Inspired by Lady_Lombax's "Not That Type of Disney Princess".

“I get it.” Marinette nodded. “But instead of trying to drown your sorrows in chlorine, why don’t you come inside instead?”

Notes

This fac was inspired by Lady_Lombax’s "Not That Type of Disney Princess"! You don’t necessarily have to read that one to understand this, but if you don’t, you’re missing out on a good fic. The short and skinny is: Chat helped Marinette out during the Evillustrator episode as planned, except Chat got trapped in the box, Marinette outside of it, and Evillustrator forced a kiss on Marinette before she wiped the floor with him. Chat took her home, her parents invited him in for dinner, and he and Mari’s dad bonded over a shared love of terrible puns.

See the end of the work for more notes.

- Inspired by Not That Type Of Disney Princess by Lady_Lombax
“What are you doing here?”

Chat looked down, surprised. Marinette’s big blue eyes blinked up at him placidly, and Chat realized she was waiting for an answer.

“Uh...just resting for a moment.” He said, slightly taken aback. “I didn’t realize you would still be awake.”

Marinette shrugged. “I’m a nocturnal child. Where is Ladybug? Are you two patrolling tonight?”

“Oh, no, she’s home I think.” Chat scuffed a toe along the shingles. “I just...needed to get out for a bit. Figured a patrol was a good way to do that.”

“Long day?” Marinette backed up on her narrow terrace until she was leaning against the railing.

“Hah. Yeah.” Chat’s baton extended, touching down on the shingles of the rooftop, and he leaned against it idly. Since he was back from the front on a lower section of her rooftop, he wasn’t terribly concerned about being seen. “Up at three for work, then school, then trying to keep up my civilian activities, and then a fight with my father to top the day off.”

“Up at three?” Marinette sounded aghast. “And then school? Why are you still awake?”

Chat shrugged. “Couldn’t sleep. I figured a good run would help calm me down.”

“And did it?” Marinette sounded honestly curious.

“Ahh...sort of. I was going to go swimming next.” Chat grinned down at Marinette sheepishly.

Marinette’s lips twisted in a moue. “It’s half past ten. Where were you going to go swimming? The river?”

Chat opened his mouth, not really sure how to respond, but Marinette beat him to it, waving her hands frantically to forestall his words. “No, no, it’s okay. You don’t have to say. Why don’t you come down here though, so we don’t have to speak so loudly?”

Chat blinked. Then, shrugging, retracted his baton, casually stepping off of the edge of the roof to land lightly on her terrace.

“Thanks for understanding.” He replied as he straightened. “Identity stuff, you know?”

“I get it.” Marinette nodded. “But instead of trying to drown your sorrows in chlorine, why don’t you come inside instead?”

“Come inside?” Chat was honestly shocked. “You want me inside your house?”

Marinette, who had already leaned over to open the door, looked back at him. “Um...yes? You’ve been here before, right? I mean, you don’t have to if you don’t want to.”

“Oh! No, I don’t mind. I’m just surprised.” Chat tucked his baton onto his back.

“Do you have fleas or something?” Marinette’s lips quirked as she opened the door.
Chat grinned. “Had my flea bath yesterday.”

“Ok. Then don’t scratch up my furniture and we’ll be fine.” Marinette bypassed the ladder, jumping in to land lightly on her bed. Once Chat was inside and had politely pulled the trap door shut, she started down her stairs, motioning for him to follow.

Chat took in her room with a bit of surprise. He’d never really been in many other bedrooms, aside from his own and Chloe’s, but he knew those weren’t typical teenage bedrooms. Still, he didn’t think that Marinette’s bedroom looked typical, either.

For one, it was clear that pink was her absolute favorite color. Between her bed, her walls, her furniture and her decorations, Chat figured that every shade of the pink spectrum was covered. It was broken up by other colors here and there - the beams on the walls and the floor were brown wood, her desk was white, there were black accents and one odd green folding screen, but pink was definitely the dominate color.

The other thing was that her door wasn’t a typical door. Marinette lifted another door in the floor and had laid it open, looking at him expectantly.

“So...do you see the world through rose colored glasses?” Chat grinned, gesturing around.

Marinette blinked, looked around, then giggled. “I’d never thought of it that way. Alya would just tell you that I don’t half-ass anything. And I like pink. So…”

“Pink explosion.” Chat nodded. “Though I do like the black accents...and your green folding screen.” He waggled his eyebrows expressively.

“Doofus.” Marinette smirked, eyebrow winging upwards even as she planted a fist on a cocked hip. “I had those long before you appeared.”

“Princess, you wound me.” Chat pouted, spreading his fingers over his heart. “Right here.”

“I’m sure you’ll survive.” Marinette said dryly. “Now, do you want some tea or not?”

“Tea?” Chat asked, following her obediently down the stairs and into the kitchen. “I always took you for a hot chocolate kind of girl.”

“Mm. Based on the entire one time we’ve met?” Marinette teased, turning to plug in the electric teapot. Chat winced, mentally kicking himself, but Marinette missed it as she tried to reach the mugs in the cupboard.

“But you’re so sweet Princess!” He covered, waggling his eyebrows as she shot him a flat stare over her shoulder. “You have to get it from somewhere.”

“Riiight.” Marinette rolled her eyes.

“It must be because you live in a bakery.” Chat mused. “All these sweet treats around...how could you not be sweet yourself?”

“I’m going to hit you with this mug next.” Marinette deadpanned, waving the aforementioned mug expressively. But a smile was tugging up a corner of her mouth, so Chat only grinned.

“Fine.” He pouted, giving her his very best Kitten Eyes, and not minding her unimpressed look in the least. “Then, since you invited this poor stray in, is there anything I can do to help?”
“Yeah.” Marinette was crouched down in front of a cabinet now, rifling through it. “Plates are above the dishwasher. Papa’s secret scone stash is in the pantry on the top shelf. Aha!” She held a small tin aloft triumphantly.

“Um, if they’re your father’s scones, should we be eating them?” Chat asked, as he opened the cupboard and retrieved the requested plates.

Marinette snorted inelegantly as she spooned tea leaves into a strainer. “Please. They’re the worst-kept secret in the house. Us eating them only give him an excuse to restock.”

The electric kettle started whistling, and Marinette reached over and flipped it off. Dropping the tea strainer into a teapot, she filled the teapot and carried it over to the table, settling it carefully onto a trivet.

It was oddly domestic, Chat thought as he watched her place scones on the plates he’d set out, before taking a seat at the table herself. No, he mentally recanted, bizarrely domestic. He was a virtual stranger, who was wearing a mask, had just come off of her roof, and her response was to bring him in for tea? And yet, here they were, moving around each other, setting the table and pouring mugs of tea in a strangely comfortable silence. Marinette didn’t look the least bit out of sorts.

Chat couldn’t decide if she was just the most easy-going person in the history of ever, or had no sense of self-preservation. Superhero or not, he was a complete stranger to her!

“So what have you been up to, lately?” He asked her, fiddling with the mug of lavender-scented tea she’d poured.

“Mm. Not much. School mostly. Hanging out with Alya and Nino, designing.”

“Alya?” Chat made a considering noise, as if he didn’t know who she was. “Alya… Ladyblog?”

“Yep.” Marinette grinned over the steaming mug. “My bestie is a little bit obsessed.”

“It’s hard not to be obsessed with Ladybug.” Chat said dryly.

“Alya is super into superheros, and she’s great, but most people have the sense required to run from the akuma fight, not towards it.”

“Annoyingly so.” Marinette agreed. “Plus, she bailed on our last study session to go looking for danger. By the time she made it back, it was so late we just called it off and she’ll try to tutor me during lunch tomorrow.”

“She’s fearless.” Chat said dryly.

“What were you supposed to work on?” Chat asked. Making small talk was easy; he was good at it. Plus, keeping the conversation focused on her made her less likely to ask about him.


“You speak Chinese?” Chat asked easily, grinning unrepentantly at the flat look she shot him.

“A little.” She replied, before switching back to French. “My mom is Chinese, so you think it would come a little easier. Nope. My English is better than my Chinese!”
“You speak English?” Chat asked, in English, and caught the piece of scone that she threw at him in his mouth, laughing. “Mmm. Cranberry orange. My favorite. Thank you for sharing!”

“I only understood half of that.” Marinette grumbled sulkily. “How many languages do you speak, anyway?”

Chat paused, taking a bite out of his own scone as he considered the question. Deciding it couldn’t do any harm to answer, he swallowed. “Five, but only French, Chinese and English fluently, and even then it’s Mandarin Chinese and British English. Which seeps over into American English, but they’re not the same thing.”

“Seriously?” Marinette gawked. “The hell? That’s insane. What are you, a genius?”

“I’m smart, yes.” Chat replied. “But…my father is...a businessman.” He said carefully. “He wants me to take over the family business, so I’m required to learn the languages that I most need to communicate in.”

“Ah.” Marinette nodded. “Like Kim’s dad - he does real estate. Kim’s dad, not Kim! Kim is a boy in my class.” She hurried to explain. “His dad learned English so he could communicate better with the customers who aren’t local. Gives him a leg up over the ones who only speak French.”

“Yes, very much like that.” Chat replied, happy to let her divert herself from more questions. “So you speak Chinese and English?”

“Not well enough to do anything with.” Marinette rolled her eyes. “I can’t even carry on a conversation with my Uncle, outside of the standard introductions and ‘Where is the bathroom?’ types of questions.”

“That sounds frustrating.” Chat said.

“Not as frustrating as algebra!” Marinette replied. “I only see my Uncle every few years - I see algebra every day.”

“I’m pretty good at algebra.” Chat replied. “I might be able to help you?”

“Is there anything you’re not good at?” Marinette cocked an eyebrow, but the quirk of her lips took the sting out of the words.

“Plenty.” Chat Noir said. “But how will I maintain my image as a superhero if I admit all my faults? We superheroes are supposed to be flawless, you know.” He added, wagging a finger at her.

Marinette sniggered as she set her cup down. “I’ve seen you run into a lamp post. And vault into the side of a building.”

“My image is ruined!” Chat leaned back in his chair, bringing the back of his gloved hand to his forehead dramatically.

“I’ve also seen Ladybug fall off of buildings, miss her throw and get tangled up in her own string.” Marinette added.

“Really?” Chat blinked at her, surprised. “You’ve seen all that? I thought you didn’t stick around for fights.”

“Ahh…” Marinette blinked, appearing surprised for a second before she let out a breathless laugh. “Best friends with Alya, remember? I get to see the unedited footage.”
“Man, I hope she doesn’t release a blooper reel then.” Chat hummed. “It would be catastrophic for our superhero image.”

“Nooo...” Marinette groaned. “You were doing so well!”

“I couldn’t let it go without at least one pun.” Chat grinned, rising to set his dirty cup and plate into the sink.

“You and Papa, I swear.” Marinette grumbled. “Do you want to go via the roof, or are you ok out the front door?”

“As long as nobody is around, the front door is fine.” Chat replied.

“Oh, that reminds me.” Marinette said as they wandered through the living room. “My parents want you to come to dinner again. If you’d like to?” She asked, looking at him over her shoulder.


Marinette shrugged. “I dunno. Mom said you’re too skinny, Papa likes your sense of humor - God help us all - but I think honestly? They just like you.”

“You know what happens when you feed strays, right?” Chat teased, not bothering to conceal his grin as he followed her into the store. They like me? They like me!

“They keep coming back.” Marinette grinned.

“And what about you, Princess? I won’t come around if it makes you uncomfortable.” Chat said, regarding her seriously. After all, just because her parents wanted him around, didn’t mean Marinette herself did.

“Well...” Marinette tapped her finger against her lip and pretended to ponder the question. “I’m kind of terrified of you and Papa together, but... You did save me from Evillustrator, and came to check up on me after, and...” Her grinned turned wicked as she pointed her finger at him. “You volunteered to help with Algebra.”

“I didn’t save you.” Chat shook his head. “You totally kicked ass. I mean it.”

“I’m pretty amazing.” Marinette agreed, grinning cheekily. “But don’t dodge here: you told me you’d help with math. No takebacks! Or I’ll tattle to Alya.”

