

## Soyez sérieuse / The Anniversary

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# Soyez sérieuse / The Anniversary

by [Bailey41](#)

## Summary

*“The sublime grants pure feeling.”*

—Goethe, on describing the sight of the alps, in a 1778 letter to Charlotte von Stein.

A short tale of transitions,  
told in fragments:  
Between object and subject.  
Between regarding and being observed.  
Between thinking and feeling.  
Between listening and being heard.

*“vous avez rêvé de moi?,” ou “vous avais rêvé de moi?”* Between the present indicative and the imperfect indicative.

Or if you like, the change from minor to major key in Vivaldi’s “Summer: III. Presto,” that plucky violin solo in the middle that has Héloïse smiling triumphantly through her tears.

But as this is a happy Noémie Merlant x Adèle Haenel AU, the heavy notes in G Minor that resume at the end of that piece don’t ever come back.

Same continuity as my other Noémie x Adèle AU [Chanmé](#)

## Notes

AU. The principal actors from *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu* / *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, in a relationship. Paris, a summer night or two in Adèle Haenel's apartment in the 10ème. They are celebrating an unspecified anniversary, one that allows for breathy declarations, lots of looking back (!) and stuff. Lots of *baise-tois* too as these are \*mad normal\* modern French women. There's a lot of the Adèle attitude from the *120 BPM* era.

I make an oblique reference to the green, silk *robe à la française* Héloïse wore. That garment, a staple of the late 18th-century, was distinguished by its sack shape, and the wide pleats in the back that streamed from its square nape. Alber Elbaz referenced it a lot, and Adèle wears a Lanvin dress by him in this fic.

Also, I can’t help that Goethe, Marianne and Héloïse would have all been the same age in the 1770s ☺



“Done.”

Adèle half-mutters the word as she finishes replacing the last of the cooking pots in the cabinet beneath the kitchen counter.

She pushes the blue dutch oven further in, gently closes the door, and with a firm grasp on the lip of the marble top with her left hand, she springs erect from her crouch. She swivels in the direction of the too-large dining table.

Just in time to see Noémie rest her empty wine glass. With a grimace, she’s dabbing intently at the dried spatter of gravy on the front of her dress with a spit-moistened napkin.

The stain had gone through the taffeta and onto the material underneath, and while not particularly salient against the charcoal and dark green of the silk placket, it is visible, and is causing the wearer a lot of consternation.

Adèle raises her left eyebrow to the seated woman, and she dutifully scrunches her nose in acknowledgment.

The main part of the meal ended more than two hours before. The dull, rusty streak would have passed without any mention had Noémie not noticed Adèle stare down at something on her, halfway through some menial chit-chat over revisions to a screenplay for a small film set during the Algerian War. It’s to shoot in the autumn and seemed promising for a "message-movie" when Noémie's agent first sent it over. But she is very bored with it now, and had begun to wonder if it wasn't too late to bail out on without a lot of hurt feelings.

Adèle knew much of tonight's work blather was mere preamble to what her girlfriend really wanted to talk about, but there seemed to be no urgency for much of anything lately. It’s been a week since Bastille Day, and Noémie had just flown back from a quick, two-day photoshoot on the Basque coast for *Elle*, but the pair had yet to make up their mind to use the little time they had between jobs to go anywhere outside of the city. An oppressively hot July, they've mostly stayed in with the one main air conditioner groaning just to keep things comfortable on most days.

The nights have thankfully been cooler.

“Don’t mess with it anymore, or it will just get stuck in there, and then you’ll be really upset. Leave it with me and I’ll give it to Elie, the dude at the cleaners.

“But what if he can’t remove it?”

“I mean, those dudes, at Vuitton, they’ll get you a new one, no?”

“That is so not the point.”

The recipe she got from Tatiana, the chef at Le Servan, did call for less tomato paste and red sherry, but no matter. It’s not like she was gonna change anything the next time she cooked it

for them. Noé loved the stew and that pretty much settled it. She made a mental note to add a few more prunes and sultanas. They did not make it through the first serving.

“And what was?”

“What?”

“The point?”

“You know I hate having to spell out this kind of thing, cuz you’ll give me shit later for being vain.” She cocks her head and uses both her long, bare arms to intimate the length of her not-too-short dress. “I wanted to show this off to you, to wear something brand new for you in my Biarritz tan, to look *super* nice for you and all, and now it’s all fucked...” Still mid-pout, Noémie sits up from her slouch, her back now ramrod straight. “I was gonna have this nice little speech to cap off our little celebration, the lovely meal you made, and now it’s a bit fucked.”

“Oh my god. Baby, it’s ok...I’ll keep the apron on if it helps.” It’s a cheapish looking thing, a denim blue promotional one with the Pathé logo silkscreened in yellow over her chest.

“Ahhhh! This is such a stupid, *stupid* little thing, but It’s all about the *moment*, you know!” She pronounces ‘moment’ in English.

