook the man's hand. "You have yourself a deal...boss." She
smirked evilly.

He grinned. "I knew you wouldn't be able to turn it down, Miss Ladybug. Volpina, let the cat out of
the bag."

Volpina grumbled but did as she was told. Chat Noir stood when the ropes dropped, glaring daggers
at everyone in the room save Ladybug.

In the blink of an eye, Ladybug twirled her yo-yo and used it to to take hold of Chat's baton on the
table. Everyone gazed at her in confusion until she called for Chat, throwing his signature weapon in
the air.

Chat Noir's mouth twisted up in a smug grin as he leaped through the air and effortlessly caught it,
performing a backflip and landing next to his partner. He twirled the staff in his fingertips while
Ladybug spun the yo-yo at her side, wearing a similar grin to his own.

"What is the meaning of this?!" Hawk Moth bellowed angrily. Mime, Jackady, and Volpina
narrowed their eyes and shifted into fighting stances.

"Did you really think I'd become a criminal?" Ladybug scoffed. "For a crime lord, you're not that
smart."

Hawk Moth's teeth clenched in anger. "You'll regret betraying me."

The three criminals took a step forward.

Chat Noir gazed at the spotted heroine with a smirk. "Ready when you are, L.B."

She didn't have time to bask in the feeling of Chat turning his back on his criminal brethren. She
didn't have the time to wonder if he really picked the life of a hero. No, all she could focus on right
now, was defeating these people and escaping alive.
"Ready."

Chat's grin never wavered. "I love a good cat fight."

He charged at Jackady and Mime, letting Ladybug battle Volpina. When Ladybug swung her yo-yo at her, Volpina whipped out her flute and blocked the attack. Thinking quickly, she wrapped her new weapon's string around one of Volpina's ankles and yanked, causing the vixen villain to drop to the ground.

Ladybug jumped on top of her, straddling her to she wouldn't escape. She was able to nail a few punches before Volpina grabbed her fist, trying to inch it away from her face. The women's teeth gritted, both using all their strength; Ladybug to deliver another hit and Volpina to knock her off.

Seeing as how they were at a standstill, Ladybug leaped off her, grabbing the string of her yo-yo and twirling it by her side threateningly.

"You won't win, Volpina," she spoke. "Give up."

"Like I'm going to be beaten by a newbie," Volpina scoffed. She dove, Ladybug's eyes widened but she didn't have time to move out of the way. The vixen had her pinned to the ground, teeth revealed in a savage snarl.

"You little bitch," she seethed. "I don't know how you brainwashed Chat Noir into betraying us, but I'm sure your death will make him snap out of it."

Ladybug grunted, trying to remove her wrists from her attacker's hold.

Volpina took hold of her wrists in one hand, using her now free one to take out her flute that was strapped to her back. She split it in two, revealing a sharp dagger on the end.

Ladybug could feel sweat perspiring down her forehead in panic. She wiggled harder as the blade came closer.

"How fortunate that your suit is red," Volpina grinned. "This way, the blood will just blend in. Very fitting choice of fashion, Marinette."

Ladybug gasped. The brown hair, olive green eyes, the fact that she just came from Italy, and a particular incident in class after her fake excuse to the nurse.

"Lila?!"

"That's right, Lady Luck." The blade hovered dangerously close to her jawline. "Although you might not be so lucky now. I've waiting to decorate my knife with your blood."

Ladybug closed her eyes, waiting for the slice of pain, but it never came. Instead, the pressure from her wrists was gone and Volpina's weight was off her body. She opened her eyes just in time to see the fox sprawled out on the ground to the side, and see Chat Noir's staff retract.

Ladybug stood with a grin. "Thanks for the assist."

"Anytime, My Lady." He winked and gave a two-finger salute before turning back to the Mime who was just rising from the floor. Jackady, she noticed, was unconscious with three claw marks running down his face.

Ladybug returned her attention to her opponent, spinning her yo-yo at her side. "Let's finish this."
Volpina growled. "Gladly."

Yo-yo flew and met flute. This continued back and forth for awhile, with the girls slowly circling each other like lions.

Finally, Ladybug was able to wrap her weapon around the flute. She quickly pulled back before Volpina could untie it, the flute flew out of the surprised vixen's face and clattered uselessly to the floor behind the red heroine.

