

It's Complicated - Alternate Lukanette Ending

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It's Complicated - Alternate Lukanette Ending

by [NerdyPanda3126](#)

Summary

How my fic "It's Complicated" would've ended if I had gone for the Lukanette endgame.

Notes

This picks up after Chapter 7: Seam Ripper of [It's Complicated](#)

Frayed Edges

When he knocks on her window, Marinette's head pops up. She seems flustered, and he watches as she scurries around, picking up various objects off the floor and shoving them in the chest in the corner of her room. She shuts the lid on it before she walks back over to let him in. As he steps inside, he notices right away that something is different.

Marinette is steadfastly avoiding his eyes. She's never avoided Chat's eyes before. She shuts the window behind him and slips past him to sit in her desk chair. That's when he notices that Luka's hoodie is draped over the back of the chair behind her. Luka let her wear it home. Gave it to her, probably. His teeth are instantly on edge again. He falls into his feline crouch. Why did he come here, anyways?

Because she's his friend and he's worried about her. Because he still doesn't know if she saw him transform or not. Because if she did see him, then he has to tell Ladybug that he screwed up and Marinette is in danger.

She's brought her heels up onto the chair and wrapped her arms around her knees. Is she hiding from him?

"What's wrong, Chat?"

How is he supposed to answer that? Marinette doesn't know that he's been trying to figure that out for himself all night. Between Kagami and Marinette and Ladybug, he can't seem to say or do anything right tonight. But there is something bothering him. And she knows it. It would be pointless to try to misdirect her. Just take a deep breath and ask.

"I was wondering if you... if you know who I am. You know, under the mask."

She pales and looks away. That's not a good sign. He can feel his tail flicking behind him impatiently. It seems to take forever, but Marinette gathers herself and hides her forehead into her knees.

"Yes," she whispers, "yes, I know who you are, Adrien."

For some reason, his heart lifts knowing that he doesn't have to hide anymore. But that also means that whatever issue Marinette has with Adrien, he *can't* hide behind the mask anymore. She's not looking at him, and he's fully suited up, but he feels exposed. He drops to the floor to cross his legs.

"Plagg, claws in."

The green light washes over them both. When Plagg appears, he looks between Adrien and Marinette, horrified.

"It's okay, Plagg. She knows." He means for his words to be comforting, but Plagg's eyes widen farther still. Marinette is surprisingly calm at his appearance. She's uncurled from her

ball on the chair and she's holding her hand out for Plagg. Even more surprising, Plagg flies into her hand and perches like he's known Marinette forever. Like they've met before.

"It really is okay, Plagg. I've been talking with Tikki and... I think it's time," she says.

"Tikki?" Adrien asks. "But Tikki is Ladybug's kwami. How do you know-"

Marinette winces and that's all Adrien needs to connect all the dots.

"I never asked how you knew it was me." His voice sounds hollow. Ladybug is Marinette. Marinette is Ladybug. The events of the night start to click into place in his head. That explains a lot of what he's been feeling all night long. He's been jealous of Luka. Because of the attention Luka's been getting from Marinette.

Because he's in love with Marinette.

"I never showed Chat the finished jacket." She gives Plagg a small pat then points with her head to where Tikki is. He floats away to follow her direction. "And Adrien was the only one missing from the group."

"Besides you."

Her cheeks flush. "Besides me."

He takes a moment to absorb this. She's been right behind him. The entire time. His heart starts hammering in his chest. Does that mean the other boy she's been in love with is Luka? His eyes flick again to the hoodie hanging off her chair. It certainly seems like they've gotten close. His throat starts to feel tight again.

"So, what now?" He can't keep the waver out of his voice. He clears his throat.

"Now... I have to tell you something."

"Is this about what happened earlier?"

She nods and he can feel his heart sink. This doesn't seem like good news.

"Bunnix asked me not to tell you. But she also said there's a time for everything and... I think it might be time. Time to have no more secrets."

"Bunnix?" He blinks up at her. What does Bunnix have to do with any of this?

"I don't know much about it, really. She dragged me to the future and just told me to fix it."