“Is that how it’s going to be?” Chat grinned, heart a little lighter. “You’re going to blackmail a superhero?”

“Absolutely.” Marinette nodded decisively. “Mama wants to feed you, Papa wants someone to appreciate his terrible jokes, and if I can’t understand math, my grade is going to tank. You’re trapped. Escape is not possible, so you’d better just sit back and enjoy the dumplings.”

“It sounds like torture.” Chat chuckled. “When do they want me here?”

“No set date.” Marinette shook her head. “They told me to ask after you were here the first time, but...I didn’t have a way to get a hold of you, so...” She shrugged. “But, if you have work and all, can you give me a few dates and times when you’re free? We can work around that.”

“How do you want me to do that?” He asked. “Should I just swing by, let you know what dates are good? I don’t really want to be seen around here too much - I don’t want to draw more attention to
“Good point.” Marinette chewed her lip thoughtfully, then walked behind the counter, pulling out a pad from beneath it and writing something down.

“Here’s my email address.” She said, handing him the slip of paper.

“Well,” Chat laughed. “That works too. I’ll email you soon then, ok?”

“Sounds good!” Marinette chirped, unlocking the front door for him to leave.

Checking to make sure nobody was around, Chat stepped out, waving at her over his shoulder as he jogged down the road towards his house.

And thus began a very unlikely friendship.
Spitfire

Chapter Summary

In which Alya gets hit with a clue-by-four, and kicks some ass.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Graphic depictions of violence. It's in the tags, but it bears repeating.

It needs to be said that I don't have a plotline or anything that I'm following - Chapter 1 was it's own stand alone, and this chapter, paired with the next, can also stand by themselves. I tacked them on because they're in the same imagined universe.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Alya was a special brand of crazy, Chat decided. As Marinette had said, most people ran from the big scary monsters. But Alya? Ran straight to them.

The Villain of the Week was, this time, a teenager who had apparently gotten their ass kicked at dodgeball. Which seemed a pretty stupid reason to get akumatized, but teenagers were often pretty stupid.

Though Chat would admit, having listened to the Akuma’s rants as he ducked and dodged freaking cannon balls, that having essentially the entire opposing team gang up on you for the whole miserable session was pretty bad. Really, it reminded him of something Chloe would orchestrate, if she had more friends than just Sabrina.

Still, despite Chat’s sympathy for the Akuma’s situation, he had a job to do. And today, that job involved dodging cannonballs… Well, ‘steel dodge balls’ if he wanted to be fussy about it, but dammit, when a rubber ball the size of his head turned into metal, it was effectively a cannon ball. He’d been clipped by one earlier, and his right arm was still numb from the elbow down, despite the protection Plagg offered as his suit.

The sheer amount of property damage was catastrophic, if he did say so himself. Ladybug’s lucky charm had taken a nosedive, so he was playing distraction while she recharged. He’d managed to keep the akuma pretty centralized, but the cannon balls had already destroyed cars, smashed a whole bunch of windows, taken out every light pole on the block and beat the hell out of the buildings. Luckily, all of the civilians had vacated, so the damage was completely stuff, not people. They weren’t sure that the Miraculous Cure would bring back people, and they had no desire to test it. Preferably ever.

The other downside of having smashed so much stuff was that he was running out of places to dodge to.

“Hold still, you mangy fleabag!” The Akuma howled, another ball hurtling his way. “You took them away! I want revenge, and after I smash you and collect your miraculous, I will have it.”
“Now now, no need to be insulting,” Chat taunted from atop a nearby building. “I’ll have you know that I take a flea bath regularly!”

The routine was second nature to him now. Dodge projectile, move, look for next place to go. Make noise if necessary. Rinse, repeat. Chat skittered along the rooftop, hopping up from a flat part onto a slope. He stood straight despite the steep angle - his boots had very good grip, and even before Adrien had become Chat Noir, he’d had excellent coordination and the fine muscle skills necessary to hold sometimes awkward or uncomfortable poses.

“And I know those girls pissed you off,” He added, “But it’s kind of my superhero duty to not let you kill them.”

“They’re bullies!” The Akuma raged. “They bullied me and bullied me and bullied me, and I will not take it any more!”

Another volley of flung cannonballs, and Chat had to abandon the high ground and vault to the street level. The car was on it’s side, with the windows smashed out, but Chat was still able to land on top of it, balancing on the twisted metal of the doors and roof. Turning to face the Akuma, Chat caught the movement out of the corner of his eye.

Alya was crouched down next to the car, handheld camcorder running.

“Alya?” Chat squawked, effectively distracted. “What the hell?”

The camera swung in his direction, and Alya’s lips pursed irritably. “What? I’ve been here for like, ten minutes!”

“Aren’t you insane?” Chat hissed. “If a cannon ball hits you, you’re dead!”

“Miraculous Cure,” Alya shrugged, and Chat ground his teeth together in irritation. “Don’t get distracted Cat Boy!”

Oh, and now he was a boy? Fantastic, just skippy. Chat’s cat ears flattened against his head as he glared. If Alya had been here for ten minutes, then Ladybug should be back any time now. And the closer he kept the Akuma to where they’d had to part, the sooner she could get back. But now Alya was in danger, and he needed to get away - but if he did, the akuma would follow him, and Alya would still be in danger...and probably still running that damn camcorder. And if Alya was hurt, Marinette would probably blame him.

Maybe he could ditch her on a rooftop nearby and get back quickly. It wasn’t ideal (ideal would be her not being here), but it was the best he could do.

“If you don’t want me distracted, don’t be here.” Chat snapped, somersaulting over the incoming ball and landing next to her. Swatting the camera out of the way, he reached down, picking her up and tossing her over his shoulder, perversely satisfied with her breathless oomph! as her stomach impacted against his shoulder. With a sharp click, he extended his baton, smirking at her squeal as he rocketed them upwards to a nearby two story roof. Nice and flat on top, part of the protective wall had already been destroyed by the Akuma’s attacks, and it wasn’t hard to vault right over the rubble and take off running over the roof, staff automatically retracting to an easy-to-carry half-meter baton length.

“Chat!” Alya’s frantic scream had him glancing over his shoulder. The Akuma had been surprisingly quiet as she’d cleared the roof, and the cannonball was coming way too fast to fully
dodge it.

Chat didn’t even think as he shoved Alya roughly off of his shoulder and out of the line of fire. He never heard her surprised yelp as the cannonball slammed into the shoulder she’d just been on. The crack of impact was all he heard, fire blooming under his skin even as he was propelled forward and into the meter-high wall at the edge of the roof.

Later, maybe, he would think that if might have been lucky that he was going down as fast as he was going forward, because despite how low the wall was, he wasn’t flung over it, but his head impacted with the wall with yet another crack, and pain was all he knew. It spread, racing like lightning down his neck, outstripping even the knife-like pain of his shoulder where the fractured bones rubbed together with every shaky inhale.

Chat wasn’t sure whether it was a blessing or a curse that he wasn’t unconscious. Plagg’s protection extended to even the bit of his body not covered, it seemed, because that blow should have killed him. Instead, he lay on the ground, pebbles digging into his cheek, knives of pain twisting deeper into his shoulder with every shallow gasp, and his vision blurring as the Akuma advanced on him menacingly. His baton was off to the side, only a meter away, but he could not lift his arm to reach for it.

Shiiiiitttt…

Alya was off to the side, camera on it’s side and apparently forgotten and she scrambled backwards from the Akuma. The Akuma paused, regarding her briefly, before her lip lifted in a sneer and she turned back towards him, disregarding Alya completely.

Shit shit shiiiiitttt… Where was Ladybug?

Behind the Akuma, Alya’s face shifted, swinging from gut-clenching terror to indignant fury in the space of a breath. The glint in her eye, the set of her shoulders and the brief flare of her nostrils was an expression that Adrien was passingly familiar with, and it never boded well for whoever had pissed her off.

She shifted, rolling up into a crouch and studying the Akuma from behind. Chat saw her eyes narrow, darting from the Akuma to his baton and back again, lips pursing in anger. He wanted to yell at her, to tell her to just stay there, but all that came out was a pained wheeze.

The Akuma was nearly on him, and Chat tried to focus on her, his vision swimming and the world tilting alarmingly. If he could just get up-

The scrape of pebbles caught his attention. Alya was up and sprinting towards them, red hair flying back and eyes set as her sneakers kicked up gravel and spat it in all directions. The Akuma turned, cannonball already firing towards the girl’s head even as her arm was raising.

Alya ducked, still moving forward, one leg extended and her hand reaching back for balance. She slid straight past the startled Akuma towards his baton. Her weight shifted as her momentum slowed, rising back into a crouch. The hand that hadn’t been balancing her snatched up his baton even as she spun and launched herself at the Akuma.

The Akuma was too startled to react, and even though the surprise halted her for only a second, that second was all Alya needed.

The hand holding the baton swung up, Alya’s whole shoulder rolling with the motion as she slammed the baton into the startled Akuma’s temple. The akuma’s eyes rolled up into her head and
she went down, hitting the roof top in a tangle of limbs. Alya stood over her, baton at the ready, but the Akuma didn’t move.

Alya reached down, unclipping a bow from the base of the Akuma’s ponytail before setting it aside and rolling the unconscious Akuma into the rescue position. Snatching up the baton and bow, she backed towards him, only turning to face him when she was right next to him.

“Chat! Oh my god, Chat! I’m so sorry! Please be okay, I am so so sorry.” She babbled, hands reaching out like she wanted to grab him, before halting and fluttering over him nervously instead.

Chat coughed, something wet hitting his lips even as his chest tightened painfully.

“Good- Good job.” He managed.


The corner of one lip quirked upwards, just a little, and Chat eyed her even as she wavered in his sight.

“And then you saved me.” A small, broken chuckle, that ended with a pained gasp. “Damn, you two make quite a pair.”

“What?” Alya’s hands stilled, her head tilting quizzically. “We do? Who?”

Ever the journalist, Chat thought affectionately. His head didn’t hurt quite so bad now, almost floating on his shoulders.

“Oh no no no no no.” Alya reached out, patting his hand frantically. “Don’t you dare close your eyes. Look at me, Chat.”

Why? Chat wondered. Closing his eyes sounded great, sleep sounded great. Maybe when he woke up, things would hurt less.

Something prodded his shoulder and Chat yelped, eyes flying wide at the sharp spike of pain.

“I’m sorry Chat.” Alya said, hand withdrawing. “I’m so sorry. I need you to stay awake. Ladybug will be here any minute...and, and I’ve got the item, so she can just purify it and do the cure and you can be okay, okay?”

Why the hell was Alya babbling? Though seeing Ladybug did sound nice…

“Hey. With me.” Alya said, catching his eyes, hair falling like a flaming curtain as she tilted her head to look at him directly. “Who do I make a good pair with? Come on, Chat, don’t leave me hanging.”

“Mari…” His tongue didn’t want to finish her name, and Alya reached out to poke him again.

“-Nette!” He gasped, jaw clenching. “Marinette. She kicked ass, too. You two...like the Dynamic Duo.”

A wet chuckle made his chest spasm, more liquid on his lips. He couldn’t even bring himself to care that he was apparently drooling on himself. Chat tried to scoff, but it came out as another weak cough instead. Sunlight streamed through her hair as her head tilted, lighting it up like a living flame. It was really pretty, Chat thought. It suited her. Ladybug might be the color of passion, Marinette was sweet pink with surprising hints of sleek, dangerous black, but Alya was fire. Orange and red and
gold, and she burned so brightly.

“Look at you go, Spitfire.” He whispered, trying to ignore the pain. “She never saw you coming.”

“Yeah. Yeah, that’ll teach her, huh?” Alya’s cackle was watery. “Come on, eyes open. I need an interview Cat Boy, so no napping.”


“Oh, oh thank god.” He heard Alya say, more pebbles shifting as she got to her feet. Chat got a closeup of her shoes. Black, white...a little scuffed. Her shoelaces were shaking. Was she waving? “Ladybug! Ladybug, over here! He’s hurt!”