“You still look *amazing* in it, if it helps.”

“Oh... It helps. Much.”

“Let’s wash up and you can recite it all to me in bed? That would be a pleasant change of scene, no?”

“But I’m not really tired yet.”

“C’mon. Show me these tan lines. I know you wanna get out of that dress.”

Adèle turns her back and gestures for help with the apron.

Noémie gets up and unties the bow with one sharp tug, the sound cutting the air. Deftly, she runs all ten fingers over the broad pleats of the linen and grosgrain dress that the apron hid, smoothing them down as she cradles the small of her lover’s back. She slips her right hand in the gap she created between the coarse denim of the apron and the much softer fabric to feel the shape of Adèle’s abdomen, slightly swollen from braised lamb, couscous and way too much Coke Zero. She finds her navel and kisses her nape, drawing the first of her many rewards.

“Oh.”

“You need to wear this number more often,” Noémie purrs. “It does it for me.”

“It’s by Alber, when he was still at Lanvin. He made it for me. It’s kinda old now but it means a lot to me. I’ll only wear it for you. From now on.”

“Would you let me wear it?”

Adèle turns around. “Would you like to try it on? Right now?”

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It’s past 1 in the morning. They’re on the balcony, looking down the Friday-night hubbub on Boulevard Magenta five floors down. It’s not as noisy from that height.

Noémie is plucking the leaves off of a succulent on the patio table. Adèle swats at her playfully, but doesn’t stop her, instead shifting the ashtray to keep it from falling off the edge.

The leaves always grow back.

They both then turn their stools back towards the bedroom and away from the street, the aluminum feet of Adèle’s chair straddling the concrete floor of the exterior and the lumber of the room. Noémie shimmies her stool to create a little distance, well into the interior but still close enough to where Adèle was sitting.

Noémie is anxious to take up where she left off an earlier conversation—post-prandial, post-coital, and one she needed to fully articulate, to solemnize the occasion. She composes herself, running fingers through her short-cropped hair.

“Of the things that I feel most grateful for, from that joyful welcome you gave me, that time I first met you, was your sincerity.”

She pauses, withholding her gaze. Her eyes cast down to a dark gap in the ochre parquet.

She doesn’t speak for what felt like a minute.

A slight breeze blows in from the west, from République, from the one window they left open as they came back in, the kind of humid, stultifying puff you get in Paris in the summer.

Intermittently tapping the floor gently with her left foot, she resumes.

“...That you are kind, with a generosity that is so deep, so enveloping, that I felt, and this is going to sound so corny, but that I really was the only person in the room.”

Of late, Adèle’s physical ticks have been breaking her train of thought, so her eyes remain locked on the spot on the floor.

She heaves. She exhales. “It’s funny to look back at it now, the time at Melun, in that drafty house, in the time we had to ourselves... That how much more of what I said and did were responses to things...to things that you said and you did, that I was sure were calculated to draw those things from me, from the kind of actor I am...”

She adjusts her gaze slightly, tugging at the collar of the t-shirt that she now realizes she put on inside-out. She lifts her head up and stares at Adèle head on.

“That time over lunch, between takes, once... when we sat on the steps of the big staircase that led up to the first floor, wearing our own clothes, bundled in our puffers, that day when it was really, really cold.”

“That day Luana left for Paris for a day to see her mother at the hospital?”

“Yeah. When you began to ask me about things that had everything to do with who I was, who I am... I suppose I should have been a little annoyed, for you to use what you learned of me later, when we got back to working. But I wasn’t. Yeah, you got the response Céline wanted.”

“—You know it wasn’t like...I’m sorry, continue.”

“You are so good at that, making me feel so wanted, to feel like the only one to have ever been the audience to... to that... to that kind of affection.”

She stops to admire the way Adèle’s tousled hair glints in the half light.

“I wanted so much for you to not think me naïve. I know the circumstances, Céline, the film, whatever, demanded it. But a small part of me, the one that is with you now, believed that you did all that for me...”

She looks down again. “For my little heart.”

“...”

Opening her arms wide from where she sat, Adèle stands to negotiate the gap that separated her from Noémie, her strong arms drawing sure momentum from the two determined strides it took to close the distance.

Already coiled, Noémie launches from the stool, now cool to the touch from the air conditioner, and locks Adèle’s embrace in place with her own arms, sweeping them simultaneously, if a little inelegantly from beneath Adele’s own, to take in her heaving back, the fingers of each hand spread wide to grasp and take as much of her lover into her, her left hand moving up to gently caress Adèle’s neck, her jaw, her cheek.

“We’re such saps.”

“You *possess* me a little...”

“Not *your* line...”

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“I didn’t even know I liked my women tall until I shared a bed with you.”

To make her point, she rears up to meet Noémie’s gaze until they lock in place, the tips of their noses barely touching, defining the distance. She pulls back just enough to focus out of the blur.