"Fix what? What are you talking about?"

She takes a deep breath and avoids his eyes. "Chat Noir was akumatized."

Her words feel like a wave that crashes on top of him and pins him to a rocky shore. They seem to echo in his head. Akumatized. That's the one thing. The one thing he never wanted to

happen. The whole reason they kept their identities secret. What if he told Hawkmoth everything? What if Ladybug had gotten hurt because of him? The thought stabs into him until he feels like he can't breathe anymore.

"Did I hurt you?" He hears the words leave his mouth. He doesn't want to hear the answer, but he has to. He has to know.

She pulls her eyes back to him and they're brimming with tears. She doesn't even have to say it. Please don't say it.

A slow nod.

His head falls forward into his hands. Whatever else he did doesn't matter. He hurt Ladybug. The love of his life, his partner, his best friend. No wonder she panicked when she met him earlier. No wonder she ran to Luka as soon as she found out. No wonder.

He feels Marinette's cool hands over his on the sides of his head.

"It's not your fault, Chaton. It's Hawkmoth's."

"Why?"

"Why what?"

"Why was I akumatized? What happened?" His voice is gruff, it doesn't even sound like him.

Marinette hesitates. He manages to pull his head up and she's kneeling across from him, reaching out to him, holding him. But she still feels so far away. Her thoughts are back in whatever timeline, whatever damage, he caused.

"Like I said, I don't know much about it." She's hedging. She's hiding something.

"Please tell me."

She pulls his hands away from his face to hold them in hers. She takes a deep breath and lets it out as a sigh. "All I know is you wanted the Miraculous to fix everything. To put things back the way they were." She raises her eyes up to meet his. "So we could be in love again."

"Again."

She nods. "You said I broke your heart. You said..." she takes another long pause and he holds his breath. "You said it was our love that destroyed everything."

Another wave crashes over him. This. This whole night. Has been a nightmare. One after the other. And now he knows why his question made Ladybug react earlier. He knows her answer. He knows her like the back of his hand and he knows how her mind works. His thoughts are spinning, chasing hers, looking for any way out, any hope of surfacing. He pulls away from her to stand and pace, hoping that moving his feet will give him a way to shake off the buzzing in his head.

Finally, he stops. He's arrived at the only conclusion. The same conclusion she must've reached. There isn't any other way.

"Which means the answer to my question is, 'for the sake of everything, we can't be in love.'"

She nods. The sadness in her eyes is enough to make his heart break. She had tried to tell him before.

I can't be in love with you Chat Noir, you know that.

It's not even an issue of if she does love him or not at this point. She can't. It's just the logical conclusion. It makes sense. But he can't help it. He still wants to know. If they weren't superheroes, if the fate of the world weren't at stake, if they were just two people. Would she have loved him? Or has Luka always been her target? He picks the hoodie up off the back of her chair and offers it to her.

"So, Luka? He's the other boy?"

She blushes before she takes the hoodie from him and holds it close to her, digging her fingers into the fabric. "What makes you think that?"

He shrugs, like it doesn't matter to him either way, but his heart is in his throat. "You two seem close."

She nods, thoughtful, then her blush intensifies until her entire face is red. As he waits for her answer, every second passing feels like it's a year being taken off his life. The pressure in his chest builds. If she would just say something. Relieve him of this torture. Is it Luka or not?

The wind gusts against her window, and she turns her head to look outside. He follows her gaze. It's a beautiful night, if just a bit cold. He feels the pull towards the rooftops. He wants to run. Like he always wants to run when he's thinking too much. Marinette's room suddenly feels too small, too closed in. He wants to keep talking to her. But he also needs to be out of this room.

"Do you want to take a walk? I feel like I need some air," he offers.

She turns back to him and nods, then flips the hoodie over her shoulders and pushes her arms through the sleeves, pulling them down over the heels of her hands like he'd seen her do before. He tries to ignore the way his jaw is clenching again.

She looks up at him expectantly. "Lead the way, Chat Noir."

Separated Threads

Chapter Summary

Marinette answers Adrien's question and discovers her feelings have changed.