More gravelly noises as someone else touched down on the roof, and red crowded his vision.

“Oh god.” He heard Ladybug breathe. “Chat.”

“I’ve got the item! Here, here, hurry!”

They seemed really upset. Chat just wanted to sleep.

Ladybug’s voice was calling out somewhere close. The words, their cadence was familiar, but he couldn’t make them out. Pink and red flowed through his vision, sparkling in the sunshine, white and gold sunlight glinting off of thousands of ladybugs.

Marinette liked pink. Chat wondered what she thought of red?

The swarm enveloped him, flowing over him, soothing aches in his muscles. His chest felt lighter, no longer so constricted. His headache vanished, and with it went the blurred vision. The pain in his shoulder and chest was abating, and for the first time in what felt like forever, Chat could breathe.

And now that his head was clearing, Chat felt belated fear grip him. He took quick, short gasps, closing his eyes and trying to calm down. Inhaling through his nose, exhaling softly out of his mouth, Chat struggled to slow his racing heart and ignore the delayed adrenaline spiking through his system.

He’d nearly died.

This rooftop was great, Chat thought hysterically. Warm sunshine, the rocks weren’t too sharp...he was just going to stay here for a minute, and pull himself together.

Trembling hands gripped his shoulder, rolling him over onto his back. Chat cracked his eyes open to find Ladybug and Alya staring down at him. Alya’s eyes were suspiciously shiny, and Ladybug was biting her lip, staring down at him with wide concerned eyes.

“Are you okay Chat?” Ladybug asked, trembling hand still gripping his shoulder, her fingers flexing compulsively ever as her thumb rubbed little circles in his bicep.

It actually felt pretty good, Chat thought. Nobody really fussed over him, or even touched him all that often, in his day to day life.

Apparently alarmed that he hadn’t answered yet, Ladybug’s hand left his arm, traveling up to cup his cheek.

“Come on, Chat, talk to me.” Ladybug said, her voice wavering alarmingly. “I’m sorry I wasn’t here. I’m so sorry. Please tell me you’re alright.”
Well hell, now both girls looked like they were about to cry. That couldn’t be allowed to stand.

Chat pulled his lips up, trying for a smirk and ending with a grimace instead. “Feline fine, my lady.”

“Hah!” Ladybug’s shoulders sagged in relief, and her eyes rolled heavenward even as she let out a shaky chuckle. “I can’t believe you.”

Her gloved hand was still on his cheek. Chat turned his head, nosing her palm absently. “Sorry to worry you.”

“Silly cat.” Ladybug said affectionately, her hand slipping up to card through his hair once, ruffling his bangs back. “Can you get up?”

“The roof is really warm…” Chat whined as the hand withdrew. “I want a cat nap.”

“Yeah, no.” Ladybug’s voice was regaining its strength, and her lips were pulling up into a smile. “You’ve only got four minutes left. Come on, up.”

Pushing one arm up under himself, Chat allowed Ladybug to wrap the other around his ribs to help him into a sitting position. Tilting his head back against the newly repaired wall, Chat let out a shaky exhale.

And got a lapful of sobbing Alya.

“I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.” Her arms squeezed his ribs, her hair tickling his nose even as her forehead bumped against his collarbone. “I’m so sorry.”

“Hey. Hey now.” Chat lifted his hand, patting her awkwardly on the back. “It’s okay. Everything’s fine.”

“But it wasn’t. You nearly died, and it’s all my fault and I’m so sorry.” Alya sniffled. “I shouldn’t have gotten so close.”

“Probably.” Chat allowed. “But I might have gotten hit anyway - I was running out of places to jump to.”

“But I-”

“Hey.” Chat cut her off. “Come on now, Spitfire. You made a mistake - and then saved me. I think it helps even out.”

Alya looked up at him, tears still rolling down her cheeks. “I’m still sorry.”

“Apology accepted.” Chat replied, wincing as the beep sounded again. “And while I would love to stay and chat, I need to go.”

“Oh! Oh, yeah, okay.” Alya’s face flooded red as she scrambled backwards off of his lap and stood. Ladybug shot her an amused look as she reached down, grasping his hand to help haul him to his feet.

“You gonna be okay?” She asked lowly, blue eyes searching his.

“Yeah.” Chat’s grin was a little strained. There would be nightmares, he knew. “Miraculous Cure for the win. All the way.”

Another beep.
Ladybug’s eyes narrowed thoughtfully, and she handed him his baton. “Meet me at the tower tonight, nine p.m. if you can. Okay?”

“I’ll try.” Chat said. Plagg had taken a beating today, and Chat wasn’t sure the little kwami would be up to another transformation.

“That’s all I can ask.” Ladybug nodded understandingly. “If not today, then soon. Email me, or something, okay? I want to know you’re alright.”

“Yeah.” He nodded, turning back to Alya, giving her his best cocky smirk and a mock salute.

“Till next time, Spitfire.” He winked, and, extending his baton, vaulted away.

Chapter End Notes

Bullying is nothing to sneeze at. As children, we are hardwired by those around us, and our peer interactions are the most important ones as we begin to gain independence from our parents. Having those interactions be negative ones can have profound effects. The world is cruel enough without us tearing each other down as well.

No, I do not think Marinette would actually blame Chat for Alya being hurt - she knows what her friend is like. But Chat is stressed out and annoyed, and maybe isn't thinking so straight.

When you're sick or injured, a lot of times you're not thinking straight. I've never been that badly injured, but I have been so sick that I was. I remember the nurse coming into the hospital room and saying "We normally need to wait eight hours after food before we can perform surgery, but we don't have that long. Get some rest, we're going to the OR in four hours." Any normal person would have panicked (and I did, later) but at the moment my big concern was that she took away my roll. By the time I hit the OR doors, pink elephants could have danced through the room and I wouldn't have been phased. It took a while to process everything that happened, and then I got to get up close and personal with PTSD.
Adrien dragged himself into school the next day, tired and sore, but still alive.

Well, dragged might have been an exaggeration. He wasn’t limping, he wasn’t even dragging his feet, but that was only because he didn’t want to deal with the lecture that came with scuffed shoes. Concealer disguised the dark circles under his eyes, and a double shot of espresso had given him the caffeine surge necessary to function.

But it hadn’t been a good night. Plagg hadn’t been up to transforming to meet Ladybug, which didn’t really surprise Adrien. It had been a rough day. Since his dad wasn’t home (again) and Nathalie left at six, Adrien had taken his dinner to his room, stuffed Plagg full of cheese, and the two of them had lounged in front of the television watching the stupidest, most mindless shows they could find. Adrien wasn’t even sure what they’d watched.

By the time he’d fallen into bed, he’d been more than exhausted, but sleep didn’t come. He’d even taken a sleeping pill as a precaution, but nightmares still plagued him, jerking him upright in bed, sharp cracks and remembered pain echoing in his head. The floaty, helpless sensation of being so hurt that he didn’t notice he was coughing up blood, the bright red-gold of Alya’s hair and the panic in her voice. All he could do was sit in bed and wait for the shaking to subside.

When morning had finally arrived, Adrien was exhausted. He couldn’t stay home - his dad would take skipping school as a sign that he didn’t want to continue going, and he’d be back to being homeschooled in a flash. And even though all of the physical injuries were healed, Adrien still had the bone-deep aches that came with exertion, and muscles remembering that they’d been gravely injured not very long ago.

“What’s wrong man?”

Adrien didn’t even start, despite his surprise at Nino’s voice. They were in a lull between lessons, and Adrien had been staring at the board, eyes unfocused as he took a moment to just not think of anything.

“Hmm?” He turned his head slightly and slid Nino a glance. “Nothing, why? Do I look like something’s wrong?” Not even a trace of sarcasm, just honest curiosity.

“No…” Nino said slowly, frowning. “But…you’ve got the model face on.”
Adrien blinked. The what now?

“The Model Face.” Nino repeated, and Adrien realized he’d said the last bit out loud. He could almost hear the capitalization Nino had added to “model face.” Adrien isn’t sure what he wants to ask, so he settles for blinking at his friend in confusion. A ruddy flush suffused Nino’s cheeks as his hand reached up to rub the back of his neck awkwardly, scrubbing the skin under his ever-present headphones.

“It’s the thing you do.” He says. “Whenever you’re not okay, but want everyone to think you’re okay anyway.”

“Huh.” Adrien mumbled. “I didn’t know I did that.”

“I don’t think too many other people have caught it.” Nino says, tapping his fingers on the desk contemplatively. “I mean, you don’t look upset. But the face is just too...practiced, you know? It’s not your real face.”

“Nino,” Adrien pulled his lips back into a leer, “are you accusing me of faking it?”

“Ugh.” Nino’s face contorted into a grimace. “I don’t want to hear about your bedroom antics, perv, I just want to know if you’re alright.”

Seems like Nino wasn’t going to be deterred. Sighing, Adrien gave in.

“I’m alright. I will be alright.” He corrected at Nino’s unimpressed stare. “Just...nightmares, last night. I didn’t get much sleep.”

Nino’s brow furrowed, but the teacher walking into the room and calling the class to attention forestalled any further argument.

“Okay.” He said finally. “If you say so.”

Adrien smiles, grateful for his friend’s concern, even if it’s something he can’t actually talk to him about. “I’m good. I have a free afternoon tomorrow.”

“Yeah?” Nino glanced at him even as he flipped his textbook open. “I thought you had that shoot?”

“Photographer’s sick.” Adrien couldn’t keep the glee out of his voice. “Nathalie just told me today. She also isn’t going to mention it to my dad until tomorrow, so he can’t schedule in something else.”

“That’s cool.” Nino nods. “Guess you’d better tell Nathalie that you have plans then.”

Adrien turns his attention back to the teacher, heart a little lighter than before. He’s not okay, yet, but he’s getting there.

Alya looks like hell.

Nino notices it right away: the bounce, the spark, the flare that he normally associates with her is conspicuously absent today. Her face is stiff, her hands are a little wobbly, and the concealer under her eyes is just far enough off to be noticeable.

Which is totally Adrien’s fault, by the way. Nino, like every other self-respecting man, had known nothing about makeup until Adrien had entered his life. He’d spent fifteen years happily oblivious to the eighteen million different shades of foundation, concealer, blush, lipstick and whatever the hell
else girls (and guy models) smeared on their faces. And ever since he’d gone to a shoot and seen the before and after makeup application, Nino privately scrutinized every girl he saw, wondering if he was actually seeing their real face.

Disturbing. Seriously, nightmare fuel. But in the little more than a year that he had known Adrien, he’d learned far more about makeup than he’d ever wanted to know. And the irony that it was a boy he’d learned it from was not lost on him.

Fifteen year old Nino wouldn’t have noticed the concealer under Alya’s eyes. He might have noticed she was acting weird, and wondered what was wrong, but the too-light concealer under her eyes would have flown completely over his head. Worse, now that he knew, it drew attention to the fact that above the poorly done concealer, her eyes were red-rimmed and bloodshot.

She’d been crying.

Nino didn’t have time to ask her about it before class - she’d come in just ahead of the teacher, and hell, even Marinette had made it into her seat before Alya - but he could hear the two girls murmuring quietly to each other, and a couple glances over his shoulder showed Marinette patting Alya gently when the teacher wasn’t watching, her head bent close as she whispered. He’d tried to catch Adrien’s eye, see if maybe he knew what was going on, but the boy had his stupid Model Face out in full force too.

Nino loved the Model Face. Adrien was also wearing makeup, and though it was really well done, Nino knew it was there. Aidrien’s expression was the perfect blend of polite, unconcerned interest, lips tilted slightly into a frozen smile that he held for the entire class. His expression never changed. No grin, no grimace, no smirk. His eyebrows didn’t twitch, there was no concern or mischief or laughter in his expression. Just this stupid, pretty aloofness that was fake, fake, fake.

And everyone bought it. Adrien looked like he didn’t have a care in the world, but when the Model Face came out, something was definitely wrong. So in the lull between the first and second subject, Nino asked Adrien what was wrong. Bros first, and all. And even though he didn’t find out what was actually wrong with his friend, Adrien still looked a little better after they talked. The smile he’d shot him was small, but it had been real.