She marvels at the brilliant polychromy of her eyes for a moment, and breathes.

“I had never really understood the appeal of symmetry before you. Covering me with the length of you. Precise. Equal to my own.”

“Oooh baby, that sounds very fancy. Is this written down somewhere?” Noémie demands her iPhone. “Show me what you’ve been tapping on there.”

“Lemme fix a few things—”

She doesn’t get a chance as it’s taken from her. With not a little force.

*Dear Noé,*

*Don’t believe what you’ve heard, what you’ve read. Héloïse is my own sovereign creation. Yes, she existed first in Céline’s mind. But she existed in her mind as me. She had always been me before she even had a name.*

*And because I was the one that had to breathe life into her, to give her being, to give her form, she would, in time, cease to serve Céline’s memory.*

*It’s been a while now, and I didn’t know it then, but Héloïse, as I realized her with you, was ever only intended for you anyway. Much of her self, her self-hood, could not be. Not without your complicity, not without your mind, your eyes, your lips, your touch, your words, your whole being.*

*Forget too that Héloïse now exists in the popular imagination. Take her out of the purpose she served for our little film, and she still belongs to me, wholly my emotional property.*

*She is still in me. Still very much me. The parts of her that gave your Marianne joy or anguish are very much still there, and try as I might to leave her, her character is imprinted on me now, consciously linked to how I am with you, now, a self inextricably fated with yours. Now.*

*Marianne, Noémie, it doesn’t matter whose devotion she seeks, she inspires, whose thoughts she wants to apprehend and unpack.*

*There is no confusion.*

Noémie hands the phone back to Adèle. More accurately, she grabs her left arm, pries the fingers of her hand open and sets it on her palm, face up.

“Can it even be resisted, this logic?”

Adèle bites down on her lower lip.

“You writing film analysis for *L’Obs* now? Can you imagine if Céline saw *this*? You’d never live it down.

“I know, I know! ...it is a bit much.”



“Yeah, ‘del. It is. Much. It needs work if you intend to write this all down, on nice paper, with your fountain pen.”

“Fuck you. It wasn’t ready.”

Noémie breaks into mock song. “How’d it go? *‘A self inextricably tethered—*““

*—‘fated.’”*

“My bad.” She apes a dramatic, Jean Marais delivery: “*‘fated with yours. Now.’* Noémmmmmieeeeh.”

“Oh shit. You shit!” Adèle half buries her face into a pillow and muffles “you need to stop. I wasn’t going to write you *Mirabeau Bridge*. You think it’s that bad?”

“No, God no! A little Comédie-Française, a little Louis Aragon, but I love it. Yes, write it down in your own hand. Get rid of that old Waterman your mom handed down to you, the one with the loose cap. I’ll get you a fancy new one. Or two. Inscribed.”

“You’re serious? And it—“

“—It would.”

“No, don’t interrupt me. It reads nothing like Louis Aragon, you loser.”

“Haaaah.”

“You ever read any women poets in school?”

“Uhhh... fuck you too, but does Rimbaud count?”

“Boom. That’s actually funny. I’d refrain from making that joke in public, though.”

“Ooopsies.”

“Anyway. Stop humiliating me and I’ll think about writing it.”

“Yeah, write it all down, get fancy stationery at that shop on Lancy, get a nice envelope... get me a huge bouquet from Moulié. You’re with a very classy girl. I want to press the wax seal against my chest as I think of you and this, this *grande poésie*.” [Sorry, but the direct translation would fail miserably in English].

“You’re really something else, aren’t you.”

“I sooo am. My God, you were literally on all fours, *begging, begging* for it earlier.”

“Fuck. You. Really.”

“Hahaha. You’ll do that right? A proper love letter? For me? For your eternal Marianne? Do that for me and, by God, I’ll... I’ll... I don’t know. Whatever I do in return, it’s gonna be like a week of me as the feminist Max Pécas. You won’t soon forget.”

“You! as Max Pécas?! You’re the only woman I know who watched that shit.”

“Please... Don’t lie to me like you never saw those movies. And please stop this thing, you've had it on all night.

"What thing?"

You, know, like you're running for the National Assembly. My feminist credentials are impeccable. Plus I'm your main bitch, I hang on to your every word, and I give you \*GREAT\* pussy... so you don't have to buy my vote, Mme. Deputy.”

“Whatever, miss literary critic over here. And had I really been on you all ni— Don't answer that. I’ll buy any sexy you sell me. Can’t it just be sexy though, like from a real feminist? Like Maïwenn? Like, maybe, *Céline*?”

“Naaah, ‘del, I don’t want the baggage.” She laughs nervously at her own joke. "I mean Maïwenn and that Luc Besson thing."

“😏”

Noémie cranes her neck, closes her eyes, and purses her lips for a kiss that she knows is coming.

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