Chat sets her down near the Pont des Arts and she sits on the ledge to wait while he finds a spot to detransform. He'll loop back around and join her again when he's sure he wasn't followed. She had wondered what it would feel like to be carried by Chat, knowing he's Adrien, but it felt like it always did when Chat carried her. She trusts him. That hasn't changed now that she knows who's under the mask. She could feel his heart hammering, though. Of course, Chat is in love with Ladybug, and knowing she's Ladybug probably makes a difference to him.

While he's away, his question from before bounces back to her.

So, Luka? He's the other boy?

She pulls Luka's hoodie tighter around herself. She knows Adrien will want an answer. As long as they're getting everything out in the open, she might as well confess. But when she thinks about telling him she's been in love with him, for some reason her heart doesn't flutter like it normally does. Of course he's Adrien, and he's still kind, and smart, and sweet, and handsome. And now he's also Chat. Which means he's goofy, and loyal, and trustworthy. She talks to him all the time. He's her best friend. All that makes telling him so much easier.

But Luka. That's a different story. When she thinks of him, a warmth washes through her that has nothing to do with his jacket. She feels grounded when she's around him. Even when she's not around him. Talking to Luka has always been easy, no matter the subject. She remembers how she felt when he held her earlier tonight. It just felt right. Like that's where she belongs.

She hears Adrien step up behind her and she stands, brushing off the seat of her pants. When she turns to face him, he has his hands stuck in his pockets. He seems about as reluctant to start this conversation as she is. He inclines his head towards the path, and she nods, falling into step with him easily.

They're both quiet, lost in their own thoughts, processing the night's events. She can feel the tension rolling off of Adrien. He's waiting for her to start, to take the lead.

She glances over at him. "It wasn't Luka, you know. The boy I was in love with."

"Nathaniel, then? He took you on that date before." His tone is light, but strained. Like he's trying to not get his hopes up.

“As an akuma, remember? No, it’s not Nathaniel.”

“Nino?” He’s teasing now.

She bumps his shoulder lightly with hers and he bumps back. “Guess again.”

He stops and tugs on her arm to get her to stop with him. When she does, and turns to face him, she can see the hope starting to light in his eyes again.

“Marinette, who was it?”

No flutters. Not even one. And she hasn’t stammered this whole time. That’s different. She tugs at the sleeves of Luka’s hoodie. Maybe having this little piece of Luka is helping her get through this. Keeping her calm. Deep breath. Here goes. “I fell in love with a boy who gave me his umbrella so I wouldn’t have to walk home in the rain.”

His eyes widen and he starts to smile. “Me.”

She nods. His smile slips when he notices that she doesn’t seem as happy as he is. His brow furrows as he starts to understand. “So we’re back to square one, then.”

Another nod and she turns to start walking again. After a few paces, he catches up with her. There’s another pause between them. She can practically feel the gears of his mind turning.

“We could try again. To be together,” he suggests softly. “If you want to. Maybe something’s different this time.”

She bites the inside of her lip while she thinks. It’s really not that simple anymore. She’ll have to tread carefully here. “It’s dangerous enough to keep our Miraculous when we know each others’ identities.”

He scuffs his toe against the pavement on the next step. “Hawkmoth.” He spits the name out like a curse. She nods in agreement.

A silence falls between them. Their footsteps echo off the pavement. The river beside them splashes quietly against the embankment.

“What about...after Hawkmoth?” he asks hesitantly. “If we can’t be akumatized anymore, then there’s no reason we couldn’t be together, right?”

She sighs. “But we don’t know when that will be.” She thinks briefly about Master Fu, waiting until it was safe to be together with the one he loved. A lifetime. “You really want to put your life on hold? To wait to be together?”

“If it’s to be with you, yes. Absolutely.” His voice rings with certainty.

The wind blows through her hair and she clutches Luka’s hoodie tighter around herself. The problem isn’t that she doesn’t love Adrien. She does, she always has, but now that she thinks about it, she doesn’t really know why. It just was. And it’s still there, but it’s softened somehow. Tempered.