At the end of the second lesson, Nino reached out, elbowing Adrien in the side.

“You know what’s up with Alya?” He whispered as he wrote down the homework assignment.

Adrien blinked, before twisting around to look up at Alya, who had her head propped up on her fists, listing towards Marinette as the other girl whispered something in a soothing tone. Adrien’s expression softened, and he reached out, patting Nino’s shoulder.

“You’re a good friend, Nino.” He said, and before Nino could ask anything else (that remark was damn cryptic), Adrien was out of his seat, picking up his bag and stepping around the desk to Alya’s side. He bent over, murmuring something to the other girl in a low voice, and the two stepped out of the room together.

“Marinette?” Nino asked, quirking an eyebrow at the girl who was biting her lip anxiously as she watched the other two leave.

“There was another Akuma attack yesterday.” Marinette said after a moment.

“Yeah, I heard.” Nino said. He’d been DJing at a gig on the other side of town, but he’d heard people talking about it when he’d stopped for a bite later on.
“Alya was there.” Marinette said.


“She-” Marinette sighed, “She got too close. She wasn’t hurt, but Chat Noir was, trying to defend her. It scared her.”

“Oh.” Nino couldn’t think of anything else to say. “What happened?”

Marinette shook her head. “She won’t tell me. She starts crying every time she tries to talk about it.”

“Damn.” Nino leaned back in his seat and blew out a sigh. Alya had been following or in the middle of Akuma fights for more than a year now - hell, she had almost been sacrificed before, and she’d never been shaken up like this. “That’s...not good.”

“No.” Marinette said, and the two fell silent.

Adrien and Alya slid back into the classroom right before the bell, and Alya looked...better, Nino decided. More put together. Whatever Adrien had done (and it had probably involved more makeup), Alya looked better for it, perking up a bit and offering him a tentative smile as she slid into her seat.

Lunch was an oddly subdued affair. Not to say they hadn’t shared awkward lunches before - nothing could top Marinette’s previous levels of hilarity as she tried to speak in Adrien’s presence, Adrien’s polite-but-confused obliviousness, and Alya gleefully trying to throw them together while Nino watched on in amused fascination. Those had led to some awkward, quiet, or downright confusing mealtimes, even if they’d started getting better in recent months. Still, there were days when someone was off (upset, mad, sad, whatever) that led to subdued lunches and awkward not-conversations.

But in the past few months, since school had started back up, the four of them ate together more often than not. Alya had quit trying to blatantly hurl Marinette into Adrien’s presence, and in turn, Marinette had learned how to speak actual words in front of him. Adrien, bless his sheltered little soul, was still mostly oblivious, but happy to have another person to speak with.

So, yeah, awkward lunches hadn’t happened in a while. But whatever is was that had Alya on edge was still hanging in the air, and it appeared that Marinette and Adrien had done the best they could. And it had helped, but Alya was clearly still not okay. One mistimed phrase from Chloe was liable to make the whole situation explode...even if Nino still wasn’t sure what the situation was, exactly.

So he gave it twenty minutes - enough time for Alya to eat and engage in stiled conversation - before he dusted off his hands, thanked Marinette for the pastries, and pulled Alya away.

They didn’t go far. Not even off of school grounds, just behind a convenient clump of trees that students like to sit under and was currently deserted in favor of enjoying the sunshine on the steps or sitting in the nearby park. Pulling her behind a tree so they were facing the school’s wall and out of sight of any students wandering by, Nino sat down and pulled Alya into his lap.

It wasn’t something he could do with anyone else: he and Adrien had a guy relationship, and men did not do sissy things like cuddle with each other. That was gay as hell, and would never, ever happen. And while he’d known Marinette for years and considered her a good friend, they weren’t close like that. He could hug her, sure, and he had before, but this? Was too close for her comfort.

But if he’d known Adrien for a year, and Marinette since they were ten, he’d known Alya even longer. Sure, she hadn’t moved to their school district until last year, but their parents ran in the same circles and were friendly, and he’d known Alya since before he could remember. They’d seen each
other through chicken pox, fights with parents, bad haircuts and all sorts of equally embarrassing things. Cuddling was totally okay.

So when he sank down against the tree, crossing his legs and tugging on her hand, Alya flopped across his lap with no hesitation. Her calves draped over his knees, head thumping on his shoulder and her breath warm against the side of his neck. Nino wrapped his arms around her, resting his chin on top of her crazy hair and sat, letting her worry her lip and twist her fingers in his headphone cord.

“What happened bae?” He asked quietly, after a few minutes had passed.

A small, choked noise, and the tension in his headphone cord went slack as she dropped it.

“I fucked up, Nino.” Alya whispered shakily. Nino said nothing apart from a small hum of acknowledgment, rubbing soothing circles on her back as she pressed her nose into his chest.

“I...just...The heroes aren’t supposed to get hurt, you know?” Alya whispered. “They’re supposed to be, like, invincible. They get hit, they fall down, but they’re supposed to get back up.”

“You know Batman has died, like, twice, right?” Nino tried to make it sound teasing. It was the wrong thing to say.

Alya curled in on herself, fingers clenching in his shirt as a hiccuping sob was wrenched from her.

“Oh no. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that.” Nino panicked a little, pulling her tighter against him and rubbing his cheek on top of her head soothingly as his shirt grew damp.

“He didn’t get back up!” Alya wailed, the noise muffled against his chest. “She hit him, and there was this snap, and he hit the wall and just crumpled. And it was all my fault!”

Nino winced, well able to guess who “he” was. Damn, Alya was good with descriptive imagery. Stupid journalism.

“I shouldn’t have been there.” Alya sobbed. “I thought I was safe - I was behind this car, and it was already destroyed, but he was on the other roof and he jumped on the car to get away and he saw me. And, and he told me to get out, and I should have listened, but I just wanted to see what was happening.”

Nino had a bad feeling how this story was going to end.

“He took the hit for you, huh?” He asked quietly.

Alya sobbed in response, and that was all the answer Nino needed.

“And then...he just lay there. And the Akuma was heading towards him, still chanting about how she was going to smear his blood across the pavement and-” Another sob, a stifled wail. “It was awful.”

“And...my camera had fallen, but it was on it’s side and it was still recording, so it’s all there. And the news stations are calling and asking for footage, and...oh my god, I feel terrible.”

“Ahh, bae.” Nino hugged her, ignoring the spreading dampness of tears and probably some snot to pull her against him even tighter.

“And then he tells me it’s okay.” Alya sobbed. “Said Marinette and I make a good team and it’s okay and he’s trying to reassure me after I nearly got him killed.”

“What?” Nino is officially confused. “Marinette was there?”
Her hair twitches against his nose as she shakes her head. “I, uh, I hit the Akuma.”

“You did what?” Nino yelped, straightening in shock.

“Hit it.” Alya patted his chest comfortingly. “I was, uh, pretty mad.”

“So you attacked the Akuma?” Nino is horrified. “The one that took out freaking Chat Noir?”

“We- Well, it was my fault he’d been hit in the first place!” Alya defended. “He was trying to haul me out of the way, and the Akuma was behind him, and he...he pushed me out of the way, and-”

“Shit, Alya.” Nino hissed, head thumping back against the tree trunk his heart threatened to race right out of his chest. “Shit. What were you thinking? Where was Ladybug?”

“She...she had to go recharge.” Alya mumbled. “I didn’t think I was in danger, I was really well hidden. I just wanted the story.”

“Damn bae. Damn.” Nino took off his glasses, scrubbed a hand over his face. “You could have been killed.”

“But I wasn’t,” Alya mumbled, voice thick with guilt, “Because Chat took the hit instead. And...Nino, it was the scariest thing I ever saw. I could hear his shoulder blade shatter. He hit the wall and stopped breathing. He was coughing up blood.”

Nino shuddered. Alya’s arms wrapped around his torso, and he could feel her shivering.

“And the worst part?” She whispered brokenly. “He wasn’t even mad at me. Not even when I was trying to shake him to keep him awake until Ladybug could get there and do the cure, and I could feel pieces of his bones under my fingers. Not even after. But Ladybug? I thought she was gonna kill me, and I actually felt better about that, then Chat telling me it was okay and he wasn’t upset.”

“Did she...” Nino wasn’t sure what he was trying to ask. Kill was a strong word: Ladybug hadn’t even smacked Chloe yet, so she had to be pretty even-tempered. But anyone who had ever seen a battle where Chat took a hit knew that was a hot point with her. And it was the same with Chat - neither one reacted well when their partner was hurt. And either one being knocked out of the game usually led to some epic beatdowns for the Akuma involved.

But Alya wasn’t an Akuma. She was just a stupid, sixteen year old girl who hadn’t really considered what her involvement could lead to.

“She didn’t hit me.” Alya said, patting his back comfortably. The irony of their abruptly reversed positions wasn’t lost on him. “She just gave me this look, and handed me my camera, and asked if I would please stay back now.”

Nino winced.

“And then she left.” Alya continued. “And I had to go home, and the news stations saw me, and they want my footage...and it just feels dirty, you know? They’re gonna pay me, because I nearly got Chat Noir killed, and all they want is a better view of the carnage.”

That was squicky, in Nino’s opinion, but he knew what media was like. “What did you tell them?”

“Nothing yet.” Alya resumed twisting her fingers in the cord attached to his headphones. “I...I couldn’t even look at the footage last night. I puked instead.”
“Ah, babe.” Nino sighed. “I wish you’d called me.”

“I couldn’t.” Alya said. “But...could you come over today? After school? I...I don’t want to watch this alone.”

Nino didn’t want to watch it at all, not if it had upset Alya that much. But, for her, he would do anything. So he said “Yeah. I’ll be there.”

The footage was, if anything, even worse than Alya had described it. The fight was pretty standard: a lot of jerky movements as she tried to track two fast-moving superheroes as they battled the Akuma. Ladybug’s failed lucky charm and hasty departure to go recharge. Chat keeping the Akuma’s attention on him so his partner could make her get away, and keeping it contained in a central area. Watching Chat casually stand on an almost vertical rooftop as he taunted the Akuma was just as surreal now as every other time he’d seen it. A flip and a blur, and he was on top of the car next to Alya, camera pointed up at him as he balanced on the twisted wreckage of the car.

It was a pretty cool picture, actually. Chat was balanced on top of the car, poised to move with his body angled slightly towards Alya’s camera and his baton clenched in his fist at his side. His face was in profile, focusing on the off-camera Akuma, but the guy looked like a damn movie star posing for a picture.

Then he saw Alya, and everything went to hell. A short exchange between Alya and Chat Noir, and Chat was clearly annoyed. His attention wandered between Alya and the Akuma before he finally somersaulted over another volley of cannon balls, and landing in front of Alya scowling.

Then came the bouncing, jolting, head spinning sequence that Alya explained was Chat Noir throwing her over his shoulder and using his baton to vault onto a nearby roof with her. What was clearly seen, however, was the Akuma lifting up over the roof and looking right at the camera with murderous intent.

“Chat!”

A cannonball was launched towards the screen, and the view abruptly jolted straight to the right, the cannonball disappearing as the camcorder spun through the air before landing on it’s side, pointed at the back wall. Even as the camera spun, there was a sharp crack, a pained grunt and then a dull thud. The camera’s autofocus showed Chat Noir sliding down the low wall, cracks in the cement spider webbing out from where he had impacted.

“He hit it head first.” Alya whispered, leaning into his shoulder. Which Nino was a-okay with, because this was absolutely brutal to watch.

It wasn’t gory, really. Nino saw worse in movies all the time. But movies were just that - movies. Cinematic tricks and actors who weren’t really hurt, just playing a role. But this? This was an actual person lying on the ground next to the wall, twitching feebly with their shoulder warped and unnatural looking and the camera microphone picking up his choked, pained gasps. Chat Noir’s eyes were slitted open as the Akuma advanced past the camera.

“I am going to smear you into a bloody paste on that wall, you insufferable feline. Then...I will take your Miraculous.” The Akuma’s laugh gave Nino chills.