Not wasting another minute, Ladybug threw the yo-yo and let the string wrap around Volpina's ankle again. However, she bent down and grabbed the string, tugging violently, causing Ladybug to fall to the floor and skid closer to her.

Volpina dived and struck a punch to Ladybug's face, the action causing her to blink and look around dazedly.

"One punch is all it takes to defeat you?" Volpina taunted. "Pathetic."

Ladybug blinked again, shaking her head to clear it. When the next fist flew, Ladybug caught it in her hand. She used the other to deliver a punch to Volpina's face.

This continued, eventually the women rolled around on the floor, each trying to end up on top of the other to easily beat their opponent. At last, Ladybug pushed the Volpina off her, clutching her stomach and panting heavily. At least the criminal before her didn't look much better, what with a split lip and a bruising cheek.

Grunting, Ladybug lifted her leg and let it fly to Volpina's stomach. She cried out in pain and sunk to the floor. While her head was down, Ladybug brought out her yo-yo and swung it against her head. She was out cold before she hit the ground.

Ladybug breathed a sigh of relief. Turning around, she saw the Mime laying down next to Jackady, knocked out. Bleeding claw marks criss-crossed on his painted face, she could see small rivulets of blood on his neck, indicating Chat had grabbed him there.

As for Chat himself, he was leaning on his staff, breathing harshly but a small smile danced on his lips. His mask had a small tear in it, below his left eye, his lower lip was bleeding and a bruise was on his cheek. But other than that, he looked relatively fine.

"Good job, My Lady," Chat praised.

Ladybug smiled. "Good job, chaton."

He walked over to her and lifted a fist. "Pound it?"

She grinned and connected her fist with his. "Pound it."

Suddenly she gasped, looking wildly around the room. "Where's Hawk Moth?!"

Chat's eyebrows furrowed as he glanced around. "Coward ran away while we were distracted."

"We have to go get him!" Ladybug made to run away, but Chat grabbed her wrist to stop her.

"Neither of us are exactly fit to fight any more people today. We can find him another day."

"But."
"Another day," he repeated sternly.

She pouted and crossed her arms in front of her chest. "Fine."

Chat chuckled. "I had no idea you loved to fight so much. It's most unbecoming of a Lady."

When she turned to glare at him, prepared to tell him just where he could shove that opinion, she caught his teasing grin and mischievous eyes.

So she settled with a teasing grin of her own and playfully punched his arm. Afterwards, the two glanced down at the three unconscious criminals.

"Well, I think Christmas came early for the police this year," Chat drawled. He walked over to the knocked over chair that he previously occupied and grabbed the discarded rope from the floor. Catching on to his meaning, Ladybug picked up Volpina's feet and dragged her to the other two criminals.

She smirked and walked over to a desk, grabbing a marker and paper.

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A pounding of the door grabbed the attention of the cop on guard at the desk. It was past midnight, what could they possibly want? He yawned and took a sip of his coffee before sliding back his chair and trudging to the door. This had better not be a prank by some stupid teenagers.

His mouth dropped at the sight of the three bound criminals. Their heads were down and their bodies limp, indicating they weren't conscious. His eyes squinted as he noticed a piece of paper in between the coils of the rope. Curious, he grabbed it and opened it.

**Courtesy of Ladybug and Chat Noir. Merry (early) Christmas!**

Below it was a ladybug symbol accompanied by a paw print.

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Breaking News!

"Last night, Paris police were baffled when the city's two popular criminals, The Mime and Jackady, were wrapped up on their doorstep accompanied by Italy's famous thief, Volpina...who in actuality is the famous actress, Lila Rossi! The benefactors of this generous gift? Ladybug and Chat Noir! Who is this Ladybug? And has Chat Noir turned over a new leaf? Stay tuned-"

Marinette smiled as she clicked off the news video and turned away from her computer. Adrien was lounging on her chaise, who heard it all and offered her a lazy grin.

"So, is it true?" Marinette asked coyly, rising from her chair and walking to the chaise. She laid down next to him, the blond moved so she would have room and turned on his side, wrapping a protective arm around her waist. He picked up her hand and gave it a loving kiss.

"Is what true, my love?"

She bit her lip, holding back the grin that threatened to split her face at the nickname. Adrien smirked knowingly, gazing at the blush on her cheeks.