The problem is there's too many problems. Too many obstacles. She could spend her life waiting for Adrien, waiting for the right moment to be together, waiting until it's safe. And that could be a month from now, or maybe it could be fifty years. There's no way of knowing.

She thinks again about Luka's soft voice, the way he isn't afraid of her emotions, the way he talks to her without even saying anything. She already feels safe with him. She already feels like she doesn't have to hide from him, or have any secrets. He feels like home. Her heart lifts at the thought of seeing him again. She feels the heat rise to her face. She wants to see him again.

"I don't," she whispers.

"You don't what?"

"I don't want to put things on hold." She didn't notice when she stopped walking. Adrien stops a few paces ahead and doubles back to stand in front of her.

"But I thought you said...?" His brow furrows as he misunderstands her meaning.

She fidgets with the hem of her sleeve, rubbing the fabric between her thumb and forefinger. It's still a little damp from her outburst earlier. "Let's say we defeat Hawkmoth. And it takes a month, or a year, or however long it takes. Then there's still Mayura to deal with. Let's say we defeat her, too, but it takes however long it takes. Then some new Hawkmoth comes along and we have to beat them, too."

She pauses to take a deep breath, and she can see that he's still not quite getting it. He's still so sure in his belief that if they just love each other, things will turn out alright. But that's not the case and she knows it.

"There's always going to be something keeping us apart. There's always going to be some threat to Paris, and some way to use us against each other."

He shoves his hands in his pockets again and looks away. "So what are you saying?"

"I don't want to try to wait until we can be together." She bites her lip. The next part is going to hurt them both. "I think it's better if we...stay partners."

He hangs his head and scuffs the bottom of his shoe against the pavement repeatedly as he thinks. "You mean to say. As long as we're the saviors of Paris, we'll never be together." When he looks up again, there's a hint of anger wavering in his eyes. "Then let's just stop being superheroes."

She huffs in frustration. "It's not that simple, Adrien."

"But it can be."

"Even if I stop being Ladybug, I still have a responsibility to the kwamis. And before you say it, if I give up being the Guardian, my memory gets wiped like Master Fu's. In case you

forgot that little detail.” Her tone is sharper than she intended. He just wants to give up? How could he even think that?

“So, what, we just give up?” He’s accusing her now. The echo of her own thoughts strikes a chord in her.

“No. We try something new.”

“Something new?” The pain in his voice is barely controlled. “Or someone.”

She meets his eyes as evenly as she can. She can’t help the flush that spreads across her face.

Her blush seems to be a confirmation for him. His jaw starts working with something he wants to say, but he’s biting it back. He turns to take a few steps away and clasps his hands around his head. She hears him take a few deep breaths to get himself back under control.

"So that's where Luka comes in." He's not really speaking to her. His words are directed at the stars, but they still fall like daggers in her heart.

“I was already trying to let you go, Adrien. I thought you were happy with Kagami. I thought you liked her.”

He sighs and drops his arms. “I do like Kagami.”

“Then I don’t really see the problem.”

He turns to face her again, and she knows she’s said something wrong. His eyes are glistening with unshed tears. “Kagami told me to talk to you.”

“When?”

“Tonight, when I walked her home.” He scoffs, more at himself it seems, then at anything else. “Even she could see what I couldn’t.”

She doesn’t know how to respond. There seems to be more to his thought, and she waits for him to work it out. When he walks back towards her, he takes her hands in his.

“Even she could see I’m in love with you, Marinette.”

Her words stick in her throat. Her heart feels like it tears in two. A part of her will always love Adrien. He’s her partner. They’ve been through so much together. But she’s not in love with him anymore. She can’t explain it, even if she tried. Even now, as Adrien’s face falls at her lack of response, as she can feel the rift that’s been created between her and her partner, all she wants is to dive into Luka’s arms and bury her face in his shoulder.

“I’m willing to wait for you. As long as it takes,” he continues. When she still doesn’t respond, he smiles, but it doesn’t reach his eyes. He brings one of her hands to his lips and presses a light kiss to the back of her hand before he steps away.