Chat’s fingers twitched in the direction of his baton, but it was clear that he wasn’t getting up anytime soon. If he’d been a normal person, he wouldn’t have been getting up at all. His eyes
watched the Akuma close in on him before flicking briefly to something off screen. There was a faint crunching noise off-camera before Alya suddenly sprinted into the frame. The Akuma turned, another cannonball materializing and heading towards Alya’s head. Nino sucked in a sharp breath even as Alya ducked the cannonball, going into a slide that took her past the Akuma and towards Chat Noir. Her hand flashed out, snatching up Chat’s baton as she spun and launched herself towards the Akuma, who had hesitated in shock.

It was a brief pause, only a second or two, and Nino silently and feverently thanked every deity he could think of that there had been that hesitation, because Alya had been at point-blank range for a cannonball to the face.

Alya’s hair streamed behind her like a banner as she flew at the akuma. The silver baton gleamed in the sunlight when Alya swung it around and into the Akuma’s temple, who crumpled to the roof in a heap.

Nino knew he was biased, but to him Alya looked like an absolute goddess standing over the fallen Akuma. Chat Noir’s baton was clenched in her fist, her chest heaving with exertion and her hair shining like fire in the sunlight. Alya’s eyes were narrowed angrily, but when the Akuma showed no sign of movement, Alya grimaced, leaning down to unclip a bow at the base of it’s ponytail. Setting it and the baton aside briefly, she grabbed the Akuma by their shoulder and hip, rolling them onto their side before snatching up her items and backing towards the still-dazed hero.

Alya’s camcorder was pretty new, a birthday present from her parents a few months back, and was a decent model. And Nino silently cursed the sensitivity of the microphone, because even though her back was to the camera, the panic was plain in her voice. The baton and bow were on the ground and Alya’s hands fluttered over Chat Noir, clearly afraid to touch him.

Chat’s voice was too low, or too quiet, to catch, but Alya’s yelp was easily understood.

“Good job?” She exclaimed, back straightening in surprise. “Are you insane? I nearly got you killed!”

The rest of it was basically Alya doing her best to keep Chat Noir awake as she waited for Ladybug to arrive. It only took a minute or so, but Alya was clearly getting desperate, babbling at Chat to stay awake, just stay with me. Don’t close your eyes! as she continued to poke, prod and even shake his injured shoulder when his eyes apparently slid closed anyway.

Ladybug swung over the wall and onto the scene when Alya jumped up waving, and the terror was evident in her profile, even behind the mask. Alya picked up the bow, thrusting it at the other girl who nearly snatched it out of Alya’s hand in her haste to tear it and release the Akuma.

There was no ceremony. No cries of “I’ve got you now!” or “Time to de-evilize!” And apparently fuck that “Bye bye little butterfly” shit, because the white butterfly was barely released when Ladybug threw her yo-yo into the air and called for the Miraculous Cure. The wave of pink washed over the scene, descending on Chat Noir and the Akuma victim before whisking away.

The victim’s transformation bubbled away, dissolving and leaving a blonde girl who was probably about their age lying, still unconscious on the ground, a bright blue bow clipped to the base of her ponytail once more.

Neither Alya nor Ladybug spared her a glance, bending over the still form of Chat Noir and rolling him onto his back. Ladybug’s voice rose in alarm, wavering slightly as she implored her partner to talk to her.
Apparently Chat Noir responded, because both girls shoulders sagged in relief, Ladybug’s relieved sounding “Hah!” audible to the microphone as she reached out and wrapped an arm under him to help set him upright. She moved off to the side, and a now visible Chat tilted his head back against the now-repaired wall and closed him eyes as he let out a shaky breath. A trail of blood gleamed wetly, tracking from the corner of his mouth down his cheek. Nino shuddered again.

Alya, who had been standing to the side, nervously shifting her weight from one foot to the other, abruptly launched herself towards the hero, falling to his side and throwing her arms around his shoulders as she apologized profusely.

Chat’s bright green eyes snapped open, wide with shock even as his arms flailed briefly to the side. He patted Alya on the back, speaking in low tones as Ladybug watched the two with an amused smirk. There was a beep that heralded a failing Miraculous, and Alya back off of Chat’s lap, the side of her face that was visible to the camera as red as her hair as Chat stood up and Ladybug approached. The two had a quiet conversation as she handed him his baton, and the black cat offered her a cocky grin before turning to Alya with a mock salute before he vaulted off.

The two girls watched him for a moment, backs still to the camera, before Ladybug turned and scanned the rooftop. Clearly, she’d spotted the camcorder, because she moved towards it, and the last scene before it cut off was a flash of red.

“Well.” Nino sat back in the chair he’d commandeered from the kitchen, trying to absorb everything he’d just seen. Next to him, Alya reached up and removed her glasses, scrubbing her eyes with the heels of her palms as she leaned back in her chair.

“Well.” She said, echoing him.

There was a lot Nino wanted to say. Things like “Don’t do this again” and “Have you learned your lesson?” and “What the hell were you thinking.” None of that would do any good though, so Nino bit his cheek and sighed.

“So,” he began, “How are you feeling?”

“Terrible.” Alya said plainly, head tilted back as she stared blankly at the ceiling. “Absolutely awful. I might be sick again.”

Discreetly, Nino nudged her little trash can towards her with his foot. Just in case she was serious.

“It wasn’t that bad.” He offered. “Not that it looked good, but it didn’t look bad.”

Alya’s panicked cries would probably haunt his dreams for a while, but Nino could accept that, because she was safe, and here. Warm and real and scarily traumatized.

“It was terrifying.” Alya let out a shuddering breath.

“Yeah, it was.” Nino agreed. “But it’s over, and everyone is safe and sound. Now the question is...are you gonna release it to the news stations?”

Alya made a whining noise in the back of her throat.

“Looking at the film objectively,” Nino said. “How bad does it look? Is it something you would want seen on national television? Is it too graphic to be on the news?”

“It’s not too graphic.” Alya said slowly, then chuckled. “Most of it is covered by my ass, actually. And even if I remember how scary it was, it won’t give the outside viewer nightmares. But...”
“But?” Nino asked leadingly, as she trailed off.

“I don’t think I want that on the news.” Alya said. “I’ve seen the news coverage of the fight, and they’ve got pretty much the entire thing via the helicopters they had up. They really just want my footage to add ‘flavor’ and ‘depth’ to the stories. They’ll take that part with Chat Noir being hurt and run it into the ground for ratings. And the girl...they’re gonna roast her. And if the news doesn’t, her own classmates probably will. Which was how that mess got started in the first place.

“And even if I just wanted to kick her teeth in, she doesn’t deserve it. She was the victim.” Alya finished.

“So showing the footage won’t actually do any good, or add anything to the story.” Nino concluded.

“Oh, it would add to the story,” Alya said wryly. “Just probably not in the way we want.”

“And the final answer is...?” Nino asked, leaning forward and turning his head to study Alya’s profile.

Alya’s head turned to look at him, lips tilting in a small smile. “I’ll give them the ground footage, but cut it off where Chat dumps me off of his shoulder. I’ll tell them the camera shut off when it hit the ground. And I get to upload it to the Ladyblog first.”

“Best of both worlds.” Nino reached out, placing his hand over hers and giving it a squeeze. “That’s my girl.”

Chapter End Notes

Poor Alya. That reality check was a harsh one, but, really, it needed to be done. If you have, or have dealt with, children, you know that they have the terrifying belief that nothing can really hurt them. It's what makes trying to keep them alive so hard, lol. (I'm going to be in therapy for the rest of my life, but I will have the best stories.) And even if Alya is a teenager, she's still a child. Unfortunately, running into an unpredictable war zone simply because you feel like you've got a trump card is just never a good idea.

This was supposed to be posted like...5 hours ago. I got distracted. There's only one more planned bit to this fic. Maybe two. Three on the outside? And as previously stated, this isn't really even a congruent story - I don't have a specific plot, or even an idea of where this is supposed to go or where I think it should stop. These are all basically a few stories that take place in my imaginary universe, loosely based off of Lady_Lombax's original story.

Like it says in the tags...I don't know where this is going. Maybe somewhere, maybe nowhere. So talk to me - tell me your thoughts and ideas.
Identity Crisis

Chapter Summary

“Sounds good.” Chat nodded. “So, how do you want to do this?”

“I was thinking on the count of three.” Ladybug replied flippantly. “Or never. Seriously, I change my mind about eight times an hour.”

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

It was still light when Adrien escaped his room.

School had been better the today, and him and Nino hitting the arcade afterwards did a world of good, really. Gorilla had picked them up at half past five, and Nathalie had left for the day once Adrien arrived home at six.

As much as Adrien loathed the echoing, empty halls of his home, the upshot was that when his father was out of town, Adrien was effectively home alone. So long as he showed up at the expected appointments and Nathalie saw him before she left for the day, nobody bothered him. He went to his room, shut the door and that was it. Human interaction done. Someone would usually leave dinner outside his door if he didn’t appear at the table, but so long as the empty tray made it back to the kitchen, nobody informed his father if he ate or not. And so long as Adrien didn’t gain any weight or start getting fat, his father and dietician didn’t need to know if he actually ate what was served to him.

Thanks to his activities as Chat Noir, Adrien burned off far more calories than he took in. He was still a little short for his age - which prompted his dad to give him an annoyed look on occasion, but really, what did he think Adrien could do about it? - but his parkour activities kept him leanly muscled in a way his father approved of. A few of the designers had started complaining that his shoulders were too broad - he didn’t fit the clothes right. Only one person had done so in Gabriel Agreste’s presence, however, and that person soon found themselves searching for other employment.

However, Gabriel was out of town more often than he was in it, so it was easy for Adrien to simply leave for the evening: as long as he didn’t use the front door, no one was any wiser. Still, it was risky to continually leave his house as Chat Noir, so Adrien would put his acquired parkour skills to good use. Thanks to the bleed over between himself and Plagg, even scaling the four meter wall around the property wasn’t difficult once he’d chiseled out a few shallow hand- and toe-holds to assist him.

Once he was over the fence, he simply took off, jogging down the road until he found a deserted alley or deep doorway where he could transform.

Today, he left early - he wanted people to see him out and about today. There had been speculation on recent news about his physical condition after he’d been thrown into that wall. One sensationalist had even speculated that he was in a coma somewhere and Ladybug would be working solo from now on. At that point, Plagg had rolled his eyes and sat on the remote, flipping the channel to something else.
And while he did want people to see him, Chat also had a destination in mind: the Dupain-Cheng house. Immediately after the fight, an email from Marinette appeared in the cloaked inbox address he’d given her, asking if he was okay. His response had been brief, but the reply had cheered him immeasurably. Marinette told him to stop by soon, because her parents were worried about him anyway, and apparently needed to physically ascertain his health.

Adrien loved Marinette’s parents. Ever since the Evillustrator incident almost ten months ago, he’d been a regular in the Dupain-Cheng household. He’d thought the impromptu dinner the night of the event was a one-time thing: a “thank you for keeping our daughter safe” sort of thing. Two weeks later, Marinette had found him on her rooftop - and no, he wasn’t being a creepy stalker, thank you very much. He’d really just been at the end of his run, but delaying going home. The front of the bakery was higher than the rest of the roof, and the deep shadows in the eaves were a great spot to sit and rest for a moment.

Being invited in for tea was novel - Marinette really was a completely different person around Chat, as opposed to Adrien. Being informed that her parents wanted him back to dinner had been downright shocking. So when Marinette gave him her email address, Adrien had set up a new email account, installed an IP blocker and anything else he could think of, and emailed her the dates he would be available for dinner.

And had been there ever since. Granted, going there as Chat Noir was kind of awkward - who wanted to wear a mask when they played video games with a burly baker in his oddly pink living room? And eating dinner with gloves on could be downright strange. But as Sabine and Tom kept inviting him back, it had grown comfortable. Normal, even. He appeared at the side door when he could, but otherwise Marinette’s roof door was usually unlocked.