"Did Chat Noir really turn over a new leaf?"
He chuckled. "It would seem so, you know how the news knows all and is never wrong."

A frown tugged at the edges of her lips. Did he really want to be a hero, or was last night a one-time thing and tonight he'd be back on the streets, robbing various stores?

"Adrien?"

Emerald eyes opened, noticing the designer's gloomy expression. "Hey," he soothed. "It really is true. I-I'm going to be a hero."

Her sapphire eyes brightened at the declaration. "Really?"

A corner of his mouth tilted up. "Yeah. I don't need to steal, but I still want my freedom. Being a hero would let me have that freedom, and the best part is that I wouldn't have to worry about the police on my tail."

Marinette smiled and buried her nose into his shirt, inhaling the light and pleasing scent. "Thank you."

She felt his lips on her hair. "Anything for you, my Princess."

Without removing her head from his shoulder, she turned so she was looking up at her ceiling. She idly picked up his hand in the air, lacing her fingers with his.

"And now we can publicly date..." he murmured. She didn't miss the smile in his voice.

She nodded. "Since Alya believes that Ladybug and Chat Noir are now a thing, but good thing you, Adrien Agreste, saved me from heartbreak by asking me out." She giggled.

"Good thing. I could tell you were about to lose your mind with grief, so I took pity on you and asked you to the movies this weekend."

She sat up and turned, seeing her companion's smirk. "Is that all I am to you? A pity date?" She asked, making her voice sound sad and even letting out a sob for affect. "How dare you!"

Adrien laughed and gathered her in his arms. "Oh no, my Princess! You are so much more to me than that. You are my moon, my sun, and my stars. You are the horizon to my sky, the butter to my croissant, the marshmallow to my hot chocolate, the milk to my cookie, the ink to my pen, the charger to my phone-

Marinette laughed especially hard at that last one. She pulled back to see her boyfriend's impish expression.

"But most importantly," he said smoothly, leaning closer to her face. His eyes shifted from her lips to her eyes. "You are the Ladybug to my Chat Noir."

Marinette closed her eyes when he connected their lips in a soft, loving kiss.

Maybe Paris's (ex) top criminal wasn't such a bad guy, after all.

The End

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Bonus Scene:
"Ready for patrol, Princess?"

Marinette slipped on her mask. "Almost. Just give me a second." She walked to her vanity, smirking when she held the small, golden object.

Chat Noir walked down her stairs, meeting up with her. "Clock's a ticking, My Lady." He grinned. "If I was still a criminal, I could've robbed a store by now."

She rolled her eyes but walked up to him, meeting his bright emerald orbs and mischievous grin. She gave him a chaste peck on the lips.

When she pulled away he made a humming noise from the back of his throat, grinning and waggling his eyebrows. "I didn't know you were in that mood, My Lady. We can skip patrol and stay here for the night, I won't have any issues with it."

Ladybug huffed with an annoyed groan, but she smiled anyway. "Don't get your hopes up, Chaton. We're still going, but before I give you a gift."

He rose an eyebrow in question, but both of them lifted when she revealed the small object in her palm.

"A bell?"

"Yep," she affirmed with a grin. "Since you're a tamed cat now, I figured it was time to put a bell on you."

He laughed and shook his head. "Are you serious?"

"Come on," she goaded. "It'll complete the look! Please?"

He rolled his eyes. "Anything for you, My Lady."

She squealed and unlocked the clasp to attach the bell to his zipper. When she was done she hit it with a finger to make it let out a soft jingle. "Perfect!"

Chat walked over to her vanity mirror. He tilted his head as he observed the new addition to his outfit. At last, a small smile lifted his lips.

"Huh. You're right, it does complete the look." He gave it an experimental tap, letting the bell chime again. "I like it."

"So do I," she agreed, coming behind him and wrapping her arms around him in a hug. "Do you want your ring back? I mean, you've always had it before."

He shook his head with a fond smile. "Nah. You can keep it, My Lady. I'm still yours." He bent down to envelop his lips over hers.

When he pulled away, he gazed down at her with an alluring smirk. "I'm still up for skipping patrol, you know..."

Ladybug laughed and swatted him on the arm. "Nice try, kitty. Now let's go."

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