All she can do is watch as he turns to walk back the way they came.

She doesn't know how much time passes as she stands in a daze. The wind gusts again, bringing her back to herself, and making her shiver. She can't go home right now. If she goes back to her room, all she'll do is stare at the ceiling and think about Adrien and doubt her choice.

As she looks around, she notices the path they had taken. If she walks just a little further, she'll be at the houseboat. She doesn't even stop to think about it. Her feet start to follow the pull of her heart.

A Fresh Start

Chapter Summary

Luka wasn't expecting to see Marinette again tonight, but now that she's here, he can't help but wonder why.

Luka strips off the jacket Marinette made for him and lays it across the back of the couch before he goes to the kitchen to check the fridge for something to eat. The gang had stayed behind for a while after the band was done playing. Marinette left pretty quickly; not surprising with how much she had on her mind. Alya and Nino were the last to leave, and Luka had just left Juleka and Rose to their stargazing.

With a frustrated sigh, he closes the fridge door a little harder than necessary. He should eat something. It's been a long night. He leans against the fridge and rests his forehead on his arm. A long night.

What an understatement. Marinette had almost kissed him tonight. He had seen the idea flash across her face when he helped her up. It would've been so easy to let her.

But it wouldn't have been real. She just wanted a distraction. A way to run away from her feelings. And he couldn't let her do that to herself. He knocks his head gently against his arm. It had been like fighting gravity to step away from her. He's still not entirely sure it was the right choice.

He turns to look back across the room, to the jacket on the back of the couch. His eye goes straight to the glint of gold on the left side of the lining. It's like a magnet. He can't help but follow the pull.

Marinette's signature in gold thread is right over the warmth of where his heart has been beating all night. He hadn't missed that detail. He traces it lightly with his fingertips before the ice shards in his heart start to cut too much. He's not ready to fold the jacket away, yet. But he also can't pretend anymore.

She isn't going to choose him. He's known that since the ice rink. But damn his foolish heart, he had allowed himself to hope tonight. When she had shown up with this beautiful piece of art. Made with such care. For him. A Marinette original. He had hoped it was her way of telling him...

With a groan, he flops backwards over the couch. His back hits the cushions and he lets his legs dangle. He sighs and leans his head back until the room is upside down. Deep breaths, Luka. Ladybug and Chat Noir are a matched pair. Partners. It doesn't come as any sort of surprise, then, that Marinette belongs with Adrien. It's just the facts.

Even through his deep breathing, he can feel the jealousy boiling in his stomach. Adrien doesn't deserve her. If he hasn't picked up on her attraction by now, then he's the most oblivious blond in the universe. Everyone else knows. Or maybe he's intentionally pushing her away. Either way, it's been causing Marinette so much pain.

His head is starting to pound in time to his heartbeat. He rights himself on the couch and pulls his guitar into his lap. More for comfort than anything else. He doesn't feel much like playing. He strums the strings absent-mindedly, just to let the vibrations echo through his chest.

He needs to let this go. No one really deserves Marinette. Whoever she decides to give her heart to, it's truly a gift, and it's something to treasure. Hopefully Adrien knows that, too. He takes a deep breath and holds it before letting it out slowly, imagining the jealousy and the black pain swirling around his heart leaving him with the breath.

He'll be okay. Maybe not right now. But eventually.

He hears a light step behind him on the stairs, but he doesn't turn around. Juleka knows when he needs space. She'll probably head off to her room, or maybe just sit with him.

The footsteps start shifting from side to side instead. His fingers automatically start to play Marinette's song, finding the familiar notes with ease. That can't be right. Marinette left a while ago. He told her to talk to Adrien. If she did, then she wouldn't be here. If she didn't, he'll have to tell her to go again. But he doesn't know if he has the strength for that.

He forces himself to stop playing, flattening his fingers over the fretboard. It can't be her. He's been drunk on hope all night. He hasn't eaten, and he's exhausted. He's probably just hearing things. Or maybe Juleka needs to talk to him after all.