And his friendship with his shy classmate had blossomed. Even though Marinette had graduated from “completely tongue-tied” to “awkward but complete sentences” around Adrien, she had no problem engaging his alter ego in conversation, or banter, or even occasionally flat-out sass. Which Adrien found completely backwards (was Chat Noir really less intimidating that Adrien Agreste?), but he enjoyed her company too much to let it really bother him. At first he’d figured that she was just tolerating him for her parent’s sake, but there’d been too many instances where she’d just “happened” to be out on her terrace at night during his solo patrols for it to be coincidence.

So when he wasn’t engaging Tom in Halo or Mecha Strike wars, or watching Sabine putter around the kitchen, he was with Marinette. Working on homework together (which let him finish it much faster once he got home), playing games, or even just reading a book while she sewed. It was comforting and familiar and Adrien wouldn’t give it up for the world.

His path was roundabout and seemed fairly random, but Chat eventually just dropped between one roof and the next, landing lightly in a back alley that he knew would lead him to the rear of the Dupain patisserie. Vaulting onto Marinette’s terrace, he landed lightly behind the umbrella she’d propped up, slinking around the side and falling into the open skylight and onto her bed.

Marinette’s face peered around the corner as he stepped off of the bed, brightening when she saw him.

“Chat!”

“At your service, Princess.” Chat descended the stairs, stopping at the bottom to sweep into a bow.

“My hero.” Marinette deadpanned, but when he stood, she was eyeing him speculatively, hands twitching at her sides like she wanted to grab him. “But...you’re alright? Really alright?”
“I’m good.” Chat assured her easily. “My head is definitely harder than the wall.”

“And your skull is thicker, too.” Marinette murmured, but there was no bite to the words. Instead, she stepped up to him, lifting the arm that had been injured and watching his shoulder rotate. Flexed his elbow, and eyed him for signs of discomfort.

When she stepped back in front of him, grasping his chin to tilt his face down towards her, Chat raised his eyebrow. “Princess?”

“Are you really okay, Chat?” She asked softly, tilting his face left than right as she stared into his eyes. “Don’t lie to me; I’ll know.”

“Worried?” He purred, grinning flirtatiously.

“Don’t deflect.” Marinette retorted, releasing his chin and allowing him to straighten.

Chat knew what had been shown on the news. The helicopters had gotten the roof fight, but hadn’t really been able to zoom in enough to get the details. And Alya’s footage had only showed their ascent onto the roof, and the cannonball coming towards the screen, before cutting off. He hadn’t looked particularly damaged, just dazed as Alya charged in to rescue him. And he’d definitely taken worse looking hits before, so what was upsetting her now?

Something of his confusion must have shown on his face.

“I saw the news footage, silly cat.” She murmured, staring hard at the bell at the base of his throat.

“Alya is my best girlfriend.” Marinette said.

Oh. “And the two of you are a force to be reckoned with.” He smiled disarmingly. “If you ever teamed up, me and LB could retire.”

“She’s been chasing Ladybug and Chat Noir since the first day they showed up.” Marinette continued, ignoring his attempt to divert her attention. “She’s been hit by debris, captured by villains, and damn near sacrificed on one memorable occasion. And I have never seen her so badly shaken. She was a wreck at school yesterday. Spent half of lunch sobbing on Nino’s shoulder.”

Chat shifted uncomfortably, well aware of how Alya had acted yesterday at school.

“And I know that she wasn’t hurt during that fight.” Marinette pierced him with a look. “She was barely scratched. The Akuma only looked at her. Which means she’s upset about you. So, answer me honestly Chat Noir, are you alright?”

“I…” Chat was honestly taken aback. Just when he thought he had Marinette figured out, she showed him another piece of herself that he never suspected was there. Between his two personas, he thought he’d seen all of her. Shy Marinette, who tripped over nothing and stammered through conversations, and who had managed an Akuma with poise and wit, then took it down with a speed and grace that was both surprising and captivating. He knew she could be loud and passionate, he’d seen it, but this quiet fierceness was no less intense for all that it was benign.

“And though she be but little, she is fierce.” Chat murmured.

“What?” Marinette pursed her lips at him.
“Nothing.” Chat smiled. “You surprise me, is all.”

“And you’re quoting Shakespeare at me. You did hit your head harder than you admit.”

“I did.” Chat admitted slowly. “And you’re right, I wasn’t okay. But I’m doing better, and I will be fine.”

Marinette’s eyes clouded, a corner of her lower lip tucked between her teeth as she worried it. “What can I do to help?”

“You’re already doing it.” Chat assured her. “Are your parents around? I don’t have too long, but you said they wanted to see me.”

“They do.” Marinette nodded. “And if I let you go without seeing them, they would skin me, so you’d better come on down.”

Thirty minutes later, Chat Noir was vaulting over rooftops towards the Eiffel Tower. It was almost nine o’clock, and it wouldn’t do to keep his lady waiting. He’d barely made it up to “their” spot when he heard someone touch down behind him. Retracting his baton, he turned to face Ladybug with an easy grin.

“Hey LB, long time no oomph.” Ladybug was a red blur as she collided with his chest, arms snaking around his ribs to grip him tightly.

“Well, if this is the kind of reception I get,” Chat murmured, surprised even as his arms crept up around her shoulders, “I’ll be sure to hit walls more often.”

“Stupid cat.” Ladybug only hugged him tighter. “Stupid, stupid cat. You scared me so badly!”

“Sorry, my lady.” Chat whispered, burying his nose in her hair. “I would have avoided it if I could.”

“I know. I know.” Ladybug released him and backed away, one hand darting up to swipe at her eyes before she turned towards him resolutely. “Ok. Alright then. How do you feel?”

“I’m fine.” Chat shrugged nonchalantly. “Go Miraculous Cure, right?”

Ladybug did not appear impressed, and Chat briefly wondered if his acting skills were degrading, or if she and Marinette just knew him too well.

“Allright.” Chat sighed, and gave up. “I’m still sore and achey. My shoulder and back are a bit stiff, but I’m on Motrin. The injuries are healed, there’s no swelling or pain, just...aches.”

“Thank you.” Ladybug’s shoulders relaxed and Chat blinked, belatedly realizing how tense she had been. “How are you sleeping?”

Man, his lady really knew him entirely too well, despite not really knowing him at all. But then again, they’d both been there. Just because the injury was gone, didn’t mean the memories were.

“Nightmares.” Chat replied succinctly. “But it’s better than last night, and tomorrow will be better than tonight. You know how it goes. How are you?”


“You did?” Chat’s ears swiveled forward, surprised.
“Yeah.” Ladybug nodded. “Rotate your shoulder. I know you’re friends with her family. Any pain?”

“Nope, just stiffness.” Chat replied, rotating his shoulder, then swung his arm, showing her that he had his full range of motion. “That was nice of you.”

“It wasn’t entirely selfless.” Ladybug grinned. “I got a treat for being the bearer of good news.”

“Tom makes the best pastries.” Chat agreed, sighing dramatically.

“You were there before you came here, weren’t you?” Ladybug’s grin stretched wider.

“Damn right.” Chat chortled, picking up a small bag he’d set at the base of the beam when he landed. “Danish?”

A few minutes later the two of them were balanced on the edge of the platform, legs kicking idly into the open air as they munched on their treats and watched the sun set over the Seine.

“I was thinking,” Ladybug started, nibbling the edge of her danish, “about what happened.”

“Oh?” Chat was happily licking crumbs off of his claws, free hand digging in the sack for another. Tom and Sabine had been really happy to see him, Sabine nearly crushing him in a hug after she’d checked to make sure he wasn’t broken. Tom had only put a hand on his shoulder, but his gruff voice had been relieved just the same. They hadn’t let him go before he’d promised to return soon, but had pressed a bag of pastries on him for him and Ladybug to share.

Chat really loved Marinette’s parents. He wondered if she realized just how awesome they were.

“Yeah.” Ladybug huffed out a breath, turning to face him. “You...really scared me, Chat. If I’d been two minutes longer...”

“Hey.” Chat paused, hand still in the bag as he turned his head towards her. “Don’t do that.”

“I can’t help it.” Ladybug shrugged. “You...you were in bad shape. And I started thinking...This job? It can be really dangerous. If something happened, to either of us...I’d want somebody to tell my family, you know? So...”

“Yes...?” Chat raised his eyebrow, wondering where she was going.

“I want to tell you who I am.”

“What?” Chat’s ears flicked back, hurt. “Why was I cut out of this? And who is Master Fu?”

Ladybug said nothing, only nibbling around the edge of the danish and watching him with wide blue eyes.

“That’s...” Chat paused, and reassessed. It was exactly what he’d dreamed of, for the past year and better, but...

“That’s a pretty abrupt reversal on your previous stance, my lady.” He finally said. “Not that I don’t want to know your name, but...why? Because if this is some kind of guilt thing, you can-”

“It’s not that abrupt.” Ladybug muttered. “Not really. Tikki and I, and then us and Master Fu, have been discussing it for a while.”

“What?” Chat’s ears flicked back, hurt. “Why was I cut out of this? And who is Master Fu?”
Ladybug blinked, straightening. “You don’t know Master Fu?”

“No? Should I? And don’t change the subject.” Chat retorted.

“I’m not!” Ladybug defended. “Plagg didn’t tell you? He hasn’t said anything for a damn year?”

“Clearly not.” Chat’s ears flattened against his head as he scowled.

“That little shit.” Ladybug muttered. “Mast Fu is the Guardian. He’s the one who gave us the Miraculous.”

Oh, he and Plag would be having words soon. Plagg had known someone he could go to for help this entire time, and hadn’t said anything?

“And I wasn’t purposely cutting you out.” Ladybug continued. “Tikki actually brought it up, and I can’t talk to her when you’re around. And she wanted to go see Master Fu, so I had to take her. The three of us talking was just a byproduct.”

“Alright.” Chat bit out, annoyed. “Well, since everyone has clearly come to a consensus on this, please, do fill me in.”

Ladybug fidgeted at his irritation. “I’m sorry… I should have found a way to include you.”

Chat said nothing, but his tail was now whipping back and forth in irritation.

“Just… just let me talk, ok?” Ladybug squirmed. “And if you’re still mad afterwards, you can yell at me. And since your kawmi is apparently a closed-mouthed little brat, I will take you to Master Fu.”

Chat sighed, nodding reluctantly.

“Did you know the last time they were out was over seventy years ago?” The apparent non-sequitur left Chat baffled.

“Yeah, Plagg’s mentioned it.” Chat replied. “Said things have changed a lot.”

Ladybug nodded. “They have. Tikki said she didn’t realize how much, until she’d been with me for a while, and was able to get a good look around. But in the past, there wasn’t all these methods of tracking people. Television, internet, cell phones...cameras everywhere.

“Previous Miraculous holders didn’t have as hard a time of concealing their identities.” Ladybug continued. “They were able to get away, transform, and create alibis before different parties could talk to each other. Keeping their two lives separate was easier.”

“Must have been nice.” Chat said. “I mean, today? One mistimed transformation and bam! Covers blown wide open.”

“I said almost the same thing.” Ladybug smiled. “And Tikki and Plagg...they didn’t know about any of this before they emerged. So the standard advice was to keep our identities secret.”

“Plagg didn’t say to keep them from each other,” Chat murmured.

“True.” Ladybug shifted uncomfortably. “That was me taking Tikki’s advice to the extreme, at first.”

“At first?” Chat cocked an eyebrow at his partner.

“Yeah.” Ladybug winced. “Then I was just afraid.”
“Afraid?” Chat’s other eyebrow rose. “You? I mean, I’ve seen you scared, or nervous or uncomfortable, but…”


“Of what?” Chat’s ears, which had swiveled back forward, flicked back again in agitation.

“Pretty much everything.” Ladybug’s fingers twisted nervously in her lap. “If we knew who each other were, if we were akumatized, we could lead Hawkmoth right to our families. Or he would know who we were and could hunt us directly. Target our family and friends.”

“Makes sense.” Chat allowed. “I’ve thought about it as well, but…” He trailed off, shrugged.

“But?” Ladybug’s eyebrow lifted inquisitively.