He dares to turn towards the stairs. Marinette. She *is* here. And she's still wearing his hoodie. He gulps down another draft of hope. It doesn't mean anything. It's cold out. He told her to bring it back later. It is later. Although if she gives it back now she'll still have to get home. Something isn't adding up.

She's blushing under his scrutiny. He's been staring for too long. He blinks and looks away before he moves the guitar off his lap to stand and offer her a seat. She takes a hesitant step forward. Towards him. Her eyes catch on the jacket that's on the back of the couch, and she moves to touch her fingers to the embroidery, just like he had done moments before.

Talk. Say something. Don't just stare and wait for her to start the conversation. He clears his throat.

"I didn't expect to see you here," he manages to say, unintentionally betraying his thoughts. Maybe she didn't catch it. The nervous trill that runs through his head says otherwise.

"I didn't really expect to be here."

"Is everything okay?"

She sighs heavily. "I talked with Adrien." She brings her eyes up to meet his. Like two still ponds. "I told him everything." She's calm. She's made her decision, then.

And she's here. With him. He can't help the little balloon that it feels like his heart has jumped on. He pauses to gather himself. It still doesn't mean she's here for him. She could be here to break the news to him. Stop assuming. Let her talk.

"How'd it go?"

Her mood shifts sideways and becomes thoughtful, melancholy. His fingers twitch towards his guitar on the couch. Her emotions are always so complex, always swirling around, and always right there on the surface. Music helps him tease them apart. Separate his own feelings from hers from everyone else's.

"He needs some time," she finally says, her brow furrowing as she seems to be very interested in one of the seams of his jacket. "He'll be okay, though."

The balloon in his chest keeps inflating. It's making it hard to breathe.

"I think I knew. When I put this here." She's tracing her signature. "I could've put it in the sleeve. Or around the hem. Inside one of the pockets, maybe."

"Why did you put it there?"

She levels him with a steady gaze. It's enough to take his knees out from under him. The only thing keeping him standing is the buoy inside him. She looks back down and fidgets with the fabric. Maybe it wasn't fair for him to put her on the spot like that. It's been a rough night for everyone involved. He wills himself to move.

He barely makes it a step forward before his knees really do give out on him. He kneels on the couch cushions, facing her, and covers her hands with his to stop her fidgeting. Hopefully she doesn't notice that his hands are shaking.

"You don't have to answer that."

Her brow furrows again. "I do, though, don't I?"

He hesitates. He wants to know. But he doesn't want her to feel pressured. But she's the one who brought it up in the first place. Patience. Give her a minute. Let her think. If she wants to explain she will.

She fiddles with her fingers underneath his hands. "I put it there so when you wore this... I'd be close to your heart." Her eyes flick up to his, hesitant, unsure.

He blinks at her. Her words bounce around inside him and fill him with warmth. Does that mean...? No, it can't possibly. It's too good to be true. But what else could it mean? He should say something. She's waiting for him to say something, but he just feels like he's misfiring on all cylinders. His hands twitch around hers. He doesn't have the words for everything he wants to say right now. Guitar. Where's his guitar?

He turns his head to look for it, and he can feel Marinette deflate next to him. No, he's not rejecting her, that's not... that's not what he means at all. He turns back and threads his hands through hers, squeezing them gently. She smiles softly, relieved. Even when he doesn't say anything, she always seems to know what he means. Not many people get him like that.

He gives one of her hands a gentle tug to the side and she follows wordlessly, moving around the couch to be in front of him. Their hands stay linked, and he uses the strength she's given him to pull himself up.

It feels like he's getting a Second Chance. A chance to fix the mistakes of the night and move forward. He's standing here with her now, in the same spot as before, and she has the same look on her face. Looking up at him like he's all she can see. A gentle flow of tears starts to slip down her cheeks. She's not hiding them now, though. She's trusting him with them. He can feel the emotions rolling off of her in quick succession. Relief, doubt, heartbreak, hope, all whirling around her. Spiraling. He reaches up to wipe her cheeks with his thumbs, cradling her head between his hands.

I've got you, he wants to say, it's okay.

Her reaction to his touch is instant. It's the same feeling as the air after a sudden storm. Lighter. Easier to breathe. Clear. She sighs and leans into his hand, closing her eyes. He can practically feel the weight lift off her shoulders. Her doubt, her indecision. It dissipates like rain falling on hot pavement.

She moves forward and wraps her arms around him tightly, burying her face in his shoulder.

His breath catches in his throat. She chose him. He knows it like he knows which note comes next in her song. If he was in danger of falling before, now he's in danger of floating. Floating right through the ceiling and drifting off into the night. She chose him. He holds her to him, one hand on the back of her head, his arm wrapped around the small of her back. Marinette chose him.

He leans down to set his cheek on top of her head, squeezing her just a bit tighter to him.

His stomach chooses this moment to growl ferociously. She breaks apart from him, at once so apologetic and so protective and so Marinette it makes him chuckle.

"When was the last time you ate?"

"Sometime this morning, I think."

"Luka..."

Another chuckle. "I'm not hungry." It's the truth. He's so full of light, he's surprised it isn't beaming out of his fingertips. Hunger is the farthest thing from his mind. She looks around, and seems to notice for the first time that they're alone below deck. Her cheeks start to tinge pink.

"Maybe I should...go?"

"It is late," he agrees easily.

She fiddles with the zipper at the bottom of his hoodie. "Do you mind if I hang onto this?"

The breath is knocked out of him again. God, the thought of Marinette wearing his hoodie, all the time, announcing to everyone that she's chosen him. That she's with him. He nods enthusiastically, his body responding before his brain can catch up with words.

"Keep it," he finally chokes out. "It's yours." He's not talking about the hoodie, anymore. *I'm yours*, he means to say.

She smiles shyly as she catches his meaning. "Can I have one more thing?"

"Anything." Heart, body, soul, whatever she wants.

She steps up to him again and laces her fingers through his. When she looks up at him, he sees the question on her face. *Can I kiss you?*

He nods in response, and tightens his hand around hers. He feels her push up onto her toes, and then his eyes flutter shut as he leans down to meet her.

Her lips touch his shyly at first, featherlight. She pulls away, then seems to rethink it, and presses her lips quickly and firmly against his.

Kissing Marinette is an explosion of euphony in his head. Every instrument playing together, every chord perfectly balanced, crescendoing up to a peak of sound.

He can't help but smile as he tilts his head to deepen the kiss. He brings a hand up to cup her cheek, digging his fingers into her hair. He can't even be sorry that he's mussing up her pigtails as the fine strands slip through his fingers. She throws her arms around his neck and ruffles a hand through his hair. A small moan escapes him from somewhere deep in his chest.

He wrenches himself away from her kiss to press his forehead against hers. His breathing is ragged. He inhales deeply to try to even it out, only for the scent of cinnamon and sugar to fill his head instead.

"It's late," he murmurs against her lips.

She nods. "I should go."

He fights against gravity for the second time tonight to take a step back from her, but this time he twines his fingers through hers.

"I'll walk you out."

As they emerge from below deck, Juleka and Rose are sitting on the stage, watching them. Rose squeals and leans back on Juleka's shoulder, and Juleka smirks at him. He feels the heat rise to his face, but he can't help grinning back at them like a mad fool. Marinette hasn't let go of his hand. That's really all he cares about.

He helps her down the stairs and stands with her on the bank of the river. She swings their hands lightly beside them and when she looks up at him, he swears the entire sky of stars is sparkling in her eyes.

He leans down to press a chaste kiss to her cheek. "Get home safe," he whispers in her ear. He can feel the heat of her blush under his lips. When he straightens up, she takes a step back, then another, keeping their hands linked as she pulls away.

When her fingers slip past his, she takes a few more steps backwards, keeping her eyes locked on his. He smiles and nods. *I'll be here*. She gives him one last smile before she turns to keep walking.

He waits until he sees Ladybug yoyoing over the rooftops. And even when she's gone, he keeps his face turned towards the stars. A new melody starts ringing through his head, clear and pure like the blue of Marinette's eyes, bright like the stars tonight, as light and buoyant as his heart.

He has a new song to write.

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