“I guess… It just didn’t worry me as much.” Chat admitted. “I didn’t have that many people who mattered to me. Just an indifferent father and one friend. And, sure, if my schoolmates were targeted it would upset me - it does upset me - but they would be targeted just because of proximity to me, not because we were friends.”

“That’s…” Ladybug huffed out a sigh. “That’s really upsetting to me, that you have so few people that you’re close to. I wish I’d known.”

“There’s more now, than when we started.” Chat admitted. “Marinette and I are friends, and her parents...they’re amazing. I wish they would adopt me.” His grin was lopsided as he laughed a little.

“I’m glad you have them, then.” Ladybug smiled. “But...Tikki and Master Fu, and I think Plagg too somehow, have been talking about today, and technology, and how difficult it is to keep ourselves hidden from everyone.”

“It’s not going to get easier.” Chat shrugged.

“No, it isn’t.” Ladybug agreed. “Which is why Master Fu recommended an...inner circle.”

“Inner circle.” Chat repeated, testing the words out.

“A small group of people, including each other, who know who we are, and can help hide us. It will be easier if we pick people who have already been hit, since it's harder to hit people a second time. It can be done, but it's apparently more difficult.”

“Huh. Yeah, we haven't really seen any repeat victims, have we?” Chat leaned back, considering. He’d be lying if he said he didn’t like the idea. “...So am I Batman, or Robin? Never mind, I’m totally Batman.”

“What? How are you Batman?!” Ladybug squawked.

“I’m the one already wearing black, duh.” Chat grinned. “And you’re already wearing red. Plus, I think you’d look much better in the short shorts than I would.”


“Not even a little.” Chat scoffed. “I mean, I’m in a skin tight black leather catsuit. I’m lucky my weapon is a baton and not a whip.”

Ladybug choked, and bent over coughing.
“Oh...my god.” She gasped. “I can so see that! I can’t unsee it. Ugh, I need brain bleach!” She fell back, grabbing her head dramatically.

“You’re welcome.” Chat said smugly, buffing his claws against his chest. “And for the record, I could rock short shorts. Alas, my friend tells me pretty regularly that my Man Card is in danger of being revoked. So I’m pretty sure that if I showed up in short shorts, that would be the end of it.”

“Ah, the infamous Man Card.” Ladybug nodded sagely. “I’ve heard tales, but never actually seen one.”

“Neither have I.” Chat shrugged. “I’m kind of thinking of making some and passing them out as a joke. I’m pretty sure he’d die, though. Hell, my whole class might die. I could blame it on him - they’d never believe that it was me who did it.”

“I don’t know…” Ladybug mused. “It would be pretty funny. I’m know my friends would get a kick out of it. Hell, I think my dad would get a kick out of it.”

“Your dad?” Chat cocked his head. “Really?”

“Yeah.” Ladybug nodded. “He has a terrible sense of humor - a lot like yours, actually. You two would get along great.”

“Maybe he would adopt me.” Chat grinned. “Because my dad has no sense of humor. Seriously, I’ve wondered if we were actually related.”

“Why wouldn’t your class think you would do something like that?” Ladybug asked skeptically. “I mean, now that I’ve thought about it happening, I can’t see you not doing something like that.”

“Ah, well… Hm.” Chat leaned back, stretching out along the platform and lacing his hands behind his head as he thought. “I’m...actually pretty quiet, as a civilian.”

“Your dad?” Ladybug gawked.

“Hmm.” Chat stared up at the beams arching above him. “You probably wouldn’t recognize me, if you saw me as a civilian. I’m not...like this.”

Ladybug was quiet.

“There’s a freedom in being Chat Noir.” Chat continued. “I can be myself, and not what I’m expected or told to be. I mean, my friends probably see it more than most, but not...not like this, you know?”

“I do.” Ladybug said, huffing a quiet laugh. “I can absolutely relate. That was the other reason I didn’t want to tell you who I was, to be honest.”

“My lady?” Chat glanced over, eyebrows raised. “Are you telling me that you’re actually Clark Kent, too?”

Ladybug snickered. “That’s a pretty good way of putting it. I mean, this...persona, it isn’t totally unlike me, but as Ladybug I can cut loose in a way I can’t as me.”

“So you didn’t want me to know, what? That you’re human?” Chat asked, heels kicking against the side of the platform idly.

“I thought you would be disappointed.” Ladybug replied. “As me, I’m kind of quiet. Awkward. I’m
a total klutz, who trips over nothing and just learned how to talk in front of my crush.”

“You have a crush?” Chat asked, surprised at how forthright she was being.

“Yeah. He’s a great guy.” Ladybug shrugged. “But he doesn’t have a clue I like him. I think he just thinks I have a speech impediment or something.”

“Oh my.” Chat grinned. “Do you blush, too?”

“Blush?” Ladybug sniggered. “I turn into a freaking tomato. It’s gotten better - I’ve actually gotten to know him this school year, and he really is nice. It helps, also, that my best friend quit trying to set us up.”


“Drama queen.”

“I’ll never love again!” Chat moaned, covering his eyes and pretending to sob.

And, honestly, he was a little hurt, not that he’d ever admit it. He really did like Ladybug, and had hoped that someday, maybe... But Chat (and Adrien) were staunchly pragmatic, and even if he was also romantic sap, he was honest enough to acknowledge that his partner didn’t return his romantic feelings for her, and never had. And he liked her too much, as a partner and an individual, to let his crush ruin what they had.

So it hurt, a little, to watch a dream die. But they were friends enough that Chat also resolved to, if Ladybug ever revealed her other self, track her down and watch her with this guy, because the thought of cool, confident Ladybug turning into a shy schoolgirl was hilarious in it’s absurdity.

A finger jabbed into his ribs, and Chat’s mock-sobbing cut off with a squawk as his twisted, hand snapping out to grab her wrist. Yanking her down, he drove his fingers into her sides in retaliation, and the tickle fight was on. They rolled around the platform until Ladybug managed to get on top of him, knees splayed on either side of his ribs while her hands pinned his wrists down.

It only lasted a second, and Chat was lying if he didn’t say that his heart did an uncomfortable somersault in his chest, but Ladybug grinned a wicked grin and leapt up, bouncing off of him and diving over the side of the platform before he could react.

Chat laughed breathlessly, taking a moment to tell his hormones to calm the hell down, then got up and followed. After that, the tickle fight was mobile as they chased each other over building and rolled around on rooftops. There were probably going to be all kinds of weird pictures and speculations on the internet, but Chat didn’t care. This was too much fun, and it was surely not the weirdest thing they’d ever done. Parkour competitions, handstands on the edges of roofs, who could vault the furthest using his baton or swing the best with her yo-yo (with Tarzan yells, because you just had to, really)... Chat loved spending time with Ladybug. Nino might be his best friend, but Ladybug was his partner. There was a bond between the two of them that went far deeper than friend.

Eventually they wound up across the city on a random rooftop, on their backs at an angle from each other and panting with exertion.

“I win.” Ladybug announced breathlessly.
“Do not.” Chat retorted.

“Do to.” Ladybug’s hand slapped at him, but her fingers only managed to brush his arm.

“Do not.”

“To.”

“Not.”

“Totally did.”

“Totally did not. What the hell were we talking about, anyway?” Chat asked.

Ladybug hummed. “Umm… Technology sucks. Identity reveal. I’m Batman, you can wear short shorts, and we need a couple of Alfreds to help us not blow our covers wide open. Master Fu. Plagg is an asshat.”

“Can we get a bat cave, too?” Chat asked, staring up at the night sky. “Because that would be badass.”

“Yeah, totally.” Ladybug agreed easily. “Let’s go build a mansion over a subterranean super hideout.”

“Sounds good.” Chat nodded. “So, how do you want to do this?”

“I was thinking on the count of three.” Ladybug replied flippantly. “Or never. Seriously, I change my mind about eight times an hour.”


“I’m a sixteen year old girl.” Ladybug replied primly. “I don’t have to make sense.”

“What are you worried about?” Chat asked. “Afraid I’ll be too hot for you to handle, and you’ll ditch your boy crush so we can run away to Majorca?”

“Majorca?” Ladybug tilted her head, ambient light from the city’s lights highlighting the shape of her jaw and the curve of her neck as she regarded him. “Why Majorca?”

“I like how it sounds.” Chat replied. “It’s just fun to say. And I can speak passable Spanish.”

“I’m not really afraid, any more.” Ladybug’s voice turned pensive as she regarded the night sky. “But it will change things. I’m nervous about change.”

“It could change things for the better.” Chat suggested lightly, shrugging even though he knew she couldn’t see the gesture. He wanted this; he really, really did. Wanted it in ways that made his chest tight and his heart race uncomfortably. But if Ladybug was still uncertain, than he was gentleman enough not to try and force her.

“Or make them unbearably awkward.” Ladybug argued. “Who do you think you might tell? Besides me?”

“Hmm.” Chat considered. “I think Marinette and her parents could be trusted. They’re really good people. And despite most of her class being Akumatized at some point, she never has been.”

“Oh?”
“Yeah. It’s kind of weird, actually. I mean, Marinette is emotional. I mean...wrong word.” Chat waved Ladybug’s raised eyebrow away. “She’s not emotional like a wreck, I mean she’s...passionate. She doesn’t half-ass things. If she goes in, it’s all the way. So she’s not emotional so to speak, but she has strong emotions. And that’s usually what Hawkmoth goes for.”

“That does sound strange.” Ladybug murmured. “Why do you think that is?”

“Probably because she’s a bona fide badass.” Chat joked. “I mean, you did not see her handle Evillustrator. She handed him his butt.”

“You sound impressed.” Ladybug giggled.

“Not gonna lie, it was hot.” Chat affirmed. “If I didn’t want to never see her near another Akuma ever again, I’d set her loose just to appreciate her kick-assery.”

“Is kick-assery even a word?” Ladybug asked rhetorically.

“No idea.” Chat replied. “But it is now. But, um, her parents are really easy-going. Level headed. Not good targets for flying harbingers of doom, you know?”

“So just Marinette and her family?”

“Probably my best friend, to.” Chat replied. “He goes to school with me, he’s really chillax, and he could help cover me when I needed to bail for an Akuma attack.”

“So...four people for your inner circle.” Ladybug hummed. “Not your parents?”

“Nah.” Chat replied. “I told you, my mom isn’t around. My dad is gone more often than he’s here, and even when he’s in town, we still don’t see much of each other. As long as I show up where I need to be, he doesn’t really care what else I do.”

“I’m sorry.” Ladybug murmured.

“Don’t be.” Chat replied. “I’ve had years to get over it. It’s just...how it is, you know? But, enough about me. Who will you tell.”

“Well, my parents.” Ladybug muttered, glancing back at him guiltily.

“I’m glad you trust them.” Chat replied, trying to set her at ease.

“Honestly? I think they might already know.”

“Really?” Now it was Chat’s turn to tilt his head back, trying to study her profile.

“Yeah. I mean, there’s only so many times I can disappear in the middle of the day, or night, you know? And whenever Ladybug stuff comes on the news, I get this look. Like, a side-eye glance. I think they’re just waiting for me to fess up.”

“That’s…” Chat paused and thought about it. “Kind of awesome.”

“They are kind of awesome.” Ladybug grinned. “But they can be really embarrassing, too. They take pride in it.”

“Please, adopt me.” Chat joked. “I’m housebroken, and have all my shots.”

“I dunno…” Ladybug pretended to consider. “Are you going to scratch up my furniture?”
Chat tilted his head, struck by an odd sense of deja vu. “I’ll try to restrain myself. No promises.”

“I’ll consider it then.” Ladybug replied. “And...I think my best girl friend, too. She goes to school with me, so pretty much the same reasons as you.”

“So...” Chat paused, biting his lip. “One?”

“You want to do this tonight?” Ladybug sat up, twisting to look at him.

“I don’t have a pressing reason not to.” Chat replied, shrugging as he laced his fingers underneath his head and crossed his ankles casually. In reality, he didn’t feel nearly as relaxed as he was pretending to be - it felt like something was coiled into a knot between his shoulder blades, and he would bet that were it not already dark, his pupils would be blown wide with excess adrenaline. But Adrien had literally years of training to conceal his emotions, and they stood him in good stead now.

“Well, hell.” Ladybug sighed. “If I knew you would want to do this now, I’d have worn something besides my tank top and pajama bottoms. Or at least my normal outfit.”

“You’re worried I’ll judge your clothes?” Chat asked, amused.

“Yes. No. I don’t know.” Ladybug whined, reaching up to tug her pigtails. “I thought I’d have to talk you into it, or that you’d want to go see Master Fu, or yell at Plagg, or—”

“You really are a sixteen year old girl.” Ladybug glared at him. “Why do you want to do it now?”

“Parkour competition.”

“...What?” Ladybug’s hands dropped, and she blinked at him.

“You heard me.” Chat grinned up at a bewildered Ladybug. “If you’re not going to swoon and declare your eternal love for me so we can run away to Majorca, I want a no-super powers parkour competition. In daylight. You and me.”

“So...you want me to drop the transformation so we can go building hopping as civilians.”

“Or declare your eternal love so we can run away to Majorca.” Chat nodded. “I’m flexible.”

“Oh...God, Chat.” Ladybug laughed breathlessly. “I can’t even. What did I do to deserve you?”

“I don’t know, but don’t do it again - I don’t want competition.” Chat quipped, grinning when Ladybug giggled.

“Want me all to yourself, do you?” Ladybug teased.

“I’m a selfish cat.” Chat replied primly. “Though apparently I already have to share you with ‘a great guy.’ I’m totally going to track you down so I can watch you blush and stammer.”

“Rude!” Ladybug gasped.

“I just can’t picture it.” Chat replied. “I need to see it in person. Maybe with a camera, so I can picture it.”

“Well, that tears it.” Ladybug sniffed as Chat chortled at his own wit. “I am never revealing my identity.”
“Ok, I’ll leave the camera behind.”

“I can’t believe you.” Ladybug said. “I’m still nervous… Tell me about yourself.”

“What?”

“Tell me about you.” Ladybug reached out and poked him. “The other you.”

“Like what?” Chat laughed. “You want to know my favorite color or something?”

“That’s a good start.” Ladybug agreed. “Give me some insight: who is Chat Noir when he isn’t Chat Noir?”

“That statement shouldn’t have made any sense. You know that, right?”

“Chaatttt,” Ladybug whined, poking him again.

“Blue!” Chat yelped as she hit a ticklish spot. “I can’t really tell you too much about me.”

“Why not?” Ladybug’s head tilted to the side.

“There’s probably not much I can say without you figuring out who I am.” Chat sighed. “You already know more than most everyone except Nino anyway.”

“Nino?”

“That’s his name - my best friend.” Chat nodded.

“You have a best friend named Nino?” Ladybug repeated, staring at him oddly.

“Yeah…?” Chat looked back. “You sound really surprised by that.”

“I know a boy named Nino.” Ladybug replied.

“So maybe you already know me, then.” Chat shrugged. “Maybe you just don’t know that you know me.”

A beat of silence. “...’That statement shouldn’t have made any sense. You know that, right?’”

“We don’t make a lot of sense.” Chat fired back. “Tell you what: let’s meet up later this week. Somewhere ground level. We’ll do the reveal, go grab some coffee, and get to know each other.”

“Thought about it, have you?” Ladybug asked wryly.

“It’s been a fantasy of mine since I met you.” Chat replied with surprising seriousness. “Two people who know each other, getting to know each other, and hanging out like friends do.”

“You make it sound so easy.”

“Why should it be hard?” Chat replied. “You’re already my best friend. I love you, no matter what face you’re wearing under that mask. What are you doing on Friday?”

“Friday? Ah, nothing that I know of, unless the Villain of the Week crops up.”

“Great. I have work until six, but I should be free after that. I’ll jump ship and meet you at, say, seven? I know of a little park near Collège Françoise Dupont that should be pretty empty by then. Do you want to just meet in the park as civilians, or do the whole ‘one two three’ thing?”
“Actually…” Ladybug chewed her lip thoughtfully. “Meet me in the gymnasium courtyard at the collège. Under the stairs by the front doors. We’ll be shielded from the public, and there’s no cameras that point in that direction.”

Chat blinked. That was...oddly intimate knowledge of the school.

“How do you know that?” He couldn’t resist asking. “Do you attend school there or something?”

“...Yeah. I do.” Ladybug said softly, then laughed ruefully as she stood up and dusted herself off. “I guess it’s not top secret information anymore, but it feels odd to say it out loud anyway.”

“We’ve been keeping secrets so long.” Chat rolled to his feet and stretched. Paused when he felt his partner’s eyes on him.

“You don’t have to do this, you know.” Honor compelled him to offer, even though it was the last thing he wanted to say. “If you’re that unhappy about it.”

There was a heartbeat of silence while Ladybug regarded him. Then she stepped towards him, wrapping him in another hug.

“You’re a good guy, Chat.” She whispered. “The best.”

She sighed and leaned back to look into his eyes. Her hands came up to frame his face, thumbs tracing his cheekbones as her fingers brushed the back of his neck, and Chat couldn’t stop the shudder that ran through him.

“This is something we need to do.” She said finally. “I’ve held us back far too long. I just hope that when it’s all over, you forgive me.”

“My lady…?” Chat’s brow furrowed in confusion, but Ladybug only smiled sadly, leaning up to rub her cheek against his.

“I’ll see you on Friday, chaton.”

---

“Adrien! What brings you here?” Sabine smiled at the boy across the counter. “I’m afraid Marinette isn’t in right now.”

“Oh, that’s alright ma’am.” Adrien smiled. “I’m supposed to meet up with someone in just a little bit, but I thought I’d grab some pastries.”

“Of course honey, what did you have in mind?”

A few minutes later Adrien walked out of the patissiere, bag in hand as he whistled tunelessly and wandered towards the school. His photo shoot had actually finished up early, which was nice, so Adrien was out a little sooner than he expected, and figured he’d pick up some snacks for The Big Reveal. Because if there was one thing he’d learned from interacting with Marinette’s family, it was that food was like social lubricant. After all, you couldn’t get too mad with the person that had tasty snacks. And having something to chew on was good for covering fidgeting, or awkward silences. It was part of the reason he’d asked to go to a coffee shop afterwards, as well.

He stopped in an alleyway near the school, opening hisshirt and staring down at his kwamii.

“Ready Plagg?” The question was rhetorical, but it seemed polite to ask, and Plagg never missed an opportunity to complain.
“Teenagers.” He huffed. “So dramatic.”

“It comes with the hormones.” Adrien replied. “Claws out!”

A few minutes later Chat Noir was slinking through the evening shadows and into a side door helpfully propped slightly open with a rock. Stepping into the courtyard, still sticking to the shadows and wary of any cameras, Chat made for the stairs where a smear of red stood mostly concealed under the treads of the open staircase.

“My lady.” He greeted her as he stepped around the stair case.

“Hey.” Ladybug looked at the bag in his hand. “...Danish?”

“I’ve got a problem.” Chat nodded. “It’s almost an addiction.”

Ladybug’s amused snort sounded a little forced, but it did it’s job anyway.

“You ready for this?” She asked nervously.

“Yeah. Totally.” Chat replied, his own nerves starting to get to him. “Let’s hurry up and do this so we can go get some coffee.”

“...You want to rush this really big event for coffee?” Ladybug was staring at him strangely.

“Well, yes and no.” Chat admitted. “I just know that the longer we drag this out the more likely we are to chicken out. So...let’s do this, and go get coffee.”

“Alright.” Ladybug took a deep breath. “I want to go first.”

“No one two three go?” Chat’s eyebrow quirked.

“No.” Ladybug shook her head. “Because...you might be mad, when you see who I am. And if you don’t want to show me who you are, after, you’ll still have that choice.”

“Are you some kind of felon?” Chat asked. “Mass murderer? Because you’re kind of freaking me out now.”

Ladybug’s lips pursed, and Chat fleetingly wondered if she really was a wanted criminal.

“Spots off, Tikki.” She said instead.

The flare of pink was bright, almost blinding in the relative gloom, and Chat hoped it hadn’t been picked up by any of the security cameras. Chat blinked, trying to clear the spots from his vision. Then blinked again, in case he was hallucinating. He felt his jaw drop.

It was kind of hard, to describe the absolute flood of conflicting emotions that raged through him. Shock was pretty much first and foremost, but he also kind of wanted to smack himself: it should have been so obvious. Really. Ancient magic aside, Marinette hadn’t changed much more than her outfit, so why couldn’t he see it before now?

Hard on the heels of that was hurt. Why had she done this? Tricked him? Was she doing it to be cruel, did she want to laugh at him, did she want something from him? But even though he was a little hurt, he knew Marinette: she wasn’t a mean-spirited, and she didn’t take pleasure in other’s pain or laugh at people cruelly. And what could she possibly gain from having Chat in her life, really? He didn’t come with any extras: in fact, she had been sharing her family and home with him for months. She didn’t get anything out of his continued presence that she couldn’t have as Ladybug...except
maybe more puns.

Once he’d sorted out the hurt, there was a rush of *giddiness*. This was great! Ladybug and Marinette were the same person! His two favorite people were actually one people, and he didn’t have to feel weird about liking two people anymore. And her family was awesome: they liked both Adrien and Chat already. Now they could have twice the fun, as Adrien and Marinette and Ladybug and Chat Noir!

“Um...Chat?” Marinette was shifting nervously. “Are you okay? Are you mad? I’m so sorry - I wasn’t trying to trick you or lead you on, I promise! Please, say something?”

Chat opened his mouth. Closed it, and opened it again, trying to figure out how to convey all of the things going on inside him into something like *words*.

You’re amazing. I’m so glad it’s you. Why did you wait so long to tell me? Holy shit this is great! I love you. We’re going to have so much fun! Wait until you see who I actually am, you’re going to scream. Can we be best friends in real life, too?

Chat opened his mouth, still trying to figure out which of his possibly weird-sounding thoughts was going to emerge.

As it turned out, it was none of them. What he *actually* said was “...Guess I should have asked you to bring the danish.”

Marinette facepalmed.

Chat would have too, except his hand was still stuck at his side. He wasn’t really sure he had an arm anymore, actually. But if he *had* a working arm, he would have used to to bring his palm up to cover his face in shame.

“So...you’re not mad?” Marinette peeked out from between her fingers.

“No. Yes. Maybe a little? I feel kind of tricked here.” Chat’s runaway mouth apparently decided to voice *all* of his thoughts, after spouting off something to uncool as ‘guess I should have asked you to bring the danish.’ “I mean...I’m okay. Mostly. And really, now that I’ve seen you do that, I can’t believe I didn’t see it before. I feel kind of stupid, actually. I mean, the only thing that changed was your *outfit*.”

Marinette shrugged. “So, you don’t hate me?”

“Hate you?” Chat cocked his head. “Nope. Definitely not. Besides, you doing that makes me feel better about doing this.”

“Doing what?” Marinette’s eyebrows scrunched in confusion.

Chat smirked. “Plagg, claws in.”

Chapter End Notes

This entire fic was a sad, sorry vehicle to use the phrase "Guess I should have asked you to bring the Danish." It took me 21 pages to get there, because these two would not shut up, and I couldn't bring myself to make them.
I’m also a fan of trying to feed Adrien. Headcannon says that poor boy probably does not get enough to eat to sustain him in a healthy manner. As a mom, I worry about shit like that.

Lastly, I’m a big fan of Best Friend Feels. I love fics where Adrien/Chat and Marinette/LB are best friends who look out for each other, trust each other, and place their friendship ahead of their own desires. I love how much they respect each other.

End Notes

The line about "I'm a nocturnal child" is a direct quote from my own child. The first time he used it was when he was four years old, and woke me up at 2am to tell me he couldn't sleep because he was nocturnal. I didn't even know he knew what that word meant.

Two years later, he still likes to pop up randomly throughout the night and tell me that he can't sleep "because he's a nocturnal child."

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